Government-funding awarded for an academic evaluation of the DSM Foundation drug education programme

Monday 11 November, 2024

The Daniel Spargo-Mabbs Foundation's universal drug education programme is to be evaluated as part of an innovation project funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). The research is one of four innovation projects aimed at helping to reduce the use of drugs such as cannabis, ecstasy, nitrous oxide and powder cocaine among young people.

The project leads are Betsy Thom, Professor of Health Policy at Middlesex University, who will lead research to evaluate a drug education programme targeting 13-15 year-olds, and Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE, founder and director of the DSM Foundation, who will be responsible for delivery of the drug education programme between January and March 2025. The programme includes teacher training, a video, parent workshops, student workshops and lesson materials.

Middlesex University's Professor Thom comments: "In evaluating the programme, we are adopting a 'whole school' within a 'whole community' approach. This acknowledges that to reduce drug demand among young adolescents, drug education interventions in schools are only part of the necessary response. Schools need to have the support of parents and carers and work closely with other stakeholders in the community."

The Middlesex team is part of the **Drug and Alcohol Research Centre**. It comprises different faculties and academics including Professor Karen Duke, a criminologist, and Associate Professor Camille Alexis-Garsee, a psychologist. The research team will examine how effective the programme is and the extent to which it can provide students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to avoid drug use. A collaborating team of health economists from Bangor University, led by Professor Rhiannon Tudor-Edwards, will analyse the costs and benefits of the programme.

The DSM Foundation's Fiona Spargo-Mabbs adds: "As a drug education charity whose vision has always been to make sure every young person has access to effective drug education, it has always been important to us not only to make sure we're doing everything to the highest, evidence-based standards, but also that we're finding out all we can about the difference it's making to young people. So we're delighted to have received government funding to evaluate our multi-component drug education programme, targeting 13-15 year olds in schools across England.

"In total NIHR is awarding £1.8 million in three phases of funding, to identify programmes that are effective in reducing the demand for drugs in young people. Having received funding for Phase 1 in 2023, we're so pleased to be able to continue the initial work undertaken then into Phase 2. The schools taking part represent a range of very different settings, communities and pupil demographics in London, Surrey and Cumbria, and we'll be delivering five different elements of our programme in each of these, while data will be collected through surveys and focus groups, with teachers, pupils and parents for the final report.

"This is an incredibly important piece of work for us, as a drug education charity committed to supporting young people to make safer choices about drugs – we not only need to know how best we can do that ourselves, but also how others can too."

Information for editors:

The DSM Foundation is a drug education charity established in 2014 following the death of 16 year old Daniel Spargo-Mabbs from an accidental overdose of ecstasy. His family felt that he simply hadn't known enough to be able to make decisions that would keep him safe, and realized there was a huge gap in the resources and support available to schools, so set up the charity in order to spare other families going through what they had experienced.

The aim of the DSM Foundation is to provide young people with relevant, age-appropriate, up to date and evidence-based information about drugs so they develop the skills to make choices that will keep themselves and their friends as safe as possible. To this end, the charity is currently working in around 750 schools, colleges and community organisations across England and Scotland with children and young people, and also provides workshops for parents and caregivers, and training for school and college staff. Educational settings are also able to access "I Love You Mum, I Promise I Won't Die", a verbatim play by Mark Wheeller that was commissioned by the charity to tell Dan's story in the words of

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his family and friends, through studying the work itself, which is a GCSE Drama set text on the Eduqas syllabus, or booking a Theatre in Education performance. Schools and colleges can also download age-appropriate, relevant, up to date and evidence-based drugs education lesson resources free of charge from the DSM Foundation website for delivery by teachers through PSHE provision.

For more information about the DSM Foundation, go to https://www.dsmfoundation.org.uk/.

Media enquiries about the work of the DSM Foundation should be sent to media@dsmfoundation.org.uk

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