Rise in suspected drug deaths in Scotland underlines importance of drug education in reducing demand and harms

Wednesday 13 March, 2024

Data from Police Scotland has shown a 10 per cent rise in suspected drug deaths, with 1,197 reported for 2023 compared to 1,092 in 2022. The figure for under 25s is almost unchanged between the two years, with 54 in 2023 compared to 55 in 2022.

Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE, founder and director of the drugs education charity the DSM Foundation, commented:

“Seeing these figures rise yet again is heartbreaking from both a personal and professional perspective. As a mum with lived experience of losing a child to drugs, I know something of how much of a hole each one of these individual lives will have left for those that love and have lost them. As the director and founder of a drug education charity committed to reducing drug-related harm, this is another sad reminder of how vital it is to ensure all young people across Scotland have access to effective, evidence-based drug education, that equips them to face decisions about drugs more safely, and reduces the risks and harms drugs can cause, both in the short and longer term. We know young people are exposed to drugs on an increasingly regular basis as they move through their teens, both in real life and on social media, just at the stage of their lives when managing risk is never harder, especially when they’re with their friends. Making sure the drug education young people in Scotland are getting is as good as it possibly can be must be right at the heart of all the wider work going on to prevent drug-related harm, and any response to these tragic figures.

Having provided three successful tours of our Theatre in Education production of our commissioned play by Mark Wheeller, ‘I Love You, Mum – I Promise I Won’t Die’, in schools across Scotland over the last two years, we’re so pleased to be piloting our multi-component drug education programme in nine schools across the Grampian region this academic year, with funding from Scottish Government, Police Scotland, local authorities and schools. Every school has been being provided with interactive workshops for students, webinars for parents and carers, training for staff, drug education lesson plans and resources for teachers to use in Personal and Social Education (PSE), our Youth Ambassador programme, and a performance of our play that tells Dan’s story. The evaluation of this pilot programme that Aberdeen University is working on will be shared at a dissemination event in June, and following this we very much hope to be able to provide our programme resources much more widely to schools and communities across Scotland.

Prevention, with drug education as a core part of that, takes time to demonstrate its impact on numbers like this, but without it being firmly embedded in any response to drug-related deaths we’re likely to see these numbers keep going in the wrong direction, and more families robbed of those they love, which isn’t what any of us want.”

Information for editors:

The DSM Foundation was 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 does a lot of work in schools, colleges and community organisations with children and young people, and also provides workshops for parents and caregivers, and training for school and college staff – the two groups shown by NHS survey data as the most likely sources of information about drugs and alcohol sought out by 11-15 year olds. 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 his family and friends, through studying the work itself, or booking a Theatre in Education performance. Schools and colleges can also download age-appropriate, relevant, up to date and evidence-based drugs education resources free of charge from the DSM Foundation website for delivery by teachers through PSHE/PSE provision.

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

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

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