

WRENS - Outcomes

This section will look at the WRENS project in terms of their outcomes and what they have achieved since the programme was established in 2002, it will also take a look into how WRENS has benefited their clients over the past few years through various workshops focusing on topics such as drugs, coping with stress, suicide prevention and many other topics and skills which have been delivered through a number of personal development and drugs awareness courses for the local parents and children of the Killinarden area.

According to Duggan (2007) ‘The work undertaken by the KDDPG was evaluated in 2003 while the WRENS project was half way through its pilot phase and was only briefly referred to, the initial brief of the evaluation was to assess the impact of the work with families; the evaluation which was undertaken during May and June 2007, covers the three main work areas of the Young People’s Programme, The Adult Outreach and Support Programme and also Work done with clients of the Probation and Welfare Service; it became clear that there were many organizational issues that needed to be addressed (2007: 5). Duggan outlined that ‘the methodology for the evaluation involved a number of components, principally documentary analysis and interviews, the interviews involved staff and board members, family members using the service and key personnel agencies’ (2007: 6). “The proposal to commission an evaluation of the WRENS programme came from the staff of the KDDPG” (Duggan 2007: 3).

Duggan points out that 'WRENS has been highly effective in delivering interventions based on the principles of community development that have been organically embedded within the community and that these interventions benefit individuals, families and also the wider community as well as adding value to the work of local schools and statutory agencies, the organisation however, is weak on strategic planning, targeting and reporting and as a result it is now experiencing some stresses on its resources and is facing uncertainty in relation to ongoing funding' (2007: 6). Rourke points out that 'it is estimated that in October 2003 the WRENS project had worked with over 100 people living in the Killinarden area, on an individual basis, in a group context and as part of a training programme' (2003: 6).

"WRENS has helped by empowering local parents to better understand the problem of drug misuse and by facilitating them to provide awareness programmes in local schools" (Duggan, 2007: 4). 'Workshops on topics such as drugs, coping with stress, suicide prevention and many other important topics and skills have been delivered'. Duggan points out that 'parents acquired a greater awareness of drugs and mis-use, they could use the skills they developed through WRENS to the benefit of their own families, and through the schools programme, WRENS were able to educate young people in drugs awareness and facilitate them to make more constructive personal choices' (2007: 9). Duggan states that 'WRENS has become recognised as an important and significant organisation within the drugs prevention infrastructure of Tallaght' (2007: 9). She also states that 'information stands were made available at parent/ teacher meetings in local

schools, a drug awareness poster competition in local primary schools were organized and a series of drug awareness programmes were delivered in local schools, these include how to say no without losing face, a six weeks drugs awareness training course, follow up courses and a self-esteem programme, piloted in a local primary school in 1994 (2007: 10). “The work of WRENS combines the specific expertise of the organisation in addressing the needs of individuals with meeting the objective of the school in terms of retaining vulnerable young people in the educational system” (2007: 15).

Duggan has also outlined that ‘WRENS has helped to contribute meaningful outcomes for young people through generating long term benefits for them including increased life and job prospects, it helps to identify needs among the families of the young people which the project may be able to respond to, it reduces disruptive behaviour in class and in the school generally, it has also contributed to improving the rate of retention in the school system and the numbers completing senior cycle; One mother noted that her son had been repeatedly suspended from school because of his behaviour and subsequent to key working with WRENS personnel, his behaviour improved significantly and his participation in school became much more satisfactory’ (2007: 18). “In the views of school personnel, there has been an improvement in the behaviours of those involved in the more intensive work of WRENS” (Duggan, 2007: 19)

Duggan also reports that ‘a significant impact of this work is on helping young people involved in drug misuse to remain within the school system, this type of intervention is very valuable for young people whose drug use makes them highly vulnerable to early school leaving and to slipping into an unstructured life style and further drug use and criminal activities’ (2007: 20). “Participation in the courses facilitates a number of positive outcomes for family members. It provides them with a new understanding of issues, it introduces mothers to other women in similar circumstances, it enables the support they receive from the project to continue within the group setting and it also empowers them to give something back to their communities” (Duggan, 2007: 26)

“From the interviews with family members who had been involved with WRENS it is clear that their impact was dramatic, people began to understand the nature of the problem they were dealing with, to regain their confidence, and to separate their own needs and those of their family, from the needs of the member whose behaviour had generated the difficulty, family members were also enabled to interrupt the negative dynamic resulting from drug use or associated criminal behaviour and to establish or re-establish a more appropriate and effective of managing behaviours within their households” (Duggan, 2007: 25). Duggan also explains that ‘several families interviewed had benefited from this level of support which included one to one work with the daughter of one family who had an eating disorder and support for a son of another family with a drugs problem, a frequent comment from women interviewed was that even if they were the only one in contact with WRENS, they were able to bring the benefits they were receiving into their homes’ (2007: 26).

In the view of Probation and Welfare Duggan outlines 'that the one to one intervention provides a re-affirming experience for women who are often without other forms of affirmation or support and that it has enables women to understand their behaviours, the implications of their behaviours and to realise they can do something to change their behaviours, It also enables women to work more effectively with the Probation and Welfare Officers' (2007: 34). "The work of the WRENS project is seen as adding value to the work of the Probation Services in so far as it enables them to use their time more effectively and also to focus on the work they can do, the work with the WRENS project with clients of Probation Service is achieving very effective outcomes" (Duggan, 2007: 34)

The WRENS project does not meet the SMART criteria, mainly because it is a support group for families rather than for offenders. Deem et al. (2007) state that 'New managerialism has been focused on the detailed restructuring of public services delivery, organisation and management in a way that facilitates a flexible and changing balance between strategic control and operational control (2007: 1). They also state that "It entails the progressive and intensifying expansion of market forces, performance measurement and control, and consumer populism into the public sphere" (2007: 22). The WRENS project doesn't exactly adhere to new managerialism because WRENS are still very much under the control of the KDDPG and also the Probation Services, Sinead who works in WRENS stated that they will be working towards this form of new managerialism in the coming future.

“Overall it is clear that clients derived huge benefits from the project in terms of better understanding the issues that effect them, being better able to manage problematic situations in their family, better able to participate in their own community and in some instances, being facilitated to acquire skills that they can use in their own communities or in other settings” (Duggan, 2007: 23). Duggan outlines that ‘it is clear from the evaluation that from the perspective of clients, very good work is being done with families and individuals and the manner in which the work is delivered, as well as the quality of the work, was important in this (2007: 27). Duggan also outlines that ‘the high progression rates, and the low drop out rate, are very notable; a progression to employment or education/training of almost one in three is an exceptionally high success rate’ (2007: 29).

To conclude, it is clear that the participants of the WRENS programmes benefit a lot from these activities, which include key working, one to one counseling, outreach work, workshops and various different types of programmes from drugs awareness to building self esteem and from these programmes WRENS clients have been able to move forward in their lives and face certain difficulties and issues that have been arising and have learned skills on how to deal with and cope with situations that they may have been faced with, and may have to face in the future. WRENS has made a very dramatic impact on the local Killinarden area, in primary and secondary schools and also in the wider community and hopes to continue to be a great success in the future.

Bibliography

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