

# Stella Project

Separate **Issues** Shared **Solutions**



## SAMPLE DRUGS POLICY - FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES

Supported by



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This policy draws on the 'Sample Drugs Policy developed by Kevin Flemen/KFx. This is located at [www.ixion.demon.co.uk](http://www.ixion.demon.co.uk)

## Definitions:

**Controlled, prescribed drugs:** Controlled, prescribed drugs are substances that can be used to provide a state of intoxication and are considered potentially harmful. Because of this perceived risk some controlled drugs are only available by prescription. It is legal to be in the possession of controlled, prescribed drugs, provided they are prescribed for you and remain in your possession.

**Illicit, controlled drugs:** Illicit Controlled drugs are substances that can be used to provide a state of intoxication and are considered harmful. Because of this potential harm to users, they are illegal to use, possess or supply.

**Domestic violence refuge:** A refuge is a temporary, safe house where women and children who are experiencing domestic violence can live free from violence.

**Anti Social Behaviour:** Anti-social behaviour includes a range of problematic behaviour including excessive neighbourhood noise, abandoning cars, vandalism, graffiti, litter and using premises for the supply and production of illicit drugs.

**Sharps:** A term used to describe needles and syringes that may be used in the process of injecting substances.

**Drug paraphernalia:** Equipment used in taking or manufacturing illicit substances. E.g. Crack pipes, syringes, tourniquets.

## Section One: Introduction

The **Stella Project** is a partnership between the Greater London Domestic Violence Project (GLDVP) and the Greater London Alcohol and Drug Alliance (GLADA). During 2002, discussions between GLDVP and GLADA identified gaps in current service provision for both survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence who are problematic substance users. GLDVP and GLADA therefore decided to create the Stella Project in order to find positive and creative ways to work towards more inclusive service provision.

The sample drugs policy has been developed to assist residential domestic violence projects to work with drug using women. Some points to keep in mind when using the policy:

- This policy sets the legal guidelines for refuges that have **actively** chosen to work with drug and alcohol users.
- Issues in relation to children or disruptive behaviour are **not** covered in this policy. These issues should be covered by your organisations policy in relation to child protection and abusive behaviour.
- The policy provides a legal framework for working with drug using women in relation to section eight of the Misuse of Drugs Act. **It is not designed to guide your professional practice when working with drug and alcohol users.** The policy does not for example cover risk assessments or drug and alcohol assessments. Please refer to the Stella Project Toolkit for this.
- It is a large document, because many pieces of legislation need to be considered when housing drug users. There is no way of condensing all this legislation any further.

This policy may look dense, but is in fact a condensed version and refers to procedures and rules that are applicable to both paid and unpaid staff and residents. Most of the issues raised within the policy are only applicable to residential services; however the basic legalities of drug use applies to all settings. The "Sample Drugs Policy for Domestic Violence Refuge" should be used in conjunction with the **Stella Project's** toolkit "Domestic Violence, Drugs and Alcohol: Good Practice Guidelines" and the Sample Drugs Policy developed by Kevin Flemen/KFx, located at [www.ixion.demon.co.uk](http://www.ixion.demon.co.uk).

**Myth: Women who use drugs or drink can stop whenever they please**

*Fact: Drug and alcohol use is entwined with physical and psychological addiction. Withdrawal may require time and medical supervision. She may feel using is fundamental to survival.*

The **Stella Project** does not offer this policy as the answer to all the issues raised in working with drug using women. Each refuge needs to look at their own specific situation and adapt the policy accordingly. It is hoped this document will simply provide a legal

Sample Drugs Policy For Use By Domestic Violence Services. Copyright: The Stella Project 2006

framework for practice when working with drug using women, in a residential setting.

It is also important to remember that the policy is a work in progress. It will need to be reviewed on a regular basis to take account of changes in service design as well as changes in legislation.

The main index of this document provides an easy reference for particular relevant sections of policy. It is advised that managers make themselves familiar with the entire policy, however it is realised this may not be practical for all workers in an agency.

Basic drug and alcohol awareness training should be provided by refuges, which choose to work with drug and alcohol users. Training will allow staff to feel more confident and ensure that the information and support offered to drug and alcohol users is appropriate.

## Section Two: Issues for Managers and Organisation

*Why work with women who use drugs? • Child Protection Issues • What key messages should we be giving to staff and clients?*

*The section below is designed to assist organisations to tackle some of their concerns about working with this client group.*

- “Why should we work with women who use drugs?”

Traditionally women who use substances have been viewed as deviant and undesirable; by taking substances they are no longer replicating the desired role of women in society. Mothers have particularly received a great deal of criticism and have often been ostracised from services due to their drug use. By refusing to work with women who use substances we continue to alienate some of the most vulnerable women within our communities.

The outright rejection of women substance users has failed to acknowledge the reasons women may turn to substance use. In the context of domestic violence, many women find substance use an effective way of coping with day to day, systematic abuse. Substance use can numb both physical and emotional pain, offer a way of disassociating from abuse or can be used as another mechanism of control by a perpetrator. The **Stella Project** hopes to increase this understanding of women and substance use, enabling women more choices and opportunities to live free from violence.

Many people believe all substance users are unruly, violent, rude and inconsiderate. These beliefs are generally unfounded and based on the notion that ‘drugs are bad and so are the people who use them.’ For some women substances in fact make them more subdued, withdrawn and make them act and behave ‘normally.’ The latter circumstance illustrates how substances can be used as a coping mechanism. We all make choices about our behaviour whether under the influence of substances or not. Substance use does not excuse or cause violent or offensive behaviour.

Women with drug or alcohol problems face additional barriers when trying to leave violent relationships. Often perpetrators will sabotage attempts to reduce or stop substance use, force women to use or sell substances and spend the family income on substances. Women who use substances may fear the removal of their children or their partner may act as the only point of supply for substances. These behaviours combined with those generally associated with domestic violence, dramatically increase a women’s vulnerability. In general, the longer a woman stays in a relationship, the more severe and repetitive the violence becomes. As the violence increases her substance use is likely to rise.

Domestic violence and substance use often work in a spiralling effect. Women in this situation are less likely or able to contact services, often only doing so when in crisis. As substance use is often used as a coping mechanism by survivors, once the threat of violence is removed, an opportunity to address her substance use is available. It is incredibly challenging for drug and alcohol agencies to work with survivors whilst they are still in a violent relationship.

Refuge providers have a unique opportunity to offer these women safety, security and access to drug and alcohol treatment and referral. If we choose not to work with drug using women, we are declaring them as unworthy recipients of our services. We may feel scared by our lack of experience or knowledge about working with drug using women. Yet this fear can deny women the right to live free from violence.

- **But what about child protection issues?**

Many refuges are concerned about the impact of having drug users and children housed in the same premises.

The drugs policy covers details about how drugs should be stored and disposed of. It also works under the belief that drug or alcohol use do not cause unruly or aggressive behaviour. However, any behaviour whether related to substance use or not that threatens the safety of any residents, children or staff needs to be addressed and dealt with in accordance with your organisation's policies.

If genuine fears about a woman's ability to parent or fears about child abuse or neglect should always be reported to social services. It is assumed most refuges have a procedure and policy for this. If not, sample child protection policies can be found in the **Stella Project** toolkit.

- **What key messages should we be giving staff and clients?**

You may find it useful as an agency to adopt a few key messages for staff and clients. These messages are designed to underpin some key practice issues:

- We all have the right to live free from violence
- Drug use by survivors often enables them to cope with their experiences of trauma
- Not all drug use is problematic
- Anyone whose behaviour is offensive or disruptive, whether substance affected or not will be challenged.
- Negative language such as 'junkie', 'alkie', 'clean' or 'addict' are unacceptable ways to refer to drug users
- Illegal drug use will be investigated and challenged
- Any suspected drug use, supply or manufacturing in the building will be challenged

- All women and children should report prescribed medicine use to staff and store them in a safe place.
- Staff are prohibited from being substance affected at work

### **Section Three: Staff Guidelines for implementing the Drugs Policy**

*Staff and the drugs policy • Explaining the policy to clients • Drugs covered by the policy • Where is the policy applicable?*

This organisation recognises that some of the women accessing our services will have some involvement with legal and illegal drugs. The organisation neither condones nor approves of the possession, use or supply of illicit drugs. However we will attempt to include drug using women where possible, dependent on our time, resources and expertise. We expect all staff to adopt a positive attitude to working with drug and alcohol users. We also expect staff to engage in any training and development in relation to working with substance users.

The refuge seeks to provide safety and support for women and children fleeing domestic violence. In order to do this we also recognise that some women will also be using substances. Whilst the refuge provides an accessible and inclusive service to people who use drugs, the organisation also recognises that it has other duties and obligations. These include:

- Our obligation to work within the law
- A duty to provide a safe environment for all workers, volunteers and service users
- A duty to work with, and be sensitive to, our local community

The refuge recognises that the intention to work with drug users may create tensions. This could be between staff and women, between individual women, between service providers and the local community and between service providers and statutory services.

This policy is intended to minimise these tensions and ensure the safe and legal provision of services to all those involved.

#### ***What do I need to know as a worker?***

Staff are expected to read, understand and abide by the drugs policy. If staff are unhappy with any aspect of the policy or are unclear how to deal with the situation, they should always discuss this with a manager. Failure to adhere to this policy could mean you are risking the legality and safety of the refuge for women, children and staff.

As your employer we will:

- Explain the drugs policy to staff during their induction.
- Provide all staff with a copy of the drugs policy

- Make available a copy of the policy to locum or temporary staff. They should also receive an explanation of the policy during their induction
- Provide new staff with basic drug and alcohol training. Refresher training will also be provided in house on a regular basis.
- Actively encourage you to work in partnership with local drug and alcohol services, this may include accompanying clients to services and undertaking partnership working with drug and alcohol services.
- Provide staff with regular supervision. Implementation of the drugs policy should be discussed during supervision. Where necessary, further training or skills development will be made available.

### ***How do I tell clients about this policy?***

It is your job to discuss and explain this policy to clients. You should explain to clients that the drugs policy is devised to protect the rights and safety of ALL women, children and staff. If a woman uses drugs we still have an obligation to work with her provided we have the appropriate resources and training to provide support for her. If after explaining the policy and presenting women with their copy of the policy they are still confused you should refer them to your manager.

These are guidelines about how and when you should explain the drugs policy:

1. **Explain the drugs policy to all women when they enter the refuge.** Try and do this in a way that is clear and concise. Tell the woman that the refuge can provide support and information to her if she has issues with drugs and alcohol. Stress that she will not be evicted from the refuge if she has issues with drugs and alcohol. If she discloses this as an issue, include this in your key working and make contact with a local drug and alcohol service for support and referral.
2. You should also present them with a copy of the policy. If your client has difficulty reading or English is not their first language you should explain the policy verbally. It is our legal obligation to provide all women with a copy of the policy when they enter the refuge. The policy should be provided with as a part of their induction pack.
3. Ask women to sign an agreement that states we have explained and that they understand the drugs policy. This agreement means women are happy to stay in the project, abide by the drugs policy and possibly share the refuge with women who do use drugs and/or alcohol. A copy of this sample form is at the back of this policy.
4. It is our legal obligation to remind women of the drugs policy during their stay. This could be done on a quarterly basis by writing a letter, which is both direct and discrete. Therefore if problems are

raised in the future with the police, this proves we have been clear and informative in relation to our drugs policy.

5. Remember to remind women that they can provide feedback on the policy via our service user consultation procedures.

### ***What sorts of drugs does this policy cover?***

The drugs policy covers:

- Legal drugs such as alcohol, tobacco and medicines
- Illegal drugs such as cannabis, heroin and cocaine
- Other substances such as khat, solvents and ketamine.

The drugs policy affects any women who may have involvement with these sorts of substances.

### ***But what about Alcohol?<sup>1</sup>***

It is acknowledged that alcohol can have a powerful effect on the individual and an entire refuge. Alcohol is legal and therefore we have no legal obligations in terms of possession or supply of alcohol by our residents. However we acknowledge that alcohol usage can be just as problematic as drug usage. For some women the use of alcohol is a more acceptable way of coping than using illegal substances.

If a woman has problems with her alcohol use we ask workers to:

1. Talk to the woman about her alcohol use in a non-judgemental and sympathetic fashion
2. Include discussions about her alcohol use in keyworking
3. Provide her with basic information about alcohol and safer ways of drinking
4. Provide support and referral to a local specialist alcohol agency. This may include taking a woman to the service and working in partnership with that agency.

If her alcohol use causes distress or harm to other residents we will enact the same processes we would for other types of disruptive behaviour.

### ***Does the policy apply to the whole building?***

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<sup>1</sup> It is acknowledged that different refuges have differing policies about alcohol. Some allow women to drink in communal areas, some are completely dry houses. This section of the document attempts to highlight some of the difficulties associated with housing women who may drink alcohol problematically.

Yes. As a service provider we will take action under the drugs policy when we have concerns about drug related activity both on and near the refuge. By law this includes:

- The entire building
- Individual's rooms
- The garden
- The front steps
- Adjoining alleys or out buildings

The powers to close premises included in the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 can be triggered by behaviour associated with the property. In order to abide by our legal requirements, we ask staff to:

- Ensure the building and surrounding areas are supervised when staff are on duty
- Check areas of the building where you may suspect supply or use may be likely to occur regularly. E.g. the front steps or a certain individual's room
- Log and investigate all complaints from the public regarding drug related activity in the vicinity of the building . Make sure this information is passed on to management as soon as possible. The management then have a duty to investigate the complaint. It is our legal obligation to take action against this reoccurring.

***What if someone brings illegal drugs into the building?***

We cannot condone women bringing illicit drugs into the building. Where you know or suspect this is happening you will need to discuss the matter with the woman involved.

It is an offence to be in possession of a controlled drug; the refuge does not encourage or condone illegal drug use. If drugs are found on a woman, the woman is breaking the law, not the refuge.

If you suspect a woman is using illegal drugs we ask that you:

1. Tell the woman that the refuge can provide support and information to her if she has issues with drugs and alcohol. Stress that she will not be evicted from the refuge if she has issues with drugs and alcohol. If she discloses this as an issue, include this in your key working and make contact with a local drug and alcohol service for support and referral. Also ensure that basic information about drugs and alcohol and local agencies is given to the woman.
2. Remind her that she is committing an offence under the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971). It is a legal obligation we have as service provider to inform women of this.

3. Stress that the use of drugs within the refuge could pose issues especially if she has children or uses in a communal area. In the longer term if she is not able to seek treatment for her use you may have to rehouse her.

#### **Section Four: Guidelines for working with women drug users**

*What to do if you find substances • Acting on suspicions or knowledge of drug dealing • What to do if someone is using substances on the premises • How to work with a woman who is prescribed a controlled drug • Dealing with intoxication and overdoses • Disposal of drug equipment • Record keeping and police involvement • Confidentiality and preventing discrimination*

#### ***What should I do if I find drugs?***

Unattended drugs are a potential risk to everyone. **The law is different depending on the type of drug you find e.g. prescribed or illicit and also where the drugs are found.** Below is guidance for a variety of scenarios:

#### ***What should I do if I find prescribed medication in a communal area?***

1. The drugs should be removed from the area
2. If the drugs are clearly labelled and the identity of the owner is known, they should return them to the owner. Residents should be reminded that all medication should be stored in their own individual locked cupboards when not in use.
3. When the identity of the owner is unknown or the drugs are unlabelled, they should be returned to the pharmacy. A written record of this should be kept.
4. Where the identity of the user is unknown, all women should be reminded of the drug policy in this area.
5. When the identity of the user is found you should offer support and information about their prescribed medication. If you suspect a woman is misusing her medication you should attempt to work in partnership with her prescriber and a local drug and alcohol agency.
6. This maybe considered a breach of contract and we have a legal obligation to inform residents that this could lead to a warning being issued or to a woman eventually being rehoused.

#### ***What should I do if I find illegal drugs in a communal area?***

1. Remove the substance from the area
2. The drugs should either be destroyed or taken to the police for disposal

3. You should talk to the woman involved in a non-judgmental and sympathetic manner. Remind her that she will not be evicted simply because of her drug and alcohol use. However you are legally obliged to challenge this woman and remind her of the legal implications of being in possession of an illicit substance.
4. You should provide basic information about drug and alcohol use to the woman. It is also essential discuss her substance use as a part of keyworking. Workers are expected to provide support and referral to a local drug and alcohol agency.
5. It is important however to consider this a breach of contract and we have a legal obligation to inform residents that this could lead to a warning being issued or to a woman being re-housed.

### ***What if I find drugs in a woman's room?***

**If a woman has a licence or tenancy agreement**, the contents of her room will be treated as her possessions. Therefore if she has drugs in her room, the offence of possession will be hers rather than the organisation's. The organisation is under no obligation to dispose of substances found in their room. You may however want to discuss your findings with her in a non-judgemental, supportive fashion. You should provide information and a supported referral to a local drug and alcohol agency.

**If a woman shares her room with another resident or her children**, staff have an obligation to act under the Duty of Care that the organisation has to its service users. If her drugs were exposed and accessible to her children you should refer to your child protection policy. You should also discuss your findings with her in a non-judgemental and supportive fashion. You should offer a referral to a local drug and alcohol agency. It is also important to discuss the implications of her drug use in terms of her parenting and the effect it may have on children. Be clear that your findings will not lead to eviction or necessarily lead to a referral to social services.

If a woman has moved out, substances should be disposed of as if they were found in a communal area.

### ***Can I store prescribed controlled drugs for women***

No. We cannot store prescribed controlled drugs on a woman's behalf. Woman should ensure that such medications are safely and securely stored, out of reach from children. Each room should ideally contain a locked cupboard; all prescribed controlled drugs should be kept here when not in use. A woman's use of prescribed medication should be known by staff and discussed in key working sessions.

The refuge cannot take possession of a woman's medication, as this would be committing an offence. To be legally in possession of a prescribed controlled drug you need to have it prescribed for yourself.

***Can I take possession of illegal drugs such as heroin, cocaine and cannabis?***

Only if your intention is to destroy them or hand them into the police. If you find illegal drugs only pass them back to a woman exceptional circumstances, such as fears for yours or their personal safety.

***Can I take possession of other medicines such as aspirin or Prozac?***

Women should be responsible for the storage and consumption of their own medication. Refuges do not provide staff around the clock, therefore women must be expected to control their own consumption of medication.

***If I find drugs, how do I dispose of them?***

If you find an illegal substance in a communal area, please follow these guidelines for its disposal.

1. You must not pass the substance to anyone else. You should either destroy it or pass it to the police. Small quantities of powders flush easily, however substances such as cannabis resin may not be so easily disposed of. It may be more practical to take these to the police.
2. Destruction should take place in the presence of a senior worker such as a manager, to witness the process. A written record of the incident should be kept and placed in the incident file.
3. When the quantity of drugs found seems excessive this may suggest supply the police should be involved.
4. When a decision is made to take drugs to the police, the police should be informed that a worker is coming to the police station prior to setting off.
5. Speak to the resident/s you may suspect of leaving the substances there. Do so in a non-judgemental and supportive fashion, offer them information about drug use. Undertake a supported referral to a local drug agency and key work the client in relation to their substance use.

***What if I think someone is supplying or dealing from the building?***

Examples: A woman giving another woman some methadone, one woman injecting another with heroin, two women sharing a spliff or a woman selling ecstasy.

This refuge cannot tolerate the supply of controlled drugs on the premises. We will always act where we know or suspect that supply is taking place. Any woman found supplying or suspected of supplying controlled drugs it may lead to very serious repercussions, such as written warnings or being rehoused.

This refuge has a legal requirement to take reasonable steps to stop supply from taking place on the premises.

If you suspect a woman is supplying drugs:

1. You should advise your manager of your concerns. Citing any evidence which might have led you to believing a woman is supplying.
2. Initially you will need to confront the woman in a non-judgemental and supportive fashion. You should supply her with information about drug use and provide a supported referral to a local drug agency. It is however very important that you tell her of your suspicions. You have a legal obligation to remind her of the legal implications of supplying drugs.
3. If after speaking to a woman you suspect or know supply is taking place you may be forced to provide her with a written warning or re-house her.<sup>2</sup>
4. Make a written note of the action your organisation has decided to take. This information should be kept on a client's individual file or an incident file.

***What if someone tells me a client is supplying or dealing?***

If you receive information from a third party e.g. another resident or a neighbour you should:

1. Acknowledge the information and ensure it is recorded
2. Advise the informant the information will be looked into and treated seriously
3. Discuss the information with staff and management. Identify any shared concerns
4. Ensure that staff record and watch for any suspicious behaviour that may be related to the information provided.
5. Discuss the matter with the accused woman in a non-confrontational, supportive manner. Always offer access to a local drug and alcohol agency and provide basic information on drugs and alcohol.
6. Where applicable, it may be essential to undertake a room search. This should always be done in the presence of a senior worker or manager.

If these steps are taken and our findings support the accusation, we are required to take action.<sup>3</sup> When no evidence supports the accusation, you

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<sup>2</sup> The approach individual refuges take will vary depending on your policies relating to disruptive behaviour. We ask you to refer back to your agencies protocols in relation to dealing with difficult or illegal behaviour. You are however legally bound to take some form of action.

<sup>3</sup> The approach individual refuges take will vary depending on your policies relating to disruptive behaviour. We ask you to refer back to your agencies protocols in relation to

should log the steps taken, note that no evidence was found and record any further action taken.

If the third party asks what has been done about their accusation, no additional information will be given. Staff will ensure the informant that the accusation has been investigated in accordance with the policy.

**IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT YOU NEVER TURN A 'BLIND EYE' TO ANY SUSPICIONS OF DRUG SUPPLY**

***What do I do if I think someone is using on the premises?***

The law varies a great deal in relation to use on premises, depending on the sort of substances used and where they are used.

Cannabis and Opium

**The rules for opium and cannabis are different to other illegal controlled drugs. Therefore your actions in relation to someone's use of Cannabis and Opium need to be more assertive.** Even though cannabis has been reclassified to a class C drug it is still illegal to possess or supply the drug. Despite the fact that Opium is rarely available or used in the UK these days, the these guidelines still apply to its use.

If a woman uses **cannabis or opium** in the refuge, we advise you to:

1. Challenge her behaviour immediately; this however should be done in a non-confrontational and understanding manner.
2. You must instruct the woman to cease smoking immediately.
3. You will need to inform all staff about the incident and be aware it may occur again
4. Inform the woman that any future use will be dealt with more seriously than the first incident
5. Remind the woman that it is illegal to be in possession of controlled drugs.
6. Ensure that information about cannabis or opium and relevant support agencies is available to the woman, which can help her make informed decisions about her drug use.

If her cannabis or opium use is a recurring issue, we may choose to provide women with verbal or written warnings or termination of her licence agreement. Any action taken by the refuge will be decided in consultation with other team members, senior managers and other agencies where appropriate. All breaches of the drugs policy, agency responses and reasons for those responses will be recorded.

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dealing with difficult or illegal behaviour. You are however legally bound to take some form of action.

**What if someone uses other illegal drugs on the premises, what should I do then?<sup>4</sup>**

If a woman uses other **illegally held controlled drugs** (e.g. heroin, cocaine, ecstasy) we ask that you:

1. Remind the woman they are committing an offence and highlight the legal implications that this carries for the woman
2. Highlight the implications of her drug use in terms of her health and welfare
3. Remind the woman that her drug use may place staff or other women and children at risk.
4. Ensure that information about drugs and relevant support agencies is available to the woman. Always include discussions about her drug or alcohol use within your key working sessions. Be sure to make a supported referral with a woman's consent to a local drug and alcohol agency.

Behaviour that may create risk for other women such as: using in communal areas, discarding injecting equipment will be treated seriously. If this sort of behaviour occurs you must speak to a woman about the legalities and risks involved in such behaviour. If this behaviour continues the project maybe left with no other choice but to re-house her. Any action taken by the refuge will be decided in consultation with other team members, senior managers and other agencies where appropriate. All infringements of the drugs policy, agency responses and reasons for those responses will be recorded.

***How should clients be using legally prescribed drugs?***

The use of **legally prescribed drugs or other drugs such as Khat or solvents** is not an offence; there are no legal repercussions for this behaviour for either the woman or the refuge. However we do ask staff to ensure:

1. That legally prescribed drugs are not used in shared or communal areas
2. Women use their legally prescribed drugs within their own. Women need to store their medicines in the locked cupboard provided within their rooms.

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that under the Misuse of Drugs Act the refuge is not committing an offence where it is known that drugs other than cannabis or opium are being used. According to the Act you are not committing an offence by knowingly housing someone using within their room. However due to health and safety and Duty of Care we are obliged to challenge this behaviour. Additional issues surrounding drug related behaviour or the protection of children might also strengthen this approach.

3. Women are using legally prescribed drugs as prescribed. If this is not occurring you will need to speak to a woman about the risks she is taking. You may wish to work with her prescriber and a local drug and alcohol agency in partnership to assist a woman to use her medication correctly.

***How do I work with a woman who is prescribed a controlled drug e.g. methadone?***

If one of your clients is being prescribed a controlled drug, please follow these guidelines:

4. Encourage women to inform workers of what and how much they are being prescribed. This should be recorded in the client's file and incorporated into key working sessions. You may also consider referring and supporting a woman to access a local drug and alcohol agency.
5. Ensure that prescribed drugs are always kept on their own person or stored somewhere securely well out of the reach of children. Each room should ideally contain a locked cupboard; all prescribed controlled drugs should be kept here when not in use. Ask women to keep them in their original packaging and with labels intact, so we are aware of who owns them if they do become lost or misplaced. **Prescribed controlled drugs should never be given to other people to take or look after, this includes refuge workers.**
6. If you are worried about a woman's use of prescribed controlled drugs you should seek to work with prescribers and pharmacies with women's consent. The management of this organisation will support you in doing this. This may be time consuming but is considered good practice as it ensures service users are not prescribed large quantities of drugs at one time. This can be done by simply contacting the local GP's surgery and attempting to discuss this with them.<sup>1</sup>
7. Warn women to remove any medication that is openly displayed, left unattended or given to others for safe-keeping.

**What if a resident is misusing prescribed medication?**

You will need to follow the steps below:

1. Highlight the implications of her drug use in terms of her health and welfare. This conversation should take place in a non-

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<sup>1</sup> You may find it useful to contact your local Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) for a full list of prescribers within easy access to your projects. DAAT contacts can be found at: <http://www.drugs.gov.uk/Directory>

judgemental and understanding fashion. Always offer her information about the support you can provide. You should offer to work in partnership with her prescriber and the local drug and alcohol agency.

2. Remind the woman that her drug use may place staff or other women and children at risk.

Behaviour that may create risk for other women such as: using in communal areas, will be treated seriously. We will attempt to speak to women about the risks involved in such behaviour. If her behaviour continues the project maybe left with no other choice but to re-house her. Any action taken by the refuge will be decided in consultation with other team members, senior managers and other agencies where appropriate. All infringements of the drugs policy, agency responses and reasons for those responses will be recorded.

### ***What do I do if someone is intoxicated on premises?***

Women who wish to use any part of the service should be sober enough to do so. If you feel a woman's intoxication will cause harm to herself or the other service users it is advisable to ask her to stay within her room. If she has children, you should refer to the organisations child protection policy.

**Anyone whose behaviour is offensive or disruptive, whether due to substances or not will be challenged and asked to change their behaviour.**

If a woman's inappropriate behaviour is linked to her substance use we will talk to the woman about the support that is available from the refuge and also from local drug and alcohol agencies. Our aim will be to support this woman in conjunction with a specialist drug and alcohol agency. We will also ensure that basic information about drugs and alcohol and local agencies is given to women.

All incidents should be recorded in the Incident book or in an individual's file.

### ***What should I do if someone overdoses?***

The refuge will attempt to provide first aid training to its entire staff. We will also ensure that a fully stocked first aid kit is available at all times. If a woman appears to be unconscious or not breathing do not assume it is necessarily due to drugs. However if you are worried about a woman's condition staff should:

- Reassure her that the priority is her well being and encourage her to divulge any drug use, including legal medications.
- Call an ambulance if necessary.

Sample Drugs Policy For Use By Domestic Violence Services. Copyright: The Stella Project 2006

- If an ambulance arrives and any drugs have been taken, retain and pass them onto the ambulance crew for identification.
- When moving or assisting a woman take care in case syringes have not been discarded.
- Try to get relevant information from other service users about a woman's condition
- If a woman is found unconscious or becomes unconscious or stops breathing, deliver first aid.
- Have another staff member or service user call an ambulance if a client is found unconscious or becomes unconscious
- Always remember to make a record of the incident.
- When a woman returns the incident should be discussed and information or a referral to a drug and alcohol service should be supplied where appropriate.

***What do I do with injecting equipment and sharps bins?***

*(If you choose to work with injecting drug users it is recommended you adopt the following section of the policy)*

Sharps bins are available to all service users for the safe disposal of razor blades, toothbrushes, injecting equipment, bandages etc. All women should dispose of such items safely. The unsafe disposal of items such as needles will be treated as a health and safety issue.

It is legal for us to provide women with sharps bins and to dispose of these.

Due to the presence of children we ask that women store their sharps bins in their individual locked cupboards.

No restriction will be placed on women bringing or storing clean, unopened needles into the building. The more access an injecting, drug using woman has to clean needles, the less likely she will be to share. All used needles are to be placed in sharps bins. Any woman who fails to do this will be challenged. She will be reminded of the drugs policy, the risk she is creating for workers and women and given a new sharps bin. Future transgressions may result in warnings or being re-housed. Details of the local needle exchange will be provided to the woman.

In the case of indisposed needles:

- Always take care in situations where needles may be encountered, such as when moving mattresses or soft furniture. We will assume that needles may be present even if areas are not thought to be used by known injectors.
- If we find an indisposed needle, take a small sharps bin and use a dustpan and brush to put the needle into the bin.

Sample Drugs Policy For Use By Domestic Violence Services. Copyright: The Stella Project 2006

- Check sharps bins prior to carrying to ensure that they have not been pierced. Bins which have been pierced should be placed into a larger bin prior to transportation.

A needlestick injury will include a prick, scratch or puncture by a used needle. If this takes places, we suggest refuge staff should:

- Remove the needle and place somewhere safe where it can be retrieved
- Squeeze the injury to encourage bleeding for a few minutes and place under cold running water.
- Wash and clean the site with iodine or soapy water
- Apply a plaster or other dressing
- Report to their local GP or Accident and Emergency department for a Hep B vaccination within 48 hours if not already vaccinated. Screening for blood borne viruses should also occur during this time.
- A senior worker or manager should be informed and the incident recorded.
- Support and counselling should be made available to the injured person. Especially in the case of infection.

It is an offence to transport controlled waste if you are not a registered carrier, therefore sharps bins will only be collected by local council environmental services or the local needle exchange scheme.

***Do I need to record any drug related incidents?***

All drug-related incidents and responses to them must be accurately recorded. The recording should balance the need to record incidents and protect the rights of women accessing the service. The police can apply for a warrant to gain access to written information including those involved in the supply of drugs. After a warrant has been issued, organisations are obliged to hand over written documents. Sensitive or incriminating information should only be recorded in an individual's personal files, not in more generic files such as logbooks, ban books or daybooks. While all written records can be seized, some such as an individual woman's notes enjoy a greater degree of protection than others.

Recording of all incidents will be done in an 'incident' book, which should be bound, rather than loose leaf. Each drug-related incident including episodes of suspicion and third-party information should be recorded in the incident book. Information in the incident book is limited to:

- The date and time of the incident
- The name of the woman involved
- A reference to the woman's personal file
- The initials of the worker dealing with the incident

Full details of the incident and action taken should be recorded only in the Woman's personal record. Information should be recorded in an accurate, unbiased and professional manner.

### ***Confidentiality***

We offer a refuge that aims to protect women's right to privacy and safety. In most circumstances we will not discuss anything about a woman outside the organisation without their consent. *For further guidance refer to your organisations confidentially guidelines and policy.*

### ***How do I manage other clients discriminating against substance users?***

All women, children and workers have the right to be treated with respect, fairness and dignity. This organisation will work with people who use drugs and those who do not. Abusive, threatening or offensive behaviour, which discriminates against people who use drugs or alcohol, will be treated seriously.

Staff and women should avoid using offensive language such as "smack head", "junkie", "alkie" or any other derogatory, negative or stigmatising language. Literature and resources within the building should not reinforce stereotypes relating to drug users. The use of concepts such as "addict" and "addiction" should be used with care, as they can become unhelpful labels. The terms "clean" and "dirty" to describe using and lapsing are inappropriate and should be challenged.

**SAMPLE LETTER TO ADVISE ON A REFUGE'S DRUGS POLICY**

DATE:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

When you moved into the refuge you would have been advised that we have a drugs policy. We have this policy because we believe all people have the right to live free from violence, including drug and alcohol users.

It is our legal obligation to reminder you of the content of this policy from time to time. Therefore we would like to remind you of a few key points from the policy:

- We cannot hold onto your prescribed medication.
- It is illegal for you to give, share or supply any illegal drugs or prescribed medication. Doing so could mean you are issued with a warning or eventually re-housed.
- Do not use any prescribed or illegal drugs in communal areas.
- Please store any prescribed or illegal drugs in the locked cupboard in your room.
- The law for cannabis and opium is different to other drugs. If you use these anywhere on the premises we may have to confiscate your substances and issue you with a warning.
- It is unacceptable to discriminate against other people who may use drugs or alcohol e.g. name calling or exclusion.

Please follow these simply guidelines, as our goal is to run a safe, legal and secure refuge.

If you have any questions or would like a copy of the drugs policy please feel free to ask a member of staff.

Yours sincerely,

The Friendly Management

DRUGS POLICY AGREEMENT

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

I confirm that I have read or had the drugs policy explained to me. I agree to:

- Not supply or manufacture illicit drugs on or around the premises.
- Not leave illicit or prescribed drugs unattended.
- Not use illicit or prescribed drugs in communal areas.
- Safely dispose of any drug paraphernalia.
- Not discriminate against other people who may use drugs or alcohol.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Witnessed by: \_\_\_\_\_

## RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

Please find a further list of resources which may assist your refuge in developing work with substance users:

### **Domestic Violence, Drugs and Alcohol: Good Practice Guidelines**

Produced by the Stella Project in 2004

The Stella Project also provides advice, training and events for practitioners across the domestic violence and drug and alcohol sectors.

Contact: [karen.bailey@gldvp.org.uk](mailto:karen.bailey@gldvp.org.uk)

Phone: 0207 785 3862

### **The Sample Drugs Policy**

Produced by Kevin Flemen in 2004

[www.ixion.demon.co.uk](http://www.ixion.demon.co.uk)

or email: [kfx@ixion.demon.co.uk](mailto:kfx@ixion.demon.co.uk)

HIT delivers effective interventions on drugs, alcohol, sexual health, community safety and other public health concerns. This site contains useful information on Harm minimisation. Hit also produces high quality information about drugs and alcohol, such as flyers and cards.

<http://www.hit.org.uk/>

**Release** is a national charity committed to informing and advising the public about drugs, the law and human rights. The Release Legal Helpline and Heroin Helpline are open 10.00am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, on 020 7729 9904. You can also contact Release by email at [ask@release.org.uk](mailto:ask@release.org.uk), visit their website at [www.release.org.uk](http://www.release.org.uk), or write to them at Release, 388 Old Street, London EC1V 9LT.

**Talk to Frank** offers basic information about drugs and alcohol. You can also write with substance related questions and have them answered by a professional.

<http://talktofrank.com/>

**Drugscope** is the UK's leading independent centre of expertise on drugs. They provide drug information, promote effective responses to drug taking, undertake research at local, national and international levels, advise on policy-making, encourage informed debate and speak for our member organisations working on the ground. <http://www.drugscope.org.uk/> or 020 7928 1211.

**Drugs.gov.uk** is the cross-government national drug strategy website for drug prevention and treatment professionals and others interested in the drug strategy. Content includes publications, events, Drug Action Team Directory, public drugs campaign resources, government press releases and the national drug strategy.

Quick Guide to the policy

