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With excerpts from relevant sections of
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1. Part One

1.1 Author Details

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1.2 About the Research and Preliminary Report

This research aims to evaluate the CLP at the secondary school level and to explore its impact on the school children who take part in the event. The Founder and Manager of the CLP, Steve Duffy approached the team after years of running the project with a desire to conduct a formal evidence-based evaluation of the CLP.

For over fifteen years, the CLP has been concerned with addiction education and has provided substance use and addiction education for young people, students and professionals. Since 2008 the CLP has educated over 50,000 young people in schools, Youth Offending Teams, universities and pupil referral units. Further to this, it has educated over 5,000 police recruits in Merseyside, Lancashire, Cheshire, North Wales and Greater Manchester. They have also trained people from diverse fields including Criminal Justice, Job Centre Plus, Park Wardens, Probation, Psychology, Social Work together with national and regional charities.

This part of the CLP evaluation is primarily concerned with the work it has done within schools and to understand how the project might better inform pupils about addiction and the lives of the people who have experienced drug/alcohol addiction. Other drug education programmes (e.g. the 1980s UK campaign 'Just Say No', (Mold, 2021), and government led strategies since, have aimed to inform school aged children about drugs and alcohol with an emphasis of involving teachers and multiple agencies (police, teachers, peers and parents) to help both prevent and educate pupils on the dangers of addiction (Allott, Paxton and Leonard, 1999). The CLP events however inform pupils from the perspective of people who have

experienced addiction as they believe “there is no-one better to educate and inform about the danger of drug and alcohol abuse than someone who has been there and experienced it all for themselves” (Choose Life, 2020a). The Project educates about addiction, how addiction happens, the harms of addiction, recovery and the pains and tribulations of recovery, and desistance from harmful behaviour by involving people who use substances to talk openly and frankly about their experiences. It also builds in workshop time which allows Choose Life volunteers to spend time with smaller groups, allowing pupils to ask any questions they please, which helps further dispel myths about those who use substances but also how easy it is to become addicted.

The request for an evidenced based evaluation is timely as it coincides with Dame Carol Black’s independent review focusing on drugs, drug use, prevention, treatment and recovery (Black, 2021). Black’s (2021) review highlights that there are evidence gaps in research, including what works to deter people taking drugs. Black recommends more research into interventions regarding the prevention of and responses to drug use. This report refers to drug use as substance use and this includes alcohol use. The term ‘people who use substances’ rather than ‘substance users’¹ is also preferred. Importantly, the Black (2021) review also highlights the role of education in preventative interventions, and recommends that staff working with people with drug dependence be appropriately trained. In addition, it recognises the importance of bringing researchers and practitioners together. This research project, therefore, addresses some of the issues raised in the Black (2021) review by evaluating the impact of the school’s CLP concerned with addiction education, substance use prevention and recovery and desistance from substance use.

This evaluation of the CLP involved three secondary schools and evaluation of the events by the principal researcher alongside Steve and the team. Each school was located in either North Wales/North West England and represented communities from urban, rural and semi-rural areas. All pupils who attended the CLP were invited to complete a survey after the event which asked them open questions about their feelings towards substance use and the people that use them. It also aimed to establish the wider impact of CLP in terms of their understanding of substance use as a wider social issue. 192 pupils across the three schools completed the survey either partially or fully (75 pupils from rural location, 57 pupils from a semi-rural location and 59 pupils from an urban location). Pupils were aged between 12-14 years and the CLP had taken part within their schools (with different pupils) for a number of years prior to the evaluation project alongside the Personal, Social, Health and Education curriculum which exists in its various forms within both the English and Welsh education

¹ In the open-ended survey pupils were asked about ‘substance misuse’ and ‘substance users’. Substance misuse is a term that is commonly used to convey the harmful use of drugs, including alcohol, and it is a term that participants would understand. When discussing pupil’s responses, this original terminology will be used. However, in other areas of the report the terms ‘substance use’ and ‘people who use substances’ are preferred.

systems². The research is part of an inter-related three-fold research project, details of which can be found later in the report.

This preliminary report is made up of two parts. Part One provides an executive summary and the main headline findings and recommendations of the evaluation project. Part Two provides further detail to the origins of the CLP and further outlines the unique ways in which it helps school-aged children to understand issues surrounding substance use. The aims and methods of the research are presented together with a discussion and thematic analysis of the main headline findings, which includes direct quotations from the pupils themselves.

This preliminary report will be followed by a final report. The final report will deliver a more in-depth thematic analysis of the data. It will also provide a literature review of the schools' drug/alcohol education policies in the UK, perceptions and representations of people who use substances and the use of creative and critical methods and pedagogy in education on substance use, addiction and its impacts.

1.3 Executive Summary

This Choose Life Schools Evaluation Project (hereafter the evaluation) contains the preliminary findings from research into the impact of a CLP event amongst school pupils aged 12-14 years from schools located in urban, rural and semi-rural areas. The CLP has provided substance use and addiction education and awareness for young people through schools, students and professionals in the community for over 15 years. The project voices volunteers' first hand experiences of addiction whilst addressing themes including (but not restricted to) recovery and the desistance process, homelessness, childhood trauma, and incarceration. This research explores the impacts of a CLP event and the extent to which it might help pupils understand that addiction is more than an individual problem.

The timeliness of this report is apparent following Dame Carol Black's independent review of drugs with recommendations that include greater governmental focus on drugs, drug use, prevention, treatment and recovery alongside a recognition that young people (aged 11-15 years) have seen a steep rise in drug-use problems that needs further consideration (Black, 2021). Black's (2021) highlights the lack of evidence available to show the most effective way to deter people turning to drugs. Although wider social and structural changes are required to truly change the lives of those most vulnerable to substance use, more research into the role of the education sector in contributing to this change is crucial. This evaluation is therefore key in beginning to build evidence in relation to the impact of substance use and addiction education alongside the related issues of recovery and desistance.

² Please note that education is a devolved issue within the UK and therefore there will be variances in curricula across England, Wales, Scotland and N. Ireland.

represented only a distinct minority of pupils. In such examples pupils felt that the volunteers had made some bad choices that they could have avoided and that due to this they didn't deserve any help. An understanding of the role of the media in unfairly representing people who use substances was also expressed by the majority of pupil participants who believed that the media could do more in representing more fully the multifaceted factors leading to substance dependency.

CLP events provide a powerful opportunity to increase understandings of substance use, addiction, recovery, homelessness and crime and deviance and this report recommends that the CLP school events are rolled out nationally for schools. Those who work with and influence policy in this area (e.g. teachers, support staff, child and adolescent mental health practitioners, MPs, educational ministers etc.) and other change agents should also attend a school's CLP event to better support young people. In consideration of these findings, we recommend that sufficient time be dedicated to these CLP events as an important aspect to addiction education in the curriculum. The CLP event should help formulate one important aspect of the wider education and training that focuses on substance use, addiction education, prevention, early help, harm reduction and recovery throughout the secondary school curriculum (key stages 3 and 4).

1.4 Main Headline Findings and Recommendations

Following the data collection process which took place in the Spring and Summer terms of 2022 in three different schools across England and Wales, thematic analysis of the data took place. This involved following Braun and Clarke's six phases of thematic analysis (2006/2022) which allowed for a full immersion into the data collected. Other questions that simply asked participants to give a list of words to describe substance use or those who use substances, were analysed and data inputted into a word cloud generator to give a visual representation of the pupils' ideas. The preliminary findings and recommendations are laid out below and are discussed in more depth in Part Two.

[F1] Finding: Pupils mainly discussed substance use and those who used substances in a negative manner before participating in the Choose Life event. Coupled with a fear of substances and their users, it was clear in the emotive and sometimes moralistic language used by pupils, that a one-dimensional and individualistic understanding of substance use was common.

[R1] Recommendation: When engaging with secondary school pupils it is important to understand the diversity of experience/knowledge in terms of substance use and people who use them with the vast majority of pupils appearing informed by inaccurate and one-dimensional stereotypes. However some of the pupils who already think a little more widely about the issues of substance dependency could be utilised in some way to highlight early on in the event that users of substances are more than 'addicts'. The CLP event provides an

important opportunity to breakdown some of the stereotypes and myths often levied at people who use substances through the stories of the volunteers. The potential for the Choose Life event to develop ideas for pupils to understand social issues in the wider context should be emphasised to schools as this helps contribute to developing a socially aware citizenship agenda which is present in most personal and social education curricula throughout the UK.

[F2] Finding: CLP events led to school pupils adopting a wider, multifaceted understanding of the various life events that lead people to use substances and the following consequences of their substance use right through to their recovery. The CLP event allowed for the de-stigmatisation of people who use substances, as participants were able to humanise their experiences.

[R2] Recommendation: Choose Life event coordinators should exercise caution to ensure social background does not replace individualised character blaming as an inevitable, singular causal factor in substance dependency but instead forms a wider complex network of factors contributing to substance dependency. Recommendation 7 suggests how a debriefing session can help avoid this. It is integral that schools throughout the UK and other change agents within the education sector, benefit from the education provided by the CLP events. Educators, policy makers and MPs should attend a CLP event themselves to experience and witness its impact and better understand the value of such a programme in contributing to elements of the wider national curriculum. The postcode lottery in terms of being connected to the CLP director and therefore a school's pupils benefitting from inclusion in the programme, can be ended by committing investment into and expanding the reach of the project.

[F3] Finding: There was a clear emotional connection to the volunteers' stories within the CLP event which helped participants of the event develop an empathetic understanding with volunteers' experiences and the reality of addiction. The emotional impact was clear in pupils' responses and helped create a sense of connection to volunteers' stories.

[R3] Recommendation: A key strength in the CLP events are the volunteers' stories which provides an emotional connection between the participant and the issues related to substance use and users. The real life stories are the key element of the events that enable a breaking down of harmful stereotypes of users of drug and alcohol which results in their neglect in terms of help and support. A scheduled debrief with school pupils at the end of an event will help participants realise how the volunteers' stories share similar elements with other people who use substances they might encounter throughout their lives. This can help better ensure that the real-life stories allow pupils to be socially conscious citizens within their communities which could further help shape future policies surrounding drugs.

[F4] Finding: Following the CLP event, the majority of participants in the evaluation study felt that the media has a tendency to represent people who use substances in a bias or over-simplified/derogatory manner. There were few participants that felt that there were more accurate portrayals and most responses referred to the media as either sensationalising, stigmatising or over-simplifying the issue of substance dependency in the media.

[R4] Recommendation: As the media in all its forms (e.g. news reporting, television, soap operas, social media, etc.) has such a huge influence on the lives of young people, a section in the school CLP event addressing the inaccurate stereotypes of drug/alcohol use through different representations might be a useful addition to the event. This could help pupils recognise the ways societies and media channels construct the 'problem' of substance use inaccurately and unfairly.

[F5] Finding: The majority of pupils who participated in the CLP event expressed how society could do more in terms of helping with the problems of substance use. This derived from their deeper understanding of the wider cultural, social and structural impact on the lives of the people who use substances. Many of the suggested interventions placed responsibility on the government in terms of helping to prevent/alleviate the problems associated with substance use (including reducing poverty, greater access to emotional support and wider structural support). Some participants focused on more punitive measures such as a greater focus on the policing of drugs and thought that help for people who use substances should be restricted to those who want help.

[R5] Recommendation: The CLP event clearly highlighted the wider societal impact and causes behind many lives experiencing addiction. This can be taken as another strength of the programme itself in terms of building on citizenship which is core to the curriculum across the UK. The potential impact of the event in teaching pupils to be socially responsible, caring and considerate members of their community, is clear. There are signs within some participant responses that they would benefit from further related sessions to the CLP event which could be connected to a wider programme of educational workshops that further help develop their critical citizenship.

[F6] Finding: The volunteer life stories and the role play were especially impactful for the participants in the school events. The experience of a CLP event goes beyond educating about substance use, it extends to participant self-reflection and self-identification with the work of the CLP and its volunteers.

[R6] Recommendation: The creative pedagogical tools employed in the CLP event should be recognised as powerful and impactful on attendees and should be extended to local and national substance use and addiction education as part of the national curriculum and within free schools and academies. CLP organisers could use the suggested debrief session to ensure that participants of the event understand these stories are authentic to the volunteers but further resonates with many people's stories who have lived through addiction and

desistance. This is important to ensure that the volunteers' stories do not merely exist as 'special exceptions' in the minds of the participants.

[F7] Finding: For the majority of pupils there was nothing about the CLP event that they did not like. There were a minority of participants who were confused about the role play and others who felt the initial section of the event (where addiction to substances was outlined through the PowerPoint presentation) was too long and could be more interactive.

[R7] Recommendation: The CLP event is impactful as demonstrated by the very few suggestions for improvement/change to the event. Further clarity concerning the purpose of the role play and the 'acting' role of the volunteer in that section *alongside* accentuation of the authenticity of volunteer's narratives could help explicate the purpose of these to the audience. Further interactive exercises could be included in some of the presentation elements of the event. A debriefing exercise could be one way to close a school CLP event to recap some of the main discussion points/aims of the events and reflect on some of the new things participants have learnt.

[F8] Finding: Pupils felt that they learnt a lot from the CLP event and this was expressed by the participants in the following four ways; *self-reflection, the tragedy of drug use, the re-humanising of people who use substances* and *the social responsibility in addressing substance use*. There was both an emotional connection with the life stories and overwhelmingly positive feedback from the events.

[R8] Recommendation: The CLP events should form part of schools' Personal, Social, Health and Economic education agenda. Further funding and growth of the CLP events should allow for a wider school commitment to developing young adults into 'ethically informed citizens of the world' (see Department of Education and Skills, 2020) and the CLP schools event can be part of a wider curriculum to achieve this.

2. Part Two

2.1. An introduction to the Choose Life Project

The CLP began as a project in HMP Liverpool and in 2008 Steve Duffy, a former prison officer (and Founder and manager of the project) established CLP within the community as a charity. Its foundations within the prison manifest following Steve's observation that a majority of people in prison had problems with addiction and substance use and nothing was being done to address this. There was no education in the prison about substance use and addiction, "there wasn't even a poster on the wall or any form of support for the inmates" (Choose Life, 2020a). It was within the prison that Steve developed an education programme about substance use and addiction which introduced the novel idea of using drama and real life experiences to respond to substance dependency and addiction amongst people in prison.

Since 2008, the CLP events provide education and awareness to young people, students and professionals within the wider community.

It has been well reported that educational programmes designed to inform and educate wider audiences in relation to addiction, substance use and recovery have failed to have any measurable impact as large problems in relation to substance dependency a deep and widening problem within the UK setting (Black, 2021). Previous 'Just Say No' campaigns were based on the logic that informing (and often scaring) children about the dangers of drug use, would subsequently dissuade them from partaking in drugs (Mold, 2021). Other health education programmes tried to encourage children and young people to make healthier choices in their lives with some authorities worrying that such a drug education might make more people aware of the drug market and allow them to be more curious about partaking (ibid.). One of the features of CLP events is utilising people with real experiences of addiction to talk about their lives as a child, growing up and the slow impact of substances on their lives. Shiner (2002) allows us to regard the CLP events as a peer-informed practice if we are to define 'a peer' as an alternative to a person with 'professional credibility'. Shiner continues to explain that a peer does not have to be defined by age but includes a person who may have an affinity to those being educated and when an affinity is identified peer education can be an effective tool. Parkin and McKeganey (2009) however highlight how the major diversity in peer education approaches (in the health context specifically) create a difficulty in terms of assessing the efficacy of peer-led education programmes and yet there is an increasing demand for this as professions (including those within the education sector) operate within evidence-based practice models.

Many people believe that individuals simply selfishly choose to engage in substance use often for hedonistic gain and this lack of understanding can result in a lack of empathy for people who are in the grips of drugs and alcohol addiction. The CLP events aim to dispel the myths surrounding substance use, substance dependency and addiction, and the individuals whose lives have been impacted by these, through employing a range of creative techniques (see Section 2 below). The event is firstly built on the philosophy of using "first-hand knowledge and experiences" (Choose Life, 2020a) by recruiting recovered alcohol and drug users as volunteers to the project. CLP aims to educate pupils, students, and professionals about substance use and addiction to "about the pitfalls of substance abuse, with the addict's own experiences offering a powerful and cautionary voice about the risks that lie on the road to addiction" (Choose Life, 2020a).

2.1.1. The Choose Life Project and Desistance

The theory, policy and practice regarding the concept and process of desistance is a relatively new area inside and outside of academia. For the purpose of this report desistance is the process of stopping unwanted patterns of behaviour such as substance use and/or crime. The

relationship between substance use and crime and the need to simultaneously study desistance from both types of behaviour has been recognised (Nixon, 2023). It has also been acknowledged that desistance is not an identifiable one-off event, it is process (Burke and Gosling, 2023; Kewley and Burke, 2023). The process of desistance “is also not linear, people ‘zig and zag’ in and out of [unwanted patterns of behaviour] for periods of time, often long before permanent cessation occurs” (Kewley and Burke, 2023), if it occurs at all. Audiences at CLP events gain important insights into desistance – in terms of what this entails and how difficult the desistance journey is. Importantly, being a volunteer in the CLP is a crucial part of their desistance journey. For some volunteers this is not only part of their recovery, rehabilitation and desistance from substance use it is also about their departure and desistance from the commission of crime. For many of the volunteers, their cycle of substance use resulted in a life of crime, for some it resulted in imprisonment. Some female volunteers have worked in the sex industry and many male and female volunteers went through the care system. When the volunteers share their powerful personal testimonies not only are they doing so to aid the audiences understanding of and empathy towards the complexity of substance use and desistance, they are also giving something back to the community. Wanting to give something back is an important aspect of the desistance journey (Maruna, 2001) whether it is desistance from substance use and/or crime. The following comments from volunteers on the Choose Life (2020c) website captures both the importance of this project for the volunteers and the audience:

“Being involved with the Choose Life Project has been a great experience. Telling my life story to large groups of people, including students and new police recruits, has really boosted my confidence. As volunteers, we always get positive feedback from the audience, which lets us know we’re doing something worthwhile.

I have volunteered for Choose Life on many occasions. Why I do it is so that young people can hear first-hand what the horror on life addicted to Class A drugs is like and hopefully will educate them not to go down that route. I also get so much from this Project.”

The CLP has more than 600 volunteers, many of whom have been part of the project for over ten years. The volunteers are “at the heart of the project” and “their shared stories are the essence of Choose Life” (Choose Life, 2020c). Each volunteer is in recovery and they have “a unique and powerful story to tell [t]heir experiences inspire and empower others to walk a path that leads away from substance misuse” (Choose Life, 2020b).

The CLP is currently based in Merseyside and there is a real desire to expand this nationally for that both volunteers and attendees can benefit from CLP across the United Kingdom. To validate the expansion of this scheme a formal evaluation of the schemes’ benefits is required.

2.2 An Overview of the Schools' Choose Life Project Event

The section provides an overview of the CLP event experienced by the participants of this research (more detail can be found on the Choose Life website on addiction education for young people (2023)).

2.2.1 Introduction to Substance Use and Addiction

A school CLP event typically begins with a talk by Founder and Manager of CLP Steve Duffy about his experience of substance use and addiction in prisons. This is followed by a PowerPoint presentation about legal and illegal substances and addiction. Although this section follows a more traditional 'drug education' pedagogical model (i.e. delivers information through slides and relevant videos), it is an important phase of the event as myths and misconceptions about substance addiction and how it operates physically/chemically in our system, are dispelled, challenged and corrected.

2.2.2 Role Play: *The Life Testimony of a Drug Dealer*

The next stage of the event introduces the volunteers (usually three) and one of these have been selected to play the role of a drug dealer (at this point the audience are not aware that this is a role play). The 'drug dealer' is then introduced to the class by Steve and the role play takes the form of a question and answer session with Steve. The questions asked by Steve are often contentious and designed to reveal the 'drug dealers' focus on making money at the cost of exploiting or harming vulnerable others. This is the first time that the audience learns about drug use from a storied account (albeit not an authentic one) and generally evokes clear exasperation towards the 'dealer' as the realisation of the power of those at the top of the hierarchy and their actions in terms of violence, exploitation and splicing of drugs before they hit the market, becomes apparent.

2.2.3 Question and Answer and Role Play Revelation

The pupils are invited to ask questions to the 'drug dealer' which usually results in a series of challenging and confronting questions directed at the 'drug dealer' which demonstrates how emotionally engaged participants are in the event. After the Q & A it is revealed to the audience that this was a role play and in fact the 'drug dealer' is a person recovering from substance use and not a dealer, but that the answers are based on conversations Steve previously had with drug dealers during his time as a prison officer. Further explanation of the drug chain of command is given via another PowerPoint presentation and it is made clear that those at the top of the drug supply chain are usually protected whilst the vulnerable people below them become more exposed to the violence, addiction, disruption, exploitation and dangers involved in the drugs scene.

2.2.4 Volunteer Life Story

Next the volunteers come forward one at a time to share their life stories with the school group as a whole. Each of the volunteers on the programme are in recovery from substance use they have experienced in the past. Some may have experienced the care system, prison, homelessness, abuse, loneliness, unemployment, violence and other difficult circumstances but all are united in their dependency on substances at some point in their lives. This allows another opportunity for pupils to benefit from understanding addiction through the context of lived experiences which can help create an affinity between the volunteer and the pupil.

In their discussions about recovery, it is made clear through volunteers' stories that relapses are common. All volunteers are encouraged to speak frankly, honestly and authentically about what happened, frills and all and if they feel comfortable will discuss their feelings at different points in their lives. As an audience member the stories can be hard to listen to at times but can also demonstrate how the volunteers have persisted and attempted to build safer and happier lives for themselves as they work towards desistance and recovery.

2.2.5 Video: Rat Park & Morph

In between the volunteers' stories a short film outlining the main findings of the experiment *Rat Park* undertaken by Bruce Alexander in the 1970s is shown. A discussion of this classic study allows participants to fully consider the social and environmental factors that impact upon addiction (see Gage and Sumnell, 2018) which is a common theme running through the event and is clearly highlighted by the volunteers' stories. The timing of this in the event is crucial and allows the audience to map parallels to the ways in which the volunteers' social environments have impacted upon their relationships with substances.

There is also a video shown which shows some images of the previous volunteers' journeys from a substance user to a person in desistance. It is an important aspect of the event to allow audience members who may experience substance use themselves or live with people who use them, that there is support available to help people move away from substance dependency.

2.2.6 Volunteer-led Question and Answer Session

The volunteer-led question and answer section is the final part of the CLP event and allows for interaction between the audience and the volunteers. Schools may organise the smaller groups differently but it works well when volunteers are able to take their groups to different rooms to create a smaller and more relaxed environment. Using a carousel learning strategy (pupils are able to move between the volunteers in groups) participants are encouraged to ask questions to the volunteers. Although this extends the learning of the pupil in terms of understanding in more detail the emotional, practical, physical and mental strains of substance use and desistance, the ambience is relaxed and personable to allow the pupils to truly see the person behind the label.

2.2.7 Support for School Pupils

Steve and the volunteers are trained in offering support and directing attendees to relevant services in the instance of a pupil sharing their own stories about substance use which can sometimes happen. In schools the CLP team are usually at the venue for much of the day and correspondence with teachers before the event outlines any safeguarding issue procedures that should be followed in the instance of pupils' disclosure..

2.3. Background to the Evidence-Based Qualitative Evaluation of the Choose Life Project

2.3.1 Introduction

This research is part of a comprehensive inter-related three-fold project which comprises the following:

- 1) An evaluation of the impact of a CLP event on *university student's* personal, academic and professional understanding of substance use (led by Dr Karen Corteen and Dr Amy Hughes-Stanley.
- 2) An evaluation of the impact of being part of the CLP on *volunteers* (led by Dr Sarah Nixon and Dr Michelle Jolly)
- 3) An evaluation of the impact of a CLP event on *pupils in secondary schools* (led by Dr Cassie Ogden)

The researchers have collaborated to independently evaluate the impact of the CLP on university students, school pupils and CLP volunteers. This is with the intention of using this evidence-based research to build on good practice within CLP and to identify where improvements can be made. This evaluation also has the potential to inform evidence-based policy and contribute to practice change beyond the CLP.

The schools' evaluation project aimed to capture the impact of the CLP across three schools in the North Wales and North West England regions in terms of pupils' understanding of substance use, the potential factors contributing to addiction and the desistance journey. School pupils between the ages of 12-14 years located in rural, semi-rural and urban areas were included in the study and asked to complete an open-question, qualitative survey designed to capture their views and feelings on substance use and users.

2.3.2 The Impact of Desistance Narratives

Desistance is a relatively new but important field of inquiry in criminology and in criminal justice theory, policy and practice. Defining desistance "is not without debate" (Kewley and Burke, 2023. P 55) and "it has been much contested" (Barr, 2019, p. 2). According to Nixon (2020, p.1) desistance is "the study of pathways out of offending and desistance narratives are expressions of 'going straight'". For the purpose of this evaluation desistance is

understood in a wider sense as the process of stopping unwanted patterns of behaviour such as substance use and/or crime.

Despite the oversight of women's experiences within desistance literature (Barr, 2019), understandings of desistance are beginning to influence evidence based practice (McNeil and Weaver, 2010; Maruna and Mann, 2019)³. For people impacted by substance use the desistance process could reduce recidivism, desistance from crime and substance and "prevent future harm, ... (re)build relationships, provide reparation, and help desisters develop the strengths and resources needed to live a life free from crime" (Kewley and Burke, 2023, p. 55). The acknowledgement of desistance narratives can therefore have a potentially impactful effect when trying to educate school pupils in their early teenage years about substance dependency, especially those who might have experienced this from a primary or secondary perspective.

At present there is very little research which examines the impact of desistance narratives on drug education in schools however lots of research has addressed the important role of narrative and experiential learning in teaching on a range of different topics (Payne et. al., 2003; Butcher, 2006; Hochstetler, 2006; Polletta, Chen, Gardner & Motes, 2011; Ancrum, 2015; Marsh and Maruna, 2017; Belisle et. al., 2019; Geregova & Frisaufova, 2020; Nixon, 2020) and demonstrates how stories can help audiences reflect on various stereotypes and assumptions that may be made about groups of people such as people who use substances (Geregova & Frisaufova, 2020). It is the intention of this research to explore the impact of narratives on pupils' understanding of substance dependency. Nixon's (2020) study set in HE educational settings, reported that exposure to the desistance narratives of people who had offended, had a positive impact on 68% of students' perceptions of them and helped to humanise stories of people who had been to prison. For Roth (2016, in Nixon, 2020, p. 4) bringing in guest speakers and using real life case studies in lecture delivery "can open student's eyes to offender's capacity for change".

As well as the stories of the volunteers, Steve Duffy offers his own insider perspective of what he learned during his time as an ex-prison officer. Earle (2014) and Nixon (2020) both express the unique insider's perspective that ex-criminal justice practitioners can offer to others which is expressed in the way that substance use and addiction was brought to life in the role play section of the CLP event.

It is hoped that the desistance narratives and the stories shared more widely in the CLP events, will contribute positively to drug and alcohol education within secondary schools throughout the UK. It is this project's aim to further explore the ways in which narratives and the efficacy

³ See Burke and Gosling (2023) and Kewley and Burke (2023) for more detail on desistance and theories of desistance.

of role playing within the CLP impact upon young people's understandings of drugs and alcohol use.

2.4. School Evaluation Aims and Methods

2.4.1 Summary of the Research

192 pupils across three schools in the North West of England and North Wales regions representing communities from rural, semi-rural and urban areas of the UK, participated in the school evaluation project within the Spring/Summer terms of 2022. Gatekeepers from each participating school were approached before the CLP event and sent an information sheet about the project and a gatekeeper consent form (see appendix 1). On the day each pupil was given a covering letter (appendix 2) and a participant information sheet (appendix 3) before they completed the open question survey (appendix 4) that also requested their consent before completion. Both participant information sheets and surveys were distributed once the CLP event had finished.

All pupils were reminded that details written on the survey would remain confidential and surveys were completed entirely anonymously. The participating schools allowed for time within the hall/class that the CLP workshops were delivered for the surveys to be completed. This resulted in a very high return rate. Nevertheless perhaps due to different motivations/abilities throughout the different classes, many surveys were completed with scant detail which somewhat impacted upon the data. Nevertheless the vast majority of participants were able to express, at a minimum, a few lines about their views on substance use and the CLP event itself and most attempted each question.

2.4.2 Ethics and Ethical Approval

The Liverpool John Moores (LJMU) Research Ethics Application Form was completed and submitted to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) in February 2022 and gained LJMU Research Governance Approval on 4th March 2022. The UREC Reference is: 22/HSS/002.

2.4.3 Key Aims of the Research

The research entailed five key aims:

1. To evaluate the impact of the CLP event on pupil attendees' attitudes towards people who use substances and substance dependency.
2. To evaluate the impact of a CLP event on pupil attendees' understanding of the wider social factors contributing to substance use and people who use substances.

3. To build on good practice within the CLP and to identify areas of improvement.
4. To provide key findings and future recommendations in relation to education aimed at raising an awareness and understanding of drugs, alcohol, addiction, and recovery and desistance.
5. To disseminate the findings and recommendations and to track and record impact.

2.5. Discussion and Thematic Analysis of Headline Findings

The below section provides the research aims, main headline findings, key recommendations and a detailed discussion of the findings as a result of a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006/2022) of 192 open-ended surveys completed by participants. The findings are rooted in and supported by the student participants' voices.

Research aim: To evaluate the impact of the CLP event on pupil attendees' attitudes towards people who use substances and substance dependency.

This aim was addressed via a series of questions to participants which asked them to describe their feelings and thoughts about both substance use and users using 3-5 key words and further to explain their perceptions and thoughts in more detail. Three main findings are presented that address the research aim above. The visual word clouds (below) presents the range of words and phrases used to describe their thoughts both before and after the CLP events.

Finding 1: Although there was a mix of different attitudes regarding substance use and its users *before* the CLP event, the majority view was that addiction was an individual problem and that individuals who became addicted were to blame for this and were morally reprehensible. The key words used to describe people who use substances before the CLP event demonstrated an enacted stigmatisation of people who use substances which led to what Goffman (1963/1990) would refer to as a spoiled identity. A spoiled identity occurs following a recognition by a person/persons of a stigmatising attribute (e.g. drug use) which discredits the person and reduces someone "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, 1963/1990, p.12). Goffman explains how our environments demand us to establish the social category of strangers (based on their occupation/status) which we then utilise to consider their social identity. "We lean on these anticipations that we have, transforming them into normative expectations, into righteously presented demands" (p.12). From here we begin to characterise the stranger and create a *virtual social identity* of whom we expect them to be. In this study we found participants characterised people who use substances in the following four main ways *before the event*; as a *tainted character*, *someone to fear*, *someone to blame* and less frequently as *a product of their circumstance*. In summary before the CLP event, pupils tend to be influenced by one-



Recommendation 2: To help further combat the minority of viewpoints who still held stereotyped ideas of addiction it might be useful to include a debriefing session which might explicitly outline how myths around substance use have been challenged throughout the day. It is integral that schools throughout the UK benefit from the education provided by the CLP events. The CLP’s website could more explicitly demonstrate the benefit of this project to those involved in educating young people. Educators, policy makers and MPs should attend a CLP event themselves to experience and witness its impact and better understand the value of such a programme as part of the wider national curriculum in UK schools. The postcode lottery in terms of being connected to the CLP director and therefore a school and its pupils benefitting from inclusion in the programme can then be ended by committing to and expanding the reach of the project.

Finding 3: The emotional reaction of school pupils participating in this evaluation was clear, following the CLP event. This emotional response was mainly expressed in a positive way and reflected through an empathetic understanding of the volunteers’ stories and their lives with addiction. As well as the recognition that outside factors might lead and contribute to substance dependency the emotional reaction to personalised stories helped participants reconsider the social identity of the substance user through feelings that moved them to perceive them differently.

Recommendation 3: Empathetic reasoning has the real potential to allow for greater emotional and cognitive connections with others which is crucial in helping us strengthen bonds individually, within the community and on a wider international scale (Riess, 2017). The volunteers’ stories harnessed empathy towards those with substance dependency for the majority of pupils participating in the CLP event. The CLP organisers need to consider the potential power of this and recognise this part of the event as a key feature to enable deeper

understanding and help develop the pupils' capacity for compassion. Developing empathetic reasoning and establishing ways to create connections and affinities becomes a key learning opportunity for the school pupils participating in the event. These skills are likely to also map to young people's personal, social, health and economic education and their development into socially conscious citizens within their communities. There is some small risk that the format of the stories could be interpreted by some participants as an 'exception to the rule' and the untold stories of people who use substances outside of the project could fall into the same stereotypes held by participants before the CLP event. To help reduce this perception a debrief at the end of the workshops is recommended to give time for pupils to reflect the elements of the volunteers' stories that are present in the lives of people who use substances, unknown to them. Furthermore we recommend that the CLP event features as just one event amongst a wider schedule of innovative educational workshops around substance misuse within schools throughout the key learning stages.

Discussion

There is significant data collected in this study to demonstrate how attending a school CLP event can change the ways that substance use and people who use substances are understood. Pupils' thoughts about addiction and people who are dependent on drugs before the event generally adopted a static, unilateral, and stereotypical standpoint which rarely deviated from blaming and stigmatising the substance user. The adoption of an individualised understanding of addiction creates a dehumanising caricature of people dependent on substances which both blames the individual for making the wrong choices and subsequently makes it difficult to imagine recovery and desistance as the stigmatised 'drug-user'/'alcoholic' lacks the moral integrity to make the 'right' decisions. The range of words used to describe substance use/users are more numerous before the event but have a clear tendency towards negative adjectives and there are only a few words raised that reflect empathy for those dependent on substances. The pupils' ideas about substance use and its users before the CLP event can be categorised in the following ways a) people who use substances as *tainted characters*, b) as something/someone to fear and c) a person to blame for their lives d) a product of their circumstances

Tainted characters

Many participants discussed people who use substances as 'othered' beings that were selfish and degenerate in nature. '*I thought the people were all really bad and horrible people*' (participant 66), '*I thought they were wasters*' (participant 22), '*I thought they were idiotic and stupid*' (participant 51) '*they are bad people who choose to do drugs*' (participant 122). Moreover, some participants felt very negatively towards the substance use they took part in '*it is bad, gross, not healthy for you or anyone else*' (participant 17) '*it's very wrong to abuse substances in that way*' (participant 51), and held judgemental views towards people who

used substances, *'Drugs are bad for you, you should not take them because it makes you a bad example to other people'* (participant 54).

The perception of the selfishness of people who use substances was also reflected in a number of participants' comments highlighting their belief that people who use substances consistently chased hedonistic pleasure. *'I thought people used drugs for fun'* (participant 21), *'I thought that people did drugs for fun with their mates and in parties'* (participant 120 and participant 113), *'I thought that substance misuse was taking drugs because it made them feel good and that they took it because they wanted to'* (participant 35), *'They don't care about their lives and future and instead prefer to spend all of their earnings on drugs/alcohol'* (participant 61).

Overall, a large proportion of the participants displayed a lack of awareness of the complexities of substance use and the people who use substances before they attended the CLP event. Goffman explains in his seminal text *Stigma* (1963) how the stigmatisation of others occurs when an attribute is identified that can be discrediting to the individual. The process of stigmatisation involves a process of dehumanisation and an eventual discrediting of a persons' identity as the individual becomes defined entirely by their derided attribute. This process is more likely to occur in a society which prioritises individuality over the importance of collectively and community and utilises soundbites over deeper explanations when discussing important issues. The responses of the pupils here are a product of their wider environment just as their ideas about substance user is a product of theirs.

Something/one to fear

Within the responses was a clear indication that pupils believed drugs and alcohol were very dangerous which may have reflected some of their previous drug education within their primary schools. *'It's not good for you, it's very dangerous and addictive'* (participant 38), *'Drugs and alcohol can have major implications on your mental and physical health'* (participant 122). The clear common answer reflected in the word cloud is 'addicted' and this word is used in a negative way prior to the event, and addiction becomes something to be feared itself. This reflects a sort of inevitability around substance use and the development into addiction. This links to the ideas of people who use substances making 'bad choices' in the first instance that ultimately leads to addiction in their lives. Although some level of understanding of the addiction and chemical processes underlies these ideas, there is still a general lack of acknowledgement of how environmental/cultural factors have a part to play in the stories of people with substance dependency.

Previous drug education policy might regard the fear of both legal and illegal substances as a positive outcome (Mold, 2021), however if a wider understanding of the causes of addiction are not recognised (e.g. vulnerabilities apparent in people's lives that make them more

susceptible) early warning signs will not be noticed leaving young people more at risk. Conversely, the users of substances themselves are regarded as dangerous as the substances they are dependent upon and due to this, participants expressed a fear towards these people. *'They are dangerous'* (participant 10), *'They are angry, not well educated, homeless and criminals'* (participant 17). The connection between criminality and addiction in this instance is built on the essentialisation of the morally devoid character who continuously makes the wrong decisions as opposed to being linked to the complex cycle of desperation, physical decline and chemical dependency within a culture (particularly with illegal substance use) that can be corrupt, exploitative and dangerous.

Someone to blame

The 'individual blame' of the person dependent on substances is clear in the previous themes however the frequency of blame geared towards them was pronounced and warrants a category in itself. Participant 144 represents the viewpoint held by some that if the individual wanted to, they could quite simply decide to stop; *'Even if you do drugs you can still get rid of them out of your life'*. This continues; *'they might depend on drugs to get through pain, but it's always their own choice'* (participant 121) *'they could easily recover from substance abuse'* (participant 67) *'I previously thought people had more power in their decisions'* (participant 142) *'they don't care about their lives and future and instead prefer to spend all of their earnings on drugs/alcohol'* (participant 61).

The CLP helps challenge the idea of addiction being simply the fault of the individual who becomes substance dependent. If society believes that drug and alcohol addiction is a negative and dangerous thing to have in our communities then we need to work together to help support those already addicted towards desistance, as well as working on a society that better prevents addiction in the first instance.

A product of their circumstance

The final theme of this finding highlights the viewpoint of a minority of young people before participating in the CLP event but reflects some participants' recognition that understanding addiction requires thinking beyond the individual perspective. Participants recognised drugs can be used as a coping mechanism to overcome difficulty in their lives *'I believed it [substance abuse] happened when someone's life isn't as good as they wanted it to be so they used drugs to feel something'* (participant 76) *'I think that people have trauma from their childhood so will become addicts'* (participant 19), *'I thought people who had a bad upbringing or family issues [would get addicted]'* (participant 120). These responses are a more positive and accurate reflection of the backgrounds and experiences of some people dependent on substances. Other participants said a little more in relation to the impact of their environment *'I thought that [people] misuse substances because of depression, sickness, loneliness or trauma'* (participant 68) and even broke the individualised understanding of addiction by

recognising the need for outside support *'I thought the people would be in a bad place and need someone's support'* (participant 36).

This reported theme in the attitudes towards substance use and its users is an important one and one that the CLP events can build on and encourage throughout their time at the schools. It is important to note that different audience members will have a more multifaceted understanding of addiction, however it is also important to explain that not all people with childhood trauma, mental health issues, with difficult lives etc. will turn to substances and likewise not all people who use substances have this background.

The attitudes towards substance use and their users after the CLP event reflected a wider understanding of the social and environmental issues that might contribute to them becoming substance dependent. The realisation of the full stories and circumstances of the volunteers' stories clearly helped establish a fuller appreciation of the various factors that might lead to addiction and more fully establish people who use substances as people in their own right as opposed to merely 'addicts'. Goffman (1963) explains the reality of people's lives are never represented through stigmatising processes and this research shows how the volunteers' stories succeeded in revealing their *actual social identity* which involves a process of understanding further the details of their biographies, the experiences of their life events and creating an empathetic connection with these accounts. There were three main ways in which participants expressed their thoughts on substance use and users; *the reality of addiction, empathetic reasoning, wider social awareness*.

The reality of addiction

Addiction is a term that appears frequently in the list of adjectives used to describe substance use and users by participants both before and after the event. The difference in the use of word 'addiction' is however apparent when looking at pupils' ideas about addiction *after* the CLP event. First there was the improved understanding of how addiction works as a chemical process. The CLP event explains this and how due to the chemical need developed by people who use substances drives that need for more drugs/alcohol. *'I now understand how addiction effects the brain and how falling into misuse is pretty easy.* (participant 160). Although some might over-simplify the process of addiction, the discussion about it appears to change from addiction being a personal problem, to something that comes from that chemical dependency *'My thoughts are it [alcohol/drugs] is extremely addictive and everyone could easily become addicts'* (participant 19) and that with the right help addiction can be prevented/managed *'[Substances are] addictive and dangerous, but if you can get help for it, the addiction goes down'* (participant 20). Addiction no longer becomes the substance user's goal/purpose but instead a consequence of substance use *'I know now that people don't do it to get addicted'* (participant 66), *'There's a story behind why people need to consistently*

take drugs and that it's an addiction that's hard to tackle' (participant 45) which demonstrates a more informed and empathetic understanding of the substance user's experiences.

Alongside the more informed discussion of addiction, away from the demonisation of addiction as a life choice, there was a further expression of the exploitative nature of the illegal substance market; *'People use young people to do their dirty work. They manipulate teens* (participant 72), *'I realised how easy it was to become addicted and how easy dealers can persuade you to take them'* (participant 41) *'I've learnt that the business market for misuse is a dirty and horrible trade'* (participant 61). Such statements further highlight the ways that the CLP event helps pupils better understand the complex and nuanced set of circumstances that can lead to substance addiction and how vulnerabilities are exploited. To relate this back to the work of Goffman and structure, the pupils who took part in the CLP event started to move away from assumptions about people who use substances' personalities as moralistically flawed, to humanising personal attributes as a result of recognising the structural influences (e.g. the drug trade) and objective processes (chemical reactions to substance).

Wider social awareness

Some pupils cited specific social factors that they felt contributed to substance dependency; *'They might have a bad upbringing or friends that do drugs'* (participant 44), *'People fall into addiction because of things that happen in their life and they use it as a coping mechanism'* (participant 121), *'They're people who just get that caught up in their lives by things such as being abused, and they feel as if they need to use drugs to stay happy'* (participant 76), *'[They] could be stressed, sad, could have family problems or anything else'* (participant 1). The overall recognition of the social factors leading to addiction is summed up in the following quote; *'People just get lost; mistreated and get dragged into substance misuse'* (participant 176). Common to these quotations are phrases such as 'falling into' getting 'caught up', getting 'lost' or 'dragged in to' substance use, which suggests that outside factors are leading to substance dependency, in contrast to language utilised commonly to describe people who use substances prior to the CLP event which tended to focus on 'choices' and 'not caring'.

The sense of inevitability with regards to people's background/family lives 'leading' to substance use can sometimes border on stigmatisation if not framed a particular way. *'They get roped into it because of the environment around them that it starts off as a way for them to fit in or just it's what they've always known'* (participant 137). Although the intention of this statement might be to shift the causal factor away from the individual conscience to social background, the effect can be the stigmatisation of culture/ lifestyle and the framing of the debate in terms of 'problems of the underclass'. Theses proposed by thinkers such as Charles Murray, (1990) define the underclasses by high rates of welfare dependency, unemployment and poverty and blame and deride this constructed group for high rates of single parent

families, antisocial behaviours and criminality. Highlighting social background as an explanation for substance dependency therefore is not always progressive but can be equally as damning as blame is placed on a whole perceived community as opposed to individuals within it. Extending this observation to recognise that a) such a straight forward causal explanation is inaccurate and b) situations impacted by environment and poverty are just as much the responsibility of government and politicians as they are individuals or communities is an important step in understanding substance use more fully.

Some of the participants expressed a clear understanding of the complex social factors in the lives of people who use substances. First by making explicit the need for support in their lives; *'They just needed support and help to stop using and it's way harder than it sounds'* (participant 4), *'It's hard to stop and they need help'* (participant 44), *'What matters is to educate ourselves in how to give the proper support when trying to recover'* (participant 142). Such comments locate responsibility of desistance and recovery firmly outside the culture of the person who uses substances. Second by expressing more fully the complexity of various factors in leading to the volunteers' substance dependencies; *'I think my perspective has really been altered after this session. It has made me realise substance abuse has lots of layers to it and the costs that come along with it can be more damaging than the actual substance'* (participant 142).

In Tyler and Slater's article on 'Rethinking Stigma' (2018, p.721) as well as recognising the importance of understanding the negative consequences of stigmatisation on individuals and communities, they advocate for the reconceptualising of stigma to allow for a better understanding "of pressing contemporary problems of social decomposition, inequality and injustice". This theme within the young people's responses demonstrates how the school CLP event has contributed to an understanding of drug and alcohol dependency as an issue influenced by wider environmental, social and cultural factors that impact upon groups of people inequitably.

Empathetic reasoning

Demetriou and Nicholl (2022) state that empathy manifests both in the emotional form (where we are able to live the other person's experiences) and in the cognitive (where we can appreciate another person's experience but don't become emotionally involved). Having gained empathy a person has a greater capacity to fully understand and appreciate a particular experience/situation. The responses from pupils to the CLP event demonstrates how initial emotional connections to volunteers' stories can generate empathy and allow for a connection to people who might have very different lives to themselves. When outlining their perceptions of substance use/users after the CLP event, pupils expressed a range of different emotional reactions *'I felt sad'* (participant 8) *'Most of them have an extremely sad story I don't think they're as bad as I thought'* (participant 70), *'I think they are misunderstood*

and probably have a sad backstory' (participant 50). At times participants felt conflicted but still evidently emotionally connected; *'My thoughts about people who misuse substances after the event are the same (lonely/criminals) but I feel depressed and angry at the same time'* (participant 17).

The importance of feeling something about the volunteers' stories (usually sadness/upset but also anger) generally allowed for a greater empathy towards substance dependency and desistance. *'People just get lost; mistreated and get dragged into substance misuse'* (participant 176), *'I understand how they can get addicted and why they want to sell drugs'* (participant 120). In order for the pupils in this study to start to understand the volunteers' experiences better however, there had to be a challenge to some of their prior ideas of the person using substances as being inherently bad and evil, and the realisation that these same people can be nice, personable and likeable people seemed to enable a greater understanding of addiction; *'I think they can still be very nice people and not as horrible as people make out'* (participant 66), *'Can be nice most have just made bad decisions'* (participant 27), *'they are not all bad. They have thoughts and understand what they did'* (participant 30). The challenge faced and epitomised in this last quotation is that participants of the CLP event could leave having understood and humanised the volunteer's narratives but might still hold stereotyped ideas about strangers' stories around addiction and desistance. The volunteers may be seen as the exceptions and that other people who use substances are 'bad'. This can be addressed via a debriefing session at the end of the CLP event which can contextualise the volunteers' stories in light of the wider discussions about addiction and people who use substances. The CLP event creates a "critical interpersonal and societal role enabling sharing of experiences...between individuals and provid[ing] an emotional bridge" (Riess, 2017, p. 74) and as a result of spending time with people recovering from substance use, young people establish an empathetic understanding of their situations.

Overall the CLP event has allowed school pupils to improve their understanding of substance use and consider the multiple factors leading people to rely on substances. Empathetic reasoning is highlighted as one of the key outcomes which derives from the volunteers' stories and enables a multifaceted understanding of the complexities of substance dependency. The stigmatisation of the substance user appears to decline following the CLP event as participants were able to humanise people who use substances as opposed to making their substance use their only defining characteristic.

Research aim: To evaluate the impact of a CLP event on pupil attendees' understanding of the wider social factors contributing to substance dependency and people who use substances.

To address this aim participants were asked to discuss their views regarding media representations of substance use and users and asked to consider the role of society in addressing addiction and desistance. The findings are discussed below.

2.5.4 Finding 4: Participants in this study felt that media representations of substance use tended to be inaccurate and portrayed people who use substances in derogatory and negative ways. A minority of students acknowledge some of the more positive portrayals but generally their responses showed that generally the mainstream media tended towards sensationalism, stigmatisation and bias when addressing the issue of substance dependency in all forms of media. The sorts of one-sided and dehumanising tropes that participants identified as existing in the media, mirror in many ways the sorts of ideas prevalent in participants' views of substance use/users before the CLP event. This highlights the powerful influence the media has on framing people's ideas on important social issues. It furthermore highlights the ways in which the CLP event has the power to equip school pupils to think critically about the ideas presented to them through different mediums.

Recommendation 4: As the media hold such a powerful influence over the ways in which the entire population, but especially school-aged children, perceive the world around them, it would be useful to consider addressing this in future CLP events. Discussion of media representations of addiction could be included in the introductory section when addiction is first explained. Although, arguably, pupils in the CLP event were still able to recognise the difference between learning about addiction and recovery from the perspectives of those who have had experience of it, compared to retrieving information from reports/representations on their electronic devices, the explicit reference to media representations might further consolidate their reasoning.

2.5.5 Finding 5: The vast majority of pupils who had participated in the CLP event agreed that people who use substances should be supported to help them break their dependency cycle. Participants also commented on the sorts of interventions they felt could prevent substance dependency which involved help from criminal justice services and policy change. The main themes derived from participant responses are *punitive support measures* (the introduction of sanctions and police power), *therapeutic support* (both from professionals and friends and family) and *wider structural/societal support* (the widest of the categories discussing the need to eradicate poverty and further educational opportunities). A small minority of participants felt that help should not be given to people who use substances.

Recommendation 5: The CLP event clearly succeeds in highlighting to pupils the wider societal impact of substance use and how certain initiatives/support can help prevent substance use or support people who use substances in their pathway to recovery. The diversity of responses from the participants of the events demonstrate the ways in which the day with

Steve and his team has helped them think about substance use more widely. The building of pupil's social responsibility in this way can help contribute to a diverse PSHE curriculum and allow their critical thinking and citizenship skills to grow exponentially.

Discussion

Once school pupils had attended the CLP event it was clear that they were more likely to recognise the ways that social institutions played a part in contributing to the real life experiences of substance dependency and could help contribute to successful narratives of desistance. This first section explores the three ways in which the school pupils' understood the responsibility of media in portraying the 'realities' of addiction as they critiqued many representations as sensationalising, stigmatising and over-simplifying this complex issue.

Sensationalist representations of substance use and people who use substances

One creative participant (63) was able to express their understanding of the media process when discussing substance use and their users via a visual diagram.

Figure 1: Participant 63's drawing



The drawing shows a person stirring potion in a cauldron. The text reads 'extra' going into the pot and 'real' coming out of it. The image accompanied the following quote; *'I think what they [the media] do is, what I call 's**t stir'. So they take a real story and add their own little parts to make it sound worse than it actually is'* (participant 63).

Another participant states; *'They usually tell one-sided stories because it makes them more money and there are no feelings in them'* (participant 4). This theme demonstrates an understanding by participants of the intentions and priorities of media when reporting about or representing substance use. Within this theme participants don't recognise any moral or ethical incentive within the industry and instead emphasise the drive to make a story 'good' ('extra') so that it is watched by many.

Another participant shows how they believe that further careful research is needed if media representations are to improve; *'I feel they only tell one-sided stories because it never tells you what the actual person is thinking or why they were doing it sometimes people can be very, very nosey and need to do research before putting it everywhere'* (participant 65). Mistruths/misrepresentations are also cited by some participants; *'They say people become drug addicts, always become addicts because of peer pressure'* (participant 64).

The inaccuracy of portrayals of substance use and people who use substances within the media was a common trend in the responses of the pupils. It would be useful to learn more about which forms of media participants felt were particularly open to this practice as most responses just referred to 'media' in the general sense.

Stigmatisation of the substance user

Related closely to the above theme, participants wrote a lot about the ways in which media stigmatise people who use substances regularly in their portrayals/reports. *'I think the media is quick to shame people with substance misuse. They are very much deemed rough which is not always the case. The people suffering have a backstory and a reason to their coping mechanisms and shouldn't be judged for it. The media fails to mention the suffering they go through'* (participant 161), *'I think the media and such say that people with addiction problems always have a choice and that they're bad people that cause trouble'* (participant 42), *'they can make it seem like the people that are addicted sound really horrible.'* (participant 27). It is clear from these responses that pupils can identify the processes of stigmatisation taking place within some media channels and the CLP event could have enabled the identification of these discrediting processes by giving access to first hand experiences of substance dependency. Participant 28's quote conveys their emotional response to the CLP event and how this contrasts to media coverage *'I feel that they make it less sad than it actually is'*. Which implicitly alludes to the lack of substance user voice within the media which could help contribute to inaccurate and unfair portrayals.

Another participant also alludes to the unfair and inaccurate reporting on addiction; *'I believe most of the media only tell one-sided stories they portray an addict as an entirely bad person. The media does not understand that an addict most of the time wants to change and that is something the media can't understand and the media always only reports bad news'* (participant 23). Here the suggestion that only bad news is news worth reporting, further also suggests that the complexity of stories about desistance are not of interest to the media.

In trying to further explain the reason behind this stigmatisation of addiction participant 52 explained *'I think it's so people that are addicted to drugs and alcohol [can] stop and so if they post it will also get people to not become drug addicts and alcohol addicts'* (participant 52). In contrast to other opinions on the media, participant 52 suggests there may be some moral reasoning behind painting a particular image of substance use and people who use substances. The reality of the volunteers' stories about their substance dependence is obviously dark, sad and troubling at times but when entering desistance their lives can be turned around with the right help and support. The stigmatisation of people who use substances does not help anyone's road to recovery and the acknowledgement of the negative impact of media stigmatisation of people who use substances shows the ways that the young people's understanding and empathy towards vulnerable others gained partly through the CLP event, could help build a more caring and supportive society.

Autonomy and the substance user

The final theme when discussing media's discussion of substance dependency outlines the ways in which participants feel media individualise the plight of the person using substances and downplay the outside social factors that have helped contribute to substance dependency; *'No I don't think it's fair (portrayal) without the person/victim's life they are seen as plain idiots as it is portrayed, when it's usually trauma/depression'* (participant 68), *'they fail to mention the fact of childhood trauma and exploitation and manipulation'* (participant 6). Participants also felt there is a lack of discussion of the support that could be put in place to help people who use substances towards desistance; *'they don't show that people can't help their addiction without help. They make it out that all people that have a relationship with drugs are bad, and that they're always gonna be bad'* (participant 72), *'they talk about the drug addicts as bad people when not all are. They also don't say how much it's hard to stop it'* (participant 45). The help sought by the volunteers in the project and the difference this made, clearly helped pupils understand the importance of that help and if the media also conveyed these messages then more people may support the need for structured help to support those dependent on substances.

The last quote of this section accurately conveys the participant's frustration in relation to the media reproducing false assumptions about people who use substances and constructing them as 'othered' from the rest of society; *'[media] describes them [people who use substances] like they are f**k all to do with us but it's not their fault or their choice; it's an addictive substance'* (participant 71).

Participants of the CLP event agreed in the main that society and people should help create an environment where substance use is not as big a problem and one which helps those whom already are substance dependent. Voices of pupils who still believed that substance use is an individual problem and therefore people shouldn't receive further support were evident, but were in a minority across all three schools involved in the project. These individuals occupied the position that people who use substances were still 'bad people' and therefore were undeserving of help; *'It's the person's problem and not the good people's problem'* (participant 54), *'obviously they [the person using substances] can do more. They always could have just chosen not to'* (participant 63). The vast majority of participants did not agree with this position and felt changes were needed in society to help support people who use substances and to help prevent substance dependency. Their responses are grouped into the following three themes below; *punitive support, therapeutic support, wider structural/societal support.*

Punitive support

Participants were creative when it came to thinking about the various ways in which in particular substances could be kept off the streets. Their responses demonstrated a real

understanding of the ways the illegal substance market (and alcohol) has a detrimental impact upon people who get caught up within it, but also reflected a naivety in relation to the difficulty of infiltrating this culture. *'People should have licences for specific substances and should be helped more than they are'* (participant 68), *'Yes burn everything that produces drugs'* (participant 32), *'The society could try put limits to the alcohol to shops so people can't keep on drinking and try to stop illegal drugs getting sold'* (participant 67). It was however pleasing to see young people firstly understanding substance use as a wider social issues and second considering the power of policy change in addressing this problem.

Other participants felt that the police could offer further support in terms of the surveillance and arresting of drug dealers in particular; *'I think there should be more cops preventing substance misuse'* (participant 4), *'I think society could do more by arresting more drug dealers and be more patient with them'* (participant 180). The interesting shift in this last quotation is in the criminalisation of the people on top of the illegal drugs trade hierarchy as opposed to the people who use substances themselves. This seems to be an obvious impact of the CLP event which explicitly outlined the nature of the illegal drugs trade through the role play section.

Therapeutic Support

There was much discussion amongst participants of the need for further therapeutic support for people who use substances both in the professional and more informal capacities. *'I think they should get some sort of therapist to help them'* (participant 50), *'they should get counselling to talk to others'* (participant 35), *'Yes get therapists to help them'* (participant 25), *'they could find help online or go to doctor'* (participant 44). Participant 137 further demonstrated the therapeutic benefits of talking to others in similar situations; *'I definitely think rehab should remain and improve for recovering addicts as well as community groups like AA as I think having a good support system is what they need'* (participant 137) with similar sentiments reflected in the following; *'they could do more like classes to talk and discuss their problems to help each other'* (participant 35) *'yes they should help and can have a club for stopping addiction like coffee, drugs, smoking and drinking'* (participant 13).

As well as professional support participants also suggested that friends, family and the local community could also offer support; *'your family could help you stop and sometimes even your neighbour because your family doesn't like to see people high and drunk'* (participant 52), *'they could have a chat with family members and the family members could try to talk them out of it or other people'* (participant 67). This theme reflects the participants' observation of sadness, loneliness and isolation in the volunteer's stories as the pupils in their responses have thought about how society can resolve the situations people who use substances are in, by building connections both with other people in their communities and lives and also connections to their feelings and issues by speaking to professionals. Prior to

the event many participants discussed the negative (physical) health impact of substances on their users. After the event the focus on this theme centres on the mental well-being of people who use substances and the need to gain support for this aspect of their lives. This further underlies a deeper understanding of what leads to substance use and the wider implications of substance use following the CLP event.

Wider structural/societal support

This is the most popular theme from participants when asked whether people who use substances should get support. Many responses in this category referred to societal support more generally and did not always specify what this might be more specifically:

“my opinion is that society should help more. They should be supported to help recover. People should keep them busy” (participant 19), *“trauma or rough childhood can be a cause but society can help more”* (participant 16), *“I think society can do more to support these poor unfortunate people and put more effort into helping them”* (participant 28), *“society can do more to help prevent substance misuse also to help people out of substance misuse”* (participant 6).

As well as highlighting the need for unspecified support from society, many participants further noted the need to stop punishing/judging people who use substances for their pasts; *“because they might have just made one mistake that can change and ruin their lives”* (participant 39), *“they should be helped and supported even if they relapse”* (participant 23), *“I think they should support them, to listen more instead of judging them”* (participant 180). An understanding of both the body’s dependency on substances and the set of complex social and cultural factors that exist in the lives of those with substance dependency are required to arrive at these standpoints.

Some participants were more specific in relation to how society may help the issue of substance use. One participant feels education is the answer, *“I believe drug dealers should be educated and users should be given support”* (participant 6), whilst another feels social media could be utilised to good effect, *“Society can do more to help (e.g. show it across social media)”* (participant 24), the reduction of poverty was also cited across a number of participants’ responses; *“[society needs] to try and prevent poverty; help people to not want to buy drugs and alcohol”* (participant 120), *“[we need to] stop poverty/house the poor instead of [what] the Tories [are doing]”* (participant 113).

Some participants felt that wider help was needed but individual agency of the substance user was further required for the support to work; *“we should help if they are willing to and put the effort in but there is no point helping them for them to relapse”* (participant 120), *“I feel [people who use substances should be asked] to help them recover but if they say no then it’s their problem”* (participant 65) *“If they regret their decision and want to get better then you should help”* (participant 24). There is some evidence of moral judgement behind some of

these quotations but nevertheless if the focus is on change and support, then these standpoints can lead to positive and effective change in the way society views substance use and supports recovery.

The following final quotations sum up the ideas and perspectives held by participants in terms of their views of the role of society in resolving problems related to substance use:

'Instead of hating them and punishing them we should get them in the community where they can have a normal life' (participant 149), *'Society should do more than turn a blind eye to the reality that they don't want to see. Instead they should try and help'* (participant 23).

Overall the pupils in this study demonstrated much maturity and wisdom in their reflections on what could be done to help the problem of substance dependency following participation in the CLP event. Some of their responses could rival those posed by current policy makers and change agents which is testament to the candid sharing of experiences by the volunteers.

Research aim: To build on good practice within the CLP and to identify areas of improvement.

To address this aim participants were asked to outline their favourite and worse parts of the event and were given the opportunity to suggest how the event may be improved. The corresponding findings (6 and 7) are further discussed below.

2.5.6 Finding 6: The participants of the CLP event were asked which their favourite part of the day was. The vast majority cited the real-life stories as their favourite with many participants choosing to leave comments for the volunteers at the back of the survey in the 'any other comments' section. Alongside the volunteers' stories pupils also enjoyed the 'drug dealer' role play. Together this demonstrates the power of narratives in conveying meaning and understanding about significant social experiences.

Recommendation 6: Experiential learning is demonstrated to have worked well within the CLP event and should be invested in and rolled out across the UK to enhance and improve current drug/substance education in UK schools. It is suggested that as well as improving understanding of the social problem of addiction that the event also supports individual pupils to become ethically informed citizens of the world (a current aim of the new curriculum for Wales, Department of Education and Skills, 2020). To ensure volunteers' stories do not exist as 'special exceptions' to an otherwise 'unfavourable' subgroup of society in the minds of the participants, we suggest a debrief session at the end of the workshops to explain how elements of the volunteers' stories resonate with so many others' stories about addiction. An exercise drawing on parallels between the volunteers' stories and wider trends in the stories of people who use substances, might also help achieve this.

2.5.7 Finding 7: The majority of participants across the three schools were unable to cite any part of the CLP event that they did not like. There were some pupils however who were a little confused about the role play and some cited the initial section of the event (the PowerPoint slides with the information about addiction) as being too long.

Recommendation 7: In the school CLP event there is a need to explicate the purpose of the role play section and how the volunteers' stories are truly authentic despite the 'acting' in the role play. The confusion amongst some participants suggest the need for a clearer outlining of the purpose of the role play immediately following the section and also at the end of the event. With some of the feedback pointing to some lapses in interest/energy due to the length of the CLP, it is suggested that interactive elements are introduced to the presentation components of the CLP event (and use of breaks depending on school policy). Finally a debriefing section at the end of the CLP event could help underline some of the key discussion points and learning opportunities throughout the session. The debrief could involve; a) the contextualisation of volunteers' stories through discussing wider social trends in the lives of those with substance dependency b) a discussion to further re-establish the purpose of the role play c) to underline the key 'take home' messages about substance dependency and d) to give the opportunity for the young people to thank the volunteers and have the opportunity to feedback to them.

Discussion

The enthusiasm and engagement of participants with the volunteers' stories was clear and the impact the stories had on them emotionally and cognitively is testament to the volunteers' candid, heartfelt and open discussions of their experiences. Participants appreciated volunteers' honesty and spoke with affection and care about individual stories they heard: *'I liked Sam's⁴ story, it was interesting it shows that life is hard sometimes'* (participant 16), *'I liked how honest everyone [the volunteers] was'* (participant 68), *'I liked it when they were telling their stories because it made me think about how other people suffer and how in the future should I help people like them'* (participant 35). The connections to the volunteers' stories were so strong that many participants left the volunteers comments at the back of their survey; *'I really appreciated this session and I'm really grateful to the people that helped me understand'* (participant 28), *'I feel really sorry for Sam. He didn't deserve to be messed with on the streets'* (participant 51), *'Joseph's the best!'* (participant 107), *'I hope the addict in your brain stops and you get to see your kids and your family'* (participant 52), *'Good luck at staying sober'* (participant 62), *'Thank you for spreading awareness and I'm sorry that happened to you Steve'* (participant 65), *'Stay well'* (participant 69).

Participants also appreciated the opportunity to ask questions to the volunteers and liked the more interactive elements of the event; *'I enjoyed asking questions'* (participant 66), *'I liked*

⁴ Pseudonyms are used in place of the real names of volunteers

being able to ask questions' (participant 23) *'listening to their stories and asking questions'* (participant 17). Many participants also enjoyed the role play element which demonstrates that story sharing from an authentic space was a good learning tool for the school pupils. Participants didn't really embellish on what it was they liked about the role play but simply stated it as their favourite part of the event.

Although the vast majority of the participants did not highlight anything negative about the event, a minority of participants demonstrated confusion about the role play; *'I thought the role play was good, but wasn't fully sure what was going on.'* (participant 150), *'I got a bit confused with the role playing. Did the guy that was acting as a drug dealer actually go to prison?'* (participant 172), *'there should be a prisoner from a real prison in the event'* (participant 110). The last point demonstrates confusion as one of the volunteers from participant 110's event had been in prison, so although the role play component was fictional, the pupil didn't seem to understand that the volunteers' stories (which involved discussion of being in prison) were real.

Others struggled with the length of the event and wondered if some of the sections that utilised more traditional pedagogical practice (e.g. the Powerpoint presentations) could incorporate more interactive elements within them. *'Maybe show more videos to make it more interesting. Like what and how it effects the human body etc.'* (participant 144), *'I got a little bored so maybe not as much talking and more fun stories and more activities to do'* (participant 17), *'we were sat down for 2 hours straight so maybe we could do something more practical'* (participant 147). This finding further demonstrates that the use of story-telling worked well (although the role playing component could benefit from further explanation) and any significant constructive feedback focused on the delivery of some of the more traditional delivery of information regarding addiction.

Recognising the diversity of the audience when visiting pupils in secondary school could help improve the overall experience for those pupils who might struggle with traditional forms of teaching. Utilising some of the methods adopted in the more experiential elements of the event to re-think some sections of the PowerPoint material could further improve engagement of the audience. Furthermore wider utilisation of break times (in line with school policies) would seem to benefit some of the young people; *'The people talked for a bit too long, I felt guilty saying that but at some point I found it was less inspiring. There was no break.'* (participant 111), *'I enjoyed all of it. Maybe we could've not sat in one chair for so long (have breaks) or maybe a smaller group'* (participant 156).

Research aim: To provide key findings and future recommendations in relation to education aimed at raising an awareness and understanding of drugs, alcohol, addiction, and recovery and desistance.

This aim has been addressed throughout all of the findings and recommendations, however the following Friday help encapsulate the key messages that young people had learnt from the school CLP event.

2.5.8 Finding 8: Students were asked to reflect on what they had learnt from the CLP schools event and their responses fit into four main themes: *self reflection, the tragedy of drug use, the re-humanising of people who use substances and the social responsibility in addressing substance dependency*. These core messages taken away from the event can be seen to derive mainly from the emotional connections pupils gained from hearing the authentic narratives which generated empathy towards the volunteers' experiences which in turn allowed for a deeper understanding of the complexities of substance use.

Recommendation 8: The strength of the schools' CLP events can be seen throughout this report through the mapping of pupil's increasing understanding of substance use and substance dependency. The key to the CLP's success is the volunteers' involvement in the event and the respect and connections pupils make with them that challenge their prior held assumptions about people who use substances. The success of this programme justifies the need to invest further in the CLP to allow a national roll-out throughout UK schools as part of their PSHE curriculum (or equivalent).

The CLP schools event allows young people the opportunity to understand more fully the complex nature of addiction and the factors that might contribute to people using substances. These four themes illustrate the main messages that pupils gained from attending the event.

Self reflection

Following the CLP event many pupils considered how the event's messages might influence their own engagement with substances; '*[I learnt] that I should always think before I do something*' (participant 15), '*[I learnt] that no matter what, I should never do drugs, alcohol or anything like that*' (participant 17), '*to never start and do drugs because once it starts there is no way back*' (participant 191). This important theme demonstrates that listening to honest accounts of addiction and desistance can help young people make informed decisions about their future experimentation with substances and realise that often there are real and difficult consequences of substance use. It is important to emphasise that scare-tactics are completely avoided in the CLP events and audience members are respected as curious young people that deserve the right to learn the truth about addiction and substance use. By showing respect to young people in the learning environment especially when dealing with pressing issues that may impact them within their lives, has proven to have a positive learning impact.

The tragedy of drug use

Related to the above, in terms of highlighting some of the reasons to avoid substance use, many pupils discussed how they had learnt how tragic and chaotic the lives of people who use substances often are. *'Drugs end your relationship with everything and everyone'* (participant 5), *'substance misuse is life changing and [gives a] horrible life ahead'* (participant 26), *'drugs can absolutely ruin your life'* (participant 31), *'[drugs] can really let you get up just to knock you down again 10 x harder'* (participant 142). It is noticeable in these responses that the young people are talking about the problems of addiction and drugs in particular with the absence of explicit blame on the individual using drugs. The focus instead is on the tragic consequences of drugs and the impact it can have on people's lives.

The re-humanising of people who use substances

Following the trend to recognise the wider, complex set of factors often leading to substance dependency following the CLP event, the key learning points for the vast majority of pupils centred around how anyone can be impacted by substance use and become substance dependent; *'It's not just the people that [are] homeless that do drugs'* (participant 13), *'anyone can be addicts no matter how much they say they will stop. Everyone's story is different'* (participant 19), *'addictive substances are bad but some people who use them aren't'* (participant 148). There is also a return and challenge to their prior-held assumptions about people who use substances and a realisation that people who use substances are people first; *'All former drug users aren't dangerous or rough'* (participant 16) *'people who substance misuse are not necessarily bad, just misunderstood'* (participant 50), *'it's not always the addict's fault and they are usually vulnerable people'* (participant 137), *'[they are] people [who] just often just wanna feel better'* (participant 68), *'that addictive substances are bad but some people who use them aren't'* (participant 148).

Part of the re-humanising and de-stigmatisation of people who use substances occurs due to the recognition that the choices people make are made under difficult circumstances; *'they didn't choose for this to affect them as much as it did'* (participant 23), *'life can force you to go on drugs sometimes'* (participant 25). And once substance use begins participants were able to understand how addiction takes its hold; *'the addicts try to stop but it's super hard for them because it develops in your brain'* (participant 52), *'substance misuse is not a choice'* (participant 166). Throughout this theme the young people also emphasised the need to stop judging people who use substances which is an important component of de-stigmatisation; *'Substance misusers are misunderstood'* (participant 43), *'don't judge people you don't know'* (participant 181), *'Don't judge them, yes they do/did do drugs but you have no idea why'* (participant 173).

The social responsibility in addressing substance use

Through the recognition that recovery/desistance is possible in the lives of the volunteers, pupils learnt that society could do a lot more to help those who are substance dependent and in preventing the substance use in the first instance. The stories once again made a clear impact on the pupils who could see that the life of crime that sometimes accompanies the lives could be prevented; *'there should be more charities to help once people get out of jail.'* (participant 4), *'people who are addicts should not be left in the dark. Someone needs to give them a hand'* (participant 23), *'substance users should be supported because everyone deserves a second chance'* (participant 8).

The analysis of the themes in the data collected from the three schools in this evaluation demonstrates the clear impact and efficacy of the CLP schools event in educating young people about the realities of substance dependency. Due to the success of this project and the benefits that many pupils from participating schools have gained from this, we hope that recommendations are followed by key change agents as we strongly believe that the CLP school events could form part of the solution to addressing drug and alcohol addiction so prevalent in current UK society.

2.6. Conclusion

This preliminary report has provided an executive summary and the main headline findings and recommendations in Part One. Part Two of the report outlined the work of the CLP and the content of the CLP event which pupils from the three schools attended. The aims and method of the research were outlined and a detailed discussion of the thematic data analysis of the findings helped give voice to the pupils who participated in the research. This preliminary report will be followed by a final report which will provide a more in-depth thematic analysis of the data. It will also provide a fuller literature review of the issues, namely, the representation of people who use substances, children and substance use, educational policy and drug education and the use of creative methods and critical pedagogy in the education of school pupils about substance use, addiction and its impacts.

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3. APPENDICES

3.1 Appendix 1: Gatekeeper Information Sheet and consent form



GATEKEEPER INFORMATION SHEET

Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: 22/HSS/002

Title of Study: A Qualitative Evaluation of the Choose Life Events in Schools

Dr Cassie Ogden, School of Humanities and Social Science

Your school is invited to take part in a research study. This only applies to pupils attending the Choose Life Project and no pupils have to take part if they do not wish to. Please read this information for further detail.

Please feel free to contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of the study is to explore the impact on pupils who attend a Choose Life Project event. It aims to look at pupils' attitudes to and understanding of substance abuse and substance use recovery both before and after the Choose Life Project event to see what impact attending the event has. The school evaluation of the project is important to us as we want the project to be as engaging, informative and transformative as possible. Your pupils responses to the survey will be valuable in terms of the future running of the project and its efficacy.

Why has our school been invited to participate?

Your school is one of three schools who have been invited to participate because you have expressed interest in running a Choose Life Project event in your school.

Do I have to take part?

No. The school is under no obligation to agree to the research aspect of the study. If you don't wish to take part in the evaluation study your school the CLP can still take place. If you do agree to take part each pupil attendee of the CLP will be invited to complete a survey. They however will be under no obligation to complete this. Participation is voluntary.

What will happen if the school takes part?

If you decide to take part, each pupil will first be handed a participant information sheet before the CLP event to inform them of the study. After the event they will be handed a survey and pen to complete at your school. The survey might take between 20-30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. No personal questions will be asked in this survey and it will explore the impact of attending a Choose Life Project event and how it might have changed their

understanding and attitudes towards substance misuse. Teachers and other members of staff in the school will not see the completed questionnaires.

Are there any possible disadvantages or risks from taking part?

There are no disadvantages or risks in taking part in the study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no direct benefits for taking part in the study, it is hoped that the findings may be used to justify a much larger study with the hope of extending the Choose Life Project beyond these selected schools. Also, your pupils may find reflecting on their experience of the event, relating it to their studies and personal development and understanding of wider issues, insightful.

What will happen to the data provided and how will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

No personal information is collected in this study and therefore the survey results will be completely anonymous.

What safeguarding features are in place for this project?

The project itself has extremely little risk attached to it as it only involves the completion of a survey that collects **no personal data** from any of the pupils. Any safeguarding issues with regards to the Choose Life Project itself should be addressed with Mr Steve Duffy the founder of CLP and event organiser. As a registered charity the Choose Life Project has its own safeguarding procedures and ethical guidelines that will be followed alongside the safeguarding policies of the school should any concern arise.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

Cassie will produce a report for Steve Duffy the Choose Life Project Manager. The report will be shared with the steering group and it may be used to secure funding for a much larger study with a view to supporting the expansion of the Choose Life Project beyond the selected schools that Steve currently works with.

Who is organising the study?

This study is organised by Liverpool John Moores University and Dr Cassie Ogden is the researcher.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Liverpool John Moores University School of Justice Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: 22/HSS/002).

What if I have a concern about the study or something goes wrong?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please contact me (Cassie Ogden: c.a.ogden@ljmu.ac.uk) and I will do my best to answer your query. I will acknowledge your concern with within 10 working days and give you an indication of how I intend to deal with it. If you still remain concerned or unhappy or wish to make a complaint, please contact the

Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at Liverpool John Moores University who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible:

Chair, Liverpool John Moores University Research Ethics Committee; Email: FullReviewUREC@ljmu.ac.uk; Tel: 0151 231 2121; Research Innovation Services, Liverpool John Moores University, Exchange Station, Liverpool L2 2QP

Data Protection Notice

Liverpool John Moores University is the data controller with respect to your personal data.

Information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from:

<https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/legal/privacy-and-cookies/external-stakeholders-privacy-policy/research-participants-privacy-notice>

Contact for further information

Dr Cassie Ogden Email: *****

Address

Office number

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering to take part in this study.

Title of Project: A Qualitative Evaluation of the Impact of a Choose Life Project Event on Pupils in England and Wales

Name of Researchers: Dr Cassie Ogden

Please tick to confirm your understanding of the study and that you are happy for your school to take part and your facilities to be used to host parts of the project.

The Gatekeeper is agreeing to provide access to the Announcement about the study to pupils and parents who are invited to attend the Choose Life Project event, and the Participant Information Sheet to pupils attending a Choose Life Project event.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that participation of our school and pupils in the research is voluntary and that they do not have to complete the survey without giving a reason and that this will not affect legal rights.

3. I understand that no personal information will be collected during the study.

4. I agree for our school and pupils to take part in the above study.

5. I agree to conform to the data protection act.

Name of Gatekeeper:

Date:

Signature:

Name of Researcher: Dr Cassie Ogden

Date:

Signature:

3.2 Appendix 2: A Covering letter for pupil attendees



Dear Potential Research Participant,

My name is Dr Cassie Ogden and I am a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Liverpool John Moores University. In collaboration with Steve Duffy, Manager of the Choose Life Project and in collaboration with three Schools in the North West of England and Wales, I am conducting a study of the personal impact of a Choose Life event on pupils in terms of their attitudes towards and understanding of substance abuse and recovery.

I am looking for participants to complete a voluntary survey with open ended questions about the impact of attending a Choose Life Project event. The survey should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete. You have been identified as a potential participant as you are a pupil who will have attended a Choose Life Project event at one of the three selected schools. If you are willing to participate in the study, time has been built in at the end of the event to complete the survey.

The Participant Information Sheet is attached for you to read. If you have any questions about the study then please come to speak to/ email me directly via c.a.ogden@ljmu.ac.uk and I will do my best to answer any questions that you may have about the research. Alternatively you can speak to either myself or Steve at the event.

If you are willing to participate in the study then you will be given a survey to complete at the end of the Choose Life Project event.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Cassie Ogden

3.3 APPENDIX 3: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research Ethics Committee Approval Reference: 22/HSS/002

Title of Study: A Qualitative Evaluation of the Choose Life Events in Schools

Dr Cassie Ogden, School of Humanities and Social Science

You are being invited to take part in a research study. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. Please read this information which will help you decide.

It is important for you to understand why the study is being done and what participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Contact me (raise your hand to get my attention) if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of the study is to explore the impact on pupils who attend a Choose Life Project event. It aims to look at pupils' attitudes to and understanding of substance abuse and substance use recovery both before and after the Choose Life Project event to see what impact attending the event has.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate because you will have attended a Choose Life Project event in your school.

Do I have to take part?

No. You can ask questions about the research before deciding whether to take part. If you do not want to take part that is OK. Submitting the questionnaire implies your consent to participate in this study.

You can stop being part of the study at any time, without giving a reason and by not handing in your survey you will be withdrawn from the study. We will keep information you have written and handed in on the survey which will not contain any personal information.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to take part, you will be handed a survey and pen to complete at the end of the Choose Live Project event at your school. The survey might take between 20-30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Don't worry about how long it takes you, there are no right or wrong answers we are just interested in learning more about what you thought about the event. Cassie and Steve will be there should you have any questions about this. No personal questions will be asked in this survey (i.e. you will not have to write your name on the survey

or provide any other personal details and the researcher will have no way of knowing how has completed it). The survey will explore the impact of attending a Choose Life Project event and how it might have changed your understanding and attitudes towards substance misuse. Your teachers and other members of staff in the school will not see the completed questionnaires.

Are there any possible disadvantages or risks from taking part?

There are no disadvantages or risks in taking part in the study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no direct benefits to you for taking part in the study, it is hoped that the findings may be used to justify a much larger study with the hope of extending the Choose Life Project beyond these selected schools. Also, you may find reflecting on your experience of the event and relating it to you studies and your personal development and understanding of wider issues, insightful.

What will happen to the data provided and how will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

The information you provide as part of the study is the **research study data**. Any research study data from which you can be identified (e.g., from identifiers such as your name, date of birth, audio recording etc.), is known as **personal data**. This can include more sensitive categories of personal data (**sensitive data**) such as your race, ethnic origin, politics, etc. Your participation in this study will **not involve the collection/use of personal data** by the investigator

What will happen to the results of the research project?

Cassie will produce a report for Steve Duffy the Choose Life Project Manager. The report will be shared with the steering group and it may be used to secure funding for a much larger study with a view to supporting the expansion of the Choose Life Project beyond the selected schools that Steve currently works with.

Who is organising the study?

This study is organised by Liverpool John Moores University and Dr Cassie Ogden is the researcher.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Liverpool John Moores University School of Justice Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: 22/HSS/002).

What if I have a concern about the study or something goes wrong?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please contact me (Cassie Ogden: c.a.ogden@ljmu.ac.uk) and I will do my best to answer your query. I will acknowledge your concern with within 10 working days and give you an indication of how I intend to deal with it. If you still remain concerned or unhappy or wish to make a complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at Liverpool John Moores University who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible:

Chair, Liverpool John Moores University Research Ethics Committee; Email: FullReviewUREC@ljamu.ac.uk; Tel: 0151 231 2121; Research Innovation Services, Liverpool John Moores University, Exchange Station, Liverpool L2 2QP

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Contact for further information

Dr Cassie Ogden Email: [***](#)

Address

Office number

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering to take part in this study.

Should you wish to discuss any issues raised in the event today please remember you can always talk to an adult you trust, pupil pastoral support at school or any support helpline such as those listed below:

Childline

08001111

childline.org.uk

Support for children and young people in the UK, including a free helpline and 1-2-1 online chats with counsellors.

FRANK

03001236600

talktofrank.com

Confidential advice and information about drugs, their effects and the law.

Refuge

08082000247

refuge.org.uk

Help and support for young people affected by domestic violence.

Samaritans

116123 (freephone)

jo@samaritans.org

Chris, Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK

PO Box 90 90
Stirling FK8 2SA
samaritans.org

Samaritans are open 24/7 for anyone who needs to talk. You can [visit some Samaritans branches in person](#). Samaritans also have a Welsh Language Line on [0808 164 0123](tel:08081640123) (7pm–11pm every day).

The Mix

[0808 808 4994](tel:08088084994)
[85258](tel:85258) (crisis messenger service, text THEMIX)
themix.org.uk

Support and advice for under 25s, including a helpline, crisis messenger service and webchat.

Youth Access

youthaccess.org.uk
Advice and counselling network for young people, including details of free local services

3.4 Appendix 4: Schools Open-Ended Survey

The following open ended survey is designed to explore the impact of a Choose Life Project event on your understanding and attitudes towards substance misuse* and substance users. You will not be asked to give any personal information and therefore all answers will be anonymous (i.e. there will be no way of knowing who has completed the survey) and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. You can stop completing the survey at any time. Thank you for participating.

Please note once you have handed in your survey you can no longer withdraw from the study as we will be unable to locate which survey response was yours.

Please tick to confirm.

I have read the information sheet provided and I am happy to participate. I understand that by completing and returning this questionnaire I am consenting to be part of the research study and for my data to be used as described.

Name of the Event Attended:

*The term substance misuse is used throughout this survey which is a phrase used to describe the use of alcohol, illegal drugs, or over-the-counter or prescription medications in a way that they are not meant to be used.

Questions based on your ideas on substance misuse before the event

- 1) What were your thoughts about substance misuse and the people who misuse substances **before** you attended the event? Write as much or as little as you like.

My thoughts about substance misuse *before* the event

My thoughts about people who misuse substances *before* the event

- 2) Please provide three to five key words that describe your thoughts about substance misuse and people who misuse substances **before** the event.

Key words to describe my thoughts about substance misuse *before* the event

Key words to describe my thoughts on people who misuse substances *before* the event

Questions on your ideas on substance misuse **AFTER the event**

- 3) What were your thoughts about substance misuse and the people who misuse substances **after** you attended the event? Write as much or as little as you like.

My thoughts about substance misuse *after* the event

My thoughts about people who misuse substances *after* the event

- 4) Please provide three to five key words that describe your thoughts about substance misuse and people who misuse substances **after** the event.

Key words to describe my thoughts about substance misuse *after* the event

Key words to describe my thoughts on people who misuse substances *after* the event

5) a) On a scale of 1-10 (1 = entirely inaccurate and 10 = perfectly accurate) how accurate do you think the representations of substance misuse and substance users are in the media (which can include newspapers, TV programmes and social media)? _____

b) What do you think of the ways newspapers, TV programmes and social media discuss substance misuse? (e.g. do you think they are fair or tell one-sided stories?)

Write as little or as much as you like.

6) a) In your opinion is substance misuse an entirely personal issue or can society do more to help prevent substance misuse?

Write as little or as much as you like.

b) In your opinion should substance users be supported to help recover from substance misuse and if so how?

Write as little or as much as you like.

7) What is the most important thing you learnt from the event?

Write as much or as little as you like.

8) What was the best part of the event?

Write as much or as little as you like.

9) Is there any aspect of the event that you did not like or you feel could be made better? If so please explain.

Write as much or as little as you like.

10) Please use this space to add anything else you would like to say.

Thank you for your time and participation.