

## ■ New drug and alcohol initiative to target kids

BY DECLAN TIERNEY

A MAJOR initiative to tackle drug and alcohol abuse has been launched this week in Galway - and one of its main focuses is to target young children as part of an early intervention initiative.

And it is hoped that a new strategy, the first of its kind in the country, will reduce the stigma of substance abuse as well as providing education programmes for schools, the general public and professionals who work with families.

The Western Region Drug and Alcohol Task Force launched their new support strategy for addicts and their families in Tuam yesterday morning in the Ard Rí Hotel.

The strategy is to create greater awareness of the needs of families affected by substance use and to increase the visibility of supports available. It also encourages families of substance abusers to seek support.

The family support element of the new strategy is an approach to working with children, young people, parents and families which is based on a style of work which emphasises prevention, early intervention and a focus on the strengths of family members.

Deirdre Hurney, Chairperson of the Western Region Drug and Alcohol Task Force welcomed the completion of this initiative and said it signified the importance of the Regional Family Support Strategy when she highlighted "it is



well documented the distress and destabilising effect caused by addiction to the family unit."

She added: "This strategy aims to develop a co-ordinated plan to improve and enhance support for individuals and family members living with such distress.

"It is the first of its kind in

the country and reflects the commitment of the task force to supporting both users and their family members affected by substance misuse."

Co-author of the strategy, Debbie McDonagh, who is family support co-ordinator, said that the initiative emphasises the need to support families due to the stress and

chaos that substance misuse has on thousands of families in the West of Ireland

"Children, parents, carers, siblings and extended family members are impacted by substance misuse and we must develop targeted prevention, intervention and ancillary supports for them," Ms McDonagh stated.

She said that this strategy was developed through an extensive consultation process with service providers and family members. She added that this strategy strives to be a cohesive and integrated plan for the task force and its partners aimed at meeting the needs of families affected by drugs and alcohol.

The task force has established its 24 goals for the next four years and aims to work with all relevant stakeholders to achieve these ambitions. The strategy will be overseen by the Western Region Drug and Alcohol Task Force Family Support Working Group and will be reviewed on an annual basis.

## Galway students still feeling pinch as they get €750,000 in hardship funds

BY DARA BRADLEY

GALWAY'S students are still feeling the pinch of recession, and relying on State help to tide them over during hard times.

New figures reveal that more than a three-quarters of a million Euros was paid through a hardship fund to students attending Galway's two third level institutes.

Education Minister Richard Bruton said some €759,498 was dispersed to third level students in Galway through the Student Assistance Fund.

That included some €485,954

to students of NUI Galway, and some €273,544 for students of Galway Mayo Institute of Technology.

The hardship pay-outs relate to the academic year 2014-2015.

Minister Bruton said the Student Assistance Fund, "provides financial supports to students who are experiencing short-term or ongoing financial difficulties."

The fund is administered locally within each higher education institution, he said, and the monies are provided on an annual basis to each institution by the Higher Education Authority.

During the 2014-2015 academic year, some €6.6 million

was paid out by the State, to hard-pressed students under this scheme.

It amounted to €8.35 million nationally in 2013-2014; €11 million the previous year and 9 million the year before that.

GMIT said its students cannot use the fund for tuition fees or to cover student loans. "The objective of this fund is to assist students in a sensitive and compassionate manner who might otherwise, because of financial reasons suffer hardship or be unable to continue their third level studies. The fund is intended to tackle educational disadvantage by providing financial support to enable stu-

dents to fully benefit from their third level studies," GMIT said.

It is to be used to pay for day-to-day expenses that are necessary to allow them to participate in third level, including rent, transport, food, medical costs, books, and childcare costs. Receipts must be submitted.

"Some students find themselves experiencing financial hardship despite penny counting during their time in the University," said NUI Galway Students Union.

It added the fund is designed to "tackle disadvantage by enabling students to fully benefit from their studies."

## Virtually all penalty notices in Loughrea delivered next day

THERE'S a 98% next day delivery service of fixed penalty notices in the Loughrea area - but despite that people still claim they haven't paid fines for alleged road traffic offences because they never received them in the post.

Judge James Faughnan had requested that a survey be carried out in the Loughrea area to ascertain the efficiency of the delivery of fixed penalty notices.

Garda Keith Noone told Loughrea Court last week that he had concluded that 98% of

them were delivered the next day.

Judge Faughnan welcomed Garda Noone's news noting that despite that, a large number of people before the courts on road traffic offences such as speeding, not wearing a seat-belt or using a mobile phone while driving, still maintained they never received the fixed notice penalty in the post.

These penalties are usually about €60 but once the case comes before the Court, the fines can be up to €2,000 depending on the offence and can incur penalty points.