As Chairperson of the Western Region Drugs Task Force (WRDTF), I am delighted to welcome you to the summer edition of TF News.

The twin problems of drug and alcohol abuse are still with us and there is no room for complacency. However, there is some great work going on in the various communities throughout the region where community-based initiatives are vital in the ongoing battle against the scourge of drug and alcohol abuse.

The rate of suicide, especially among our young people has become a very serious issue in our communities. There have been a number of very good initiatives to try and stem the tide, notably in the East Galway area. We wish them well in their efforts.

Again I would like to compliment our own staff who link into the various community, voluntary and statutory agencies to ensure that there are no gaps in our services.

The recent elections brought joy and sorrow to those involved in the campaigns. For the WRDTF it means that we have to say goodbye to some of the public representatives who have been with us for the past five years. I would like to thank them for their support and active participation in our activities and we look forward to new representatives joining us.

It is also the end of the line for our community representatives who are up for reappointment later on this year. Their contribution to the work of the Task Force has been immense and we hope that at least some of them will be back with us again. I have to note, especially, the work of Edith Geraghty from the Mayo Community Forum who did Trojan work for us as interim co-ordinator for a number of months last year.

Martin Lee, Chairperson

Ecstasy Warning

In recent weeks reports have appeared concerning a range of ‘Ecstasy-type’ substances which are now available on the market. A number of hospitalisations and fatalities have been linked to their use. These substances may be sold as Ecstasy (MDMA) itself or as an alternative drug having similar effects.

The tablets now come in an even wider variety of shapes, colours and sizes than previously seen. Examples include: Green Apples, Green Rolexes, Ninjas, Superman Crests, Blue Stars, Dominos, Crosses, Hearts and Ghosts. Potentially, the Ecstasy on sale may also be of greater strength (increased purity) than has been commonly seen over the past few years. Some tablets may also have other substances added, such as PMA or PMMA. These substances have led to fatalities in Ireland and elsewhere in Europe.

If someone continues to use drugs they should make themselves aware of available harm-reduction advice. Always avoid mixing Ecstasy with alcohol. Combining Ecstasy with any other drug can lead to even more unpredictable effects than using Ecstasy by itself. Anyone experiencing side effects should seek urgent medical help.

Fiona Walsh/Neil Wilson
It’s been a busy year since I took up the post of Drug/Alcohol Training and Development Family Support Worker. To date I’ve been working on initiating new projects and continuing existing work.

Family support grants were advertised and awarded, offering support to successful applicants. The DASFN continues to meet and I am currently facilitating a review of the network. The Mayo Family Support Group was identified as needing input, so since late last year I have been working on the re-establishment of the group. This has included extensive media input and facilitating fortnightly group sessions.

In addition, I have provided support to the newly-established Family Support Drop-in Service in Roscommon Town Primary Care Service via the DASFN, advertising and promotion.

In conjunction with my colleague, Liam O’Loughlin, I have delivered a number of information seminars titled: ‘Responding to Family Needs in Relation to Drug and Alcohol issues. These seminars have proven to be very popular and will be rolled out across the region later in the year.

One of my many projects has been the development of the Family Support Needs Analysis Survey. The main objective of the needs analysis was to create a greater understanding of the ways in which families seek support, the availability and effectiveness of such support as well as to provide information through service agencies to families and communities on existing drug services and supports in the Western Region.

This has provided an ideal opportunity to update all contact lists in the region including email distribution lists. Many of these contacts were found either through visits, websites or from contacts utilised by other funded workers. This list is quite extensive and continues to be updated.

Through the NDS I have developed the questionnaire using Survey Monkey and it is currently being emailed to all interested parties. There has been a very positive response with a significant number of surveys completed. Work will soon begin on analysing the responses and collating the report. It will be launched later in the year and will be incorporated in the development of a three-year plan.

Debbie McDonagh

The WRDTF in conjunction with the Galway Alcohol Strategy, Brendan Murphy, HSE Training Officer and Ruth Armstrong, HSE Project Manager-Alcohol are planning to roll out SAOR training in the Western Region and train a number of individuals to become SAOR Trainers.

Developed by Paul Goff and James O’Shea of the South Eastern Region, SAOR is currently being implemented within Galway University Hospital by the Galway Alcohol Strategy. The SAOR model incorporates the common elements of screening, assessment, intervention and referral.

A brief intervention for alcohol use is a short helpful conversation that focuses on identifying what a person needs to consider and alter their alcohol consumption. Brief interventions have shown to be effective in initiating change in alcohol consumption for people with mild to moderate alcohol-related problems and in helping people with more significant difficulties to access specialised alcohol treatment services. This model provides an evidence-based practical step-by-step guide to the delivery of Brief Intervention for hazardous/harmful alcohol use and to date has been applied in acute care settings. The WRDTF now plans to roll this out in the community and voluntary sector in the west.

WRDTF/HSE will provide training aimed at staff who have occasion to ask people about their alcohol use. This could include workers from social care, family support, employment support, vocational training, criminal justice, probation, education, housing support and general health care services.
Mayo Junior Cert Results Night Group

The Mayo Junior Cert Results Night Group (MJCRNG) was established in 2012 as a response to the health and safety issues that have arisen around alcohol use and Junior Cert students of late. Our aim is to reduce the overall harm caused by alcohol around Junior Cert results time. The initiative was developed by Pat Conway, CLW, and Gillian Conway, ESW. The group consists of staff members from An Garda Síochána, Western Region Drugs Task Force, South West Mayo Development Company and the ISPCC.

Since 2012, the group has been very successful in reducing the alcohol-related harm on Junior Cert results night in County Mayo. Evaluations of the campaign over the last two years have found a 95% reduction in Garda arrests on that night compared to the same night in 2011.

In May 2014, the group again supported parents of Junior Cert students in Co Mayo (1737 in total) with an information pack *Teenage Years: A parent’s guide to protecting your teenager on a night out*. This pack provides helpful tips on keeping your child safe and enables discussion for parents with their teenage sons or daughters in advance of the results night. In addition, parents were invited to attend information evenings facilitated by the CLW and ESW throughout Co. Mayo to further support parents around the issue of underage alcohol use and Junior Cert celebrations. Information evenings took place in Westport, Belmullet, Castlebar, Claremorris, and Ballina during the week of May 26th.

In September 2014, the group aims to deliver the ‘Stay Safe–Stay Sober’ campaign to all students receiving their Junior Cert results in 29 post primary schools throughout Mayo. This campaign will highlight the work of the MJCRNG, focus on a harm-reduction approach to alcohol and explore alternative celebrations that exclude alcohol and drugs. We will also provide all students receiving results with alcohol harm reduction leaflets and specially designed silicone wristbands that will display a harm-reduction message.

*Pat Conway, CLW*

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Ballinasloe Alcohol Strategy

The WRDTF, in conjunction with representatives from local statutory and voluntary organisations, is currently developing the Ballinasloe Alcohol Strategy. This strategy will help enhance the way that agencies respond to alcohol-related harm in the town.

In order to get a wide range of views on the issue of local alcohol related harm, agency and community consultations have been held and a youth panel has been established comprising members of the local Comhairle group. These young people will contribute their perspective on how best to tackle the issues concerned.

This strategy will be formally launched in September and run initially from 2014 to 2016. It will focus on the four key areas of: Prevention; Supply, Access & Availability; Screening, Treatment & Support Services; Research, Monitoring & Evaluation.

For further information please contact Emmet Major, CLW (East Galway & South Roscommon) on 087 6629953 or emmet.major@gretb.ie.

*Emmet Major*
The 2014 WRDTF Training Calendar (March to July) has proven to be very popular. So far this year training has been delivered on Over-the Counter Medication, Putting the Pieces Together, New and Emerging Drugs, The 5-Step Method, SAOR: Brief Intervention for Alcohol Use and Responding to the Needs of Families Relating to Drug and Alcohol use. Other courses about to take place in the coming weeks include Motivational Interviewing (1) and Good Practice in Drug Education.

The training calendar for September to December is currently being finalised and will be circulated in the coming weeks. It will also be available on the WRDTF website www.wrdtf.ie/publications. For booking enquiries please contact the WRDTF office at 091-480044.

For all other enquiries regarding drug and alcohol training contact:

Gillian Conway (Mayo & Roscommon) 086-7814779; gconway@southmayo.com
Neil Wilson (Galway City & County) 086-7274888; neil@aidswest.ie

This new poster is now available from the WRDTF in A3 and A5 format.

The Western Region Drugs Task Force (WRDTF) is a co-ordinating body established in May 2003 as one of the key recommendations of the National Drugs Strategy, 2001-2008.

Using a partnership approach, it researches, develops & implements a co-ordinated, regionally appropriate response to substance misuse in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon.

Task Force Name Change

In April this year Mr Paul Barron, Chair of the National Co-ordinating Committee for Drugs & Alcohol wrote to all Local and Regional Drugs Task Forces regarding the titles of Task Forces.

He stated that at a meeting of the National Coordinating Committee in April it was agreed that the titles of Task Forces should be changed to “Drug and Alcohol Task Forces”. The letter states that this is in line with the recommendation in the report on the review of Drugs Task Forces and the National Structures under which they operate.

Mr Barron goes on to state that clarification in relation to the role of Task Forces regarding alcohol misuse will be provided when the committee has concluded its deliberations.