

F R Ü H I N T E R V E N T I O N



B E I E R S T A U F F Ä L L I G E N
D R O G E N K O N S U M E N T E N

Early Intervention for first offended drug users

Pilot project
Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Berlin
and eight federal states

(project period: October 1, 2000 till December 31, 2003)

Doris Sarrazin, LWL, Münster, June 12th, 2003

Project organizational body:

Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe (LWL)
Department of Health
LWL-Koordinationsstelle Sucht
Warendorfer Str. 27, 48133 Münster
Tel.: 0251/591-38 38
Fax: 0251/591-54 84
e-mail: projekt-fred@lwl.org

Project manager: Wolfgang Rometsch

Starting situation

Young people still experiment with a multitude of legal and illicit drugs. For more than 20 years, most activities initiated by institutions of the German drug help system have primarily been focussed on avoiding use (primary prevention) and treating dependence (therapy). It is true that the phase of use or abuse (when secondary prevention measures have to be taken) is more and more often picked out as a central subject, but in day-to-day business it is only rarely used as starting point for intervention.

Experts, however, are of the opinion that an *intervention preferably initiated at an early date* (at an early date in the biography of the person affected and at an early date of a lawsuit) may help to prevent a “drugs career”. Against this background, it is important to develop specific offers for youngsters and young adults at the beginning of the phase of problematical drug use in order to counteract the development of a potential dependence.¹

Statistics on new users of *hard* illicit drugs compiled by the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA)² show the relevance and explosiveness of the topic of drug use among young people. From 1988 (7,456) to 2001 (22,551) a steady increase has been recorded. Furthermore, it has to be assumed that the number of users not registered by the police is very large.

About 69 % of first offenders use ecstasy (23,6 %), amphetamines (24,1 %), cocaine (18,8 %) and LSD. After the 21-24-year olds (29,5 %), the age group of the 14-20-year olds is the second biggest group (28,7) among the registered first offenders.

If furthermore the increase in number of offences related to cannabis use (2001: 57 %) and other findings concerning lifetime prevalence of the use of illicit drugs (34 % of the 14-24-year olds / WITTICHEN, H.-U.; LIEB, R.; Munich 2000)³ are taken into account, the total number of persons using *illicit* drugs is even higher.

The German criminal law provides for refraining from punishment or from taking measures imposed by the juvenile court if specific, defined requirements are met (among others personal use, small quantity and minor guilt, no public interest, cf. § 31 a BtMG⁴, § 45 sect. 1 JGG⁵). There is, however, also the possibility to impose educational measures or to issue instructions (§§ 45 sect. 2, 3, 47 JGG; 153a StPO) aimed at encouraging the persons affected to have a critical look at the risks of drug use.

A large number of drug users have first been registered by the police before their parents or other relatives hear about their use. 41 % of the participants in the emergency aid project “Immediate treatment” located in Dortmund (placing of drug addicted people in treatment within 24 hours) mentioned this. The pilot project “FreD” takes this fact as starting point for finding access to this group of potential problem users. The delicate situation of their first registration by the police shall be used to provide support which can be used on a voluntary basis or due to a specific instruction.

For this reason, the central idea of the pilot project was to submit **young new** drug users **at an early stage** a **short-term, specific** and preferably **optional** offer.

¹ „Eckpunkte für den Aktionsplan Drogen und Sucht“ 6/2002 by the drug commissioner of the federal government

² Rauschgiftjahresbericht des Bundeskriminalamtes-BKA (2001), p. 53 ff.

³ WITTICHEN, HANS-ULRICH; LIEB, ROSALIND: Schlussbericht d. forschungsvorhabens „Vulnerabilitäts- und Protektionsfaktoren bei Frühstadien von Substanzmißbrauch und –abhängigkeit“ supported by BMfBWF

⁴ BtMG – narcotics act

⁵ JGG – Juvenile court act; § 45 sect. 1 possibility to refrain from prosecution if conditions for § 153 StPO are satisfied - § 153 StPO – Refraining from instituting legal proceedings.

Aims

The German pilot project „FreD“ is targeted at drug users registered by the police for the first time and pursues the following aims:

- to encourage the new user to reflect on his/her own use of psychoactive substances and on situations forming the basis for this behaviour,
- to confront him/her with his/her personal limits and the effects of his/her own use,
- to motivate the user to change his/her attitudes and behaviour,
- to provide him/her with detailed information about the different kinds of drugs, their effects and risks,
- to empower the new user to take his/her own decisions on the basis of self-assessment and assessment by others as well as his/her personal risk awareness,
- to show him/her working practices and support (also persons, if need be) provided by institutions of the regional drug help system.

The most important aim is to prevent the development of an addictive behaviour as well as new offences and the resulting negative consequences.

Target group

The pilot project „FreD“ is targeted at youngsters, adolescents and young adults experimenting with drugs and/or using illicit drugs who have been picked up (by the police) when doing so, but who have **not** developed an addictive behaviour yet.

Main focus is on the 14-21-year olds, but also young adults up to the age of 25 belong to the target group.

Those persons who can be approached under § 31a BtMG are the central target group of this pilot project. In most cases, intervention is initiated during the period between the first questioning by the police and the final decision by the prosecution.

Furthermore, other kinds of intervention like imposing conditions or instructions and the possibility of diversion⁶ can be used in order to motivate the persons affected to participate in such a measure. The same applies to educational measures pursuant to § 45 sect. 2 JGG

Local cooperation and networking

The motivation of persons affected to make use of such an offer can only be successful if there are close and reliable forms of cooperation between the local project institution (drug advisory services, etc) and the local cooperation partners involved in the project (police, prosecution, youth welfare office and, if need be, probation service).

The task of these institutions, especially the task of the police, is to find persons of the target group, to inform them about the basic ideas of the pilot project and to encourage them – as far as possible – to make use of this offer.

Experiences hitherto gained show that it is recommendable to set up a (relatively) small project group which is responsible for the coordination of the activities. In order to ensure a successful

⁶ Diversion means an alternative to formal juvenile court practices. “By using the strategy of diversion, the possibility shall be promoted to refrain - in appropriate cases of offences committed by youngsters and adolescents for which the juvenile court act applies - from prosecution if this has been decided by the prosecutor within the framework of summary proceedings. In this context, the educational idea of the juvenile court act shall be given effect by a reaction suited to the personality of the accused to be shown immediately after the offence has been committed”. Source: Diversionsstrategie für die Praxis des Jugendstrafanwalts nach § 45 JGG des Landes Rheinlandpfalz of July 1987

cooperation, to minimise time and to ensure short information channels, clear agreements and responsibilities, all representatives should have the necessary powers to take decisions. These basic conditions are required to achieve maximum efficiency in this complex pilot project. All agreements concerning the local structure of procedures should be concluded in writing so that the local project development can be documented.

The embodiment of the project at regional as well as national level has to be discussed and decided in cooperation with the ministries of the interior and the ministries of justice of the federal states on taking the respective data protection regulations into account. In doing so, all persons involved can benefit from a well-funded, efficient structure of procedures and thus the foundations for a high efficiency have been laid.

Experience hitherto gained in this project shows that during the initial phase of the project a lot of time has to be spent on the development and extension of regional cooperation structures.

The referring institutions like the police, prosecution and youth welfare office (department of juvenile court assistance) use a brochure, which is the same for all federal states, to inform and motivate the persons affected. This brochure provides information about the legal situation, available support and local institutions/persons that can be contacted.

Contents of the offer and method

As already mentioned, the central idea of the national pilot project „FreD“ is to encourage new drug users to have a critical look at their use of drugs and their way of life. The most important thing is to get into conversation with the persons affected, to inform them, to motivate them to have a critical look at their behaviour and to initiate changes in their attitudes and behaviour.

This shall be done by implementing a short-term intervention programme the participation in which is on a voluntary basis. This offer includes an “intake” interview and a course which is divided in several sequences. It is organised by experts from institutions of the regional drug help system and takes place at intervals of 4 to 8 weeks.

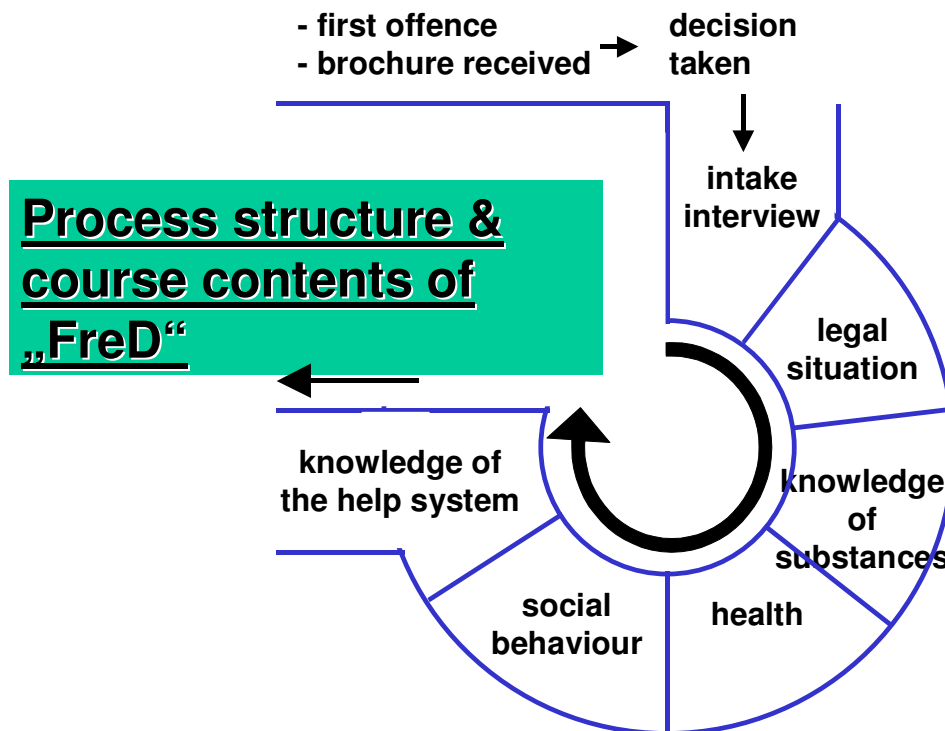
A course group is composed of 5 to 12 participants. The courses as well as the intake interview take place e.g. at the premises of institutions of the youth welfare service or the drug help system.

During the initial stage of the pilot project, the structure of the course was developed in cooperation with the experts who led the courses. On the basis of the length of the course of 8 hours –spread over 4 evenings of 2 hours (alternatively 2 afternoons of 4 hours) – contents and adequate methods oriented to the project aims were elaborated. Experiences gained during the project implementation and the results of the project evaluation have been considered when updating the programme.

When preparing the individual “course units” which are led by two professionals working in the field of prevention or drug aid, didactic and methodical aspects have been taken into account. In case of specific topics, it is possible to seek advice of external experts (e.g. lawyer, doctor).

Before the beginning of the course, an intake interview takes place in order to get in personal touch with the course participant, to get some information about his/her individual situation and to provide information about the contents and conditions of the course. The most important aims of the interview are to motivate the interested person to attend the FreD course and to verify if he/she is suited to participate in such a programme.

After completion of the course, an individual evaluation interview takes place on a voluntary basis. Subject of this interview may also be the planning of a follow-up measure. In case the participants have attended the whole course, they get on request a certificate of attendance.



Experts involved

The pilot project was implemented simultaneously at 15 project sites located in 8 federal states. At each project site, 2 prevention experts were responsible for the implementation of the FreD programme. They spent 7 hours each per week on project activities. Within the framework of national working sessions taking place at regular intervals, experiences are exchanged, the conception of the project is developed further and the project workers are trained in the method of motivational interviewing and in the discussion of specific topics.

Advisory council

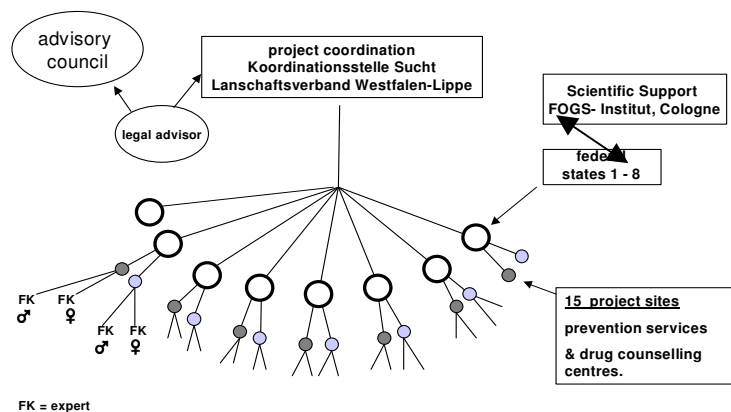
For the implementation of the pilot project an advisory council had been set up. Members of this council were representatives of the principal, the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (BMGS), of the national project supporting organisation LWL and of the competent departments of the participating federal states that are dealing with drug issues. Furthermore, a senior public prosecutor and the manager of the research team of the FOGS-Institut, Cologne, had an advisory function within this council.

The project was funded by the participating federal states, the national project supporting organisation LWL and the Federal Ministry of Health.

Project coordination

The whole model project was managed by the Koordinationsstelle Sucht (Co-ordination Office for Drug-related Issues), a section of the Health Department of the Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe (LWL)⁷, Münster. A qualified employee was responsible for the organisation of the project as well as for the coordination of the activities of the researchers and the advisory council. Regular working sessions and further trainings with all professionals involved as well as the continuous provision of qualified support to the local professionals and their work were central elements of his/her job. He/she was supported by a part-time employee who was responsible for secretarial and administrative work.

Structure and persons involved in the pilot project FreD



Scientific evaluation

The pilot project „FreD“ was evaluated by the institute FOGS – Gesellschaft für Forschung und Beratung im Gesundheits- und Sozialbereich mbH, Cologne. For this purpose, a method which makes – without prejudice to rights of data protection - a collection and a neutral evaluation of the data possible and provides answers to conception-related issues, was elaborated in cooperation with the project coordination, the supporting institutions and the professionals responsible for the implementation of the courses.

In particular the following aspects were evaluated:

- acceptance of the offer by the users,
- change in the participants' attitudes (before/afterwards),
- cooperation between the institutions involved when recruiting persons affected at the level of
 - the project sites and
 - the federal states participating in the project.

⁷ Together with municipalities and districts, the LWL forms part of the Westphalia-Lippe's communal self-administration. On behalf of its members, the 18 districts and the 9 self-administered municipalities in Westphalia-Lippe, the LWL deals solely with tasks which can be professionally und financially addressed more efficiently on a supra-regional basis. This mainly involves tasks in the areas of social affairs, health, youth and culture.

Some Results

The results of the scientific evaluation show that the aims of the pilot project have been well accomplished.⁸ The average age of the persons who made use of the FreD offer was 17.7 years and the majority of persons reached were members of the target group of youngsters and adolescents. 91 % of the interested persons were under 21. The social situation of the persons who made use of the FreD offer is relatively stable. Most of them are pupils or trainees. The use of cannabis (96 %) followed by ecstasy (11,5) are the most common form of use in this target group.

The project could reach the following number of users in the different project stages:

First contacts	675
In-Take agreed	625
In-Take carried out	569
Course recommended	514
(documented) (course) participants	457

The great majority of those who made use of the FreD offer have not sought any drug-specific or other kinds of psychosocial advice yet. During the course, the confidence in finding a solution to their problem and the knowledge of available support increased. A high percentage (94 %) of the participants considered the offers of the pilot project to be (very) good and 73 % of them said they could recommend the offer to others.⁹

Other results show that the (successful) implementation of the project idea primarily depends on a close cooperation between the different persons involved. The role the police and the juvenile court assistance play is of particular importance since they are the first points of contact.

As in any other secondary prevention measure, establishing contacts and getting through to persons showing a risky and harmful use behaviour is very important. The high number of persons who completed the course in the regular way (78,3 %) proves that the FreD offer is well accepted by the participants.

Transfer into practice

After a successful trial phase, the pilot project can be introduced at other locations at relatively low costs. A manual was elaborated which can be downloaded and thus be put at the disposal of interested institutions and persons.

The transfer period was from January to December 2003. In between FreD has been implemented at more than 100 sites nationwide.

Concluding evaluation

The results of the scientific research obtained during the project period up to the end of 2002 show the following advantages of the FreD project:

- young users of illicit drugs can be reached and a preventive measure can be initiated at an early stage,
- the model programme comprising an intake interview and the course implemented by qualified and experienced professionals is well accepted by the participants,

⁸ Final report by FOGS about the results of the pilot project FreD dated 4/2003 (unpublished)

⁹Also compare remarks concerning the pilot project in „Drogen- und Suchtbericht 5/2002“ published by the drug commissioner of the federal government.

- effects can be achieved which express themselves in the personal significance of the participation stated by the participants as well as in the improvement of their level of knowledge concerning health, social and legal aspects of drug use, in an improved risk assessment, the application of use rules or in giving up use.

Success-promoting factors were among other things a good cooperation between the different persons involved in the project, clear responsibilities and a great commitment of the project participants.

Factors which had an hindering influence on the acceptance of the offer were problems in the cooperation and unclear responsibilities of the persons involved in the project, the voluntary nature of the offer, the lack of motivation among the “first offenders” and a low number of cases at some project sites.

Seen as a whole, the method of using the first offence as starting point for finding access to new drug users is quite successful, but in some places there is enormous need for coordination. In general, the time invested into cooperation should be reduced. The basic orientation of § 31a BTMG¹⁰ should be closer linked to a specific support measure..

¹⁰ ..the public prosecutors may refrain from prosecution if the offender’s guilt is to be regarded to be minor, if there is no public interest in criminal prosecution and if the offender cultivates, manufactures, imports, exports, transports, buys or possesses narcotics merely in small quantities for his/her own use.