



Drug and Alcohol Services: Experiences of Children and Young People

Healthwatch Hertfordshire was commissioned by Public Health at Hertfordshire County Council to gather feedback from children and young people aged 14-24 who have firsthand experience with using drug and alcohol services.

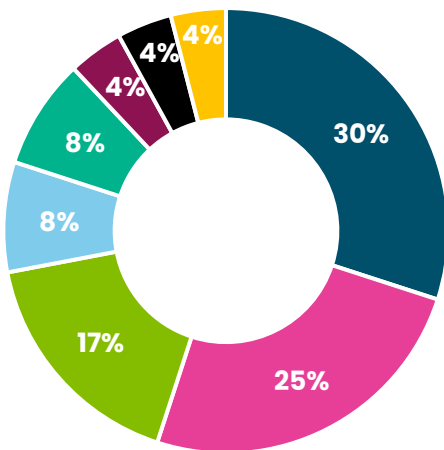
This summary highlights their perspectives on substance use and the support received from drug and alcohol services in Hertfordshire.

33 people shared their views with us. Thank you for your insights and contributions.

Accessing Drug and Alcohol Services

Key Findings: Most respondents from both age groups had accessed support in the last 3 months

18-24 year olds



30% (7) were referred by mental health support workers

25% (6) were referred by healthcare workers

17% (4) were self-referred

8% (2) were referred by social services

8% (2) were referred by crisis teams

4% (1) were referred by the youth justice system

4% (1) were referred by family or friends

4% (1) were referred by occupational health

"I found it easier to follow through due to the mental health team reaching out, I wouldn't have done that myself."

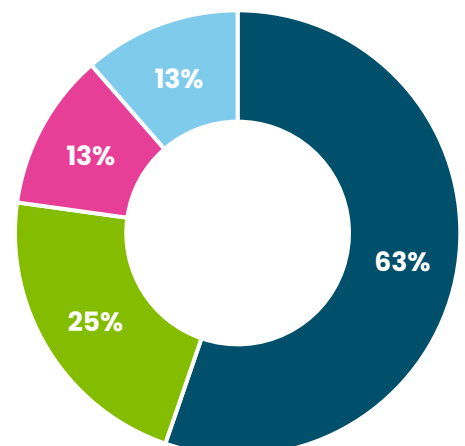
14-17 year olds

63% (5) were referred by the youth justice system

25% (2) were referred by school or college

13% (1) were referred by social services

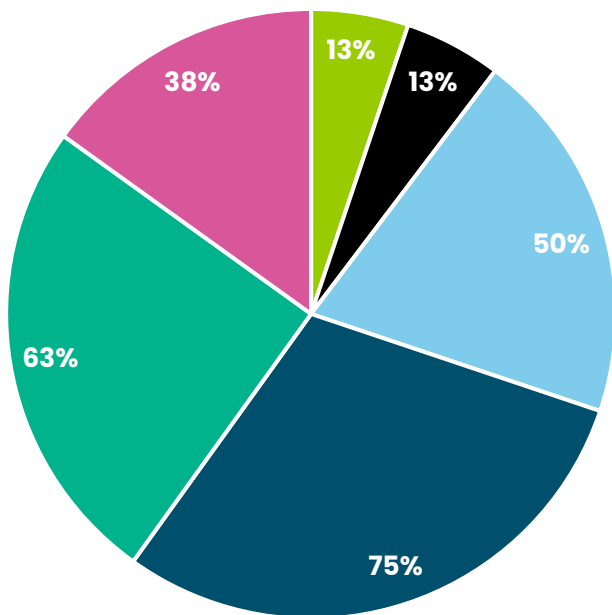
13% (1) were referred by mental health support workers



Reasons for Using Drugs and Alcohol

Key Findings: Respondents aged 14-17 primarily used drugs and alcohol due to boredom

Respondents aged 14-17 were asked why they used drugs and alcohol:



- 1 Boredom (75% - 6)
- 2 Social use (63% - 5)
- 3 Liking how it feels (50% - 4)
- 4 Recreation (38% - 3)
- 5 Mental health (13% - 1)
- 6 Bereavement (13% - 1)

Although the 18-24 year old cohort was not explicitly asked about their reasons for using drugs and alcohol, some said they also felt uneducated about drugs and alcohol and their effects.

"Started smoking weed at a young age I was very ignorant, what I'd been told and taught by our school system did not shed honest light on the drug, nor any drug for that matter."

"The reason I refused to get help earlier was due to ignorance. I never thought my drug and alcohol usage was going to become a problem and thought I could continue using drugs for the rest of my life with no issue."

Priorities When Accessing Support

Key Findings: Both age groups felt uneducated about drugs and alcohol

Respondents aged **14-17** shared what was most important to them when receiving help from drug and alcohol services:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Better understanding of drugs and alcohol (100% - 8) | 4 Safe place (63% - 5) |
| 2 Friendly and supportive (75% - 6) | 5 Confidentiality (50% - 4) |
| 3 Convenient time and place (63% - 5) | 6 Support in reducing or stopping use (38% - 3) |

Respondents aged **18-24** shared what was most important to them when receiving help from drug and alcohol services:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Friendly and supportive (100% - 20) | 4 Confidentiality (70% - 14) |
| 2 Safe space (85% - 17) | 5 Better understanding of drugs and alcohol (70% - 14) |
| 3 Reducing or stopping use (85% - 17) | 6 Convenient time and place (45% - 9) |

Key Findings

- Respondents aged 14-17 prioritised understanding drugs and alcohol
- Reducing or stopping use was the lowest priority for 14-17 year old respondents
- Confidentiality was more important for respondents aged 18-24
- Friendly and supportive staff members was important to both age groups

Barriers to Accessing Support

Respondents were asked if anything prevented them from accessing support from drug and alcohol services sooner:

18–24 year olds

- **55% (9)** did not realise they had a problem or were in denial about their use
- **35% (7)** felt they had limited awareness of available support services
- **20% (4)** did not experience barriers to accessing support

14–17 year olds

- **60% (3)** did not experience any barriers when accessing support
- **20% (1)** felt they had limited awareness of available drug and alcohol services
- **20% (1)** did not feel they needed to access support

“I didn’t realise I had a problem earlier, people around me recognised I had a problem.”

“As soon as I realised I had a ketamine problem I tried to get help.”

“Denial, embarrassment and not knowing what support was available held me back.”

“Wasn’t ready.”

“Never knew what was there for support.”

“I wasn’t aware of the help available.”

Recommendations

Recommendations were provided based on feedback from respondents:

Education:

- ✓ Reviewing current materials and ensuring information is kept up to date
- ✓ Working to understand what information children and young people need
- ✓ Engaging with children and young people to ensure support services are promoted



Awareness:

- ✓ Campaigns targeted at children and young people
- ✓ Promotional material in different formats and various platforms



Availability:

- ✓ Ensuring service users can receive support during evenings and weekends
- ✓ Providing a helpline to signpost people to other organisations that are open out of hours



Communication:

- ✓ Contacting service users in between meetings and individualising the support
- ✓ Maintaining open communication between meetings
- ✓ Ensuring service users can book urgent appointments if they are at risk



Individualised support:

- ✓ Focusing on the individual's goals and needs in a safe and confidential manner
- ✓ Referring service users to additional organisations as appropriate for holistic support

