



Scottish Youth Parliament
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Thursday, 16th May 2019

To Joe Fitzpatrick MSP (Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing),

LETTER WITH FINDINGS FROM CONSULTATION ON DESTIGMATISING CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL ELIGIBILITY WITH THE SCOTTISH YOUTH PARLIAMENT (SYP)

As the Convener of the Transport, Environment and Rural Affairs (TERA) Committee at the Scottish Youth Parliament (Calum McArthur MSYP) and two MSYPs for Aberdeenshire West (Sasha Brydon MSYP) and East (Josh MacRae MSYP); we are writing to you to formally record the views of young people on the National Partnership for Action of Drugs Scotland (PADS) Community Group and Scottish Recovery Consortium's (SRC) consultation on destigmatising concessionary travel eligibility.

We hope that you can relay these views to your colleagues, and please do contact us if you have any further questions or wish to update us on how you will take these views forward.

Our findings come from a consultation workshop attended by [eleven young people](#) on this topic at our 68th National Sitting on 17th March 2019 in Dalkeith, Midlothian, co-produced by us, PADS and SRC.

We also include findings from co-designed questions in our #WhatsYourTake online survey which was open from 15th February until 20th March, gathering [1136 responses](#) from young people aged 12-25 across Scotland, [from all 32 local authorities and our 11 national voluntary organisations](#), and various others representing a diverse range of communities of interest and lived experience (including different faiths, disabilities, care and carer experience, LGBTQI+, young farmers and young offenders).



Background information of survey respondents

The majority of respondents are at school (87%) and aged 12-14 (49%) and 15-17 (42%). 55% of respondents are female, 45% are male, 2% identified as non-binary and 1% prefer to use their own term. 13% of respondents belong to black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.

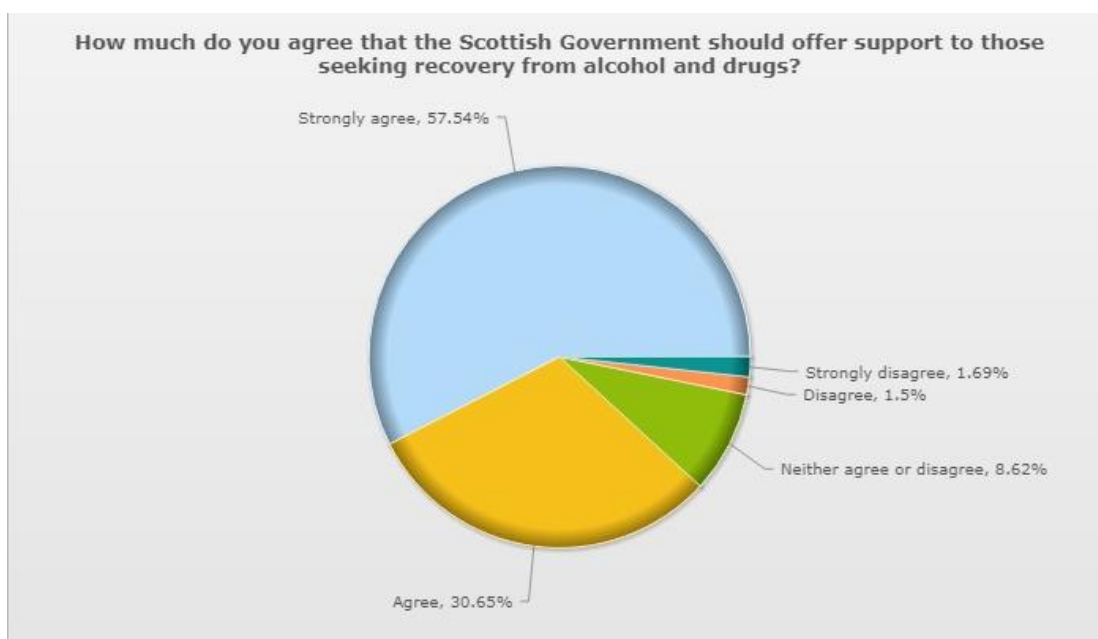
Background

Some people can get a free bus pass through the Scottish Concessionary Travel Scheme, such as those with mental health problems. The pass helps them to access the community supports needed for their recovery to flourish. Connecting with people, family and friends is key to wellbeing whereas being socially isolated is as bad for health as smoking.

People recovering from addictions are expressly excluded from the scheme despite evidence by PADS and SRC showing that having a bus pass is essential for their recovery. The research says that having a pass improves recovery rates and engagement with services. In excluding those in recovery from addictions from getting a free bus pass, are we further stigmatising people and their families?

PADS and SRC asked MSYPs to drive national change on how best to support those in recovery from problematic use of alcohol or other drugs, by asking the following questions (answers summarised below):

1) Do you agree that the Scottish Government should offer support to those seeking recovery from alcohol and drugs?



Workshop participants:

- It's the **Government's** role to support people who are suffering, recognising the **human rights based approach**: 'they should, as they are a person too!', and that '**growing up in poverty can often lead to addiction**'.
- Government taking action could **change perceptions** of people living with or recovering from addiction.
- **Early intervention**: including more of **a focus on recovery and go beyond a 'just say no to drugs' approach in PSHE education and awareness** for young people and **increased investment in facilities for young people**.

Online survey respondents:

- Concerns over resource allocation: support strategies must be **cost-efficient** and **help has to be wanted** - many respondents said that taking alcohol and drugs is a choice, some pointing to culpability, and that money should not be wasted and should be spent elsewhere if the help is not wanted or if the individual keeps relapsing.
- Ask *how* they became addicted to drugs, to work out how to support.
- Addiction should be supported as a health and social, and not a criminal, issue.

- Many pointed out that helping addicts recover will support their communities and families, including children *‘because the people suffering from drugs or alcohol [sic] could lose their children and their [sic] children can’t live with them (me).’*
- *‘All some people need is for someone to support them as motivation to stay clean or sober.’*
- **Preventative drugs and alcohol education, showing short and long-term consequences.**

A right to recovery

‘There should be more people out there offering to help addicts etc.’ ‘By ignoring them and leaving them to struggle, and then punishing them for the actions they came to get help for, you’re the villain. Not them.’ ‘People deserve to start again’. ‘There are too many of my pals involved in drugs because their mum or dad uses. They [sic] all need help not condemnation if they are to have any sort of life.’ ‘As somebody who grew up with a family member who had issues with this, I think it’s really important to nip these issues in the bud as soon as they first become apparent, and provide ongoing support.’ ‘We are all human beings with empathy so yes, help anyone that is suffering from an addiction.’



2) Should people in recovery from problematic alcohol or drug use be included in the national concessionary travel scheme?

Just under half of online survey respondents answered ‘yes’ to this question (48.75%), with 19.29% answering ‘no’ and 31.96% answering ‘don’t know’, some commenting that they needed more information or that it *‘depends on the circumstances of their addiction’*. *‘Is this for life or just during recovery? Who defines that?’*

The workshop participants were also split, some felt that travel can **help reduce the isolation** of people recovering from addictions, especially in Scotland. On the other hand, some felt that such a move would indicate **priority** and amount to unfair treatment, carrying the risk of people **taking advantage of the system or finding it easier to travel to drug dealers / use travel to sell drugs**. Few disagreed that this is a health issue, and said that people in recovery should be **blamed** and not supported. **Responsible use** was recommended. *‘If they can afford drugs/alcohol, they can afford a bus.’*

Online respondents commented that they may support this move if the individual can **prove that they are no longer using and are in rehabilitation for their addiction**, attending meetings etc. Others were concerned about **how you could assess eligibility**, suggesting that attendance of recovery meetings would have to be logged. *‘If they’re well into their recovery, yes. If they’re early on in their recovery, no.’*



Some agreed with the research findings from PADS and SRC that this would make it easier for people in recovery to attend appointments to support their recovery, health and travel to work - *‘if there is evidence showing that it helps, why deny it?’*. *‘If it helps them recover then yes.’*

‘If they can’t get places or they can’t get to [sic] a support group of sorts it could make them feel more defeated and unmotivated to recover, meaning they’re more likely to return to their addiction.’ *‘Everybody who requires additional support for travelling should be entitled to [sic] national concessionary travel.’*

However, as support did not amount to over 50%, SYP cannot recommend that people in recovery should be included in the scheme. Nevertheless, we are keen to explore this idea further.

3) What stigma do people and families in recovery from addictions face, and how can we combat this?

Throughout the activity, we had a stigma wall. At any time during the discussions, if we thought a view expressed or referenced could amount to stigma, we noted it down on a 'brick post-it' and built a stigma wall.

At the end of the session, we reviewed the wall and came up with recommendations to the Scottish Government based on what we have discussed to the wrecking ball template to try and 'break down the stigma wall'.

Some of the stigma noted throughout the consultation resulted from young people perhaps not having full access to a range of thought and resources on addiction and addiction recovery.

This led to recommendation no.1, and in relation to this, we wish to draw your attention to a recently published report which looks at how this could be done in more detail: [The Road to Recovery Refresh - Views from the Scottish Youth Parliament Justice Committee by Crew from SYP65](#) (May 2019).

Break down the stigma wall!

SYP, National Partnership for Action on Drugs Scotland (PADS) and Scottish Recovery Consortium.

SYP
SCOTTISH YOUTH PARLIAMENT

SYP recommends that...

1. We transform realistic education and advertising on drugs and alcohol as a form of early intervention.
2. Young people need a better understanding of how to keep them and others safe, what to do and where to go should they encounter substance related issues.
3. More groundwork should be done to look at how a concessionary travel scheme for people in recovery would work in practice.

PADS
PARTNERSHIP FOR ACTION ON DRUGS IN SCOTLAND
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SRC SCOTTISH RECOVERY CONSORTIUM

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Should you wish to meet with us or update us on how the findings will feed into your work, please do not hesitate to get in touch with our Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Laura Pasternak at laura.p@syp.org.uk or 0131 557 0452.

Yours sincerely,

Calum McArthur MSYP (Orkney Islands; Convener, Transport, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee)

Sasha Brydon MSYP (Aberdeenshire West)

Josh MacRae MSYP (Aberdeenshire East)