

advice to help services and police

# UNDERSTANDING DRUG USE



# C O N T E N T S

About the advice collection .....	2
Knowledge from children and young people	
Advice for help of the future .....	8
Experiences from the services	
Youth outreach services .....	24
Secondary care .....	26
Residential childcare institutions .....	28
Drug control contract .....	30
Police .....	32
Rights of children and young people ...	38
To national authorities .....	46

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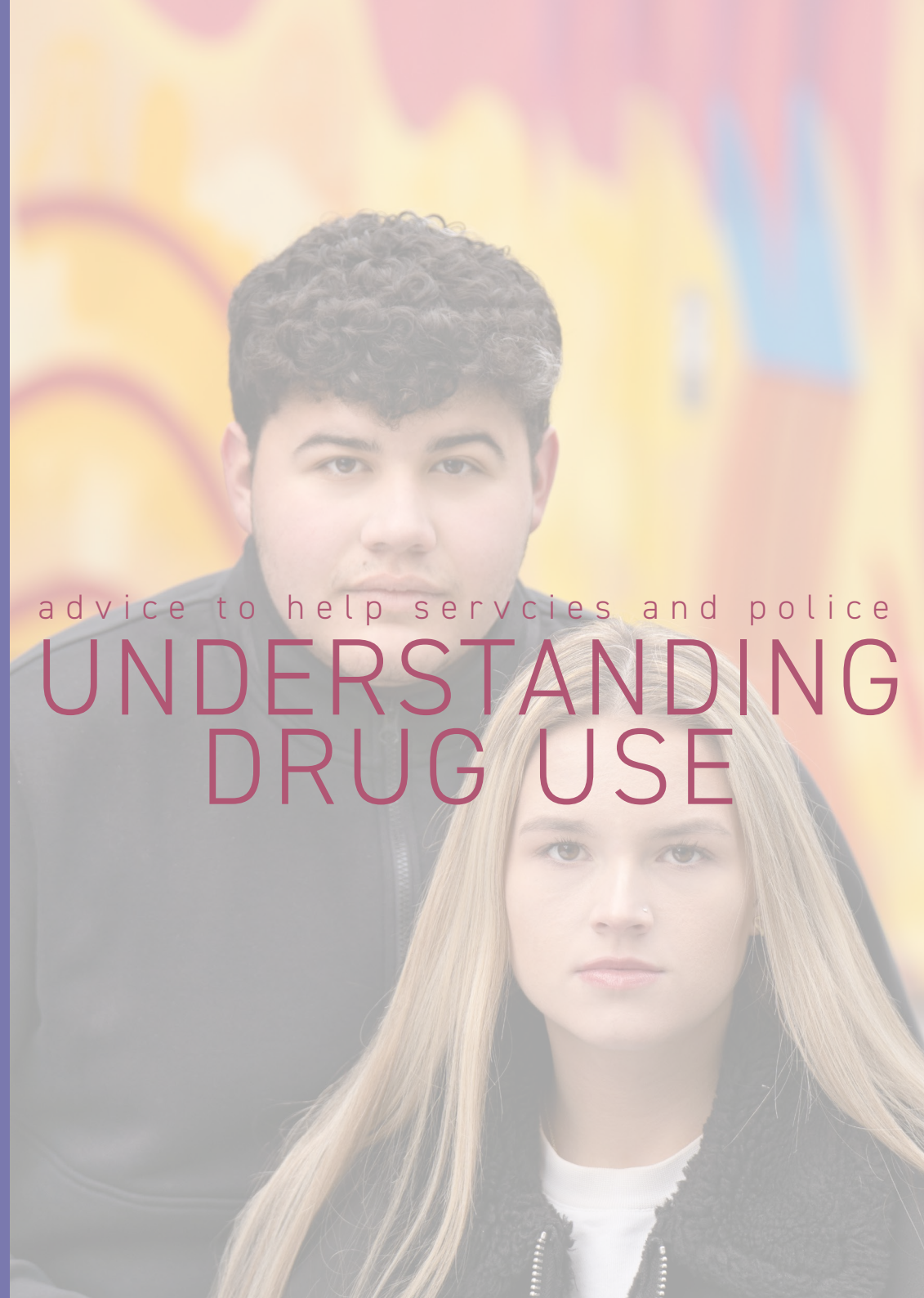
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The photos are of participants in the advice collection

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advice to help servcies and police

## UNDERSTANDING DRUG USE

## ABOUT THE ADVICE COLLECTION

The advice collection UNDERSTANDING DRUG USE was conducted April-October 2022. Experience and advice from 50 young people aged 15-23 with an average age of 19, was collected.

### **The participants**

The young people who participated lived in Alta, Tromsø, Harstad, Bodø, Trondheim, Malvik, Sandnes, Finnøy, Stavanger, Øygarden, Bergen, Lunner, Gran, Lillestrøm, Oslo, Bærum, Sarpsborg, Halden, Sandefjord and Kristiansand.

The young people have experience from various services because of drug use. Some have experience from one service, and some have experience from several services. What kind of experiences the young people have within each service is also different. Some have exclusively good experiences, some have exclusively bad experiences, and some have both good and bad experiences from one service.

34 out of 50 have met the police because of drug use

22 out of 50 have had a drug control contract (observed urine tests over a period of time)

20 out of 50 have received help from secondary care because of drug use

15 out of 50 have met the youth outreach services because of drug use

13 out of 50 have lived in a residential childcare institution because of drug use

5 out of 50 have not met any of the services because of drug use

The young people who participated have struggled with drug use in various ways. Someone has used drugs a little. Some have used drugs a lot. Some have just started using drugs. Some have used drugs for a longer period of time.

The young people who were invited to advice collection are young people who are or have been pros in Changefactory - or other young people in Changefactory's network.

### **Invitation and information**

The young people have received information ahead of the sessions about what the advice collection is about, why Changefactory conducts the advice collection, what will happen with the answers they give, that it is completely voluntary to participate, that they answer what they want to answer and that it is anonymous. In addition, the young people have been given contact information for one or more of the facilitators to be able to ask questions or get more information.

The facilitators have agreed with the young people whether they would like to talk in a larger or smaller group, or alone with the facilitators. The facilitators also agreed with the young people when and how long it suited them to meet.

### **Consent**

The young people who have participated in the advice collection have themselves given consent to participate, and when the young person has been under 16 years, their carer has also given consent. The young people in the photos in the advice collection have consented to the use.

### **About the method**

The advice collection has been conducted with use of the Change method. This is a participant survey method to obtain in-depth knowledge of use in change work and equal collaboration with children and young people. It has been developed based on Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) and is built on responses from children and young people about how participating in a survey can feel safe. The Change method consists of a value basis, working principles and a number of concrete tools, to retrieve experience and advice directly from children and young people. The tools are creative and visual, to help make it safe, fun and useful for many different children and young people.

### **Qualitative and quantitative approaches**

This advice collection has been conducted with both a qualitative and quantitative approach. The qualitative has been most important, to bring out a range of experiences, and to ensure in-depth understanding of what the young people express.

### **Conducting the sessions**

The sessions were conducted in large groups, smaller groups or one to one. The facilitators tried, as far as possible, to make the place for the session pleasant, and made sure that no major disturbances would occur. In the sessions food, snacks or drinks were served if the young people wanted it.

The sessions started with the facilitators and the young people getting to know each other a little better. This was adapted based on how well they knew each other from before. The facilitators then provided information once more about why the advice collection was being conducted, that it is voluntary to participate, and that the young people choose for themselves what they want to answer. The facilitators emphasised that the transcript was anonymous, and that the transcript would be word-for-word what the young people say.

The young people have not given advice on services they do not have experience with. If a young person has experience with one

of the services the advice collection focuses on, however, this experience has not been because of drug use, they have not been asked about this service. If the young person has nevertheless talked about this service, the answers have not been included in the advice collection.

At least one facilitator has been involved in conducting all of the sessions. 13 of the young people have been spoken with twice.

### **The main questions in the advice collection**

In the services you have experience of having encountered because of drug use:

- how have you experienced that they meet young people who use drugs?
- what has been helpful?
- what has not been helpful?
- what should they do differently, in your experience?

If you were able to help shape the way Norway meets drug use:

- who should the help be for?
- what kind of adults should work there?
- what kind of help should they provide?
- how should they provide the help? • what should the place be like?

### **Summary of the knowledge**

The experiences and advice that were collected were thematically sorted. Explanations that were repeated the most from the young people are in this advice collection summarised as knowledge from children and young people, written in bullet points. The language used is as far as possible similar to what the young people have been using. The knowledge from children is not connected to theory.

## **THANK YOU**

Thanks a million to you wise, kind young people who have participated and given answers in this advice collection. It's not a given that you give advice and share experiences to make Norway's help for drug use more useful and safer for young people. We are so grateful for the knowledge you have shared, and hope Norway takes it very seriously.

KNOWLEDGE FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

# ADVICE FOR HELP FOR DRUG USE OF THE FUTURE



## ADVICE FOR HELP OF THE FUTURE

The young people who have participated in the advice collection have been asked how they would create "the help of the future" for drug use. The themes have been who should get the help, what kind of adults who should work there, what the help should consist of, how the help should be given and how this new place should be. Here's the advice they gave.

## Who the help is for

In order for the help of the future to feel safe and useful for young people, the help must be available to those concerned. Some young people start using drugs when they are young. Some may need help to stop using, or stay away from, drugs when they are older. Young people must get help at the time they need it.

Advice from 50 young people aged 15-23, who struggle or have struggled with drug use

### **Make it easy to get help**

- going there must be voluntary
- the help must be for everyone who struggles with drug use
- we need to be able to get there to talk at any time
- we must not need a doctor's referral to get there
- we need to know how we can contact the adults there
- we need to know that we can talk to the adults about anything
- we must be able to go there even if we are still struggling with drug use

### **Divide by age**

- we must get help from as young an age as possible
- there must be different options for the younger and the older young people
- there must not be a large age difference within the different options
- remember that it can be uncomfortable or scary to be with someone much older or younger than oneself
- remember that we may feel young and need help when we are over 18, therefore the help must not only be for those under 18

## Who gives the help

In order for the help of the future to feel safe and useful for young people, the adults who work with prevention and help must feel safe for young people. Young people can feel that different adults are safe, and therefore different adults must work there. Then young people can more easily get help from adults who feel safe for them.

Advice from 50 young people aged 15-23, who struggle or have struggled with drug use

### **Adults with their own experience**

- there must be several adults there who have their own experience with drug use
- they must be clean to work there
- those with their own experience know more about standing in the situation and can understand the social environment better
- those with personal experience know how hard it is to stop using drugs
- remember that it might be nice for us to hear how they have recovered from addiction
- there may be a greater chance of them reaching in to what we are struggling with
- it can feel like they can bear to hear more
- it can feel like they take it more seriously
- it may be easier for them to understand how they can help

### **Adults who are different**

- adults who work there should have different educational backgrounds. They can be, for example, psychologists, kindergarten workers, musicians, cooks, youth workers, nurses, social workers, teachers, child and youth therapists, youth outreach services people, plumbers, economists
- adults must speak a bit youthfully, not stiffly or in an adult language
- give us the opportunity to talk to an adult with or without their own experience
- give us the opportunity to talk to several adults if we want to, not just the same adult every time
- give us the opportunity to change which adults we talk to when we need it

### **Adults with different educational backgrounds**

- whether adults have an education or not is not so important for us, as long as they understand that drug use is about something
- if everyone giving the help has the same educational background, the adults can feel a bit similar

### **Adults who understand enough about drug use**

- the adults must understand what drug use can be about
- they must understand that people use drugs for various reasons
- they must understand what drug use does to the body



## What the help consists of

In order for the help of the future to feel safe and useful for young people, the help must be adapted to each one of us. The help must have a focus on why young people use drugs, and also to find something that they can replace drugs with. Young people can then get help that focuses on what is important to them.

Advice from 50 young people aged 15-23, who struggle or have struggled with drug use

### Talk to us about why we use drugs

- remember that we know that drugs are not good for us, but there are reasons why we use drugs anyway
- show and say that you understand that there are reasons why we use drugs, and that drug use can be an escape from these reasons
- focus on figuring out and understanding why we use drugs
- let us talk when we're ready
- spend time getting to know us and building trust in the beginning
- then talk to us about the reasons why we use drugs
- work on getting to the bottom of why we use drugs
- make it as safe as possible for us to talk about our feelings
- help us understand and work with why we feel the way we do
- help us deal with emotions and memories
- push us a little, but not too much
- tell us that drugs are not okay, but that you want to help us
- give help to the reasons, before you think that we should be referred to receive diagnoses or medications
- don't try to take the drugs away from us before we have been allowed to talk about the reasons
- do not force us to pee in a cup, or check us in other ways
- remember that no one can be forced to become clean if they do not want to

### Help us find something to replace the drugs

- remember that drug use often takes over our whole lives, and may be the only safe thing for us
- remember that drug use may have become a habit for us
- remember that having something to fill the days with can keep us away from drugs
- help us find other interests, hobbies and things that are more important than drugs
- help us find something to distract ourselves with when we actually want to use drugs
- help us find a job or something else to fill our days with
- help us find joy in things other than drugs
- help us find social environments where there are no drugs
- help us to try other things, if something doesn't work

### Take us on activities

- remember that we can feel alone when we use drugs
- remember that we may have little money, or are not able to participate in activities
- help us have good experiences
- help us try out new things
- help so we can see that life can be good
- make fun projects that we can take part in
- invite us to various activities such as theme evenings, film evenings, mini golf, go-karting, bowling, pizza night
- remember that doing activities can give us a feeling of accomplishment

**Collaborate with each of us**

- remember that we are different, and that different things are useful to us
- find out together with us how you can help
- collaborate with us when you need to find solutions
- give us information so that we can know what opportunities we have
- show that you want to collaborate with us, for example by listening carefully when we speak
- believe that what we say is how it feels to us
- find out together with each of us which solutions are best
- focus on what is most important to us, when you are going to help
- be open and flexible, and do not have one single conclusion for help
- help us find and contact another place to get help, or someone to talk to, if you can't help us

**Avoid giving us consequences**

- show that you are not out to get us
- talk to us about why we use drugs, use violence or do crime
- do not give us consequences when we tell you about something that is not allowed
- remember that if you give consequences, we can stop talking to you

**Don't put all the focus on the drug use**

- remember that it can be difficult to talk about the reasons why we have it difficult if there is a lot of focus on the drug use
- remember that it can be scary to get help if there is a lot of focus on the drug use

**Help us if we relapse**

- show that you support us even if we relapse
- try to find out with us why we relapsed
- say kind things, so we get motivated to become clean again
- show that you have faith in us
- show that you are proud of us if we become clean again

**Dare to talk to us about drugs**

- don't be afraid to talk to us about how it feels to be on drugs
- give us information about drugs without making it more dangerous than it is
- explain that you get scared for us when we use drugs

## How the help is given

In order for the help of the future to feel safe and useful for young people, the help must be given in ways that are based on what is important to young people. Adults must show with their body, actions and words that they want to help and care about the young person getting better. Young people can then get help in ways that feel safe, warm and helpful.

Advice from 50 young people aged 15-23, who struggle or have struggled with drug use

### **Show that you are kind and want to help**

- show that you have motivation to help us
- show us that you care about us, for example by saying that you are there for us and wish us well
- don't judge or look down on us because we use drugs
- ask us how we are feeling and how you can help us
- be good at putting yourself in our situation
- care about who we are, not what we have done
- show that you listen to us
- give us hugs, if we want

### **Focus on safety**

- make it as safe as possible for us, so you can help us
- remember that safety is necessary for the help to be good, and for us to feel that we are worth something
- be patient
- show love, compassion and understanding
- be calm and avoid loud voices
- say that you are not out to get us
- don't use physical restraint or put us on the ground, it can trigger painful feelings and memories
- give us information about who gets to know what we say
- do not share what we have said with others without making an agreement with us first
- talk to us before you go to other adults

### **Put away prejudices**

- show that you respect us and don't look down on us
- meet us openly, without judgement
- meet us as you would meet other young people
- show that you care, but don't see us as pitiful
- be open, then it is safer for us to be open

### **Get to know us**

- remember that it can be difficult to speak honestly if we don't know you
- talk a little about yourselves, for example what you like to do
- ask us about things so you can get to know us a little too
- remember that if we get to know you, it can be safer for us to get help

### **Talk to us in safe places**

- remember that we are different and think different places are safe
- remember that offices can feel unsafe
- find out together with us where we can feel safe
- give examples if we wish, such as going on a walk, car ride, café, talking at home or in a park
- do something while we talk, such as playing games with us

## How the place is

In order for the help of the future to feel safe and useful for young people, it must be easily accessible and feel safe to come to. There must be different rooms, where young people can talk, sleep or hang out. If the place feels safe, more young people can go there and get help.

Advice from 50 young people aged 15-23, who struggle or have struggled with drug use

### Accessible

- it must be centrally located, preferably in the middle of the city, so that as many as possible can get there
- there must be one in each municipality, and in each district in larger cities
- it must be close to public transport
- it must be open for as long as possible, preferably around the clock, because difficult things often happen at night
- it must be open as often as possible
- it must be possible to contact those who work there, when we need it

### Homely

- make sure we feel welcome, especially when we arrive
- make sure we feel that we can relax and be calm there
- remember that we can feel more valuable when we arrive at a cosy space
- remember that it can be easier to talk when the rooms don't feel so stiff
- avoid having anything that looks like a reception desk
- have a kitchen, sofa, TV, pictures, colours on the walls
- have snacks and food available
- remember that in order to become clean, we must be somewhere that feels safe for us

### Own section for sleeping

- remember that not everyone who use drugs have a home, or feel safe at home
- make a section where we can sleep if we want
- give us the opportunity to be there for a few days, if we need it

### Separate rooms to talk

- have separate rooms where we can talk to you about difficult and painful things
- make sure that the rooms are located in such a way that others do not see us going in to talk
- let's talk about things we have experienced and felt in the past, but also things we experience and feel right now
- have games/toys in the room that we can play with while we talk to you

### Separate rooms to hang out

- have separate rooms where we can just hang out when we are not on drugs, for example with toys, games and gaming equipment
- have separate living rooms, kitchens and outdoor spaces remember that it can help us feel a sense of community
- make sure that there are things in the rooms that are fun for young people of different ages
- let us eat and drink there

KNOWLEDGE FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE  
EXPERIENCES FROM  
THE SERVICES



# Youth outreach services

Experiences from 15 young people who have encountered youth outreach services because of drug use

## Positive experiences

15 out of 15 have told about positive experiences with the youth outreach services

Summarised experiences

- adults felt safe and easy to talk to
- adults helped with various things in the young person's life
- adults did things together with the young person
- adults were available to the young person
- adults felt kind
- adults did not judge the young person for things they had done or said
- adults did not share what the young person told to others
- the youth outreach services had cosy premises

How it turned out for young people

- it felt safer
- it felt good and the young people were happy
- the young people felt trust, so it became easier to talk
- the young people used drugs less

## Negative experiences

3 out of 15 have told about negative experiences with the youth outreach services

Summarised experiences

- adults did not feel available
- some adults did not feel safe
- adults shared information with the young person's parents

How it turned out for young people

- it felt difficult when the youth outreach services contacted the parents to the young person
- the young person did not want to go there when they felt that the adults were so different
- it felt difficult not to be able to contact the youth outreach services in the evening

## QUOTES

It has helped to gain insight into how important we are. I get a feeling that we don't need to use drugs because we are something.

They have taken us on fishing trips. Then we sat and smoked cigarettes and fished. Then it is so much easier to talk. It comes easier.

They don't talk like other adults, who feel they know better and are above you. They are more like us.

They didn't snitch to the Child Protection System, I could trust that they wouldn't share any information behind my back. Hadn't been able to tell if it weren't for this, so it was very important to me.

Things were usually the worst in the evening and then I was alone. No one I could call, not the youth outreach services either.

I think they have short opening hours, and rarely.

# Secondary care

Experiences from 20 young people who have been to a secondary care due drug use

## Positive experiences

6 out of 20 have told about positive experiences with secondary care

Summarised experiences

- adults have felt kind
- the young person received help from the same person over a longer period of time
- the young person got to know the adult a little and they got a good relation
- adults asked why the young person used drugs
- the young person got some help with the reasons behind why they used drugs

How it turned out for young people

- the young person felt better inside
- the young person felt a little better inside
- it felt safer

## Negative experiences

18 out of 20 told about negative experiences with secondary care

Summarised experiences

- much of the focus was on medicines and diagnoses
- the young person experienced not being believed
- adults were perceived to be most concerned about the fact that drugs are dangerous and bad
- adults shared something the young person had told, to other adults
- adults did not ask why the young person used drugs

How it turned out for young people

- the young person felt worse inside
- the young person was afraid that other adults would get to know
- it did not feel safe enough for the young person to talk about drug use

## QUOTES

What worked was that I had the same psychologist for a long time, which made me feel safe with her. The help was a bit so so. She helped me sort out my feelings and I got to talk about how I was doing.

It's like every time I leave there I smile because we never end the talk by talking about the negative. We don't leave the talks like that, but we leave when we have come to something good.

They have seen me as a person and not as a drug problem.

Lost count of the number of times I had to hear how dangerous amphetamine was for me, it didn't work to get me to stop using drugs.

They always sent transcripts to the Child Protection System, which I didn't want them to. It didn't help, it just made me feel like a shitty person.

I didn't want to say much to her since I knew she snitched to mom and dad, so I just kept it low key.

It was like they were punishing me for being in pain, it was horrible. Since it was the truth. I was just a little kid who felt a huge amount of emotions.

# Residential childcare institution

Experiences from 13 young people who have lived in a residential childcare institution because of drug use

## Positive experiences

5 out of 13 have told about positive experiences with residential childcare institution

Summarised experiences

- adults had kind body language and eyes
- adults scolded little and didn't use much coercion
- adults talked to the young person about feelings
- adults took time to be with the young person
- routines felt helpful
- there were few frameworks and limitations

How it turned out for young people

- the young person gained more respect for the adults
- the young person believed that they could do things on their own
- the young person felt seen
- the young person felt better inside
- the young person felt less desire to run away from the institution
- the young person learned useful practical things for life

## Negative experiences

13 out of 13 have told about negative experiences with residential childcare institution

Summarised experiences

- coercion and restrictions felt hurtful
- adults did things that felt unsafe
- frameworks felt like punishment
- adults did not ask why the young person used drugs

How it turned out for young people

- the young person felt different and alone
- the young person felt worse inside
- the young person had more difficulties later in life
- the young person started to use drugs again, or use drugs more
- it felt like adults had all the control
- it felt like the young person was being punished for being in pain
- the young person distanced themselves from adults
- the young person felt that it was becoming painful and difficult to live in the institution

## QUOTES

I felt like he treated me more as a person and really cared and wanted what was good for me. Just gave a damn about the rules and wanted what was good for me.

They took me on lots of activities, snorkelling, surfing, sup-board, bowling, mountain hike, bike trip. In the garage they had a punching bag and roller skates, anything you can think of.

Routines are fine and all, but you get punished if you don't follow the routines.

It wasn't really any help. There were framings and limitations and force. They used a lot of coercion. When I used drugs, it was to get away, get a break from my thoughts and my feelings and my life.

They really just had fucking strict rules. There was tightening of rules all the time, did not let them go no matter how well I did.

It felt like they were punishing me for using drugs when I actually sat and felt hurt inside, but there was no one who asked about that. The focus was only on getting rid of the drug use.

# Drug control contract

Experiences from 22 young people who have had a drug control contract (observed urine tests over a period of time)

## Positive experiences

3 out of 22 have told about positive experiences with a drug control contract

Summarised experiences

- the young person was able to say no to drugs because of the drug control contract
- the young person felt trust from parents or adults around them, because they were on the contract

How it turned out for young people

- the young person felt stronger and more confident that they were able to say no to drugs
- it became easier for people around to understand why the young person said no to drugs

## Negative experiences

21 out of 22 have told about negative experiences with drug control contract

Summarised experiences

- the young person did not stop using drugs
- the young person started to use drugs again after the contract ended
- it was difficult that people would watch when the young person peed
- the drug control contract felt like coercion
- the young person felt that they were not believed
- the young person felt that no one cared
- the young person tried to cheat the tests
- the young person was punished for a positive test

How it turned out for young people

- the young person felt small and uncomfortable
- the young person became afraid of disappointing others
- the young person did not feel any better inside
- the young person felt they had lost control

## QUOTES

Later it has worked for me to be on a drug control contract. It gives me a greater strength to say no. It worked for me to just be strict with myself.

There was so much focus on becoming clean that the reasons why I used drugs were forgotten.

I already felt like I was an outsider, that's one of the reasons that I used drugs, but this made it worse. People asked why I was away so much. What was I supposed to say?

It was just a way of taking control over me that was disgusting, offensive, humiliating and mean. The feelings I got when I was on a drug control contract became one more thing that I had to drug away.

The drug control contract is a useless control thing that the police must stop doing. It doesn't help at all in getting you to stop using drugs. The only thing it works for is finding out if you have drugs in your body.

For me, it wasn't the drugs itself that were the problem, it was the social environment. And it's not like you change your social environment because of one contract.

# Police

Experiences from 34 young people who have met the police because of drug use

## Positive experiences

18 out of 34 have told about positive experiences with the police

Summarised experiences

- the police met the young person in ways that felt safe
- different police officers met the young person in different ways
- the police gave the young person several chances
- the police asked why the young person used drugs

How it turned out for young people

- it felt good when the police showed that they cared and gave the young person new chances
- it became safer and less scary
- the young person showed respect when the police first showed them respect

## Negative experiences

30 out of 34 have told about negative experiences with the police

Summarised experiences

- the young person felt like a criminal
- the young person was stopped and searched
- the young person was taken into a security cell
- the young person felt that the police were prejudiced
- the police used force against the young person
- it felt like the police were rude, strict or angry
- it felt like the police were out to get them
- it felt like the police didn't care about the young person
- it seemed that the police had little understanding of why the young person used drugs
- the police collaborated with the parents of the young person in a way that felt unsafe for the young person

How it turned out for young people

- the young person felt painful feelings
- the young person became afraid or paranoid
- the young person did not trust the police
- the young person did not dare to call the police when they needed help
- the young person felt labelled as a problem, or felt themselves that they were a problem
- the young person became irritated and angry
- it felt gross or embarrassing

## QUOTES

What has worked is the one policeman we talk with. He shows respect and he understands.

When the police met me safely the first time I met them in a drugged condition, I didn't think they were so scary anymore.

She sat with me and asked if there was anything she could help with. You become calmer. But because of past experiences you don't necessarily tell anything.

Laying me on the ground or putting me in a security cell only made me more afraid of them. It made me angrier towards the police every time I met them.

I feel that there are things we have no control over that control what happens to us. I never had the choice if I wanted to be white or black.

It was scary, it felt like I was the criminal. I don't think they should do that to children. But they will never understand anything since it's the police that are the ones who punish. And who wants to trust someone who punishes?

Now I don't dare call the police anymore. Once I got beat up and almost stabbed and didn't dare call the police. I thought they just wanted to get me.

# 2016- 2021

Changefactory conducted the first survey on the topic of drug use 2016-2018. After that drug use has often come up as a theme in several of Changefactory's qualitative surveys.

The answers that came in this advice collection, are very similar to answers from over 150 young people in qualitative surveys 2016-2021. Here are some of the main answers:

## SECONDARY CARE

- it felt like the adult cared
- the help didn't feel right or helpful
- the focus has often been on medicines and diagnoses, not on why they used drugs

## RESIDENTIAL CHILDCARE INSTITUTION

- they met adults who have felt kind
- coercion lead to them not accepting help
- the help has not felt helpful for them

## DRUG CONTROL CONTRACT

- they met adults who felt kind
- they felt pressured
- it was difficult that people would watch when they peed

## POLICE

- they were met by the police in nice ways
- it became unsafe when the police collaborated with their parents
- they felt like criminals

CHILDREN  
AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE'S  
RIGHTS



# CHILDREN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was incorporated into Norwegian law in 2003, through Section 2 of the Human Rights Act. The Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to everyone under the age of 18.

The Constitution is Norway's supreme law. Several of the rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child were in 2014 included in the Norwegian Constitution (GrL.) section 104. Some of the rights are included in the various special laws. The Convention on the Rights of the Child must be used together with the special laws. If the special laws state something other than the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the provision in the Convention on the Rights of the Child shall carry the most weight.

## Children have procedural rights

The Convention on the Rights of the Child gives children some procedural rights. These are rights that describe how children should be met in all actions and decisions concerning them. Actions that affect children who struggle with drug use, can for example be giving children a drug control contract or placing a child in a residential childcare institution because of drug use.

Children's procedural rights are children's right to information, to speak freely, the right to respect for one's privacy and that these rights are secured before the best interests of the child are considered.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child prepares general comments on the interpretation of the text of the convention. The Supreme Court of Norway has determined in HR-2018-2096-A that the general comments shall be given considerable weight. Therefore, the general comments must also be emphasised when dealing with children struggling with drug use.

## The child's right to information

Implicitly follows UNCRC art. 12, see general comment no. 12 paras. 16, 25 and 41

The Committee on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to have all the information necessary to be able to express oneself freely and be involved in deciding what is best for themselves in one situation. The right to information is therefore a prerequisite for the child to be able to speak freely about actions and decisions to be taken.

The right to information means that the child must, among other things, receive information about:

- the situation and the case
- what information the adults have and from whom they have received the information from
- what happens with the information the child shares
- which decisions can/must be taken
- which alternative solutions exist
- what consequences the various choices may have

The information must be given in an understandable way, it must be repeated when the child needs it and the child must receive information during the process.

## Children's right to express themselves freely

- UNCRC art. 12 and the Norwegian Constitution. Section 104

Children have the right to express themselves freely in all matters that concern them. The child's opinion must be emphasised. The authorities have a duty to ensure this right for all children. This is an independent right all children have. Neither parents nor other adults can limit it.

That children are allowed to express themselves freely is done by ensuring that:

- the child receives useful and understandable information (General comment no. 12 paragraph 25)
- the child feels safe and respected (General comment no. 12 paragraph 23)
- the child is allowed to express themselves without influence, pressure or manipulation (General Comment No. 12 paragraph 22)
- the child may speak without the consent of parents or others guardians

There is no age limit for when the child must be heard; the central point is whether the child is able to express themselves freely about the question. (General Comment No. 12 paragraphs 20-21).

If other solutions are chosen than what the child wants, the child must be given the opportunity to say how the child thinks this will turn out. The best interests of the child cannot be used as justification for the children not to be allowed to express themselves freely.

## **The child's right to respect for their privacy**

-UNCRC art. 16, Grl. Section 102, Article 8 of the ECHR

The Convention on the Rights of the Child clarifies that no child shall be exposed to arbitrary or illegal interference with their privacy.

In practice this means, among other things, that adults cannot automatically share information from or about the child with other adults, within a service, with other services or with parents. Ensuring and respecting children's right to privacy is an important prerequisite for children's right to express themselves freely.

The sharing of a child's information must have authority in law, and the intervention in the child's privacy must be necessary. In many cases information is shared, from or about the child, without the child's right to privacy being considered. If information is shared without children knowing, the child may lose trust in the adult who shares.

Ensuring children's right to respect for their privacy involves, among other things:

- the child must be told what can happen to the information the child shares, before an adult starts talking to a child
- adults must inform the child when sharing of information is being considered, and let the child speak freely about this before the information is shared
- since sharing is an intrusion into the child's right to privacy, only the information that is necessary can be shared and the sharing must not be arbitrary
- the right to privacy applies to all children regardless of age and must be secured, as far as possible

Professionals, services or parents can share information from or about the child with others, but the procedure for giving the child information and letting them speak freely, must first be followed. In addition, there must be a legal basis for sharing, and the adult must consider whether it is necessary to share. It must then be assessed whether it is in the best interests of the child to share.

## **Assessment of the best interests of the child**

-UNCRC art. 3 and Grl. Section 104

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the best interests of the child shall be a fundamental consideration in all actions and decisions concerning a child.

That the best interests of the child "shall" be a fundamental consideration means:

1. What is best for the child must be assessed in all cases and decisions
2. Consideration of the child's best interests must be given great weight and be the starting point for the decision (Rt 2015 p. 93 section 65)

What is in the best interests of the child must be determined through a concrete assessment, where the child's own opinion is a central element (HR2021-475-A section 62). The assessment must be done after the child has received information, the opportunity to express themselves freely and that the child's respect for privacy is ensured.

Facilitating the right for children to express themselves freely is central in the assessment of what is in the best interests of the child. If it is considered that the child's statements should not be given weight, it must be documented and justified which meaning and which consequences it may have for the child to act contrary to the child's statements.

In order to take action or make decisions for children who are struggling with drug use, that are in the best interests of the child, adults must ensure that the child has received sufficient and understandable information, has been allowed to express themselves freely, and the child's right to respect for privacy must be secured. What the child thinks about what should be done should be given great weight and should be the starting point for the decision. If these rights are not secured, it becomes arbitrary if what is done is helpful and in the best interest of the child in the concrete situation.

# YOUNG ADULTS' HUMAN RIGHTS

Everyone has the right to have the state both protect and respect their human rights. This applies to both adults and children. When drugs are used, a number of human rights become relevant such as the right to life, health, privacy and liberty.

The international bodies that monitor states' compliance of human rights, have in recent years come with several recommendations on the topic of drug use. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has, among other things, recommended that people who use drugs get access to health-related information, treatment without discrimination and that damage reduction measures are implemented measures (Study on the impact of the world drug problem on the enjoyment of human rights 2015).

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) was made into Norwegian law when it was incorporated into the Human Rights Act in 1999. The ECHR contains rights that apply to everyone, children too. For young adults over the age of 18, the ECHR sets out a range of relevant human rights obligations for young people who struggle with drug use:

- Art. 3 "No one must be subjected to torture or to inhumane treatment or degrading treatment or punishment.
- Art. 5 "Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be deprived of their liberty save in the following cases and in accordance with a procedure prescribed by law." The cases are described in art. 5 No. 2-5.
- Art. 8 "Everyone has the right to respect for their private and family life, their home and their correspondence. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic wellbeing of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."

## Right to respect for one's privacy

Young adults struggling with drug use may experience intervention from public authorities. According to ECHR Art. 8 everyone has the "right to respect for their privacy(...) and there shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise

of this right except such as in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society(...)" Coercion in the form of body searches, searches of mobile phones or physical examination are examples of interference within ECHR art. 8. The right to privacy according to Art. 8 requires that the interference is authorised by law and that the interference is proportionate to the legitimate aim pursued.

In a letter from the Norwegian Attorney General of 9 April 2021, according to The Attorney General, in the practice of coercive measures, the fact that all investigations must pursue relevant investigative purposes has been given too little attention. The requirement means that coercive measures can only be used

to search for evidence of a criminal offence when there are "reasonable grounds for suspicion" that the person has committed a crime. In addition the Attorney General wrote that there was a need for special clarification of the right to search in cases of drug use. In the letter point 6.2, the Attorney General wrote further that physical examination in the form of a urine test will not be a proportionate intervention under Norwegian law, and that there will be no basis for either review of the suspect's mobile phone without sufficient grounds for suspicion that e.g. the person in question is involved in sales.

These assessments and clarifications that the Attorney General makes must be implemented and followed up in practice by public servants. It is therefore absolutely crucial that the Norwegian authorities ensure that all coercive use by authorities is carried out in a way that ensures young adults who struggle with drug use their right to respect for their privacy in accordance with ECHR Art. 8.

TO NATIONAL  
AUTHORITIES



# NATIONAL VENTURES AND MEASURES

Here follows input to national authorities, based on advice from this advice collection. The input is based on the advice from young people and is written by pros in collaboration with political advisors in Changefactory. The input can contribute to Norway getting commitments and measures with good effect.

## **New prevention - and treatment reform**

In 2023, the government will present a reform on prevention and treatment in the drug field. This shall apply to adults as well as youth. The aim is to strengthen prevention and provide better treatment and follow-up of people struggling with drug use. Those who are addicted shall be met with health care.

As part of the reform, the government will promote a national program for drug prevention work among children and young people, and look at how to help the municipalities to use outreach methodology to a greater extent, to get in early contact with particularly at-risk youth.

Advice for the reform on prevention and treatment built on knowledge from children in this advice collection:

- The youth outreach services or similar services must be available in all municipalities
- All municipalities must have a place where young people can come to talk, outside school hours and without referral
- The measures from the help services must aim to help with the reasons why young people use drugs

## **Advisory units for drug cases**

The drug reform committee proposed in 2019 that it should establish drug counselling units in all municipalities. This measure was supposed to help people who were caught for use and possession of smaller doses of drugs. Adults and young people should, instead of punishment, have conversation. This was not approved, but it was decided that all municipalities should set up advisory units for drug cases.

The units were given other tasks than the drug reform committee originally suggested. The Directorate of Health wrote a letter to everyone in the country's municipalities in 2022: "Attendance at the advisory unit for drug cases is not considered health care, but as a criminal matter reaction..."

Advice to drug counselling units based on knowledge from children in this advice collection:

- Municipalities are obliged to provide services to young people
- who struggle with drug use. If municipalities must at the same time conduct punitive actions, it may prevent the possibility
- to help. Young people can lose trust and lose faith in that the municipal aid apparatus will really help
- Drug counselling units must provide help that does not contain drug control, but which aims to reach in to what the drug use is about
- The units must provide help that is adapted to each young person, in collaboration with young people
- The units must provide help that is easily accessible, low-threshold and without requiring referral

### **Drug control contract with drug tests**

Drug control contracts involve drug testing through a regular urine sampling. Both the police and municipal services can make drug control contracts with young people.

The Norwegian Directorate of Health has in consultation input to NOU 2019:26 expressed that they lack documentation on the effect of the drug control contracts:

*"There is a lack of documentation on the effects of drug control contracts, and we know too little whether they contribute to reduced experimentation with illegal drugs. Drug control contracts cannot be seen as a knowledge-based approach and if the measure is still to be used, it should be implemented with more systematic documentation of the effects of this."*

Advice for drug control contracts based on knowledge from children in this advice collection:

- When the results of drug control contracts are poor or uncertain, the authorities have great opportunities to rethink
- Young people cannot continue to be guinea pigs for "project drug control contracts" while the national authorities wait on effect
- Drug control contracts must be replaced with help based on what young people describe as helpful treatment for drug addiction in the chapter on "future help for drug use"

### **Treatment for drug addiction in residential childcare institutions**

When young people struggle with drug use, they can be moved to residential childcare institutions for children with behavioural issues in the Child Protection System, specialised in providing treatment for drug addiction. Young people can consent to live in such an institution or be moved there by force. The treatment itself can be different, but stopping young people from using drugs is often an important focus. Over many years, the institutions have had frameworks that allow the use of restraints and coercion, related to stopping young people from using drugs.

Advice on treatments for drug addiction at residential childcare institutions built on knowledge from children in this advice collection:

- Coercion and restraints are used as part of the treatment at institutions. This is problematic and must stop
- The institution shall, as far as possible, be a safe home for the young person
- The institution must feel safe in order to help
- In collaboration with young people, descriptions and quality indicators for what constitutes good treatments for drug addiction should be developed. National training programmes for how young people can get help to stop taking drugs can then be created. The training must among other things, contain knowledge from children

# CHANGEFACTORY

## KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

### Why knowledge directly from children?

Children and young people have to feel that the school, kindergarten, support services, police and legal system are safe and useful for them. Children and young people all over Norway have experiences from meeting these systems and advice on how they can be the best possible. Authorities, professionals and students often lack this knowledge from children and young people, when frameworks and what constitutes good practice are to be determined, nationally and locally. Therefore, it must be brought in to a much greater extent and, together with other knowledge, be part of the knowledge base, in order to develop and ensure the quality of good systems for children and young people.

### More than 10 years of collecting knowledge

For more than 10 years, Changefactory (CF) has systematically collected experiences and advice from children and young people about how they experience school, kindergarten, support services, the police and the legal system. In 2017, the Prime Minister opened Changefactory Knowledge Centre, to collect knowledge from children and young people about the public systems. As far as we know, there are few knowledge centres in Europe whose main purpose is to gather and disseminate knowledge directly from children and young people about the systems they are in. CF seeks collaboration with similar organisations.

### Participatory and practice-oriented method

In order to collect, systematise and disseminate summarised experiences and advice from children and young people, a participatory and practice-oriented method is used. CF has called it the Changemethod. The Changemethod has been developed in close collaboration with children and young people. It greatly considers that children have the right to express their opinion, in ways that feel safe for them. The method consists of process descriptions and tools that help many diverse children and young people to participate. It's based closely on a participatory method used in action research, called Participatory Learning and Action (PLA).

### Safety is most important

The experiences and advice are collected directly from children and young people in sessions or interviews. The sessions are organised with an emphasis on ensuring that they are experienced as safely as possible for the children and young people who participate. The adults who facilitate are, among other things, trained by children to meet children and young people with openness and human warmth. This is based on the main findings from children about what adults have to be like, in order for children to be able to tell honestly.

### Experiences and advice are summarised

Experiences and advice from the sessions are documented in transcripts and other written and visual documentation. The data is summarised and systematised. No links are made to theory. Experiences and advice that are repeated by many children and young people in many places in the country, become the main answers. We call this knowledge directly from children.

### Children and young people present

The knowledge from children is presented in reports, films, podcasts, books and online. Participants in the qualitative surveys can also be invited, as pros, in communication and professional development. The pros present knowledge directly from children to politicians, national authorities, professionals and students.

### Selected publications



#### Angry on the outside, hurting on the inside

Advice from 101 children on how to meet children and young people who are angry and use violence



#### Not mean

Advice from 103 children on how conversations, interrogations and punishment can be done in safe and helpful ways



#### Wisdom about drug use

Advice from 58 young people on how adults can meet drug use in safe ways



#### They think they know best

Advice from 152 children on how residential childcare institutions have to be for it to feel safe living there



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