

## **C-Card Condom Distribution Scheme Newcastle and North Tyneside**

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**Summary:** A condom distribution scheme targeting young people under 25 at increased risk of unplanned teenage pregnancy, providing them with a card entitling them to free condoms and sexual health advice.

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**Background/Context:** The scheme is based on an established programme that had been developed in the Lothian region of Scotland for 10 years and was very successful and well evaluated. The scheme targets socially disadvantaged young people under 25 at increased risk of unplanned teenage pregnancy. A prime objective of the scheme is to engage boys and young men who have not attended services previously, to raise their awareness of the need for safer sex and increase their use of condoms. The scheme started with a pilot in Newcastle and was then rolled out across North Tyneside. Newcastle and North Tyneside are areas of social and economic disadvantage. North Tyneside is among the top 10 areas in the country for highest rates of teenage conceptions and within the area there are some wards with very high conception rates.

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### **Project Description:**

The scheme aims:

- To increase the availability, accessibility and acceptability of condoms.
- To increase numbers of workers who have sexual health knowledge, skills, and understanding, and to link young people in to mainstream sexual health services.

The C-Card scheme gives young people easy access to free condoms from trained workers in a range of contraception and sexual health, youth and community settings and young peoples services.

- Young people register for their C-Card giving a set of initials, date of birth and first part of their postcode (and so do not have to give a full address). They are given a card which they can use at a number of venues across the city to collect free condoms – the card will record the transaction and this is centrally monitored anonymously
- Each young person registering is given an induction session by a trained worker which includes discussion of sexual health issues, a review of child protection issues (if they are under 16), a condom demonstration and making sure they know about sexual health services they can access. Many young people develop a relationship with the worker and will return for further condoms and/or advice. They frequently return with a friend or a partner who would like to use the scheme
- C-Card outlets include sexual health services for young people and youth and community settings as well as venues used by particular groups of young people such as the Meadowell Gym and an Asian young womens project. C-Card outlets were initially selected according to criteria such as geographical location (compared to existing service gaps), service user profiles (matching with particular target groups), or particular areas of deprivation / higher than average teenage conception rates. Increasingly organisations are now requesting to be part of the C-Card scheme

### **Achievements:**

- Around 50 outlets in both Newcastle and North Tyneside are operational and there have been 9000 C-Card transactions. The peak age for young men registering is 14 / 15 years and the peak age for young women is 16 years.
- The scheme has been so successful that it is about to be rolled out in Northumberland.
- A programme of sexual health training is provided to staff at C-Card outlets. It consists of a Basic Training session focusing on values and attitudes in that setting, how to do a condom demonstration, the levels of service required to participate in the scheme and how to operate the scheme. This is followed with update and top up sessions for example focusing on new condoms/updated information and problem solving if issues arise in a particular outlet. This has ensured that all staff operating the scheme (including many youth and community workers) have had training in sexual health and participate in ongoing training. They have increased their awareness of sexual health and in particular of the different needs of boys and young men. It has also led to increased collaboration between youth workers and staff in sexual health clinics.

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**Key Learning:**

- The scheme has been able to engage large numbers of young men (one in ten of eligible young men have registered) and the tracking system has demonstrated that large percentages of them do return as repeat users. The scheme seems to have created a sort of 'club feeling' among young men and become a bit of an 'in ' thing to have a C-Card in your wallet. This may be related to the fact that it provides a service that meets a need and that the service has been designed to be accessible and acceptable to young men. A boys and young mens worker was appointed who worked with existing users and other groups of young men to find out their awareness of and experience of using C-Card outlets. The findings from this were fed back to service providers.
- The scheme has found that word of mouth is the best advertising and many young people bring friends who would like to register. There is some publicity about the service (for example posters) but this was designed with young people to ensure it was acceptable and appropriate. Also many of the venues are not sexual health clinics and so young men could be visiting them for a range of activities so the use of the service can be totally anonymous.
- Younger boys and men do register to with the service but this is often a bit of bravado or trying it out. They are treated as seriously as anyone else registering and the workers use it as an opportunity to talk about sexual health and to reinforce that is OK for men to be interested in sexual health. Many of these younger boys and men have returned to the service at a later point when they need it.
- The training programme to support the workers in outlets needs to be ongoing - this is because staff change over time, and also issues may arise in a particular unit that staff need help with. For example many outlets were asking 'What shall we do with all these boys and young men' as they did not have experience of working with them on these issues and also some outlets were concerned that they had attracted a younger age group than they had expected. The staff who deliver the scheme are key and so the scheme must be supportive to the staff delivering it.

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**Difficulties/Challenges:**

- The dramatic increase in workload for service providers has been problematic in some cases. Some outlets have been so popular with young people that they are handling thousands of transactions (this is particularly true of city centre outlets) and this demand has put pressure on the outlets in terms of their ability to provide staff etc. This is valuable learning for future development of the scheme but primarily raises issues about funding and long term sustainability.
- The scheme is dependent for its success on a high level of specialist and administrative support, the true cost of the scheme (including staff time) over the two years is estimated to be £60,000. This again raises issues about funding and long term sustainability
- Evaluation is a challenge as the scheme is very good at process evaluation and has used a range of means of evaluating the scheme from piloting early groups to focus groups and mystery shopper type exercises. A lot of information has been collated about the kind of service young people want (and what young men want) and this has been used to good effect to build an accessible service. The scheme has also generated a lot of statistical data and has been able to monitor patterns of usage etc. The scheme now needs to focus on outcome evaluation and hopes to do this in the coming year and for example will be looking at teenage conception rates and the contribution the scheme has made to the local teenage pregnancy strategy. However evaluation also has a funding implication but is essential if we are to learn from this exercise. The scheme will be seeking sources of funding to do this.
- Initially the scheme met with some resistance (some schools refused to display posters) and mixed publicity (for example the Head of Contraceptive and Sexual Health Services in North Tyneside was interviewed on Radio 4) and the team delivering the scheme were concerned that it should not become a tabloid issue. However by managing the publicity and development carefully (there was no great fanfare of publicity but just targeted advertising and focus on word of mouth) and slowly rolling the scheme out it has become an accepted part of young peoples services in the area.



