

Welcome to the twenty-seventh edition of DASH

This edition primarily focuses on young people and the provision of sexual and reproductive health and education services related to them.

The featured articles are from the following organisations:

- The Family Nurse Partnership: Intensive home visiting programme for teenage parents.
- Start360: The Lads2Dads Project - parenting rights and responsibilities programme for young fathers.
- Homeless Period Belfast: #MenstruationMatters - period poverty and menstrual health awareness.
- Informing Choices NI: The Speakeasy Programme - parent educational support during Covid-19.

In our Horizons feature, the Chair of the Belfast Youth Forum, Shántana McCullough, discusses the work of the group, their research into Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), what they hope to achieve in this area as well as future campaigns.

ICNI is contracted by the Public Health Agency to write and produce DASH.

Showcase your project, publicise an event or comment on this edition by contacting the editor, Ruairi Rowan, by email ruairi.rowan@informingchoicesni.org or telephone **028 9031 6100**

Increasing calls to improve Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in Northern Ireland

by Informing Choices NI (ICNI)

A series of reports have been released in recent weeks highlighting the urgent need to reform the delivery and content of RSE in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Abortion and Contraception Taskgroup (NIACT), a multidisciplinary professional group comprising of healthcare professionals, academics and the charity sector, published a comprehensive report on sexual and reproductive health in Northern Ireland. The report makes a series of recommendations to inform the funding and commissioning of sexual and reproductive education and integrated healthcare.

Among the 38 recommendations that the report makes include that RSE should be evidence based and delivered in a consistent, high quality, inclusive and sex positive manner across all schools in Northern Ireland, including Special Educational Needs schools, and be included as part of a school's inspection report. It also states that young people should play a key role in formulating RSE programmes in schools and communities.

The NIACT report followed the recommendations from two expert advisory panels established by the Department for Communities to help inform the development of the new social inclusion strategies.

The expert advisory panel on a Gender Equality Strategy stated that RSE in schools is inconsistent and insufficient and a separate panel on a Sexual Orientation Strategy recommended that RSE should not be dependent on school ethos.

In November 2019 the Belfast Youth Forum launched their 'Any Use?' research report which found that young people described the RSE they received in school to be 'basic',



'unhelpful', 'useless' and 'biased'. 86% felt that school was the best place to receive RSE, yet only 66% said they had actually received RSE. 73% said they had only received RSE 'once or twice' or 'rarely' and 60% felt that the information they received was either 'not very useful' or 'not useful at all'.

771 young people between the ages of 14-24 participated in this research and further information regarding this can be found in our Horizons section interview with Shántana McCullough.

The NIACT report can be found here

<https://www.fsrh.org/news/northern-ireland-abortion-contraception-taskgroup-report-2021/>

The expert advisory panel reports are located here

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-publishes-expert-advisory-panel-reports-social-inclusion-strategies>

The Belfast Youth Forum's 'Any Use?' report can be accessed here <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/Documents/youth-forum/Any-use-report>

INTENSIVE HOME VISITING PROGRAMME FOR TEENAGE PARENTS

by Roisin Neill – Family Nurse Supervisor South Eastern Trust, The Family Nurse Partnership

The Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) is a licensed, intensive, home visiting programme for teenage parents. It was developed by Professor David Olds at the University of Colorado, and is based on over four decades of high-quality research.

Research has shown that engaging in the FNP programme leads to a range of benefits for young mothers and their children in the short, medium and long term.

Using a strengths-based approach, Family Nurses empower their clients, triggering their intrinsic motivation to be the best parent they can be. The Family Nurses are supported in programme delivery through weekly supervision and also through specialist monthly psychology and safeguarding supervision.

The FNP programme has three overarching aims:

- to improve pregnancy outcomes by helping women understand and improve their prenatal health;
- to improve children's subsequent health and development by enabling parents to provide more competent care for their children; and
- to influence and improve the parents' life courses by planning subsequent pregnancies, completing education and finding employment.

The FNP programme has been delivered within Northern Ireland since 2010. Currently, there are teams of Family Nurses across all of the Health and Social Care Trust areas. Clients enroll in the voluntary programme during pregnancy and graduate when their child is two years old. Throughout the programme they are offered up to 64 home visits and a wide range of public health issues are explored with the client.

Family Nurses use motivational interviewing skills to encourage healthy lifestyle choices in many areas such as smoking cessation, drugs and alcohol use, sexual and reproductive health and healthy relationships.

The health and development of the child is closely monitored, enabling the Family Nurses to initiate early intervention action plans with their colleagues from the various Allied Health Professions.

Family Nurses work closely with their social work colleagues where any safeguarding concerns have been identified, thereby contributing to child protection plans. This multidisciplinary working has many benefits, promoting the earliest interventions and resulting in improved outcomes for children.

Family Nurses use a trauma informed approach to support and guide their clients throughout the programme. Many of our young people in Northern Ireland have experienced multiple childhood adversities, which are explored sensitively during home visits, helping the clients understand their behaviours which often helps to break the intergenerational cycle of adversity.

A strong therapeutic relationship between the client and her Family Nurse promotes resilience and enhanced self-efficacy while also promoting secure attachments between the clients and their children.

Since 2010, across the FNP community in Northern Ireland we have worked with over 1400 families and 1327 babies have been born.

Being part of FNP is a pleasure and we are privileged to work with our wonderful

young parents helping them to achieve their 'heart's desires'.

Below is some recent feedback from an FNP client:

"Thank you so much for everything you have done for me in the past 2 years... You have helped me through things I thought were impossible to get through... You have helped me become the Mum I am today... You have guided me through life... You have helped me become a stronger and happier woman... You have helped me believe that anything is possible..." (18-year-old FNP client)

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Family Nurse Partnership

THE LADS2DADS PROJECT

PARENTING RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES PROGRAMME FOR YOUNG FATHERS

by Stephen Barr – Service Manager, Start360



Start360 is a leading provider of support services to young people, adult offenders, and families across Northern Ireland. We have an excellent track record in working with a variety of clients in partnership with the statutory, voluntary and community sectors and provide a range of services and interventions in the areas of health, justice and employability.

One such service is our Lads2Dads project, a 15-week accredited parenting rights and responsibilities programme for young fathers aged between 16-25 living within the Belfast Trust. Lads2Dads provides support to fathers, or fathers to be.

As participants, they are given a wide range of opportunities to develop parenting skills and confidence, which impacts positively on their roles as fathers, and helps develop positive role models to their children.

The programme has three main outcomes which are outlined below:

- Participants are supported to deal with issues relating to being a father and/or becoming a father. They learn about parental responsibility, and how to advocate and exercise their rights and responsibilities as fathers;
- The service influences positive parenting by promoting greater awareness around sexual health issues, as well as supporting participants with the skills and confidence required to engage in positive lifestyle choices, such as safer sex choices, better awareness of contraception availability, and reduced and managed risk; and
- Promote awareness of additional relevant support services available, as well as providing participants with parenting rights and responsibilities support. This successfully builds their skills and knowledge base as well as their self-esteem.

Start360 provides each participant with tailored 1-1 mentoring sessions where they can identify person specific barriers to development, and create an action plan against these barriers, by focusing on supporting achievements.

Our evaluations show that 90% of participants demonstrated an improvement in self-image, 82% in confidence, 73% in working with others, 73% in skills and experience and 55% in support from family. Our service user feedback has included the following:

“This programme taught me how to be a better father and it was very good to have 1-1 mentoring support. Helped me feel better about myself”.

“My skills and awareness about fatherhood have improved a lot”.

As a result of Covid-19 the programme is currently being facilitated by Zoom, telephone, and other social media platforms. Participants completing the programme receive an Open College



Network (OCN) qualification in Parenting Rights and Responsibilities.

Lads2Dads is funded by the Public Health Agency (PHA) and runs once annually, usually between September-March and we are delighted to have secured funding to continue delivering this much needed programme in 2021/2022.

A detailed list of the learning outcomes and information regarding referral into the programme can be found below:

LEARNING OUTCOMES Participants will:	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA Participants can:
1. Have an awareness of the responsibilities of being a parent.	1.1 Identify the major responsibilities of parenthood.
2. Understand the rights and needs of different family members.	2.1 Identify the individual rights and needs of parent(s), children, and other members of the family.
3. Recognise the importance of being honest with children and others in the family.	3.1 Give examples of the importance of being honest with children.
4. Understand the importance of listening to children and giving them choices.	4.1. Give examples of situations in which it is important to listen to children. 4.2 List ways to offer choices to children.
5. Recognise the major stages of a child's development and be aware of some of the techniques that may be used to cope with children's behaviour.	5.1 Identify the major stages of a child's development. 5.2 Identify and outline basic techniques that might be used to cope with children's behaviour in given situations.
6. Understand how children learn through daily activities.	6.1 Identify ways in which children learn through daily activities. 6.2 Suggest ways in which parents can achieve this.
7. Be aware of their own needs as a parent and consider ways of meeting them.	7.1 Identify their own needs as a parent. 7.2 Suggest a plan of action for beginning to meet these.

For more information about the Lads2Dads programme:

Email: stephen.barr@start360.org

Telephone: 028 9043 5810 / 07545 929 260

Website: www.start360.org / <http://start360.org/how-can-we-help-you/lads-2-dads>

HORIZONS FEATURE

Belfast Youth Forum Chair, Shántana McCullough, discusses the work of the group, their research into RSE and future campaigns

WHO ARE THE BELFAST YOUTH FORUM AND HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THE GROUP?

Belfast Youth Forum is a group of 40 young people aged 13 - 18 who live across Belfast and want to make a positive change in their city. I became involved with the forum in 2018 when I saw on Facebook that they were recruiting for their new term. As I was already a passionate activist, I knew this would be a great opportunity to make real change. I applied, interviewed and was fortunate enough to get a place. In my three years as a member of the forum I have been lucky enough to get voted as secretary and now I am the current chairperson.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO CONDUCT RESEARCH INTO RSE?

When we were choosing the campaigns that we wanted to pursue for our term, we realised that a lot of the young people in the forum had little to no RSE in school. We also discussed this with other young people, not in the forum, at our Rights Here Rights Now event in 2019 and a lack of RSE was a common theme. We then worked alongside the Centre for Children's Rights QUB and Common Youth to develop and distribute our survey to hear from a broader spectrum of young people and from that we developed our Any Use campaign.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH RECOMMEND?

From our research we have three key recommendations. Firstly, to adopt a rights-based and proactive approach to RSE. This approach should be based on public health, education and support of young people. It should help young people understand sexual rights, sexuality and sexual behaviours and how these impact on their, and others, health and wellbeing. We want to see an end to reactive approaches to RSE that may come too late and move towards a proactive approach.

Our second recommendation is to co-produce a curriculum programme and relevant interventions with young people, and to have specialist staff to deliver RSE. We want young people to be included in the development of age appropriate, relevant and inclusive RSE programmes in school.

We also want specialist staff to deliver RSE. We want co-produced education programmes to be delivered by specialised, qualified and trained staff who fully respect the rights of young people to privacy and non-discrimination.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE AS A RESULT OF THE ANY USE REPORT?

Through the Any Use campaign we hope to see a positive difference being made in RSE, both for education and in



attitudes towards RSE. Teaching RSE properly protects young people, not only from sexual health issues but acts as a preventative measure for sexual assault, both as a victim and as a perpetrator. RSE is a rights-based issue that we have a duty to meet.

WHAT OTHER ISSUES WILL THE GROUP WILL BE FOCUSING ON IN 2021 AND HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED THESE PLANS?

The Belfast Youth Forum works on multiple campaigns at a time, including our Elephant in the Room mental health campaign, Poverty; It's Not A Choice campaign and our Immigration and Diversity campaign. Covid-19 has definitely had an effect on the progress of our campaigns. Not being able to meet with young people in real life for focus groups has made research more difficult. However, we have done our best to adapt to the circumstances, meeting with decision makers online and recently launching our mental health toolkit Heads Up along with the Northern Ireland Youth Forum and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. Having to work remotely with the Belfast Youth Forum has had its challenges and we are definitely hoping to get back to normality as soon as we can!

#MenstruationMatters

Period poverty and menstrual health awareness

by Katrina McDonnell, Founder and Project Manager, The Homeless Period Belfast

Having started back in 2016, The Homeless Period Belfast is a non-profit, volunteer-led campaign that provides period-packs filled with donations from the public to people in need across Belfast and beyond.

We believe period poverty, and the taboo that surrounds menstruation, is inextricably linked. We therefore pledge to talk about periods and strive to normalise the conversation through workshops, panel discussions, events and our social media platforms.

More recently, a huge focus of our work has been our #MenstruationMatters campaign calling for free period products in all toilets as we firmly believe in free, universal access to essential period items so that everyone has a dignified period.

With the current pandemic exposing severe inequalities and rising poverty, we saw an exponential increase in need for period products, especially for those of school age.

Schools have undeniably been in the spotlight of this crisis; we therefore felt compelled to focus our #MenstruationMatters campaign efforts on getting free period products for all schools throughout N.Ireland.

In November 2020, we met with the NI Assembly Education Committee and presented our petition with over 5000 signatures, along with evidence from our surveys of school students and teachers throughout NI which exposed how a lack of essential period products at school has been disrupting their teaching and education.



Alarming statistics such as these demonstrated the reality to the Education Committee and they agreed to back our campaign, deciding to present our petition of 5306 signatories to the NI Executive a few weeks later.

A week before Christmas 2020, Education Minister, Peter Weir MLA also backed our campaign call and requested approval from the Executive which successfully resulted in a decision to provide all schools in NI, primary, post primary and special schools, with free period products by September 2021.

Since then, our campaign call for free period products in all toilets has gained notable momentum and has galvanized many people into action.

People understand the serious issue of period poverty and are tired of having their own menstrual needs sidelined. As we always say, if every public toilet can provide free toilet roll, soap, and hand towels for bodily functions we have no control over, how does having a period, another bodily function we have no control over, make it any different?

We say it firmly: any toilet that requires toilet roll, requires period products in exactly the same way!

The future of Homeless Period Belfast is exciting, but we must be clear: our aim is not to grow; it is to become redundant; to cease to exist. We don't believe we should be co-opting for the government through our provision of period products. Instead, we envisage a day where period products are as freely accessible as toilet roll as a result of our overall #MenstruationMatters campaign success.

Watch this space!

For more information about The Homeless Period Belfast and their

#MenstruationMatters

campaign please visit:

Facebook: [/TheHomelessPeriodBelfast](#)

Twitter: [@HPeriodBelfast](#)



OUR KEY FINDINGS WERE:

- 74% of school girls had left school early or missed a day entirely because of a lack of period products at school;
- 87% said that a lack of period products has negatively impacted their attention in class and/or school attendance;
- 91% have had to use toilet roll as a temporary measure;
- 84% of teachers said that they have witnessed how the ongoing pandemic has exacerbated the need period products in schools; and
- 60% of teachers have had to buy period products out of their own wages.

THE SPEAKEASY PROGRAMME – PARENT EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT DURING COVID-19

by Roisin Flanagan, Speakeasy Project Officer, ICNI

Without a doubt, the impact of Covid-19 has presented various challenges for all of us, but particularly for parents and carers. The entire dynamic of the parenting role has changed dramatically with the onset of a global pandemic and subsequent restrictions.

The world of parent's and carer's is now dictated by home-schooling, home-working and online learning. On top of this many have extra caring responsibilities for their own elderly parents, coupled with reduced or no childminding support.

Speakeasy is a community-based parenting programme funded by the Public Health Agency (PHA). It aims to encourage and support parents and carers to effectively communicate with their young people about growing up, relationships, sexuality and sex education.

It recognises the significant role that parents and carers play in their young people's understanding of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and it is our experience that parents and carers can often feel a sense of dread regarding this issue.

Speakeasy aims to increase confidence and self-assurance in parent-child communication. The project is informative and engaging and provides the opportunity for parents and carers to discuss and explore solutions that are relevant to them.

Parenting during a global pandemic has been nothing short of extraordinary and each family has faced their own set of challenges and intergenerational dynamics.

One such dynamic that the Speakeasy programme encountered on multiple occasions was the reality of parenting much older children – the late teen and/or young adult who still 'lived under their parent's roof'.

As one parent openly expressed in one of our socially-

distanced groups that took place after the first lockdown, "I feel awful. I am disciplining my 19-year-old in the same manner as my 13-year-old – it's just not right".

The parent explained that in order to keep herself, her partner and her vulnerable elderly parents safe, she banned all her children from hanging out with friends and boyfriends or girlfriends. In the case of her 19-year-old son, she stopped him from seeing his partner.

She continued "I can't believe, me who always tried to be more open-minded and supportive of my kid's right to sexual relationships and here I am, banning him from even leaving the house".

This parent was not alone. Another gave their 16-year-old an ultimatum – your girlfriend or your friends – not both! While a third parent reported family arguments over similar in-house restrictions imposed on the now adult young people!

This is just one such emerging issue addressed within the framework of the Speakeasy programme. Others include body and puberty knowledge; my private space; conception, pregnancy and 'Where do I come from?' conversations; sex and the law – consent; contraception and STI prevention; nurturing relationships; and healthy digital relationships.

The Speakeasy programme has continued to listen, assist and provide educational support to parents and carer's during what has been an incredibly challenging time for them.

The Speakeasy programme is delivered in the Belfast and South Eastern Trust areas. If you'd like further information about the programme please contact:

Tel: **028 9031 6106**

Email: roisin.flanagan@informingchoicesni.org

Website: <https://informingchoicesni.org/speakeasy>



SAVE THE DATE

BUT I WAS ON THE PILL?

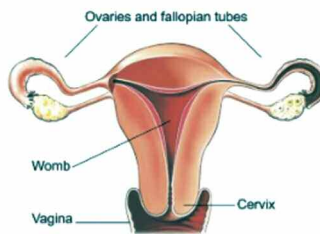
**Tuesday 27th April, 7pm, Friday 30th April, 10am,
Tuesday 25th May, 7pm, Thursday 27th May, 10am,
Tuesday 22nd June, 7pm and Thursday 24th June, 10am**
Facilitated by ICNI

ICNI has recently launched a series of online community information sessions entitled 'But I was on the pill?' focused on the importance of understanding the date of your last menstrual period (LMP).

These hour-long information sessions are designed for both individuals and professionals and provide key educational tools aimed at increasing knowledge and understanding around the menstrual cycle and the importance of this when it comes to making decisions around pregnancy. This now has added significance as the law in relation to abortion in Northern Ireland has changed.

All Health and Social Care Trusts are currently providing an early medical abortion (EMA) service within the first ten weeks of pregnancy and the referral pathway into this service is provided by ICNI.

Do you know the date of your last period?



Our central access point enables people from across Northern Ireland to contact a single telephone number – 028 9031 6100 – to access non-directive information, pregnancy choices counselling if requested, and referral into a local EMA service. Seamless access to post pregnancy counselling support is also available.

An overview of this service will also be provided as part of our information sessions. We initially launched these as part of Sexual Health Week in February 2021 and due to their popularity and positive feedback we are continuing to run them on a monthly basis.

All sessions are delivered via Zoom and places are limited. For further information, and to book a place on an upcoming session please contact: admin@informingchoicesni.org

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION AWARENESS TRAINING

Monday 26 and Tuesday 27 April, 10am – 1pm
Facilitated by ICNI

This online training is over two mornings and is suitable for anyone who supports people with a learning disability, difficulty or autism. The aims of the course are:

- To enable participants to look at what RSE means for them;
- To examine how our values and attitudes can influence our work;
- To enable participants to become increasingly confident in their use of appropriate language when discussing topics concerning sex and sexuality with people who have a learning disability, difficulty or autism;
- To examine barriers to the implementation of sexuality topics within their workplace;
- To develop an understanding of the importance of an individual's role around RSE; and
- To develop an understanding of the importance of an RSE policy in your organisation.



Participant feedback:

"Really welcomed training that will enable me and my staff to better support young people with disabilities. I can incorporate this knowledge into my daily work to inform/educate students, parents and staff and confidently give support where needed." – SEN Principal

"Very informative, relaxed learning environment. Approachable yet professional staff. Challenged my own fear of objectivity and reinforced the need for critical thought in our daily practice/lives." – Social worker

The cost to access this training is £65 and places can be booked via **Eventbrite**. The full range of training we offer can be found here https://informingchoicesni.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ICNI-Training-Brochure_-1.pdf

SEXUAL HEALTH HELPLINE

ICNI provide a confidential sexual health helpline which offers information and support across a range of sexual health issues including contraception and sexually transmitted infections.

The helpline can give details of the opening hours and locations of Contraceptive and Sexual Health (CASH) clinics and Genitourinary Medicine (GUM) clinics. These services and their opening times have been impacted as a result of Covid-19. For the most up to date information please call the sexual health helpline on 028 9031 6100. This helpline is staffed Monday to Friday, from 9am to 5pm.

The helpline acts as the Central Access Point into early medical abortion care in Northern Ireland and can also be used to make an appointment for post pregnancy counselling.

COVID-19: VACCINES & FERTILITY

The British Fertility Society and Association of Reproductive and Clinical Scientists have created a document in response to questions that patients have been asking about Covid-19 vaccines and fertility. These include the following:

Q. Can any of the Covid-19 vaccines affect fertility?

A. No. There is absolutely no evidence, and no theoretical reason, that any of the vaccines can affect the fertility of men or men.

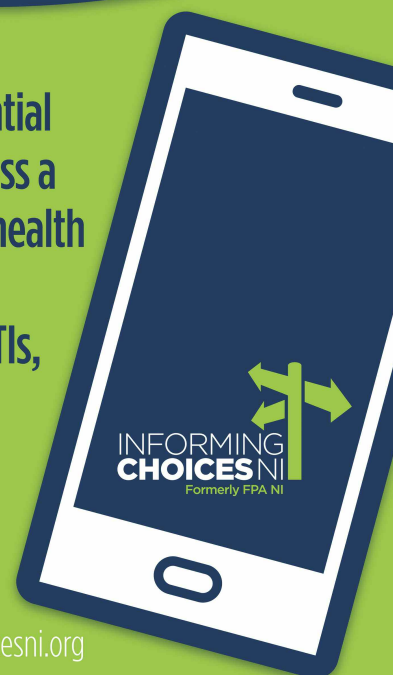
Other questions include – ‘Should I delay my fertility treatment until after I have had the Covid-19 vaccine?’; ‘I had a positive pregnancy test today. Can I still have a Covid-19 vaccine?’; and ‘I have had recurrent miscarriages and am now trying to get pregnant again. Should I postpone having a Covid-19 vaccine?’

SEXUAL HEALTH HELPLINE 028 9031 6100

Monday to Friday 9am-5pm

Our helpline can provide confidential information across a range of sexual health areas including contraception, STIs, pregnancy and abortion.

@ICNI2019
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www.informingchoicesni.org



MYTH BUSTER



FERTILITY

There is absolutely no evidence, and no theoretical reason, that any of the vaccines can affect the fertility of women or men.



The factsheet can be read in full here

<https://www.britishfertilitysociety.org.uk/2021/02/09/bfs-arcs-covid-19-vaccines-fertility/>

These FAQs were created on 8th February 2021 and are correct at the time of publication. The authors note that the speed of scientific research in this area is very rapid and advise any concerned person to always discuss their individual situation with their health care provider.