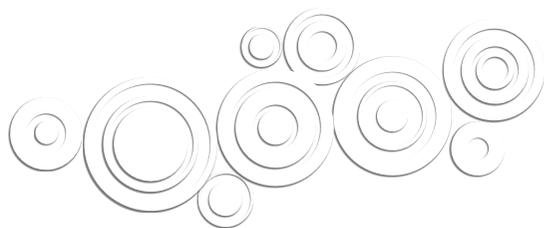




SUGGESTIONS FOR REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENT  
IN REGARDS TO IMPROVEMENT OF ORGANIZATION OF HELP  
FOR THE SCHOOL STUDENTS USING PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES



LITHUANIAN SCHOOL STUDENT PARLIAMENT  
Working group for prevention and control  
of use of psychoactive substances



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INTRODUCTION



Lithuanian Students Parliament (hereinafter – LSP) is an institution representing the interests of Lithuanian pupils. It has 95 members – senior pupils from 65 municipalities of Lithuania. They have been democratically elected for a two-year term. LSP debates issues relevant to all pupils, puts forward proposals to state institutions, initiates discussions and implements various projects.

LSP was launched in 2000, and today it is a partner of state authorities which has won recognition for shaping youth policy in Lithuania. Representatives of LSP are invited to participate in various working groups and debates while dealing with issues relevant to youth; their opinion is heard and taken into consideration.

From the very beginning LSP mainly focuses on various educational issues: they continually observe the organisation of state exams and respond to emerging problems, they take an active part in the development and adjustment of the university studies' reform, etc.

In 2009, with the view of expansion of the range of LSP activities and in order to encourage participation of young people in other areas of relevant public policy to, LSP in cooperation with the I Can Live Coalition implemented the project "Strengthening of the Role of Youth in Drug Policy Making and Implementation". Within the framework of the project, a working group on control and prevention of use of psychotropic substances (hereinafter – the Working Group) was formed of 15 members representing several LSP committees and various towns of Lithuania. The aim of the Working Group was to actively participate in the policy of control of psychotropic substances and prevention of their use among youth.

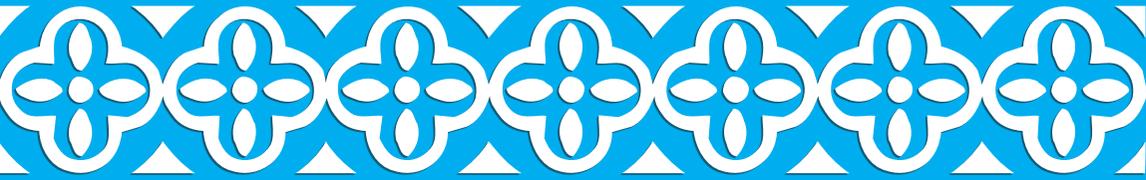
During the period of September 2009 – October 2010, the members of the Working Group in cooperation with the I Can Live Coalition" participated in series of training sessions on dependences and related problems, study trips, meetings with Lithuanian main policy makers and key actors in the field of control of psychotropic substances and prevention of their use, implemented activities promoting better control of psychotropic substan-

ces and prevention of their use (e.g. in cooperation with V. V. Margeviciene, Chair of the Commission for Prevention of Drug and Alcohol Addiction of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, a round table discussion with pupils, teachers and professionals "The Problems Related with Drug and Alcohol Addictions and their Prevention among Youth" was organised in Kaunas Municipality; an open letter regarding the Draft Law on Alcohol Control composed and distributed, etc.).

With the help of experts from the I Can Live Coalition, the members of the Working Group have also prepared recommendations to state authorities on possible ways of improvement of control of psychotropic substances and the prevention of their use among youth. You will find the summary of the recommendations in this publication.

Due to successful implementation of the project, LPP continued cooperation with the Coalition "I Can Live". In spring 2011, having elected the 6th LPP, a working group for prevention and control of psychoactive substances of the new term of office was formed. The question of organization of help to teenagers who use psychoactive substances became the priority of the new Working group activities. School students discussed this topic in depth during trainings and meetings with professionals employed in the area of dependencies; they did homework, communicated with peers and representatives from their communities, namely adults, youth coordinators, school psychologists, social pedagogues and school public health professionals. With assistance of sociologists the Working group conducted a pilot survey called "Activities of Specialists Working at School with Students Who Use Psychoactive Substances". Based on the results of this survey and experience gained during this project, members of the Working group have formulated suggestions to the members of the government and politicians how to improve organization of help at school to students who use psychoactive substances.





ORGANIZATION OF HELP TO SCHOOL  
STUDENT USING PSYCHOACTIVE  
SUBSTANCES AT SCHOOL: PROBLEMS AND  
SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS



## ORGANIZATION OF HELP TO SCHOOL STUDENT USING PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES AT SCHOOL: PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

As per results of the survey conducted in European schools in year 2007 under European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD), use of illegal drugs (cannabis, amphetamine, cocaine, crack, ecstasy, LSD and heroin) among school students in Lithuania tended to grow, consumption of alcohol and tobacco remained high compared to other countries, therefore we cannot ignore the fact that the problem of use of psychoactive substances among school students in Lithuania exists.

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**We have noticed that a lot is spoken and done at schools in the area of prevention, trying to prevent the use of harmful substances, however quite often the fact that a number of students already use psychoactive substances and they need some help in order to stop using them, is ignored. According to our available data very little is done for such students at school and the help is not systematic.**

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## GAPS IN ORGANIZATION OF HELP

We tried to find out whether a teenager using psychoactive substances can get some help at school and what kind of help. First, we talked with peers. Our surveys\* showed that:

- School students often don't know what school professional (social pedagogue, psychologist or public health specialist) they should contact first if they have problems with the use of psychoactive substances. They have no idea whether and how a school's public health professional in particular could help and what functions of this professional are.
- Often students don't consult a psychologist because they need parents' consent for that, especially if they need repeated counseling. However, there are topics teenagers do not want to discuss with their parents, they do not want them to know about some of their problems or parents may not pay much attention to children's problems for a variety of reasons.
- Often students do not consult the school professionals because they don't trust them, are afraid they might not keep the confidentiality of their conversation in secret, will tell their problems to other members of a close school community.
- Often they do not consult school professionals because these cannot come to an understanding with students, start moralizing them and have no idea how to talk to a teenager.
- Quite often school students know more about the reality of use of psychoactive substances than professionals do. This also reduces trust in professionals.



- Inconvenient working hours of the professionals – sometimes it happens that professionals are out of their office or start their work after classes when students are out of school.
- There are cases when professionals do not know what to advise, how to start, what directions to give – this also reduces students' trust in the professionals and their wish to seek help.
- School students are afraid to ask for help because of the prevailing attitude of the society, especially among teenagers, that asking for help is a sign of weakness.

We have reviewed legal acts<sup>1</sup> defining functions of the professionals working for a school, and as implies, help for students using psychoactive substances should be provided at schools by psychologists, social workers and public health professionals. Seeking to clarify how this help is being realized in practice, we have performed a pilot research "Activities of professionals working for a school with students using psychoactive substances"<sup>2</sup>. The research has revealed the following:

- Some professionals, especially public health professionals, are unaware of their particular role and responsibility in work with students who have behaviour problems because of the use of psychoactive substances. It is not clear who is the leading initiator of such work at school.
- Professionals lack knowledge about psychoactive substances and dependency problem.
- Professionals lack specific instructions and methodology on how to work with students who already use psychoactive substances,

what particular aid they could provide to such students. Especially unclear is what aid is considered as 'intervention' when the parents' consent is already required. If it is complicated for a student to get the parents' consent (because of mistrust, broken relations in a family) the role and help of the professionals end with their first contact with a student since they do not have the right to continue their work with the student.

- The school professionals lack time to work with school students regarding the said matters – their job descriptions stipulate a lot of other duties also, and it is not clear which duties are of priority and must be performed first of all given the limited time. Furthermore, considerable amount of time is required for compulsory paper work rather than direct work with students.
- Professionals do not co-operate at all or poorly co-operate internally and with other members of the school community in settling problems of students who use psychoactive substances.
- The professionals working for a school are often unaware of where to direct a student to get the professional help outside a school, if the needed help exceeds their competence. They are even unaware that dependency and dependency-related behavioural disorders must be diagnosed and treated by a psychiatrist; meanwhile psychiatrists work in mental health centers in any municipality. In this case the parents' consent is also important and may be problematic.
- The school professionals obviously lack motivation to perform the contact work with students who experience problems because of the use of psychoactive substances, not to wait until a student asks for help but to reach out in watching, suspecting and seeking a contact with a student.



<sup>1</sup> Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania regarding qualification requirements to a social care teacher and approval of job descriptions No. 1667, Vilnius, 14 December 2001.  
Specification of procedure for provision of psychological aid approved by Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No. 1215, 5 July 2011.  
Educational psychologist's general job regulations approved by Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania No. ISAK – 1548, 22 July 2005/  
Order of the Minister of Healthcare and Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania regarding approval of Specification of procedure for healthcare at school No. v-1035/isak-2680, Vilnius, 30 December 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Analysis of the pilot research "Activities of professionals working for a school with students using psychoactive substances", Coalition "I Can Live", 2012, Vilnius



## SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

Taking into consideration the stated problems, we think that in order to make efficient and high-quality initial help available for students in school who use psychoactive substances it is necessary to take the following steps:

- To define concretely and in detail the school professionals' job descriptions in regards to work with students who use psychoactive substances; to spread information among the school community on who and how can help a student also involving the students' self-government. The school self-government institution could become the chain to connect a student and the professionals.
  - To define clearly who of the professionals (or another member of a school community) should take the lead in organization of the work at school with students who use psychoactive substances.
  - To recommend schools to draw up a strategy and plan of actions to work with students already using psychoactive substances.
  - To prepare for the professionals the specific tutorial materials (recommended practice, methodological instructions) for work with students using psychoactive substances.
  - To guarantee the periodic improvement training for the school professionals in regards to the matters of psychoactive substances and dependencies.
- To cancel the provision requiring the parent's consent in order to receive counselling from a school psychologist or social pedagogue on a regular basis.
  - To urge professionals not to wait until students ask them for help in coping with their problem, but to display activity in seeking a contact with a student who is suspected of using the psychoactive substances.

