

Strong & Clear/ IOGT Norway

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Good morning everyone! My name is Hanne Cecilie Widnes, I am a trained sociologist and I work as Secretary General in IOGT Norway which briefly described is a member organisation that works so that people can live free and meaningful lives. We do work in the field of prevention, social work and rehabilitation. I am happy to be able to present to you our drug prevention program Strong & Clear whose main objective is to mobilize parents to make a difference in their communities.

The UNGASS Outcome Document makes reference to the International Standards on Drug Use Prevention as a guide to choose effective interventions. The Standards point at the important role of parents at all stages of development, from a child is born, through childhood and adolescence. This corresponds very well with the experience and the approach of IOGT. We have developed the Strong&Clear programme and see this as one of our contributions to the implementation of the recommendations from UNGASS in 2016. Time has come for action, parents should be mobilized and we are happy to share how this can be done.

What you see here are the parents of the 9th graders of a secondary school in my own neighbourhood in Oslo, which is the closest you come to a big city in Norway.

And here you see another group of parents of 8th graders. They live in a totally different environment up in a small community in the mountain area in Norway called Bø.

Both these pictures are from meetings in our program Strong & Clear. Each year we meet more than 5000 parents in such settings all over Norway and in all types of communities.

Our core message is that parents - whether they live in a city or in a small village - could and should be the **most important** drug prevention agents in their communities - but that is given that they do the right things. That is what Strong & Clear is about; to train parents to be better parents. This is why we focus solely on the parents in this program and only meet with them and let them do the most important prevention work for their children.

Strong & Clear was initiated in 1997, it is funded by government grants, it is fully in line with the International Standards on Drug Prevention on parenting skills programmes.

The program was created to prevent underage alcohol use and use of illicit drugs - mainly cannabis - among teenagers.

We believe that preventing drug and alcohol use among these wannabe-adults is only possible if it is perceived as attractive, natural and easy to make alcohol and drugfree choices - not only for adolescents, but also for young adults and for parents as myself.

That is one of the reasons why there should be an overreaching goal for all societies to reduce drug use prevalence. This will not only lower the number of problematic drug users. But it will also reduce the number of young people who are exposed to drug use in their peer groups, in their society and in their homes. The drug use prevalence in Norway is low - among the lowest in Europe - and it is important to keep it that way - or better to reduce it.

So why do we spend all our effort on parents instead of targeting their children directly?

That is because we have good knowledge of the fact - supported by new research - that parents can have a huge influence on their youngsters' drug- and alcohol use. We experience that too many parents do not believe this. But they are happy to be told. And they are also grateful that we offer concrete advice and tools on how to act as an adult community to protect their own children.

The stakeholders in this program are both the School Management and the Parent Working Committees in the respective schools. Parents are not only responsible for their own children, but they also serve as local politicians, football coaches, religious leaders, journalists, opinion leaders and teachers in their community. Changes in the parent group can positively influence the whole local community.

So what are our core advices to parents on effective preventive behaviour?

I'll present this to you in four bullet points:

- 1) Set boundaries and express restrictive attitude towards under-age drinking and use of cannabis. Youngsters want their parents to set boundaries. We know that it is easier for parents to set boundaries in their own families if they are given an opportunity to meet and do it as a group. It is also easier if they are presented concrete suggestions for rules to agree upon for their kids.
- 2) Parents own limited or non-existent use of alcohol and cannabis has an important preventive effect on their own children and on whether drugs are perceived as normal or not in the local society.
- 3) Parents need to have knowledge about harms connected to use of alcohol and cannabis and to discuss this with their children
- 4) Parents need to invest time and love in a good relationship with their children.

And this is how we do it: The Strong & Clear method consists of three elements:

1. We arrange 4 parent meetings during secondary school where parents are offered information, case studies and group discussions and last but not least - the possibility to network. We know that parents of teenagers don't naturally meet each other as often as in earlier school days when they used to follow their children everywhere.
2. Strong & Clear gives funds to the Parents Committee in each school for parents and their teenagers to arrange an activity together.
3. Strong & Clear invites teenagers to sign a deal agreeing to spend their three secondary years without using alcohol and other drugs. Every year one of the 10th graders wins the prize: 2000 Euro to spend on the driver license. This is an attractive prize and gives the youngsters a good excuse in their peer group to say no to drugs.

And we know that this works:

The evaluation of the program shows that the parents who joined the program were more engaged with the topic, their attitudes toward adolescents' alcohol use became more restrictive and they were more reluctant to give alcohol to their children.

As a result their children initiated alcohol use later than their peers. They used less alcohol and were more rarely intoxicated compared to their equals. The subject of illicit drugs has lately been given much more attention in Strong & Clear. We know that there is a strong connection between the use of alcohol and illicit drugs. Therefore we have good reasons to expect that Strong & Clear will have a preventive effect also on the use of cannabis.

Thank you for your attention, and please don't hesitate to contact us for any questions about Strong & Clear or IOGT Norway.