

Public information campaigns under the spotlight Just Say No.

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The Central Office for Information (COI) celebrates its 60th anniversary this year and in September the British Film Institute is hosting a season of public information films at the National Film Theatre (21 September 17 October).

In the addictions field, campaigns have always been an important part of education and prevention work and DrugScope has collected public information materials since its earlier incarnation as the Institute for the Study of Drug Dependency. This resource is proving to be well-used as increasingly, training for drugs workers includes modules on drugs in the media and students are studying public sector advertising.

The Just Say No campaign (1986) has remained fresh in many peoples memories. Featuring a storyline in teen soap Grange Hill in which popular character Zammo developed a heroin problem, the cast of the programme also released a single (Just Say No) in April 1986. It peaked at number 5 and apparently raised over 100,000 for the Standing Conference On Drug Abuse (SCoDA). Then First Lady Nancy Reagan was involved in the American Just Say No project and, hearing of the success of the UK campaign, invited the group to the White House.

Simultaneously the Government was running a wider anti-heroin campaign in England and Wales. Heroin Screws You Up (1985-6) featured print and TV ads depicting some of the physical effects of the drug along with its socially isolating impact. The campaigns success was questioned when one of the bus-stop ads became a popular teen pin-up, linked by some to the appearance of heroin chic on the catwalks.

Currently the biggest media campaign is Talk to Frank (2003 present), aiming to ensure young people know the risks involved in drug taking and where to go for help, as well as giving support to parents, teachers and professionals.

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