



**Drug & Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)
Community Engagement Programme
Khat Awareness Project**

KHAT BRIEFING

What is Khat

Khat (Qat, Quat, Chat; pronounced “cot”) is the green-leafed *Catha Edulis* plant which is cultivated throughout Africa, especially Somalia, Ethiopia and the Arabian peninsular. Khat leaves contain active ingredients known as cathinone and cathine.

Although Khat is not traditionally considered a street drug with desirability comparable to other drugs such as heroin, crack, cocaine, marijuana, cannabis or amphetamines, it has the same effects as these drugs. Khat is not illegal to use, possess or sell in UK; it is usually imported into the UK as a vegetable. However in other countries such as USA, Republic of Ireland, Canada, Norway, Sweden including Somali itself, it is a controlled drug.

Fresh Khat leaves are reddish-brown in colour, and are glossy. With age, they become yellowish-green and leathery. The leaves near the top of the plant are the youngest and the freshest. After Khat is harvested, it is often wrapped in banana leaves to maintain the potency of the leaves. Khat is commonly sold in bundles of 40 twigs, approximately 12 to 16 inches in length. Khat is normally chewed in dens or ‘Mefrish’ as it is traditionally called all over Brent. These dens are kept dark, and windows are closed for heat concentration, a practice believed to raise the potency of the Khat.

Brent DAAT Involvement

Brent Drug and Alcohol Action Team in partnership with key stakeholders and some Somali organisations in Brent have organised a series of campaigns to tackle the problem of Khat particularly among the Somali communities. The effect of Khat misuse affects not only the user, but the family, friends and carers. The entire social and extended family network suffers.

Working with the Somali Community in Brent is a response to a need identified in our Equality Impact Assessment carried out in 2002. The need identified a low uptake of drug treatment services from the BME community. However, work with the Somali community looks particularly at the misuse of KHAT and its associated problems within the community in Brent.

Campaigns have been organised targeting users, young people, professionals and friends, carers and family. Work so far done has included the following:

- **Somali Substance Misuse Worker** – A Somali substance misuse worker has been recruited. The post although funded by Brent DAAT will be managed through Brent Ethnic Alcohol Counselling Hounslow (EACH) and based at their Wembley office. Post is a job share split between a male and female worker to reflect the cultural needs of the Somali community. The post holder responsibilities will include establishing and providing support and counselling service to parents, carers, family members who are either users or affected by someone else's substance and Khat misuse. Work to be started in April.
- **Bulsho Bile Newsletter** – 'Bulsho Bile which means 'Society' also demonstrates inclusiveness and aims to suggest a community approach in tackling the problem of Khat misuse among the Somali community in Brent. The newsletter is produced quarterly. So far two issues have been produced. The second issue highlighted concerns about spitting and the spread of tuberculosis. These have been distributed through out Brent, to all the 'Mefrish' or where users are likely to congregate to chew Khat. They have also been distributed to most Somali organisations with the aim of cascading information down to the entire community
- **Youth Khat awareness workshop** - This workshop looked at raising awareness of Khat and other illegal substance misuse among young Somali, and to challenge some of the myths surrounding substance and Khat misuse. The outcome of this awareness programme will undoubtedly influence their choices regarding whether or not to misuse Khat
- **Khat Leaflet** – Brent DAAT in partnership with Addaction has produced an information leaflet about Khat. The leaflet highlights the dangers of Khat misuse and the subsequent effect on the family, carers and the wider community; it also offers some safety tips on safer use of Khat within the harm minimisation context. This is also available in the Somali language.
- **Khat Calendar Campaign** - An animated calendar was designed to further raise awareness of KHAT. This was particularly targeted at users, friends and family during the Eid festival in January 2006. Calendars were sent to all Somali cafés, communication centres and 'Mefrish' across the borough. Copies will soon be published electronically on Brent PCT intranet and BRAIN from Brent Council.
- **Somali Outreach Worker** - As a response to the growing concern of Khat misuse within the Somali community, the post of an outreach worker who will be a link between drug treatment service providers, Brent DAAT and the community has been advertised. The post though funded by Brent

DAAT will be managed by Ethnic Alcohol and Counselling Hounslow - Harrow and Brent (EACH). Interviews will take place on 9th March 2006