

Submission: the Spending Review 2010

Adfam is the national umbrella organisation working to improve the quality of life for families affected by drugs and alcohol. We do this by working with a network of individuals, practitioners and organisations who come into contact with the families, friends and carers affected by these problems.

Background information

Adfam was founded in 1984 by the mother of a heroin user who could not find the support she needed to deal with her unique set of problems. Since then Adfam has grown into the national umbrella organisation representing a growing and diverse network of community activists supporting families with multiple problems, and also works to represent families' interests in the wider drug sector, through providing training, resources and information in this complex area.

Adfam works to improve the quality of life for families affected by drugs and alcohol and expand the availability and quality of support to meet their needs. Family support organisations offer a huge range of services including counselling, respite care, training, mediation, helplines and therapeutic interventions, as well as information on specific issues such as bereavement, finance, kinship care, imprisonment and drug treatment.

Key points

Questions set out in the Spending Review Framework are discussed individually below. As an introduction, Adfam emphasises the following key messages relating to supporting families affected by drug and alcohol use:

- Improved and earlier support for the children of drug-using parents presents an efficiency saving to public services
- Drug users are more likely to access treatment services and recover when their family is supporting them
- Rehabilitation and recovery is more likely – and therefore provides better value for money – when families are supported and involved, and this also leads to savings to the healthcare and criminal justice systems
- Improving local partnership work between healthcare services and drug and alcohol family support facilities involves no new funding commitments but only improved mutual awareness, meaning that families are signposted to the appropriate service for their unique support needs in their local community
- Family support services form a vital part of the Big Society and already represent its ideals. Often formed by family members themselves – the same way Adfam started - they employ

staff and volunteers from their community (which also helps to keep costs low) and are dedicated to solving local problems in a local way.

- Family support delivers Big Society objectives, presents efficiency savings and links together agencies which all have a stake in supporting families with multiple and sophisticated problems.

Is the activity essential to meet government priorities?

Yes. Family support has influence in a wide variety of Coalition priorities in many different policy areas including families and children, public health, drug education and prevention, social activism, crime prevention and justice. For example the Programme for Government pledges to ‘investigate a new approach for helping families with multiple problems’, ‘better involve organisations with a track record of supporting families’, and ‘support the creation of neighbourhood groups across the UK, especially in the most deprived areas’. This is by no means exhaustive and the excellent fit between family support and the government’s priorities will become even clearer in the rest of this submission. If the government is committed to supporting local activists who take it upon themselves to tackle the worst problems in their community, it must account for family support.

Family support – and adopting a whole family approach to sophisticated problems – reaps benefits far beyond one specific area. The whole family approach adopted by Family Intervention Projects, for example, has been demonstrably successful: NatCen figures from as recently as March 2010 attest to the fact that major reductions are seen in risk factors of antisocial behaviour (64% fall), substance misuse (70%), child protection (43%), domestic violence (61%) and relationship breakdown (58%) following family intervention.¹ Key reasons for this success were noted as a whole-family approach, effective multi-agency relationships, dedicated keyworkers and staying with a family for as long as necessary – all issues well known to family support providers.

Does the government need to fund this activity?

The government needs to *support* this activity, yes, but given the excellent fit of family support and the revival of localism, policy leadership in this area from central government could be more effective – and more appropriate – than funds alone in fostering effectiveness. There is no doubt that increased funds would help the family support sector, but this is not always best provided by the state, which may not fully grasp the local issues at hand. Adfam does look to central government, however, for sponsorship, policy leadership and seed money in this area to ensure that local decision makers and commissioners are fully aware of the importance of family support and the value it can bring to communities.

Adfam is in touch with well over a hundred local community groups working with families affected by drugs and alcohol, and many of these organisations survive on short-term contracts, sporadic surpluses from local Drug and Alcohol Action Teams and PCTs, limited private donations, the free

¹ <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/pzMedia/uploads/Downloadable/e3e97aca-4d52-40fd-8ccb-5c11b7bd49a8.pdf>

time of their own staff and volunteers and sheer determination. Adfam is concerned that these relatively small amounts of money (especially from local authority budgets) will be seen as 'easy cuts' in the current funding environment and will suffer unduly.

Family support still requires core costs to facilitate its work in order to provide professional and safe support, for example with volunteer training expenses. A key role for the government, therefore, lies in providing policy leadership and direction, for instance through guidance, partnership protocols and strategies which recognise the role of family support and encourage its sponsorship at the local level. Adfam would be extremely interested in assisting the government in any way to create a policy environment friendly to family support.

Can the activity be targeted to those most in need?

Yes, that is precisely its function. Families affected by drug and alcohol use consistently experience stigma, isolation, depression, anxiety, mental and physical ill health and financial difficulties. Though drugs and alcohol affect families from all walks of life, there is an undeniable relationship between substance use and socio-economic deprivation, community safety, welfare and willingness to work. Family support works with and for those with complex issues and those in the most need, and therefore family support providers would be invaluable partners in any new initiatives to help families with multiple problems.

Family support targets people who are often under the radar of mainstream services due to stigma, fear and lack of awareness that there is provision out there to meet their needs. Family support services also have very low thresholds, meaning that they do not have exclusive criteria for the people they work with and anyone who is experiencing problems with drugs and alcohol in the family can access support.

How can the activity be provided at lower cost?

The cost is already extremely low and saves money in other areas, notably primary care. A recent UK Drug Policy Commission estimated – conservatively – that families experience harms equivalent to £1.8billion and the support that families provide to drug and alcohol users would cost the NHS and local authorities £750million to provide.²

Adfam surveyed family support groups in early 2010 as part of a workforce development project and the results of this showed that 25% of support service staff are volunteers, a highly significant proportion in signifying the commitment of the workforce.

Another study conducted by Adfam in 2009 showed that even extremely sophisticated family support organisations were operating at a cost of roughly £650 per family, **per year**; this is very much at the high end of the spectrum and many others were providing support at a fraction of this, often at a rate of under £100 per family per year.

² http://www.ukdpc.org.uk/resources/UKDPC_Supporting_the_supporters_Policy_Briefing.pdf

Family support already provides excellent value for money and it is absolutely crucial to the government's social programme that it is appropriately recognised and maintained. Given the cost savings family support provides in other areas, the question is less how it can be provided at lower cost, but how it can be provided more widely, thereby compounding the savings.

How can the activity be provided more effectively?

Better mutual awareness and partnership work with healthcare services and treatment facilities would make a great difference at little or no cost. Family support is often provided on insecure funding foundations and services are experienced in making every pound count, so they are already well-equipped to work efficiently. Results from Adfam's 2010 survey show that 88% of family support services have 10 or less staff, meaning that their administration costs and waste are cut to an absolute minimum and staff are using their resources directly to help families in their local community.

Notwithstanding this, many family support organisations' excellent work is hindered by short-term funding agreements, which can be a barrier to them reaching their full potential. Family support should be fully integrated into central and local policy, thereby recognising its merits and encouraging local areas to make more long-term plans to tackle the effects of drug and alcohol use.

Increasing the support available to families would not require a great expansion in the workforce – only better training and partnership work between existing professionals and volunteers. For example, Adfam was commissioned by the last government to provide training for Family Intervention Project keyworkers on the impact of drugs and alcohol on the family, which was extremely well received. In this case, the recruitment (and expense) of new specialist workers was not required, but drug and alcohol training was provided for staff in mainstream services to enhance their ability to work with families with multiple needs.

Can the activity be provided by a non-state provider or by citizens, wholly or in partnership?

Yes, both. 62% of respondents to Adfam's 2010 survey were voluntary sector providers, and this is where the bulk of expertise really lies; also 67% of family support is provided in a community setting (with support also provided in prisons or private rehab services, for example). Adfam sees a vital role for local authorities and the NHS in promoting and supporting community action, but beyond this family support is better provided by independent, voluntary sector professionals – many of whom have personal experience of the issues they reach out to help others with. Family support organisations provide a hugely valuable service independently of the state, but statutory backing through leadership, influence and promotion at central policy level would be extremely valuable.

Can non-state providers be paid to carry out the activities according to the results they achieve?

Previous indicator sets and outcome monitoring systems at local authority level do not recognise the specifics of the work that family support providers undertake, and this needs to be reviewed for a

new payment by results system to be effective and fit for purpose. Voluntary and community sector providers are not always in the necessary financial position to enter an environment of payment by results, especially when outcomes do not adequately recognise the specific remit of their work. Adfam would welcome the opportunity to work with the government to develop an appropriate outcome monitoring system for family support, which was one of the major proposals set out in the 2010 Adfam manifesto.³ Family support can be paid according to the results that they achieve just as any other provider can, but these outcomes must be properly designed and developed to recognise the full scope of family support work.

Can local bodies as opposed to central government provide the activity?

Yes again. As local organisations provide a service tailored to local need, they represent the ideas of the Big Society perfectly.

There is a great danger that, as local authorities are asked to trim their budgets wherever possible, family support services in receipt of small amounts of statutory funding could be seen as an 'easy cut'. Adfam is hopeful that family support receives the recognition it deserves as a pillar of local service delivery in response to drug and alcohol issues.

Contact

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³ http://www.adfam.org.uk/docs/Adfam_manifesto_2010.pdf