

This briefing is a fortnightly update on important policy developments relevant to family support and the drug and alcohol sector. It includes comment, data, reports, parliamentary news, policy directions and debate.

POLICY BRIEFING

9 – 20 August 2010

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Editorial

All of the media attention on spending cuts, transforming public services and the reduced influence of the state has heightened anxieties of how family support, which has been traditionally under resourced, will survive. The Coalition has discussed its desire to 'investigate a new approach to helping families with multiple needs' but not clarified how this new approach might be manifested. The ring-fence has also been removed from the 'think family' budget stream, meaning that local authorities have to spread shrinking resources over a number of competing priorities. Within this context we think it is vital to investigate and highlight the ways that family support can be delivered by a multi-agency approach working together to support the whole family.

Family support, delivered and set up by family members themselves, constitutes the very ideals of the 'Big Society'. However in a period of spending cuts, partnerships and communities may need to consider how existing services and resources can be even more efficiently harnessed to meet the sophisticated, and often multiple needs families can have. Relationships and practices may need to be further developed to ensure joint working to ultimately improve the recovery outcomes for all family members.

Within this context Adfam will be hosting five regional consultations in October 2010 to consider some of the key issues highlighted above. We will use the new 'Adfam Virtual Family' model to explore the necessary processes, support needs and service requirements of families with sophisticated problems. We hope the Virtual Family will help create an interactive learning environment that will raise some challenging and interesting debates.

Consultations will all be from 12:30pm – 4pm in the following locations:-

7th October – Taunton

8th October – London

14th October – Newcastle

15th October – Leeds

19th October – Birmingham

If you would like to attend please [email Justin Mulcahy](#) or call on 020 7553 7640.

We look forward to seeing you there!



Joss Smith

Head of Policy and Regional Development

Parliamentary roundup

Parliament is currently in recess so no new information is available. This section will be updated after Parliament returns to normal business on September 6th.

Consultations

[2010 Drug strategy consultation paper](#) – Home Office

This is the first concrete and detailed announcement relating to the new Government's plans for drug policy. It is based around four themes: preventing drug use, led by the Department for Education; strengthening enforcement, led by the Home Office and Ministry of Justice; rebalancing treatment to support drug-free outcomes, led by the Department of Health; and supporting recovery to break the cycle of drug addiction, led by the Department of Work and Pensions.

At present there is little content relating to families affected by drugs and alcohol so Adfam would strongly encourage all those with an interest in this area to make their own submission. Adfam will be making a submission and a joint submission with other organisations. The consultation closes on the 30th September.

Families with multiple problems: a partnership approach – Adfam

In October 2010 Adfam will be running a series of nationwide consultations on responding to families with multiple needs. The consultations will ask participants to work with Adfam's Virtual Family model to explore and discuss ways of effective working with complex issues in a joined-up way. The events will be held in Taunton, London, Newcastle, Leeds and Birmingham. For further details see the [Adfam website](#) or email j.mulcahy@adfam.org.uk to register.

Grandparent Carers event – Adfam and Grandparents Plus

On Monday September 13th 2010, a joint event between Adfam's Grandparent Carers Project and [Grandparents Plus](#) will be held in London. It is open to both grandparents and the professionals that work with them and will be a great opportunity for grandparent carers to meet each other, network and share their experiences. There will be workshops, speakers and a lunch and the event will run from 10:30am to 2:30pm.

If you would like to attend please email [Vicky Brooks](#) for further details and venue information.

Rebalancing the Licensing Act – Home Office

This [Home Office](#) consultation offers the chance for interested individuals to provide feedback on the government's plans to revise the current Licensing Act. Figures from the year 2009/10 show that

nearly half of all violent crimes are alcohol-related and there are 6.6 million alcohol-related admissions to hospital every year, at great cost to the NHS. The government would therefore like to give more power to police and local authorities to remove drinking licenses from premises causing problems, shut down places that repeatedly sell alcohol to children and charge more for late drinking licenses. There is an [online form](#) which can be used to make a submission and you can also download the whole [consultation document](#). It is closing on 8 September 2010.

[Refreshing the National Carers Strategy](#) – Adfam

The coalition government is currently [running a consultation](#) aimed at refreshing the previous government's strategy 'Carers at the heart of 21st century families and communities'. It wishes to produce a plan of work for 2011-15 which outlines priorities of work for the government in partnership with carers, local authorities, the NHS and others. [Adfam](#) is going to make a submission to the [Department of Health](#) explaining the priorities of families affected by drug and alcohol use and would value your input. If you would like to give your views on improving support for carers please [submit to our consultation](#). This will be open until September 6th.

Reports and announcements

Click on the report titles to access the documents.

[Children talking to ChildLine about parental alcohol and drug misuse](#) – NSPCC/ChildLine

Taken from helpline calls from April 2008 - March 2009, this report looks at the number and nature of calls to ChildLine which concern parental drug and alcohol use. Key findings included that children often took on caring roles and saw it as their responsibility to solve their parents' problems; children counselled about parental substance use often talked about physical abuse, family relationship problems and neglect; the largest percentage of callers about these problems were aged between 13 and 15; and more girls called than boys. Around twice as many children rang about alcohol issues than about drugs.

[Business plan](#) – NTA

The NTA Business Plan promotes a drug treatment system enabling individuals to overcome addiction as quickly and as safely as possible. It examines those priorities of the government with the ambition of a rapid transformation of the treatment system focusing on a continued recovery and reintegration into the local community. The Business Plan demonstrates key actions taken by the NTA along with future plans for improving relationships between treatment services, encouraging support services for families and continuing to support the Drug Interventions Programme. The Business Plan focuses on support for individuals whereby 'effective drug treatment enables addicts to turn round their lives bringing benefits not only to themselves, but to their families and societies.'

[The potential of recovery capital](#) – Royal Society of Arts

This paper from the [RSA](#) outlines the nature of recovery capital and explores how individual successes can impact upon a community or group as a whole. Recovery capital is defined as the range of resources that a person can draw upon in their recovery journey. It includes social resources such as friends, family and partners, human and cultural capital such as skills, attitudes and beliefs and physical capital such as savings or property. The report acknowledges that recovery is something rooted in community and 'a powerful force not only in transforming the lives of individuals blighted by addiction but in impacting on their families and communities'.

[Getting it Right for Young Carers: The Young Carers Strategy for Scotland 2010-2015](#)

– Scottish Government

This document outlines the priorities the Scottish Government has identified as necessary to support young carers in the country. It concludes that young carers can benefit from the caring work they do, however the demands can at times be huge. It might provide them with personal skills and teach them about the family but it also may prove highly stressful and detrimental to health and wellbeing. Early intervention is suggested as the best way to support the young carers. By early identification and assessment of young carers, agencies and practitioners can work out how best to provide the support it is inappropriate for young carers to supply themselves. The strategy also outlines measures such as producing a good practice guide for teachers and the commissioning of research into young carers.

Featured issue

[Supporting families affected by substance use and domestic violence](#) - Adfam

This report demonstrates the emergence of work bringing together specialist alcohol, drug and domestic violence agencies, focusing on the impact of recurring problems affecting the family of the individual user. With little research about how family members are supported when dealing with these overlapping issues and how young people understand and cope with these problems, this report outlines the project designed to explore the views and perspectives of adult and young family members of substance users.

Methodology

The project worked with two distinct groups of family members: young people living with parental substance use, and adult family members whose experience has led to them running family support groups. Focus groups used for the young people were designed to hear their views about what makes a happy or unhappy relationship, without using direct discussion about domestic abuse, alcohol and drug issues. Young people were then given the chance to express their views about messages that other young people should hear about alcohol, drugs and relationships whilst describing their own experiences of what they do when things get on top of them.

The adult sample conducted individual telephone interviews with Family Member Support Providers, allowing time for in-depth private discussion. The family support providers are a unique group, having dual roles both as family members who have, or had, a family member with a substance use problem, and also as providers of support services for other family members. Routine questions regarding domestic violence were not asked by the Family Member Support Providers at the start of the family members' contact, suggesting people should disclose when they felt ready to do so and in their own time.

Findings

The project illustrated that young people have a range of opinions about the components of happy and unhappy relationships, and demonstrated diverse levels of understanding regarding the impacts of drugs, alcohol and abusive behaviour on relationships. The project highlighted clear differences in understanding and experience for young people according to age. The exercises provided for young people showed that the impact on relationships can depend on the strength and type of substance used. From the project one of the clearest messages that the young people expressed was that 'getting help for alcohol and drug problems does not necessarily improve relationships.'

Research with the family support providers took a very different path to that expected, highlighting the predominance of child to parent abuse rather than partner to partner domestic abuse. The abuse was found to be perpetrated by a substance using older or adult child, whereby frequent conflict was reported within families living with a substance user. Abuse and violence by substance using children towards their parents tended to mirror gendered violence from male to female

partners, with more sons committing violent and abusive threats towards their mothers. From this research it is particularly clear that issues regarding child to parent abuse need to be assessed. Family support services will also benefit from information helping identify and address partner abuse, ensuring their services are able to maximize support for family members suffering from domestic abuse in relationships.

Conclusion

This research project has allowed for a further understanding of the experiences of two groups of family members with regards to substance misuse, relationships and domestic abuse. The project has highlighted the important changes and developments for educating those supporting young people living with parental substance use, as well as areas of policy, practice and research that need to be developed in order to meet the needs of family members living with a loved one's substance use.