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Adfam Grandparents Project
Supporting Grandparents: Learning From Practice

Adfam Grandparent Carers Project
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Workshop agenda

- Who are Adfam?
- Policy context
- Introduction to the project
- Project aims
- Scoping
- Grandparent carer quotes
- Exercise
- Mind the Gap DVD – the experience of grandparent carers
- Exercises
- Questions/comments
- What grandparents have told us they want/ coming soon
- Contact me.

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- Adfam are the national umbrella organisation working to improve the quality of life for families affected by drug and alcohol use. Adfam provides direct support to families through publications, training, prison visitors' centres, outreach work and signposting to local support services.
- Adfam's goal is that no family member in need of support should go without it, and works to inform and influence Government policy, the media, and national and local services to achieve this.

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Policy context

- Key, is the **2009 drug strategy**'s commitment to focus more on families, addressing: the needs of parents and children as individuals, as well as working with whole families to prevent drug use, reduce risk, and get people into treatment.
- The 2008 drugs strategy **committed to protect families and communities** "We will prevent intergenerational harm and support access to treatment by:
  "Supporting kin carers, such as grandparents, who take on care responsibilities for the children of substance-misusing parents with improved information and support"

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Policy context

- **The 2008 NTA guidance** on the National Treatment Agency (2008) ***Supporting and involving carers*** is clear on the benefits of engaging with family members on positive treatment outcomes.
- **'Hidden Harm'** – Supporting grandparents raising their grandchildren because of parental substance misuse contributes to many of the recommendations laid out in the 'Hidden Harm' report. Link: http://drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk/publication-search/acmd/hidden-harm2835.pdf?view=Binary

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Introduction

- In the UK, especially since 1994, there has been an increase in the total number of children being looked after in 'out of home' placements. Kinship care arrangements are forming an increasingly larger proportion of these placements, with estimates at between 12% to 20%. This compares to 11% in children's homes and 6% who are adopted (as recorded in 2002).
- This rise is taking place within a context of scandals about residential care; more diverse family structures; poor outcomes for children leaving care; a shortage of foster carers; an over-representation of BME young people in care and financial pressures on children and foster care budgets.

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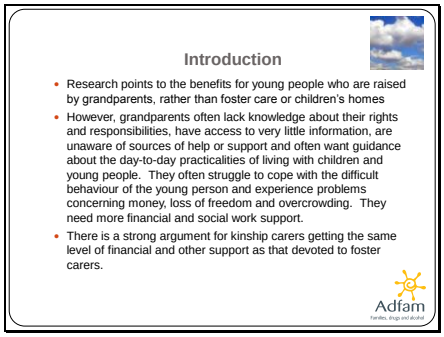

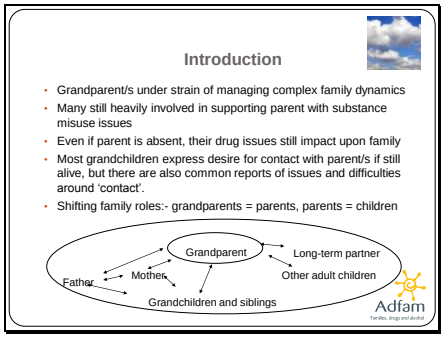

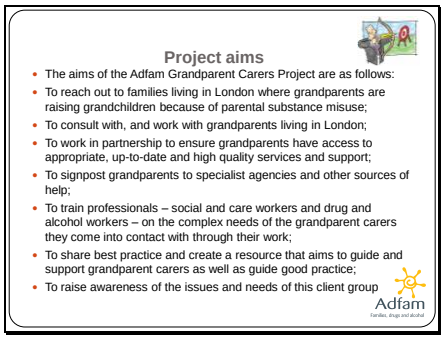

Scoping

We have contacted:

- Grandparent carers themselves - both face to face and by postal and telephone surveys;
- Drug and alcohol commissioners;
- Children's social and care teams;
- Carer leads;
- Young people's substance misuse coordinators;
- Service providers;
- Grandparent organisations;
- London carer organisations;
- Lawyer representatives and those offering advice on kin care;
- Support groups who work with kin carers.

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Quotes from grandparent carers

- "My daughter started taking drugs after she had her second child. I was looking after them without any help until her third child was born, and social services got involved (four kids under nine years). We have a residence order but I think we should be treated like foster parents and have what they are entitled to – they are strangers, we are family. When my boyfriend became sick I could not be there with him when he died, because of the children – there was no one to look after them."

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Quotes from grandparent carers

- 'I've got a residence order and social services just won't help. I have hurt my leg and I can't get down the stairs so he can't go to nursery, and 'cos of being disabled I am sleeping downstairs so he can't play either. Here we are, protecting the young and have no help at all. There is a nice parent and toddler group but they are all so young – they are nice to me but I don't fit in. I go there for him.'

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Ask the audience

- Does anybody from the audience work directly with grandparent carers?
- If so, what and how?

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Exercise

- Work in pairs (with the person sitting next to you) for five minutes and consider the difficulties that grandparent carers face. (5 minutes)
- Come back as a group and brainstorm ideas.

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Mind the Gap DVD

- Mentor UK worked in partnership with Adfam and Grandparents Plus to produce the Mind the Gap DVD in 2005-2008. The DVD aims to illustrate the experiences of a grandparent carer.
- Showing the DVD is a good way to effectively and quickly introduce the area and key issues to people.

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Findings (from work with grandparent carers)

- Drugs commonly used by parents are class A - crack cocaine
- Parental substance misuse often part of bigger picture
  - Domestic violence, bereavement, loss of partner/job
- Some parent/s or partners have been or still are in prison
  - For theft, dealing, possession, prostitution, violence
- Others homeless or living in 'crack dens'
  - At risk of physical threats from drug dealers or overdoses

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Findings (from work with grandparent carers)

- Grandparents recount receiving threats from drug dealers or people who their children have stolen money from to get drugs
  - In some cases, they have received threats from their own children (DV sometimes apparent)
- Some parents in rehab working to resolve substance misuse issues
  - Grandparents know it takes time and will inevitably encounter set-backs
  - Resignation that this is a painful journey, with no happy ending guaranteed.

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Findings

- Many grandchildren have experienced severe trauma
  - Babies born with addictions, toddler finding mother dead from
    - overdose
    - Separation from parent/s and siblings
- Grandparents recognise profound effects on grandchildren
  - Emotional and behavioural difficulties which get triggered easily
  - E.g., the making of Mother's Day cards, family trees at school etc.

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Findings

- Some families also face extortion and threats from drug world
  "They threatened to torch the house & hurt the grandchildren if I didn't pay them what she owed."
- Experience is life destroying
  "It's hell what we've gone through"
  "I'm still angry with everything my son has put us through."
- Yet, family duty and love is evident everywhere
  "People say you have a choice, but you don't"
  "What's the alternative, really?"

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Findings

- Grandparents have had to make range of difficult choices:
  - **To give up work**
    In order to have time to fight legal case or look after toddler or be on call if grandchild needs time-out from school
  - To take out an **injunction** against parent/s
    In order to have access to grandchildren
  - To decide **which grandchild** to look after in some cases
    As other siblings get put into foster care
  - To keep **supporting own child** with drug issues
    Ongoing battle
  - Or **give up** on them if it gets too much
    Either as result of death by overdose, or them not making any effort to change

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Findings

Grandparents dealing with three layers of loss/grief

1. For themselves
   - Failure and shame about not being able to prevent what happened
   - On top of own life issues – bereavement, domestic abuse etc.
   - Have also lost out on the much looked forward to experience of being a grandparent
2. For their children
   - Witnessing child/parent's spiralling self-destruction
   - Involvement with criminal activities, theft, prostitution, extortion
3. For their grandchildren
   - Witnessing horrors they've been through
   - Most children still love their parents (no matter what they've done)

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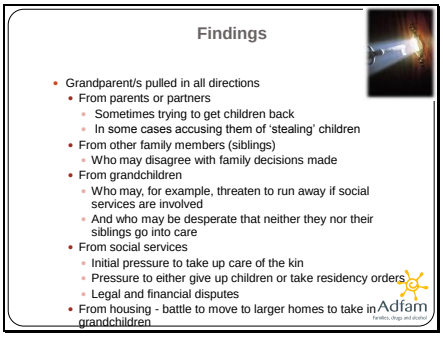

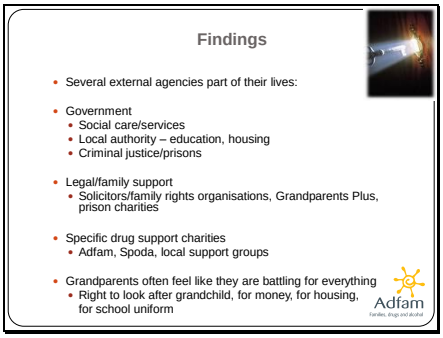

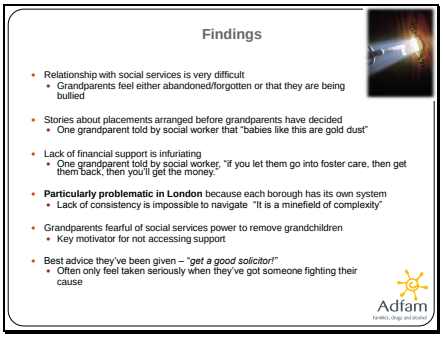

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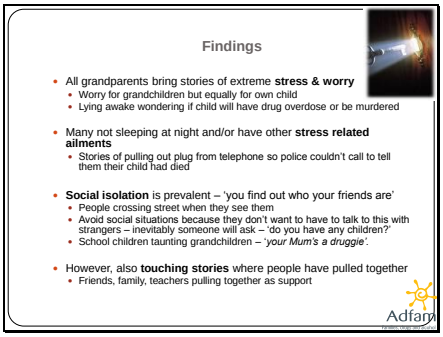

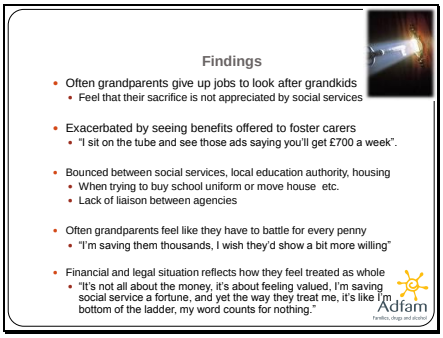

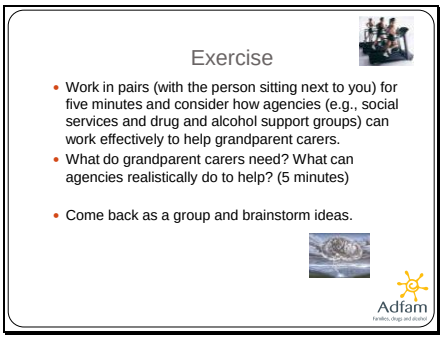

Exercise

- Work in pairs (with the person sitting next to you) to discuss what changes you can make to the way you work in order to respond to today's learning? (5 minutes)
- For example, 'what can I change about how I respond to individual grandparents?'
- If possible, feed these ideas back to the group.

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What grandparents have told us they want/need

- Grandparents main interest resource wise is **a tool to navigate the care system.** Specifically including
  - Legal and financial information on care orders;
  - Managing social services;
  - Signposts to support.
- In ideal world, they want a 24 hour helpline with dedicated expertise
  - Which shows deep need for information and help.

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Coming soon

May 2010 –
DCSF funded **resource** (in partnership with Adfam) that aims to guide and support grandparents carers. Adfam will be distributing copies.
Will include sections on: drugs, support, finance, legal, care orders, case studies (& verbatim quotes) from kin carers in different regions in England, social services, child care.
Advice relating to key issues: social isolation, health and stress, bereavement, behavioural issues.

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If you would like to talk about developing partnerships or enabling better support for grandparent carers, or to find out how to receive your copy of the new kinship care resource or these slides, contact

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References

- Information taken from the following exercises/resources:
  - Mentor UK *Mind the Gap* project (in partnership with Adfam and Grandparents Plus) findings and recommendations (2005-2008);
  - Silver Owl, Talk to Frank, Forster for Change qualitative research brief: developing a kin carer resource (February 2009). Information obtained through focus groups with groups of kinship carers in the South (through Adfam) and the North (through Spoda).
  - Adfam's training manual 'Engaging and supporting grandparents - a good practice guide to working with grandparents bringing up the children of substance users, participant's Notes (2009).

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