

EAST AYRSHIRE

ADULT PROTECTION COMMITTEE

SOCIAL WORK SERVICES AND RECOVERY FROM SUBSTANCE MISUSE: A REVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE

17 MAY 2011

Report by the Team Manager (addictions) East Ayrshire Council

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the Adult protection committee with evidence to the effectiveness of Social Work interventions in the recovery of people with problematic drug and alcohol use.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Following discussion with Scottish Government and the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS), the Association of Directors of Social Work (ADSW) substance misuse standing committee in partnership with IRISS and Scottish Government issued a tender for a review of the evidence base to determine the contribution made by social work and social care to supporting people with alcohol and/or other drug problems. The findings were to be set within the context of the recovery based approach to working with substance use that is at the core of Scotland's national drugs strategy.
- 2.2 Following the tender exercise, the contract was awarded to Dr Sarah Galvani from the University of Bedfordshire.

3. THE REPORT

- 3.1 The report provides evidence of effectiveness of social work interventions in three specific areas:
 - Evidence of the effectiveness of social work/social care interventions with people with substance use problems.
 - Information about social services' workforce development in the area of substance use
 - Evidence of specific social work roles and functions with people who have problem drug and/or alcohol use
- 3.2 During the research, the authors discovered that unfortunately, of the relevant and appropriate studies, the majority were from the USA, with eight being from the UK, and none from Scotland. The report is available on <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/resource/Doc/346164/0115212.pdf>

4. FINDINGS

Evidence of the effectiveness of social work/social care interventions with people with substance use problems

- 4.1 Of the 57 studies examined, there was a surprising absence of interventions relating to substance misuse and older people, people with disabilities, children in care with substance misuse issues or domestic abuse.
- 4.2 Most of the studies related to care management. This care management becomes effective when
- The form of care management offered matches the needs of the service users being worked with: the more complex the needs of the service user group, the more intensive and long-term the form of care management will need to be.
 - The more serious the problems of service users, the more likely that care management will be beneficial.
 - Approaches that focused on developing and sustaining a relationship appeared more likely to be linked to positive outcomes than forms of care management which focused on effective service coordination.
 - An emphasis on creatively engaging individuals, for instance through out-of hours work and interventions based in service users' homes or other places that they might attend
 - Access to additional services rather than simply coordinating existing services.
- 4.3 In addition to the findings on care management, there were a number of studies identifying promising social work contributions to helping people with drug and/or alcohol problems to recover. These included:
- Intensive interventions for families where children were at risk of entering care.
 - Outreach services for homeless individuals with problem drug and/or alcohol use.
 - Promising interventions for individuals where mental health issues co-exist with alcohol and/or other drug problems.

Workforce Development

- 4.4 Of the 48 studies examined, three key points emerged
- Training social workers can improve their attitudes, knowledge and work in this area. Additionally, where social workers feel it is a legitimate part of their job to address substance use, training has a greater impact.
 - There are a range of educational barriers that need to be overcome to ensure social workers are equipped for working with alcohol and drug use. In particular, "situational constraints" created by organisations that do not consider working with substance use to be their focus and the challenge of providing training and skilled supervision when there is limited expertise within the current workforce.

- In social services with specialist substance use workers, both staff and service users report more positively about their knowledge, skills and the support available to them.

Roles and Functions

- 4.5 The 25 studies examined pertaining to this area, revealed that social workers are well placed to play an active role in supporting people with alcohol and other drug problems because of the profession's holistic and ecological approach. The literature also suggests that an ongoing and intensive involvement with service users may often be an appropriate role for them to fulfil rather than a shorter, time-limited involvement.

Conclusions

- 4.6 Despite the strong evidence for the potential difference that social work can make to supporting the recovery journey, the review overall found that to-date the social work contribution has been insufficiently researched.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 The report makes six recommendations relating to policy and practice
- Review and expand care management in Scotland
 - There is an urgent need to develop and evaluate new approaches among older people, people with disabilities, people suffering domestic abuse and children in care.
 - Consideration could be given to mandating substance use education within the qualifying and post-qualifying social work curricula
 - All organisations providing social care provision should have a clear responsibility to ensure its workforce have the skills and support to help individuals with drug or alcohol problems.
 - Develop and monitor relationship skills
 - Ensure effective and informed supervision

6. RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

- 6.1 In order to ensure that the reviewed research reaches a wide audience and is used to inform practice, ADSW have produced the research results as an eight page easy to read practitioners briefing.
- 6.2 In addition, ADSW are currently preparing briefing sessions for practitioners in order to further discuss the findings and implications. The first of these sessions is scheduled to take place in Edinburgh on 22 June 2011.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR EAST AYRSHIRE

- 7.1 Training for children and families social workers via the Getting Our Priorities Right (GOPR) agenda has been ongoing for a number of years. Such is the stated value of this multi agency training that discussions are ongoing with children and families team managers to deliver this training specifically to all newly qualified social workers entering the service.
- 7.2 This GOPR training is delivered using the skills and experience of the dedicated children and families addiction staff who also play a key role in advising and supporting social workers where problematic substance use is an issue in the care of children.
- 7.3 Despite the lack of evidence relating to interventions around substance use and older people, the occupational therapist (OT) for falls in older people relating to alcohol use is viewed as being a positive addition to the substance use field in East Ayrshire.
- 7.4 East Ayrshire Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (ADP) has now established and operational group examining provision within adult services to develop recovery for individuals and communities.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 It is recommended that the Adult Protection Committee:
- i) Recognise the significant role played by Social Work and social care in recovery from problematic substance use;
 - ii) note the limited research within Scotland;
 - iii) support the practitioners briefing session on 22 June 2011;
 - iv) otherwise, notes the content of the report.

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