

EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS UNIT
FEEDBACK FROM THE FAMILY SUPPORT SEMINARS

Nov-Dec 2002

Supporting the families and carers of drug users

The report is a review of the research evidence and current practice which provides a range of evidence and information to assist in strengthening the range and quality of support available to families and carers of drug users. The report sets out for Drug Action Teams, service commissioners, managers and practitioners in the statutory and voluntary sector, and in the community:

- the impact of drug use on families and carers, and the nature and extent of their needs
- the role and purpose of different approaches to supporting families, including models of family support groups
- examples of practice
- sources of support and funding.

The report was published in November 2002 and the EIU conducted three seminars throughout Scotland to disseminate the main messages and promote discussion amongst service commissioners, service providers and family members.

The EIU undertook to inform participants at the seminars of the main points raised during the discussions. These have been grouped together under the following headings:

- Key features of family support
- Working in partnership with others
- What a national family support network might do

Key features of family support are:

- Support should focus upon the needs of the family / carer and not the drug user
- A wide range of methods of support is required to meet the different needs of families, for example, children, men, partners, grandparents
- Support should be easy to access, in terms of where it is located, and be available at the most appropriate times. It should also be provided in an appropriate language. Easy access to information is a key form of support
- Support should be adequately resourced, and those delivering support adequately skilled and supported themselves
- Support can be best strengthened when agencies and services work together to share information, experience and resources

- Agencies and services should have a clear understanding of what support exists and how it can be accessed
- Support should be confidential and anonymous and be delivered in a non-judgemental manner
- Agencies and services should ensure that there are standards, guidelines and policies in place relating to supporting families, as this will assist in ensuring consistent quality of practice
- Families should be involved in identifying their needs and also of ways of responding to such needs
- A broad range of people should be involved in supporting families, in particular other family members, GPs and health visitors, drug agency workers, voluntary sector, community agencies and other statutory bodies.

Working in partnership

Suggested responsibilities and action points for DATs with regard to strengthening partnership working with families are:

- DATs should take responsibility for investigating what gaps exist in meeting the needs of families and carers
- DATs should take responsibility for raising awareness of the issues affecting families among agencies and services
- DATs should develop a directory of what agencies and services can offer families and carers and how such services can be accessed
- DATs should develop a structure that provides families with a voice to participate within decision making. Participants should also be properly compensated for their involvement
- DATs should ensure that the needs of families feature more prominently in their Corporate Action Plans
- DATs should dedicate a worker to strengthening the support to families and carers, and also to raise the level of communication.

Suggested responsibilities and action points for service providers included:

- Seek to work with others in order to address some of the needs that families and carers may have
- Ensure that you are aware of what support exists in your area and how it can be accessed
- Go out and actively make contact with families and family support groups, carer groups etc
- Ensure all staff have a clear understanding of the issues affecting families and carers

- Consult directly with families and carers
- Be open and honest about what your service can and cannot do.

Suggested responsibilities and action points for family support groups included:

- Go out and actively make contact with agencies, service providers, DATs etc – promote your existence
- Learn how the 'system' works, what the role and function of DATs and forums are, what agencies do and why they do it etc
- Seek support from others to assist in developing the group or overcoming difficulties
- Look to working in partnership with others rather than in isolation.

What a national family support network might do:

The function of a national family support network could include:

- Developing a central resource base of information, training materials, funding sources etc
- To lobby and raise awareness of issues affecting families and carers at a national level
- To promote and share good practice, and establish guidelines to assist in developing good practice
- To provide or promote access to training on issues affecting families and methods of supporting families.
- To provide or promote access to consultancy, training and advice to family support groups
- To produce a range of information such as a regular newsletter and other publicity to promote understanding of the issues families face
- To develop a national directory of what support exists and how it can be accessed
- To establish a national telephone helpline for families and carers
- To organise conferences and seminars throughout Scotland
- To establish strong links with other organisations such as Drug Action Team Association, STRADA and other UK bodies
- Assist and co-ordinate future research into the impact of drug use upon families.

At the seminars there was some discussion about the possibility of any existing family support groups or organisations taking on the remit of such a network. There were mixed views and the majority opinion was that such a network should be developed by representation from throughout Scotland; and that it should be member-led and person-centred.

The Scottish Executive is currently working with a core group of representatives from family support groups from throughout Scotland to develop such a network and it is hoped that a management committee will be elected at the forthcoming Family Support Scotland Conference in May. Details of this event will be sent out via the Network steering group.

Next steps

- As requested at the seminars the EIU intends to gather further feedback regarding the content of report from families and family support groups to identify if there are ways in which the most relevant information could be presented in a more accessible format
- An evaluation guide for services supporting families and carers will be produced by the EIU over the coming year.