



# Working with Parents

the e-newsletter for people working with drug-using parents

## Introduction

Welcome to *Working with Parents* the first e-newsletter for parenting educators and supporters who work with drug-using parents.

from each other. There's no fee, in fact the only requirement for taking part is that you tell us about your projects - what has or hasn't worked, so we can all learn from it.

In 2001, the *Equal Space* project was initiated by the Parenting Education Support Forum and DrugScope to set up parenting courses for drug users linking with local services. We knew that this work had more potential and, in January 2005 at the *Families, Carers and Drugs* conference, DrugScope and Adfam approached people with the possibility of connecting practitioners working in the field. This network for practitioners could help us share good practice and experience, keep up-to-date with developments nationally and give people a way of talking to others in a similar role.

Feel free to pass this on to colleagues and associates who might wish to hear from us and have them sign up to our *Working with Parents* newsletter.

To send something for inclusion in the newsletter, please email Carol Marsh at [carolm@drugscope.org.uk](mailto:carolm@drugscope.org.uk)

Please let us know what you would like to see from this *Working with Parents* newsletter - we want to include your ideas so that you can get the most out of it.

*From everyone at Adfam, Alcohol Concern, DrugScope and Parenting Education & Support Forum.*

The e-newsletter is a great way for us to share information and we would like to hear from you. Please send us examples of what you are doing so that we can include these in future editions. Our aim is also to set up three or four meetings in the year when we can get together and learn

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### Contact details

To send something for inclusion in this newsletter please email Carol Marsh:  
[carolm@drugscope.org.uk](mailto:carolm@drugscope.org.uk)

*"Working with Parents"* is produced by the 'Drug and Alcohol Education and Prevention Team', a joint project between Alcohol Concern and DrugScope.

## National Occupational Standards for Work with Parents

Research has proved that the quality of parenting is crucial to successful outcomes for children and government policy is therefore increasingly focussed on work with parents. Parenting education and support is recognised as providing a key contribution to both the Government's social inclusion and skills agenda.

In some cases, the staff providing education and support for parents have received no specific training for this work. There was a growing awareness that quality standards are needed to ensure that work with parents is of the highest standard. The Standards were urgently needed in view of the shortage of workers



in the sector and the need to build a trained and effective workforce. Staff need to be carefully recruited, and given initial and on-going training and supervision.

The Parenting Education & Support Forum is the national umbrella body for people who work with parents. In partnership with the Life Long Learning Sector Skills Council UK and with funding received from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) we have developed National Occupational Standards (the Standards) for Work with Parents. The standards development work has been funded by the DfES due to the urgency in developing the National Transferable Qualifications Framework promised in the Green Paper "Every Child Matters".

The National Occupational Standards for Family Learning with leadership from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) was developed alongside the standards for work with parents. The parallel development of both sets of standards identified the common skills and understanding in the two areas of work and will enable

transferability between job roles and allow for effective use of resources.

On 26 April 2005, new National Occupational Standards (the Standards) for work with parents will be submitted to the Standards Approval Board. All who work with parents in the public, voluntary and private sectors will be expected to meet or work towards meeting these standards. The Standards have to be accepted by the four nations.

One of the new set of Underlying Principles and Values accompanying the Standards states "anyone working with parents should have specific training for that purpose". The parenting education and support sector works in a wide variety of areas and at different levels and embraces work delivered from health, education, social care, community justice and community development perspectives.

In time, a suite of qualifications and awards will be developed to support the Standards, including distance learning. There are already some awards available from universities

at degree, diploma and certificate levels, and from other awarding bodies pre-university levels NVQ 2 and 3. Although the Standards will be used as the basis for the development of National Qualifications, training and continuing professional development, they can also be used for other workforce management and development activities such as:

- Appraisal
- Job descriptions
- Person specifications
- Developing project briefs
- Managing change
- Benchmarking performance indicators
- Risk management
- Business planning
- Judging quality of provision
- Bidding for funding
- Contract specifications
- Marketing

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## What about the Dads?

Our new partnership project with Fathers Direct, funded by the Parenting Fund, looks solely at fathers and how they are affected by drugs and alcohol in a family's life, **writes Adfam.**

The work covers the whole spectrum of how drugs can be a part of fathers' lives: how dads can talk to their children about drugs and alcohol; handle their children's substance use; or move from drug using to parenting again. This piece looks specifically at where the father is using substances.

Since *Hidden Harm: Responding to the needs of children of problem drug users* appeared, it has been impossible to ignore the attention placed on this distinct group by the media and the chances that this has provided for practitioners looking to work with these children; the report has made a platform from which agencies can advocate for more research and resources to be dedicated to this area.

Clearly, it is imperative to support the needs of children affected by

their fathers' drug use but we must couple this with helping dads tackle their drug use and become fully involved as a parent - learning how to live as a family. There is a clear need to deliver effective support to fathers stopping or reducing their drug use, to manage their drug treatment and learn how to come to terms with the impact that their habit has had - family mediation and parenting skills classes can be essential tools in creating a positive result for everyone.



We know that children of drug users are not automatically at risk - many children of substance-misusing fathers receive good fathering, stability and have all their needs fully met - but beyond practical issues, eg erratic mealtimes, substance misuse can have, there may be an impact on a child's emotional well-being where fathers under the influence of substances are emotionally unavailable to their child.

With Fathers Direct, Adfam is gathering examples of what works and how we can attract fathers to activities or work that might help them move forward. Traditionally, the field has focussed on ways for people to 'talk', find 'support' and enter 'counselling'. Although it is a myth that men are unable to talk about their feelings, it can be true that they may not feel comfortable

accessing services that emphasise this 'softer' side rather than practical ways forward. Practitioners need to be able to find a way of ensuring that their services are as attractive to men, and the way they may want to communicate, as women.

With the increased awareness of fathers' needs - especially with the growth and clarity of work by groups such as Fathers Direct - we have a huge opportunity to capitalise on the moment and deliver some targeted and effective ideas to help address the discrete needs of substance-using fathers.

Already, Adfam has collaborated on a special training forum looking at *drug use and fathers* at the Fathers Direct national conference, and is working to develop materials in this area.

We know that it is important for us to have our own house in order and everyone at Adfam will undergo special training and discussion sessions around how to work with fathers in a way that genuinely speaks to them. It would be easy to follow the mold of support groups that deal primarily with mothers - but we really need to examine how we attract more men to these activities.

The partnership is keen to gather more work on policy and practice in working with dads.

For more information on this work or to offer your own experience to the evidence base, please contact Rachel Nicholson - [r.nicholson@adfam.org.uk](mailto:r.nicholson@adfam.org.uk)

## Equal Space - A short follow up report

In addition to the report from Gary Seaman about the exciting work in Merton, three other areas in which the Equal Space project was undertaken have provided insights into developments since the two-day training was carried out. The key learning from all three areas provides valuable insights for other projects.

In one area, a feasibility study was carried out to develop services for parents but this has not yet been acted on.

### Key learning:

- Professionals can identify a need for parenting support for drug-using parents and see potential benefits of early (as opposed to post-conviction) intervention.

- There is a need for an auditing tool to clarify extent of need across agencies.
- A programme champion in a senior position is needed to carry forward any innovative service such as this.
- Professionals involved in the feasibility study felt that inter-agency communication had to improve to make the project successful.

In another area a lead worker was identified and work with a small group of parents has been carried out.

### Key learning:

- Support of the DAT from the outset appears to have been crucial.

- Equal Space training was not enough on its own to develop the pilot project, but helped staff to identify their needs and provided the motivation to develop the pilot project.
- To sustain this initiative there is a need for a clearly defined project lead whose role includes family liaison and parenting education, as well as co-ordination of support from key local agencies.
- The Hidden Harm report has helped to gain more strategic support for this work.

In a third area the training was duplicated for a second group and has helped existing projects extend their work with parents who use drugs.



### Key learning:

- Parenting education was already well established but Equal Space provided an opportunity to develop the confidence of professionals who were not accustomed to working with drug and alcohol using parents
- The project brought together all agencies who were doing similar work, including some who had not been able to join in previous multi-agency work
- The Hidden Harm report has now given this work a much stronger focus in the City.

Thanks to all those projects who found time to provide the feedback on which this short report is based.

Were you involved in the Equal Space project? Jenny McWhirter at

DrugScope would be delighted to hear from you and learn about what has happened in your area. What has helped and hindered development of parenting support for drug and alcohol misusing parents? What are the next steps?

Contact [jennym@drugscope.org.uk](mailto:jennym@drugscope.org.uk)

## Parenting Strategies

In the London Borough of Merton we run a programme one day a week over seven weeks specifically to meet the needs of parents/carers and significant adults, who recognise that they have, or had, an issue around drugs/alcohol.

This has developed from the Equal Space project, a joint project developed by DrugScope and the Parenting Education & Support Forum.

### Objectives

The aims for the parenting education programmes were to enable participants to:

- Improve their communication skills with their children.
- Identify and begin to meet their own needs as a way of enabling them to meet their children's needs more effectively.

- Give and receive mutual support
- Identify their fears and anxieties about being a parent and a drug user.
- Identify and access further sources of support.
- Develop coping strategies.

The current accredited course gives a potentially vulnerable and hard to reach group, positive insights and tools to develop their parenting in a non-judgemental and safe learning environment. The course is a generic humanistic programme and fits well to the needs of the parents. Peer educators deliver it, which is effective in breaking down preconceived barriers and offers positive modelling.

The course looks at the parents' needs, and those of their children over seven weekly sessions, and includes: acknowledging and

accepting feelings; describing behaviours and descriptive praise without labelling; understanding children's needs; discipline and boundaries; dealing with a child when upset; listening skills; and empowerment/enabling the child/parent to learn positively. Also that parenting can be rewarding and fun!

Knowing where to get support is an integral part of this course so that positive lifestyle changes can be developed. Empowering parents to support their children via access to the wide range of services that Merton offers builds self-esteem and engenders confidence in their ability to be a wonderful resource to their families, friends and community.

The process is working because we have established effective networking between as many statutory and voluntary agencies as possible, not always easy.



**“Empowering parents to support their children ... builds self-esteem and engenders confidence in their ability to be a wonderful resource to their families, friends and community”**



Having a joint role of service user involvement and parenting course delivery allows for the variables of staffing and agency roles. The course is funded by the Drug and Alcohol Team, run at a local, small and, most importantly, friendly college where everyone enjoys a post session lunch which doubles as bonding exercise and debrief.

I co-facilitate with a woman, which allows flexibility in meeting the group's needs and we run with approximately 50:50 gender mix with ages from 20 to 57. (I was moved by this man who said of his expectations, 'I want to learn how to

play with my grandchildren'.)

Each potential student is interviewed and potential fears, issues are discussed along with their motivation to access the course. Open and honest information at this point is essential as child concern issues and anonymity often come to the fore at this stage and building trust is paramount. Although structured, the course allows for enough flexibility to examine particular group issues in more depth.

The next course (begins in June) is advertised at least six weeks in

advance through agencies but more effective is that course participants are promoting it by word of mouth. Two men and two women are about to begin facilitator training for professionals and volunteers. This allows increased capacity to deliver employment opportunities and engagement with other providers.

The most important outcome is that, without exception, those that accessed the course felt more positive and could pass that onto their families.

Questions?

*Gary.seaman@merton.gov.uk*

## Parenting and Alcohol Project - Alcohol Concern

This exciting, new two-year project, supported by the Parenting Fund, aims to protect, improve the quality of life and life opportunities of children parented by someone who misuses alcohol.

The training programmes are being designed to develop the capacity of specialist alcohol services to support their clients in their parenting

role, and to develop the capacity of 'parenting professionals' to work effectively with parents who have alcohol-related problems.

We are looking to recruit alcohol specialists who work with parents who misuse alcohol as well as parenting professionals, such as health visitors, social workers, practice and school nurses and

teachers, who work with parents who misuse alcohol.

If you are interested in this project please look at the project detail and application form on our website

[www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk).

or email us at

*parenting@alcoholconcern.org.uk*

## Journeys: When parents use drugs

Children who live with substance-using parents may present as sad, unhappy and withdrawn. Their own self-esteem may well be affected as they feel they have no control over events within their own lives.

Adfam has produced a booklet specifically for children whose parents use drugs. The booklet is an excellent prompt for workers or

carers talking to a child or young person whose parents use drugs.

The booklet is divided into three sections, one for 5-11 year olds, one for older children and a central section for the adult reading through the booklet with the child or young person. The item comes with a mini-booklet with information on what to do in an emergency and

shows children why it is important for them to recognise and consider their own needs.

You can order the 'Journeys' by email at *publications@adfam.org.uk* or online at [www.adfam.org.uk](http://www.adfam.org.uk)



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Through this newsletter we intend to learn and share information and good practice. We know the field is looking for information as work with parents is developed, so please get in touch and let us know what you are doing.

If you do NOT want to receive future editions of *Working with Parents* or invitations to our meetings, email Carol Marsh ([carolm@drugscope.org.uk](mailto:carolm@drugscope.org.uk)).

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