

## Out of hours family support for young carers living with a substance misusing adult



### What is the initiative?

Out of Hours Family Support

### Who runs it?

Blackpool Carers Centre, in partnership with Blackpool Council's Children, Adults and Families Department – Learning, Schools and Communities Division

### Who does it benefit?

Young carers aged 5–18 in Blackpool living with a substance misusing adult in the family. Adult family members willing to engage in treatment services to address substance misuse issues.

### What does it do?

The project aims to provide a range of emotional and practical support to families in order to improve outcomes for young carers, the substance misusing adults they care for and the wider family.

Support provided includes guidance and information, emergency support planning and trips and activities for young carers and their families. In conjunction with partner agencies, such as Team Around the Family (TAF) units at Blackpool Council, the project builds on the existing strengths of the families they support. The project operates both within usual office hours as well as during the evening and weekends, offering wrap around support to the families involved in the project.

Adults need to be willing to engage with treatment services to address their substance misuse issues in order to be supported by the family support workers. If they choose not to engage with treatment then the project continues to support the young carers only.

### When did it start?

April 2012.

## Why was it started?

There were no services to support children affected by parental substance misuse after the closure of Blackpool's Children of Substance Misusers and Young Carers service. Over the past year Blackpool Carers Centre received over 30 referrals for children and young people living with parental substance misuse. The existing Out of Hours project at Blackpool Carers Service was supporting many young carers from substance misusing households, as it is often these families that need this kind of support most due to chaotic lifestyles, fractured family relationships and the complex nature of addiction and its accompanying issues. This provided the impetus to create a new service using a whole family support model to meet this identified need.

## What are the aims and objectives?

### Aims:

- To reduce excessive or harmful caring roles using a multi-agency, whole family model.
- To reduce the chances of young carers becoming substance misusers.
- To reduce the levels of isolation and poverty in the families supported.
- To facilitate a better working relationship between adult and children's services so that young carers can be identified earlier.
- To improve the school attendance of young carers.

### Objectives:

- To intervene early to ensure young carers do not take on additional duties, resulting in an inappropriate or excessive caring role.
- To engage specialist support so that adult family members can reduce their substance misuse and work towards solving their other problems.
- To ensure all adult services, drug and alcohol services and probation services are aware of all young carers and children within their client families.
- To empower young carers to feel more confident to ask for support whenever it is needed in their lives.

## How is it funded?

This partnership site has been funded via the Integrated Interventions programme, managed by Carers Trust with funding provided by the Department for Education towards the delivery of the Government's Carers Strategy.

## What has it achieved?

"We love coming out with you as we never get to do any of the good things like bowling and going to the cinema that we've done as we don't go anywhere with Mum. She never has any money but she said that

she is getting some help to sort things out and that she is going to get better so that we can do things that other families do. Mum really likes you as well.”

#### **Young carer**

“I just know that I can phone you and you’ll be there. No other service that is supposed to help me offers that. Once 5 o’clock comes every night I know that I’m not on my own anymore and that I have got you to help me if I need it. I don’t dread weekends anymore either as I know that I can phone and even arrange to see you if I need to.”

#### **Parent**

“I know we say that we have a Family Support service within Horizons but this isn’t really true. We have a service which supports adults affected by a family member’s substance misuse issues. We offer nothing to the children. The Out of Hours project gives me a bit of peace of mind that something is there and is being done to help these kids. People don’t realise just how bad some of these kids have it and anyone who says that the kids often don’t know or aren’t affected, don’t know what they are talking about. It’s just nice to know that support is there for the kids if they want it and they also have opportunities to experience ‘normal’ things that most kids take for granted.”

#### **Drug Support Worker who makes referrals to Out of Hours**

The project is now providing intensive and highly valued support to young carers and their substance misusing parents during evenings and weekends. All supported families have bespoke family support plans with agreed actions and many have benefited from the range of trips and activities available for the whole family, such as a visit to the zoo and games of bowling.

Providing trips which are for the whole family, and not just the young carer, have been very valuable and have produced some favourable outcomes. They have really helped families to bond together as a unit, socialise with each other and with people from outside their family. These trips have also allowed staff a better insight into the family dynamics than the usual consultations at home often allow.

Due to one Project Worker’s promotion of the service using her contacts in substance misuse services, the project has a high profile locally. Local networking has resulted in increased referrals and families benefiting from the project’s support and referral pathways into appropriate services.

A training pack for health, education and social care professionals – so they can better support families with parental substance misuse – has been developed alongside an Esmée Fairbairn funded family work project. Development of this training involved young carers caring for a parent with a substance misuse problem and some of the families on the Out of Hours project have prepared and delivered the training to professionals in Blackpool.

The success of the project so far has prompted Blackpool Council to sign up to a Memorandum of Understanding and a joint protocol between adults and children's services. Notably, the Out of Hours project has also been featured in the local media and on ITV's Daybreak, helping to raise awareness of young carers more generally.

## How have carers been involved in planning and delivering this work?

The design of the Out of Hours provision for substance misusing families was informed by the Young Adult Trustee Board and the 22-year-old Vice-Chair of Blackpool Carers Centre. Since the project has been up and running, young carers and their families are consulted on the planning of all aspects of service delivery via a mini Trustee Board, and both young carers and parents are invited to design and evaluate activities and trips. All activities are in line with the Hear by Right standards, promoted by the National Youth Agency.

The young carers have helped to develop a DVD training pack with another family work project. Some of the families on the Out of Hours project have also delivered this training to social workers and healthcare professionals.

## How is the initiative run?

The majority of the service delivery is conducted by Blackpool Carers Centre. Blackpool City Council's work is more on the macro level as it is focussed on implementing robust protocols and referral pathways, and raising agencies' awareness of whole-family working with young carers and encouraging multi-agency collaboration.

To run the project, three part-time Family Workers are employed by Blackpool Carers Centre, who between them cover office hours, evenings and weekends. Every month, staff from Blackpool Council agencies are invited to shadow one of the Blackpool Carers Centre Family Workers in an effort to promote the advantages of whole-family working.

At present, 55 young carers in 29 families are served by the project. Referrals are received from a wide variety of sources, with many coming from drug and alcohol services based in Blackpool. One of the part-time Family Workers also happens to work at Drugline and this link has led to a high number of referrals from drug and alcohol services. It has also meant Blackpool Carers has been able to renew contact with some families they once saw years ago.

Consent to involve the children with the project must initially be gained from their parents, so an appointment is made with them to run through the aims and purpose of the project. If they agree, parents then sign consent forms and a general information sheet about the support for each child who is to be involved.

Once consent has been given, children may be assessed using the Multidimensional Assessment of Caring Activities (MACA) and Positive and Negative Outcomes of Caring (PANOC) tools.<sup>1</sup> However, Blackpool Carers Centre believes that for the

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1 Tools from Joseph S, Becker F, Becker S (2012), 'Manual for Measures of Caring Activities and Outcomes for Children and Young People'. Carers Trust.

majority of its families the MACA and PANOC assessment tools are unsuitable. Children of families affected by parental substance misuse tend to self-care rather than provide care and support to their parents or siblings, and as such, the activities they do, are not reflected well by the MACA tool nor do they tend to identify with the term young carer. Family dynamics within substance misusing households can also be relatively stable but then change dramatically within the space of a day. Therefore, a constant and flexible approach to family assessment, which incorporates the My Life Now tool for individual assessment and outcome measurement, is considered to be more appropriate. These assessments can take place in the home setting, at school or at a neutral location such as a local cafe or fast food outlet.

Young carers are given information at the assessment stage about what help and support the project can offer them and the sort of activities and trips organised for them and their families. Help and support for the young carers can consist of one-to-one meetings, emotional support via email, phone and social networking sites, and trips and activities – often involving their family members as well.

Support for families includes Blackpool Carers Centre collaborating with other agencies to co-ordinate the statutory provision for the families they are involved with and to foster sustainable multi-agency working. Blackpool Carers Centre works with criminal justice agencies, adult substance misuse and adult mental health agencies to develop closer working relationships which will in turn support early identification of children and young people in families with a substance misusing adult. Ultimately, the strong protocols promoted by Blackpool Council will ensure seamless pathways for the whole family and more effective inter-agency working.

Most families' contact with the service will be quite long-term, due to the nature of addiction and substance misuse. Contact is gradually reduced over a six month period with families who have become stable and feel they do not need such intensive support until both parties agree to close the case. For families receiving reduced support, the onus is on them to contact the service if their situation changes or if intense support is required again. Cases can be closed due to non-engagement, however, in these situations appropriate referrals will be made to other agencies.

Support is offered to parents who misuse alcohol or other substances if they agree to engage with local treatment services. Beneficial support for parents can include trips and activities for the whole family, emergency support planning and signposting to other useful services. Usually the support is given at the weekend or in the evenings to ensure that the whole family can be involved. However, if parents cease to engage with treatment or with the Out of Hours support, then support will only be offered on an ongoing basis to their children. Intensive work with families cannot be carried out if the adult is not willing to make the necessary changes to improve the lives of their children and themselves.

All contact with individuals is recorded on the system CharityLog. Attendance by both adult and children's teams from the local authority and Blackpool Carers Centre at partner agency team meetings and events is encouraged and actively participated in. Presentations have been given to the substance misuse practitioners in drug and alcohol services and there is a close working relationship with the Family Worker employed in drug and alcohol services. The service is promoted and advertised by word of mouth, leaflets and networking with potential referral agencies.

## What methods have been particularly effective?

Developing relationships with families and young people based on honesty and mutual trust has been extremely beneficial. As the service is voluntary, with families being able to withdraw at any time, this engenders trust among families who are often wary of statutory involvement in their lives. However, it is also made clear to parents that because of Blackpool Carers Centre's commitment to child protection, the relevant authorities will always be contacted if necessary.

Transparency with clients and close working relationships with partner agencies has cut down on the issue of client families playing services off against each other. Clients know that their Family Workers attend Common Assessment Framework, Team Around the Family, child protection and core group meetings and any discrepancies in the information they give to different agencies will be challenged.

The provision of family trips has been greatly valued, particularly the opportunity for quality family time as for many it was the first time they had been out as a family unit in a long time, if at all. They have also given staff a better insight into the dynamics of the families they support and encouraged parental engagement with the service. Getting parents to see the service as something for them as a family and not a babysitting service has been instrumental.

## Have there been any challenges along the way?

Recruiting workers to posts outside of normal office hours was a challenge. Blackpool Carers Centre had to put the job advert out three times which really slowed down the start of the project.

Getting workers in Substance Misuse to refer into the project was initially a challenge. Blackpool Carers Centre was very fortunate with the recruitment of one part-time Family Worker who also works for Renaissance at Drugline, a charity for substance misusers in Blackpool, and who has been able to encourage referrals by drawing upon her relationships with professionals in the field.

## What hints and tips might help me get started?

- Allow plenty of time to recruit the right employees for the project who are willing to work unsociable hours. Of course, as well as being prepared to work out of hours, Family Workers have also got to be knowledgeable, experienced and dedicated to this kind of work.
- Workers must have a supportive team approach to working out of hours. They need to be prepared to work flexibly and available to back up team members when they are not scheduled to work if necessary.

## Are there any useful documents or resources that could assist me?

The **Out of Hours** information booklet.

The **Substance Misuse** pages of the **Blackpool Carers Centre** website.

The **National Youth Agency's Hear By Right Standards Framework** and **FAQs**.

## Where can I get further information?

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