

Breaking the Cycle of Substance Misuse among Families

The results of a three-year Addaction pilot project

Breaking the Cycle

A Three Year Pilot Project

(This report is based on the independent report from the MHRDU at the University of Bath)

Executive Summary

Context

Until recently the treatment of the substance user was the focus of treatment services with no real remit to address the context of their lives. The impact of parental substance misuse on children and young people has been largely disregarded except in situations where there are child protection issues.

The impact of drug and alcohol use on families has become more prominent in Government thinking. There is evidence of intergenerational transfer, that is that some children and young people are influenced by their parents' substance misuse and develop a substance use career of their own.

With the changing focus of alcohol and drug policy towards a more holistic approach, there is some evidence that including family members in treatment can produce positive outcomes and more likelihood of sustainable change for both substance misusers and members of their family.

In response to the evidence, Zurich Community Trust (ZCT) and Addaction established a partnership to develop an innovative project called Breaking the Cycle (BtC), to support and empower families where parents have substance misuse issues to improve their family functioning and family life and to provide an environment where their children can thrive.

The pilot

A variety of sites were selected to test the efficacy and feasibility of family interventions. These were in Tower Hamlets, Derby, and west Cumbria (two sites to engage with families with either parental drug use or alcohol use). It was envisaged that 150-200 families per year would benefit from engagement with BtC.

Project coordinators in each site assessed the families and developed care packages to help parents improve their parenting skills, improve communication between parents and children, and refer families to specialist services. The coordinators also sign-posted families to other sources of support, acted as advocates on behalf of families and developed partnership working with other agencies. This service was delivered mostly at home.

The impact on families with substance misuse

The objectives of Breaking the Cycle was to work with families to reduce their substance use, improve their parenting skills, help establish boundaries and structures within the home, put children's needs first and encourage the adults to improve their economic situation by claiming appropriate benefits, enrol on training courses and find paid or unpaid work outside the home.

Over the life of the project a total of 251 clients and 465 family members worked with BtC. Of the 251 cases, at the time of writing 152 clients had completed their involvement, with the remaining 99 still in progress.

Monitoring client outcomes was a vital process to assess whether clients met their treatment goals, and to establish whether BtC fulfilled its aims and objectives. A monitoring tool was developed and rolled out to all sites in October 2007. Evaluation data was collected from 68 families who had been engaged in and completed the pilot.

Overall, 83% of clients achieved some level of progress in working towards their treatment goals. 81% of parents stabilised, reduced or stopped highly problematic substance use that was impacting negatively on their and their family's lives.

In addition, 81.7% of parents reduced their involvement in harmful behaviours including involvement in unresolved disputes, domestic violence and engagement in crime; 84% of parents acknowledged the benefits of engaging in a meaningful occupation; 87% of mothers and/or fathers increased their efforts to prioritise their children's healthy development.

Breaking the Cycle was reported as providing a unique service which supported the client and family in a non-judgemental, non-authoritarian way; providing both good quality information and expertise in relation to addiction and its impact on the family; and providing practical support when families were in need or in crisis.

Clients and families described engagement with BtC as a "life-changing" experience. They valued the reliability of the service; home visits; and working with the coordinator to gain insight into the nature of addiction, the journey to recovery with its possibility of relapse, and the impact of their substance use on those around them, in particular their children.

The overall findings showed that the family-centred approach instigated by BtC, which included raising awareness of substance misuse and its impact on the family, in addition to the practical skills to support their needs and the understanding of family life, contributed to the empowerment, changes and improved lives of families engaged with BtC.

Evidence of impact of Breaking the Cycle

Area	Results	Quotes
Family functioning	Empowerment and practical support with organisation, consistency of family life, improved communication with and attention for children much appreciated and valued.	<p>“...she has helped me to become organised, carry a diary, write lists...”</p> <p>Drug user about Coordinator</p> <p>“She (grandmother) had her far too much...now... weekends ‘cos I might have rehearsals or a gig....but she knows I’ll be back on Mondays. She has much more structure, more routine...its so important ‘cos she goes from nursery to big school soon.”</p> <p>Drug user mother about daughter</p>
Prioritising children's development	Improved school attendance, help with understanding the importance of health care, nutrition etc., and with attending appointments, practical skills cited as important by parents and grandparents.	<p>Just because the user stops using it doesn't mean the difficulties go away, especially not for children.... People say children are resilient, they bounce back – but when they are damaged, it is hard, and this is damage.... Once S has sorted her head out with [coordinator's] help, things will look brighter for her’.</p> <p>Grandmother about granddaughter affected by mothers drug use</p> <p>She also has memory loss probably as a result of her addiction and finds it difficult to retain information such as dates etc. [Coordinator] has been able to help her with the aid of diary sheets and organisation of her telephone etc. to become more aware of her obligations to attend hospital appointments with her children and for herself.</p> <p>Young mother with long history of drug use living in isolated community</p>

Area	Results	Quotes
Parenting skills	<p>Wide range of knowledge and expertise in family work, non-judgemental delivery and acknowledgement of parents' existing skills cited by family members as both helpful and unique to BtC</p>	<p>.....the level of support she was experiencing was "about right.....the right tempo." She just wanted "to be myself.....try to protect my own kids... give them a better future. I have more confidence now.....am more able to do things for myself now."</p> <p><i>Ex-drug using mother about moving on with her family</i></p> <p>[Coordinator] praised her when things were going well and gave her ideas of how to deal with some of the difficult behaviour of her sons more appropriately. Above all [coordinator] did not judge her which made A feel more confident in her own abilities and more willing to take advice.</p> <p><i>Methadone user about working with coordinator</i></p>
Substance use	<p>Not being judged for their addiction but being helped to understand it more, its impact on their family and supported to comply with treatment cited by parents as positive and empowering.</p> <p>Young people and children felt that family life had improved and their understanding of their parents addiction helped with their own behaviour.</p>	<p>"I want to give my son the same chances as my mum gave me"</p> <p><i>Ex-user about his son and working with BtC</i></p> <p>'When I'm abstinent I'm a brilliant mother, when I'm not the level of care drops, they get neglected'. [Coordinator] is my main support network. She has pointed me down the right road to go down, with different types of support. I don't have any close friends; you lose them through drugs and drinking.</p> <p><i>Alcohol/drug user struggling to stay clean</i></p> <p>...things had improved immensely for the family since [coordinator] had become involved and her mother had stopped drinking and using amphetamines.</p> <p><i>16yr old daughter of drug/alcohol user</i></p>

Area	Results	Quotes
<p>Harmful behaviours</p>	<p>Being engaged with BtC had helped families to reduce their harmful behaviours through advocacy with other organisations to obtain further help; being able to be open about their behaviours.</p>	<p>“I can be honest with SB....I binge when things get tough...he helps me look at things differently....he’s helped me put things right. <i>Alcohol user about working with coordinator</i></p> <p>“I’m much more confident and happy in myself now. I despised myself for drinking ‘cos it upset everyone around me..... I’m much better in myself and my relationship is better too. He says its much nicer now I’m awake in the evenings- I used to be out of it by 8.30 but now its different...he says its really noisy here....I never stop talking now.” <i>Alcohol user about understanding and stopping her drinking</i></p>
<p>Raising awareness about problematic substance use</p>	<p>Both clients and family members cited a greater understanding of the nature and impact of addiction as being helpful.</p> <p>For family members and children, understanding that they were not responsible for their parents’ behaviour and that they were able to reclaim their own lives was cited as liberating.</p>	<p>[T’s] two daughters had enjoyed a session on drugs with [coordinator] who had brought the drug box to show them. T was really pleased that [coordinator] was able to tell them about drugs-she learned a lot too. <i>BtC client family living in high drug/ crime area.</i></p> <p>[Client] was referred by a local school to BtC for support as she was concerned that her younger children and grandchildren may be being affected by her own addiction and wanted to prevent them from becoming involved in drugs in the future. Her eldest daughter (mother of the grandchildren) is a known drug-user..... [Client] agreed to the referral to BtC as she felt that anything that might prevent intergenerational transfer would be worth trying. <i>Grandmother, a long-term methadone user, about referral to BtC</i></p> <p>[Coordinator] set us free....we all say this as a family...Having [coordinator] in our lives helped us to communicate...to cope with R....she set us free from the chaos and anger.” <i>Grandmother about working with coordinator</i></p>

The wider impact of BtC

Addaction is at the forefront of the development of family-focussed work in drug treatment services. Practical experience of how family support work fits with Tier 3 treatment services; how to give added value, supported by sustainable change, has contributed to the profile of Addaction in this area of work.

The innovative work with families and substance use being piloted through BtC and other Addaction services has enabled Addaction to provide expertise through advisory committees and groups, working with the Prime Minister's Office, the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the National Treatment Agency (NTA).

BtC has also changed Addaction as information gathering about family status has become part of the initial assessment process for adults accessing treatment services across many services within Addaction. It has provided learning for use in the training of other Addaction staff and has attracted funding from the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCFS) to extend the family-centred approach.

The impact of BtC has influenced other agencies. This has included a local adult treatment service provider routinely gathering family information and referral to BtC in their initial assessment process; referral to Child and Family Services (CFS) where there are family drug and alcohol issues resulting in onward referral to BtC even when not in need of CFS services. BtC has also been cited within Family Court proceedings as an invaluable resource. The engagement of the client with BtC has been influential in some decisions made by the Family Court.

In all sites BtC has become an integral part of the response to families referred to CFS where there are concerns in relation to child protection and parental substance misuse. The coordinators are valued for the unique knowledge they bring in relation to substance misuse and its impact on families and as a resource for information and advice for other professionals.

Financial case for family-focussed interventions

The impact of parental substance misuse is felt at family, community and national level, and the economic cost of parental substance misuse is borne by the whole of society. The costings for Breaking the Cycle based on 68 completed cases showed that the direct costs were £141,000, which equated to £1,700 per family for the average contact time of seven months.

Potential savings using predictive assumptions taken from a range of government documents predict optimal short-term savings for the average seven month engagement as £20,000; savings for the medium term of up to 1-2 years of £148,000; and in the long term £880,000 (costs of family within two generations and assuming 10 years of regular drug use).

The future of family-based services

Despite the Government voicing support for holistic interventions in relation to families where there is parental substance misuse, there is at present a dearth of funding available with which to set up such services.

Current commissioning has little flexibility and is unlikely to allow for research and development or to commission family-based services in the short term. Central government funding is required to allow the continuance of the development of the evidence-base and family-based services until such time as the remit of Drug Action Teams can be changed.

Copies of the full report are available from **Alan Booth**, Director of Marketing & Public Affairs, Addaction – a.booth@addaction.org.uk or phone **0207 0172757** (direct line)