

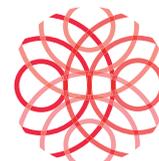
SUMMARY

Connections are key

Unlocking the heart of
relationship-based practice

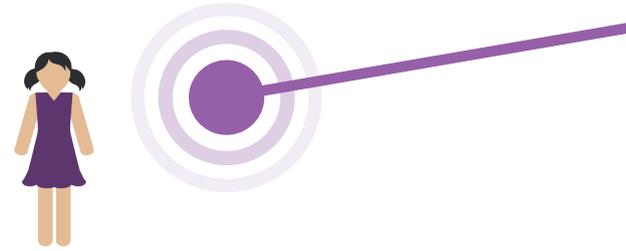


CORRA
FOUNDATION



PDI
Partnership
Drugs Initiative

Background



In 2019 Corra Foundation's Partnership Drugs Initiative (PDI) gathered information on third sector support services, to identify elements of practice that support, strengthen and maintain positive relationships for children, young people and families affected by drugs and alcohol.

The purpose of this research was to influence knowledge, policy and practice of relationship-based support so that children and families can develop and sustain loving and nurturing relationships.

The research aimed to identify and analyse how practitioners and people being supported understand, interpret and experience these relationships; and how these relationships related to improving the lives or outcomes of people accessing support.

This built on Corra's previous action learning project, *Everyone Has A Story* which found that listening, stories and trusting relationships were critical to providing high quality support.

Principles of relationship-based practice

A scoping review gathered information on relationship-based practice and defined this through a set of principles that can be considered to be good practice:

- Support is not provided in isolation, rather it includes support from other sectors such as health, education or social work, often with a peer support element.
- Relationship-based practice places the child or young person at the centre of the family unit, where a family is involved.
- While relationship-based practice will involve the whole family working collaboratively by building honest and strong relationships, it is not essential that family members meet together at the same time to engage in support. Other methods such as each family member having one-to-one meetings can still be considered part of a family approach model, provided they consider the wellbeing of everyone.
- It is recognised that the term 'family' takes on many definitions, but for the purpose of this research, family is defined by the person receiving support, the people they deem close to them and with whom they have a relationship.

Findings



Using these principles, an archive review looked at evaluation reports from all PDI-funded charities between 2014-2018. **Most charities reported working collaboratively with different services, while few reported working collaboratively with multiple family members. This suggests there are multiple relationships to consider when providing relationship-based practice that contributes to quality support being provided to the family as a unit.**

The next stage of research involved conversations with practitioners and families across Scotland to provide a comparative reflection on what works in theory, and what works in practice.

Through these conversations, the research uncovered four main relationships that involved a child/young person or family, either directly or indirectly. It is in the context of these relationships that the research discussed elements of quality practice that were essential to providing relationship-based support:

1. Relationship between a practitioner and supported person
2. Relationships between third and statutory sector
3. Relationships between a family
4. Relationships within a community

The research did not find significant evidence of relationships between a practitioner and a 'whole' family. **'Whole family work' was more often perceived and described as involving multiple practitioners with different family members.**

This suggests that the first step to providing quality whole family support is an increased focus on maintaining strong relationships between workers from different sectors.

This should include:

- Professional relationships which provide a service based on equality and compassion.
- Listening and understanding the experiences of people, their needs, their perspectives and their lives.
- Policy which recognises the importance of relationship-based practice, and what that means for delivery agencies across Scotland.
- Practice which is based on relational approaches rather than reliance on any particular model or intervention.
- Commissioning and funding which supports consistency, relational, long term, unconditional support.
- Service design which facilitates collaboration and values the role of each agency.
- Workforces that work in a relational way, with their employees, partners and supported people.
- Formal processes which recognise the importance of third sector workers' skills, and their relationships (and therefore understanding) of the needs of people they support.
- Consideration of how we develop leadership which is compassionate across all areas of service design, delivery and commissioning.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's Model, 1992



Recommendations

Commissioning and funding

Funders and commissioners need to recognise and respect the time it takes to meaningfully build relationships and account for this in the grants, tenders and commissions they manage. They must accept that limitations on the length of support offered to families are unhelpful and are likely to be incongruent with building trusted relationships.

Service providers, commissioners and funders must also reflect on how success is measured. There needs to be understanding that the quality and longevity of relationships, and other less tangible or easy-to-measure outcomes, will give a more rounded reflection of the impact of support than simple numerical data.

Commissioners and funders must be more considerate of relational, long term approaches to support

Commissioning agencies must accept that relational work is critical to meaningfully supporting people – and that relational work takes time.

Agencies with duties of care to support people affected by alcohol and drugs must consider that important relationships are not always confined to genetic or family relationships. Children often have close connections and bonds with other adults who have a positive and nurturing role in their lives, and where possible, these relationships should be acknowledged and maintained.

Workforce

Having the right people working in an organisation is critical to providing relational work. Staff who are compassionate and nurturing, with themselves, their colleagues and the people they support, are what appears to create the optimum conditions in which to deliver a support service. This is true for third and statutory sector agencies.

Recruitment

Qualifications and experience are important elements of recruiting the right staff for a job. However, the qualities that make a 'great' worker are not measurable only by what is listed on a CV or application form.

Organisations must devise recruitment strategies which assess a person's potential for compassion, empathy and commitment, alongside traditional recruitment measurements like competency-based interviews and qualifications required for the job.

Culture

Compassion blossoms throughout an organisation when it is led by nurturing, supportive leaders. Leaders have the power to make compassion and care the foundation of the organisation they manage; they should regularly reflect on how they lead with compassion and by example.

Sustaining important relationships

Opportunities for whole family sessions may only become beneficial once each family member feels comfortable speaking in sessions together

During this research, there was universal agreement that a child is best supported when the parent is also receiving good quality support. As each family member will have different needs, priorities, experiences and aspirations, it is critical that each person is seen as an individual in their own right, with support services tailored to offer individualised support.

Policy and research

Rights, Respect and Recovery (2018) reflects a rights-based, person centred approach to supporting people affected by alcohol and drugs. Relational approaches are complementary to this aspiration and should be a key feature of implementation and monitoring of *Rights Respect and Recovery*.

GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child)

GIRFEC has supported agencies to have a common language, to promote a shared understanding the needs of the child. Consideration should be given to the potential of using the principles of GIRFEC – which clearly place the child at the centre – as the basis of looking at the needs of the whole family alongside the needs of the child.

Further research

More research is required to fully understand relationship-based practice and its role in supporting whole family approaches, particularly in the context of

families affected by alcohol and drugs. To further understand the potential for whole family approaches, and the context in which they are delivered, consideration must be given to issues around gender, trauma, poverty, policy cohesion, service design and workforce development.

Service Design

There is a need to reflect on the reliance in Scotland on particular models of delivery. This research did not hear practitioners or people who use services talking about models of care, or programmes to which they attribute positive outcomes. Rather, they talked about how it is personal, trusting, connections that helped people to get well, or to stay safe. This suggests that practice which is based on relational approaches is what is fundamental to supporting people, and not reliance on any one model or intervention.

People who use services should be involved in their design

There is a welcome move to coproduction in the drug and alcohol sector, and this should continue to be strengthened, at both organisational and governmental level. Children, young people and adults who are experts by experience should be included in every aspect of service design, in a meaningful and inclusive way.

Services which support or surround an individual or family must improve their information sharing processes

The design of services generally means support to different family members is being provided by multiple, often disjointed, services. To support the whole family, the way in which services are designed must be reconsidered with siloed working challenged.

Further information

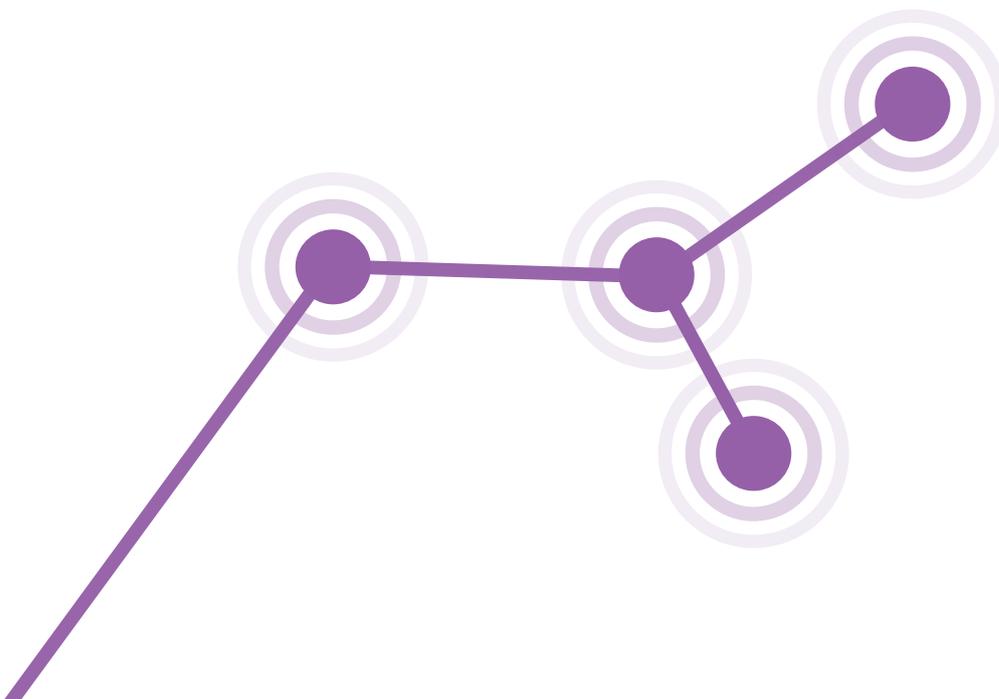
For the full report of this research, along with the supporting evidence, please visit www.corra.scot/connectionsarekey

This research has also been used to develop a reflective tool which can be used across and within third sector agencies. This can also be found at www.corra.scot/connectionsarekey

About Corra Foundation

Corra Foundation exists to make a difference to the lives of people and communities. It works with others to encourage positive change, opportunity, fairness and growth of aspirations which improve quality of life. Corra wants to see a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

In 2020 Corra launched a ten-year strategy. It is long term because making a difference on the big challenges will take time. At its heart is the strong belief that when people find their voice, they unlock the power to make change happen.





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