

Recommendations

Connections are key

Unlocking the heart of
relationship-based practice



Recommendations

Commissioning & Funding

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

As service providers, commissioners and funders, we must also reflect on how success is measured, and move to 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 a reliance on numerical data or perceptions of 'value for money' do.

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 that have 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.

Agencies must also understand that the relationships their staff have with each other are critical to the quality of support provided to people who they serve.

- Tenders and commissions must recognise the importance of allocating sustained, secure funding to third sector agencies to allow them the organisational security to deliver relational programmes well.
- Third sector agencies are critical to delivering relational support, and must be valued accordingly, both in their financing, but also in the role they play as trusted partner to statutory agencies.
- That tenders and commissions offer opportunity for third sector and statutory sectors to become more closely aligned, and have greater clarity in their roles and remits. The opportunity to collaborate, share resources and skills should be an inherent element of commissioning services. Partnership working, with clear roles and responsibilities, is of paramount importance to supporting children, young people and families.
- Commissioners should consider resources beyond financing that can support the delivery of relational services, like co-location of third sector and statutory workers, forming multi-agency community hubs and drop-ins.

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 makes appears to create the optimum conditions in which to deliver a support service. This is true for both third sector agencies and statutory services.

Recruitment

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

- Organisations must devise recruitment strategies which reflect assessment of the quality of a person's potential for compassion, empathy and commitment, alongside traditional recruitment measurements like competency-based interviews and qualifications required for the job. This could be achieved by interviews that involve creative approaches to gaining an insight into the person's interpersonal skills, or references requests that ask explicitly for comment on skills that are not measured by qualifications or training.
- Recruitment panels should include people who have experience of using the service or receiving support. Their assessment of the applicant should be a critical part of recruitment strategies.
- Knowledge about specific issues, for example – drugs and alcohol can be taught. Compassion is an inherent part of a person's qualities – and so must be present for them to be a 'great' worker. Recruitment based on 'learned' skills or qualification without recognising a candidate's humanity and compassion risks missing out on the skills required to deliver a relational service.

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.
- Relationships between staff, whether intra or inter agency, must be nurtured. This can be through formal or informal process, like during team-meetings or shadowing – or by simple measures that create a working environment is welcoming and supportive, like informal gatherings or breaks.
- Staff members should be supported to bring the best version of themselves to work. They have responsibility to reflect on their practice, its strengths and weaknesses and should be supported with supervision which includes reflection on workplace practice and environments, alongside the needs of the people supported.
- Reflective practice is critical to providing high quality relational support and could contribute to developing workplace culture and relationships which are compassionate.
- Third sector and statutory sector agencies have a significant amount of learning opportunities, and the impact of these could be maximised if they were shared between agencies. The potential to learn from each other could facilitate improvements to practice, skills development and the professional relationships workers have with each other.

Sustaining Important Relationships

During this research, we heard how important it is for each member of the family to be supported and for their own unique needs and roles.

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

Each family member will have different needs, priorities, experiences and aspirations. It is critical that each person in a family is seen as an individual – in their own right – and that support services offer tailored, individualised support.

- From our research, we know that 1-1 support is crucial to implementing effective relationship-based practice, as it helps to build trusting relationships with the workers who can help.
- Support for people as individuals, and their unique needs, is crucial before any moves towards implementing whole family interventions. It is imperative that the individual needs, perspectives and experiences of people is understood before services attempt to navigate the often-complex needs and relationships within a family.
- Good quality support for parents is protective for children and young people. During this research, there was universal agreement that a child is best supported when the parent is also receiving good quality support. Currently, service design generally means support to multiple family members is being provided by multiple, often disjointed, services. If we seek to support the whole family, we must

reconsider the system that surrounds children, young people and families – and how well each element of the system work together to most benefit of the people it aims to support.

Policy and Research

The Scottish Government's alcohol and drug strategy, *Rights, Respect and Recovery* (2018) shows a desire to take 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 the action plan that will outline the progress and focus of the implementation of *Rights Respect and Recovery*.

GIRFEC

In this research, we heard how GIRFEC has supported agencies to have a common language, which promotes a shared understanding the needs of the child. Consideration should be given to the potential of using the principles of GIRFEC – which clearly places the child and their needs at the centre – and if it could be usefully expanded as tool to look at the needs of the whole family alongside the needs of the child.

Further research

More research is required to fully understand the role of relationships-based practice and its role in supporting whole family approaches, particularly in the context of families affected by alcohol and drugs. We must consider issues around gender, trauma, poverty, policy cohesion, service design and workforce development when we seek to further understand the potential for whole family approaches, and the context in which they are delivered.

Service Design

We must also reflect on our reliance on models of delivery. Throughout our research, we did not hear practitioners or the people who used the services, talking about models of care, or programmes to which they attribute positive outcomes. Rather, we heard about how it is personal, trusting, connections that helped people to get well, or to stay safe. This leads us to believe that practice which is based on relational approaches is what is fundamental to supporting people, and not reliance on any one model or intervention.

During this research, we set out to interview families who had experience of third sector support services. Whilst the research did not include criteria in recruitment that specified the gender of parents we wanted to have conversations with, during the research, it became clear that it was most frequently mothers who were accessing the support service with their children or families, which means this research is, in the main, based on experiences of women (mothers) who access support services. In fact, we only spoke to one father during the research.

It is imperative that we are constantly responding to the issues that surround mothering and woman when we design services. We must accept that women continue to have the majority of caring roles within a family, and so the specific and unique needs of women must be of critical importance when designing, commissioning or providing 'family' or 'parent' services.

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.

Currently, the design of services generally means support to multiple family members is being provided by multiple, often disjointed, services. If we seek to support the whole family, we must reconsider how we design services, and how we challenge the continued siloed working.

- Third sector organisations can offer valuable insight into the lives of the individuals and families they support. Collaboration and co-working of families by statutory and third sector services must become normalised to implement a truly whole family approach.
- Everyone involved in supporting an individual or family should be invited to participate in formal meetings or panels. Third sector organisations must be asked to share their understanding of a person/family's circumstances on a more regular formalised basis. This research heard that individuals and families may have a more open and honest relationship with third sector workers, which means third sector workers are often well placed to comment or advice on the individual or family's situation.
- Third sector workers should therefore be respected and valued as a 'trusted person', and in meetings should be welcomed as a key asset in making decisions for and with a family.



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