

Supporting families and
carers affected by another
person's substance use



SPODA Grandparents' Project Evaluation Report

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Contents

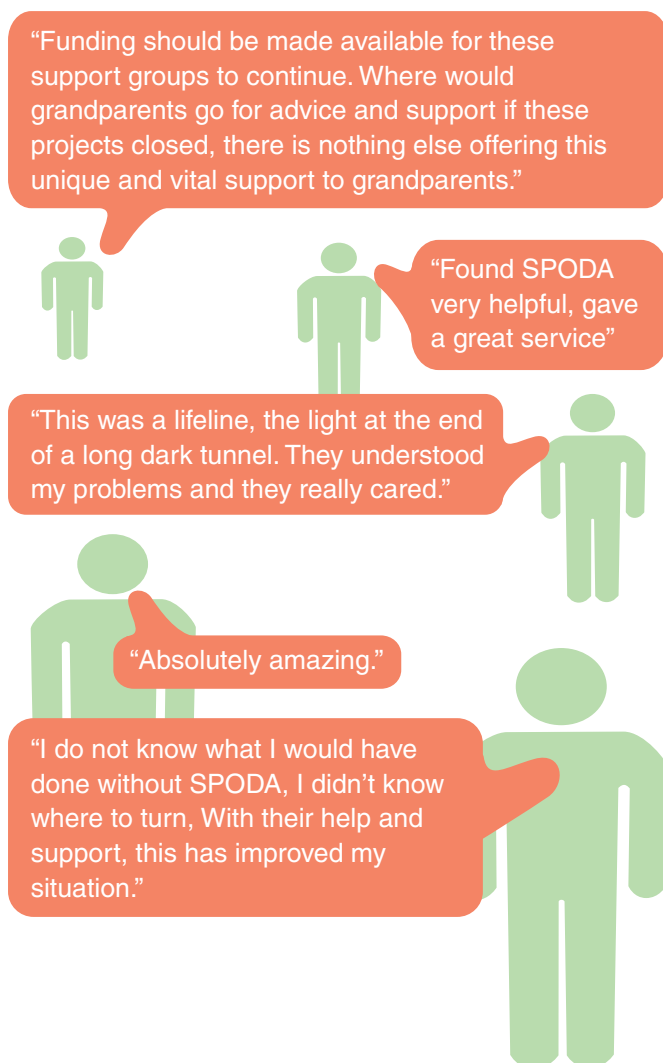
Executive Summary	3
Background	5
Evaluation Questions	5
Methodology	6
Results	
• Activity Data	7
• Grandparent/Kinship Carer views	7
• Professional Referrers views	7
• Project Worker's views	7
Discussion	
• A summary of results	8
• Limitations to the evaluation	10
• What the results tell us	10
References	11

Executive Summary

The Grandparents project (GPP) was evaluated via postal questionnaires to recipients of the service (grandparents and other kinship carers) and to professionals who had referred family members into the service, as well as via an examination of the activity data held by the service, and a self-assessment provided by the main project worker.

22 grandparents of other kinship carers returned an evaluation questionnaire, alongside 8 professionals.

The findings were overwhelmingly positive. Some quotes from the grandparents were:



The survey of Grandparents showed that:

- **57%** said it had made an **enormous difference** to them and **43%** said it had made quite a lot of difference.
- **80%** stated that their experience of using the services and support provided was **brilliant**.
- **69%** said it was **hugely useful** to them.
- **85%** said the ease of contact was **very easy**.
- **95%** said SPODA were **brilliant at providing accessible information about their enquiry**.
- **90%** said SPODA were **brilliant at responding to the initial enquiry**.
- **81%** **strongly agreed** that their **ability to cope** with the situation had improved.
- **90%** **agreed or strongly agreed** that their general health and well being had improved.
- **60%** **strongly agreed** that the **general health and well being of their grandchildren** had improved.
- **70%** **agreed or strongly agreed** that their **grandchildren were doing better than they were** (at school or at home or with friends)
- **76%** **strongly agreed** that the project had provided them with **education and information on drugs**, effects and dealing with them.
- **76%** **strongly agreed** that GPP **listened to their views** and took this into account.
- **60%** **strongly agreed** and **40%** **agreed** that GPP **talked to them about things that mattered to them**.
- **95%** **strongly agreed** that GPP **treated them with respect**.

Some quotes from the professionals were:



The survey of professionals showed that:

- **100%** (8 workers) stated that their experience of using the services and support provided was **brilliant or good**.
- **100%** (8 workers) **strongly agreed or agreed** that SPODA is/was approachable.
- **100%** (8 workers) **strongly agreed or agreed** that SPODA provided much needed support for the client(s) referred to the GPP.
- **100%** (6 workers) said they were **brilliant or good at responding to the initial enquiry**.
- **82%** strongly agreed or agreed that there was an **overall improvement in the health and well being** of the client referred;
- **87%** strongly agreed or agreed that the GPP had **given a lot of help**;
- **86%** strongly agreed or agreed that support had been provided around **improving family relationships**;
- **86%** strongly agreed or agreed that **the ability of the referred client to cope** with the situation had improved.

The self-assessment from the main project worker was equally positive, with her considering that she had met all but one of the project's aims and objectives in full, with the remaining objective (raising the profile and giving presentations) having been only partially achieved due to the limited time available.

An examination of the activity data showed that;

- **54 grandparents and kinship carers** had been seen within the project, with an increase year-on-year in the numbers of carers who were active in the project;
- substantial numbers of **Kincarers Support groups** had been held (27) with quite large numbers of clients (50) attending these support groups;
- **530 1-to-1 counselling and support sessions** had been held;
- **125 family group work sessions** had been held;
- more than **130 Advocacy support sessions** had been held with advocacy covering such areas as criminal justice, social care and health care;
- **38 Multi Agency/Core group meetings** had been attended to support grandparent or other kinship carers in those meetings;
- and that more than **67 hours of advocacy support** had been provided, as well as more than **47 hours of support within Multi Agency/Core group meetings**.

Limitations of the evaluation are outlined, but it is concluded that, given the overwhelmingly positive way that this service is described and the dearth of alternative provision for these grandparents and other kinship carers, it seems imperative that funding is assured for its continuation.

Richard Velleman, August 2010

Evaluation of the Grandparent project

Background

It is well known that the children of parents with drug or alcohol problems have high levels of problems (ACMD, 2003; Kroll and Taylor, 2003; Velleman and Orford, 1999). It is also the case that problems are caused for many other affected family members – the substance misusers' spouses, if they too are not misusing, the misusers' siblings, and the misusers' parents (Orford et al, 2005a, b; Velleman and Templeton, 2003).

One common outcome for the children affected by their parents substance misuse is that they are taken into care (Forrester and Harwin, 2008). This can be helpful, but it can also have very negative and long-standing effects on these children (Cameron, and Maginn, 2009; Cleaver et al, 1999). It also has many negative effects on other family members, who may largely or completely lose touch with these children. This can be especially devastating for these children's grandparents.

Increasingly, and partly to ensure that they do not lose contact with their grandchildren, grandparents (and other members of the substance misusers family) are putting themselves forward as alternative carers for their grandchildren (Grandparents plus and Adfam, 2006; Guillén-Grima et al, 2009, 2010), to help these children and to try to ensure that they are not lost to the wider family.

Unfortunately, there is often very little support for these grandparents (Grandparents plus and Adfam, 2006; Guillén-Grima et al, 2009, 2010). The stress and strain which they are under anyway, by having someone in the family with a serious drug or alcohol problem, is often exacerbated by the stresses and strains of looking after their grandchildren full-time, with little support, and often at a time in their lives when they might be thinking of reducing their workload, not increasing it.

Mindful of this, SPODA applied for funding to set up and run a small Grandparents Project. Funding was obtained for this project in 2005, and in 2010 Professor Richard Velleman was asked to undertake a small-scale evaluation of the extent to which this project has been successful.

Evaluation Questions

This project attempted to clarify the extent to which the aims and objectives, and the proposed outcomes, of the programme had been realised.

The main aims of the Grandparent programme were to:

- Support grandparents and other kinship carers via a telephone helpline and in face to face sessions;
- Liaise with social services in case conferences surrounding the care of children; and
- Provide education on drugs, their effects and how to deal with them



The main services that it was anticipated that Grandparents / Kinship carers would be offered by this project were:

- a telephone helpline;
- 1-to-1 sessions;
- a special support group for grandparents;
- Full assessment of needs
- Advice on financial and social issues
- Advocacy support throughout court proceedings, social care meetings, case conferences, etc;
- Information and advice re residence orders, adoption, benefits, etc;
- Education around substance use, addiction, harm reduction, overdose; and
- Advice on how best to discuss with the children their parents' drug use and current situation.

The main outcomes aimed for were that:

- Grandparents / kinship carers will be better informed;
- They will have improved health and well-being;
- There will be improved outcomes for the (grand) children;
- They will have reduced isolation;
- They will have reduced financial burden; and
- There will be improved family relationships.

It was anticipated that at least 20 grandparent/kinship carers would be involved in this project.

Accordingly, the evaluation set out to clarify the extent to which each of these aims, objectives and outcomes had been realised.

Methodology

Two structured questionnaires (see appendix 1) were developed which assessed these questions, one to be completed by grandparents/kin carers who had used the project, the other by professionals who had referred grandparents or kin carers into the project*.

A version of these two questionnaires was also developed to be answered by the main project worker on the project, so that the project would also be self-assessed (appendix 1).

All questionnaires (other than the one to the project worker) were sent out by post, with a covering letter (Appendix 2) explaining that this was an independent evaluation and that individual questionnaires would not be seen by any employee of SPODA, and enclosing a stamped addressed envelope for direct return to Professor Velleman.

44 Grandparent/kin questionnaires sent out and 30 to professional referrers. The questionnaire was sent out to all clients who had been engaged with the service from 2006 to 2010.

As well as these postal questionnaire responses, data was also obtained from the SPODA database to answer further questions about the amount of activity undertaken by the project.

*Individuals could refer themselves into the project, so only a minority were referred into the project by a professional worker.

Results

Activity Data

The Activity data provided from the SPODA database are shown in Appendix 3. These data are incomplete, but the data that are there show that significant numbers of grandparents or other kinship carers made use of the project. They show that over the 5 years of the project, more than 50 carers have joined this project, with an increase year-on-year in the numbers of carers who were active in the project; and that in the last year alone there were 50 grandparents or other kinship carers who were active in the project.

Over the past 5 years, 27 Kincarers Support groups have been held, with 50 different kinship carers attending one or more of these groups, and with more than 250 sessions of these groups being utilised by carers. 90 clients have used 1-1 support sessions, and there have been 530 1-1 sessions held. 41 clients have also accessed family group-work sessions, and there have been 125 family group-work sessions held.

There have also been 132 Advocacy support sessions held, with advocacy covering such areas as criminal justice, social care and health care; and a further 38 Multi Agency/Core group meetings attended to support grandparent or other kinship carers in those meetings. In all, more than 67 hours of advocacy support have been provided, as well as more than 47 hours of support within Multi Agency/Core group meetings.

Grandparent/Kinship carer views

22 out of the 44 questionnaires to grandparents and other kinship carers were returned (50%). Appendix 4 provides an executive summary of these respondent's views, with the full results from the grandparents shown in Appendix 6.

It can be seen that they were overwhelmingly positive, viewing the service provided as completely outstanding. All carers who responded stated that the service had made a lot of difference to them, with 57% stating that it had made "an enormous" difference to them. Almost all stated that the service was extremely accessible and responsive, and they were treated with respect. The large majority of grandparents or other carers felt that

SPODA had managed to provide all of the services that they had aimed to (1-to-1 support, telephone helpline, needs assessments, education). All of the services provided (advice and information, 1-1 support, assessment of support needs, the grandparents support group, the telephone helpline, the information pack) were used widely by the grandparents who responded. The large majority considered that they had been significantly helped by the project: they reported improvements in their ability to cope with the situation, that they had been provided with education and information on drugs, and that they had been able to talk about things that mattered to them.

Professional Referrers

8 out of 30 questionnaires to professional referrers into the Grandparents Project were returned (27%). Appendix 5 provides an executive summary of these respondent's views, with the full results from the referring workers shown in Appendix 7.

It can be seen that they also were very positive, viewing the service as extremely approachable and the help provided as being useful and effective. The large majority of the workers who responded felt that SPODA had managed to provide all of the services that they had aimed to (1-to-1 support, advocacy support, needs assessments, education), and again the majority considered that the grandparents/kinship carers who they had referred into the project had improved substantially (in terms of their health and well-being, their ability to cope and so on). A minority of workers suggested that an area to improve on was over maintaining professional boundaries.

Project Worker's views

Appendix 8 shows the responses of the project worker. It can be seen that it is reported that she has been involved with 54 clients over the life of the project; and that she considers that she has achieved all of the projects' objectives in full, other than one (Raising the profile and giving presentations) where a great deal was achieved but where more could have been undertaken, given time.

Discussion

A summary of results

This evaluation sought to look at the extent to which the main aims, objectives and looked-for outcomes had been achieved.

There was significant support in relation to two out of the three **key aims**. The great majority of both the grandparents and the professionals who completed the evaluation questionnaires stated that the project:

- Had provided support grandparents and other kinship carers via a telephone helpline and in face to face sessions; and
- Had provided education on drugs, their effects and how to deal with them.

There was also support for the other key aim:

- Liaise with social services in case conferences surrounding the care of children.

Although many grandparents stated that this aim (liaison with social services) was not applicable in their specific case.

Again, there was significant support in relation to the **main services** that it was anticipated that Grandparents / Kinship carers would be offered by this project. The great majority of both the grandparents and the professionals who completed the evaluation questionnaires stated that the project had achieved the aim of developing:

- a telephone helpline;
- 1-to-1 sessions;
- a special support group for grandparents;
- Full assessment of needs
- Advice on financial and social issues
- Advocacy support throughout court proceedings, social care meetings, case conferences, etc;
- Information and advice re residence orders, adoption, benefits, etc;
- Education around substance use, addiction, harm reduction, overdose; and
- Advice on how best to discuss with the children their parents' drug use and current situation.



Again, the great majority of both the grandparents and the professionals who completed the evaluation questionnaires stated that the project had achieved the **main outcomes** aimed for:

- 100% of those Grandparents / kinship carers who responded to this question and 100% of those professionals who answered stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they felt better informed;
- 90% of those Grandparents / kinship carers who responded to this question and 72% of those professionals who answered stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they had improved health and well-being;
- 85% of those Grandparents / kinship carers who responded to this question stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that their grandchildren had improved health and well-being, and 70% of Grandparents (88% of professionals) stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that their grandchildren were doing better (at school/home/or with friends) than they were previously;
- 90% of those Grandparents / kinship carers who responded to this question and 76% of those professionals who answered stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they had reduced isolation;
- 58% of those Grandparents / kinship carers who responded to this question and 57 % of those professionals who answered stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they had a reduced financial burden; and
- 85% of those Grandparents / kinship carers who responded to this question and 76% of those professionals who answered stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they had improved family relationships.

In answer to the question "Overall what difference do you think the Grandparents' Project has made to the client(s) referred?" all of the grandparents who responded (21 out of 22), and all of those professionals who answered (7 out of 8) stated that they considered that the project had made either 'an enormous difference' (12 out of 21 grandparents, 4 of the 7 professionals) or 'quite a lot of difference' (9 out of 21 grandparents, 3 of the 7 professionals) to these clients' lives.

Although it had been anticipated that at least 20 grandparent/kinship carers would be involved in this project, in the event many more have been:

- the project worker states that she has been involved with 54 grandparent/kinship carers over the life of the project so far;
- the database also suggests that 54 clients have joined the project (although this seems to be an underestimate - for example, the database suggests that 5 clients joined in the first year (2005/6) but that there were 11 grandparents who were active in that year).

Large numbers of face to face counselling and support sessions have been delivered: over the past 5 years,

- 27 Kincaer Support groups have been held,
- with 50 different kinship carers attending one or more of these groups,
- and with more than 250 sessions of these groups being utilised by carers.
- 90 clients have used 1-1 support sessions,
- and there have been 530 1-1 sessions held.
- 41 clients have also accessed family group-work sessions,
- and there have been 125 family group-work sessions held.
- There have also been 132 Advocacy support sessions held, with advocacy covering such areas as criminal justice, social care and health care;
- and a further 38 Multi Agency/Core group meetings attended to support grandparent or other kinship carers in those meetings.

Limitations to the evaluation

Although the results of this evaluation are very positive, there are a number of limitations which need to be acknowledged. These include the following.

Not prospective

This is a retrospective survey which relies on people's memory of how they were in the past to ascertain whether or not they have improved. It is also primarily a satisfaction survey, as opposed to a prospective evaluation where more objective measures (of stress or symptoms, for example) might have been taken at the outset which could then be compared at various times in the future to observe positive changes.

Incomplete questionnaire survey

Although the database suggests that at least 54 grandparents or kinship carers used the service over the years, only 44 questionnaires were sent out. It is possible therefore that the grandparent / kinship carers who were surveyed are not representative of all of those who used the service, or that the ones contacted might have more positive views of the service.

Limited response rates (22/44; 8/32)

There was a limited response rate from both the grandparents / kinship carers and the professionals to whom the questionnaires were sent. It is not known how representative the 50% of carers who responded and the 27% of professionals are; and it is possible that those who held more negative views about the service did not respond.

What the results tell us

Although there are limitations to this evaluation, the results are still able to inform us.

It is clear from those evaluation questionnaires returned that this service is seen in extremely positive ways. Both the carers themselves and the professionals who referred clients into the service think that it has made a real difference to these people's lives. The vast majority are clear that the key aims, objectives and outcomes have been achieved, and that these grandparents are much more supported in the caring work that they have taken on.

It is the case that grandparents and other kinship carers are increasingly being placed in situations where they feel they need to care for their grandchildren, due to the substance misuse of these children's parents.

This is an extremely stressful situation for these carers to be put in, especially as it frequently comes at a time in these people's lives when they are thinking of retirement or of reducing the amount that they are doing.

Further, taking on the care of a child for the foreseeable future frequently creates a financial burden for these care-givers.

Providing support for these grandparents and other kinship carers is vital: if they cannot continue to look after their grandchildren, these children may well end up in the Care system, with all the significant costs that this entails, as well as the research evidence of significantly worse outcomes for children brought up in the care system.

Accordingly, given the overwhelmingly positive way that this service is described and the dearth of alternative provision for these grandparents and other kinship carers, it seems imperative that funding is assured for its continuation.

Richard Velleman, August 2010

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