

Mind the Gap Regional Dissemination Launches Conference Report

May 2007

Aim of this report

This report describes a series of Mind the Gap Regional Dissemination Launches held by Mentor UK in March 2007. The report contains details of the aims and objectives of these events, the agenda, the people who attended, feedback from the action planning sessions that took place including some examples of promising practice and feedback from attendees.

The aim of these events was to:

Raise awareness of the needs of grandparents who are bringing up their grandchildren, due to parental substance misuse or other problems.

The objectives of the events were to:

- Disseminate the Mind the Gap resources and the findings and policy recommendations from the Mentor UK, Adfam and Grandparents Plus Grandparents Project.
- Promote Mentor UK and our project partners, Adfam and Grandparents Plus.
- Disseminate the project findings and recommendations.
- Create a broad action plan for mentor UK (and conference participants) to raise the profile of the issue.

Four regional events were held:

- London Regional Dissemination Launch, 21st March 2007, 57 people attended.
- Manchester Regional Dissemination Launch, 28th March 2007, 88 people attended.
- Bristol Regional Dissemination Launch, 29th March 2007, 28 people attended.
- North East regional dissemination workshop, as part of the North East Hidden Harm Network Annual Conference, Sedgefield, March 1st 2007, 200 people were present at this event, and 20 people took part in a Mind the Gap workshop.

Agenda for London, Manchester and Bristol events:

- Presentation about project findings, policy recommendations and Mind the Gap resources, Mentor UK.
- Showed the Mind the Gap grandparents DVD. This DVD has been produced to share experiences of grandparents bringing up their grandchildren and raise awareness of their situations. The DVD consists of eight sections, highlighting real-life issues that grandparents bringing up their grandchildren encounter, including financial problems, isolation, bereavement and worries about drugs and alcohol.
- Local grandparents spoke about their experiences of bringing up grandchildren.

- Project partners spoke: Adfam and Grandparents Plus.
- Guest speaker: Susie Harries, author of *Drugs - the facts*, the report of the RSA Commission on Illegal Drugs, Communities and Public Policy (London event) and Kate Davies, Strategic Director Notts County DAAT (Manchester event).
- Facilitated action planning session: how to take policy recommendations further, and action plan for better support for grandparents locally.

Agenda for the North East regional dissemination event:

A short version of the DVD was shown to the 200 conference attendees in the morning. A Mind the Gap workshop was then delivered in the afternoon, including a presentation and an action planning session. This was attended by 20 people.

Attendees

The three Regional Dissemination Launches in London, Manchester and Bristol were attended by grandparents and by professionals with a variety of responsibilities for children and families. 115 people who attended these events completed feedback forms giving a description of their role and the details of these are shown in table 1. Some grandparent carers identified themselves as working within a support service. It is not clear if this was in a voluntary or paid capacity.

Table 1. Attendees' roles: London, Manchester and Bristol launches.

Role	Number of participants (n)	Percentage of total participants % (n/N)
Grandparents	25	22
Working with/in support of children	16	14
Representing grandparent specific support service	5 (2)	4
Family support worker/agency	34 (2)	30
Drug and alcohol service/agency	29 (1)	25
Miscellaneous ¹	6	5
Total	115	100

N.B. Figures in brackets represent participants who were grandparent-carers who self identified an additional role.

¹ Included e.g. Teenage pregnancy support worker; Police substance misuse co-ordinator; Child and Adolescent Mental Health worker, student social workers

Action planning feedback

The feedback and action points from the action planning session are divided into who they are targeted at.

Action/feedback for Mentor UK, Adfam and Grandparents Plus:

- Find a champion such as an MP or someone outside politics, e.g. Children's Charities, community/religious leaders.
- Hidden Harm follow up report.
- Lobby NTA for more equal funding for DAATs and better funding for DAATs to provide services to families/carers.
- Feedback on the new Drug Strategy: get a focus on grandparents and families into the new strategy.
- Campaign for advocates for grandparents to encourage social services to treat grandparents properly.
- Ideas for disseminating the Mind the Gap resources: foster carers organisations/agencies, send to senior trainers, Safeguarding Boards, Children's Centres, big children's charities, Strengthening Families Programme, Australian Family Drugs Service, NFPI (National Family and Parenting Institute), Bereavement Services, encourage budget holder to buy large orders, Police and other partners on DAAT, Citizen's Advice Bureaus, Carers Centres, Childcare information services.

Action/feedback specifically for Grandparents:

- Small awards may be available from local authorities, which grandparents can access
- Campaign for information to be collected on the number of grandparents bringing up grandchildren in your local area.
- Help local agencies with training for staff (using the Mind the Gap Staff Training Pack).
- Show the Mind the Gap DVD to agencies.

Action/feedback for all agencies that come into contact with grandparents who are bringing up grandchildren:

- Use the Common Assessment Framework to get assistance for grandparents, and where this is not working, feedback to government.
- Services should be less departmentalised so grandparents aren't always being referred elsewhere.
- Give grandparents information on entitlements.
- Bridge the information gap between local support services and grandparents, by using the local press.

- Promote the needs of grandparents in your organisation, using the Mind the Gap pack.
- Promote your services to grandparents' support groups.
- Communicate with other services/professionals regarding grandparents.
- Network with other local services who come into contact with grandparents (e.g. Communities of Practice - Barnardos, see box below for details).
- Share information about individual cases early.
- Spread the word about Mind the Gap.
- One size doesn't fit all: individual grandparents need individual approaches.
- Make grandparents aware of the Common Assessment Framework and what it can do for them.
- Make sure you know where to refer grandparents when you come into contact with them, and refer them.

Local examples of promising practice

The action planning session revealed a variety of positive examples of how services work together at a local level to improve the support available to grandparents:

Snowdrops Carers Support services, North East Lincolnshire DAAT: supports those affected by someone else's drug use, including parents, grandparents and extended family. In the view of the Project Manager, this service works because it works closely with a variety of other agencies in the area, such as a children's worker, local mental health services, social services, speech and language therapy services, bereavement councillors, housing support, the local authority, and the specialist health visitors.

Calderdale Lifeline, drug and alcohol service: staff attend networking meetings every three weeks for everybody in the area who offers a service to anyone. This enables them to link up with other non-drug and alcohol support services, and therefore provide better support for families/carers/grandparents.

Barnardos Communities of Practice: As part of their work on the Children's Charities Working Together on Drug Prevention Project, Barnardos have established Communities of Practice, groups of practitioners sharing and developing practice 'know how'. The model aims to increase communication between charities and main stream services for children and young people with substance misuse issues. Communities may be internal or local multi-agency groups and the learning is shared across Barnardos electronically or via strategic planning groups

Action/feedback specifically for bereavement services:

- Develop better links between grandparents and bereavement services.

Action/feedback specifically for drug services and Drug and Alcohol Action Teams (DAATs):

- Rearrange the funding you have to fund services for families/carers, as supporting families helps support effectiveness of treatment. Money for Drug Intervention Programme can be used to support families.
- New staff working in drug services should be trained about the needs of grandparents (use the Mind the Gap Staff Training Pack).
- Adfam have produced a guide for DAATs about commissioning family/carer services.
- Keep lobbying your DAAT to improve family/carer services.

Action/feedback specifically for social care services:

- Funding for social care services should be standardised across the country.
- Better training should be put in place for social workers around the needs of grandparents (using the Mind the Gap staff training pack). This should be permanently built into local social care services. This can be achieved using the Mind the Gap Pack.
- There is a culture of grandparents only making progress when they challenge social services. Grandparents feel threatened, and feel that unreasonable demands are placed on them.
- Services should be less departmentalised so grandparents are not always being referred on.
- New trainee social workers are taught not to use aggressive/threatening techniques.
- Respite is needed: it needs to be someone who grandchildren build up relationships with. Foster carers get respite (2 weeks per year) and grandparents should be entitled to this too, so they can get a few hours a week to themselves. The type of respite provided needs to be tailored to the needs of the specific grandparent. There should be a legal obligation for social care services to provide respite for grandparents.
- There should be kinship care workers in every area.

Local example of promising practice

The Families and Friends Team, Brighton and Hove:

Responsible for supporting family and friends carers in contact with Brighton and Hove Children and Young People's Trust, based within the Fostering Service.

The team consists of one part-time manager, two full-time and one part-time social worker, one full-time and one part-time social work resource officer and one team administrator.

They provide a variety of services, including court assessment for potential family and friends carers, monthly support groups, a monthly advice surgery, a

newsletter, targeted one-to-one home visits, training events for carers and advice via the telephone.

The team currently have 123 carers on their database that can access their services.

Action/feedback for support services specifically for grandparents/carers:

- Don't advertise widely enough, perhaps because they don't have the resources to take in any more carers.
- Need funding to advertise support groups more.
- Need funding to build capacity: train volunteers and staff.
- Carers and users should work together to show each other their perspective.

Local example of promising practice

PROPS (Newcastle):

A community based and community led voluntary organisation, providing support, advice and information to carers and families of substance misusers across the city of Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Staff and Volunteers have had first hand experience of living with drug and alcohol misusers.

PROPS provides a variety of services including a support group for grandparents, and respite for families affected by drug (PROPS owns a caravan which families can use for holiday breaks).

In the view of the service manager PROPS works because: they have a very strong DAAT, they have a determined group of grandparents who've driven the agenda, the DAAT now funds PROPS to deliver city wide services specifically for grandparents, linked in with other services such as housing.

Action/feedback specifically for schools/teachers:

- Teachers need a better understanding of grandparents bringing up grandchildren.
- Could schools provide respite?
- Improved after school services would help grandparents.

Ideas for further work:

- Something to help grandchildren think about the grandparents' experience.
- Something specifically for disabled Children.

Specific action points from the North East regional dissemination workshop action planning session will also be sent to the North East Carers Forum, for them to take forward.

Feedback from attendees

Questionnaires were distributed at the events, which provided feedback about the extent to which the events met their stated aims and the expectations of the participants. They also provided information about the roles of those attending and an insight into participants' reasons for attending.

Those returning the questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive with 99% stating the event met its aims and 97% stating it met the respondent's expectations. Attendees felt all aspects of the event were 'very useful' with the exception of the discussion which 74% recorded as 'very useful' and 29% as 'useful'. Some participants commented that they would have preferred alternative approaches to the discussion to encourage more contributions e.g. smaller groups or message boards for those lacking confidence to speak in public.

Comments indicated that attendees felt inspired by the speakers:

Wonderful to hear from such passionate people - very informative, moving and inspiring. (Tier 2 youth worker)

Several grandparents said the event made them feel less isolated:

It was great to hear other grandparents' comments..... I intend to feel less isolated as I now know how many grandparents are affected. Thank you! (Grandparent)

and some resolved to continue to put pressure on the authorities as a result of the events:

I intend to be more assertive with authority figures (Grandparent)

Professionals resolved to take a range of action in response to the information they had received and with assistance of the resources:

I will be actively looking for grandparents affected and not waiting for them to contact services as there are obviously a lot of unsupported grandparents around. (Parents and carers development worker, drug treatment agency)

Our team will look at how we can combine relevant services and aim to provide a specialist support group. (Family placement support worker)

I felt challenged to go back and do my job better than I do now. (Strategic manager DAAT)

Overall feedback indicated that the events reached an appropriate audience which had the capacity to use the resource and/or disseminate it to a wider group. Some of those attending held senior positions and many less senior professionals resolved to draw the issue of grandparent carers to the attention of managers and other stakeholders. Grandparents generally felt less isolated because their concerns had been listened to and those working with vulnerable children could identify strategies for supporting grandparent carers.

In summary, feedback from these events was overwhelmingly positive and suggested that grandparents and professionals went away feeling more positive, with the intention of being more proactive on this issue and the resources to enable them to do this.