

Reporting Officer:	Janice Brown
Subject:	Report on the Practitioner Forum events (May 2014)
Date of CPC:	22nd October 2014
* Item for	Discussion
* Restricted Access	No

1. Introduction

The Practitioner Forum Steering group (PFSG) continues to deliver locality-based events bi-annually (four events per cycle) to staff working across the Falkirk Council area. Themes for events (which focus on child protection issues and practice) are determined by emerging national policy or research, or identified by managers and practitioners. The theme for this cycle of Practitioner Forum events was Children Affected by Parental Substance Misuse (CAPSM)

This report provides an overview of the events and highlights the key messages as identified by practitioners.

2. Format of the sessions

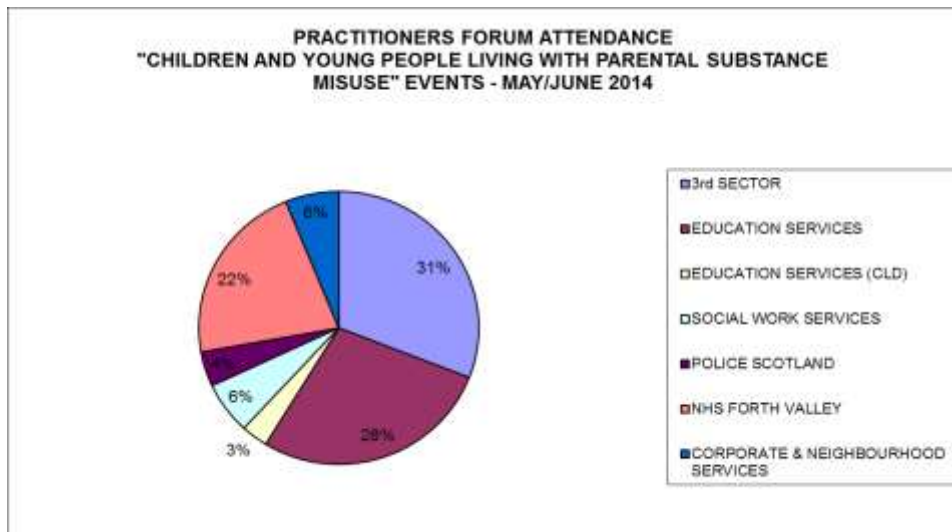
The format of the sessions followed a now established framework. Each event was opened with an overview of national/local policy and statistical data in relation to the recovery agenda (provided by the Policy Officer from Falkirk Alcohol and Drug Partnership) and CAPSM. This was followed by an update on the various strands of work being taken forward across the Falkirk/Forth Valley area. Using DVD clips from the Panorama programme '*Invisible Children*', children described their experiences of living with parental/carer substance misuse. This provided a focus for facilitated multi-agency group discussions and to explore risks and harm caused by parents/carers behaviours. Groups were then asked to assess risks to individual children from the DVD, using the resilience matrix as a tool to do this.

A marketplace was available during the coffee breaks to provide a range of information and materials on drugs and alcohol, and the various services available across Forth valley to support adults with problematic substance misuse and children affected by this.

The PFSG are keen to utilise the events as a forum for informal consultation with practitioners. On this occasion, the views of participants were sought on the format/content of practice guidance in relation to work being progressed to review current Forth Valley guidance 'Getting our priorities right'.

3. Attendance

The events continue to be well attended with a total of 97 staff and managers participating in the events over the four sessions. Chart 1 provides a breakdown of attendance by agency.



Although there continues to be a good attendance at events, some were better attended than others. Despite competing demands on practitioner time and their capacity to attend events, attendance levels suggest that the events in themselves are well valued by staff that are able to prioritise attendance.

4. Evaluations

Overall, the four sessions were evaluated positively. As with previous events, participants reported that the greatest value of the sessions was the opportunity to discuss practice issues with colleagues from other agencies, to share practice examples and experience and the informal but structured approach to the sessions helped to facilitate discussion. The use of the resilience matrix in the group discussions was particularly well received by those attending and staff commented both during the events and in the evaluation on feeling more confident about using this where they may have concerns about other children.

When asked what practice issues the events raised, responses included:

- The importance of talking to/sharing information with other services/agencies
- Being more vigilant at picking up where the signs are less obvious that children are being affected/ relating signs of parental substance use to children's behaviour
- Acknowledging the need to work with the family as a whole, but also the challenges this brings in hearing the child's voice and keeping the child at the centre
- We need to get better at using multi-agency chronologies, and the resilience matrix
- Need to be seen as more of a key partner (Addictions service worker)
- How we use Team around the Child meetings (TAC)/thresholds
- The need for staff awareness of the impact on children and attachment training
- Feel more aware/mindful
- Better understanding of the some of the difficulties faced by other agencies

When asked what changes practitioners would make to their own practice after attending the event, responses included:

- Will use the resilience matrix more often

- Will take information back to our team
- Will access some of the services (from the marketplace stalls) for some families I am working with
- More confident about questioning/challenging parents
- Will re-evaluate some cases
- Being less 'influenced' by what parents tell us
- Will continue to share information with other services / feel more confident about contacting other services that have had little/no contact with

5. Key issues for the CPC to consider

At the end of each event, practitioners were asked what key messages (in relation to child sexual exploitation) they wanted to feedback to the CPC. Whilst there were many positive comments (as above), practitioners identified a number of themes for the CPC to consider:

- There is still a need to improve joint working between child and adult services – practitioners experiences were variable and often appeared dependant on individual workers
- Where we have a child's [protection] plan and an adults plan, the two can sometimes be seen completely separately with no cross-referring to the other plan
- Information sharing can be variable – sometimes too much (addictions staff making CP1 referrals for children where the concerns are not CP); and sometimes not enough (addictions staff not being aware of VPD information). Feedback from social work following referrals continues to be variable – some workers getting written feedback, others report getting no feedback at all.
- Further themes to be considered:
 - Non-engaging families – it was recognised that this takes many formats however the need for multi-agency learning/training on an ongoing basis is required.
 - Awareness raising – impact of problematic drugs/alcohol use on children's wellbeing (including importance of attachment)
 - Children's voices – how well do we 'hear' children and read their behaviours
 - Shadowing opportunities were seen as being a good idea 'walking in the shoes of other workers' and is to be encouraged. How can we promote this?

Janice Brown

13.10.14