

Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission Report

Report Title: Children and Families Service Substance Misuse Briefing

Meeting Date: 28th February 2022

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Overview of the issue - how substance misuse contributes to children in need and local data on this:

The Children and Families Service supports children, young people and families with a range of issues, which includes substance misuse. We know that substance misuse can impact on parenting capacity, and misuse by children and young people can impact on their development and outcomes¹. A number of children and young people who work with our service experience harm as a result of substance misuse, and in 2020/21, there were 554 assessments completed where alcohol abuse or drug misuse was identified as a factor for the parent/carer, child or other person. Some children and young people are referred to Young Hackney's Substance Misuse Team (YHSMS), which supports children and young people aged 6-25 years who are directly affected by substance misuse, or affected through their parent's misuse. Interventions take a tailored and holistic approach that aims to reduce harm, build young people's resilience, and address related issues around family and relationships, finances, education and housing.

	2018/19	2019/2020	2020/21	April 2021 - January 2022
No. of young people YHSMS worked with in the year	202	210	256	208
No. of referrals to YHSMS in the year	220	213	168	158

*Please note that we will work with some young people for over a year, the above date reflects the active number of young people the service is working with, and also the number of referrals as a reflection of demand. Not all referrals will go on to become open to the service.

Adults who use substances may be referred to the City and Hackney Recovery Service, known as Turning Point, who support parents in reducing the impact of substance misuse on their children, working in collaboration with children's allocated social workers, who liaise directly with the service.

Although they are separate services, YHSMS and Turning Point complete some collaborative work. YHSMS Team Leader, Shawn Bent, works alongside Turning Point to ensure that all adults are screened, possible dependents they may have are explored, and that the impact of parental substance misuse is discussed with those adults. The Family and Friends support manager at Turning Point has requested YHSMS to conduct hidden harm² training for Turning Point staff over

¹ <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/children-and-families-at-risk/parental-substance-misuse#heading-top>

² Definition: 'The experience of children and young people living with and impacted by parental problem alcohol and other drug use has come to be known as Hidden Harm. This is because the harm children and young people experience is often hidden, or if seen, is not recognised as harm.' Source: <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/Hidden%20Harm%20Online%20version%20-%202015.pdf>

coming weeks. This may result in direct referrals to YHSMS and Hackney Children and Families Service from Turning Point.

Hackney Children and Families Service also carry out drug testing of family members who care for children, where there are concerns about substance misuse. This is done by using a swab test, which is returned to a lab for testing. This process is consent based, with people agreeing to be tested. Sometimes, this process may be required as part of a Child Protection Plan, or Court order. Evidence of substance misuse or abstinence then feeds into safety planning for the children and young people who are affected.

Hackney Children's Services and substance misuse services work hard to identify and reduce risks connected with substance misuse impacting upon children and young people. However, some children, young people and their families who are affected by substance misuse may not come to the attention of intervention services. People who misuse substances may be ambivalent about changing addiction habits, at the precontemplation point of recovery³, and may not have an understanding of the impact of their misuse on their children and/or family, therefore they may not reach out for support. Moreover, many people who use substances are able to function at a level which may not raise the concern of professionals around them, therefore they may not be referred for intervention. Research in Practice suggests that people may consume substances despite being aware of the potential harm of this due to wanting to socialise, reduce boredom, and relieve symptoms of mental ill health⁴. However, it is recognised that many of the people who support services work with are at the precontemplation stage of recovery; services work with people experiencing this, and develop motivation to create positive change with service users who engage on a largely voluntary basis. Hackney Children's Services uses a systemic approach to supporting families who may be experiencing substance misuse, exploring contributing factors towards substance misuse and encouraging engagement with services to reduce negative impacts of substance misuse on children, young people and their families.

How Covid-19, lockdown and school closures have impacted on levels of needs - and what impact has this had locally?

The Covid-19 pandemic led to periods of Government restrictions on meeting people face-to-face, with many support services adapting their work in these periods to continue to deliver interventions to children and families. In circumstances where visits had to take place virtually, it may have been more difficult to identify needs related to substance misuse. However, Hackney Children and Families Service worked hard to engage with those most at risk, adapting creatively, meeting people outdoors, continuing to complete visits in person where necessary, and working with partner agencies to ensure children and young people most in need of support continued to receive this.

At the height of strict Covid-19 restrictions, adaptations were made to the YHSMS service to ensure continuity of support for service users, particularly for those at risk of hidden harm. YHSMS supported young people to gain access to devices for virtual sessions if needed, supporting the young people to receive the required therapeutic intervention. The service worked creatively to visit young people face-to-face where Covid-19 restrictions allowed, including visits outdoors. This helped to ensure that those open to the service were delivered as much support as possible, during a time where they may have had a reduced support network around them. As Covid restrictions lessened, the service resumed more of its usual face-to-face contact, including

³ Prochaska, J. O., & DiClemente, C. C. (1983). Stages and processes of self-change of smoking: Toward an integrative model of change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 51(3), 390-395. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.51.3.390>

⁴ <https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/content-pages/videos/why-do-people-use-alcohol-and-drugs-despite-the-harm/>

outreach sessions to young people in schools and youth hubs, group drug and alcohol awareness sessions, and one-to-one support.

It is recognised that the Covid-19 lockdown and restrictions contributed towards loneliness and mental ill-health⁵, which may have contributed to an increase in substance misuse. Data from YHSMS demonstrates that:

	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022 thus far (April - January)
Number of referrals	213	168	152
Number of these referrals relating to mental health	9	25	24

The number of referrals from Health/Mental Health sources to YHSMS increased from 2019-2021, with a projected further increase in 2021/2022. This may suggest that Covid-19 restrictions increased the number of children and young people in Hackney needing intervention for mental health and substance misuse; this is in line with national trends around these issues. However, it is noted that there has been a dip in overall referral numbers over the pandemic, a trend observed across Hackney Children and Families Services, as well as nationally.

What is the local service/partnership response in terms of support for children and families, but also in relation to Early Help - what preventative work is undertaken here?

Hackney Children and Families Services work within the Local Assessment Framework, which is tailored to children and family's needs. The aim of the service is to offer intervention as early as possible. Intervention is delivered through assessment, Early Help support, Child in Need plans, Child Protection Plans, Court Proceedings, and Looked After Children and Care Leavers receive the local offer of support. Hackney Children and Families Service works to deliver prevention and intervention work to children, young people and their families to reduce any harm substance misuse may place them at.

Support is also offered through the aforementioned YHSMS. The YHSMS offer multiple approaches to support, to any child/young person who is in need. The support includes offering treatment and therapeutic support, advice and guidance to those experiencing substance misuse themselves, or to anyone concerned about someone they know. They also offer one-to-one support, group intervention, a specific dealing intervention, school and professional workshops, and a creche for parents who are over 18 and use substances⁶. The service liaises with other services/partners as necessary to support and safeguard the children and young people they work with.

YHSMS is embedded within the Young Hackney service, as part of the Early Help offer, which allows for greater joint-working and access to wider support for young people. The Young Hackney service works with young people to prevent risk of extra-familial harm to young people, encourage positive social and familial relationships, and help to build young people's resilience, often working around issues of substance misuse. Some young people are supported directly by the Prevention and Diversion team, who work with young people to divert them from entering the

⁵ <https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/news-views/2020/june/social-connection-loneliness-and-lockdown/>

⁶ <https://www.younghackney.org/advice/drugs-alcohol/young-hackney-substance-misuse-service/>

criminal justice system. This includes working with substance-related crime. The Children and Families Service Annual Report demonstrates that 94% of the young people referred to the Youth Justice Prevention and Diversion Team via Triage in 2020/21 were successfully diverted from becoming first time entrants to the youth justice system.

Externally, City and Hackney Recovery Service (Turning Point) deliver free support for all adult Hackney residents who may need support with substance misuse. This includes harm reduction interventions, treatment, one to one support, group work, and clinical support. This can include referring people to rehabilitation and detox support, and offering preparatory and aftercare for those service users. The service takes a holistic approach, offering support for carers and families of those who may be using substances. Parts of the service are tailored to specific needs, such as LGBTQA+ services, female-only support, support for rough sleepers, and those involved in the criminal justice system⁷.

Hackney residents may also work with their GP to reduce the impact of substance misuse on their families. GP's are asked to contribute to safety planning in safeguarding children and young people, where they may be involved in their lives.

Hackney Children and Families Service has an internal clinical team, who work systemically with children, young people and their families who are open to Hackney Children's Services around mental ill health and trauma. Some of this may be connected to substance misuse, using a trauma-informed and systemic approach to help children, young people and their families understand any cognitive contributors to their substance misuse, and work towards improving the young person and families' capacity to manage any mental health difficulties around this. Local mental health services including CAMHS can also support this, where children and young people are not open to Hackney Children and Families Service.

Practice Example

An example of a case that YHSMS work with to illustrate how the service operates to reduce risk for young people:

Carrie is a 15 year old, who was referred to YHSMS in June 2017, after her involvement in substance misuse and buying/selling controlled substances over social media.*

In December 2017, Carrie became subject to a Child in Need plan in response to increased risk, involving a multidisciplinary team of professionals supporting the young person. The Contextual Safeguarding Team worked to consider the peer influenced risks posed by a targeted group of young people to each other. YHSMS offered a group intervention at the young person's class, with a strong focus on risks and harm minimisation.

Carrie experienced mental health difficulties, and was admitted to a mental health support unit. YHSMS visited Carrie in the unit; she was initially withdrawn, and struggled to explore and reflect on her drug use. YHSMS continued to offer Carrie support, and she began to open up about her previous drug use, the reasons behind it, the challenges she faced currently and the challenges she envisaged for the future.

Carrie received support from a Clinical Psychologist and Family Therapist to reflect on her use of substances and the impact on her wellbeing. Alongside this, YHSMS helped Carrie to curb cravings and develop resilience to triggers.

⁷ <https://www.turning-point.co.uk/>

Through this joint work, Carrie has become familiar with the concepts of dependence, lapse and relapse, abstinence and the Cycle of Change, and can relate these with her own treatment journey. YHSMS are currently focussing on supporting Carrie to maintain her ongoing recovery.

**This is a case example and the young person's personal details have been changed.*