

# MEETING FAMILY NEEDS – AT ARREST AND AFTER RELEASE

Families play an invaluable role in helping their relatives address their drug use and offending. But research shows that families often face difficulties, particularly at the time of arrest and release. Supporting families, especially at these times, alleviates their stress and enables them to encourage the drug user to continue treatment.

Even though many families know about their relative's drug use, they are often not aware of their criminal involvement. The arrest can therefore be unexpected and very distressing – or even traumatic – for some family members, especially children and vulnerable adults.

The release of the offender causes concerns for family members. Practitioners agree that, in most cases, it is best if the drug user can be reunited with their family after the release. However, this makes many families feel anxious and worried.

In 2006, the Drug Interventions Programme commissioned Karen Whitehouse – an independent consultant specialising in drugs, families and criminal justice – to look into families' experiences and needs in more detail. She interviewed adult family members, as well as offenders, about their experiences and needs. Her findings are detailed in the report *Around arrest, beyond release* (2007).

The more recent report *Around arrest, beyond release 2 – Moving forward* (published in 2009) looks at how some of the issues highlighted in the earlier report are beginning to be addressed.

## AVOIDING DISTRESS AT ARREST

Even though many families know about their relative's drug use, they are often not aware of their criminal involvement. The arrest can therefore be unexpected and very distressing – or even traumatising – for some family members, especially children and vulnerable adults. The experience is worsened if the arrest happens in the family home early in the morning or late at night when family members may be asleep in bed or not fully clothed.

It is suggested that a child or family professional should attend domestic searches, wherever possible. In Chesterfield, Derbyshire, a specialist social worker has been appointed to look at the needs of families affected by drug use to improve the outcomes for any children involved. They also accompany the police during a raid if children are known to be in the house.

Many families do not know where to get support to help them cope with their relative's arrest. In some areas, the police give this information at the time of arrest. In Derbyshire, the police have produced a leaflet that explains how the law relating to drugs affects families.

## HELPING FAMILIES TO DISPOSE OF DRUGS SAFELY

Police searches sometimes reveal that drugs have been hidden in areas of the house that other family members assume are 'clean'. This often casts unfair suspicion on families. At other times, family members find drugs or drug-use paraphernalia, such as needles or syringes, after the police have gone.

Many families feel unsure of how to deal with these finds and how to dispose of them safely. Newcastle has a 'bag and tag' scheme which recovers and disposes of these items. In Nottinghamshire, 'amnesty bins' have been located in pharmacies so that families can make confidential disposals.

## MAKING SURE KIN CARERS ARE PREPARED

After an arrest, grandparents or other relatives are often expected to provide immediate childcare for the arrested person's children. Because arrests can happen unexpectedly, the kin carers are often not given any time to prepare – either financially, practically or emotionally – for the children's arrival.

It is recommended that the immediate needs of potential carers are assessed, alongside those of any children and vulnerable adults. It is important that necessary resources are provided to make sure that these needs are met.

In Derbyshire, a specialist worker makes sure that grandparents who have agreed to take on the care of their grandchildren get the support they need. In Newcastle, drugs and family support practitioners combine health and social care visits and use a common needs assessment tool to establish the family's needs.

## SUPPORTING FAMILIES BEFORE RELEASING THE OFFENDER

The release of the offender causes concerns for family members. Practitioners agree that, in most cases, it is best if the drug user can be reunited with their family after the release. However, this makes many families feel anxious and worried. There seems to be little support available to help families prepare and cope with the new situation after release.

Real concerns arise if the offender is released unexpectedly. Some families report that their addresses are given as bail addresses or new home addresses without their permission.

It is suggested that there is a real need to carry out a full assessment of the family circumstances and their specific needs before releasing the offender into the family home. Practices in Lambeth, Newcastle and Northumberland place emphasis on release planning and post-release whole-family support.

## MAKING OFFENDERS UNDERSTAND HOW THEIR FAMILIES CAN HELP THEM

Even though families play an invaluable role in the treatment process, many offenders feel that their recovery is their own business and do not want their family involved. In some prisons, offenders are given an insight into the impact that their behaviour may have had on their families before they are released. In Nottinghamshire, drugs and family support practitioners contribute to pre-release sessions in prisons by providing mediation between offenders and their families.

## TAKING AN INCLUSIVE VIEW

Both reports clearly suggest that treatment providers as well as criminal justice, health and social services have to understand and consider the impact that drug use and offending have on the offender's family – including children and young people. All family members have a right to be consulted about their own needs and should be offered support throughout the treatment journey.

The impact of drug use and offending on family functioning is a complex problem. Many different services are involved at various stages, and joined-up solutions are vital. Service providers, local partnerships and government departments must be proactive in sharing information about the approaches and practices that they use to make sure families get the support they need.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Clearly define exactly what is meant by 'support', and explain the different levels of support available for families of drug users, including how both generic and specialist services might contribute to this.
- Agree on common terminology. Most partnerships use the terms 'family' and 'carer' interchangeably.
- Account for the needs of both individual family members and families as a whole – not limiting the support to one or two members.
- Consider the diverse needs of all potential service users to enable more effective work with minority groups.
- Appoint a committed family support champion who can develop and drive local issues in every partnership.
- Assess the need for partnerships to help family support providers working within a criminal justice framework.
- Minimise the potential repercussions that other household members may experience following an arrest.
- Make sure that families that are willing to provide temporary accommodation for the drug-misusing offender after their release are offered additional support.
- Look into opportunities to collect statistical and anonymous information about families of drug users.
- Explore ways of measuring, recording and sharing information about the impact that family support services have.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

The two reports mentioned here can be found at:

*Around Arrest, Beyond Release – The experiences and needs of families in relation to the arrest and release of drug using offenders* (August 2007)

[http://drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk/publication-search/dip/AC\\_DIP\\_FAMILIES\\_around\\_arrest?view=Binary](http://drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk/publication-search/dip/AC_DIP_FAMILIES_around_arrest?view=Binary)

*Around Arrest, Beyond Release 2 – Moving forward – Identifying and promoting practice to meet the needs of families in relation to the arrest and release of drug misusing offenders* (February 2009)

<http://drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk/publication-search/dip/around-arrest-beyond-release-2/report?view=Binary>

For more detailed information on the case studies referred to in this fact sheet and the other fieldwork visits, visit:

<http://drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk/publication-search/dip/around-arrest-beyond-release-2/appendix?view=Binary>

For more information on the Drug Interventions Programme, visit:

<http://drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk/drug-interventions-programme>

