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Evaluation of the National Development Project Fund (NDPF) Final Report Summary



HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE



Evaluation of the National Development Project Fund

The National Development Project Fund (NDPF) is part of the Scottish Government's investment in services to reduce problem drug and alcohol use and reflects the priorities of the Rights, Respect and Recovery strategy published in November 2018. Ten projects were awarded NDPF funding in January 2019 to address gaps in advocacy services (6 projects), family inclusive services and support (2 projects), and start-up investment for new approaches to treatment, support and recovery (2 projects). In October 2019, the Scottish Government commissioned Iconic Consulting to evaluate the Fund to share learning from the projects and evidence their impact.

Main findings

Advocacy Projects

- NDPF funded advocacy projects provided valuable support to people with alcohol and drug problems to connect, re-connect or address issues with substance use services, and provided emotional and practical support to sustain their recovery.
- The advocacy projects also helped people access other support for issues often connected to their alcohol and drug problems such as housing, debt, and benefits.
- These elements could form the core of advocacy services for people with alcohol and drug problems across Scotland. Guidance on the respective roles of advocacy services, alcohol and drug support services, and recovery communities would be beneficial.
- Advocacy services provided valuable learning related to the benefits of having workers with lived experience and workers specifically dedicated to supporting people with alcohol and drug problems (as opposed to advocacy workers supporting people with a range of issues).
- Projects established training and support for peer advocates and delivered awareness raising training for advocacy services about the human rights based approach, which could potentially be rolled out across Scotland.

Other Projects

- Funding for family inclusive support services highlighted that families affected by alcohol and drug problems, including kinship carers, can be hidden and have limited support options.
- NDPF funding also demonstrated that start-up investment is useful and otherwise in short supply.

Introduction

The Scottish Government established the National Development Project Fund (NDPF) to implement the priorities of the Rights, Respect and Recovery strategy and help address problem drug and alcohol use in Scotland. NDPF was one of three funds introduced by the Scottish Government to deliver an investment of £20million per year over the duration of the current parliament (2018/19 to 2020/21) to support the delivery of services to reduce problem drug and alcohol use, with £1million per annum ringfenced for the NDPF.

Ten projects were awarded NDPF funding in January 2019 to address gaps in advocacy services (6 projects), family inclusive services and support (2 projects), and start-up investment for new approaches to treatment, support and recovery (2 projects). This final report of the evaluation highlighted learning from the projects and, as far as possible, evidenced their impact. The evaluation focused on learning of national significance that could help inform the support provided for people with alcohol and drug problems across Scotland.

Methodology

The overriding purpose of the NDPF evaluation was to provide the Scottish Government with timely, robust information on the performance of the Fund and the project management in order to support shared learning. Given the diverse nature of the ten projects, the evaluation focused on gathering evidence from each project and drawing out learning where possible.

Fieldwork consisted of: a review of key documents including quarterly monitoring reports submitted by the projects to Scottish Government; interviews with 18 individuals responsible for managing or delivering the ten projects; interviews and feedback from 15 stakeholders connected to the ten projects, including representatives of alcohol and drug services and Alcohol and Drug Partnerships; and interviews with 11 beneficiaries from the projects who provided first-hand experience of the support they received and its impact. The fieldwork was undertaken between October and December 2020. Interviews were conducted via telephone and video conferencing due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Advocacy services

There were six NDPF-funded advocacy projects, allowing the evaluation to draw out some lessons from this theme. Five projects directly delivered advocacy to people with alcohol and drug problems: Midlothian and East Lothian Advocacy Project, Glasgow Alcohol and Drug Advocacy Service, Represent Recovery (in East Ayrshire), Problematic Substance Use Advocacy Service (in Edinburgh) and Collective Advocacy Substance Addictions (in West Lothian). The sixth NDPF-funded advocacy project was delivered by the Scottish Recovery Consortium in collaboration with REACH Advocacy; this project delivered training and support for peer advocates and awareness raising training for advocacy services about the human rights based approach.

Based on the evidence presented in monitoring reports and consultation with providers, service users and other stakeholders, the NDPF-funded advocacy services provided valuable support to people with alcohol and drug problems. The services helped people from the target group connect, re-connect or address issues with alcohol and drug services, and provided emotional and practical support to sustain their recovery. They also helped people access other support for issues often connected to their alcohol and drug problems such as housing, debt, and benefits. Advocacy services also provided valuable learning related to the benefits of workers with lived experience and workers specifically dedicated to supporting people with alcohol and drug problems (as opposed to advocacy workers supporting people with a range of issues). Based on the NDPF experience, these elements could form the core of advocacy services for people with alcohol and drug problems across Scotland.

It was shown that some of the NDPF-funded advocacy services provided additional support, individually and in groups, which aimed to further support the recovery of service users. This raised questions about the potential overlap of the respective roles of advocacy services, alcohol and drug support services and recovery communities that we suggest would benefit from discussion involving all parties and the Scottish Government. Guidance on the role of advocacy services in the alcohol and drug setting could be a useful output from these, and any subsequent, discussions.

Family inclusive support services and start-up investment

The two family inclusive support services were: Families as a Movement for Change in East and West Dunbartonshire; and the South Ayrshire Kinship Family Support Service. The two start-up investments were: River Garden Auchincruive (based in South Ayrshire with a national remit); and Recovery Peer Partnership (in Aberdeen). The small number of projects and their diversity made it difficult to draw out learning for the evaluation.

NDPF funding confirmed a need for additional financial support, from the Scottish Government and other funders, for family inclusive support services and start-up investment. The funding highlighted that families, including kinship carers, can be hidden and have limited support options. The South Ayrshire Kinship Family Support Service reported challenges engaging statutory services in new ways of working and suggested that establishing stronger links with senior managers at the outset may help services in other areas seeking to implement a new approach. NDPF funding also demonstrated that start-up investment is useful and otherwise in short supply. It can also involve risks and may not always be as impactful as envisaged but is, nonetheless, likely to produce useful learning. Although the NDPF funding for River Garden Auchincruive was primarily to aid organisational development (through funding for a Chief Executive Officer), the project also generated learning at an operational level which may be of interest to those involved in ongoing discussions about residential rehabilitation in Scotland.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic had a considerable bearing on the implementation and impact of the ten NDPF projects. All ten projects were affected in some way, and in most cases, quite considerably. A very direct effect was felt among those projects delivering face-to-face support to people in recovery or their families. It was admirable, however, how quickly and effectively the projects adjusted their services to continue to support service users by turning to telephone and online support, or online training, where relevant. The services played an important role providing additional support to people affected by alcohol and drug problems during lockdown. This included practical and emotional support to adapt to the circumstances which were particularly challenging for some people affected by alcohol and drug problems.

Projects reported that the experience of successfully delivering online services will inform the design and delivery of services in the future. Projects also highlighted the challenge faced by some service users accessing online support and the potential impact this may have had on their recovery, and in some case mental health and wellbeing.

Fund management

The submission of quarterly monitoring reports by the funded organisations was mixed and the Scottish Government could have done more to contact projects regarding the missing monitoring reports. Both these issues contributed to the limited information available for this evaluation. The majority of funded organisations stated they would have welcomed feedback from the Scottish Government on the contents of the monitoring reports they submitted as it would have demonstrated interest in their project.

At the outset of the programme, the Scottish Government stated that networking events would be held to share learning among the projects. A number of the projects reported their interest in such sessions; particularly the advocacy projects that saw this as an opportunity to network and share merging benefits and challenges. No sessions were held and projects expressed their disappointment at this. Staff turnover among the Scottish Government's Alcohol and Drugs Team and the COVID-19 pandemic were contributory factors to this and the limited contact regarding monitoring reports.

Conclusions

Overall the evaluation has shown the National Development Project Fund has produced learning and impacts of national significance that could be applied to help address problem drug and alcohol use in Scotland in the future. Learning related to advocacy services should be particularly useful to the Scottish Government and partners in terms of future policy and funding.



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The views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and do not necessarily represent those of the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

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