

Building resilience in families affected by addiction

Given the emotional, behavioural and practical impact of addiction on the family even the most resilient of families can be deeply affected by it. Current Action on Addiction practice targets some of the protective factors which are believed to build resilience within families both for family units and their individual members, including children and those with the addiction. These protective factors include confidence, cohesion, communication, self-esteem, and the ability to tackle problems in a positive way and access support.

One practitioner, who recently took part in the evaluation of one of our family programmes, clearly sees the benefits of this approach:

“The impact on Dad of the child telling Dad how he or she is thinking or feeling about the situation is far more effective than a professional trying to do that. If Dad’s going to listen to anyone it’s going to be his child.”

We recently reviewed the findings of an externally commissioned evaluation¹ of one such family-specific programme within the context of some of the key literature on family resilience from recent years (none of which is addictions specific). This evaluation includes both quantitative and qualitative data from participants in Action on Addiction’s Moving Parents and Children Together (M-PACT) programme².

Quantitative data were collected between May 2013 and October 2017 from 1149 individuals (consisting of 595 children and 503 adults) from 418 families. The dataset includes data from participants in 30 locations in England, Wales and Guernsey in 23 community settings, four prisons and four schools, and data from both children and adults (both with and without substance use problems) and including parents, grandparents, foster carers, aunts, and uncles. This is supplemented by qualitative data from a number of individual evaluations of M-PACT programmes in a variety of locations.

¹ Templeton L. Moving Parents and Children Together (M-PACT): an integrated approach to supporting families affected by parental substance misuse. In Mistral W (Ed). *Integrated Approaches to Drug & Alcohol Problems: Action on Addiction* (2016). Abingdon, Wiley-Blackwell (68-78).

² Templeton L (2014). Supporting families living with parental substance misuse: the M-PACT (Moving Parents and Children Together) Programme. *Child & Family Social Work* 19(1): 76-88.

The M-PACT programme, which is delivered by a range of partners under licence from Action on Addiction, offers a whole family approach, working with parents and children from up to eight families (where at least one parent has problems with alcohol and/or drugs) at any one time in different group combinations. The programme, comprises 10 sessions: an initial family assessment; eight consecutive weekly sessions that last 2.5 hours; and a family review session; with a reunion held three months after the end of the programme.

The programme is run by experienced professionals – trained by Action on Addiction’s experts through training which is accredited by the University of Bath – who work with the young people and parents to reduce the harmful impact that parental substance misuse and addiction has on family life. At a time when there is little research about how to build resilience in family units affected by addiction, analysis of our M-PACT programme signals that a programme like M-PACT can target some of the protective factors which are believed to build resilience, with participants reporting that global family functioning had improved over time as a result of participation in the M-PACT programme. One adult family member who took part in M-PACT gave an account of just how much this meant to them:

“Where everything felt so dim and dire, I think [M-PACT] injected a bit more positivity into all of us. It brought us together and allowed us to speak more freely than we probably ever had done in all the years we’ve been together in an honest sort of a way. We were properly communicating for the first time in a very long time.”

Participants also reported positive changes over time in: the severity of the problem; how they thought they were managing as a family; how they viewed the therapy; coping efficacy; and coping being a parent. One of the family members recounted a conversation she had had with her father (who was in prison) following their participation in an M-PACT session:

“He rang me that night [and said]”:

“Thank you so much for telling me how you really feel. I could tell that was years’ worth you held in there, don’t ever feel afraid to tell me anything.”

“I felt brilliant.”

Most of the quantitative changes which participants experienced are statistically significant indicating that they were unlikely to have occurred by chance and could be associated with participation in the M-PACT programme. The quantitative findings are also substantiated by the qualitative evaluations which have also been undertaken.

Next steps

Taking account of the work of Patterson (2002)³, we now wish to further strengthen our approach by exploring how addictions-focused interventions could unlock hidden resilience within families, thereby helping them to:

- Balance addiction with other family needs
- Maintain clear family boundaries
- Develop communication competence
- Attribute positive meaning to the situation
- Maintain family flexibility and commitment to the family as a unit
- Engage in active coping efforts
- Maintain social integration
- Develop collaborative relationships with professionals

In addition, drawing on research conducted by Benzies and Mychasiuk (2009)⁴, we also wish to explore which protective factors, covering individual, family and community – as outlined in the table below – could foster family resilience in families affected by addiction.

Individual	Family	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal locus of control • Emotional regulation • Belief systems • Self-efficacy • Effective coping skills • Increased education, skills, training • Health • Temperament • Gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family structure • Intimate partner relationship stability • Family cohesion • Supportive parent-child interaction • Stimulating environment • Social support • Family of origin influences • Stable and adequate income • Adequate housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement in the community • Peer acceptance • Supportive mentors • Safe neighbourhoods • Access to quality schools, child care • Access to quality health care

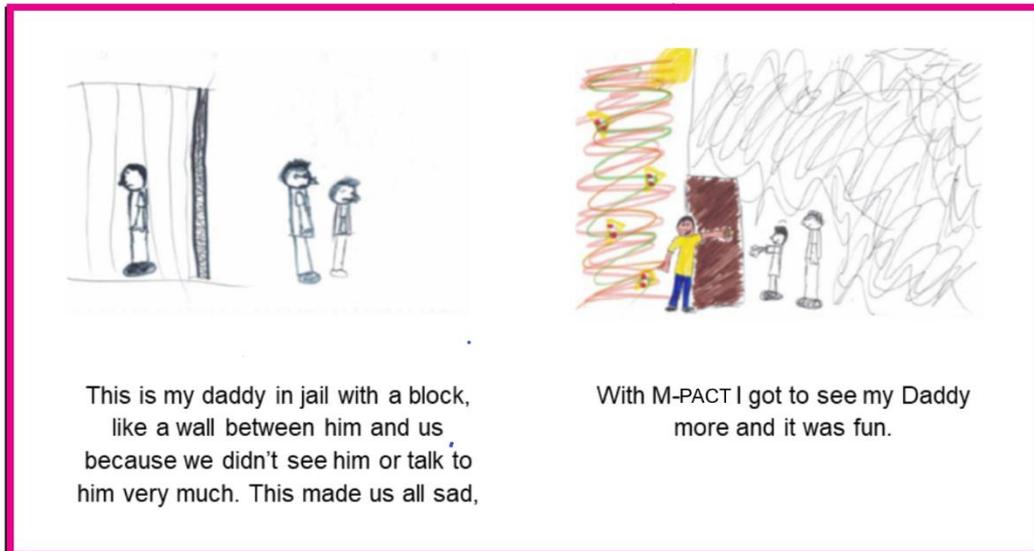
We believe this work is relevant to other policy initiatives including the ‘Troubled Families agenda’, The Family Nurse Partnership, the 2014 Public Health review of evidence around children and young people’s resilience, the Children’s Commissioner’s recent report on childhood vulnerability, and research which has highlighted the need to better understand how to build resilience in children affected by parental substance misuse⁵. We therefore propose a distinctive policy approach aimed at building resilience in family units predicated on shared learning and collaboration in related areas of troubled families and vulnerable children, including mental health, domestic abuse, homelessness and addiction.

³ Patterson J (2002). Integrating Family Resilience and Family Stress Theory. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64, 2, 349-360, and Patterson J (2002). Understanding Family Resilience. *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 58, 3, 233-246.

⁴ Benzies K & Mychasiuk R (2009). Fostering family resiliency: a review of the key protective factors. *Child & Family Social Work* 14, 103-114.

⁵ Velleman R & Templeton L (2016). Impact of parents’ substance misuse on children: an update. *British Journal of Psychiatric Advances* 22: 108-117. doi: 10.1192/apt.bp.114.014449

One of the children who took part in the M-PACT programme alongside her father who, at the time, was serving a prison sentence, presented us with a powerful illustration of what this might mean to her and others like her:



We look forward to hearing from politicians, policy professionals and practitioners who have an interest in addressing the problems of addiction and who wish to contribute to a distinctive policy approach predicated on building resilience within families.

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