The Substance Misuse Treatment Needs of Children Under 11 Year Old

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Background:

A brief needs assessment was conducted in response to discussions that arose at the Under 19's forum regarding KDAT restricting funding for treatment to ages 11 to 19. Concerns were raised regarding appropriate responses for children under age 11 who may require intervention for substance misuse.

Past research is scant regarding use in this age group; with national surveys being conducted with secondary school aged children only. Some related research however has been identified, relevant findings include:

- Trends indicate earlier onset of substance experimentation (DPAS, 1999).
- As children's brains are still developing they are at a much greater risk than adults of developing addiction to substances (Miekle, 2002).
- An extensive study investigating pre-teen substance misuse in Glasgow and Newcastle reported that although illegal drug use was rare in pre-teens (5%), it nevertheless was occurring. The most predominate drug used by pre-teens was found to be cannabis, however instances of pre-teens using heroin were reported (Hill, Gilvary, McCarthy et al., 2003).
- Early experimentation of substance misuse is associated with greater involvement and more problematic use in the future, than those young people that experiment later (U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

Method:

Research was qualitive in nature with a range of a partner agencies being consulted which include treatment agencies, CAMHS, Social Services, DrugScope, KCC Education, Police and KMEMP.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with treatment agencies in East and West Kent, with case studies collected.

Results Summary:

KCA:

In the period of the last 12 months 4 young people under the age of 11 have been referred to KCA with 3 children being accepted for service. None of the children seen by KCA were engaged in drug misuse requiring treatment, but were affected by the significant other's in their lives drug taking. Social Services Children and Families referred the majority of children discussed. A combination of interventions was provided ranging from brief and targeted work to more long-term psychotherapeutic work. A number of challenges were identified when working with this group of young people. No official policy is in place regarding work with this age group.

West Kent Young Person's Drug and Alcohol Services:

Four children have been referred to West Kent under the age of 11 in the last 12 months. Two of these children presented with their own substance misuse problems requiring professional intervention, whilst the other two children were significant other referrals. Most children referred had Social Services involvement, although referral sources were varied and included parents, education, Social Services and A & E.

Staff identified that the current policy was not to work with children under 11 years, as they were not prepared to clinical responsibility of clients of this age group. The recommended onward referral for these young people was CAMHS, however no current policy and procedures exist with CAMHS regarding this.

Kenward Trust:

Kenward Trust advised that no work has occurred with children under the age of 11 in the last 12 months.

Social Services Children & Families:

A meeting occurred with a representative with Children and Families, Child Protection Committee. She provided a document providing clear guidance on assessing the risk of parental/carer substance misuse impact on children, for professional staff across Kent – ***When Parents are Misusing Drugs: Working Together With Parents and Children: Policy and Practice Guidelines***. However the document does not contain guidance regarding the child's own substance misuse.

CAMHS:

Discussions took place with the senior practioner of CAMHS based in Thanet. The person interviewed indicated no incidences of referrals or current casework involving young people under the age 11 with substance misuse issues.

Police:

Discussion with one Youth Crime Reduction Officer indicated that in the last 6 months there had been 3 incidents involving Year 6 students and substances in Kent schools. He additionally indicated that young people in years 5 and 6 appeared to be showing increasing awareness in drug terminology.

The police were also contacted to discuss what actions they take when dealing with incidents of young people under the age of 11 in relation to illegal substances. The Kent Police indicated that this would be considered a child protection issue and a notification to them would occur.

KCC Education:

Consultation was conducted with representatives of KCC Education and the Drugs Education Advisor's who conduct their work within schools. They advised that all schools including primary and infant schools need a drug policy. Although there is a clear model drugs policies provided by KCC Education regarding appropriate responses to secondary school aged children found in possession of substances, a strategy has not been established for primary school aged children

DrugScope:

DrugScope were contacted for advice and guidelines regarding this issue. DrugScope were unable to provide specific guidance for this age group. They agreed that a multi-agency approach was needed which included CAMHS and Child Protection.

KMEMP:

The Kent and Medway Effectiveness Monitoring Project (Drug and Alcohol Services) were contacted regarding data they held regarding the ages that young people at treatment at tier 3 and 4 first used substances.

It was found that young people receiving intervention in Kent tended to commence substance after age 11, with the greatest amount reporting the commencement of substance at age 13, followed by ages 14 and 15 respectively. However with regard to cannabis use 26 (10.6%) of young people indicated commencing prior to the age of 11, whilst 40 (15.5%) of young people commenced alcohol prior to age 11.

Conclusion/ Recommendations:

The findings from the current needs assessment suggest a minimal need of treatment provision for children under age 11 years old in relation to substance misuse. However there is indication that there are isolated cases of need, which are not currently being met in a co-ordinated, consistent and comprehensive way. Additionally it is indicated from the current assessment that a gap in service delivery exists for children requiring therapeutic support for their parent's substance misuse.

A range of challenges were identified by young people's substance misuse workers in Kent when working with children under the age of 11 years, both with regard to the child's own substance misuse and significant other cases.

These challenges include:

→Lack of child specific assessment and therapeutic skills
→Lack of appropriate venues
→Therapeutic relationship and rapport difficulties
→Complex Child Protection Issues
→Multiple needs beyond substance misuse including attachment difficulties and other mental health issues
→Confusion regarding professional boundaries

Suggested Recommendations Include:

→ Forming a working party group with key agencies which include KDAT, Child Protection, CAMHS and treatment providers with communication networks being established between this group and Education and generic child counselling organisations. This working party would aim to collaboratively establish clear policies and procedures for young people below 11 years old in association with drugs. With appropriate feedback being provided on interval basis to the Under 19's group.