

Aberlour

Tackling Drugs Related Deaths

Scottish Government Debate

17th June 2021



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Key Messages

Scotland has the highest rate of drug related deaths in Europe, with most recent statistics showing that deaths recorded in 2019 were four and a half times higher than in 1999

Women with substance misuse issues are at significant risk in the perinatal period, including suicide

Scotland has no dedicated Mother and Baby residential care units for women which would allow them to receive recovery support whilst living with their children

Scotland must [#KeepThePromise](#) for mothers and their children living with addictions

Residential rehabilitation and recovery for mothers and their children can play a vital role in our drive to tackle drug related deaths in Scotland

Overview

Aberlour is Scotland's largest, solely Scottish children's charity. We work with vulnerable children, young people and families throughout Scotland, providing services and support in communities around the country. We help to overcome significant challenges, the impact of drugs and alcohol on family life, growing up in and leaving care, poor mental health, living with a disability, or the impact of poverty and disadvantage. We aim to provide help and support at the earliest opportunity to prevent problems becoming intractable or spiralling out of control. We are committed to [#KeepThePromise](#) and to the incorporation of the UNCRC.

Our Vision is **'to give every child the chance to flourish and, through this, contribute to building a fairer and more equal society'**. Our Mission is to deliver that vision by supporting children and families affected by substance misuse, poverty, discrimination, adversity, and trauma within residential and community settings. We understand that not all children are born with an equal chance and are committed to beating poverty and discrimination.

Introduction

At Aberlour we see the impact of drugs and alcohol on children and families every day. Working in communities around the country we support families affected by substance misuse and living with addictions. We deliver a range of trauma-informed services across 26 Scottish Local Authorities, including early intervention and prevention services, such as whole family substance misuse services, perinatal substance misuse and our 'Sustain' intensive holistic family support services.

We currently deliver two dedicated family support services – [Family Outreach Dundee](#) and [Intensive Family Support Dumfries and Galloway](#) – for families affected by drugs. Our services work with families who are struggling to cope as a result of drug and substance misuse in the family. We work with whole families as well as children on their own, from birth onwards. Our family workers support children with emotional and practical help at home and at school, as well as working with parents to build confidence and parenting skills, establish routines and to access wider community networks and support. We deliver group work activity for the whole family and peer group activities for multiple families. We also work with parents at home to help them create a safe environment for their children.

Until 2015 we delivered our Family Support Service in Glasgow – a residential rehabilitation and recovery service for mothers and their children which provided 24-hour support¹. The accommodation included 12 independent flats for mothers and their children where they could access emotional, therapeutic and practical support. The focus of the service was on rehabilitation and recovery from drug dependency, as well as the provision of parenting support where children could remain in (or be returned to) their parents' care for the duration of their recovery while accessing one-to-one treatment and group work. Unfortunately, this service closed due to lack of funding. It was, at the time, the only residential rehabilitation and recovery service for mothers and babies anywhere in Scotland.

Tackling Drug Related Deaths

Scotland has the highest rate of drug related deaths in Europe, with most recent statistics showing that deaths recorded in 2019 were **four and a half times higher** than in 1999². This simply cannot be allowed to continue. We know that many of these deaths are avoidable and could be avoided with correct and appropriate treatment and support.

Too many women experiencing substance misuse issues are having their children taken into care. Many will not approach or engage with support agencies due to the fear of their children being removed. The Confidential Enquiry into Maternal Deaths report³ provides evidence that women with substance misuse issues are at significant risk in the perinatal period, including suicide and physical health complications. The report states that for a significant proportion of these women who die in the perinatal period:

'their deaths are closely associated with child protection proceedings or the removal of a child into care'.

Through our work we see the impact of problem drug use on families every day and recognise that for too many families the support available does not meet their needs. We believe that the provision of rehabilitation and recovery services for mothers and their

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-19758646>

² <http://www.sdf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/MSP-Briefing-Drug-Related-Deaths-Jan-2021.pdf>

³ <https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/assets/downloads/mbrance-uk/reports/MBRRACE-UK%20Maternal%20Report%202019%20-%20WEB%20VERSION.pdf>

children which allows families to remain together is essential to further prevent drug related deaths of mothers during the perinatal period.

Mother and Baby Residential Rehabilitation and Recovery

Scotland has no dedicated Mother and Baby residential care units for women which would allow them to receive recovery support whilst living with their children. In 2019, half of all children in Scotland on the Child Protection Register were under 5 years old⁴, with parental substance misuse being one of the top three concerns raised at Child Protection Conferences. Evidence suggests that enabling women to live with their children during residential drug treatment and recovery enhances the opportunities for children to stay safely with their birth families⁵. It can also improve the mother/children relationship and outcomes for both children and parents to live lives free from additional support when they feel ready.

There is also a need to create stronger continuity of support between residential recovery and follow-on outreach community support. Relationship-based, whole family support bridging the two services will strengthen recovery and avoid relapse.

Outcomes are poorer for children in care than their peers across a range of factors including attainment, employment and relationships. Taking children into care is also costly for local authorities. Fostering placements can cost £50-£80,000 per annum, with residential placements costing £180-£300,000 per annum.

All these factors suggest a different approach is needed for women with substance misuse issues and their children.

#KeepThePromise for mothers and their children living with addictions

Scotland must recognise and reflect our commitment to **#KeepThePromise** for mothers and their children living with addictions, through significant change in the way that support services work with children, their parents and families. We must focus on valuing families, promoting supports, trusting relationships, and trying to find ways of keeping families together safely wherever possible.

We believe there are better ways to deliver positive outcomes for women experiencing substance misuse and their children. Creating new and innovative rehabilitation and recovery services for mothers and their children which focus on keeping families together is central to how we do this. Services which can bridge support in the ante natal period, intensive residential recovery provision (when women decide that is what they need) and community-based outreach support delivery. In order to achieve this there is required a 'whole system' approach to support, with Scottish Government working in partnership with Health and Social Care Partnerships and community providers to benefit those families accessing services.

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-2019-20/>

⁵ <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2017/06/22/inside-drug-rehab-giving-children-back-mothers/>

Continuity of care is also key and will require relationship-based intensive outreach support to ensure the women receive emotional, practical and therapeutic support in their homes and communities to sustain their recovery. Key to this must be supporting women and children to reconnect to communities. Crucially, we know that relapse is a common part of the recovery process and that residential rehabilitation and recovery services for mothers and babies must be flexible to enable women who do relapse to return either to intensive outreach support or into residential care.

At Aberlour we are clear that to **#KeepThePromise** for mothers and their children living with addiction we need to be bold and innovative in our approach to responding to the needs of these families. We know that properly resourced and dedicated residential rehabilitation and recovery for mothers and their children does work, and can play a vital role in our drive to tackle drug related deaths in Scotland.

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