



# **BASW Special Interest Group in Alcohol and other Drugs**

## **Annual Report 2010**

## Background

In 2006 the Home Office funded a national conference in Birmingham on the subject of social work and substance use. The demand for places at the event and the voices of social workers who attended the conference reflected a growing concern about the lack of alcohol and drug input to social work qualifying and post qualifying training. It also reflected the frustrations of the social workers who felt uninformed and unsupported and were left to deal with the realities of front line practice with people who had alcohol or other drug problems and whose use of substances was placing themselves or others at risk of harm.

The conference provided the lever to establish the BASW Special Interest Group (SIG) in alcohol and other drugs the following year. The group was set up by Dr Sarah Galvani, University of Bedfordshire (formerly University of Birmingham), Ms Annette Fleming, Chief Executive of Aquarius and Mr Ian Johnston, then Chief Executive of BASW. The main driver behind the group's formation was a shared concern over the lack of education and training social workers received on alcohol and other drugs; an awareness that the reputation of the social work profession in this area was suffering because of it; and, more importantly, that service users were likely getting a poor service as a result of this gap in education and training. While this is not a new issue the re-emergence of historical concerns and the changing policy and practice environment meant the development of the group was timely.

Initial meetings with a small group of colleagues with a background in social work and expertise in alcohol and/or other drugs set out to define the purpose and scope of the group, a position statement, and an initial programme of work.

## Purpose and scope

The purpose of the group is:

“To support social work and social care responses to people who use alcohol and drugs”.

To achieve this purpose four key areas comprise the group’s focus:

1. To influence strategy at national and local levels in the following areas:
  - a. Drug and alcohol policy
  - b. Education of social workers
  - c. Social work/service led organisations, e.g. Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) and Association of Directors for Children’s Services (ADCS)
2. To ensure individuals and organisations involved in the areas named above take responsibility for their contribution to improving social work education and practice in relation to alcohol and drug interventions
3. To provide information and resources for social workers
4. To facilitate networking opportunities and information exchange.

The group was concerned with focussing on social work as a profession in the first instance (before broadening out to social care) and identified three groups of social workers who would provide the focus for the work of the SIG:

- social workers specialising in drugs and alcohol
- social workers in other specialist settings seeking information on working with alcohol and drug issues
- those currently uninterested.

## Work/achievements to date

As is our custom in these reports, we have listed the work and achievement since the group's inception, not just the work in the last 12 months.

### Year 1 (2007)

- Initial steering group established
- Three SIG Steering Group meetings – February, June, October
- Purpose and scope developed and agreed
- Position statement developed and agreed
- Launch event at Kent St., Birmingham - February 07

### Year 2 (2008)

- Three SIG Steering Group meetings – February, July, October
- Conference at Kent St., Birmingham – *Picking up the pieces? Supporting social work responses to alcohol and drug problem* (May 08)
- Conference at CEIMH, University of Birmingham – *'Putting the question: assessing and responding to substance use'* (December 08)

### Year 3 (2009)

- Five SIG Steering Group meetings – January, March, June, Sept, November
- Review and expansion of Steering Group Membership
- Review of position statement (see appendix 2)
- Draft copy for Conference Banner
- Conference in London – *'Against all Odds'* (for social workers *specialising* in alcohol and drugs work (May 09)

### Year 4 (2010)

- Four SIG Steering Group meetings – February, May, July, October. We are delighted that a number of BASW staff have attended meetings when requested, In addition to our BASW stalwart, Nushra Mansuri, other BASW staff including Hilton Dawson, Phil James, Shirley Konstandis and Onwah Tsang.

- Production of pilot – *“Alcohol and other Drugs – Essential Information for Social Workers – a BASW Pocket Guide”* - written by Trevor McCarthy, edited by Sarah Galvani, with considerable input and feedback from SIG members. (This is a hugely successful publication, going to all BASW members through via Professional Social Work. The requests for the guide have now exceeded the number of guides printed. The success of the guide has led to the likelihood of more external funding for the production of subsequent more specific pocket guides – see below in forthcoming activity) This was achieved through the SIG securing generous support from National Treatment Agency, Alcohol Education Research Council, BASW and Bedfordshire University.
- Conference – *“Substance use among older people and people with mental ill health”* (for social workers and other health and social care workers) (Manchester, March 10) (Sponsored in part by Lifeline)
- Conference – *“Social Work and Substance Use: Evidence based practice?”* (In association with the Tilda Goldberg Centre for Research in Social Work and Social Care and the NTA) (London, September 2010)
- Development of material for BASW website – which now includes the alcohol and drugs SIG background, purpose and scope, position statement, supportive statements and contact details. Links to SIG events have also been placed on its website page along with a downloadable copy of the pocket guide.
- Close liaison with BASW’s Public Relations Manager has ensured the SIG, its purpose, and events are promoted widely.
- Consolidation of existing mailing lists to establish one single SIG database/ mailing list for people with particular interest in alcohol and other drugs issues.

The majority of SIG events, particularly from 2008 onwards, have been oversubscribed. They are attracting expert practitioners, senior managers and national policy bodies as both speakers and delegates.

### ***Mailing list***

Shirley Konstandis at BASW holds an ever increasing mailing list of people interested in the SIG or who have attended events and volunteered their contact details. It continues to grow with each subsequent SIG event. The mailing list currently holds 160 contact names.

### ***Publicity/profile***

In addition to the events arranged by the SIG Steering Group the following successes have been achieved:

- A conference banner was designed and produced and is taken/sent to all SIG conferences and other BASW events. Thanks go to Sue Hutton for her work on this.
- Coverage of conference events in *Professional Social Work* and *Community Care* when press released by BASW
- A special drugs issue of *Community Care* featured interviews with the SIG Chair and also reproduced, with permission, excerpts from the pocket guide.
- The General Social Care Council approached the SIG for a statement for a press release following their survey of social workers relating to substance use on social work training.
- Sarah Galvani continues to represent the BASW SIG on the Substance Misuse Skills Consortium, to represent the social work education/training agenda
- Various SIG members continue to receive increasing number of contacts as a result of events and increasing profile of the group. These range from requests for formal help to informal advice, information and resources, both from individuals and organisations spanning substance use and social care

### ***Policy work***

- The BASW SIG has made contact with all the bodies involved in the reform of social work education and practice, and the individuals who chair them.
- The SIG's workforce development position statement (see appendix 3) has been forwarded to them and positive responses have been received. It is understood that substance use is on the agenda for the new social work curriculum although details are yet to be established.
- The facilitator of the social work reform board's education group has asked the SIG to be involved in further consultations on this matter.
- BASW staff also agreed to put forward the views of the SIG when they represent BASW on these groups and have been sent the appropriate information accordingly.

- BASW staff also agreed to take the position statement to BASW's Human Rights and Ethics Committee for approval as formal BASW policy.

## ***Challenges***

### Administration

To date Shirley Konstandis has offered excellent support to the group. She has undertaken a number of key administrative tasks for the SIG, both in terms of arranging refreshments for meetings but also the more onerous tasks of taking bookings for SIG conferences and events, arranging CPD certificates for delegates and maintaining a database of conference delegates. This work undertaken by Shirley is vital to the functioning and effectiveness of the SIG. However, Shirley needs to devote more time to the management business of BASW, particularly at this time of change, and supporting the SIG is therefore an additional pressure on her role and event organisation in particular. The SIG needs administrative support from BASW staff in order to continue its success and hopes, in the next calendar year to have additional support so that the mailing list and database can be updated regularly and event subscription is able to operate efficiently.

### Funding

The BASW SIG comprises Steering Group members from a range of specialist social work and social care backgrounds (see appendix 1). In addition a number of them specialise in alcohol and drug use and have worked in a range of services and policy organisations supporting people with alcohol and drug problems. However very few members are able to continue funding their own travel to and from the SIG meetings. One practitioner member was unable to attend as a result of the lack of funding.

It is clear that the long term future of the SIG in alcohol and other drugs is dependent on the leadership, development and coordinating role of the Steering Group. At a time when the profile of the SIG is growing, the Group is keen to expand its activities to fulfil other elements of its purpose and scope. Therefore securing some funding is essential to the future of the group. The BASW Chief Executive is currently considering whether or not funding can be found to support steering group attendance at the SIG.

### Promoting its work

Currently the main avenue for event or SIG promotion is through *Professional Social Work* and *Community Care* magazines and other networks utilised by the Steering Group members, including JISC<sup>1</sup> mail lists and other special interest groups. The SIG has had tremendous support from the drug and alcohol fields in promoting its events. Two social care bodies that have been able to offer some advertising around events, the GSCC and SWAP, are set to be abolished in the near future. The SIG hopes to benefit from BASW's new Public Relations manager's advice on how to reach a wider audience of social workers. It also hopes to continue work with Onwah Tsang when relevant in relation to website issues and promotion.

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<sup>1</sup> A national academic mailing list service – [www.jiscmail.ac.uk](http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk) . One such list is set up specifically for social work/social care academics and practitioners interested in alcohol and other drugs to exchange information, seek advice, and promote mutual learning and good practice (social work-alcohol-drugs list).

## Planning ahead: January-December 2011

### **Events**

- Conference – *Taking a closer look at drug and alcohol treatment –Interventions for use by social workers in working with people who use substances*, (for social workers and social care workers) Birmingham, 27 April
- Conference – *Either a repeat of the April conference or a focus on services in the context of changed government and economic policy*. Autumn 2011 (to be confirmed).

### **Strategic focus**

- Workforce development – in light of the ongoing changes in social work practice and education, the BASW SIG will continue to respond and proactively contribute to debate about social work curriculum development at qualifying and post qualifying levels.
- Continued contribution to consultations on relevant policy documents when appropriate and possible.

### **Resources/information**

- Production of one or more pocket guides: Children and Families, Young People, Older People and Mental Health. (Discussions with potential funding organisations are at an advanced stage)
- Practice guidance and workforce development are high on the SIG agenda and other outputs, supporting parallel work of other social work organisations, need to be considered.

### **Administration**

- Clarify administrative support available to the group
- Actively recruit new BASW members to the Special Interest Group steering group.
- Pilot an advisory group alongside the steering group to ensure input from a range of partners and colleagues who may be unable to attend in person.

- Clarify position on BASW refunding travel fees to SIG meetings.
- Continued attendance at the group by BASW staff and management
- Consolidate existing SIG event mailing lists to establish one single SIG database/  
mailing list for people with particular interest in alcohol and other drugs
- Revisit charging for SIG events and discuss again with senior management BASW's support for this proposal and its ability to manage the administration of it. This is an option for covering the travel costs of Steering Group members and also the costs of travel for speakers at the SIG's events.

## Appendix 1

### SIG membership – at December 2010

Sarah Galvani (Chair)	Principal Research Fellow, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Bedfordshire
Alex Davis	Associate of the Centre of Excellence in Inter-disciplinary Mental Health, University of Birmingham
Sheila Burgoyne	Trust Alcohol and Drugs Service, Norwich
Rhoda Emlyn-Jones	Service Manager, Cardiff and the Vale Alcohol and Drugs Service, Cardiff City Council
Wulf Livingston	Area Manager, Interventions - Substance Misuse, North Wales Probation Service; subsequently Senior Lecturer in Social Work, Glyndwr University, Wrexham
Trevor McCarthy	Independent Consultant (previously managed community alcohol, drug, and HIV services and employed in policy and research teams for the NTA)
Richard McVey	Service Manager (Family Services), Aquarius
Nushra Mansuri	Joint Manager (Professional Services) England, BASW
Denise Tanner	Lecturer in Social Work, University of Birmingham
Steve Taylor	Programme Manager (Skills and Development Team), National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse
Jo Utting	Development Director, Action for Change
Emma Weir	Emma Weir, Dual Diagnosis Lead Practitioner, Northampton Social Services

## Appendix 2

### **BASW Position Statement on Alcohol and Other Drug Problems**

1. BASW recognises the difficulties faced by service users, their families and communities, as a result of alcohol and other drug problems.
2. BASW believes social work practice can and should respond effectively to people suffering from their own, or a loved one's, alcohol and other drug problems
3. BASW believes that service users have the right to professional social work care, delivered by well-trained and well-supervised workers who are competent to deal with alcohol and other drug problems.
4. BASW believes that competence in working with alcohol and drug problems is an essential component of high quality social care service provision for all service user groups.
5. BASW believes social workers must be able to intervene with confidence where they encounter alcohol and drug problems, and participate in active partnerships with specialist colleagues in the drug and alcohol fields.
6. BASW calls on social work educators and employers to take responsibility for enabling social workers to access the relevant education and training to meet their duty of care towards service users with alcohol and other drug problems.
7. BASW seeks to support individual social workers to take responsibility for ensuring their knowledge and skills meet the needs of service users with alcohol and other drug problems.

Reviewed 2nd December 2009

## Appendix 3

### BASW Special Interest Group on alcohol and other drugs

August 2010

#### **Position Statement: Educating and enabling social workers to address alcohol and drug problems.**

Point 6 of BASW's position statement on alcohol and other drug problems states:

*"BASW calls on social work educators and employers to take responsibility for enabling social workers to access the relevant education and training to meet their duty of care towards service users with alcohol and other drug problems."*

Social workers increasingly work with people whose difficulties are compounded by problematic alcohol or drug use – either their own use or that of a family member or partner. Yet evidence clearly shows that, for more than three decades, alcohol and other drug issues have been neglected in the professional and continuing training programmes for professional social workers. This is in spite of calls for improvement from service users, social care and health practitioners, academics, and parliamentary inter-ministerial working groups.

Service users with alcohol and other drug problems have not been receiving the services they need and deserve. BASW is committed to taking and supporting action to address this deficiency in the delivery and organisation of social work services and in the education and training of social workers at qualifying, post qualifying and employer levels.

#### **1. Qualifying social work training**

BASW's position is that qualifying social work training should include as a minimum:

- Relevant evidence on the prevalence and incidence of alcohol and drug problems among social work service users
- Theories and models of problem alcohol and other drug use
- The impact of alcohol and drugs on health and behaviour
- Evidence-based interventions for engaging with alcohol and drug problems
- Skills development in addressing alcohol and drug problems
- Initial assessment and delivery of brief interventions
- Information on the organisation and delivery of alcohol and drug interventions and treatment
- An understanding of referral processes and partnership working with specialist substance use colleagues

This would begin to prepare social workers in training for the reality of the complex problems they will experience in practice.

#### **2. Post qualifying social work training**

Post qualifying social work training should provide advanced education on alcohol and other drug issues. This training should be designed to equip social work professionals to:

- Understand how alcohol and drug use relates to, and affects, their specialist service user group, eg. older people and alcohol, young people's drug use, impact on parenting, mental health and substance use etc
- Deliver more complex evidence-based alcohol and drug interventions
- Deliver supervision and guidance on alcohol and drugs issues to social work colleagues
- Lead partnership work with specialist alcohol and other drug services
- Contribute to the continuing training of other colleagues.

This training would enable experienced social workers to deliver appropriate comprehensive interventions to meet the needs of vulnerable service users with complex needs. The development of advanced expertise in working with alcohol and other drug problems will enable social work agencies to consolidate and develop their in-house expertise. In turn this will enable social work providers to respond to the needs of vulnerable service users more comprehensively and also to work in more effective partnership with other organisations, including specialist alcohol and other drug services. *(NB. Existing social workers who have not received the preliminary education identified under point 1 above would need to receive this prior to the more advanced level identified here).*

### 3. Employer based training

Because of the lack of substance use education in the majority of social work programmes, **employer based training** is vital to address existing gaps in social workers' knowledge of substance use. When qualifying and post qualifying education improves, the nature of such training will change. However, we currently suggest that **employer led training** should include:

- Relevant evidence on the prevalence and incidence of alcohol and drug problems among social work service users, including local data
- Theories and models of problem alcohol and other drug use
- The impact of alcohol and drugs on health and behaviour
- Information on the organisation and delivery of alcohol and drug interventions and treatment, including local treatment systems
- Evidence based interventions for engaging with alcohol and drug problems, particularly using locally agreed tools and protocols
- Skills development in addressing alcohol and drug problems
- Initial assessment and delivery of brief interventions, using established locally agreed tools and interventions

Social work staff with **supervisory responsibilities** or in management posts should also receive training in supporting and guiding case workers in their work with alcohol and other drug problems. The lack of management knowledge on this subject has detracted from effective supervision which, in turn, gives clear messages to social workers about the importance, or lack thereof, of addressing substance use in their practice. Managers may also need the preliminary and advanced training and will also need to take on roles which demonstrate their ability to lead and develop partnership work at both practice and strategic levels. This is likely to involve understanding and taking responsibility for the service commissioning process.

This training for existing social workers would ensure that the practice of staff is both congruent with that of newly qualified social workers and meets the needs of service users. This education is the responsibility of all professional social work employers. In delivering this training they should work in partnership with local agencies, specialist alcohol and drug treatment services and, where appropriate, with academic institutions.

*Written on behalf of the BASW SIG on Alcohol and other Drugs group by Mr Trevor McCarthy and Dr Sarah Galvani (Chair)*