

## St Helens Building Bridges Evaluation Summary

The impact of a parent's alcohol problem on the lives of children can be devastating, often being a major contributor to parental and family conflict. It can adversely affect children's education, health, wellbeing and even future employment opportunities. Evidence suggests that those children who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) growing up in a household with domestic abuse, parental substance abuse and parental mental health issues, are more likely to develop future complex needs, particularly relating to their mental health and wellbeing.

In 2018, parental alcohol misuse was being identified locally as a significant risk factor for families in around 30% of our local social care assessments. Data from national reports suggested that St Helens had over 1000 children living with an alcohol dependent parent and that there were around 600 people who were alcohol dependent who also lived with children. It was thought likely that many of these parents and families were not receiving any kind of support or treatment.

A number of agencies had contact with many affected families including schools, the police and partners within the local 'Front Door' Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) where professionals seek to work together to identify and support families at risk. Although aware of the alcohol related issues, many partners were not clear about how to support the families. The support available focussed upon the adults, many of whom were reluctant to engage with services for fear of losing their children into social care. The voices of the children were largely unheard, and their support needs were unmet.

St Helens was one of nine areas to secure national innovation funding (£276,000 over 3 years) to develop a new model to support families with alcohol dependent parents. 'Building Bridges' built upon the existing strong culture of integration in St Helens and aimed to build capacity and knowledge of alcohol and parental conflict within agencies in contact with affected families.

Building Bridges involved St Helens Integrated Recovery Service (provided by CGL, Change Grow Live) working with agencies including schools, children's services and health services to help them screen and recognise when alcohol is a problem within a family. Agencies were supported to offer appropriate advice and support to families, depending on their levels of needs, through three key programmes delivered by CGL:

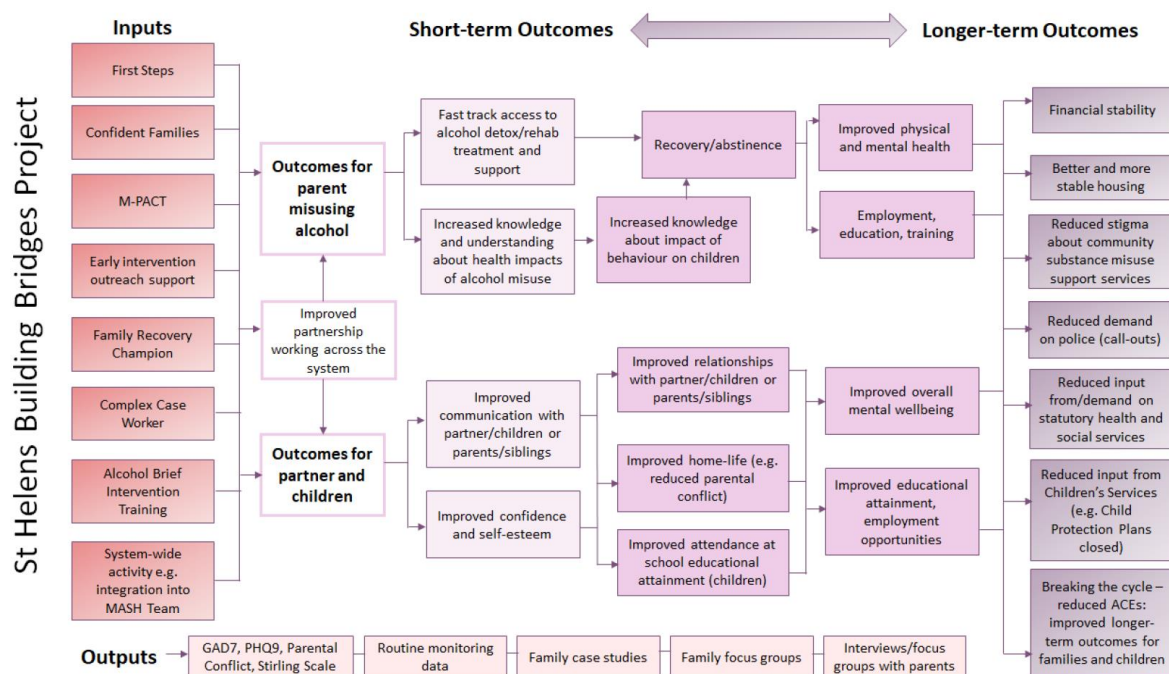
- 'First Steps' – an early intervention programme for parents to raise awareness of and reduce the impact of alcohol harm.
- 'Confident Families' – a programme that supported families to develop healthier relationships, explore behaviours, coping strategies and improving relationships to reduce parental conflict.
- A higher intensity family intervention called 'MPACT' (Moving Parents and Children closer Together).

A formal evaluation of the programme was undertaken by Liverpool John Moores University. This included quantitative data and qualitative data obtained through a questionnaire and interviews with stakeholders and families.

## Key Findings

Each element of the Building Bridges programme was evaluated, and the findings used to develop a 'logic model' (see diagram below) that clearly shows some of the short, medium and longer term impacts on the parents, the children and the wider system and services.

*Building Bridges Project Logic Model*



## Key points from the evaluation

- The evaluation's logic model suggested a range of short, medium and longer term impacts of the Building Bridges programme on parents and their children. These included access to treatment, improved relationships, better school attendance, improved wellbeing, financial stability, reduced demand for health and social care and greater likelihood of breaking the generational cycle of drugs and alcohol misuse.
- Alcohol and drugs support (delivered by Change Grow Live, CGL) is now available within the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
- Around 2000 children's social care referrals are screened per year.
- Over 1230 professionals have been trained from the safeguarding partnership.

- Around 400 more parents engaged in treatment for their alcohol; CGL can directly contact and support families requiring their support.
- Families have access to earlier support to prevent escalation.
- Agencies understand and respond to families affected by alcohol harm, and the voice of the child with lived experience.

The evaluation also highlighted the following impacts for parents, children and the wider system

**For parents** - Building Bridges has enabled better access to support and treatment, less stigma, reduced concerns that they may lose their children, raised awareness of the impact of their own drinking, given them skills to reduce conflict, enabled better parenting skills, improved mental and physical health, improved management of finance, reduced need for statutory interventions, improved engagement in volunteering and training.

*“I didn’t see drink as an issue and had a domestic with me partner where things got very out of hand...I admitted to me social worker that I had a drink problem. I already knew about CGL. I self-referred and then was put on the courses and I’m gaining great insight learning the ripple effect of what effect it’s havin’ on the kids.”* (Parent)

*“They was getting excluded from school and then I’ve come here and got clean. They was being naughty in school and I’ve gone today and I’ve got an amazing report. They’re getting ‘Masters’ which is the highest they can get because they are really, really clever.”* (Parent)

*“I’ve took up two courses. I’ve just submitted me understanding level two children’s mental health just submitted two assignments for that and I’ve already completed, this is during COVID, Mental Health First Aid and Mental Health First Aid advocacy in the workplace. I’ve just passed that as well, me level two. I’ve got a counselling course coming up. I’m gonna do me Health and Social so I can work with the Recovery Team at CGL. Yeah, and not only that, I’ve been a national wellbeing event. It was a breakout of 50 rooms. I’ve got to host the human library twice. And it was a roaring success. So, I’m doing well at the minute. I am.”* (Parent)

**For children** – Building Bridges has heard their voice, given them a better relationship with parents, improved wellbeing, a more stable home life, greater ability to attend and learn at school, reduced need for input from children's services, and has contributed to breaking the cycle of alcohol dependency across the generations.

*“My relationship with my mum has dramatically improved as we have gone through the programme. I haven’t lived with my mum since I was 2 so I have never felt like we have had a mother-daughter relationship and it was always awkward and forced when we spoke. Even though this programme is only a*

*short period of time I feel it has saved my relationship with my mum, because before this programme I had lost hope that we would ever have a relationship.” (Young person aged 13+)*

*“Dear recovery, recovery means to me that our mummy’s get better and when my mum is not drinking I feel secure and I feel a lot better because I get to spend time with my mum. My mum has changed since 6 months so if she keeps going she’s 100% to get us back. When my mum is drinking I feel distracted, unsecure, frustrated and demoralised. In school I can’t do my work because I get distracted because every time I think of my mum I think that something is wrong and in the middle of lessons I get angry because I feel angry because I feel under pressure because I have got lots of worries. When I talk about my worries with my mum it makes me cry sometimes because some of my worries are hard to tell and make me cry even more. But when my mum is in recovery my mum will give me cuddles. Feelings, I sometimes feel scared when I leave my mum something might happen, like I’m scared if she drinks but that will probably not happen. That won’t happen because she hasn’t drank in 6 months and she is in CGL now. Also I trust her now and I can’t wait to move back in with her because then we can do fun things together and be happy again. I feel happy that my mum is finally better and I get to spend time with my mummy being sober. Also, I can’t wait to spend time with my family once we are back together and we can finally do things together as a family.” (Young person aged under 13)*

**For services** – Building Bridges has resulted in more integrated working for better outcomes, raised awareness of the impact of parental drinking, improved screening for parental drinking, earlier interventions for families, reduced need for escalation, direct access to intensive treatment and support for whole families.

*“There’s health, education, police and now Change Grow Live have come on board. We all became integrated together, an integrated children’s system. We are responding to the referral together” “We don’t run that risk of missing any communication. Our work and relationships are so much better. Information is shared so much quicker. And we make informed decisions together.” (MASH Professional)*

*“It’s an early opportunity. We want preventative work before the initial point of contact to social care, a lot of our referrals do step down to level two.” (Professional)*

*“We do a lot of preventative work as well. There’s examples where CGL work and social work kind of work together, particularly with a parent who’s struggling with substance misuse or alcohol - we put a plan together. So things that CGL could do so they’d say, well, we’re going to make an appointment on this day. We’re going to offer this and then social workers can have the conversation with the parents to help get them on board. So talking to the parents about the plan together.” (Stakeholder)*

*“I’m seeing people maybe in their 40s, 50s, 60s who have been just on their own struggling, you know, their parents were alcohol users and drugs themselves. And you can see the impact on them as older people. If only there was some kind of intervention with those when they were younger, they would be much more fulfilled with life. M-Pact programme recognises the effects it has on children.” (Stakeholder)*

Case studies are presented within the evaluation demonstrating value for money. These case studies showed examples of Building Bridges providing early help to families with a range of complex needs and the evaluator provided economic estimates of potential costs avoided. The estimated cost benefits of the programme were positive and suggested the Building Bridges programme provides excellent value for money.