

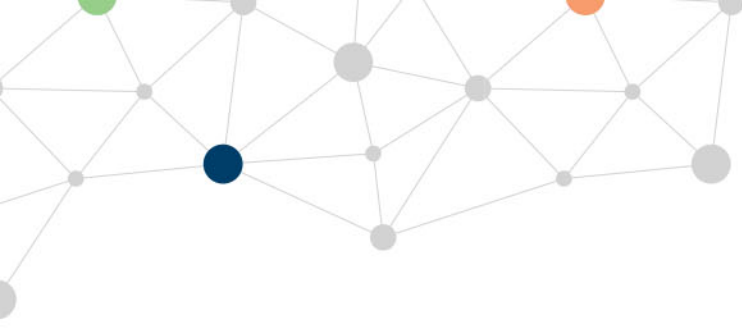
# Alcohol and Other Drugs Program: Family and Carer Support Service

## Evaluation Summary

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## Introduction

Harmful substance use is a global problem that negatively impacts the health, psychosocial and economic well-being of people with Substance Abuse Disorders (SUDs) and their families. In Australia, people living in non-urban centres are more likely to engage in risky substance use and are at greater risk of being admitted to hospital for SUDs (Roxburgh et al., 2013). Families of people with SUDs are at higher risk of verbal, physical or sexual abuse, and a multitude of interacting biopsychosocial and economic harms (Crane et al., 2016; Denomme & Benhanoh, 2017; Wilson et al., 2017).

Stepped-care approaches to treatment appear to offer the most promise for recovery in people with SUDs and as support services for families impacted by SUDs. Stepped-care models offer a targeted, needs-based, hierarchy of interventions that accommodate the needs of individuals. In so doing, this system of care can offer a spectrum of interventions from low to highly intensive treatments, in a cost-efficient and client-centred way. Stepped-care approaches appear to offer an ideal strategy for responding to the complex needs of vulnerable individuals, such as LGBTIQ and CALD communities; whether such needs can be met in regional Victoria where there are substantive challenges in terms of access to, and the quality of, services for AOD is not well established.

The Gippsland Primary Health Network (GPHN) commissioned the Australian Community Support Organisation (ACSO) to deliver the Alcohol and Other Drugs: Family and Carer Support Service Program to address the needs of vulnerable families and carers impacted by someone's SUDs and living in the Latrobe, Baw Baw, South Gippsland, Wellington and East Gippsland local government areas. The program offers a stepped-care approach to provide a hierarchy of interventions that include support, education, advocacy and referrals, matched to the needs of the individual, particularly vulnerable groups. To develop the evidence-base to support investment and implementation, it is essential that these programs be evaluated to determine the impact they have on the complex harms associated with SUDs. The aim of this project was to conduct a 'realistic participatory evaluation' of the Alcohol and Other Drugs: Family and Carer Support Service program.

## Method

Following approval by the Federation University Australia Human Ethics Committee (Project Number A18-123), face-to-face interviews were conducted with ACSO clients and staff across the Gippsland region in Victoria, Australia. These were four females, all involved with the program for a minimum of two years having professional and personal experience with SUD. Fourteen ACSO clients volunteered for interview. The majority of client participants were female with two males. All client participants had family members with SUDs, including sons, daughters, husbands and grandsons. The majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face with five conducted via telephone.

Interviews comprised a series of open-ended questions regarding experiences of the program, key benefits, any shortcomings, and possible improvements to the program plus contextual information. Interviews were recorded, with written permission, and later transcribed for analysis.

## Major Findings

A summary of key findings based on identified interview themes are presented in Tables 1 and 2 below. Clients reported a very high level of satisfaction with the program, particularly with staff involved in running the program. Clients reported a wide range of perceived benefits from the program, including feeling better supported and better equipped to manage challenging and stressful life events and



relationships with family members with a SUD and having learnt new strategies to improve their quality of life in general.

Findings from staff interviews corroborate this positive client assessment of the program. Staff were highly motivated and invested in the program and played a key role in its success by providing tailored and effective services to clients, underscoring the need for program staff to be suitably qualified and experienced in order to meet the highly diverse needs of clients. Staff were highly cognisant of the benefits of teamwork to enable program success but indicated the need for more resources in order to meet the service needs of the Gippsland region.

Table 1: Themes from interviews with clients and staff on the Alcohol and Other Drugs: Family and Carer Support Service

Theme	Outcome
<b>Client perspectives</b>	
1. Client involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment through seeking improved personal situation</li> <li>• Involved due to desperation</li> <li>• Hopeful of a good ending</li> </ul>
2. Client awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal acquaintances</li> <li>• Internet</li> <li>• Program may have been recommended</li> </ul>
3. Program highlights for clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social support</li> <li>• Emotional support</li> <li>• Education on issue</li> <li>• Developing new or ongoing relationships</li> <li>• Learning coping and management strategies</li> <li>• Links to other community services</li> </ul>
4. New strategies for clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non combative approaches</li> <li>• Setting boundaries</li> <li>• Anger management</li> <li>• Losing feelings of guilt</li> <li>• Foundations for self-care</li> </ul>
5. Ongoing client benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of positivity</li> <li>• Building a sense of normality in one's life</li> </ul>
6. Client family members involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other family members becoming engaged</li> <li>• Sharing of knowledge of strategies in family</li> <li>• Assisting SUD recovery</li> </ul>
7. Client suggested improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More staff to lessen burden</li> <li>• Improved geographic program reach</li> <li>• 24-hour program access</li> <li>• Expand to other locations nationally</li> </ul>

Table 2: Themes from interviews with staff on the Alcohol and Other Drugs: Family and Carer Support Service

Theme	Outcome
<b>Staff perspectives</b>	
1. Client satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program meeting goals</li> <li>• Strong client connections</li> </ul>
2. Program process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Logical and tailored client engagement</li> <li>• Focus on clients – not SUB problem <i>per se</i></li> <li>• Staff proactive in making client connections</li> </ul>
3. Client experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clients gain problem perspective</li> <li>• Range of approaches and steps meeting client needs</li> </ul>
4. Staff capacity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff members suitable experience and training</li> <li>• Ongoing formal training enhancing capacity</li> <li>• Staff share knowledge and skills</li> <li>• Staff development aligned with program goals</li> </ul>
5. Program risk management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies in place to maintain staff safety</li> <li>• Strategies in place to maintain client confidentiality</li> </ul>
6. Constraints and wider reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited resources present challenges in program delivery</li> <li>• Opportunities for further program delivery</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

This report provides an evaluation of a Gippsland-based Alcohol and Other Drugs: Family and Carer Support Service program aimed at supporting and educating family members impacted by a person's SUD. From interviews with clients and program staff, and consistent with reported research, several demonstrable positive outcomes have been identified. Based on reported data, the program has provided clear benefits within the Gippsland community, both for persons directly involved, and presumably to those more widely affected. These outcomes, therefore, represent an effective use of funds while providing evidence for the justification of program continuation and expansion.

## References

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