

Parents with drug and alcohol problems often do not realise how their behaviour can affect their children – which is where a Derby charity can help, as **Aly Walsh** discovers.

ONE child draws pictures of needles, another imitates drug use and a third is terrified when her mum leaves the house.

Each of these children has a parent who is addicted to drugs or alcohol and all are youngsters that the charity Women's Work has seen.

Dionne Reid, chief executive of the charity, said: "Living with parents with substance misuse problems can affect children's well-being, education and general health.

"They often witness and, in some cases experience, violence and neglect, especially in chronic misuse."

Seeing the devastating impact on the lives of these children, the organisation de-



Dionne Reid was touched by one child's comments after a seaside trip.

cid to try to support them.

Little Links began as a pilot scheme with the charity's social worker, Stacey Dixon, working with five children.

But the success of the project led to Children in Need awarding the charity £77,879 to pay Miss Dixon's salary for the next three years.

The project is an offshoot of the charity's family support service, The Link Work Project, which supports families affected by drug and alcohol misuse.

Miss Dixon said: "We recognised that there was a need for support for children aged between six and 11, so we researched and developed a six-week programme."

The project targets children who may live in a chaotic home environment but are not involved in social care. It



Stacey Dixon, 23, a family support worker for Women's Work (Derbyshire) in one of the rooms used when working with children. Children in Need cash has extended Stacey's Little Links project.

Picture: Ian Hodgkinson DERH201204188-005_C

Children devastated by their parents' addiction to drugs or alcohol get vital help from project

aims to stop the escalation of problems, which may lead to social care intervention.

Miss Dixon said: "We provide a safe space among peers who are living in similar circumstances. It's about listening to the child and hearing their views.

"A lot of the children blame themselves for things that aren't right at home.

"For example, a lot of the children don't understand how alcohol affects their parents' behaviour and may think the anger and shouting is because they have done something wrong."

Miss Dixon said these children often showed a lack of self-confidence and missed a lot of school.

During the sessions the

children are allowed to play and Miss Dixon has on occasions observed worrying activities, such as youngsters drawing pictures of needles and gang signs.

One case-worker saw a five-year-old child pretending to inject heroin.

Miss Dixon said: "They have learned a lot of negative behaviours and the earlier

they receive the input of positive role models and experiences the better."

In the project, they use different tools to get the children to "verbalise their worries".

One little girl in the project spent two years away from her mother when she was very young and she now struggles when her mum leaves her.

"She even gets upset if her mum is going to the shop – as she believes her mum is not going to come back.

"We worked with some worry dolls and after that she told her nanna she no longer had any worries."

Another part of the project is to "strengthen" the relationship between the parent and child.

Each week the parents and the children are brought together.

Miss Dixon said: "We do positive activities with them, such as looking at family photos so the child recognises their parent has not always been like that, so they can look towards a better future."

Mrs Reid said: "It is also very important for us to get the parent to recognise the impact of their behaviour on the child. Parents don't always understand the long-term consequences of their behaviour on a child's development."

She said it could often be very difficult for them when they realised how their child felt.

The charity also takes the children on trips and organises out-of-school workshops and activities.

Mrs Reid recalls comments made by a five-year-old on a journey back from the seaside.

"He said 'I'm so happy, I didn't ever think I would go to the seaside until I was 30,'" said Mrs Reid.

"These are the kind of things most of us just take for granted. So many children miss out on some very basic experiences."

She said that going to places such as the seaside and the zoo were things many of the parents had never done with their children as their own parents had also suffered with drug addiction.

Children can be referred to the project by schools, the police, the probation service, health professionals and through the charity's other projects.

After a referral, the charity assesses the child to see whether the project is appropriate for them.

The charity's Link Work Project has recently been awarded a silver medal in the GlaxoSmithKline Impact Champions awards.

The awards, run since 1997, are designed to recognise and reward charities that are doing excellent work to improve people's health.

Women's Work was originally set up in 2003 to help women drug users, particularly street sex workers.

It is holding an open day at its Charnwood Street centre from noon until 3pm today, when agencies and other professionals can drop in and find out about its projects.

Alternatively, call Derby 242525 for more details about the charity's work.

awalsh@derbytelegraph.co.uk

Dementia patients kept busy as staff at home learn new approach to care

A DERBY care home has adopted a pioneering new approach to dementia care.

Staff at Douglas Court, in Osmaston Road, are being trained in the Butterfly Approach, which focuses on giving people with dementia a more interesting living space, with plenty of things to see, do and touch.

Carers also need to learn new ways of interacting with patients.

Douglas Court's dementia patients will soon be able to "flit" between comfort items such as dolls, prams, soft toys, handbags and trays of jewellery.

Music items, puppets and art will also be used to create an uplifting environment.



Debra Meynell says there is a skill to tackling patients' boredom.

Care home manager Debra Meynell said the approach helped prevent patients "going into themselves".

She said: "Turning a resident's sense of boredom, lethargy, sleeping and staring into space into positive social interactions is a valued skill.

"It means residents living with dementia, who often have a limited attention span, can flit between different, stimulating activities and con-

gregate in smaller groups, moving on to something else when they are ready. They are not tied to one thing."

One resident at Douglas Court has been given a life-like baby doll to "care for".

Ms Meynell said: "The resident had been at risk of falls during the night as she would get up to look for her baby and would become very tired during the day.

"Since we introduced the doll, she no longer gets distressed in the night.

"The lady is fully aware that it is, indeed, a doll, and the contribution it has made to her overall health and well-being has been astounding, making her more alert and communicative."

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