

## Summary of Project

### WHY DO WE NEED THIS STUDY?

Some of the most disadvantaged families in society include children and families affected by drug use. Parents who use drugs are stigmatised and their children frequently end up in the care system. Parents and families do not always receive the right kind of treatment and family support, so these problems can be repeated from one generation to the next. Improving outcomes for families is a key goal for services as well as for government.

While the UK has established ways of working with parents who use drugs and their families, little is known about how different policies and approaches operate in practice (within and across different agencies and regions), and how they impact on parents, children and other family members. **There is a need to look at how the whole system works from a family, service provider and policy perspective.**

Our study aims to do this by looking closely at **relations** between parents, families, communities, professionals, services and policymakers, and **how the needs of parents who use drugs and their families are understood, and responded to, within and across different contexts.** Our study includes sites in both **Scotland and England** to help us understand similarities and differences in how these complex systems work and their effects on families.

### WHAT WILL THE STUDY INVOLVE?

**First,** we will set up a Learning Alliance that will involve members of the public in all aspects of the study.

Who will make up the Learning Alliance?	What will the Learning Alliance do?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents and other family members</li> <li>• Frontline practitioners and managers of services for parents and families</li> <li>• Commissioners &amp; Policymakers</li> <li>• Academics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help the research team plan the research</li> <li>• Comment on emerging findings</li> <li>• Enhance the learning from the study</li> <li>• Make suggestions about what can be done, in policy and practice, to respond to the findings.</li> </ul>

**Second,** researchers will spend a lengthy period of time (approx. 12-20 months) with 30 families who have a mother and/or father who uses drugs, 15 in Scotland and 15 in England. The researchers will try to find out what day-to-day life is like for parents and families, including their social networks/sources of support and the nature and extent of their engagement with services. The researchers will track the lives and progress of parents and families over time in order to better understand how systems of care impact on families.

**Third,** the researchers will also spend time with different professionals and services over a 20 month period, talking to staff about their work with parents/families and other services, and observing agency-family relations and interactions, as well as team and interagency meetings. Researchers will try to find out how different professionals and services understand and apply policies and practice guidelines in their everyday work with parents and families and how wider systems of care impact on families and the kind of work they do.

**Lastly,** we will review and examine policies about the treatment and care of parents who use drugs to compare how policies differ within and across agencies and countries (Scotland/England) and what effects the different policies have on how parents who use drugs and their families are managed and treated.

### WHO WILL BENEFIT?

Our study aims to help a range of people and agencies in different ways, for example:

It will benefit parents who use drugs and their families in the future because it will help to show how practices and policies might better meet their needs. It will benefit professionals, services and policymakers by producing new understandings about how existing systems of care may or may not be benefiting the people they seek to help. Findings could also help academics develop new interventions to help parents who use drugs and their families.

**WHO IS CARRYING OUT THE STUDY?** The study is being led by Professor Anne Whittaker and involves a team of researchers in Scotland and England, Australia, Canada, and the USA. The study is sponsored by the University of Stirling and funded by the ESRC (Ref: ES/S015809/1). For more information see: <https://relations.stir.ac.uk>