

Families, Parents and Carers

I like people who listen... you know, let me get things off my chest but not make things worse.

Young person, Blewett, 2011, page 16

Introduction

This final summary brings together the key messages from three C4EO knowledge reviews to help you improve your services and achieve better outcomes for children, parents and carers. The reviews include current evidence from research and local practice, as well as the views of service managers, children, young people, parents and carers gathered in consultations by C4EO.

The Coalition Government believes that strong and stable families are the bedrock of a strong and stable society. Funding in this area is being reformed, and includes a non-ring-fenced Early Intervention Grant, which brings together a number of former separate funding streams for early intervention and preventative services for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable families in our society.

C4EO's Families, Parents and Carers work focuses on three specific topics:

- Improving children's outcomes by supporting parental physical and mental health
- Improving children's outcomes by supporting couple relationships, reducing family conflict and addressing domestic violence
- The impact of parenting and family support strategies on children and young people's outcomes.

Some themes emerged strongly across all three reviews

- Multi-agency, flexible and coordinated services, with an underpinning 'think family' ethos, are most effective in improving outcomes. This includes staff in adults' services being able to identify children's needs, and staff in children's services being able to recognise adults' needs. Such services are viewed positively by families and professionals alike.
- Early intervention prevents problems becoming entrenched; the practical help, advice and emotional support which many parents value can often be given without referral to specialist services. Children and young people also prefer an informal approach.
- In order to access services, parents must feel reassured that they are not being judged or stigmatised, and be helped to overcome their fears of having their children removed. *'I do have a sort of feeling of being ashamed of having difficulties. It's not something I talk about'* (Parent, Blewett, 2011, page 11)



Key messages: using the evidence to improve practice

Partnership working

A 'think family' approach can be promoted by:

- ensuring that families can access a variety of services, appropriate to their level of need. Families may also need services at specific times, or for a sustained period: 'The right programme at the right time' (Hertfordshire CC, Barrett, 2011, page 49) Services working alone cannot deliver the 'magic bullet'.
- good staff communication and collaboration can maximise the choice of services available to parents – this is important when resources are stretched.
- the quality of the relationship between professionals and families can be a crucial lever in bringing about change: organisational culture should promote positive and trusting relationships between staff and family members.

Tackling fear and stigma

Fear of being judged or stigmatised, and of children being taken into care, are very common barriers to service uptake. Parents often think of accessing services as a last resort. These problems may be overcome by:

- making specialist services visible and accessible within universal provision such as schools and health centres

- making services informal and approachable, for instance, by offering parents befriending and peer support, and engaging them by using outreach techniques
- developing a well-trained and supported workforce, and staff who are approachable, respectful and non-judgmental – *'the right staff with the right attitudes'*. (Hertfordshire CC, Barrett, 2011, page 49).

Early intervention

Whilst early interventions prevent problems becoming entrenched, encouraging parents to access services earlier rather than later is a real challenge. The following methods can help:

- efficient screening, assessment and referral processes e.g. working with schools and health professionals to identify families, children and young people at risk
- ensuring thresholds for services are not too high to limit access or become barriers to accessing services
- providing accessible information about common family difficulties, such as relationship problems and concerns over child development, and where to get help and advice
- offering help to families at times of recognised stress, for example, transition to parenthood, dealing with teenagers, and also providing more general relationship enhancement sessions

- ensuring that counselling, vocational and parenting training, and financial advice and support are available.

Service delivery

The manner in which services are delivered is important; young people say that they *'appreciate being treated as human beings, not a collection of problems.'* (Blewett, 2011, page 19)

Service delivery can be supported by:

- ensuring that families who need it have a dedicated 'key worker' or contact person to help coordinate services
- training community members from a range of backgrounds to offer help
- incorporating the views of under-represented groups, such as fathers and minority ethnic groups, into service design; undertaking surveys and focus groups to hear their views.

Involving children, young people and families

Although challenging, regular consultation with children, young people and families can help to ensure that services are acceptable and accessible.



“A case study indicated that the project was good value for money, with between £4 and £7 saved in reduced family risk for every £1 invested.”

Shelter Bristol

Local practice that has made a difference

Practice examples have been submitted to C4EO and validated against a range of criteria to determine the extent to which they have evidence of improving outcomes for children and parents. Here, four validated practice examples are summarised. Further details on these examples and more validated and promising local practice, can be found on the C4EO website at: www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/families/localpractice.aspx

Keys to the Future Children’s Service (Shelter Bristol)

Shelter Bristol established six ground-level projects to support vulnerable homeless children and prevent youth homelessness.

The project works in close cooperation with the Shelter Homeless to Home service to provide holistic help and advice for parents on housing applications, budget management and financial support, finding local recreational activities and registering with a doctor. Making use of the CAF framework, workers coordinate multi-agency work for children with complex needs, such as offering one-to-one recreational and educational activities to build confidence. The service has reduced the risk of repeat homelessness and increased the likelihood of children and young people achieving improved outcomes. Shelter Bristol has recently also launched a Skills Support Service which offers specialist skills support.

A case study indicated that the project was good value for money, with between £4 and £7 saved in reduced family risk for every £1 invested.

The Right Response, by the Right Service, at the Right Time (Hertfordshire County Council)

The Right Response project was developed because of Hertfordshire’s high social care referral rates and concern that some families were not receiving a prompt response. The project established a Targeted Advice Service (TAS) which works closely with referrers and optimises the allocation of services so that they are matched closely to families’ needs. Virtual multi-agency teams then work with families across the spectrum of need, signposting to other services when social service intervention is unnecessary.

Although more evaluation is needed, and at the time of publication information on costs was not available, there is evidence to show that the project has enabled more timely and appropriate responses to the children’s needs. This has significantly reduced referral rates to social care, so that staff have more manageable caseloads.

The Adolescent Multi Agency Support Service (AMASS, Islington NHS)

The project delivers intensive community interventions via co-located multi-agency teams for families caring for adolescents who experience, or are at risk of, offending, anti-social behaviour, school exclusion and poor attendance, self-injury and substance misuse.

AMASS delivers a six-month intense parental/carer empowerment intervention with assertive outreach towards the young person, focused around education and positive activity. The delivery model repositions the parents/carers as the authority, with central responsibility and decision-making around the child, while encouraging them to build their own support networks.

Parents were able to identify positive outcomes for themselves including an improved ability to manage behaviour and to view their life situation differently, and improved emotional wellbeing. Young people showed re-engagement with education and improved behaviour.

External evaluators suggest that the service in Islington produces cost-savings related to reduced demands for public care. Twenty-two families with a young person exhibiting challenging behaviour benefited from the service between 2009 and 2010 at a cost of £780,000. This equates to £739.00 per family per week. The social return on investment is £1.46 for every £1.00 invested. Estimated savings to the local authority/Department for Education over two years is £336,932, the local authority/Department of Health is £161,356 and the local authority/Ministry of Justice is £624,000.

FAST (Families and Schools Together)

Families and Schools Together is an award-winning project that supports parents in improving their children's learning and development at home, to enable them to reach their full potential. Aimed at three to five year olds, the objective is to increase parents' engagement in their children's education by encouraging parents and children to perform everyday tasks and develop their skills together. By taking part, families also form strong links with their local communities and schools.

The delivery team includes a parent with an older child, a member of school staff and a community-based partner from health or social services. There are eight weekly sessions that include: a family meal; family communication games; a self-help parent group session; one-to-one parent-child time; and a fixed lottery that lets every family win once, followed by a closing game. After graduation, parents are invited to continue with monthly parent-led meetings for another 22 months.

Each participating site is evaluated for child, family and community outcomes before and after the programme is run. The programme has been found to enhance family functioning, improve academic performance, and reduce family stress. At the time of publication information on costs was not available.



References

Barrett, H., Chang, Y., Walker, J. (2011) *Improving children's outcomes by supporting couple relationships, reducing family conflict and addressing domestic violence*, London: C4EO.

Blewett, J., Noble, J., Tunstill, J. (2011) *Improving children's outcomes by supporting parental physical and mental health*, London: C4EO.

Jamal, F., Lehmann, A., Llewellyn, A., and O'Mara, A. (2011) *The impact of parenting and family support strategies on children and young people's outcomes*, London: C4EO.



Stay involved with C4EO

- Access the range of support and national and local data on the C4EO website and compare your data with that of other areas.
- Suggest that your organisation can submit local practice examples to be validated and placed on the C4EO website.
- Measure cost-effectiveness: C4EO has developed a tool to help you assess the cost of effective interventions www.c4eo.org.uk/costeffectiveness
- Encourage managers to consider applying to be C4EO Sector Specialists.
- Use C4EO Tailored Support scheme: discuss with your colleagues and director of children's services whether you could use the **free** support from C4EO's accredited and trained experts to develop your service for families, parents and carers.

Final summary and recommendations

This summary is a concise overview of C4EO's work in this theme for directors of children's services. Please visit www.c4eo.org.uk to download full, in-depth versions of the knowledge reviews.