



Family and Adolescent Support Hub Evaluation Summary

Aims and Objectives

The Family and Adolescent Support Service (FASH) delivered by Enfield Borough Council was designed to introduce a radical change in the way support for children and adolescents (aged 11-18 years) and their families was organised across the borough. A key feature was the inclusion of other services (psychology, mediation, learning mentors and youthwork) rather than referring out to other agencies; an increase in face-to-face working and greater flexibility of operation to establish effective relationships and support.

The cornerstone of the service was based on conducting whole family assessments, and case planning and reviews by a team of highly skilled social workers, drawing in other disciplines to form a customised whole family intervention; Team Around the Family (TAF). Families were referred in to FASH for: support with re-unification after a period of care; support to prevent children entering care, or support for young people at risk from child sexual exploitation.

Evaluation

The evaluation was designed to assess the impact FASH had on the needs of young people on the edge of care and their families, the effectiveness of multi-disciplinary working and the cost effectiveness of the delivery model in generating improved outcomes for young people.

The evaluation addressed both qualitative and quantitative impacts through a multi-method approach. The service supported 246 families over a period of 18 months. Detailed evidence was generated from: in-depth case reviews of 121 families including interviews with practitioners and qualitative whole family interviews with 25 families; a family and young people survey eliciting an additional 26 responses, a practitioner survey of all members of the team eliciting 26 responses and a partners' survey undertaken at three points eliciting 64 individual responses in total. Findings were supported by on-going focus groups and workshops with staff within the FASH service to capture practice, lessons learned and challenges and to determine their views on the benefits of the model.

Macro data was gathered at the start and end of delivery which tracked changes to the numbers of Looked After Children (LAC) and LAC expenditure per year. A cost benefit analysis, employing a Fiscal Return on Investment (FROI) calculation for each case and across the whole service was also undertaken.

In order to demonstrate the value added of FASH interventions, an historical comparator group of 20 families was established of young people and families with similar characteristics, but who did not receive FASH type support. This included identifying a matched sample and tracking all interventions from initial engagement to exiting social services. Interventions over their full period of engagement were costed and compared to the FASH sample.

Findings

Where engagement among families was good, the high level of support and challenge delivered by social workers in partnership with other key professionals made a positive impact; children and young people were kept out of care as relationships within families improved. Macro data provided by Enfield Borough Council showed a reduction in the costs associated with LAC across the borough and, based on the data from 2016-2017, a decrease in the number of young people recorded as LAC. This showed a total drop of 20% of young people who were in care when compared to 2014 and 2015 figures and a potential saving of over £1,250,000. Evidence suggested that FASH provided a valuable service to young people and some families and that most young people experienced a reduction in safeguarding concerns:

- Nine young people from a total of 121 were LAC on entry and this was reduced to 4 with three having no safeguarding concerns and two stepped down to Child in Need (CIN)
- Of the 49 young people who were on a CIN plan on entry to FASH, 12 (25%) remained on a CIN plan, 2, were stepped up to Child Protection and 4 became Looked After. The majority, (31, 63%) exited with no concerns recorded
- Of the 60 young people who had no previous concerns, 2 were stepped up to a CIN plan and 1 became LAC
- The clear majority (92, 76%) of young people left FASH with no concerns recorded.

Partners including internal (LAC teams, Referral and Assessment) and external (housing and drug and alcohol support) were very supportive of the service. One suggestion for improvement was that social workers could have been more challenging of families prior to bringing young people to LAC panel for placement into care.

Cost benefits

On a case by case basis, FASH appears to have proved cost effective. The average FROI for a young person supported was 3.0: for every £1 invested in support for each family, there was a return of £3 in potential savings to the local authority. The total FASH spend per year was £769,735. Based on this figure, we calculated that the return on investment at the whole service level was 1.84. For every £1 invested in FASH there was a return of £1.84.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

While the FASH delivery model was shown to be effective and overall generated a positive return on investment, there were several lessons emerging from the period of operation that impacted on aspects of performance. These include:

- project set-up - establishing the referral process and operating protocols took longer than originally planned and delayed the delivery date by nine months
- project management – the appointment of an external consultant led to problems in programme integration with current children’s services systems
- recruitment of staff - recruiting a relatively large number of experienced social workers was difficult. The result was a high proportion of Assessment and Support Year in Employment (ASYE) staff, who initially struggled with the challenging nature of the work

Funding FASH beyond the lifetime of the Innovation Fund was not possible and elements of the co-located multi-disciplinary support have not been sustained.

The DFE’s Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme funded this project and its independent evaluation. Co-ordination of the evaluation was undertaken by the Rees Centre from the University of Oxford (www.reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk.) A full copy of this report can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications