



Family Valued Evaluation Summary

Background

Family Valued was an ambitious Leeds City Council (LCC) system change programme. There were three core strands: Awareness Raising and Deep Dive training to embed restorative practice across the workforce for children, families and communities; expansion of Family Group Conferences (FGCs) to more families including those affected by domestic violence; newly commissioned services to address gaps in provision for families.

Aims and objectives

Family Valued was at the 'scale and spread' end of the innovation spectrum – building on work already undertaken and evidence of what works to take restorative practice to a much wider scale. The programme aimed to: create a default approach across children's services and its key partners that was restorative; expand FGCs so that all children who might otherwise be removed from their homes are supported to develop and meet an alternative plan; ensure that LCC will work with the family to support them in helping to decide what needs to happen in all cases where there are concerns about the safeguarding or welfare of a child.

Evaluation strands

- Restorative practice system change: exploring the delivery of restorative practice training, support for area-based service 'clusters' and the wider system change (168 interviews; administrative data)
- Family Group Conferences (FGCs): exploring the expansion of the service and creation of a new 'Innovations Team' developing FGCs for families experiencing domestic violence (interviews and focus groups with 81 professionals; surveys of 76 practitioners; telephone interviews with 36 parents/carers; 10 FGC case studies)
- Domestic violence: exploring how a new multi-agency, whole-family approach to addressing domestic violence incorporated the new offer of FGCs (32 interviews and 6 practice observations)
- Social work: exploring the development of a restorative social work service, through 'Deep Dive' reflective learning sets and supported through the wider system change (187 interviews with professionals and 13 with families; 35 practice observations; 2 practitioner surveys of 264 respondents)
- Impact analysis: analysis of Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) indicators and a Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) of FGCs, which explored the costs of the 'new model of delivery' (NDM) against 'business as usual' (BAU)

Findings

Impact analysis

There were statistically significant reductions in: number of looked after children (CLA); rate of CLA per 10,000 population; number of child protection plans; number of children in need. Other outcomes show a trend in the desired direction, for example rates of re-referral for domestic violence, which is not yet statistically significant. A Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) found savings from 760 families attending an FGC as a consequence of less time spent in the social care system that are estimated at £755 per family. If intended outcomes are achieved and sustained, these savings will increase.

Restorative practice system change

There was a wide-reaching programme of restorative practice training. Ambitious targets for training participants have been met (5913 Awareness Raising attendees (target 4500)) or were expected to be by the end of 2016

(1392 Deep Dive attendees with delivery continuing to a target of 1500); the largest group of participants was LCC employees from outside of children's services. Family Valued successfully engaged wider partners in Deep Dive training including schools, Housing Services and the police. Training was highly rated. Data from targeted service clusters indicates improved outcomes for children and families. The average reduction in Child in Need (CiN) cases for the 6 Clusters was 6.5 per cent, compared to a 1.2 per cent reduction across all Clusters, and this was statistically significant. There is qualitative evidence of culture change as a result of the programme; interview participants describe a common language and approach emerging across different partners. New services were commissioned to increase capacity to support families; in particular both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

Expansion of FGCs

There has been a successful expansion of the FGC service, now operating on a scale not seen elsewhere in England. Quantitative and qualitative data suggests positive outcomes for families. For instance, 99% of 54 parents/carers felt their FGC had helped to address their problems. Comparing data from before (2014) and after (2015) the expansion of the service, we found social care involvement decreased after an FGC. These were families where children were at a high risk of having children removed from parental care. Social work involvement decreased for families who had an FGC. A prototype pathway for FGCs replacing Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) has been developed with a wide range of stakeholders and a strong governance framework, led by the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). There is support for both the innovation as a new way of managing risk, and the way in which it is being implemented – with no targets but rather a case-by-case assessment.

A new approach to addressing domestic violence

Family Valued was a key stakeholder in the LCC Domestic Violence Breakthrough Project, which established a new Daily Domestic Violence Meeting. A referral pathway was established to the FGC service. We identified three models of FGC in operation for families: pragmatic; resolution; restorative. There were less of this latter category, linked to the early stages of the innovation. Training and other resources will continue to deliver this system change.

Restorative social work

There was a consistent, strategic focus on embedding restorative practice in social work. It created more open, harmonious and skilled social work practitioners and teams, which prevented some children from entering care and secured better outcomes for children and families. Some social workers described a more measured approach to risk in Leeds compared to other local authorities where they had worked and a greater confidence in managing risk, through restorative practice. Restorative social work has specific features of working 'with' service users in ways that adopt high support and high challenge. A programme of Deep Dive training with 180 (by the end of the evaluation) social workers was successful in widening and deepening restorative practice.

Recommendations for local authorities considering restorative practice

- Effective restorative practice outside individual services requires wider system change that is led effectively
- FGCs are an effective rights-based process for empowering families with a range of needs, which can increase the likelihood of children remaining in the care of birth family networks. They can be used to address families' problems early as well as within statutory child protection
- Social work can be restorative practice that delivers improved outcomes. To achieve this requires a systemic approach from restorative leadership to front line practice

The evaluation was carried out between May 2015 and September 2016 by ICF with the University of Nottingham, the University of Sheffield and The RTK Ltd.

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