



Family Insights Evaluation Summary

Background

Newcastle City Council (NCC) introduced 'Family Insights' – a complete re-design of the way in which families are served by children's social work. Family Insights aimed to support social workers to improve their capacity to support children and families through: segmenting service users and establishing social work units that specialise in responding to specific presenting needs; improving the collection and analysis of data on children and families to help provide a nuanced and holistic picture of needs, support and outcomes; and strengthening the skills of current and future social workers.

Aims and objectives

Family Insights was designed to offer families more tailored and evidenced-based support to better meet their needs. It aims to reduce demand on child protection services, reduce the 'revolving door' of re-referrals, re-assessments and repeat plans seen in Newcastle, and to bring about a reduction in children's social care costs.

Evaluation

The aim of the evaluation was to assess the implementation of Family Insights, and measure early impacts on children, families, staff and wider community partnerships. The evaluation involved interviews with 149 staff, partners and families about the changes introduced by Family Insights, and surveys with staff (81 responses total) and service users (84 responses total). Administrative data was used to assess child and practice outcomes. Historic case matching, involving the comparison of 19 cases with similar characteristics from the periods prior to and following the launch of Family Insights, was used to assess whether cases had progressed more or less effectively as a result of the new ways of working.

Findings

- In Family Insights, 12% of cases were de-escalated, three-quarters of which (75%) moved from a Child Protection (CP) plan to a Complex Child In Need (CIN) plan. This compared to 21% of cases under the preceding model of social care (again the majority moved from a CP to a CIN plan). The remainder of de-escalations under both models of delivery were from Looked After Children (LAC) to a CIN plan.
- Twenty-two per cent of Family Insights cases had closed between June 2015 and October 2016, compared to 41% of cases in the baseline. The majority of cases which had closed had most recently been on a CIN plan, and the most common status of closures was No Further Action (NFA).
- Fewer cases have experienced a re-referral under Family Insights, compared to cases in the baseline (2% compared to 4%) however, it is too early to assess whether this is an attributable or sustainable outcome.
- In Family Insights, 50% (87) Looked After Children were returned to their families, compared to 25% under the preceding model. Although this is based on only 87 cases in Family Insights, it suggests that this long-term outcome is better under the Family Insights model.
- Family Insights also sought to achieve cost savings. The financial viability of the programme was confirmed as sound before fast tracking the rollout of Family Insights across social care in Summer 2016.
- There is evidence of increased systemic practice by social workers, supported by training, joint working and

supervision. There is promising evidence that this is resulting in increased satisfaction from families and reductions in complaints.

- However, mobile working and changes to assessment and the case management system had limited impact on reducing administrative burdens, and were seen as potential barriers to systemic practice. There is more evidence of impact where reduced caseloads for practitioners were in place.
- Needs-based segmented social work units have been successfully implemented, and services have been designed around the needs of children and families: the case referral process has been strengthened and staff are confident children and families are being supported by the relevant unit; new Consultant Social Worker and Unit Coordinator roles are established and staff are in post; group supervision is taking place.
- While implementation has been successful and theoretically social workers should develop specialist expertise in supporting children and families in their units (improving the effectiveness of practice), there is currently limited evidence that segmentation per se will improve outcomes for the families supported. There is also an identified risk that practitioners experience burnout or compassion fatigue due to consistently working with families facing similar challenges.
- Staffing and mechanisms for collecting and communicating insight on best practice have been established. Data was increasingly seen as 'a tool and an asset' among staff, encouraging 'curiosity' – a key aim of Family Insights – and there is the potential for data to directly support segmentation and systemic practice, though it remains too early in the implementation of Family Insights for this to have been evidenced consistently.
- A culture of learning is developing in NCC, and the development of a regional teaching partnership is expected to enable NCC influence on the instruction of new Social Workers.
- The fast pace of change in implementing Family Insights coupled with a lack of dedicated communications support led to challenges in engaging staff in the implementation process. An 'us versus them' culture was fuelled by perceptions that those involved in the early roll-out of Family Insights were more privileged than wider children's social care services and caused confusion among partners about the changes implemented.

Recommendations

- Further support partner agencies and encourage well-resourced support services to provide early help and step-down support while also protecting caseloads within Family Insights to ensure practitioners' ability to engage in more pro-active, preventative work.
- Consolidate changes in practice and continue to consult with partners, practitioners and families about what is working well and less well to inform appropriate changes to the way in which Family Insights operates.
- Conduct further independent monitoring and evaluation over the next 2-5 years to explore impacts.

Changes made in services in response to evaluation findings

- Segmented units have been rolled out across children's social care and NCC is mainstreaming systemic practice through all teams working with families.
- The permanent roles of the embedded researchers and their continuing capacity to undertake qualitative research with families and partners and to feed those findings back to practitioners will help to monitor what works well and less well as the programme beds in.
- Surveys with parents and carers will continue, with plans to embed this process into all units so that views and experiences are continuously collected, reviewed and practice informed by the voice of service users.

This evaluation was carried out between June 2015 and October 2016 by Kantar Public (formerly TNS BMRB).

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(www.reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk.) A full copy of this report can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications