



Culturally Attuned Family Support in Windsor and Maidenhead - Evaluation Summary

Background

The Innovation Programme in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead has explored the value of providing culturally-attuned family support for the Army and Pakistani Muslim communities, in particular for families who, without such support, might require a statutory Child in Need or Child Protection Plan in the future.

Baseline research conducted within both of these communities and a review of the existing evidence base had identified significant barriers for Army and Pakistani Muslim families in accessing targeted family support, including: language and communication, concerns about the stigma of accepting support, or a sense of shame associated with seeking help.

Aims and objectives

The project was developed and delivered in partnership between the local authority and an established local charity, Family Friends. Between September 2015 and June 2016, the partnership offered targeted 1:1 family support via community based 'hubs', to approximately 90 Army and Asian families that were showing signs of struggling, sometimes involving the provision of early help. Targeted support was culturally-matched as far as possible and embedded in open access community-based activities to improve the acceptability, accessibility and ultimately the impact of family support, with the overall aim of safely reducing the need for statutory (social worker-led) interventions.

Evaluation

This mixed method evaluation from the Institute of Public Care, Oxford Brookes University has explored the extent to which the intended programme outcomes were achieved in the context of different stages of the programme lifetime. This has been done through case file analysis; secondary analysis of data collected by the delivery partners; interviews with families and community leaders involved either directly or peripherally; and interviews with staff involved where possible.

Findings

- Culturally-attuned community development activities and significant key worker presence on the ground appeared initially to significantly raise the profile of the new 'offer' and build community trust and interest in hearing about or receiving help with family support issues. However, the project's loss of momentum at mid-point appears latterly to have affected some local stakeholders' enthusiasm.
- Culturally attuned 1:1 family support appears to have benefited families because it supported joint family and worker understanding of the issues and ability to build trust (in the ongoing work and advice) through:
 - having a common language shared by the worker and the family, leading to a more nuanced exploration of family relationships or sensitive issues

- broader, culturally-sensitive and empathetic communication, including assessment of needs (understanding the cultural norms if not always condoning them)

This evaluation suggests that cultural competence (defined as an ability to engage and work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds irrespective of your own) is generally more important than a shared, lived experience or an exact cultural match, although there were times when such a match worked very well. It also suggests that the building of cultural competence can be assisted through ‘immersion’ in a community along the lines of the hub model trialled in this pilot programme, although this hypothesis is not fully tested.

- At least as significant in terms of the initial or short-term impact of a targeted family support intervention with families from the Pakistani or Army community were the following other factors:
 - holistic interventions, for example, involving fathers as well as mothers and extended family if appropriate (although it may be easier to draw in fathers or the extended family if the worker is culturally competent)
 - collaborative assessment and planning with families including use of wishes and feelings tools; distance travelled tools; and a range of games to draw out family aspirations
 - clearly identified outcomes at the start of the intervention, so that progress can be monitored with the family
 - confident interventions involving a mix of practical (e.g. developing reward charts for children or applying for financial support) and therapeutic (e.g. developing empathy through games and role play) work
 - workers applying their theoretical knowledge (for example, about attachment, family and parent relationships, parenting, bereavement and loss, or social learning) through solutions-focused approaches and methods
 - structured sessions with families focused on the key need areas including parenting
 - some form of structured individual reflective practice on how the family has responded to the session and ways in which the intervention can, or should , progress as a result

This evaluation study was carried out between August 2015 and September 2016 by The Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University.

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