



Ealing Brighter Futures Intensive Engagement Model: Working with adolescents in and on the edge of care Evaluation Summary

Background and aims

Ealing's Brighter Futures Intensive Engagement Model is a complex, whole system intervention that was launched in June 2015. Its implementation was intended to support and enable the children's social care workforce to build effective, consistent relationships with adolescents, families, communities and carers, and to use those successful relationships to bring about positive change.

Central to the Model has been the creation of two new multi-disciplinary edge of care teams (MAST EAST and MAST West) and a new in care team (CONNECT team). The teams include a range of professionals, including: social workers, clinical psychologists, connexions workers, education specialists, youth justice workers, family support workers, fostering support social workers, youth workers, and youth mentors. Caseloads within MAST and CONNECT are lower than in traditional social work teams, to allow more time to work intensively with young people and their parents or carers (6-8 in MAST and CONNECT compared with 18-25 in locality teams). Another core feature of the pilot has been provision of enhanced training for staff and foster carers, to help prevent placement breakdowns and support young people in out of authority residential care to move back to the local area to live with foster families.

Evaluation

A mixed methods approach was employed, including: 5 baseline and 4 follow up interviews with strategic and operational managers, focus groups with the MAST and CONNECT teams (3 baseline and 3 follow up), surveys of 22 young people at baseline and 17 midway through implementation and their carers (15 parents and 6 foster carers at baseline), evaluation of training, use of social network analysis to explore relational connections in a sample of 10 cases, interviews with 25 young people, 9 carers and 14 lead professionals, and a costing exercise.

Findings

- Nine young people moved from residential placements to foster placements during the pilot
- Organisational conditions and the structures put in place to support implementation (including training, practice integration and daily meetings) have helped establish a new model of service delivery
- Strategic managers, professionals in the teams and foster carers have observed changes in language, tools and practice to support effective working relationships with young people and their families, and perceive that the Model has promoted improved outcomes
- The 25 young people, parents and 9 carers who participated in the research were overwhelmingly positive about the intensive and relational model of service provided
- Daily team meetings were reported to have been an important vehicle to: establish trust within the

new teams, facilitate inter-disciplinary dialogue and learning, offer mutual support and guidance and ensure that multi-disciplinary expertise informs the design and delivery of tailored packages of support

- Lead workers were connected to, and drew upon a far wider range of multi-disciplinary expertise from within their team to inform their direct work
- Young people said that they trusted youth mentors and youth workers and welcomed their involvement and support
- Placement stability was promoted: only one of the CONNECT placements broke down. Foster carers said that enhanced support from the team coupled with training to help them understand and manage behaviour had been important to prevent crises escalating
- The core training received by professionals in the MAST and CONNECT teams led to an increase in the mean average scores for self-efficacy, attitudes and working relationships

Cost benefits

- The nine foster placements that replaced residential placements generated an associated cost avoidance of around £800,000
- It is too early to determine whether investment in enhanced services and support will reduce costs and promote young people's wellbeing and life chances in the future but early indications do suggest that additional services are starting to make a difference.

Recommendations

- Continue to embed the multi-disciplinary intensive engagement model
- Review the configuration of teams in light of the age profile of cohorts and the needs and circumstances of young people and families
- Ensure that clinical psychologists remain in the MAST and CONNECT teams but consider re-focusing their activity on direct therapeutic interventions (instead of fulfilling dual functions/statutory social work and therapeutic)
- Maintain the youth mentor and/or youth worker role to facilitate engagement with support services, and sustain funding for leisure and outdoor activities which research evidence suggests promote resilience.

Changes made in services in response to evaluation findings

- Group supervision and the daily team meeting model have been embedded across the Brighter Futures transformed children in need and in care teams
- The clinical psychologist and youth worker roles have been maintained in the multidisciplinary teams, but now have discreet professional roles rather than having to fulfil dual functions
- The configuration of teams has been reviewed and social work capacity has been increased to meet the needs of families as the local authority move to roll out Brighter Futures across the service.

This evaluation study was carried out between June 2015 and October 2016 by researchers from Thomas Coram Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education, University College London and the Tilda Goldberg Centre for Social Work and Social Care at the University of Bedfordshire.

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