

Intensive family support through prevention and family empowerment in Coventry

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Organisation: Intensive Family Support Team, Coventry City Council

Country: United Kingdom

Level of government: Local government

Sector: Social protection

Type: Public Service

Launched in: 2012

Overall development time: 3 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

The main focus of the innovation is on early intervention and prevention, to intervene as early in a child's life as possible or as soon as problems show up, in order to prevent later escalation, requiring statutory intervention by social care, such as having to take children into care.

Families in the programme meet the criteria of high levels of anti-social behaviour and/or crime, low educational attainment of children, high worklessness and imposing high costs on public budgets. However, many are below 'crisis' levels of intervention, so that they get 'early help'.

The main aims of the Intensive Family Support initiative are to improve services to children in need and their families and to promote social inclusion through effective joint working between Care, Education and Health.

Why the innovation was developed

- Using a standard methodology, as part of its national Troubled Families Programme, the Department of Communities & Local Government (DCLG) in central government estimated that Coventry had approximately 905 families where children were not attending school, young people were committing crime and involved in anti-social behaviour and the parents or other adults in their life were out of work.
 - DCLG estimated that the average unit cost of interventions for "troubled families" was GBP 10 000 and so made available to local authorities up to GBP 4000 per family, both as an upfront payment and then with additional 'payments by results' (PBR) on a sliding scale over 3 years in order to enable new ways of working to reduce costs and improve the effectiveness of interventions over time.
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Objectives

Improve access, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Improve social equity, Improve user satisfaction

- Reduce the likelihood of children and young people needing to be taken into care.
 - Support care placement stability, education progress and better health outcomes.
 - Support effective rehabilitation at home after a period of care.
 - Ensure that the full range of services is available to children and young people and are used most effectively for those most in need.
 - Identify and address service gaps and to address unmet needs.
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Main beneficiaries

Families, High-risk populations, Low-income groups

- "Troubled" families with children not attending school, young people committing crime and involved in anti-social behaviour, and parents or other adults in the family that are unemployed.

Results

Efficiency

- The Department of Communities and Local Government have now developed the Cost Savings Calculator. All local authorities nationally are inputting their family data each month. The results of savings will be published in October 2015.
 - This will show the national picture of savings overall but it can also be broken down by local authority and compared regionally and nationally.
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Effectiveness

- As at 31st October 2014, 915 families have been 'worked with' - this was 21.4% above the target number projected at this stage of the programme. Overall, 634 families were classed as 'turned around', against a projected target of 585 (8.4% above the expected target).
- 519 families have children with improved attendance and behaviour at school.
- 146 families have committed at least 60% less anti-social behaviour.
- youth offending has decreased by at least 33% in 49 families.
- 27 families have seen at least 1 adult move off out of work benefits and into continuous employment.
- 37 achieved the 'progress to work' outcome by voluntarily accessing the work programme or European Social Fund Support for Families project.

Development

Design

Coventry City Council wished to ensure that these families were not viewed as separate in a 'stand-alone' programme but rather were worked with as part of its overall early intervention strategy.

In 2012 Coventry's Children's Services undertook a Fundamental Service Review to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its services. The main focus was on early intervention and prevention, to intervene as early in a child's life as possible or as soon as problems show up, in order to prevent later escalation, requiring statutory intervention by social care, such as having to take children into care.

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Testing

- The 'learning by doing' approach has been reinforced by the fact that there is still no national framework for undertaking interventions within the Troubled Families programme, so staff can spend more time with them.
 - The interventions are really intensive, usually amounting to 8 – 15 hours per family per week. This is only possible, of course, because it currently only involves about 60 families in Coventry.
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Implementation

Tools used:

- There has been a high focus on empowerment of families, including work with fathers, to build resilience and sustainable behavioural change.
- Families have to agree and develop their own plan, identifying how they will input into this – e.g. "I need to get the kids to school, this is how I'll change
- The philosophy of co-production is central to the whole approach. Coventry City Council now promotes strength-based approaches, which means that the whole early intervention approach seeks to work with and help to develop the capabilities of families and all their members.

Resources used:

- GBP 4000 per family
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Diffusion

- Because 70% of 'troubled families' worked with in this programme have met the success criteria, Coventry has been invited to be an 'early starter' for the phase 2 "Expanded Troubled Families programme," announced in June 2013 by national Government with the aim of reaching an additional 400 000 families across England (3130 families in Coventry). However, Government funding will fall to GBP 1800 per family (45% of phase one funding).

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- As the programme progresses, it may be possible and desirable to develop a template of possible interventions to help the staff in the different agencies involved. It has been recognised nationally that the impact of the Troubled Families programme on supporting Early Help has been limited by the narrowness of the national criteria that determine eligibility for the programme. Consequently, the Phase 2 of the programme is intended to give better support for interventions with families before they reach crisis point. This is exactly what the Intensive Family Support initiative offers.
 - Again under Phase 2 of the national programme and for the purpose of Early Help, Health is intended to become a much more prominent partner. The links that have already been forged across Coventry through the development of the Acting Early Project which amalgamates Children's Centres, Midwives, Health Visitors, Family Nurse partnership and school nurses to work together to identify families needing support much earlier should provide a good starting point for this, but much remains to be done. The programme will also need to work further with adult services in relation to adult mental health to ensure children are fully supported.
 - Finally, the programme has shown that the current Payment by Results process is resource intensive, involving examination of cases from many delivery agencies, undertaking manual checks against the national criteria to determine eligibility for the programme and manual checks against the Payment By Results Outcomes. This is not cost-effective, so new approaches will need to be found. The development of a generic national database will be very cost effective especially if there is the possibility for all agencies to be able to input their data onto one system. We can then measure like with like.
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Conditions for success

- With schemes like Payment by Result there is always a moral dilemma of 'cherry picking' or truly wanting to see sustainable change with the most complex families, which in turn will affect the quality of life for the communities in which they live.
 - For Coventry there was always the propensity to 'cherry pick'. However, there were other more prominent drivers around reducing the number of children in Social Care and on Child Protection plans which requires whole systems change.
 - Partners also needed to be on board working in the whole family way with everyone taking responsibility for their part in helping families to change their behaviour rather than referring or passing them onto other agencies.
 - Agencies need to look at what needs to change to get the required outcomes especially in this time of economic austerity – as the footprint of agencies decrease capacity needs to be built with partners rather than through people resources and duplication. Both are very costly but cultures are hard to break.
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Other information

In regards to Payment by Result, the likely future is that Payment by Result will be rolled out across the public and private sectors – this will possibly be through Social Impact Bonds (SIBs) which encourages organisations and large companies to invest in communities to help them build resilience by providing up-front cash for results. This will take the fiscal burden away from central government placing the success or failure of communities firmly in the hands of local government and communities, making them responsible for their own outcomes and futures.