

RESEARCH BRIEFING

EVALUATION OF THE TRI-BOROUGH (HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM, WESTMINSTER, AND ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON & CHELSEA) FAMILY COACHING SERVICE



MARCH 2013 – MAY 2014

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FUNDER The London Tri-borough

WHY IS THIS STUDY IMPORTANT?

The government's Troubled Families Programme was launched in 2011 with the initial aim of assisting 120,000 families who take up a disproportionate amount of government funds. The criteria for eligibility for the Troubled Families programme are: families with school absence, youth crime and anti-social behaviour, and adults claiming out of work benefits. Local authorities are paid on a 'payment by results' basis where there is evidence of improvement in these areas. This study is an evaluation of part of the London Tri-borough's approach to Troubled Families work called the Family Coaching Service. The service works with 'medium complexity' families who meet at least two of the Troubled Families criteria. A dedicated worker, the 'family coach', takes a persistent and assertive whole family approach and works with the family for 6 months. Family coaches are skilled and experienced but not typically social work trained. The coach mentors the family once a week and provides telephone support. The family-worker relationship is seen as crucial to successful intervention.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how the service is working from a number of points of view including what makes a difference to families.

HOW WAS THE STUDY DONE?

The evaluation took place over a period of 16 months between March 2013 and June 2014. The study involved analysis of information from:

- Interviews with 20 families who gave their perspectives on what is helping and why.
- Two consecutive developmental workshops with 20 family coaches. Each coach presented a case at both the first workshop and the second workshop. The cases were used as discussion points about their work and what it feels like to work as a family coach, the support they have/need, and how they see their status among other professionals.
- Interviews with the 3 supervisors of the 20 family coaches.
- Case study diaries kept by family coaches.
- A focus group with 5 professionals from social work, education and housing.

- A detailed cost analysis of 50 Tri-borough families' needs and problems prior to and at the end of the intervention. This information was analysed using the Troubled Families Cost-Benefit Analysis tool, in combination with unit costs, in order to estimate the net expected cost savings to the public sector.



KEY FINDINGS

- Families often had to overcome suspicion and reluctance before they would engage with family coaches. The way the family coaches explained the service made a difference to their willingness to engage.
- The coaches recognised that it was not always possible to get the whole family to participate at the same time, or to the same degree, as family members were ready at different times.
- Unlike most professionals, coaches saw families very regularly in their own homes; this appeared to benefit families.
- Families valued the flexible, non-judgmental approach and the wide range of practical support on offer.
- A number of families spoke of a sense of a brighter future as a result. However, some problems, such as mental health issues, were more difficult to overcome.
- Coaches reported that the intensity and duration of the work was a key factor in positive outcomes for families. They also said that patience, kindness and a non-judgmental attitude helped to engage families.

- Overall, the 5 professionals who took part in the study saw the service as a positive intervention for families with encouraging knock-on effects for their work with the families.
- These 5 professionals were impressed by the perseverance of coaches and their ability to build relationships with families. They also thought that the knowledge base of family coaches was extensive and rarely questioned their credibility.
- Coaches gained a lot of satisfaction from the job but almost all stressed the emotional toll the work takes. They valued peer support highly but some who were based in other teams felt a sense of isolation.
- The cost analysis of the 50 families showed that education was the area most likely to show positive change with juvenile offending and anti-social behaviour being the second. For the 50 families, being unemployed and experiencing mental health problems were the problems least likely to change within the 6 months.
- The cost analysis also showed that, during the Family Coach Service intervention, a number of children were identified as being 'in need', became the subject of a Child Protection Plan, or became 'looked after'. Although there are cost implications in this, it also indicates good practice in protecting and supporting children. In total, the estimated average cost saving to the Tri-borough was £7,070 per family.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY & PRACTICE

- The whole family, intensive relationship-based model is working well. It provides a good example of a preventative early help service that could be extended to other areas.
- Potentially, there is a role for social workers offering emotional support, supervision, consultation to family coaches in schemes like this.
- Within the Tri-borough, the service needs to be more widely publicised to families and other professionals encouraging referrals and inter-professional relationships.

STRENGTHS & LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Strengths

Findings were informed from a wide variety of sources; families, family coaches, their supervisors, and a small group of other related professionals.

Limitations

Despite efforts to interview families as a group, this was only possible in 8 cases (40%). In the majority of cases the interview was with a mother only which means that the views of other family members are not directly represented. Families also need to be followed-up to assess the long-term impact of the service.

FIND OUT MORE

FULL REPORT goo.gl/onqSkR

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