

Joining The Dots

Are parenting programmes the key to integrated local family support?

Introduction

The need for family support has increased significantly over the last seven years, leaving local authorities grappling with an increased demand for their services. Whilst recent funding commitments have gone some way to ameliorating this, funding overall in this time, has somewhat stagnated. The Safeguarding Pressures report published last year¹ confirms the magnitude of the challenge we are now facing.

Part of this challenge is the increased referrals to children's social care, child protection and early help assessments. This, combined with stretched public finances, has left non-statutory services supporting children and families through the most challenging time, with limited resources or time for creativity in service design.

Recognising this, the Government's Spending Review has made positive investment in this space. The new £500million funding for the Supporting Families (£200m), Family Hubs (£82m) and Best Start for Life (£218m) programmes will offer a much-needed boost to the resources available for local authorities, enabling them to provide essential care and support for families within their communities. This is of course part of the Government's aspirations to 'level up' and dovetails well with the Independent Children's Social Care review, and the expansion of Integrated Care Boards. The challenge before us is how to use the additional resources and impetus, and ensure a cohesive and joined-up system of support that really works for parents.

We believe that evidence-based parenting programmes offer a golden thread for service design and delivery across these and wider areas of Government funding to local areas. We know from Supporting Families key workers that help with parenting is the most visible part of the important work they do². Furthermore, making parenting programmes the norm for families will go a long way to alleviating many of the pressures on the current system. The Government recognise the impact parenting programmes can have, committing £50m to them specifically, as part of the Family Hubs package. The range of areas which parenting programmes support are extensive, with the ability to address challenges from safeguarding to special educational needs, reducing parental conflict, supporting mental health challenges and healthier lifestyles. We want to create a blueprint for this investment which can address the workforce capacity challenges, whilst offering the very best service to families.

¹ ADCS, 2021. Safeguarding Pressures report. Available from https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_Safeguarding_Pressures_Phase7_FINAL.pdf

² Ipsos MORI, 2020. National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015 -2020. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/786890/National_evaluation_of_the_Troubled_Families_Programme_2015_to_2020_Follow_up_family_survey.pdf

Rationale

At the centre of the current Government's thinking is the new **Family Hubs** initiative. Alongside the Start for Life programme, the vision for these new Hubs is to provide a central base for families to go to get the support they need. As things stand, Family Hubs plan to bring together perinatal support, breastfeeding support, evidence-based parenting programmes and more. But they have the potential to provide an even more comprehensive service and integrate with the **Supporting Families** and **Reducing Parental Conflict** programmes. Ensuring good connectivity between **Family Hubs** and more **targeted Early Help support** could mean great things for families. For local authorities, the **Supporting Families** programmes open the door to provide a workforce who could provide lighter touch assistance through Family Hubs as well as deliver Specialist Reducing Parental Conflict support too, using well trained Early Help staff, all the way through to newly recruited Family Hubs staff.

There is further opportunity to think more broadly – parenting programmes can provide significant outcomes for families improving the life chances and health outcomes of babies and children, no matter their age, stage, or location. For example parenting programmes are core components of services including **Early Help, Best Start for Life, SEND services, the Home Learning Environment, Neurodevelopmental Pathways, Mental Health Support, Edge of Care/Reunification, Fostering & Adoption, Youth Offending Services, CSE / CE Services and more**. Considering parenting programmes as that golden thread across all these services and further allows us to integrate support for families throughout their journey from conception to the teenage years and beyond.

Case Study: Sheffield City Council

Over the years, Sheffield City Council (SCC) has worked on developing a model to integrate their services in the hope of reaching a greater number of parents and combining prevention, early intervention and targeted support into a single model.

Using a hub and spoke model, their core parenting team work with practitioners from across different service areas to provide training and integrate support. They then cycle these practitioners back out, to share the best practice and expertise they have gained while working with the core parenting team.

The SCC model is based on population health thinking - wherein the team offer a range of different intensities of intervention from Triple P's system (see Figure 1), allowing families to access the level of support that is right for them.

Using this approach, they have been able to normalise and destigmatise accessing parenting and relationship support – particularly with hard-to-reach / left out groups – and provide outcomes that support children and families as a whole, as well as contributing to a number of the different Government funding initiatives highlighted above.

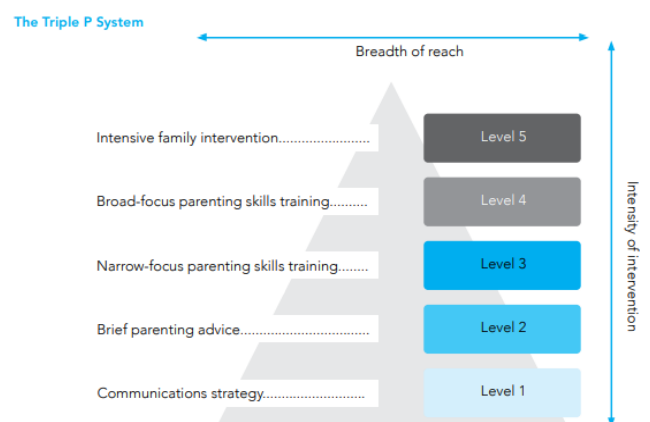


Figure 1

Bringing to life an ambitious system which is fully integrated will need a strategic vision informed by creative thinking, cohesion and collaboration. The Family Hubs initiative offers us a chance to think about how we do this in practice.

Establishing a core parenting service that can deliver support to families in a hub and spoke model across all these agendas could optimise the resources available, simplify staffing structures, and deliver a wider range of support. For example, the Supporting Families funding can be used to achieve dual aims. As it is intended, it can train the workforce and deliver on the required targets, while also using the workforce's expertise in other areas to elegantly maximise the resources available.

An offer for all

There is now considerable international recognition that evidence-based support offered at a population level reduces the number of children and families in need of more intensive services. Such programmes have also been shown to enhance the wellbeing of the greatest number of children.

We have seen this in Ireland, where the Health Service Executive led *Midlands Area Parenting Partnership (MAPP)* demonstrated the interface between an evidence-based early intervention programme and a public health approach to delivery. In this case, the programme was offered free of charge to every family with children under eight years old over a 30-month period. An independent evaluation found that the number of children with emotional and behavioural problems was significantly reduced in the population as a whole. Problems were significantly reduced for more than one in three (37%) children with higher levels of need, and there was a 30% decrease in reports of mild and higher levels of both parental distress and stress for parents. This work built on an earlier Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) funded large cluster randomised controlled trial (RCT) in the USA, which achieved significant reductions in child maltreatment, the numbers of children going into care, and the numbers presenting in A&E with child maltreatment related injuries. Estimates suggest that costs of this kind of approach could be recovered in a single year by as little as a 10% reduction in the rate of abuse and neglect³, with the British Medical Association reporting that the Triple P system can generate returns of £5.05 for every pound invested⁴.

This core parenting team model can help address another challenge in the current system; staff satisfaction and retention too. Over 10 years of delivery in Ireland a team of 11 core staff saw low turnover and supported over 37,000 parents to access an evidence-based intervention. Anecdotally we note that local areas adopting this sort of core / specialist parenting team model experience the same lower turnover. This sort of model has the potential to increase return on investment even further.

This is a time to be creative with the opportunities and resources that are being offered. As we have seen in Ireland and the USA, bold approaches create positive and lasting change, and this new phase of funding can bring about exciting changes in implementation at a local level which could revolutionise family support and the impact increasing demand has on services.

³ Research in Practice, 2022. What is early help? Concepts, policy directions and multi-agency perspectives. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1053868/Early_help_Research_in_Practice_2022.pdf

⁴ British Medical Association. 2017. Exploring the cost effectiveness of early intervention and prevention. Available from: <http://sentpressrelease.com/pressrelease/attachment/73108/79f4e4f4-c323-4f1e-a7df9abe85930d12/90d6fdbe-bd30-4f4b-8557-9250948a642c?fileDisplayName=Exploring%20the%20cost%20of%20early%20intervention.pdf>

Next steps

The full integration of services summarised above offers an ambitious but achievable approach to family support. In practical terms building this model through engagement and development of existing services in an ideal basis for change.

We are aware of a number of areas that are thinking in this way, and are keen to hear from other DCS's and strategic leads interested to develop similar models – and using the impetus the move to Family Hubs and Integrated Care Systems offers.

We welcome a conversation with you, to explore how this approach can be adapted to suit your area, and make best use of the resources available at this important time. We are committed to making evidence-based parenting programmes the golden thread in family support to create a more effective and joined-up approach.

Please get in touch with Matt Buttery from Triple P, to arrange a call to discuss design and execution of this approach:

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With thanks...

Creating the very best services for families, and designing a blueprint that works in practice, takes ambitious thinking. We have been delighted to work with Directors of Children's Services, and Directors of Public Health to start forming that vision.

Recognising these important contributions, we thank Sarah Martin, Service Manager, Children, Young People and Families at Sheffield City Council, and her team. To Colin Foster, Chief Executive of Northamptonshire Children's Trust and Debbie Lloyd, Assistant Director Children and Family Support Services & Youth Offending Service at Northamptonshire Children's Trust. To Edwina Grant OBE, immediate past Chair of the Association of Directors of Children's Services, Health Care and Additional Needs Committee.

These organisations deliver exceptional work like so many others across the country and that ambition and vision to keep driving progress in family support is what will deliver excellent and life changing support for families.

About Triple P UK & Ireland

Our team has been involved in supporting organisations to implement Triple P's system of interventions for parents, families and educators, across the UK and Republic of Ireland since 2002. We know that supporting parents is critical to improving the health and wellbeing of our local areas and neighbourhoods – our communities, that we live and work in, too.

One of the Triple P systems key strengths is its flexibility of delivery format and scale. Triple P UK understands the importance of working collaboratively with organisations to develop suitable solutions from single programme delivery to integrated multi-intervention system-wide rollouts.

We have a proven track record of working in partnership with the national and local Government, the NHS, the voluntary and community sector, schools and the youth justice system, to prevent and treat problems, support vulnerable families, and give every child the best possible start in life.

The Triple P programme is recognised by a number of What Works Centres and evidence-based clearing house including NICE, the Early Intervention Foundation, Education Endowment Foundation, Youth Endowment Fund and What Works Centre for Children's Social Care. In England Triple P is also cited in Department for Education guidance for schools and part of the Department for Work and Pensions reducing parental conflict programme.

Triple P UK is a Certified B Corporation® meeting the highest standards of social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability

For more information on Triple P UK & Ireland visit: www.triplep.uk.net