

This report analyses a small sample of local authorities and their partner agencies and looks at how services successfully support young people who are at risk of entering care to remain living at home. It draws on the experiences and views of 43 families.

*Note: This digest focuses on the **key findings** and the **recommendations** in the report, which have been slightly edited but retain the language used in the report.*

Key findings (page 6)

- The young people and families who contributed to this survey highly valued the support they had received ...In many cases they regretted that this type of support had not been available to them at an earlier stage.
- As a result of the support provided none of the young people who contributed to this survey had entered care. All could identify improvements in their lives in areas which included improved relationships, behaviour, emotional health including increased confidence and self-esteem, school attendance and attainment, and increased aspiration and ambition. In addition, parents believed they had become better parents.
- Evidence .. indicated that the most crucial factor in successfully preventing young people from entering care was the ability of the key workers to engage with the young person and their family to help them see that positive change was achievable.
- The successful services seen were able to engage the majority of young people and families who were referred to them, even where previously services had failed to do this.
- In those families where engagement had not been successful, despite persistent and concerted attempts by services, professionals identified that significant factors were a lack of parental warmth or empathy with the children, or significant mental health issues ...
- explicit and clearly stated models and methods of intervention supported more confident and informed professionals and better, more clearly defined outcomes for the young person and family...
- The features of successful engagement ..were:
 - Approaches which built on the strengths of the family
 - Persistence, reliability and flexibility including the speed of response
 - Open and honest communication, including in relation to what was and was not acceptable behaviour
 - An approach which valued family members, listening to, respecting and understanding the family's perspective
 - Clarity about expectations and what needed to be done to achieve improvements and the consequences for the family of not doing so
 - Identifying and addressing the needs of all family members
 - Working alongside the family to achieve shared goals
 - A clear plan to sustain progress when the involvement of the service ceased.
- Services which successfully supported young people and their families were able to work flexibly and responsively

This often meant working at evenings and weekends and having clear arrangements for contact when lead workers were unavailable.

- Successful outcomes were supported by strong multi-agency working at both operational and strategic levels. This involved:
 - Respecting the contribution that each agency had to make
 - Sharing key information to support robust assessment, planning and review of young people's and families' needs
 - Coordinating the contributions of different services to ensure that a family's needs could be addressed promptly while avoiding duplication of services; the role of the key or lead worker was crucial in this.
- Clearly understood and shared arrangements across agencies for managing risks to young people, including the roles and responsibilities of different agencies..,

- It was very important [for young people and families] to know where they could obtain back-up support and advice should difficulties re-emerge. A clear plan to address the ongoing support needs of young people and their families was essential
- It was not always clear why and how decisions had been taken to support young people in their families rather than allow them to enter care. The survey found that robust and clearly understood decision-making and referral arrangements supported effective decisions and ensured that services were targeted most effectively at the cohort of young people who would benefit from them the most.
- The survey found that robust assessment of risk and protective factors led to effective planning of intervention strategies with ongoing, regular review of progress. However, in some cases assessments failed to clearly identify and address risk and protective factors, and seemed to be a separate activity rather than the foundation for decision-making and planning. While the work of individuals could overcome some of the initial shortcomings of the assessment.., a clearly articulated assessment and planning process assisted in addressing needs swiftly and appropriately.
- While young people, families and key professionals were in most cases clear about what outcomes had been achieved, these were often not effectively captured in case records.
- Despite working in the context of great financial pressure, the local authorities visited were generally committed to continuing and sustaining a range of preventative services. This was based on the belief that preventative rather than reactive services were more effective in terms of outcomes and costs. However the impact may not be demonstrated in the short term. All 11 local authorities were using the opportunity of more flexible funding arrangements to redesign and realign services to ensure maximum cost benefits.
- There was not as yet a consistent approach to identifying success and outcome criteria or to measuring and collating this information. Many of the outcome measures identified were found to be qualitative rather than quantitative...While some individual services had adopted different approaches and practices to identify and capture outcome criteria, as yet this good practice was not widely shared across services with an agreed approach across the local area. There was a similarly disparate approach towards calculating cost savings.

Recommendations (page 9)

Local authorities and their partner agencies should ensure that:

- Referral pathways and decisions about access to services are clearly defined, understood and based on thorough and clearly recorded assessment of both risk factors and strengths
- Case records clearly demonstrate the impact that the service has had for the young person and family
- When it is proposed to end the involvement of a service with a young person and their family, an assessment of ongoing support needs is undertaken with the family
- They identify and agree consistent criteria and measures to demonstrate the outcomes and cost-effectiveness of interventions at service or area-wide level as well as at an individual case level.

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