
Evaluation of Intensive Intervention Projects

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Background

The government is committed to helping to transform the lives of the most vulnerable families through Intensive Family Interventions. As part of the previous government's Children's Plan and Youth Taskforce Action Plan, 20 Intensive Intervention Projects (IIPs) were established, delivered by a range of public and third sector organisations. The IIP programme was allocated £13m of funding between April 2009 and 2011. The IIPs aimed to turn around the lives of up to 1,000 of the most challenging and problematic young people aged 8-19, each year through addressing a range of risk factors, using a contractual approach combining support and sanction.

The Department for Education (formerly the Department for Children, Schools and Families) commissioned a qualitative and cost-benefit evaluation of IIPs to complement the evaluation of IIPs being conducted by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen). The evaluation included longitudinal case studies of 15 young people and economic analysis in five IIPs and interviews with key stakeholders involved in the national IIP programme.

Methodology

The research was conducted between September 2009 and March 2011. The research involved:

- A literature review of existing research evidence about Intensive Family Interventions and related initiatives.
- Longitudinal tracking of 15 young people across five IIPs (Birmingham, Bolton, East Sussex, Gateshead and Northamptonshire). This involved an initial meeting with young people, their parents or carers and their IIP workers in March 2010, followed by telephone interviews with each of these individuals, at fortnightly intervals, until September 2010. A further progress update on each case was provided by IIP workers in December 2010.
- Interviews with national IIP programme stakeholders between July and September 2010. These included managers of 18 IIPs, 13 IIP workers (in the five case study IIPs) and five area leads and the national policy lead.

- Economic evaluation of costs and outcomes in the five case study IIPs, based on data provided by the IIPs, NatCen and the Department for Education. These data were compared with estimated costs of intervention and non-intervention from a range of previous studies.

Key findings

- The presenting problems of young people and their families were extensive and complex and were underpinned by five underlying factors: **learning difficulties**; **violence** (domestic and neighbourhood); **bereavement**; **family break up**; and (linked) **mental health issues**. These factors needed to be addressed in order to facilitate transformative and sustainable change.
- Progress for the young people was complicated and seldom linear, but rather was characterised by periods of advance and regression, influenced by fluid family and neighbourhood situations and moments of crisis. Many young people and/or their families continued to require support in the period following IIP interventions.
- In two thirds of the case studies, 'hard' transformative outcomes had been achieved, including cessations or reductions in offending or anti-social behaviour and improvements in education. These outcomes were also reported by stakeholders across the national programme. The 'distance travelled' by young people should be an important measure of assessment.
- IIPs often achieved 'soft' transformative outcomes including reduced risky behaviours, enhanced psychological wellbeing and social and parenting skills, and improved domestic environments (emotional, social and physical). IIPs had also achieved crisis management or the stabilisation of young people and families which were essential to the further achievement of transformative outcomes.
- The IIPs represent good value for money. The average cost of a successfully closed case was about £35,000. The IIP intervention generated average savings from prevented expenditure over five years with an average present value of about £280,000 per person for a sample of young people with positive outcomes from the case study sites. With a return of £8 of savings per £1 spent, these figures indicate significant quantifiable cost-benefits from the intervention (as well as the many qualitative benefits for the young people and their families).
- The strengths of the IIP model included: the perceived independence of IIPs; the use of key workers; a holistic whole family approach; relatively small case loads and flexible working hours; ability to effectively engage and assess young people and families and support them over a significant period of time; the use of personalised budgets; the diversity of IIP workers' roles; and co-ordination of multi-agency support.
- The relationship between IIP workers, young people and other family members or social peers was the central and most significant factor in achieving positive change.

This was based upon a persistent, non-judgemental and assertive approach. This relationship and the use (or withholding) of informal rewards and incentives were more important than formal enforcement action or sanctions in affecting change.

- Partnership working was essential to the effectiveness of IIPs. This required access to specialist services and flexibility in statutory provision, combined with support for families to engage effectively with a range of agencies.
- IIPs faced a series of challenges, including the scale and complexity of young people's and families' problems; ensuring and maintaining the engagement of young people and other family members; issues around funding and case loads; and tensions and difficulties in partnership working, including securing post IIP exit support packages.

Intensive Intervention Projects

20 Intensive Intervention Projects (IIPs) were established as part of the previous government's Youth Task Force Action Plan. The IIPs were initially focused on providing support to the most challenging individual young people who were not being supported, or effectively supported, by other services. The IIPs were based on a key worker outreach model, utilising an assertive and persistent approach, framed within a contract and a balance of support and sanction. Each IIP was expected to work with up to 50 young people annually, with each case lasting between six and twelve months. IIPs were expected to significantly reduce offending and anti-social behaviour, tackle substance misuse and risks of homelessness and improve participation in education and training. IIPs were established across England and delivered by eight local authorities, six third sector organisations and one registered social landlord.

Conceptualising Intensive Family Interventions

Intensive Family Interventions, including IIPs, are located within a broader and complex context of influences and interactions impacting upon a young person and their family or household. Intensive Family Intervention workers undertake five key roles: engagement, assessment, development of support plans and contracts, provision of support and exit planning. Three main categories of support are provided: assessment, direct support (emotional, practical and financial) and liaison with other services (including referral to further support and advocacy with other agencies). Potential outcomes from Intensive Family Interventions include crisis management, stabilising a family and achieving transformative change (through 'soft' and 'hard' elements).

Young people's IIP journeys

The case study young people detailed in this report had significant presenting issues: anti-social behaviour and offending; non-attendance at school and a range of risk factors (mental and physical health, home and neighbourhood environment, substance misuse, negative peer groups, gang-related activity, problematic parenting, poverty, difficult transitions from education and inappropriate sexual conduct).

The history, scale and complexity of family issues meant that ensuring the engagement of young people and their parents was often challenging and engagement could continue to

fluctuate over the duration of an intervention. However, in almost all cases, some level of engagement was achieved. The persistence and assertiveness of IIP workers, allied to their informal and non-judgemental approach, the capacity to work intensively over a period of time with a young person and family, and the ability to deliver some positive outcomes (in terms of practical help or positive activities) were the key to securing this engagement.

The direct support provided to young people and their families by IIP workers was the primary mechanism for achieving progress and positive outcomes, based on providing contexts where young people could be listened to and reflect on their situations and where a range of emotional and practical support could be delivered. A multi-agency whole family approach and access to specialist services were also essential in providing the context for sustainable positive outcomes and beginning to address the underlying issues affecting vulnerable young people and their families. The advocacy role of IIPs faced a series of challenges, relating to the relative power and status of IIP workers in agency networks and processes and the criteria thresholds for accessing mainstream services.

Some young people (and their parents) continued to be involved in anti-social behaviour or offending and were not attending education provision. A small number of cases were exited from IIPs with limited obvious progress having been made in addressing presenting issues and, even in cases where significant progress was made in some aspects of young people's lives; the IIPs recognised that other issues remained unresolved.

However, for two thirds of case study young people, anti-social behaviour or offending had been significantly reduced or had ceased entirely, and improvements had been made in school attendance or engagement with further or alternative education. The IIPs had achieved 'soft' transformative outcomes such as reduced risky behaviours, enhanced self-esteem and confidence and improved domestic environments (emotional, social and physical) or had managed to stabilise families so that interventions aimed at achieving transformative outcomes could be put in place. IIPs performed a crucial function in crisis management, which was very significant in preventing situations escalating for many of these young people and their families and which is an essential prerequisite to stabilising families and ultimately achieving transformative outcomes. Young people and their parents were almost universal in their belief that the IIPs had been a positive experience for themselves and that these interventions were directly linked to the achievement of significant progress and outcomes.

Economic cost benefit analysis

Analysis was conducted of outcomes and costs data from five case study IIPs. The analysis found that the IIP programme provides a flexible, cost-effective approach to working with troubled young people, many of whom have profound and persistent deep-seated problems. About a quarter of the young people with contracts had achieved a key worker-reported successful exit from the IIP by the end of 2010. The average number of months per closed case ranged from 7.9 to 13.4 months. The average number of months per successfully closed case was slightly higher, at 8.5 to 14.3 months.

The average cost per successfully closed case was about £35,000 (though it ranged from about £26,500 to £30,700 for most of the case study sites). Non-intervention and subsequent costs and expenditure accrued, on aspects such as crime, custodial

accommodation, local authority accommodation, exclusion from education and not being in education, training or employment are substantial. For example, the potential life time public finance costs of a prolific offender have been estimated at over £2m. Based on the experiences of a number of young people with positive outcomes from the case study sites, this study estimated the average present value of savings over a period of five years to be about £280,000 per young person. This return of £8 of avoided costs for £1 of IIP expenditure indicates that IIPs represent good value for money (although additional research is needed to determine if the positive behavioural changes are sustained over time). Nevertheless, with an annual expenditure of £200,000 and a caseload of about 20-30 young people at any one time, an IIP does not need many successful outcomes to generate cost savings that greatly exceed expenditure by the IIP.

Considerable improvements were often made by other members of a young person's family but this could not be captured and quantified in the analysis. IIPs could also generate additional costs for service providers in the short term, by identifying needs and referring young people and families to supportive interventions. These costs should be balanced with the longer term savings that may arise from this additional support being provided. It was not possible to identify from the available data if IIPs efficiency could have been improved by adopting other working practices.

Perspectives from the national IIP programme

IIPs were reported to have achieved positive outcomes through crisis management and risk reduction; stabilising family circumstances and bringing about transformative changes for young people and their families. These outcomes had often been sustained in the period following an IIP intervention. The complexity of quantifying and verifying these outcomes was acknowledged, but the 'distance travelled' by a young person was regarded as a crucial element of measurement and assessment.

A number of key principles and effective working practices were identified, including: accurate and comprehensive assessments of whole family needs; linking contracts and work plans to specific needs; creatively engaging young people and families in a persistent and resilient manner; working with a range of family members and peer groups; utilising a range of one to one, group work and peer support; personal budgets; and strong partnership working. Key strengths of the IIP model included IIP staff, flexible working hours and smaller case loads; the key worker approach; differentiation from statutory services; and the diversity of the IIPs (in terms of providers, target groups and issues and intervention approaches).

IIPs faced a number of challenges including referral and assessment processes; securing and maintaining the engagement of young people and families; relationships with partner agencies; the scale, extent and complexity of young people's and families' problems; and staffing issues. A number of weaknesses in the original conceptualisation of IIPs were identified, including the focus on sanctions and working with individual young people rather than families; the time-limited nature of, and envisaged case loads within, the programme; the qualifications and relative power of IIP workers; and the policies, thresholds and resources of statutory agencies.

Project workers were required to adopt a non-judgemental, persistent and committed approach that empowered young people and families and enabled them to take some

ownership of problems. This required working at the pace of families. Project workers were required to undertake a diverse set of functions, including liaison and advocacy with other agencies, which could be very challenging. Area leads had facilitated partnership working, resolved conflicts and disseminated good practice and mutual learning.

There was a complex relationship between support and sanction, but the relationship between IIP workers and young people and families was the most important mechanism for achieving change. The informal use (and withholding) of rewards was a more predominant element of IIPs approaches than formal sanctions.

IIPs were reported to have achieved value for money through: reduced incidents of offending and anti-social behaviour and preventing escalating enforcement action; reduced numbers of children being taken into care or excluded from education; increased engagement with support services, training and employment; and more effective targeting and coordinating of cases.

The IIPs were believed to have provided additionality in their localities through: engaging and supporting young people and families not being supported by any other agency; filling gaps in provision to particular groups; enhancing understanding of needs and linking these more effectively to interventions; and shaping mainstream statutory support services. Some IIPs had sought to enhance their additionality through the use of sessional workers and volunteers and undertaking group work to increase the number of young people being supported. Both value for money and additionality were difficult to evidence and quantify.

Policy implications

The findings support key elements of the government's strategic approach, including:

- The need for Intensive Family Interventions to be based upon a holistic whole family approach with a coordinated and proactive role for statutory and voluntary agencies, local communities (including peers and neighbours) and families (including extended families) themselves.
- Conceptualising Intensive Family Interventions as addressing inter-generational cycles or vulnerability, which provide the embedded context within which 'early intervention' is actually delivered.
- Addressing existing weaknesses in the relationship between support and sanctions and ensuring that the availability of support and the effective take up of this support is improved. However, sanctions are very limited as both a deterrent to behaviour and motivation to engage with support for this vulnerable group.

There are issues that national policy should consider, including:

- Voluntary sector organisations are not in a position to independently and entirely fund all of these interventions and, although there is an important role for local communities and volunteering, this should not take the form of directly substituting for the withdrawal of other sources of funding or specialist and highly qualified expertise.

- There needs to be an acknowledgement of the wider processes of disadvantage impacting upon vulnerable families and the communities in which they are located. Lack of employment and training opportunities, poor physical environments, inappropriate housing conditions, illegal drugs regimes, financial/debt exploitation, domestic violence and very limited household incomes provide the context of the vulnerability of these families and these issues should be tackled at the macro level by government. It is also important that the government considers how proposed changes to the welfare and benefits system (including employment, education, housing and incapacity) will impact on these vulnerable households.
- The public sector should continue to have a key role to play in Intensive Family Intervention programmes and needs to be resourced to do so, otherwise there is a risk that Intensive Family Interventions become a substitute for statutory services rather than providing additionality and that threshold criteria for supporting individuals and families are raised, resulting in families with complex needs not receiving the support that they require.
- A stronger case should be made for the economic viability and sustainability of Intensive Family Interventions and the significant cost-benefits that they achieve. These benefits accrue to a range of agencies who should therefore consider contributing resources to Intensive Family Interventions.

The findings have implications for local policy makers, including:

- Consideration should be given to how a range of agencies and organisations could more meaningfully contribute to Intensive Family Interventions and the provision of support to vulnerable young people and their families. For example, local areas should seek, in a multi-agency framework, to develop a pool of workers who can deliver the engagement, assessment and linking to services roles performed by IIP workers.
- There is a need for greater flexibility in statutory service provision to vulnerable families. This includes reviewing threshold criteria and missed appointment policies; undertaking home visits; and enhancing the role and influence of intensive intervention workers in referral processes and needs assessments.
- Current mechanisms, such as Common Assessment Frameworks, may not always capture the actual extent and complexity of issues impacting upon vulnerable young people and families.
- The use of personalised budgets and spot purchasing provision, allied to the innovation and autonomy of workers, is a very significant factor in achieving progress and change for young people and their families.
- The costs of delivering Intensive Family Interventions need to be considered in the broader contexts of improved coordination and reduced duplication and longer term economic savings.

- The potential to utilise resources within communities, such as peer mentors, volunteers and local organisations should be explored. There are examples of such developments in local areas (including provision of counselling services, community champions and a mentoring role for families who have successfully participated in intensive intervention programmes).

Additional Information

The full report can be accessed at <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/>
Further information about this research can be obtained from
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This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.