
Turning around the lives of families with multiple problems - an evaluation of the Family and Young Carer Pathfinders Programme

York Consulting

Summary

The Family Pathfinder programme launched in 2007 aimed to develop local responses to the needs of families who face multiple and complex social, economic, health and child problems. Twenty seven local authorities (LAs) took part in the project which was comprehensively evaluated.

Results showed **significant improvement in outcomes for nearly a half (46%) of families** supported by the Family Pathfinders and nearly a third (31%) of the families supported by the Young Carer Pathfinders. Areas were also able to demonstrate savings to local partners, so that **for every £1 spent, the Family Pathfinders generated a financial return of £1.90**. Achieving improved and sustainable outcomes for families was dependent on the use of a **key worker** responsible for providing and coordinating effective support for families.

The evidence from this study presents a compelling case for LAs and their partners to develop and implement intensive family intervention with families with multiple and complex needs. Whilst funding for the Pathfinders formally ended in 2010 four fifths of the Family Pathfinder and Young Carer Pathfinders are being sustained in some form.

The current Government is supporting national and local activity to turn around the lives of families with multiple problems. These findings provide persuasive evidence of the value of investment in family intervention services which target these families.

Introduction and Background

1. The Family Pathfinder programme announced in the Children's Plan (2007) **aimed to develop and test the effectiveness of intensive, family focused approaches to addressing the needs of families who face multiple and complex problems**. Typically these might include poor housing, debt, worklessness, disability, poor parenting, harmful family relationships, substance misuse, poor mental health, poor educational outcomes and child protection concerns.
2. The Cabinet Office's *Families at Risk Review* estimated that around **2% of families in England face such difficulties**. The review also found that existing support for many of these families failed to result in improved outcomes because of a lack of coordination between supporting agencies and because services did not always account for the wider problems faced by family members.

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3. **Between 2007 and 2010, 27 local authorities (LAs) received additional funding to develop local solutions to the problems these families faced.** In 2008, 15 LAs received funding to test intensive family focused models of support (referred to as 'Family Pathfinders'). Six of these LAs also received additional funding to address the needs of families with young carers. In November 2009, a further 12 LAs received funding to support young carers (referred to as 'Young Carer Pathfinders').
 4. In September 2008, York Consulting LLP was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, now the Department for Education, to conduct an evaluation of the programme. This evaluation examined the various models of support, their impact on families and services, and the broader economic implications.

Key Findings

5. **The evidence from this three year study presents a compelling case for LAs and their partners to develop and implement intensive family support for families with multiple and complex needs** (i.e. those already in receipt of statutory support or just below these thresholds). However, it must be noted that this study has not made use of a controlled experiment or comparison group to estimate the net impact of the interventions.
 6. The evidence suggests that intensive, **family focused support resulted in a significant improvement in outcomes for nearly a half (46%) of families supported by the Family Pathfinders and nearly a third (31%) of the families supported by the Young Carer Pathfinders.** These families had a reduction in their assessed level of need between entry and exit (i.e. from statutory to specialist or targeted level services) and experienced a reduction in both the range and severity of risk factors impacting on family life.
 7. **A further half of families (41% of the Family Pathfinder families and 56% of Young Carer families) also experienced a reduction in the range and severity of risk factors experienced,** but were assessed as having the same overall level of service need on entry to, and exit from Pathfinder support (i.e. specialist on entry and exit). For some families there was a lag between positive outcomes being achieved and a change in the assessment of the family's overall level of need. In other cases, the change was not significant enough to result in a change in the level of service intervention required.
 8. **It is also important to highlight that the evidence suggests that the support provided was not effective for all families.** The proportion of families who experienced an increase in their assessed level of need was similar across the two types of Pathfinder, with around 13% showing an escalation in need. This was either because additional, previously undiagnosed needs were identified by Pathfinder staff during the course of assessment that required more specialist support (e.g. child protection concerns); or because families did not engage with the support provided.
 9. **The research findings revealed that the Pathfinders generated net programme benefits.** A conservative assessment of the return on investment indicates that **for every £1 spent, the Family Pathfinders have generated a financial return of**
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£1.90 from the avoidance of families experiencing negative outcomes. The **comparable figure for the Young Carer Pathfinders was £1.89.**

10. Local areas developed different structural models of delivery which, the evidence suggests, all had the potential to result in improved outcomes for families. **What mattered most was that the Pathfinders effectively established three critical and interrelated components of delivery.** Each element played an equal and vital role in the delivery of improved outcomes:
 - **a persistent and assertive key worker role:** a highly skilled, credible and experienced professional who worked intensively with families and could provide case leadership and management, both delivering intensive support to the family and brokering specialist support as necessary;
 - **a robust framework of support:** including a comprehensive assessment of the needs of all family members and a multi-disciplinary Team Around the Family (TAF) approach, delivered within an effective model of case supervision. This ensured that families' needs were appropriately identified, that the right support was accessed and that progress was regularly and effectively reviewed;
 - **an intensive and flexible, family focused response:** which provided a well managed, phased approach to support, addressing multiple family issues and using a wide range of professional expertise, over a sustained period of time. Crucially, the effectiveness of support was measured by outcomes for the family, rather than whether an intervention was delivered or not. The approach was underpinned by the principles of effective family support, i.e. it was supportive and strengths based, but equally challenging to families. Crucially, (and in contrast to previous approaches delivered to many families) the support adopted a whole *family approach* and, where appropriate, included both resident and non-resident parents/carers.
11. Supporting families with multiple and complex needs is an area of expertise that requires specialist skills and knowledge, often crossing existing professional boundaries. Both the findings from this study and the recent Munro Review¹ **highlight the skills and expertise of practitioners as a critical component in delivering improved outcomes for families. This requires investment in a system which recognises, and supports the development of the key worker role.**

Methodology

12. A multi-method approach was adopted, which comprised six strands:
 - **Strand 1: Pathfinder consultations** – annual in-depth visits to all Pathfinders, which included interviews with strategic and operational leads, practitioners, key partners (at a strategic and operational level), meeting observations and a desk review of documentation and indicators.
 - **Strand 2: Partner online survey** - to capture partners' views of the Pathfinders' impact. Two surveys were administered during the course of the evaluation to both managers and practitioners.

¹ http://www.education.gov.uk/munroreview/downloads/8875_DfE_Munro_Report_TAGGED.pdf

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- **Strand 3: Family Pathfinder Information System (FPIS)** - was an online database which gathered information on families supported by the Pathfinders, including: family demographics; areas of concern and strengths; packages of support and related outcomes. This enabled the research to gather evidence of the 'distance travelled' by families between entry to, and exit from, Pathfinder support. A total of 1,408 families were recorded on FPIS (including 711 families who had exited Pathfinder support).
 - **Strand 4: Family Assessment Device (FAD)** - this was a validated tool completed by family members on entry to and exit from support. A total of 214 entry and exit FADs were completed.
 - **Strand 5: Family follow-up** - in-depth interviews with 64 families across 13 Pathfinder areas. Families were interviewed when they exited from Pathfinder support and again six months post-exit (44 families were interviewed at this point). The purpose was to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of support on families, how this was sustained over time and what elements of the Pathfinder approach and support were effective in determining positive (and negative) outcomes.
 - **Strand 6: Costs and Benefits** – A Social Return on Investment approach generating an economic (Fiscal Return on Investment) assessment.

Findings

Improving Outcomes for Families

13. **Reducing risk and improving resilience is crucial in supporting families to function more effectively.** The research evidence suggests that it was possible to make significant improvements even where there were multiple and complex needs on entry. Whilst the families supported in the Young Carer Pathfinders had, to a large degree, parental mental ill health and substance misuse concerns, their problems were not of the magnitude as were recorded for those families supported by the Family Pathfinders.
 14. **A phased, multi-disciplinary approach to support was most effective in improving outcomes.** This involved an initial focus on the underlying causes of family tension and stress, and then moving on to tackle individual issues and problems. Addressing environmental issues, such as poor or unsuitable housing and family debt facilitated family engagement. It also meant that families were in a more stable position and better equipped to address entrenched issues, such as poor mental health and substance misuse. Tackling the causes of parental stress allowed longer term improvements to family functioning through the development of more effective parenting strategies and improved relationships between family members. These changes had a significant impact on children and young people.
 15. The evidence suggests that the Family Pathfinders in particular demonstrated a **significant degree of success in removing a whole range of concerns in families with multiple needs.** For almost every concern examined (except for inappropriate caring and child emotional mental health) the prevalence of the concern and the level of progress recorded was greater amongst the Family Pathfinder families.
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16. Across all families supported the evidence suggests that the most significant impacts at the family level were related to:
- **domestic violence:** identified as an issue for 46% of families on entry to support. Concerns were almost twice as likely to be identified for families supported by the Family Pathfinders than those supported by the Young Carer Pathfinders (57% compared to 31% of families). **On exit the evidence suggests that almost three quarters of families (71%) had concerns removed;**
 - **housing issues:** identified as an issue for 44% of all families on entry to support. Concerns relating to the security of housing tenure were more than twice as likely to be evident amongst Family Pathfinder families, than Young Carer Pathfinder families; whilst concerns relating to poor living conditions were similar across the two Pathfinder types. **On exit from support, three quarters of families where a concern existed on entry showed an improvement in their housing situation** and for half of the families where a concern was identified on entry the practitioner's concern was completely removed on exit. The extent of change achieved was similar across both types of Pathfinder;
 - **parenting issues** (e.g. establishing effective boundaries and behaviour management): identified as an area of concern for more than half of all families (57%) on entry. Parenting issues were more likely to be identified as a concern for Family Pathfinder families, e.g. boundary setting and discipline was identified as a concern for 72% of Family Pathfinder families and 38% of Young Carer Pathfinder families. **On exit, two thirds of these families recorded significant improvements.** Levels of improvement were almost twice as high amongst the Family Pathfinder families than the Young Carer Pathfinder families;
 - **relationships between family members** (e.g. lack of secure attachment, lack of affection): identified as an issue for over half (57%) of all families on entry. Concerns were slightly more likely to be identified within Family Pathfinder families than the Young Carer Pathfinder families (62% compared to 51%) and were also more likely to be assessed as having higher level needs. **On exit, nearly three fifths (59%) of families showed improvements in family relationships and for nearly a third (31%), practitioners' concerns were completely addressed.** The extent of change achieved was similar across both types of Pathfinder.
17. The evidence suggest that the support also had a range of positive outcomes for children and young people:
- **child protection concerns:** on entry concerns were identified for more than a quarter (26%) of children and young people (including 13% who were subject to a Child Protection Plan). Children and young people from Family Pathfinder families were almost twice as likely to have a child protection concern identified on entry to support. Nearly a third (30%) of all children and young people from this group had a child protection concern identified on entry, compared to 17% of children and young people from families supported by the Young Carer Pathfinders. **On exit, there was no longer a concern for nearly three fifths (59%) of this group.** A further 32 (2%) children who did not have a concern identified on entry did have a concern identified on exit, reinforcing the view that

Pathfinder support was helping to identify otherwise unidentified child protection risks;

- **inappropriate levels of caring** (i.e. caring role has a negative impact on children and young people): practitioners identified this as a concern for more than a third (37%) of all children and young people within families supported by the Pathfinders. Although inappropriate levels of caring were more than twice (51%) as likely to be identified for children and young people within families supported by the Young Carer Pathfinders, more than a quarter (27%) of children and young people from Family Pathfinder families also had concerns identified. **On exit from support, the evidence suggests that three fifths (60%) of these children and young people showed an overall improvement in their situation and for nearly a third (32%) concerns were removed;**
 - **school attendance:** on entry to support, school attendance was identified as an issue for nearly a third (30%) of all children and young people (with an average school attendance of 61%). School attendance was almost twice as likely to be identified as a concern for children and young people from the Family Pathfinder families (41%) than it was for those from the Young Carer Pathfinder families. **On exit from Pathfinder support, school attendance was no longer identified as a concern for half of this cohort;**
 - **anti-social behaviour:** identified as a concern for 11% of young people on entry to support (17% of young people from Family Pathfinder families and 4% from Young Carer Pathfinder families). **On exit anti-social behaviour was no longer identified as a concern for almost half (45%) of this cohort.**
18. Families' levels of resilience (i.e. ability to withstand crisis and adversity and avoid adverse outcomes) also improved following Pathfinder support, from an average of five indicators (e.g. financial stability, no domestic violence) on entry, to eight indicators on exit.

Costs and Benefits of Family Pathfinders

19. The average cost of Pathfinder support per family (including support provided by non-Pathfinder services) was £19,233 in the Family Pathfinder areas and £4,331 in the Young Carer Pathfinder areas.
20. Savings per family were calculated using information collected by practitioners on changes in family outcomes as a result of Pathfinder support. Monetary values were obtained for these outcomes from published sources including the DfE negative costing tool². Using this approach, the average cost saving for families was £34,560 in Family Pathfinder areas and £8,191 in Young Carer Pathfinder areas. The differences in savings were primarily due to the difference in the complexity and severity of need of the families supported and therefore the difference in change that could potentially be achieved. In Family Pathfinder areas, an average of 61% of cost savings were savings accrued in the first year following families exit from Pathfinder support. In the Young Carer Pathfinder areas, an average of 66% of savings were accrued in the first year following exit from support.

² See www.c4eo.org.uk/costeffectiveness/files/negative_outcomes_costing_tool_template.xls

21. The net financial benefit per family (cost savings minus the costs of the Pathfinder) was £15,327 in Family Pathfinder areas and £3,860 in Young Carer areas.
22. Combining the costs per family with the benefits per family allowed an estimate of the financial return for every £1 of resource dedicated to supporting families to be calculated. This is known as the SROI ratio. The average SROI ratio for the Family Pathfinders was 1.90 and for the Young Carer Pathfinders was 1.89. **This means that for every £1 spent since inception, the Family Pathfinders generated £1.90 in savings and the Young Carer Pathfinders generated £1.89 in savings from avoided negative outcomes.**
23. There were benefits to families that were identified that were not monetised. These included addressing issues such as parenting, family debt, housing, and improved family relationships, as well as strategic and practice benefits.

Operational and Strategic Impact

24. Alongside the new teams established to deliver the support to families (as was common in most Pathfinder areas), the **majority of areas focused on embedding the family focused approach across all services within the LAs.** Specifically, Pathfinders aimed to **reshape services** to ensure families were able to receive appropriate support; **increase joint working and communication across agencies;** and **increase the early identification of young carers.** To achieve these aims, Pathfinders focused on driving: **systems change** (to increase accountability and overcome systemic barriers, including implementing protocols, assessments and commissioning frameworks); **structural change** (including reshaping multi-agency team structures and creating new support packages); and **cultural change** (increasing practitioners' awareness and understanding of family focused approaches through integrated training and partnership working).
25. The overall progress as a result of this work has been encouraging. **In a third (five out of 15) of the Family Pathfinders the strategic change has had a significant impact** and there has been a marked shift towards delivering family focused services across all agencies. Furthermore, just under a third (four out of 15) of the Family Pathfinders, and just under a quarter (four out of 17) of the Young Carer Pathfinders, progress has moved in the right direction and momentum is gathering, although a full family focused service has yet to be embedded. However, not all areas have been successful and in the remaining (six Family Pathfinders and three quarters [14 out of 17] of the Young Carer Pathfinders) there were no significant strategic developments beyond the direct Pathfinder team and we do not expect developments to occur in the future. **Most Pathfinder areas faced significant barriers embedding family focused approaches within Adult Services.** This needs to be a significant focus at both the national and local level if family focused working is to be fully embedded.
26. There were common factors shared by both areas where progress was strong and those that have struggled to drive strategic change. **In order to fully embed a family focused approach, areas found that they needed:**
 - **effective leadership and governance** (including having significant seniority to influence change and an 'outward looking approach' to build partnerships with other local agencies which were in contact with families);

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- **clear aims and objectives** (with a strong understanding of what is needed to achieve these aims);
 - **political support and strategic backing** (to enable decisive and prompt decision making, particularly where more than one agency was involved);
 - **support from middle managers** (who need to understand and advocate family-focused approaches in order to achieve the cultural change for practitioners to work in a family-focused way);
 - **strong monitoring and feedback mechanisms** (to engage senior leaders and to evidence impact to justify sustainability); and
 - **engagement from other key services.**
27. **Four fifths of the Family Pathfinder and Young Carer Pathfinders are being sustained** in either their current form or are being partially sustained. This is broadly positive considering the current financial climate and reflects a commitment from key stakeholders of the benefits of continuing to work in a family focused way.

Conclusions and Implications

28. The findings showed that for families with multiple and complex needs, **the key worker acted as the 'lynch pin'** in providing and coordinating effective support for families and was vital in achieving improved and sustainable outcomes. **Establishing this intensive support role clearly has cost implications; however, our research found that the return achieved within one year was worth the investment.**
29. Whilst the evidence suggests that the impact of the support for many of the families was clear, **their enduring vulnerability should not be underestimated.** On exit from support, worklessness and mental health issues remained common concerns. **Therefore, it is important that intensive family support is delivered within the context of a continuum of support. Clear support plans need to be in place for families on exit in order to ensure that positive outcomes are maintained.**
30. The evidence indicated that intensive family support was **most effective where it was incorporated into a family support strategy that provided help across the continuum of need.** This suggests that local areas would benefit from developing a service which incorporates the range of family support, removing demarcations between the different funded initiatives and tailored to family need. This should provide a greater level of joined up support to families, rather than families being 'exited' from a particular programme or series of interventions.

Family Pathfinder Local Authority Areas

Family Pathfinder Areas	Young Carer Pathfinder Areas
1. Blackpool	
2. Bolton	Bolton
3. Brighton and Hove	
4. Durham	
5. Gateshead	Gateshead
6. Islington	Islington
7. Leeds	Leeds
8. Salford	
9. Somerset	Somerset
10. Southampton	
11. Southend	
12. Sunderland	Sunderland
13. Walsall	
14. Warrington	
15. Westminster	
	16. Blackburn with Darwen
	17. Cornwall
	18. Hartlepool
	19. Hull
	20. Luton
	21. Manchester
	22. Milton Keynes
	23. Norfolk
	24. Reading
	25. Suffolk
	26. Telford & Wrekin
	27. Wigan

Additional Information

The full report can be accessed at <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/>
Further information about this research can be obtained from
Caroline Prichard, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT
Caroline.PRICHARD@education.gsi.gov.uk

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.