



Department
for Education

Review of the Family Fund Trust

Appendix C – Individual Case Study Reports

Research Report

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Contents

Review of the Family Fund Trust	3
Family 1	5
Family 2	9
Family 3	12
Family 4	15
Family 5	19
Family 6	22
Family 7	25
Family 8	29
Family 9	32
Family 10	35
Family 11	39
Family 12	42
Family 13	45
Family 14	48
Family 15	51
Family 16	54
Family 17	57
Family 18	61
Family 19	65
Family 20	68

Review of the Family Fund Trust

In April 2012, the Department for Education commissioned the Moorhouse Consortium (including Cognizant and OPM) to undertake a rapid review of the Family Fund Trust (FFT). The review, carried out between April 2012 and July 2012, had five main objectives:

1. To compare the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the current Family Fund model with alternative delivery models
2. To assess the process of awareness raising with families and allocation and distribution of funds
3. To identify the short and long term impact of initial and repeat funding on families
4. To measure the qualitative impact of home visits
5. To review the appropriateness of the role of UK Government as a direct grant provider.

Alongside the main report there is a research brief and five supporting appendices. These are:

- Appendix A: Detailed Methodology and Research Tools
- Appendix B: Summary reports from the main strands of research
- Appendix C: Individual Family Case Study Reports
- Appendix D: Alternative models
- Appendix E: Raw survey data by country, first time applicants and multiple applicants

We undertook case study visits to 20 families in receipt of Family Fund Trust grants. This appendix sets out our case study reports.

Please note that we have used pseudonyms throughout the case studies to protect individuals' identities.

Family 1

Family Context

The family live in west London and are originally from east Africa: they are mum, dad and six children (four daughters and two sons); the eldest is six and the youngest a newborn. Their three year old daughter, Habiba, is deaf and had autism. The daily pressures they face include caring for the six children in a modest-sized house. Transport is a major issue - getting the three older ones to school each day on the bus, including Habiba to her special nursery which is about 5 miles away, is challenging and stressful particularly in bad weather as Habiba is prone to ear infections and anaemia. The parents also get very tired from coping with Habiba's behaviour – during the day, she needs constant attention as she is prone to get into trouble and hurt herself, such as climbing over the fence into the neighbour's garden, and at night she wakes frequently and makes a noise so the house is disturbed.

The family does not receive a personal budget/direct payment/individual budget for Habiba. Their monthly income before tax is less than £590. Neither parent works currently; dad has been looking for work since being granted temporary leave to remain in the UK last summer, but his lack of qualifications and experience in this country mean he has not been able to find work despite his best efforts and willingness to take any kind of work.

Applications to the Family Fund

The family applied to the Fund about two years ago, and again just under a year ago; they filled in the forms themselves and found it easy to do. Both applications were successful. Through the first application they received a voucher for Comet, to get a washing machine and a fridge. Through the second application they received a voucher for Argos, to get a trampoline and swings for the garden.

The family was happy with the system of receiving a voucher rather than cash. At Argos, they found that they could get the trampoline and swings for less than they had expected, so they were able to purchase a television too; Argos was happy for them to spend the voucher as they wished¹. However, at Comet, the voucher obliged the family to spend a certain amount on the fridge and a certain amount on the washing machine; in fact they would have preferred to get a slightly more expensive washing machine and a less expensive fridge, which would have totalled the same amount, but they were not allowed to do so. The dad pointed out that during the time between the application and the award, stores may change their prices e.g. offering sales or discounts, so more flexibility in the choice of how to spend the voucher would enable families to take advantage of these.

¹ Family Fund guidance for situations where the agreed goods cost less than their anticipated amount, is for the family to get in touch to discuss the spend of the outstanding grant monies: <http://www.familyfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/Home%20entertainment%20leaflet.pdf> . It is not understood whether the family contacted the Family Fund in advance of buying the TV set with the remaining funds.

Home Visit

The Family Fund worker came to visit the family's home after their application, staying for around 45 minutes, meeting and chatting with the family, and attempted to communicate with Habiba, but Habiba is not able to communicate. She also spent time looking at Habiba's medical records and asking about the family's financial circumstances and support needs; including whether they were receiving the benefits to which they were entitled (these were carer's allowance, income support and disability living allowance; which the family was already receiving). She asked the family why they needed the items applied for, to make sure these were the most appropriate items for which they should apply. They had applied in mum's name, as at that time dad did not have the required immigration status, and the worker confirmed this was the correct thing to do.

The parents were happy to receive a home visit and thought it was a helpful experience for several reasons. They felt it was good for the worker to see their situation for herself, because it gave a more detailed and accurate picture than writing or explaining on the phone (in addition, they had found it difficult to contact the Fund by phone).

'You can say how things are to someone, but if they see it, it's better. On the visit she can see how things are and you can also talk – both together are good.'

Another reason that the family preferred a face to face visit was that the parents' English, although very good, is not perfect and so at the visit they felt they had the opportunity to communicate their situation and needs more effectively than in the written application. They thought that the visit had saved time too, because otherwise there may have been a need for to-ing and fro-ing by email or letter in order to clarify all the information and detail in the application.

The visit also helped the family to think through and clarify what they most needed to make sure they were applying for the right items; the worker helped them to make a clear case for their need for the items.

They felt that they would have missed out had they not had the visit and were it up to them, would continue to offer the visit to families applying for the first time.

Impact

The new washing machine has made the biggest difference to the family; the old machine was too small to cope with all the family's laundry. The new machine also has a dryer, which the old one did not – so previously, clothes had to be dried next to the heater, from where Habiba would pull them onto the floor, making them dirty again.

The fridge has also made a big difference to the family because it is larger than the old one, which means they can keep more food in the house so they don't have to go shopping so often (shopping was a challenge with six children in tow and took up a lot of time, especially added to the amount of time it takes to get the children to their different schools and nurseries). It also means they have enough room for the extra food required for Habiba's special diet.

The swings and trampoline provide vital exercise for the children, which is particularly important for Habiba as she has a lot of energy. The trampoline and swings allow her to play and enjoy herself, which helps to keep her out of mischief and to tire her out so that she sleeps better at night (which means that everyone else can sleep too).

The TV which they got from Argos with the surplus left over after buying the trampoline and swings is benefiting the family because it can be mounted on the wall out of Habiba's reach; the old television stood on the floor, and Habiba once climbed on top of it, falling and breaking her leg.

The family found that the total value of the vouchers they received was sufficient for their needs, but that the inflexibility around how they spent the Comet voucher meant that they could not get the exact appliances they wanted (as explained above). They did ask permission from the Family Fund Trust to spend the voucher differently but this was not granted.

Without the awards from the Family Fund Trust, the family would have continued to manage with their existing fridge and washing machine, which were making their lives more difficult. They would not have been able to afford to buy the garden toys.

Other Sources of Support

The family is in regular contact with a range of professionals in relation to Habiba's disabilities. These include those in the hearing clinic, child development, speech and language, educational psychology, deaf teacher and occupational therapist. The latter two visit the family home to see Habiba.

They do not receive financial support from any other organisations at the moment. They applied to the local authority for direct payments for Habiba, but were rejected; however with the support of one of Habiba's doctors, they have requested a sitting service for 8 hours per month for Habiba, which they are waiting to have confirmed.

The family has received advice and support from two local groups which support families with a disabled child, who helped them to obtain a place at the special nursery for Habiba, and is going to enable them to take all of the children on a trip to London Zoo.

The Future

The family plans to apply for two further items from the Fund. One is for money to enable mum to take Habiba to Kenya to see her relatives. Habiba's grandmother in Kenya wants to see Habiba especially, because she is a 'special' child. They may also consider applying for driving lessons for mum, so that if they could afford a car, it would be easier to take the children to school and do the shopping.

Recommendations for Improvement

The family had two suggestions for improving the Family Fund:

- The first was around the flexibility of the Comet vouchers, as described above – if they worked in the same way as the Argos voucher, i.e. can be spent on any item rather than fixed ones, this would be better.
- Secondly the family had found it difficult to get through to the Fund by phone, which they wanted to do in order to have a discussion, rather than an email exchange. A more responsive phone service would help to resolve queries and reach a conclusion more quickly.

Family 2

Family Context

The family is mum and ten year old Evan, they live in north Wales. Evan has Aspergers, ADHD and anxieties, and they are awaiting a diagnosis of hypermobility. Evan is extremely bright and high-functioning in terms of academic learning; he is in year 5 but learns alongside year 6 pupils at school. He has poor social skills, and has difficulty maintaining friendships, so he is socially isolated. He also lacks a sense of danger which means he can't go out by himself in case he gets hurt on the roads. He finds it difficult to concentrate and can experience high levels of stress and anxiety which impact on his ability to go out and take part in activities (for example, a serious phobia of dogs and wasps). He also has a condition which makes his feet and legs ache, so he can't walk long distances and needs frequent rests.

Mum is the sole caregiver for Evan and she doesn't work. They have a social worker and receive carers' allowance and disability living allowance. They don't receive a personal budget/direct payment/individual budget, but they have a support worker provided by social services to accompany Evan to St John's Ambulance each week, where he can mix with older children, who he gets on better with than those his own age. Evan recently moved school because his old school was not catering well for his needs; the new school is 11 miles away and mum spends around 5 hours a day on buses to and from school.

Applications to the Family Fund

Evan is now ten and his mum first applied to the Fund when he was three. She has made several applications in between, all successful, including for Days Out (to Legoland, to London, and visitor attractions in Wales), a sofa and carpet when they moved house, driving lessons and a trampoline. Days Out are their most frequent applications. Mum finds the application process straightforward and has always received the grant within a couple of months, which is satisfactory.

The Days Out grants are received by bank transfer so that mum has a good degree of choice and control over how they are spent. She keeps all the receipts for travel, hotels, entrance to attractions etc, in case the Fund requests them for audit purposes. Receiving money for Days Out means that she can make it go further by asking for concession prices at museums etc, and spend the surplus on snacks or another activity.

The voucher for the trampoline was spent in Argos and there was some money left over from it; mum rang the Fund to offer to return it, but they allowed her to spend it on something else for Evan, which she appreciated.²

² Family Fund guidance for situations where the agreed goods cost less than their anticipated amount is for the family to get in touch to discuss the spend of the outstanding grant monies.

<http://www.familyfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/Home%20entertainment%20leaflet.pdf>

As highlighted above, families are frequently permitted to reuse surplus funds if they can source what they need for less than expected.

The driving lessons package was less helpful for mum because she had to take the lessons through BSM, who she did not think were very good, and she has not yet passed her test. If she had had a choice, she would have changed to a local instructor instead.

Home Visit

The family received their home visit seven years ago so it was hard to remember the details. However, mum recalled that she found the Family Fund worker very nice and helpful. She understood that the worker had come to find out more about the family, check their eligibility and whether they needed the items requested (driving lessons). The worker suggested that they also apply for a carpet for Evan's bedroom, as the room had bare boards at the time because they had just moved, and for a new sofa, as their second-hand sofa was in very poor condition. It would not have occurred to mum to ask for a new sofa, as it wasn't something 'for Evan', but the worker explained that it was OK to apply for it – so they would have missed out on this without the visit.

Mum thought that the visit was an important part of the application process, because the worker could make helpful suggestions about what to apply for:

'She knows families, and she can ask you questions to find out what you need, when you might not have even thought of it yourself.'

She also thought that the visits help ensure that applicants' needs are genuine and therefore avoid fraudulent applications. She would offer home visits to families applying for the first time, if it was up to her.

Impact

Of the various items they have received through the Family Fund Trust, the Days Out make the biggest difference for mum and Evan. Evan 'absolutely loves' going on trips and activities, and mum feels it helps to make him less isolated, more active and spend time meaningfully:

'He is happy enough at home playing his video games, but it's so much better to be able to get him out and doing things that he will have really good memories of.'

It's especially important for Evan to have these opportunities because his conditions mean he cannot play out in the park with other children because of his anxieties, social difficulties and need for stimulation; he prefers more stimulating activities such as visiting a historic site or museum.

For mum too it's an enjoyable experience that 'does me the world of good too.' Without the Family Fund Trust they wouldn't be able to do these days out, because living on benefits they don't have a lot of spare money (plus Evan only eats certain foods, which increases their grocery bill). Mum would find it difficult to justify spending money on days out compared to basic everyday expenses.

The new carpet for Evan's bedroom meant he could play in there without being on the bare floorboards. The new sofa provided a comfortable place for the family to sit, and also being new and good quality it has lasted well. If she had had to buy these items herself, mum would have had to save up for a long time and/or put it on a credit card; she would only have been able to afford second-hand things which would probably not have lasted so well and needed replacing.

The trampoline has not been installed yet but Evan is very excited about using it soon. Because of his ASD he has a lot of energy to burn off, and mum says that it has been shown that trampolines can be particularly therapeutic for children with ASD.

Other Sources of Support

The family is in regular contact with their disability social worker, who comes to the house and helps the family a lot in terms of making sure Evan gets the support he needs. They are also in contact with the CAMHS team: every 5-6 months they go to the hospital to check Evan's ADHD medication. Evan will also be seeing an educational psychologist about his anxieties, but they are currently waiting until he feels ready for this.

The family has also applied to Merlin's Magic Wand, which gives out free tickets for attractions such as Legoland and Alton Towers. They went to Alton Towers but Evan did not enjoy it as he was scared on the rides. However it was an easy process to apply for the tickets, because it was online, as the Family Fund Trust now is. Mum is aware of other charities to which she could apply for similar things i.e. trips and holidays, but they are limited in travelling by Evan's anxieties (for example, he would not go abroad because he is made anxious by news stories about bad things that have happened).

The Future

There are no plans to apply again to the Fund in the near future; there is nothing that they especially need at the moment and mum will always pay for things herself if she can afford to, rather than apply. If she applies again, it cannot be until September (a year since their last application), which would mean that they would receive Days Out money in the winter – so mum would rather wait until the weather is nicer so they can enjoy their days out more.

Recommendations for Improvement

The only recommendation that mum offered for Family Fund Trust was that they should encourage more parents to get involved in fundraising. This is something that mum has done herself and finds very rewarding personally, as well as helping to contribute to the Fund which she is aware may be affected by cuts to public spending (either to the Fund itself, or more widely – leading to a greater demand from families to apply to the Fund).

