**The South East Sector Led Improvement Programme (SESLIP)**

**Evaluating the impact of Early Help – A Literature Review**

1. **Introduction**

This paper forms part of the Early Help Project, which aims to establish an effective process for the evaluation of the impact of early help services across the South East region.

The SESLIP identified this work as a priority for action in 2015 and further impetus was added when the Ofsted thematic report, “Early Help: Whose Responsibility”, was published in March 2015. The report was based on inspections of 56 early help cases across 12 local authorities (2 of whom were in the South East region).

The report found that local authorities and their partners, increasingly prioritised the offer of help to families, when concerns first arose. As a result, more children were benefiting from coordinated support earlier. The quality and effectiveness of early help services however remained variable. Children’s need for additional support was often not identified or acted on, at the right time. The assessment and planning of services for individual children were too often insufficiently focused on improving outcomes for the child. Plans were not consistently or effectively reviewed and management oversight was not rigorous enough.

Inspectors concluded that planning for early help services was not informed by robust needs assessments. Neglect, parental substance misuse or ill health and domestic abuse are key factors undermining the welfare of children but not enough priority was given to understanding the nature and extent of these needs in local communities. It was therefore unclear whether early help services were being commissioned effectively to best address these needs. More generally, evaluation of the overall impact of early help services was not well developed.

1. **National Context for Early Help**

Early help has been a key part of Government policy for a number of years. A range of reviews have been undertaken over recent years which have informed the way in which early help services have been developed. These include:

* The Marmot Review – Fair Society, Healthy Lives (2010)
* Frank Field: The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults. Report of the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances. [2010]
* Dame Tickell Review: The Early Years: Foundation for Life, Health and Learning [2011]
* Graham Allen: Early Intervention: The Next Steps [January 2011]
* Professor Eileen Munro Review of Child Protection Final Report (May 2011)

There is however relatively little research into what works; the impacts on families, budgets, services and communities; and how best to evaluate the impact of early help. The following section summarises some of the findings found.

1. **What Works?**

***Spend***

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) was launched in April 2013, to investigate and promote effective interventions and good practice. In February 2015 it published “Spending on Late Intervention – How We Can Do Better for Less”. In it, EIF estimate that nearly £17 billion per year is spent in England and Wales on addressing problems too late for children and young people: problems such as mental health, substance misuse, school absences, unemployment and youth crime. This is only the immediate fiscal cost in a single year and although it is substantial, it does not include the longer-term impact of poor outcomes, nor the wider social and economic costs. Whilst the EIF does not argue that all of these costs are inappropriate and could be saved , it does claim that “*Late Intervention is not just expensive, it is also difficult to argue it is money spent well”.* The report provides some detailed analysis of spend across a number of areas and draws on examples of early intervention which appear to be demonstrating an impact (see next section: services). However it also acknowledges that detailed bottom up spend on early intervention has never been collated and so we are forced to extrapolate from a variety of figures. The report concludes by proposing a way forward. This includes:

* Policy makers prioritising early intervention spend by collating spend on early intervention and tracking a suite of indicators;
* Ensuring that local agencies pool budgets and share information. Health and Wellbeing Boards provide an important focus for this work;
* Putting the early intervention agenda at the heart of government. The argument being that: if we are really committed to reducing the fiscal deficit for adults of the future, then we must also reduce the social problems that they are likely to experience.

In “Pillar and Foundations – Next Practice in children’s Services”, a paper presented to the ADCS in 2015, Richard Selwyn states that the business case for early intervention is broken. *“Every time we intervene early we are making the assumption that the individual will require more expensive services in the future, but this is often untrue”.* He argues that the commissioning challenge is to ensure cheaper early help which reduces demand on statutory services. In order to achieve this, he argues that we must begin to formally use four pillars:

* Community resources and the support that families provide to each other. This is sometimes referred to as community resilience or social capital, i.e. the collective value of social networks.
* A universal plus model, i.e. universal services providing more targeted support.
* New online provision (particularly as the physical presence of support becomes increasingly prohibitive.
* New systems thinking and predictive modeling to identify families to help and the impact, drawing upon behavioural economics and demand data.

Selwyn concludes by acknowledging that we are in the middle of the greatest cuts to services since the Second World War but demand is growing and in the future he believes that children’s services will be built on proactive engagement with families rather than reactive.

In “The Inflection Point” (2015) iMpower argues that we have reached an “inflection point” in the development of local government in the UK: everyone is expecting further cuts and many are starting to implement new approaches, with budgets around these new models. They therefore suggest that the next six months will be critical as we see a different form of local government emerging. They argue that a range of methods will be needed for success and one of these is “demand focused transformation”

***Services***

The EIF works closely with 20 Early Intervention “Pioneering Places” across the country and has reviewed hundreds of early intervention programmes. From this work, the EIF asserts that providing Early Intervention in a local area requires:

* Commitment across relevant partner agencies, who need to join forces to deliver a more joined up approach and prevent duplication;
* Strong and careful commissioning, which includes high quality implementation;
* Success also relies heavily on the skills of frontline practitioners to build relationships with families, identifying need and providing support and opportunity; and
* Effective systems for identifying individuals and families with problems, working out what help is needed and bringing together different services to reduce demand.

The EIF has an online Early Intervention Guidebook that provides information and evidence from 50 programmes aimed at delivering better outcomes for children. These are grouped under the following outcomes:

* The Family and the Home;
* Positive Early Child Development;
* Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing;
* Preventing Child Maltreatment;
* Enhancing School Achievement and Employment;
* Preventing Risky Sexual Behaviour and Teen Pregnancy; and
* Preventing Obesity and Promoting Health and Physical Development

(<http://guidebook.eif.org.uk/programmes-library>)

In “Spending on Late Intervention – How We Can Do Better for Less”, the EIF singles out two examples of programmes, which have demonstrated strong impacts: *The Incredible Years Programme* and *Multi-systemic Therapy (MST).*

An Incredible Years parenting programme with children diagnosed with disrupted behaviour costs an average of £1,344 over a six-month period to improve a child’s behaviour. Without intervention, it is estimated that an individual with conduct disorder costs an additional £60,000 to the public services by the age of 28. (*Early Intervention: Securing Good Outcomes for all Children and Young People, 2010).*

*T*he cost of prematurely excluding a child is £300,000 which includes the costs from educating the child elsewhere and the bill for deploying services such as social care, benefits, and the probation service. The estimated cost to the individual ranges from a reduced chance of securing stable employment, to the risk of getting involved in substance abuse with the associated costs of support. *(The National Behaviour and Attendance Review, Report 2007)*

CAF episodes are leading to better outcomes in response to a whole range of needs. Analysis from 80 case studies identified potential savings of between £5,000 and more than £150,000 being reported. The CAF process gives a systematic framework for early intervention programmes and practice with clear evidence of payback. *(Early intervention, using the CAF process and its cost effectiveness. Findings from LARC 3, 2011)*

The Troubled Families programme also provides a rich source of information about early help. In *“Understanding Troubled Families”* (2014), it is argued that professionals have traditionally dealt with individuals and not families. The focus has been on presenting or dominating problems and not interconnected problems. The programme draws on its work with 97,000 families and data monitoring provided by local authorities on a random selection of 10% of the families with whom they work. The programme had required families to have at least three problems. However findings showed that in reality on average families demonstrated nine different problems and there were clearly associations between the different issues, often with children replicating the problems of their parents. The report concludes that it is essential therefore that we work differently and adopt a more systemic approach in public services. Key to this are the following:

* Understanding and managing families proactively – helping to stabilise them and providing key support to enable everyday functioning. An *“inside out”* approach *“rather than outside in”.*
* Looking beyond thresholds. Often families are just below thresholds for intervention, but when we look across their different problems, cumulatively, it is very significant, highlighting numerous risks.
* Linked to this is the importance of systematic information sharing.

1. **Conclusions**

The literature clearly highlights that a whole system approach is needed in order to maximise early help support and the child needs to be viewed within the systems in which he or she lives. E.g. the family, school etc. This is often referred to as the child’s ‘ecology’, Bronfenbrenner (1979). Emerging findings also indicate that early help services do result in improved outcomes for children and savings both in terms of financial and social impact.

This paper will now be used to underpin the development of the South East Evaluation Framework.

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