

Intensive Fostering to promote positive behaviour and support family stability

Action for Children piloted the Intensive Fostering (IF) programme, also known as Multi-Treatment Foster Care (MTFC). Multi-disciplinary teams and specially trained foster families worked intensively with young people placed in care by the Court to reward and reinforce good behaviour, improving their life chances, and returning them to their families where possible.

“The scale of support put in place means that the young person is supported much more intensively than usual, resulting in better outcomes for them, and much more cost-effectively than in a ‘traditional’ fostering scenario”.

Christina Brandi, Children's Placements Manager,
Action for Children



Achieving good outcomes for the young person

The Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 gave courts the power to include a fostering requirement where young people's behaviour was to a large extent due to their home circumstances and lifestyle. In 2005, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) commissioned agencies to pilot the evidence-based MTFC intervention.

MTFC is a community-based intervention, in which a multi-disciplinary team works intensively with young people and their families during a placement with specifically trained foster carers. They seek to encourage and reinforce positive behaviours and divert young people from anti-social behaviour and peers who encourage that behaviour.

In line with quality statements from the NICE quality standard on the health and wellbeing of looked-after children and young people, the aim of this project was to ensure that, where it was in their best interests, young people were returned to live with their family; and that any gains made during the placement were retained after completion of the programme.

Specialised training of families and better agency working

Specially recruited IF Carers were seen as integral members of a multi-disciplinary team, which supports individualised programmes for each young person. They received 12-14 hours pre-service training in the MTFC programme and their role and meet weekly with other IF carers on the programme to learn from and support one another. Complementing this, support for carers, families and young people was available 24 hours a day.

The Intensive Fostering team worked to:

- provide the young person with close supervision
- provide the young person with fair and consistent consequences
- provide a supportive relationship with at least one mentoring adult
- minimise association with peers who may be a negative influence

In order to do this, the team in London sought to build relationships with 32 different borough Youth Offending Teams and sought to overcome the difficulties in recruiting foster carers in London.

Real reductions in offending rates and spending

Evaluation by the University of York showed that the MTFC service was successful in preventing offending behaviour of young people in placements in 90% of cases. Also:

- those who had experienced IF were more likely to be engaged in education or training (70% rather than 30% in the study's comparison group)
- over half of the young people returned home to their families
- all young people reported improved relationships with their birth families.
- none of the IF group were in custody or homeless

The University of York evaluation also concluded that on average, IF placements were far more cost effective than custodial sentences given their results and compared to other options IF was still value for money. Secure children's homes cost £215,000 a year and secure training centres cost £160,000 a year but IF costs only £85,000 per year.

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