

Edge of Care Pilot IFS & Short Breaks Team -Children with Additional Needs

Context

The Short Breaks Team has had a social worker, Charlotte Grimshaw, for 12 months now since the role was agreed following the Service Re-Design in 2023. This has provided the opportunity to explore different approaches within the Short Breaks Team in thinking about how best to utilise this additional resource.

Increasingly the Short Breaks Team has seen an increased demand to support children and young people who fall outside the traditional criteria that the Complex Needs Service has tended to operate, namely children with learning disabilities.

There are children and young people that may have attended mainstream schools or resourced provisions, for example, Small Specialist Classrooms (SSCs), or other non-maintained specialist schools, who may have an autism diagnosis, an ADHD diagnosis (or both) or who may be on those assessment pathways, or where there is complex trauma but who do not have a learning disability.

This cohort of children and young people, typically with an EHCP where the primary need is SEMH, can fall between the net across Children's Social Care, or are referred into Early Help and then stepped up to Families First, neither of whom necessarily have either the expertise or the resources available to be able to offer the support that is required.

Over the last 12 months, this has emerged as the main area in which Charlotte has been the most impactful in her social work role in the Short Breaks Team. Charlotte's approach, much like previous pilots I have been involved with such as Social Workers in Schools Innovations Projects, is seen by families as different to that of a statutory social worker. Families have accepted assessments and interventions, which are experienced as supportive, looking at families through a disability lens rather than what can feel like a more punitive, safeguarding lens.

We have also learnt from some families that Charlotte has become involved with on the Edge of Care who had initially been stepped up from IFS to Families First, but that intervention had not been experienced as particularly helpful by families. This was not because of the inherent qualities of the social worker involved rather the approach taken to thinking about presenting problems, generally tending to locate problems in parenting rather than looking at the family through a disability lens.

Parenting a child with significant dysregulation, who is not attending school, who is hurting parents or siblings frequently, where there are profound attachment issues especially if that child or young person was adopted, presents parents and carers with a significant challenge.

Thinking about problems and developing formulations through a disability lens, offering breaks from caring to be able to build resilience and to scaffold families, has provided a different route into supporting families that traditionally would not have met criteria for the Short Breaks Team.

This has been an iterative process over the last 12 months and has led us to consider a more formal pilot between IFS and the Short Breaks Team, which is very timely in also being in keeping with the Social Work Reforms because it offers a more fluid and flexible approach across Early Help and support being offered at S17 level.

Edge of Care CAMHS have already supported one or two families that are being supported in this way and there has been a further piece of work that I have undertaken with Mark Knowles, Children in Care CAMHS Service Manager to look at young people with the above criteria who have entered LA Care in 2024 and to identify learning. Those particular young people would have suited this approach but are now already in residential care and unlikely to be returning home to parents.

How will the pilot work?

Children and young people open to Intensive Family Support who meet the agreed criteria (see below) will be allocated as far as possible to the same IFS practitioner.

Where threshold is met for a S17 Child & Family Assessment (eg there is an identified need for respite due to the presenting behaviours of the child and decreased parental resilience), contact will be made with the Short Breaks Team and SW Charlotte Grimshaw will carry out the assessment.

A Social Care Reviewing Officer may also be allocated to support with identifying provisions, setting up care packages.

IFS will retain their support of the family so that established relationships are not broken.

A Child and Family Assessment will be completed. During the Assessment process a consultation with the Edge of Care CAMHS Team will take place, and/or a referral to the Dynamic Support Register (with consent). These have so far shown to have had the greatest impact.

A Team around the Family approach will be taken, likely at *Child in Need Planning* level though there will be some flexibility here as well.

No referrals will be made to Families First and all safeguarding issues that arise during this pilot will be managed by the social worker in the Short Breaks Team co-working with IFS.

This pilot will run for initial period of 6 months.

A steering group/task and finish group will be set up to monitor progress and identify any challenges and learning.

Criteria for the pilot (not exhaustive):

- Child or young person may have ASD, be on the TASC Pathway, or have other social communication needs eg ADHD
- Child or young person has an EHCP with SEMH as the Primary Need
- Issues with school attendance / risk of school placement breakdown
- Violence towards siblings and / or parents and carers
- Complex trauma background / risk of adoption breakdown
- Family at breaking point

Review of Pilot

Core group of key professionals involved will meet to review progress before Easter and then quarterly. Group will include:

Justin Colman, HOS for Children with Complex Needs and DSCO

Rachel Carter-Brown, HOS for First Response and Intensive Family Support

Jodie Conroy, PM in the Short Breaks Team

Charlotte Grimshaw, SW in SB Team

Lead IFS Practitioner

Mark Knowles, Children in Care CAMHS Service Manager