Department for Work & Pensions

GSR
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Social Science in Government

Help and Support for Separated Families Innovation Fund Evaluation

September 2016

Summary

The evaluation was conducted by TNS BMRB in partnership with Bryson Purdon Social Research (BPSR), London Economics and researchers at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It involved a blend of qualitative and quantitative research with project staff, parents and DWP officials involved in the 17 funded projects providing talk-based mediation or therapeutic support, information or advice and/or contact-based interventions. Fieldwork was conducted between March and November 2015.

The evaluation was not a true impact evaluation as there was no counterfactual, rather it provided learnings for future work. It comprised both a:

- **qualitative process evaluation** of the service delivery, examining factors that contributed to effective referral of clients to the service, successful engagement and positive experiences of the intervention; and

- **quantitative examination of outcomes** in terms of parental collaboration, contact with children, use of courts and child maintenance arrangements.

The report concludes with consideration of issues of scalability and replicability if projects were to be rolled out.

The findings from the evaluation will be used to inform DWP's investment in relationship support services, following the doubling of funding to £70 million over the current parliament[1].

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[1]   https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-speech-on-life-chances

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List of abbreviations

BMT	Behaviour modelling training
Cafcass	Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service
CATI	Computer-assisted telephone interviewing
CAWI	Computer-assisted web interviewing
CMS	Child Maintenance Service
CSA	Child Support Agency
DfE	Department for Education
DOORS	Detection Of Overall Risk Screen (to detect and respond to well being and safety risks).
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
FDMS	Family Decision Making Service
HSSF	Help and Support for Separated Families
KPI	Key performance indicators
MI	Management Information
NACCC	National Association of Child Contact Centres
PAM	Parenting alliance measure
SCCC	Supported Child Contact Centres
SIB	Social Impact Bond

Glossary of terms

Parent with care   When the parent considered themselves to be the main day-to-day carer of the child(ren).

Non-resident parent   When the parent considered themselves not to have day-to-day care.

Shared care   When the parent considered that they shared the day-to-day care of the child(ren) with their ex-partner.

Executive summary

This report sets out the findings of an evaluation of the Help and Support for Separated Families (HSSF) Innovation Fund. The Fund was part of a wider programme, HSSF, which aims to help parents avoid adversarial approaches upon separation and collaborate in the best interests of their children. The programme funded 17 projects providing:

• **Talk-based services** involving mediation or a therapeutic intervention;

• **Information-based services** providing legal advice, information and signposting; and

• projects to assist with **contact arrangements** for non-resident parents.

The evaluation was conducted by TNS BMRB in partnership with Bryson Purdon Social Research and London Economics, together with researchers at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The findings will be used to inform DWP's investment in relationship support services, following the doubling of funding to £70 million over the current parliament. DWP has led on the development and co-ordination of the HSSF programme with support in evaluating bids and setting up the projects from the Department for Education and Ministry of Justice.

This is not an impact evaluation in the true sense of the word, as it was not possible to make comparison with a counterfactual. Rather, the evaluation aimed to quantitatively assess **outcomes** in terms of increased collaboration between the separated parents (using the Parenting Alliance Measure (PAM)[2]), reduced conflict and, where appropriate, stable contact or financial arrangements. It also considered qualitatively the **process** of service delivery looking at effective ways of referrals to the service and marketing, how best to engage parents and what factors supported successful implementation. Fieldwork was conducted at three stages between March and November 2015: at set up with project staff and DWP officials, during the delivery phase with project staff and parents and then a final stage, either shortly after the intervention with project staff or with parents approximately seven months after they engaged with the service.

Key findings

Reaching target groups

All projects found it difficult to estimate the level of take up for their service, due to both uncertainty about likely response from eligible groups and limited capacity within projects to conduct the analysis. In practice, projects need to build in contingency for unexpectedly high or low take up, consider potential barriers to take up among target groups and allow for review in the early stages.

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[2]   Abidin, R. R. and Konald, T. R. (1999). *PAM Parenting Alliance Measure Professional Manual,* Lutz, Fl, Psychological Assessment Resources Inc.

Factors affecting initial take up

Most projects relied on a mix of self-referral via blanket marketing or their website as well as referrals from other services or the courts. Referrals worked best when there were established links with the referring service lending authority to their project from the courts or the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) (such as for the Tavistock Centre and National Family Mediation) or reducing the need for marketing and networking (such as Malachi working through local schools). Projects that were already well regarded by other services, such as Sills & Betteridge, were also better able to both develop their offer than those starting from scratch. Relying on client self-referral, whether from blanket marketing, including social media, or websites was less reliable. Relate, for example, found only a tiny fraction of their website users went on to register for their services. Whilst new services put considerable effort into marketing to intermediaries, the process of building awareness and trust required sustained efforts. Referrals were also lower if the service was working across a large and/or rural area.

Marketing directly to a very wide range of clients was also less effective than tailoring messages to target groups. Parents either did not engage with general marketing or they actually required services that were beyond the scope of the projects. Legal, as well as some other types of service, also faced difficulties attracting both partners to the service, especially if they were providing legal advice to one parent.

Looking specifically at the effectiveness of two website projects (OnePlusOne and Relate), both sites benefited from referrals from other specialist sites, rather than general social media marketing, but had different levels of engagement beyond the initial landing page potentially reflecting the need for effective sign posting for visitors.

Engaging clients in the service

After the initial referral, services needed to be both flexible in the type and channel of service they offered and have strong onward referral links to specialist services to deal with clients who were not emotionally ready, were reluctant to take part in the service offered or had entrenched legal or financial issues.

Successful Service Provision

Talk-based services

Factors that predicted more successful service delivery among the eight projects providing mediation or therapeutic interventions included:

- **Referral from an established service**, such as the courts or Cafcass, which acted as an endorsement to the service.

- **Careful assessment of preparedness** to avoid wasting resources if one or both partners was unwilling or not ready to engage in mediation.

- **Well trained, skilled and dedicated** staff to engage parents sensitively and sustain that engagement between sessions.

- **Integration of services**, either in house or through strong connections with other organisations.

- **Flexibility** in terms of the length of the intervention, requirements for both parents to attend both sessions and the preferred channel of communication.

Services were limited in their effectiveness if either parent had serious health or learning difficulties or there were entrenched financial or contact issues. The wider family could be both a support and barrier to success. In some cases, relatives could influence one partner negatively whilst other projects found that engaging them in the process could work to support the mediation. Also if one parent had to travel a long distance it was harder to sustain face-to-face appointments which could not necessarily be substituted by online communication.

Information-based services

Six projects offered an information-based service. Those offering **legal advice** gave effective advice about the process and could increase client confidence, but there was a high level of drop off after receiving this advice rather than going on to use counselling and group work on offer. Services offering **web-based advice** received positive feedback about the quality of information offered and the flexibility for clients to browse at a time that suited them. The web-chat facility provided by Children 1st worked well for clients who preferred some 'distance' when talking about very sensitive issues.

Contact-based services

Two projects offered contact and visiting arrangements for non-resident parents to see their children. Both had some early difficulties attracting referrals, partly because fewer potential clients were approaching solicitors (who had been the main source of referrals) following changes in legal aid. To succeed with often challenging, conflicted parents, projects required deep integration with more specialist services and highly skilled staff.

Project staffing and resourcing

Whilst the overall level of demand had proved hard to predict there were some common concerns across projects about higher than expected resource required for administration and the challenges of recruiting and retaining skilled staff. Networking with other specialist professionals as well as those in the sector to share good practice was found to be very valuable. Those working with more challenging parents also recognised the need for more support and time away from front line delivery.

Participant experience

Talk-based projects

Parents were very enthusiastic about the service they experienced, feeling it had:

• improved communication between partners;

• had a positive psychological impact;

• improved relationships between partners and children; and

• brought a number of other practical impacts.

Both parents and staff felt that these overlapping benefits all contributed to reduced conflict, less dependency on court action and improved arrangements for children. The only exceptions appeared to be when the mediation began at a late, often very entrenched, stage of the separation where the courts were already heavily involved.

Information-based services

Clients welcomed the breadth of information that could be provided by information services and the signposting to other support. Expert legal advice was appreciated and although parents might be at too early a stage to expect resolution of issues, clients valued the opportunity to use the service as a 'sounding board' to consider their options.

Contact-based services

Some parents using contact-based services, particularly those engaging with Pinnacle People who provided support and activities for children at a city farm, gained from the opportunity to improve communication with their ex-partner although some clients were concerned that they did not know the backgrounds of others using the service, or that the arrangements lacked legal enforcement. The service offered by the National Associated of Contact Centres (NACC) found it more challenging to raise awareness of the additional services beyond providing contact.

Support received from project staff

Clients were very positive about the quality of support they received from staff, their knowledge, professionalism and dedication to the service. Parents appreciated the flexibility staff tried to offer with the only issues centring on geography if working across large rural areas and delays if the service was over-subscribed.

Ability and willingness to pay

Most participants, regardless of income level, felt that they could not have paid in full for the service. Clients receiving legal advice said they would be more likely to consult a solicitor directly rather than pay for this service. When asked to consider how charges could be made acceptable, clients talked of the need for clearer 'guaranteed' and legally binding outcomes. Staff reflected the same concerns and felt that charges would act as a further barrier to engagement and means testing could add lengthy delays.

Outcomes

In the qualitative research, parents reported clear benefits in terms of more effective communication, respect for the ex-partner's view point, better parenting and other indicators of well-being.

Parental collaboration

Of the 13 projects recording PAM parental collaboration scores, there were statistically significant improvements in co-parenting for the majority (nine) of the projects with the remainder showing small positive changes. However, for the nine projects who followed up seven months after initial engagement, these improvements had fallen back and fewer were still showing statistically significant rises. Improvements tended to be understandably higher among talk-based interventions than information only services. Whilst both parents with care and non-resident parents benefited from the interventions initially, only parents with care showed statistically significant improvements in their PAM scores in the seven month follow-up survey.

Other outcomes

Parents with shared care arrangements were significantly less happy with their contact arrangements than parents with care or non-resident parents (21 per cent compared to 35 per cent and 39 per cent respectively). This demonstrates that it is not simply the amount of contact that matters but also how parents co-operate around that contact. There was no clear pattern in which type of project supported an improvement in contact, reflecting the very different target groups, although clients of talk-based services were more likely to attribute any improvement to the project. Although their problems were among the most entrenched, clients of the intensive intervention of National Family Mediation, reported higher than average improvements in contact and most of these parents (six out of seven) attributed it to the intervention. Again, such improvements did tend to have 'tailed off' across all projects at the seven month follow up stage.

By this final stage, the majority of parents had a child maintenance agreement in place although levels were lower among parents with shared care (54 per cent) than non-resident parents (71 per cent). Rates of improvement were notably lower than contact arrangements, reflecting the challenging aspects of financial arrangements with no discernible patterns by type of project. Parents who had been separated less than a year appear to show more improvement, reflecting less entrenched financial arrangements.

The impact on likelihood of going to court seemed generally positive, even among more challenging clients such as those supported by National Family Mediation. For the majority of projects, between 20 and 30 per cent of parents said that the project had played some role in a decision not to use the family courts in the future.

Project replicability and scalability

In principle projects did not feel there were barriers to scaling or replicating their offers if lessons could be learned from their initial experience of funding arrangements, estimating flows of staff and recruiting and training highly skilled staff.

When asked what they would do differently or develop, project staff mentioned:

• Building networks across organisations to integrate referrals and service delivery

• Tailoring the marketing to target groups

• Minimising time between referral and first consultation to avoid dropout

• Offering the service in different languages could broaden engagement

• Consider engagement with the wider family

• Consider offering help on wider issues such as employment, housing or health or improve signposting to relevant services

• Reassure clients who are wary of counselling or group work about the aims of the project and that they are not trying to reunite the couple.

• Tailor website content to reflect the stage of separation

Whilst online services could easily and cost-effectively be scaled up to a wider audience, those offering face-to-face services considered costs would rise proportionally with take up given the staff and venue costs required.

In terms of funding, projects were highly reliant on DWP funding and did not consider themselves able to be self-sustaining. Some projects had experience of other funding sources, such as the European Union or grant making trusts, but found them very resource intensive processes that lacked certainty. No project staff were aware of Social Impact Bonds.

1 Introduction

1.1 The evaluation

This report summarises the findings of the evaluation of the Help and Support for Separated Families (HSSF) Innovation Fund, which was established to test a wide range of interventions which aimed to help separated parents to work together in the best interests of their children.

The evaluation provides some information on the impact of the projects, but does not attempt to make comparisons to a counterfactual (ie what would have happened anyway). Rather, the findings will be used to learn lessons and to inform future investment decisions, in particular DWP's investment in relationship support services following the doubling of funding to £70 million[3] over the current parliament.

1.2 The effects of separation

Children have been found to be generally resilient to parental separation – most children adjust well to their new circumstances and do not exhibit severe or enduring behaviour problems[4]. However, while **most** children adjust well to parental separation, there is evidence to suggest that children from separated families are, nevertheless, more likely to experience issues than children in coupled families. Academic performance, attitudes towards learning, and internalised and externalised problems have all been identified as being more significant issues for children in separated families[5].

The population of separated parents covers a wide range of families where circumstances could be one or more of the following:

• Parents who had been in a relationship but are no longer together, regardless of whether or not their relationship had been formalised through marriage or civil partnership, or whether they had lived together.

• Parents who had never been in a relationship.

• Families where one or both separated parents have gone on to re-partner with somebody else.

• Families where both separated parents remain unpartnered.

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[3]   https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-speech-on-life-chances

[4]   Amato, R. (2001). *Children of divorce in the 1990s: an update of the Amato and Keith (1991) meta-analysis.* Journal of Family Psychology, 2001, September (15)3 355-70.

[5]   Amato, R. and Anthony, C. (2014). *Estimating the Effects of Parental Divorce and Death With Fixed Effects Models.* Journal of Marriage and Family, Vol 76, Issue 2, 370-386, April 2014.

Furthermore, the interpersonal relationships between separated parents and their approach to co-parenting will vary enormously from couple to couple, regardless of the nature of their former or current relationship(s) – the challenges facing each family are unique. However, one of the key factors which is repeatedly shown to affect a child's adjustment to parental separation is the existence of parental conflict (in both coupled and separated families). There is an extensive body of research which shows that **children are more prone to psychological problems when their parents are in conflict**, particularly when that conflict is persistent[6].

As such, it is highly important to better understand how separating families, particularly in cases where the parents are in conflict, can be supported in order to improve the outcomes for both parents and children.

Recent research published by the Ministry of Justice suggests that court involvement in separations may be associated with higher odds of engagement in antisocial behaviours and other negative outcomes for the children involved[7]. Accordingly, usage of courts is another key area of interest for the evaluation.

1.3 Separated families in England and Wales

Separation and divorce affect a huge number of children in a wide range of circumstances. Figures for England and Wales, published by the Office for National Statistics, show that almost half (48 per cent) of all couples divorcing in 2013 had at least one child aged under 16[8]. This equates to almost **95,000 children in a single year** being subjected to the emotional and financial challenges of **the dissolution of a marriage**.

While the number of divorces in 2013 marks a significant decline in numbers since 2003 (when more than 153,000 children were affected), divorce remains a highly important event in the lives of many children. However, this only tells part of the story – in 2014 **almost half of births in England and Wales occurred outside marriage or civil partnership**.[9] As such, the dissolution of non-marital relationships also affects a very large number of children each year.

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[6] Mooney *et al*. (2009). *Impact of Family Breakdown on Children's Well-Being – evidence review* DCSF Research Report No RR113; Grych, J. H. (2005). Interparental Conflict as a Risk Factor for Child Maladjustment: Implications for the Development of Prevention Programs *Family Court Review*, Vol 43, Issue 1, 97-108, January 20015; McIntosh, J. E. (2003). Enduring conflict in parental separation: Pathways of impact on child development *Journal of Family Studies*, Vol 9, Issue 1.

[7] Goisis, A., Ozcan, B. and Sigle, W. (2016). *Child outcomes after parental separation: variations by contact and court involvement.* Ministry of Justice Analytical Series.

[8] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/ divorce/bulletins/divorcesinenglandandwales/2013#children-of-divorced-couples

[9] http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/ livebirths/bulletins/birthsbyparentscharacteristicsinenglandandwales/2014#partnership-status-of-parents

At an overall level, it is estimated that the number of lone-parent households with dependent children increased by 22 per cent between 1996 and 2012 – the equivalent of **almost 25,000 extra lone-parent households every year**[10].

To give an indication of the true scale of parental separation, across family units of all types, research published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in 2012 estimated that at that time there was a total of 2.5 million separated families and that there were 4.1 million children from separated families in Great Britain[11]. Furthermore, in a policy paper published in 2015, DWP and the Department for Education (DfE) highlighted the fact that by the age of 16, 44 per cent of children do not live with both birth parents[12]. This proportion was predicted to rise if new measures to address the issue were not introduced.

1.4　The HSSF programme

Against the backdrop of large-scale family breakdown discussed above, the Government set out proposals to reform the child maintenance system in the 2012 command paper "*Supporting separated families; securing children's futures*". This paper set out a vision for fundamentally changing Britain's approach to separated families. One of the fundamentals of this response was an intention to rebalance the system away from the previous adversarial model, where child maintenance is often arbitrated by a government agency, to one where separated parents are supported to collaborate in the interests of their children. Reflecting this change in approach, the HSSF programme was established. The programme aims to help, support and strengthen family life by making it the norm for separated families to seek and understand what support and options are available to them and enabling access to services that provide this support, especially for the most vulnerable. The programme includes an online service and quality mark, as well as the Innovation Fund.

The **Sorting Out Separation** online service aims to help parents identify their needs and signpost them to trusted information, tools and specialist services. It also provides information on a range of separation issues such as mediation, health, housing, money, legal matters, relationships, children and parenting and work.

The **Help and Support for Families (HSSF) Mark** is awarded to organisations who demonstrate that their services meet a set of standards. The standards relate to the support the organisation provides for couples to work together to resolve disputes – if it's appropriate and safe to do so – concentrating on the interests of their children. Mark-holders include mediation providers, contact centres, and relationship support services.

In addition to these activities, approximately £11 million was allocated to an Innovation Fund, the primary aim of which was to test a wide range of interventions among 17 funded projects. These projects aimed to help separated parents to work together in the best interests of their children.

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[10]　http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Pdf%20reports/CSJ_Fractured_Families_Report_WEB_13.06.13.pdf

[11]　https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/223122/Child_Maintenance_Population_Estimates.pdf

[12]　https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-poverty-and-social-justice/2010-to-2015-government-policy-poverty-and-social-justice

The Innovation Fund was established with the underlying principle that it was equally important to better understand the approaches that do not work as to identify those that are more successful. As such, a range of innovative approaches were funded and the projects were delivered by organisations from a broad spectrum of sectors, ranging from solicitors to mediation specialists. Their methods also varied significantly, falling into the three broad categories which are referenced throughout this report:

- **talk-based services**, involving mediation or a therapeutic intervention and designed to help with resolving conflict or bringing parties closer to a resolution;

- **information-based** services, where the project's core role was providing information, signposting or providing legal support; and

- projects where the primary focus was to facilitate **contact arrangements** by providing the necessary infrastructure/space (it should be noted that these were not the only projects which aimed to improve contact arrangements where possible; this was a common theme across the projects).

While some projects adopted approaches that spanned two or more of these categories, they typically focused on one approach more strongly than others. The tables below provide an overview of the approach, service offering and target clients of each of the 17 projects, grouped by their primary focus.

Table 1.1   Overview of primarily talk-based services

Key:	Mediation	Visitation/contact	Therapeutic	Information

Project	Service offering	Stage of separation	Target clients
Changing Futures NE	Initial assessment with an allocated practitioner, followed by individual and, if appropriate, joint sessions. The child then takes part in consultation or a children's group (if applicable).	Two years or longer	Any parents with ongoing issues.
Family Lives	Weekly befriending meetings with the couple over 9 to 12 weeks. The trained volunteer befriender meets with both parents, either together or separately.	Any	Parents who are reluctant to seek support. Waltham Forest, Leicester, Gloucestershire. In Waltham Forest and Leicester, Family Lives work with an Islamic relationship support organisation (Barefoot Institute) targeting the Muslim community.
Family Matters Mediate	Seven-week process comprising assessment, individual pre-meeting, joint mediation between parents and sessions between child(ren) and child consultant. Process followed by feedback and review from mediator and child consultant.	Two years or longer	Parents in conflict who have had one previous application to court/concerns raised by the local authority or school regarding the impact of conflict on their children. Resident in Doncaster area.

Continued

Table 1.1 Continued

Project	Service offering	Stage of separation	Target clients
Malachi	Weekly 1.5 hour therapeutic interventions for eight to 12 weeks comprising weekly 1.5 hour sessions. Sessions focus on attachment and bonding, with the aim of changing behaviour in the interests of the child.	Any	Non-resident parents (usually fathers). Parents with care are often involved in the referral process and, sometimes, in the therapeutic session. Parents with care are offered support outside of this project.
Mediation Now	Following a preliminary assessment, parents attend four 1.5 hour joint sessions, held fortnightly with a mediator to improve the communication between the parents.	Any	Any parents although the core Mediation Now target group were standard legal aid clients.
National Family Mediation	Pre-mediation meeting with each parent (separately) with mediator followed by two to four mediation sessions, with an opportunity to agree a parenting plan. Consultation with the children (where appropriate).	Two years or longer	Any parents in conflict with unresolved issues. including those with a background of domestic violence or safeguarding issues; involved in court.
Resolution	Qualified lawyer mediators provide parents with a one-to-one mediation session, followed by joint sessions with the guide if appropriate.	Any	One of the parents must be on a low income.
Tavistock Centre	Initial assessment and risk screening followed by up to six one-to-one mentalizing therapy and up to six joint mentalizing sessions and a co-parenting skills workshop.	Considered to have 'enduring conflict' having repeatedly used the family court system.	Clients with highly complex needs, and/or ongoing or recurring disputes so acrimonious that they are affecting the children's wellbeing and safety.

Table 1.2   Overview of primarily information-based services

Project	Service offering	Stage of separation	Target clients
Children 1st (light touch)	Telephone helpline supported by website and facility for mediation via a Family Group Conference. Providing shared infrastructure across three partner organisations to integrate services.	Any	Any parents concerned that their separation their relationship breakdown was impacting their child.
Howells	Legal advice. Delivered through initial one hour assessment. Additional support as necessary, including: ongoing legal advice; up to two hours of social welfare advice; up to two sessions of mediation OR three sessions of solution-focused individual or joint counselling.	Any	Income criteria applied. Parents with low incomes of up to £32,000 (currently eligible for limited legal aid); Parents with middle incomes of £32,000 to £45,000 (currently ineligible for legal aid).
OneplusOne (light touch)	A free online service offering behaviour modelling training (BMT) to help parents resolve conflict via videos and an online parenting plan. Some face-to-face support offered via Home Start.	Any	Any parents concerned about the quality of communication with their ex-partner and those trying to discuss finance/contact issues.
Relate (light touch)	Online project where users register with the site, read articles and obtain exercises. Non-registered users can access site, but do not get personalisation. A live chat service with counsellor is available.	Any	All parents but it was assumed that online-users would reflect the demographics accessing Relate's face-to-face counselling services, i.e. women aged 30-39 who are degree educated, with children and are thinking of separating.
Sills & Betteridge	Post assessment clients can flexibly access: a two-hour group information session; one or two one-to-one information meetings; mediation sessions, free to those earning under £35,000. All delivered by solicitors.	Any	Parents in rural areas, who need information, guidance and support to minimise the impact of their separation on their children.
Spurgeons	Single one–to–one initial assessment, followed by two group work interventions with parents, single group work intervention for grandparents, up to three couples' sessions. Delivery occurs over 12 weeks.	Post separation	Young parents where one of the parties is aged 20 or under. Grandparents are also invited to attend.

Table 1.3   Overview of primarily contact-based services

Project	Service offering	Stage of separation	Target clients
Pinnacle People	12-week series of activities at farm: parents and children participate in 3+ activities with ongoing reflection about progress towards achieving their desired outcomes and outputs. Parents also signposted to other agencies/services.	Currently separating or separated in the last three years.	Parents resident in the Bristol area.
National Association of Child Contact Centres	Two innovative elements based around: 1) an online self-service, screening process; 2) face-to-face support social worker based at a secure child contact centre (SCCC) who identifies and tackles emotional and practical needs.	Post separation	Parents whose conflict is so entrenched that the non-resident parent is required to see his/her child on neutral ground at an SCCC.

DWP has led on the development and co-ordination of the HSSF programme with support from the DfE and Ministry of Justice in specifying requirements and evaluating bids. Funding for the projects was allocated in two lots, running from the summer of 2013 to September 2015.

DWP is also responsible for the child maintenance system in Great Britain, overseeing the closure of the Child Support Agency (CSA) for new child maintenance applications in November 2013 and the introduction of the new Child Maintenance Scheme (CMS) which replaced it. DWP also funds Child Maintenance Options, a national service which provides information and support for separating parents.

2 Evaluation aims and objectives

The Help and Support for Separated Families (HSSF) Innovation Fund evaluation was designed to inform understanding of the 17 innovative project interventions from the perspectives of: parents who interacted with the projects; project staff; and the DWP internal project management team.

More specifically, the primary aims of the evaluation were to:

• Evaluate each of the 17 HSSF Innovation Fund projects to assess what interventions are effective, and for whom, in changing parental behaviour to increase collaboration, resolve conflict and, where appropriate, encourage parental or financial arrangements.

• Identify which types of interventions are replicable on a larger scale.

Under the umbrella of these overarching goals, the evaluation aimed to address a number of more specific research questions, as follows:

Outcomes

• What projects are most effective in producing key intermediate and longer-term outcomes such as: increasing collaboration; resolving conflict; and encouraging parenting and child maintenance arrangements?

    – How sustainable are these improvements to outcomes?

    – What steps were taken by project participants as a result of the intervention?

• Why are some projects more effective than others in achieving outcomes?

    – To what extent have they achieved what they planned to achieve?

• Why do some of these interventions fail, and for whom?

Service delivery

• To what extent did projects deliver what they said they would in their contracts in terms of intervention activity, level of referrals and resourcing?

    – Were there issues/problems?

    – How were participants recruited to the project e.g. did they have previous knowledge of the project or were they referred? How long did recruitment take? Which referral sources were most effective and why?

    – Did participants drop out of projects and, if so, at what stage and why?

• To what extent do project participants consider that the service provided is relevant to their needs and effective in helping them? If not why not?

    – How far is the intervention relevant to the target group?

    – What are project participants' views of the support they have received in terms of the type of support, frequency, usefulness in meeting their needs and staff input? Was the support in the best interests of the child?

- To what extent do service providers and stakeholders consider that the service is effective and is achieving what it initially set out to achieve?

  – Were sufficient staff resources allocated?

  – Were Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that were initially proposed realistic? If not why not – what changed?

- What improvement/adaptations could be made to project delivery or design to make them more effective?

  – What has worked well and what has not worked well?

  – To what extent has contract/project performance management from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) been appropriate?

- To what extent can projects be effectively implemented on a larger scale?

  – What changes would benefit future implementation and delivery of a similar project if rolled out on a larger scale?

  – Would the project(s) be applicable across Great Britain? If not, what are the barriers?

The evaluation also gathered cost-effectiveness data from the projects, which is not published as the data are commercially sensitive, but has been reported separately to DWP.

At the design phase of the evaluation a very wide range of research questions were identified as potentially being of interest. To ensure that respondent burden was not unduly heavy and in order to dovetail with the methodological parameters of the chosen approach, it was necessary to refine and focus the initial list of questions. As such, there are certain avenues of investigation that it was not possible to cover in this evaluation but which may be worth considering in any future related research. These include:

- measures of parental and child wellbeing in the short and mid-to-long term

- economic impact data in terms of the cost-savings arising from any reduction in the use of family courts or child maintenance services

- the interplay of different modes of support where a single project offers multiple channels (e.g. face-to-face and telephone interventions)

- a full investigation of project staff roles/experience/qualifications/training

3   Methodology

> **Overview**
>
> In order to build as full a picture as possible, the evaluation used a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. The evaluation was primarily focused on two key topics of investigation:
>
> • A process evaluation
>
> • An investigation of the outcomes of families participating in the programme
>
> The Innovation Fund was established to test a wide range of innovative projects, with a wide variety of approaches, a wide variety of participants and a wide variety of outcomes. It was very difficult to find a methodology which could be applied consistently across all the projects, and it is recognised that our final approach was not ideal for all projects. In particular, the quantitative elements, including the collection of demographic data and Parenting Alliance Measure (PAM) data, were not suitable for the smaller projects.
>
> An overview of the methodology employed to address these topics is provided below, along with a summary of the key methodological challenges.

3.1   Process evaluation

In the process evaluation programme of research, a range of stakeholders were engaged using qualitative methods to build a holistic understanding of clients' experiences of the projects and providers' experiences of developing and rolling out their innovative service offerings. Projects were also asked for their views about the potential to replicate and/or scale the projects in the future.

The process evaluation consisted of three stages of research, as follows:

Stage 1

During the first stage of the qualitative research, TNS BMRB conducted depth interviews with the project managers of each of the 17 projects. In addition, depth interviews were conducted with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff to provide further context about the set-up and functioning of the programme.

These interviews were developed into logic models which outlined each project's inputs, activities, outputs and intended outcomes using a consistent approach for each project. Importantly, there was a focus on how and why the activities worked (or did not work) rather than simply measuring the number of outputs. These logic models are included in Appendix E.

Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and took place between March and April 2015.

Stage 2

The second stage of the process evaluation involved TNS BMRB researchers conducting site visits to each of the projects. These site visits included:

- depth interviews with the project manager(s), lasting 60 to 90 minutes and involving one or two project managers per project;

- a focus group with key delivery staff, lasting 60 to 90 minutes and comprising three to seven staff members per project;

- individual face-to-face or telephone interviews with parents using the projects. These lasted approximately 30 minutes, with between two and eight parents taking part per project.

In cases where projects were online-only or delivered remotely (e.g. Relate, OnePlusOne) fieldwork was conducted by telephone rather than employing physical site visits.

A site visit did not take place with Resolve Cymru due to the project's early closure, although the project manager did take part in a one-hour depth interview.

In total, 81 members of staff and 74 parents contributed to the second stage of the process evaluation. A more detailed summary of the number of interviews per project is provided in Appendix B4.

All Stage 2 fieldwork took place between June and August 2015.

Stage 3

In the final stage of the process evaluation, telephone depth interviews were conducted with the project managers and with parents using the services of each of the projects. These interviews fed into updated versions of the logic models and built understanding of the experiences of parents who were involved in the projects.

The telephone depth interviews with project managers lasted approximately 60 minutes and one to two project managers were interviewed per project. Depth interviews with parents lasted approximately 30 minutes, with typically between six and eight parents interviewed per project.

In cases where fewer than six parents were interviewed, this was due to the mode of delivery of projects (with online projects proving challenging in this respect) or due to a lower than expected number of parents using the project's services.

In total, 97 parents and 24 staff members were engaged in this stage of the process evaluation. A more detailed summary of the number of interviews per project is provided in Appendix B5.

Fieldwork for Stage 3 took place in July and August 2015.

3.2 Outcome evaluation and profiling data

As summarised in Figure 3.1, quantitative evaluation data was collected in three phases; as parents began their interactions with the projects; as parents completed their interactions with the projects; and, finally, an average of around seven months after the start of their interactions with the projects (giving a longer term indication of the projects' impact).

These quantitative data served two main purposes:

• To provide information about the profile of parents participating in the projects

• To provide information about the outcomes of families involved in the projects

Some projects did not participate in all phases of the quantitative research – a detailed summary of the data collected from each project can be found in Appendix A1.

It was not possible to conduct a 'pure' impact evaluation, i.e. to compare the outcomes with what would have happened anyway, as there was not a suitable counterfactual group (i.e. parents with profiles matched to the participants in each of the projects who had not taken part in a project). However, to mitigate this effect, participants were asked to provide their own assessment of the impact of the interventions and this feedback feeds into the discussion of impact in Chapter 8[13].

Figure 3.1   Overview of quantitative data collection phases

	Timing	Data collected	Data Collection Method
Phase 1	Prior to, or close to the start of the intervention	Parenting collaboration data + profiling information about parents	Data collected directly by projects. Some allowed self-completion by respondents; others administered questions via project staff.
Phase 2	Close to the end of the intervention	Parenting collaboration data	Data collected directly by projects. Some allowed self-completion by respondents; others administered questions via project staff.
Phase 3	An average of seven months after the start of the intervention	Parenting collaboration data + a range of profiling and outcome measures	CATI or CAWI interviews administered by TNS BMRB (with the exception of One Plus One who administered their own online survey)

Phase 1

All data in Phase 1 were collected directly by the projects.

Data about the profile of the parents attending each project were collected using a standard Management Information (MI) template to ensure consistency (see Appendix A2 for full details). The MI template focused on a range of demographic metrics along with measures to determine the family/relationship situation. Parenting collaboration questions were also administered by the projects during this first phase (see Section 3.3).

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[13]   Further information on evaluation methodologies can be found at: www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/standards_of_evidence.pdf

Phase 1 data were collected close to the start of the intervention for each parent, though there were minor differences in timings from project to project. Some projects felt that it was appropriate to collect data prior to the start of the intervention, while others preferred to wait until the second or third session to do so. Data were collected from May 2014 to September 2015.

The administration of the Phase 1 data also varied slightly from project to project, with some projects preferring to leave parents to self-complete questionnaires, while others had staff on hand to guide parents through the questionnaires in a more structured manner. The underlying structure of all Phase 1 data was, however, consistent and the differences in approach should not have had any undue impact on the data collected.

MI and parenting collaboration data were only provided to the evaluation team in cases where respondents agreed that it could be passed on. As such, we do not have firm data on the response rate for this phase of data collection. However, a total of 5,159 MI records were provided by the non-online projects and, as part of the cost-effectiveness research, these projects reported that a total of 9,110 parents had participated[14]. As such, the response rate for the MI data appears to be in the region of 57 per cent. Parenting collaboration data was collected for a total of 15,349 out of 33,962 parents (this time including online projects). This equates to a response rate in the region of 45 per cent[15].

Phase 2

All data in Phase 2 were collected directly by the projects and were focused solely on the parenting collaboration measures outlined in Section 3.3.

Phase 2 data were collected close to the end of the intervention for each parent. End dates were often less clearly defined than start dates, as the duration of the intervention could vary from parent to parent and was handled flexibly in some cases. Projects therefore used their judgement to determine the most appropriate point to administer the Phase 2 parenting collaboration measures.

As was the case with Phase 1, the administration of the Phase 2 data varied slightly from project to project, but the underlying structure of all Phase 2 data was consistent.

Phase 2 data were only provided to the evaluation team in cases where respondents agreed that they could be passed on. As such, we do not have firm data on the response rate to this phase of data collection.

Phase 3

The third phase of quantitative research again involved the collection of data on parenting collaboration measures. These data were supplemented with additional metrics which measured a range of other outcomes, including changes to contact arrangements and child maintenance payments, along with details of court usage. Profiling data was also collected in this phase.

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[14]   The nature of the MI data provided by online projects was different, focusing on web-analytics. As such, they have been excluded from this response rate estimate.

[15]   Note: Children 1st interacted with a large number of parents (8,870) but provided a low number of PAM datasets (109) significantly reducing the overall response rate.
If Children 1st is excluded from the calculation, the response rate for PAM scores increases to somewhere in the region of 61 per cent.

The Phase 3 survey was administered using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) method for the majority of projects, though an online interviewing method (CAWI) was adopted for projects which delivered their support online. The telephone interview took an average of 14.5 minutes to complete. A detailed summary of which research method was used for each project can be found in Appendix A1 and the full questionnaires can be found in Appendices A4 and A5.

Phase 3 data were collected an average of around seven months after the **start** of the intervention, thereby giving a longer-term understanding of impacts. This equates to being an average of approximately five months after the **end** of the intervention (though this figure should be viewed only as an indicative estimate, as end-date data were not available for all participants)[16]. Projects were asked to provide contact details of **all** parents participating in their provision who had given the necessary permissions to allow their inclusion in the survey. After a process of data cleaning, to remove any parents for whom incomplete telephone numbers had been provided, attempts were made to interview **all** parents whose details had been provided by the projects.

All Phase 3 interviews were administered by TNS BMRB, with the exception of the online interviews for OnePlusOne, which were conducted directly by the project on the basis of data protection requirements. It was decided only to include those projects where there was the possibility of achieving 50 or more survey interviews in Phase 3 (see Appendix A1 for details of the projects which were excluded).

The overall response rate for the CATI survey was 33 per cent, though a significant proportion of the sample that was provided by projects contained invalid contact details. As such, the response rate based on **usable** sample was 48 per cent. Full details of the response rates (including a breakdown of response rate per project) are included in Appendix B. The profile of respondents to the CATI survey was typically in line with the profile of project participants collected in the MI data. Details of the profiles of parents from the MI data and the survey data are included in Appendix E.

The main stage of CATI fieldwork ran from 20 July 2015 to 28 January 2016. A pilot CATI stage was conducted prior to the main stage of interviewing in order to refine the survey instruments.

The response rate for the CAWI survey was significantly lower (six per cent of the invited sample went on to complete). OnePlusOne had a particularly low response rate (one per cent) and throughout the report we have highlighted the need for caution when looking at the survey data for this project. The low response rate was attributed to issues with the quality of the contact details provided; the time elapsed since parents had registered online; and the relatively light touch interaction that many registered parents had with the project.

The CAWI fieldwork was conducted between 24 August and 6 September 2015.

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[16]   See Appendix C.4 for further details of timings.

3.3   Measuring parenting collaboration

Common across all the projects was the aim of improving the co-parenting skills of separating and separated parents. A measure of change in parents' effective co-parenting was chosen by DWP as the primary outcome measure across all the projects. After a review of existing measures of co-parenting, DWP chose to use the PAM (Abidin and Konold, 1999) for all but three of the 17 projects, where a shorter parenting collaboration measure was used.

3.3.1   Overview of PAM

PAM measures the strength of parents' perceived alliance between themselves and their child's other parent. In other words, it captures parents' ability to cooperate with each other to meet the needs of their child. Its creators designed it to be suitable for parents regardless of their own relationship status and to be applicable for a range of parenting arrangements. It is a 20-item self-completion scale, where respondents are asked to say how strongly they agree or disagree (on a five-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree) to a range of statements. For copyright reasons, we are unable to reproduce the questions here.

Where both the parent with care and non-resident parent were in contact with the project, they were each asked to complete the questionnaire, independently of one another.

Further detail of how PAM scores are calculated is included in Appendix C1. Details of the number and proportion of parents completing the PAM questionnaire in each project at each stage are given in Appendix C2.

3.3.2   Overview of the alternative parenting collaboration measure

The two online projects (OnePlusOne and Relate) and Children 1st (who operated largely by phone) used a four-item battery of questions measuring parents' collaboration (developed by DWP), rather than PAM. It was felt that the 20-item PAM was too long for those engaging the projects online or by phone, with the potential to put parents off using the service.

Using a scale from 1 to 5, where respondents were told that 1 is 'very difficult' and 5 is 'very easy', respondents were asked how easy they found it to:

1   Communicate (talk, text, email, etc.) with your child/children's other parent

2   Reach agreement with the other parent over child contact arrangements

3   Reach agreement with the other parent over child maintenance/financial arrangements

4   Get support from your child/children's other parent when child-related matters arise

Further detail of how the scores arising from these questions were calculated is included in Appendix D, along with details of the base sizes for each project.

3.4 Key challenges and limitations of the evaluation

Our interpretation of the evaluation data has been conducted with due consideration to a number of issues which arose during the design and conduct of the research programme. These are described briefly below, and in more detail in Appendix C2.

1 **The lack of a comparison group**. We do not have data on the change in parental outcomes that would have been recorded for parents if they had not taken part in the projects (the counterfactual). This is mitigated by the fact that parents were asked directly whether changes in a number of their circumstances were attributable to the projects. Nevertheless, it is not possible to totally isolate the impact of the projects from other external factors, particularly in terms of changes in parents' PAM scores.

2 **Non-response and missing data problems**. Although it was hoped that a high percentage of the parents from those projects administering PAM would complete the form both at baseline and post-support, in practice many parents did not. There were a number of reasons for non-completion – for example, some projects had no defined end point and some participants were reluctant to share data with the evaluators. However, there is little evidence of bias in terms of parent characteristics – those completing each stage of the PAM are similar to those that do not complete all stages.

   Much of the missing data stemmed from the early stages of the project. DWP was reliant on the individual providers to collect the data and this was not done consistently in the early stages. Once the issue was identified, DWP worked closely with the projects to improve completion rates.

3 **Small sample numbers for some projects**. The number of parents participating in each phase of the quantitative research was small for some projects (for example, fewer than 50 parents completed the baseline and post-support PAM in six of the 13 PAM projects). Due to the scale and nature of some of the projects, for example providing intensive support to fewer than 100 participants, it was recognised at the design stage that robust quantitative measures would not be available in all cases. Our commentary on outcomes in Chapter 8 therefore reflects the fact that the average change score for these projects is measured with fairly low precision.

4 **Data collection by the projects**. MI data and the first two phases of PAM data were collected directly by the projects rather than via an independent third party. As such, there were some variations in the administration of these processes from project to project (see Section 3.2). These effects were mitigated by the use of standardised research tools, but it is possible that there may have been some effect.

4 Project set-up, roll-out and implementation

Drawing primarily on the qualitative research, this chapter provides an overview of how the projects went about projecting the number of participants, comparing this with what the projects achieved and exploring reasons for any differences. We also look at the mechanisms that were most effective in driving uptake. To this end, we draw upon data on the number of project participants which were collected by the projects. We also examine additional data collected by the two online projects, and consider staffing issues.

4.1 Target groups

4.1.1 Overview

Although the projects were set up on a payment by results basis, all were asked to make an initial estimate of the number of participants that they expected to work with. Over the period of their contracts some of the projects achieved or exceeded their estimated number of participants, while others fell short.

> *'We have not been able to keep up with the demand.'*
>
> (Staff), Mediation Now)

Throughout this section, we look at differences between projects that were in Round 1 of the Innovation Fund cycle and those that were in Round 2.

Round 1 projects had a staggered launch, with the earliest starting in the summer of 2013, while Round 2 projects were operational from April 2014. All Round 1 projects were launched prior to the Round 2 projects.

Table 4.1 shows the target group, the initial estimates made by projects and achieved number of participants for each project.

Table 4.1   Target groups and numbers

Project	Target group	Estimated number of participants[17]	Achieved number of individual participants[18]
Projects focusing on specific groups			
Resolve Cymru[1]	Vulnerable groups	406 individuals	n/a – project closed
Spurgeons[1]	Teenage parents	1,144 couples (2,288 total)	47 started, 2 completed
Tavistock Centre[2]	Long-term separated, protracted court proceedings	100 parents	108 started, 87 completed
National Family Mediation[2]	Long-term separated, protracted court proceedings	822 parents	544 started, 330 completed
			Continued

Table 4.1 Continued

Project	Target group	Estimated number of participants[17]	Achieved number of individual participants[18]
Family Matters Mediate[2]	Long-term separated, high levels of conflict	400 couples (800 total)	340 started, 104 completed
Family Lives[2]	Muslim communities	180 couples (360 total)	148 started, 120 completed
Howells[1]	Low/middle incomes	2,000 parents	1,980 started, 1,319 completed
Resolution[1]	Low incomes	1,447 parents	1,589 started, completed
Malachi[1]	Non-resident parents	160 non-resident parents	249 started, 209 completed

Project	Target group	Estimated number of participants[19]	Achieved number of individual participants[20]
Projects focusing on type of service provision			
Relate[1]	All	90,000 registrations	2,482 started, completed
OnePlusOne[1]	All	7,000 parents	13,500 started, completed
Children 1st[2]	All	3,962 families	8,870 started, completed
Sills & Betteridge[2]	Low incomes/rural areas	1,630 parents	2,633 started, completed
Pinnacle People[2]	All	140 families (280 total)	98 started, 45 completed
Mediation Now[2]	All	120 couples (240 total)	406 started, 185 completed
Changing Futures NE (formerly Headland Futures)[1]	Long-term separated with ongoing issues	234 parents	348 started, 188 completed
National Association of Child Contact Centres[2]	Highly conflicted	280 couples (560 total)	620 started, completed

Note: [1] Round 1 projects, [2] Round 2 projects.

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[17]   Some projects had relatively complex targets and the figures in this table should therefore be viewed as a broad indication of the intended scale of each project. A more detailed specification of the target numbers for each project are to be found in Appendix E.

[18]   These figures are based on data provided by projects as part of the cost-effectiveness research. It is individuals who may have received support alone or two individuals as part of a couple.

[19]   Some projects had relatively complex targets and the figures in this table should therefore be viewed as a broad indication of the intended scale of each project. A more detailed specification of the target numbers for each project are to be found in Appendix E.

[20]   These figures are based on data provided by projects as part of the cost-effectiveness research prior to completion of the projects.

4.1.2   Identifying target groups

The selection of target groups varied according to whether the project was focusing on a specific group of people or whether it was more broad-based in its service provision.

Projects focused on specific groups

Key drivers behind the selection of those groups were as follows:

- **Teenage parents**

  Spurgeons took the view that the **existing service provision for separated parents was not suitable for teenage parents** and a tailored service was needed to meet their needs. Consequently, their 'Supporting Separated Teenage Parent' service was targeted at separated parents where one parent was 20-years-old or younger. By intervening early with teenage parents Spurgeons believed that this would reduce ongoing reliance on state services.

- **Separated parents with ongoing conflict and entrenched views**

  The Tavistock Centre for Couple Relations estimate that around 250 couples per year in London require ongoing or recurring contact with the courts or the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) because they are unable to come to long-term arrangements over their co-parenting, contact and maintenance issues after separation. They therefore **targeted parents who had highly complex needs** and had ongoing or recurring contact with the courts and Cafcass (i.e. 16.4 cases and those on Section 7 reports).

  National Family Mediation already provided a court-based mediation service to long-separated parents who are in conflict and have **unresolved separation** issues in Berkshire, Hereford and West Yorkshire. However, the focus of this project was to **divert families from the expensive and stressful court process and help them work together through mediation**. The project was based on the model used by Robert Emery in his Mediation and Divorce Study[21].

A focus on children

Both Changing Futures and Family Matters Mediate aimed **to provide a service that gave children a voice** after separation and to use this as a vehicle to help parents resolve their problems.

- **Hard to reach communities**

  Family Lives already provided a volunteer-led befriending service to separated and separating couples who were reluctant to seek help in three areas: Gloucestershire, Waltham Forest and Leicester. The **project aimed to extend the service to a new hard to reach community** by partnering with an Islamic relationship support organisation (Barefoot Institute) targeting the Muslim community, as there is a reluctance to access support within this group.

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[21]   Emery, R. (2004). *The Truth About Children and Divorce*, Plume.

- **Low income parents**

  Howells targeted two groups of separated or separating parents: **parents with low incomes £0 to £32k (currently eligible for limited legal-aid); and parents with middle incomes** £32,000 to £45,000 (currently ineligible for legal aid). The reason for targeting these two groups was based on the assumption that they would struggle to privately fund legal advice and support during and after separation but would benefit from such support.

  Resolution targeted parents – either jointly or as individuals – **who were on income-related benefits, those who had no income or benefits because they had just separated, and those on a low income**. The targeting was based on the assumption that these groups were particularly disadvantaged and experienced separation acutely as a result of complex interlinked factors such as debt and the risk of housing problems. A further interrelated assumption was that the target groups might suffer 'referral fatigue'.

Projects focused on a type of service provision

Projects whose focus was on the nature of the service provision rather than specific groups of separating or separated couples tended to work with a much broader group of people. Projects had a range of different service aims:

- **Enabling greater empowerment**

  Mediation Now already provided mediation service to separating and separated parents, working to enable parents to improve their communication to resolve issues for themselves. However, they found that unless the mediator was present the process did not empower people with the tools needed to solve their problems. The project was **designed to empower people by giving a wide range of separating and separated couples the techniques they needed to solve all their issues by themselves without outside help or intervention** (e.g. mediation, the court or the CSA).

- **Widening existing client group**

  Relate's existing services, including online services, tended to be used primarily by women aged 30-39 who are degree educated, have two children and are thinking of separating. However, it was evident that those who have access to the internet and are technologically savvy enough to navigate online tools and related resources would also be able to take advantage of an online service. It was hoped therefore that a revised online service could be widened to 'hard to reach' groups such as men and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds as it was thought that the anonymous, free and immediate nature of online support would increase uptake from these 'hard to reach' groups.

- **Greater collaboration through more effective sign-posting**

  The National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC) noted that more and more parents who were in entrenched conflict were trying to self-refer to Supported Child Contact Centres (SCCCs) in order to see their child on neutral ground. However, SCCCs (mostly run by volunteers) cannot currently accept these referrals without safeguarding information that comes from traditional referral sources (family solicitors and the court social work service, Cafcass) which leaves parents 'in limbo' with one parent at severe risk of losing touch with his/her child. The NACCC project was designed to provide more proactive support for parents to make the contact centre visits work and for improved collaboration between the separated parents by making all SCCCs aware of this facility so they can signpost parents to the website.

- **Initiating behaviour change**

  Sills & Betteridge intended to work with a wide range of separating couples by developing and implementing a behavioural change programme to assist parents in the transition from parenting together to parenting apart. The programme was designed in cooperation with Dr David Briggs, a leading psychologist who has previously developed programmes adopted by the Probation Service.

4.1.3   Estimating demand

Projects undertook a range of different types of research to estimate participant numbers, including using local and national demographic statistics, small-scale surveys that they had undertaken themselves and discussions with local organisations that they had worked with before. However, with hindsight, it was realised that projects participating in Round 1 were not particularly experienced in undertaking such research and reflected that in future they would need to undertake more detailed analyses of the local population to better estimate how many parents were likely to be in scope for the projects' aims.

There was significant variation in the nature of referral estimation errors. For example, while Relate and Surgeons each ended up working with less than five per cent of the total number of parents they had projected, OnePlusOne and Children 1st both ended up more than doubling their initial projections.

In the case of Spurgeons it was found that engaging the target group of young people with chaotic lifestyles over a wide area in the West Midlands and Warwickshire was far more difficult than had initially been anticipated. The cost and time of travelling to the project, coupled with the unpredictability of the target parents' lives proved to create a barrier that could not be effectively overcome. As such, it is highly important to **consider the potential barriers to participation** rather than simply focusing on the number of families that may benefit from the intervention when estimating likely uptake. As we discuss later, Spurgeons also focused on **social media marketing activities which struggled to communicate** relatively complex messages with the impact necessary to drive uptake and there were also questions about the suitability of the 'Spurgeons' brand name. Reliance on social media marketing activities was also felt to be a factor in the low uptake for Relate.

As a consequence of the difficulties that Round 1 projects had in projecting client numbers, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) provided extra guidance for Round 2 projects. However, despite this additional briefing, there were still obvious challenges in predicting flows of referrals – even more concerted efforts to research likely demand will be needed if estimates are to be improved in any future parenting support activities. While the use of specialist research or data analysis organisations may help in this regard, the costs associated with commissioning such investigations is likely to be prohibitive to smaller providers. There is also likely to be a degree of error in the estimation of uptake even with extensive research. Given the difficulties of predicting demand for this type of service, projects would be well advised to both create contingency plans to respond to unexpectedly high or low demand and to build in a review period in the roll out of services to make the best use of live user data to inform long-term decisions.

4.2   Reaching target groups

There was significant variation in the profile of parents that each project had chosen to target. Accordingly, there was a range of approaches to publicising each project's service and to securing referrals. Projects used a mix of **broad-brush marketing approaches** (such as radio/press/poster/social media advertising and leaflet drops) and more **targeted marketing of their services to specific organisations** (such as the courts, social services and health services).

The **majority of projects adopted a mix** of broad-brush marketing and targeted marketing to local professional organisations. The only organisations which did not employ broad-brush marketing activities were Malachi, Mediation Now, Sills & Betteridge and Spurgeons, all of whom relied solely on a targeted approach.

As the target groups, marketing channels and referral sources for each project are relatively complex, we have provided a full summary for each of the projects in Appendix F. Further details of the profile of parents participating in each project are included in Appendix E.

We discuss these in more detail below.

4.2.1   Referrals – Factors that facilitated client referrals

Overall, there were four factors that facilitated client referrals.

• Having existing links with the courts and Cafcass;

• Being able to leverage existing professional relationships;

• Having a positive reputation in the areas where the service was being offered; and

• Offering a service that was familiar to potential referring organisations.

These are discussed in turn below.

Courts/Cafcass: It was clear that referral numbers were typically higher when the referrals were made by the courts or Cafcass. This was in part because clients were compelled to engage in the projects to which they were referred (or felt that they were compelled), but there was also a sense that as they had come this far in the divorce process that a third party might be able to help them through some of their difficulties. Consequently, the Tavistock Centre and National Family Mediation, which had strong relationships with the courts/ Cafcass, found that referral numbers from those sources were high; additionally, the projects felt that clients were more likely to be engaged in the process where they had been referred by these organisations.

> *'Once the district judges and Cafcass are referring in, the solicitors will start referring in, as they think you'll get sent there anyway so you may as well do it now. That was helpful.'*

(Staff, Mediation Now)

Indeed, the Tavistock Centre found that, once established, the referral process could be too efficient and the flow of clients too high for the project to cope:

> *'We were very quickly inundated by Cafcass referrals – my role [to arrange that] became unnecessary after a few months.'*

> (Staff, Tavistock Centre)

The Tavistock Centre managed the unexpectedly high level of referrals by setting up a waiting list, although this had unexpected consequences in the form of some negative comments from clients:

> *'Referral was not timely. It took months and there was a lack of transparency…they said we were on a waiting list. We waited six months and then were suddenly top of the list…It was very stressful as I was using this as an alternative to litigation.'*

> (Male client with five children, the Tavistock Centre)

Leveraging existing relationships: Where projects had an existing relationship with a referral organisation, referrals were also found to be high. Malachi, for example, had a very strong relationship with local schools and found that this referral route was particularly effective. Another benefit of leveraging existing networks, partnerships and relationships was that there was much less marketing to carry out, meaning they could get the project up and running much more quickly and effectively.

Looking specifically at the projects which **focused on long-term separated couples** (those separated for more than two years), National Family Mediation worked primarily through the courts. In Berkshire they had a particularly strong relationship by virtue of being located within the court building and referrals were accordingly strong. However, take-up was lower in West Yorkshire where there were greater difficulties getting in to court. Family Matters Mediate, who were also working with the long-term separated, built networks with a range of local organisations, including the local health and social services. However, they found that the organisations were prone to forget them and so needed to re-engage them every so often in order to ensure a flow of clients.

Positive reputation: Referrals were also found to be healthy where the project was being run by an already well recognised organisation. For example, Sills & Betteridge were already well regarded by the local courts, Cafcass, Citizens Advice and by other local solicitors as they were well known for their high quality family legal services. Similarly, Family Lives were well regarded and were promoted and endorsed by the Barefoot Institute (in Waltham Forest and Leicester), which made the project much more accessible to local Muslim families who may otherwise have been challenging to reach.

> *'The most important* [aspect of the project] *was that it was run by people on the same wavelength or coming from the same background – ordinary people doing ordinary jobs…"* "*We were working within the community to make the unacceptable become acceptable. Family Lives provided a very vital service which should have been led and given by the Muslim community.'*

> (Family Lives/Imam)

Providing familiar services: Projects varied in whether they were offering new or existing services, or whether extending an already existing service and this was seen to have an impact on client referral rates.

In cases where projects were offering an existing service (albeit with new products or services) or were extending an existing service, referral rates were higher than those of projects that were either starting anew or were creating partnerships.

Examples of existing services included:

• Sills & Betteridge were a law firm that already provides legal and mediation services for separating and divorcing couples;

• Family Lives provided a volunteer-led befriending service to separated and separating couples in three areas. They already had an established presence in each of these locations and have run successful befriending projects supporting wellbeing, troubled families and mental health, particularly among Muslim families, in Gloucestershire, Waltham Forest and Leicester. In each case, however, the projects were trying out new products and services alongside their already tried-and-tested offering;

• Mediation Now noted that the intervention they were delivering was very similar to mediation which they already provide, so fits in with the wider work they are doing. The processes they use for the project are in-line with those existing and so have not had to change very much in terms of organisation and no additional training has been required.

4.2.2   Understanding lower than expected client numbers

Four factors were identified as having a negative impact on the number of clients supported:

• reliance on self-referral;

• overly large catchment areas (particularly rural areas);

• funding issues; and

• lacking presence in the parenting support space.

Self-referral, whether in person or via web-based offerings, was less likely to engender commitment to engage with and continue using services. This was a particular issue for Relate, who expected around 90,000 registrations, but found that only a tiny fraction of web-users went on to register for their services. The general view was that in order for clients to engage with the service and benefit from what was being offered, an up-front commitment was required; where this was not the case clients were more likely to fall away from using the service.

Projects that **did not have a pre-existing presence** in the parenting support space also found it more challenging to establish an effective referral stream. This was primarily because new organisations were less well known and needed time for marketing and networking to establish their referral channels or needed to establish working relationships with new partners.

> *'On reflection, we acknowledge the steep challenge we set ourselves in setting up this service in just one year, and the challenges of working in partnership with two very different organisations. However, we feel that we have used our learning to improve the service and have enabled significant positive outcomes for all types of families in Scotland.'*
>
> (Staff, Children 1st)

4.2.3   Marketing to clients

Projects used a wide range of approaches to reach clients. This included **blanket marketing**: radio advertising, radio editorials, newspaper adverts and editorials, leaflet drops (usually in strategically designated localities), adverts in drop-in centres or family centres, GPs offices, children's centres, health centres and social media marketing.

The primary learning from all of the projects is that while broad-brush marketing in the form of radio and newspaper advertising, leaflet drops and posters helps to raise some awareness of the services on offer, it results in only a small number of referrals – when used in isolation, this approach tends to impact negatively on the speed at which the project becomes fully functioning. Some of the projects that had either used a broad approach to marketing (or had not realised the need for early advertising of their services) took many months before the number of clients coming forward picked up.

> *'Initially not much publicity about the service…now inundated with callers as more people know about the services.'*

> (Staff, Resolution)

It was generally felt social media has a place in the overall mix of marketing approaches, but it **could not be relied upon as a sole source of good quality referrals**. Projects using social media marketing (such as Relate and Spurgeons) found that the number of referrals from this channel was very small. Spurgeons, on reflection, thought that there were a number of marketing issues that served to impact on their client flow. This included a project name that did not convey the aims of the project, social media marketing using Facebook and Twitter that was 'very disappointing', blanket marketing using radio and local media that only produced a small flow clients and a marketing approach involving the distribution of information packs to professionals that, while having some impact, was soon forgotten. Staff at Spurgeons also thought that they had not been able to sufficiently describe the service they were offering or its potential value to clients.

4.2.4   Marketing to intermediaries

Projects often leveraged existing networks such as the courts, Cafcass, Dad Info, local authorities and schools. They also undertook a variety of promotional activities with these organisations including 'info packs', short presentations and general networking approaches such as phone calls and discussions at meetings that both organisations had been invited to attend.

Projects realised the importance of being **clear about the target audience** in order to target their marketing more accurately and **design products and services that were relevant and would engage clients**. For example, the Tavistock Centre specifically focused on fathers and non-resident parents that had exhausted all other options – audiences that were considered to be excluded from pre-existing services. They considered this to be the right approach to ensure an appropriate flow of referrals for whom their services were tailored.

> *'You have to be very specific about your audience. And also collaboration with other agencies is crucial and is key because some users might not be in a position to use the service immediately* [but] *they can be identified by their volunteer or front line worker that this can be a service that could be of assistance to them…If they* [users] *are aware of the benefits from the beginning, you can see the enthusiasm or the engagement on their part.'*

> (Staff, OnePlusOne)

Marketing to intermediaries could not be a one-off event and required considerable effort on the part of projects to sustain the momentum. Continuing efforts were necessary, in part to embed the project and its aims in the minds of potential referring individuals, and in part for the project to gain sufficient trust from the partner organisation.

> *'Despite potential referral agencies welcoming news of the service, we think that they did not always remember to make those referrals later on.'*

(Staff, Family Matters Mediate)

> *'There was a large amount of networking with local organisations and marketing of the project during the first 12 months of year one. Staff felt that referrals were initially slow, as it took time for the project to 'bed into the community' and raise awareness of the service…Referral rates have increased over time, predominantly due to increased awareness of the service. In particular, word of mouth referrals have significantly increased as clients recommended the service to others in similar situations.'*

(Staff, Resolution)

> *'Take-up of counselling increased as time went on because staff were more successful in promoting the benefits to clients.'*

(Staff, Howells)

> *'The project did not receive the number of referrals that was expected in the first few months, as it took time to build trust within the community, to build a network for referrals and to find our place in the market.'*

(Staff, Pinnacle People)

Nevertheless, even in cases where considerable marketing activities had been carried out, including targeting specific organisations and arranging meetings to discuss the services on offer, some projects still found that referrals could be slow. There was a wide range of reasons for this:

• the organisations they had targeted were not recalling the service

> *'Overall, the number of clients accessing the service was lower than anticipated. It was felt that the targets were overambitious and referrals did not come in from sources we had expected, such as solicitors and judges.'*

(Staff, Children 1st)

• there were difficulties getting mediators into the court

> *'There was a lower take-up of the service than was anticipated, owing to some difficulties in getting the courts in West Yorkshire to allow National Family Mediation mediators into court. This was resolved after 12 months.'*

(Staff, National Family Mediation)

- changes in local access and referral points posed challenges

  'Cuts to legal aid have led to less use of contact centres (which is normally court ordered) meaning many have seen their overall referrals fall. This has had a knock on effect for the project which attached itself to existing contact centres.'

  (NACCC)

Despite these issues, marketing to intermediaries tended to be much more effective in getting the project up and running fairly quickly and in meeting the target client numbers.

In terms of lessons learned for ensuring a good flow of clients, projects recognised that the following were key to success:

- Broad brush advertising using radio, local papers, leaflet drops and social media has its place in gaining referrals but is likely to result in only a trickle of clients. The messages that need to be communicated are relatively complex and are challenging to express with sufficient clarity and persuasiveness via these channels. Clients self-referring having seen advertising may also not be emotionally ready for the services to which they have referred themselves.

- The most effective sources of referral are existing networks, which might include the courts, Cafcass, social and health services, GP clinics, schools, and referral through internal sources (e.g. a legal firm referring clients to its own mediation service).

- Where projects do not have existing networks, it has to be realised that: a) potential referral organisations may be suspicious of them until they have proved themselves; and b) organisations will need regular reminding of the project's presence and services offered as there is a tendency for 'institutional forgetting'.

- Self-referrals, either in person or via web-based applications, are more likely to result in early drop-out or a lack of engagement compared to referral by professional organisations.

- When operating across different geographical areas it is important to recognise that different types of marketing and/or different types of organisations may be needed in order to stimulate referrals.

It was notable that projects with higher levels of client diversity (i.e. where they were not targeting specific types of clients) and with a wider focus tended to experience a wide range of challenges. They tended to find that their initial 'broad brush' marketing was not as effective as they had initially expected, resulting in a slow start-up to the project. Subsequently, they found that focusing their approach by networking with potential referral agencies increased the flow of clients – but this does take time, especially if these relationships are not already in place.

Projects recognised that they may have been naïve about the importance of marketing, particularly in terms of the early marketing of the projects' services. There was some sense of 'build it and they will come', not realising how much they needed to continue to reinforce the message about the project's existence, its aims and who it was for. By way of example, Changing Futures NE initially approached five local authorities with the view that they would provide a sufficient level of referrals. However, referrals were very slow and the project had to expand its marketing activities to other local authorities in order to achieve the referral numbers it desired.

'We've sent materials to anywhere that we might get referrals from and it's generated interest from professionals, and we have received referrals, but it's been difficult to get them to engage.'

(Staff, Spurgeons)

4.3   Engaging clients

As discussed above, projects had varying degrees of success in **reaching** participants. The next challenge was to **engage** them in their activities. Projects quickly learned that the **volume and quality of referrals were not necessarily synonymous**. For example, OnePlusOne found that while the social marketing approach they had used brought in a healthy volume of potential clients, they were not necessarily emotionally ready for the services that were being offered. Consequently, they estimated that 75 per cent fell away before registration with the project, with only around a quarter engaging sufficiently for therapeutic work to be carried out after the registration process had taken place. To address this, the project phased in a short questionnaire for users upon entering the site to assess emotional readiness with those deemed to be ready directed to the service and signposting to other services for the remainder.

In some cases there were difficulties in engaging both partners in a couple

'Referrals occur through an online registration. This is led by the resident parent, and relies on this parent to make contact with the non-resident parent in order to share a registration code and encourage them to sign up. Support workers can only make contact with parents or assess a case once both parents have registered.'

In other cases there were difficulties in engaging couples with very entrenched views

'It's harder to engage those more entrenched in their views; those more used to the court service; they tend to have fixed views of things…It tends to be easier to work with pre-court people.'

(Staff, Resolution)

Where the project attempts to engage with a broad spectrum of families, it is highly important to ensure that the mode of delivery is suitable. For example Sills & Betteridge found their offer of group work for fathers was less effective than for mothers. The men faced barriers to participation in a group appointment such as working hours and distance to travel if they have moved away from the area. They were also more reluctant to discuss personal matters in a group setting. Likewise, there would seem to be challenges when it comes to engaging both parents in online interventions – while online services can be more convenient for parents (thereby reducing barriers to participation), it seems that they may also exert less 'leverage' when it comes to encouraging a reluctant parent to take part. It is also important to ensure that services are **fully integrated**, and clients can see how the various components of the service fit together and the benefits of participating in the complete service. An integrated service with mandatory and optional components would still be able to meet client needs for flexibility whilst providing a more holistic service.

Conversely, where projects offer a very focused service it is vital that parents **understand the limits of the remit** of that service and that the project has a good knowledge of **suitable onward referral** organisations in the event that parents need additional support.

Some of the projects were operating over a wide **geographical area** and frequently had to engage with separated partners who lived far apart. In addition, some parents were geographically isolated, living in rural areas with poor transport links. As such, travel to central locations was often difficult and commitment and engagement with the project were considerably weakened. This was exacerbated by the fact that many parents were from low income groups and the cost of travel also served as an inhibitor of engagement with the projects. By way of example, these factors limited Spurgeons' ability to convene group discussions for information provision and to discuss issues among their young clients spread over a wide area in the west Midlands and Warwickshire.

Projects need to consider providing alternative means of participating, for example, through satellite offices, Skype or other online tools, widening opening hours to evenings and weekends, and reimbursing travel costs.

If the project was trying to meet the needs of a wide client group, it could not always meet the wide range of client needs. In some cases, this was because clients were not ready for the service offered; in others it was because conflict had become too entrenched for the service to have any effect, elsewhere it was because the service did not provide the range of expertise that the couples required (for example, NACCC tended to only be seen as a contact centre, although it did provide other services which some clients were not aware of).

- There were also intrinsic factors relating to the nature of the service provided that proved to be barriers to engagement. For example:

  - Sills & Betteridge offered their legal, mediation and group work services to a wide range of separating/separated couples but found that there was a high proportion of clients only wanting legal advice. They also found difficulties in getting both partners in a couple to participate in group work.

  - Relate too found that it tended to be only one partner in a couple who would use their services.

  - Howells could only provide a legal service to one partner, due to potential conflicts of interest, which meant there was little opportunity to promote collaboration between separated parents.

Mediation Now found that clients commented that the service was not holistic enough to meet their needs; they also experienced considerable drop-out until they introduced the 'threat' of payment if the course was not completed.

Two of the projects mentioned **funding issues** as a reason for being unable to meet their initial estimates for engaging clients. Relate, for example, felt that the costing model, which they had suggested themselves, proved to be disadvantageous and meant that they could not afford to develop and adapt the service in the face of low client flow:

> *'If we were to do something differently, the whole costing model would be completely different. We would be much stronger with DWP around the initial contracting…The very high targets alongside the very low payment per outcome kind of stymied things basically.'*

> (Staff, Relate)

This again underlines the importance of projecting uptake as accurately as possible prior to the launch of a project, as well as having contingency plans in place to allow the project to adapt to scenarios where uptake is markedly higher or lower than projected.

Resolve Cymru, meanwhile, closed down for financial reasons (in part because their core services lost their key funding), which of course made it impossible to hit their targets.

4.4   Web analytics

The two online projects, OnePlusOne and Relate, also collected web analytics which provide a more granular understanding of how parents interacted with their services.

The following sections provide a summary of the web analytics, while full details are included in Appendix E.

OnePlusOne

OnePlusOne saw a total of 103,307 unique visitors to its site, viewing a total of 330,071 pages (an average of 2.6 pages per visitor). Each visitor spent an average of 2.39 minutes on the site. There were a broadly even number of initial registrations from women (51 per cent) and men (48 per cent).

The first six months of operation, from December 2013 to May 2014, saw a trend for rapidly increasing numbers of visitors to the site (reaching circa 5,000 in the month of May). As such, it appears that there was a relatively long bedding-in period for getting referrals fully up and running. Over the following year, visitor levels remained relatively stable, though there was a surge in numbers over the final two months for which data are available (August 2015 and September 2015). During these final months, visitor numbers hit a peak monthly total of more than 10,000.

The bounce rate (i.e. the number of visitors who viewed only a single page on the website and then left without engaging any further) was relatively high (58 per cent). By comparison, the bounce rate for visitors to the DWP website arriving from the Google search engine is typically just over one-third[22]. However, OnePlusOne's rate is close to 'content only' websites which, in the US, have been found to average 40-60 per cent bounce rates often because visitors have **found the information they required on the first page they come to** because they entered search criteria which took them directly to their required page[23].

One-quarter of all OnePlusOne visitors also made more than one visit to the site and around three-quarters of parents who registered on the site went on to create a parenting plan (77 per cent) – as such, there was significant engagement from a large number of parents and men were again well represented in using this service representing 47 per cent of plans. Women did, however, tend to go no further and were more likely to watch at least one of the Behaviour Modelling Training (BMT) videos (60 per cent of those who went on to view a video) compared to men (39 per cent of viewers).

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[22]   https://www.gov.uk/performance/site-activity-department-for-work-pensions/top-department-referrers

[23]   https://www.digitalgov.gov/files/2014/05/2ND_EDITION__GOOGLE_ANALYTICS_FOR_GOVERNMENT_TRAINING_MANUAL-4.pdf

More than half (53 per cent) of the total visits to the OnePlusOne site came via the "dad. info" site showing the success of partnering to bring in more interest from fathers. A further one in seven (15 per cent) came via the Facebook site and one in nine (11 per cent) via the Cafcass site. This again underlines the **importance of specialist referral channels compared to more generalist social media platforms**. Mobile devices (mobile phones or tablets) accounted for more than half of all visits to the site (57 per cent), underlining the **importance of ensuring that sites are designed with a 'mobile first' approach** – if sites are not easily navigable on smaller devices a large proportion of the potential user base will be alienated.

Relate

The flow of visitors to the Relate site was lower than that for OnePlusOne, with a total of 30,928 unique visitors to the site between March 2014 and June 2015. There was a total of 61,922 'sessions', equating to an average of around two visits to the site per visitor. The number of monthly visits to the Relate site increased throughout the first four months of operation, again suggesting that there was a bedding-in period for the service. However, in contrast to OnePlusOne, there was a decline in visitor numbers towards the end of the project, with a large reduction in the number of visitors over the last three months for which data are available (April to June 2015).

Around four in ten visitors to the site came via the main 'Relate.org.uk' site, while a further 43 per cent of visitors came via Google. As such, the **strong brand presence** of Relate in the relationship support sector appears to have been key in driving site visits (many of the Google search referrals are likely to have included 'Relate' as a key word). As was the case with OnePlusOne, **social media referrals were relatively low**, with 7 per cent of visits coming via Facebook.

The **bounce rate for the Relate site was lower than that for OnePlusOne**. Only 25 per cent of parents landing on the Relate project site's homepage left without engaging any further, while only 21 per cent of those landing on the site's advice page immediately left the site.

As was the case with OnePlusOne, mobile devices were used by the majority of visitors.

5   Service provision

This chapter draws upon the qualitative research and provides an overview of the services provided by the projects, together with a discussion of what worked well and the experience that projects gained in terms of how to further develop their services.

5.1   A summary of the projects' services

Most of the projects provided a range of different services although there was always a core offer at the heart of the project. Analytically, the core service can be considered to be one of three types:

* **talk-based services**, involving mediation or a therapeutic intervention and designed to help with resolving conflict or bringing parties closer to a resolution;

* **information-based** services, where the project's core role was providing information, signposting or providing legal support; and

* **contact-based** projects, which were designed to assist with contact arrangements or provided facilities for non-resident parents to see their children.

These are discussed in turn in the following sections.

5.2   Talk-based services

Eight of the 16 projects provided mediation or a therapeutic intervention as their core service. These were: Changing Futures NE; Family Lives; Family Matters Mediate; Malachi; Mediation Now; National Family Mediation; Resolution; and the Tavistock Centre[24].

* Changing Futures NE, Family Matters Mediate and National Family Mediation all focused on couples who had been separated for at least two years; by virtue of their entrenched conflict, many of the Tavistock Centre's clients were also long-term separated.

* National Family Mediation also specifically focused on couples where there had been domestic violence.

Changing Futures NE and National Family Mediation also had a child focus. In the former the child would take part in sessions, along with parents whilst National Family Mediation would consult with the child on issues where appropriate.

5.2.1   Type of offer

Changing Futures NE and the Tavistock Centre offered parents, along with their children, individual and joint sessions where they worked towards a parenting plan. The Tavistock Centre included co-parenting skills workshops as part of their service offer.

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[24]   Resolve Cymru is excluded from this discussion as the project closed down very early on.

Changing Futures NE, Family Matters Mediate, National Family Mediation and Tavistock Centre all offered both individual and joint therapeutic sessions as well as most offering mediation with the Tavistock Centre also using a specialist 'mentalizing therapy'. A more detailed explanation of the services offered is given in Appendix G.

Family Lives offered a befriending service amongst Muslim parents – a group that is generally reluctant to seek outside help and support. In Waltham Forest and Leicester, the service was offered with the Barefoot Institute which is an Islamic relationship support organisation.

Malachi worked through 70 local schools, providing a therapeutic intervention for non-resident parents, with sessions focusing on changing behaviour in the interests of their child.

Mediation Now provided support for all separating/separated couples although their clients were primarily legal aid clients. Mediation Now primarily used joint mediation sessions,

In order to participate in Resolution's mediation sessions, one of the parents had to be on a low income and Resolution used a mix of single and joint sessions.

Further details of each of the projects in terms of their service offering, targeted client group, facilitators and barriers may be found in Appendix G.

5.2.2   Strengths and facilitators for talk-based projects

In considering their **strengths and the factors that facilitated the development and continued success**, the projects identified a range of features, some of which were specific to an individual project but could be useful to others in their future development.

Critical to the success of projects was the **referral process**. As previously discussed, projects found that engaging other services and professionals and forging strong links with the community was key to their success. This included developing strong relationships with the courts, Cafcass, health professionals and local authority social service departments. Similarly, support and/or endorsement from other organisations (such as the link between Family Lives and the Barefoot Institute) contributed to the success of the project. Typically, projects that had cracked the potential difficulties in ensuring a flow of referrals felt that not only were they able to meet their contracted targets but considered that the project 'felt good' in that they were more financially stable, staff were happier and more highly motivated, and the project could spend more time doing the work it wanted to do rather than chasing referrals.

Although it is not always possible to arrange, National Family Mediation found that being able to have mediators who were based in the court offices not only enhanced the referral process but also found that engaging parents was less difficult as they were already 'on-site' and primed by the court to start the mediation process.

Projects found that there was a difference between the volume and quality of referrals, with some of the projects realising that the **service they were offering worked only for specific client groups**. Over time they realised that it was important to target and accept onto the programme the 'right' clients; Changing Futures, for example, decided to exclude referrals who displayed extremely challenging behaviours while Mediation Now found that their service was not suitable where one partner was hoping to reconcile, there were unresolved financial issues, or one or both of the partners presented with learning difficulties or personality disorders. Further, Changing Futures found that widening the scope of the

intervention to young teenage children, new partners, and grandparents could have a positive impact on the outcome of the mediation between the separated parents.

Nearly all of the projects specifically referred to the **quality and skill of their workers** and attributed considerable success of the projects to their dedication, ability to engage with a wide range of people and the empathetic approach they brought to the interaction between the parents.

> *'We go into "relationship build". We tell people we are not here to tell you what to do, we are here to listen. We ask people what they think should happen, how often they want to see their child, and what they think, what are they offering. We are not dictatorial; we listen to what they want. We say here you are now, here are where you want to be, and are led by the parents and are solutions focused.'*

(Staff, Malachi)

However, a number of projects commented on how they had underestimated the complexity of the work that project workers would do. Changing Futures for example commented on how their support workers had a much greater role than they had initially envisaged. Apart from carrying out their normal role, they found that they spent a lot of time keeping the ex-partners engaged between sessions and often dealing with a much wider set of issues than originally expected, including financial issues and benefits, alcohol and drug dependency and a wide range of health issues.

Overall, **good engagement** with both parents was critical to success. This could in part be ensured through the skill and professionalism of the support workers and in part the nature of the intervention and the flexibility with which it could be offered. Engaging both partners was frequently mentioned as being a difficult task and one in which support workers would need to place considerable effort. Changing Futures noted that they had underestimated how intimidating the process of being referred and taking part in an intervention could be for people. Engaging couples required time, tact, sensitivity, and a full explanation of both the process and the benefits of participating.

Typically, projects found that **good engagement also meant that couples were likely to need fewer of the services offered**. For example, Malachi found that while their therapeutic intervention was estimated to require 12 weeks, good engagement meant that eight to ten weeks would suffice. They also found that the six weeks of telephone support for non-resident parents was not required. Similarly, National Family Mediation found that 'shuttle mediation' (where the mediator shuttles between the ex-partners who are physically separated) was less likely to be required where engagement was good; the Tavistock Centre also found that, quite unexpectedly, co-parenting workshops were not needed because both partners engaged with the therapeutic process and attended joint sessions. They attributed this in part to the sensitive way in which couples had been referred and in part to the DOORS assessment that they used which made it clear that the process they were to engage in was not trying to reunite them.

Many projects offered a range of services. Projects noted for themselves that **one of the facilitators for engagement was through the provision of an integrated offer** – that each component was linked and appeared to be one component of a complete process. This was also commented on by users who appreciated how projects provided a number of services under one roof. Some of these were designed and run in-house; others were the result of collaborations between different services. For example, Sills & Betteridge whilst primarily offering a legal information and advice service also offered an in-house mediation service

as part of the project. By contrast, Children 1st is a collaboration with One Parent Families Scotland and the Scottish Child Law Centre. They provided a one-stop-shop for separating and separated families across Scotland, called the Family Decision Making Service (FDMS) which aimed to establish contact and child maintenance arrangements. The service operated via a website, phone line and face-to-face consultations. Although acting as a partnership, it was clear that it was a seamless service as users did not realise it was a partnership – this contributed to the project's success.

Projects also found that being able to be **flexible** in their approach was important, for example being able to tailor the service to the individual couple, shortening or lengthening the intervention dependent on needs and being able to use a mix of different channels for communication (such as face-to-face, on-line chat, Skype), even though these on-line channels tended to be used only by a minority of couples. Mediation Now found that flexibility was important in order to be able to ensure that the intervention was not burdensome to the couples. They found that their 2 x 1.5-hour sessions were difficult when one of the partners was living some distance away and so converted to 1 x 2-hour session which reduced the burden and ensured continued engagement with the project.

Different types of interventions may take different amounts of time to become fully functional. While Family Lives had initially estimated that it would take one to two months for the befriending journey to bed in with both partners, in practice it was more like three to six months. Primarily this was because ex-partners were living separately and there was a great deal of going back and forth.

5.2.3   Barriers to success for talk-based projects

Barriers to success of the projects centred primarily around **the nature of the ex-partners**. Changing Futures found that the service was less successful for potential service users with mental health problems, learning difficulties and health issues. Many projects found that unresolved issues that were outside the project's remit would have a negative impact on the intervention process, including unresolved financial difficulties and issues over contact rights (e.g. Changing Futures, the Tavistock Centre).

Similarly, a general reluctance to discuss sensitive issues, continued conflict and entrenched views meant that interventions were sometimes less effective than expected. Projects noted that they were sometimes unable to deal with individuals that presented with such entrenched views, were registering a high level of conflict (noted by Family Lives), or when one or both partners refused to engage with the process (noted by Mediation Now, Resolution and National Family Mediation). In part this may have been because the intervention was not designed to deal with such couples and as a consequence managing these difficulties was outside the skill set of some of the support workers. In such cases, as the Tavistock Centre noted, the degree of conflict is such that trained psychologists and therapists are required in order to help the partners engage and benefit from the intervention.

There are times when the wider family has an impact on the intervention. This can work both ways. As discussed earlier, involvement of the wider family can have its benefits (e.g. Changing Futures), but the extended family can also be working behind the scenes against the intervention, pushing one of the partners away from engaging or making excessive demands without any compromise (an experience noted by Malachi).

A number of the projects, including Malachi, Mediation Now and National Family Mediation), aimed to put in place some form of agreement between the ex-partners. While this could be very successful for some couples, because the **agreements were not legally binding** they were not always as successful as initially hoped for.

Projects that covered wide geographical areas, especially those with rural catchments, found that the **geography itself could be a barrier to engaging** with the intervention, an issue noted by Howells when offering their mediation service. Partly this was because it meant one or both ex-partners needed to travel, which was not always convenient because of work commitments or possibly because of a lack of income or commitment. This meant that appointments might be missed. This in turn often gave rise to resentment on the part of the ex-partner who did attend the appointment, which in some cases they would use as a lever in future interactions. It also reduced engagement of the couple, which in turn reduced the effectiveness of the intervention. While projects did try to use electronic communications such as online chat and Skype, these were much less widely used than had been expected. This was partly because of other commitments getting in the way and also a lack of good quality internet connections.

5.3 Information-based services

Six projects provided an information-based service. These were: Children 1st; Howells; OnePlusOne; Relate; Sills & Betteridge; and Spurgeons.

Howells and Sills & Betteridge are both firms of solicitors with expertise in family legal matters and offered legal advice, mediation sessions and joint/group work. Howells focused on two groups of clients – couples with low incomes and eligible for legal aid and couples with middle incomes and not eligible for legal aid; Sills & Betteridge offered their service to all couples that were separating/separated, but with a focus on rural communities.

Children 1st, OnePlusOne and Relate were all internet-based projects, with Children 1st also offering telephone support and Relate offering a live chat facility. OnePlusOne could also provide some face-to-face support via a Home Start helper. The three projects were open to all separating/separated couples. Both Children 1st and Relate provided an information service with articles to read, while Relate also provided users with tasks and exercise to undertake if they wished to do so. OnePlusOne also provided Behaviour Modelling Training which was designed to lead couples towards agreeing a parenting plan.

Spurgeons are a youth-orientated organisation and considered that adult-orientated services were inadequate for teenagers with parenting responsibilities. Their service was designed to provide support for young parents through mixed gender group sessions. The project also included work with grandparents as a means of encouraging greater communication within the family.

Further details of each of the projects in terms of their service offering, targeted client group, facilitators and barriers may be found in Appendix G.

5.3.1   Barriers and facilitators for information-based projects

Legal projects: These two projects were offered by legal firms specialising in family relationships (Howells and Sills & Betteridge). Both projects provided legal advice and support as well as counselling and group work (Sills & Betteridge used a behaviour change model). Employing **solicitors trained in family legal work meant that they were able to provide expert advice and support to clients**, helping them understand their rights, informing them of the court process and increasing clients' confidence in being able to take issues forward. One of the potential downsides is that by being legal advice providers **they could sometimes only support one party**.

Sills & Betteridge could provide additional support for both partners, Howells to only one of the partners. However, both projects found that their **counselling and group work were underutilised**. In the case of Howells this was in part due to a slow start as the change in legal aid rules meant that clients had rushed to meet the deadline before the changes were implemented, resulting in an initial lull in referrals; and in part because it took time for support workers to learn how to promote the benefits of the counselling process. Sills & Betteridge found that clients were **less inclined to use the group work sessions, primarily because of the high level of conflict** that existed between ex-partners and partly because of the geography – many partners were living a long way from the project base. Typically, women were more likely to take up the group work than men.

Overall, both projects found that there was **high drop-out rate after clients had received legal advice and support**; both were looking at ways of promoting their additional services.

Sills & Betteridge had initially intended to offer their services in local prisons but were unable to do so due to the difficulties with gaining access.

Web-based projects: Relate, OnePlusOne and Children 1st were all primarily web-based, with Children 1st also providing online chat and telephone support.

While Children 1st found that their website was used more than initially expected, both OnePlusOne and Relate recorded lower website visits than expected, particularly at the early stage. Nevertheless, all the projects reported very positive feedback over the high quality material that was available on their websites (including information, tasks and signposting). One of the **key benefits of the web-based offer was that people could browse at a time that suited them and at their own pace**. The additional offer of a **web-chat facility provided by Children 1st appeared to work very well as it enabled people some 'distance' when discussing very personal issues**; this often meant that a subsequent telephone discussion was more effective as a relationship had already been established between the support worker and the individual.

The three projects had different referral process experiences. Relate recognised that they had overestimated the number of likely users but nevertheless felt that in order for increased use of their web services they would have needed a much larger marketing budget. Children 1st were surprised at the high level of web use, which was due to working in partnership with two other services and therefore had referrals arising for a range of sources. By contrast, OnePlusOne found that while their web offer was well used, it worked most effectively for couples who were at an early stage of their separation and before issues had become entrenched and the level of conflict had risen. However, they also found that couples would fall away after the initial registration process as they were not emotionally ready to discuss the issue of separation. **There appeared to be an optimum window in which their service would be most effective – some time after the initial separation when**

couples are emotionally ready to discuss issues but before any ongoing conflict has become too deep-seated and entrenched. However, as projects noted, it is not possible to predict when the optimum window for service delivery arises as couples – and individuals within couples – become emotionally ready at different and unpredictable times. Projects did consider, however, that there should be a general campaign to raise awareness of services for separating couples amongst the public as well as relevant professionals (health and social services, solicitors etc.). Even if an individual, or couple, are referred, or refer themselves, before they are ready for any form of mediation, the service to which they are referred should have in place a 'pre-preparation' service that allows separating couples to have the opportunity to start to think through the issues of separation and provide a follow-up service at a later date to explore how the couple is handling the separation and whether mediation might be relevant. 'Trigger points' might also be discussed with couples (such as communication being reduced, arguments starting to arise, etc.) that might help to remind the couple to seek help and support.

Both Children 1st and OnePlusOne found, as have many of the other projects, that providing a **flexible service works much more effectively** than one that is heavily prescriptive. OnePlusOne had initially designed a 'planned pathway' through their offer but found that allowing partners to pick and choose the elements (often with sensitive guidance from the support worker) provided a more effective and efficient service.

Spurgeons had identified couples under 20 years of age as being in particular need of support, as the adult services were not really applicable to them. This assertion was reflected in the sometimes chaotic lifestyles of these young people around which it was critical to provide **flexibility and tailoring to individual needs** to deliver the service. As many of the young clients were still living at home and/or had strong links with extended family, the project found that **engaging with the wider family could be more successful in achieving positive outcomes with their ex-partner than working with the individual alone**. As with other types of project, there was also a downside in that some families could work against the intervention by advising the young person in ways that were likely to result in conflict between the partners. The chaotic nature of some of Spurgeons' client group meant that they would miss appointments. Geography, as with other projects, also played its part; those that were living some distance away often could not afford to travel to appointments on a regular basis.

5.4   Contact-based services

Two projects provided safe contact and visiting arrangements for non-resident parents to meet their children as their core service – Pinnacle People and National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC).

Pinnacle People was based on a farm and provided the opportunity for non-resident parents to meet with their child and engage in activities such as cooking. The parents with care could also be present and the project provided an opportunity for reflecting on their relationship and what outcome would be in the best interest of their children. The project also provided signposting to other relevant services. It was open to all couples who had separated in the previous three years.

NACCC utilised an online screening service and face-to-face support from a social worker, the design of which was to help couples with entrenched conflict find a way of allowing non-resident parents contact with their children.

Further details of each of the projects in terms of their service offering, targeted client group, facilitators and barriers may be found in Appendix G.

5.4.1 Barriers and facilitators for contact-based projects

NACCC and Pinnacle People both aimed to deliver a means of providing contact with children for non-resident parents in a safe environment. NACCC undertook this through an on-line self-serve screening process feeding in to a face-to-face support service provided by a social worker, where practical and emotional issues could be tackled. Pinnacle People used a farm setting through which the non-resident partner could see their child.

Both projects had difficulties in **attracting referrals**, although referrals to Pinnacle people increased after some months. In the case of NACCC, the number of self-referrals to the project was considerably lower than anticipated; only around 10 per cent of the expected self-referrals were made, though the number of parents going on to complete the face to face programme of support offered by NACCC was actually in line with expectations. NACCC believe that due to the change in legal aid, few separated parents were approaching solicitors for help, and as solicitors were the main referral route for Child Contact Centres, there was lower awareness of their services in general. In addition, NACCC felt that, with hindsight, the online referral system was challenging for some parents with low literacy or IT skills and for those without an internet connection. There was also some anecdotal evidence that some judges had been frustrated with the length of the process for parents to self-refer and access the services, a view that was also held by NACCC itself when reflecting on the requirement for both parents to complete the intervention when many parents with care are not keen for the non-resident parent to establish contact with their child.

Discussing NACCC with parents, it became apparent that there was **insufficient clarity around the aims and services to be delivered**. While NACCC have social worker support for families, parents tended to see the service purely as a contact centre without any additional services. This is likely to account for the lower than expected improvements in collaboration between parents as a result of the project (only around 20 per cent of parents noted a significant improvement on the collaboration scale). For Pinnacle People, the slow start was attributed to the time taken to **build trust within the community**, to build a network for referrals and to find their place in the market.

Both projects found that it was **difficult to engage both partners**, which meant that the interventions were less likely to be successful. Additionally, the projects had difficulties in sustaining engagement and dealing with **clients presenting with complex problems, ongoing conflict and anger management issues**. Pinnacle People felt that not only was there was a lack of service integration and insufficient support within the intervention to deal with these more complex issues but that the intervention timescale of 12 weeks was insufficient in these cases.

Despite the problems that the projects experienced with referrals and the difficulties in dealing with clients with more complex problems, the **features that facilitated positive outcomes for clients were very similar to those discussed for all the other projects** – skilled and empathetic support workers and a tailored and flexible intervention. Pinnacle

People also thought that the farm setting was particularly conducive to more relaxed interactions and noted that parents often benefited through improved relations, fewer arguments and reduced animosity.

5.5 Project staffing and resourcing

In delivering their services, most of the projects considered that they had been sufficiently resourced to carry out the interventions they had specified in their bids. There was, however, a sense that if projects were to continue with the project they would look to slightly increase resourcing in order to more fully support staff.

As projects were initially unsure about the level of demand, most of the projects built their resourcing as demand increased, although this was usually only in terms of one or two extra staff.

In terms of lessons learned, there were no steps that were seen as universally necessary for all projects. However, factors that should be borne in mind with a view to ensuring the successful staffing and resourcing of any future projects include:

- ensuring that sufficient resource is given to cover administrative requirements. A number of projects considered that they had underestimated the level of administration required, partly in managing the interventions and partly in managing the Management Information (MI) aspects of the contract (e.g. Sills & Betteridge, Family Matters Mediate);

- making better initial estimates of referral numbers so that staffing needs can be more clearly ascertained;

- ensuring sufficient resource to update and develop projects (particularly in related to web-based projects). For example, given the unexpectedly low number of registrations, Relate considered that the payment regime they had suggested – and hence resourcing – was insufficient to update and further develop their web offering;

- ensuring that the necessary skilled staff can be recruited. While this was not an issue for many of the projects, Changing Futures noted that they experienced some difficulties in recruiting skilled staff suitable for their intervention;

- arranging access to a network of mediators and other professionals, such as psychiatrists, especially when dealing with parents with personality disorders (e.g. National Family Mediation);

- providing more face-to-face supervision, development days to share good practice and further in-service training (e.g. NACCC);

- allowing for more breaks and support for staff who work with families with high levels of conflict, which proves to be emotionally challenging work (e.g. National Family Mediation);

- developing a more efficient assessment process with a dedicated assessment team. This is because the assessment process can be long and complex (i.e. there are often other agencies involved from whom it is important to gather evidence, which can take time and cause delays). This issue would be alleviated if there was a dedicated team working on the assessment process (e.g. NACCC).

6   Participant experience

This chapter draws upon the qualitative research and considers participants' experiences of the projects in terms of whether the service provided was relevant to their needs and their views on the support they received. We also explore participants' willingness and/or ability to pay for the service.

While the qualitative feedback on projects was highly positive, it should, however, be viewed in light of the outcomes findings detailed in Chapter 8. In this later chapter we see that while parents gave positive overall ratings to the projects, the longer term outcomes in terms of co-parenting skills were less strongly positive. Nevertheless, the qualitative feedback does show that the projects were felt to be genuinely helpful at a difficult point in parents' lives.

6.1   Relevance of projects to participants' needs

6.1.1   Talk-based projects

There was **almost universal praise for the projects that were offering mediation and therapeutic interventions for their impact, effectiveness and the way support staff dealt with them**.

Overall, amongst the clients taking part in the qualitative research, there was considerable enthusiasm for the projects and the services they offered.

The talk-based projects were seen to benefit parents in four distinct ways:

i)   improving communications between partners;

ii) having a positive psychological impact;

iii) improving relationships between partners and children; and

iv) a number of practical impacts.

> **Box 1: Improved communication**
>
> *'If I didn't have access to this mediation I would not be able to communicate with my ex and his new partner at all.'*
>
> (Client, Changing Futures)
>
> *'If I had to sum up, I would say it was communication between everyone…respecting other people's opinions and decisions because you sit down and listen to how the other person feels throughout.'*
>
> (Client, Changing Futures)
>
> *'Talking to the befriender made me realise things from a different perspective. It helped in the wording of things – less confrontational, more welcoming, understanding.'*
>
> (Client, Family Lives)
>
> *'It did help, realised we could agree on things, not impossible to agree.'*
>
> (Client, Mediation Now)
>
> *'I've learnt, through the counselling, to not be combative on points that are clearly confrontational.'*
>
> (Client, the Tavistock Centre)
>
> *'I learnt how to deal with my husband without getting angry.'*
>
> (Client, Family Lives)

In terms of **improved communication** (See Box 1 for examples), the talk-based projects, through individual and group sessions and mediation, enabled clients to listen to their ex-partner without shouting them down or ignoring them. The projects also helped them to respect their ex-partner's views (even if they did not agree with them), and generally see that there were always two sides to a disagreement. Overall, communication became less confrontational, less angry and generally more productive.

The effect of improved communications was generally considered by both parents and staff to have a **positive impact on the relationship between ex-partners**. This ranged from being able to be in the same room as each other without any sign of verbal or physical violence, through to being able to discuss contact and parenting arrangements for children in a more rational and less angry manner. Box 2 provides some examples of improved relationships. Of particular concern for clients was the deleterious effect of their disintegrating relationship on their children. One of the key outcomes of the talk-based projects – and the effect of improved communications between ex-partners – was improved relationships with children, which in turn resulted in children who appeared to be happier and exhibit less negative behaviours such as moodiness, argumentativeness and anger.

Box 2: Improved relationships

'You might not get a good relationship with your ex-partner…you need to be realistic…but it is a good way to move things forward.'

(Client, National Family Mediation)

'The situation with my daughter is better overall – there's less conflict between everyone.'

(Client, Family Lives)

'She [daughter] *is less angry because she's seeing her dad…He's* [son] *a lot happier when he comes over to see me.'*

(Clients, non-resident parents, Malachi)

'My son is a lot happier and his behaviour has improved…he sees me and his dad getting along. My relationship with my ex has improved. Before we only used to argue, now he invites me in for a cup of tea when I pick Jack up – we both know that [son] *knows what is going on.'*

(Client, National Family Mediation)

Clients often commented on how working with the projects had 'helped them' and made them feel 'better in themselves'. In this respect, there was evidence of **improved psychological health** in terms of increased confidence to deal with situations, a feeling of being a person whose views and opinions were valid and generally being more relaxed in situations that could be challenging. Box 3 provides examples. In addition, talking with project staff could help some clients to move out of a more depressive state, start to look forward to better times and generally give them the impetus to 'sort themselves out'. In some cases this was about taking greater pride in themselves, their personal appearance and their home; in others this was concerned with taking control of their financial situation and in some cases looking for work and considering a '*new future*'.

Box 3: Improved psychological health

'It's made me more confident in what I am doing…it made me feel that wanting things for the children was right, it's not me being unreasonable.'

(Client, Family Lives)

'I was very low when I started, depressed not working, after a little chat with them, it gave me the kick up the backside to get things sorted for my children…Now I have a better outlook, better attitude, I even got some qualifications, I done forklift training in a month and it has opened doors and have just got a job.'

(Client, non-resident parent, Malachi)

'I'm more relaxed when I'm with him [ex-partner]*…I can put my point forward and answer him…Facing him in front of the professionals gave me the courage and it made me think I can do this.'*

(Client, the Tavistock Centre)

'Mediation saved my sanity.'

(Client, Mediation Now)

'…I had a voice. I was valid.'

(Client, National Family Mediation)

There were also a range of **practical outcomes** as a result of working with the talk-based projects. These included working towards an agreed approach to parenting, formalising parenting agreements and agreeing contact arrangements for children. Court action was particularly disliked by clients – even the thought of it for those who had never experienced taking legal action. A number of clients interviewed as part of the qualitative research expressed considerable relief at either avoiding court action altogether, or deciding that further court action was no longer a desirable route. In all cases, clients considered that this outcome was as a result of being encouraged and enabled to talk through the issues with their ex-partner in a safe and non-judgemental environment. Box 4 provides some examples of the practical outcomes of the talk-based projects.

Box 4: Practical outcomes

'[We did lots of activities on how the children see us and what they would want us to do]. *We realised, even though we hate each other, we wanted the same things for the girls and so we had to work together for that.'*

(Client, Mediation Now)

'It has had a big impact. This has gone on for five years and it is a weight off my shoulders to have [a parenting plan in place and no more court]*.'*

(Client, National Family Mediation)

'If Malachi didn't get involved, I probably still wouldn't be seeing my daughter. It probably would have got a lot worse.'

(Client, non-resident parent, Malachi)

'I would much rather talk to people than going to the courts. I feel the courts just try to discredit the one who is not living with his child. [Changing Futures] *is a lot fairer.'*

(Client, Changing Futures)

'We would still be in court [were it not for mediation]*. I think the situation would have gotten worse and worse.'*

(Client, National Family Mediation)

In the light of the benefits that clients felt they had gained from participating in the activities provided by the projects, many of the clients interviewed in the qualitative research were very enthusiastic about the services they had received. The following quote from a client attending Changing Futures sums up the enthusiasm with which most clients taking part in the research talked about their experiences.

'They surpassed [my expectations] *by the mile, surpassed, exceeded, excelled, you name it, I cannot fault them, they've been wonderful, I'm so grateful.'*

(Changing Futures)

However, while clients were **generally very positive about the impact of the interventions, they did not work for everyone** and a minority of clients still had unresolved issues. Typically, where the relationship between ex-partners had completely broken down or where individuals refused to give any ground or compromise, the interventions were much less successful. For example:

'[The structured programme] *caused more harm than good.'*

(Client, Mediation Now)

'It was not successful for our objectives. My ex is an extreme case…she is very adamant and dogmatic and won't budge. She refused to engage in the process. She was very polite, but just not interested in letting me see my children.'

(Client, the Tavistock Centre)

Some clients also felt that had they entered mediation earlier, or been directed to do so by the courts, the outcome may have been different.

'The course didn't work for us – nothing has really improved, though I can see the benefits. I think for us as a couple it was too late. If we'd done it two or three years ago it may have been better…should have been done early on in the separation.'

(Client, Mediation Now)

'It would have been useful during the court case, would have got us talking better then.'

(Client, parent with care, Malachi)

'Because we were involved so heavily in the court, we will never talk again. If we were involved in more mediation, earlier, that would not be the case. If the judge had ordered it or if there was a legal basis to it, we would be in a much better position and our child would be even happier.'

(Client, National Family Mediation)

Two further issues compromised the effectiveness of the projects:

- the **lack of legal backing to parental agreements**:

   'Everything which had a legal foundation was fantastic. Everything in the parenting plan, which didn't have that foundation, was ignored…because they make it so clear it has no legal grounding they have no recourse.'

   (Client, National Family Mediation)

   'That's the weakness. It [agreement] can't be relied on.'

   (Client, Mediation Now)

- a **lack of support once the intervention had finished**:

   'Nowhere to turn if anything went wrong.'

   (Client, Mediation Now)

6.1.2   Information-based services

It was only possible to discuss the interventions with clients from four of the projects that were providing either information-based services and or legal support as client contact details were not available for the web-based projects.

Overall, the clients we were able to talk to were very pleased to receive the projects' services. Clients particularly welcomed the **projects that provided them with a breadth of information and could signpost them to the most relevant services**. This raised their general understanding of the issues that faced them, improved their understanding of their legal rights and, in the case of Children 1st, pushed the parents to think about the impact their separation was having on their children.

Even where ex-partners thought that nothing had really changed between them from being in touch with the project, they nevertheless found the opportunity to discuss their personal circumstances a very positive experience.

> *'I just used them as a sounding board to find out what would help my two girls. It gave me other avenues to explore but it didn't really change anything.'*

> (Client, Children 1st)

Howells and Sills & Betteridge, both of which are primarily expert providers of family legal advice, as well as running mediation and group work services, were also highly regarded by clients. In part this was because they were able to access legal advice from trained legal advisers who were extremely familiar with family law. This allowed clients to understand their rights and the actions that they could take as well as being given an insight into the legal and court process. This in itself was often found helpful as individuals could then consider how they wanted to act. The additional services provided by the legal firms in the form of group work and mediation further helped individuals by increasing their confidence, helping them to see their ex-partner's point of view and at times agreeing on mutually agreeable parenting plans.

Box 5: Comments on the benefits of information-based projects

Being informed of one's rights

'As I went through the system I was told I would never be able to get the court system changed and that this was it until my child was 16. Having talked to Children 1st I learnt that this was not the case. It was great to have someone tell me that she has rights.'

(Client, Children 1st)

'The service is good for those who what to be told what their rights are and what is out there for help.'

(Client, Children 1st)

'Ultimately Children 1st helped fill in a lot of the blanks about my and my child's rights.'

(Client, Children 1st)

Having a greater understanding of one's information needs

'[It's had a long term impact] in terms of being more confident in the types of advice I need.'

(Client, Children 1st)

Signposting

'Without Children 1st I'd have struggled to get in touch with the people I am dealing with now – the solicitors.'

(Client, Children 1st)

Focus on children

'They have given me to confidence to try to do better for my daughter. Using the service did not make me feel like I was being selfish. I was trying to show I was doing the best for my children.'

(Client, Children 1st)

'The legal advice was really helpful. It helped me think through what I wanted to do…didn't use the other services as once I had the legal position my ex stopped making such a fuss.'

(Client, Sills & Betteridge)

6.1.3   Contact-based services

NACCC and Pinnacle People were designed to enable the non-resident parent to see and interact with their children.

Clients considered that the **biggest impact of NACCC's project was that it provided a safe, secure, supervised environment in which a parent was able to see the child/ children on a regular basis, without having to go through the courts to achieve this**. As such, there may be a degree of blurring between parents' perceptions of the NACCC services funded as part of the Innovation Fund and those that were offered outside the Innovation Fund.

> *'Without the Contact Centre, I wouldn't have had any contact with my son unless I'd taken my estranged wife to court.'*
>
> (Client, NACCC)

> *'If it wasn't for NACCC…I wouldn't have seen* [daughter]*, I wouldn't have known what to do. I would have had to go to court.'*
>
> (Client, NACCC)

> *'Comfortable. I felt safe with the boys being there. Everything was explained to me.'*
>
> (Client, NACCC)

The way in which the project worked also meant that it **reduced the costs and time associated with going to court to gain contact with the children, encouraged an enhanced relationship between ex-partners, greater communication, reduced conflict and provided overall emotional support**.

> '[The Contact Centre was] *the bridge that took us from being together as a married couple to being separated parents.'*
>
> (Client, NACCC)

> *'It* [Contact Centre] *has acted as an enabler to maintain the relationship.'*
>
> (Client, NACCC)

> *'A great way to communicate, to sit in a room again.'*
>
> (Client, NACCC)

> *'A godsend, there were days I didn't think I could cope.'*
>
> (Client, NACCC)

> *'I wouldn't have coped without the support of people at NACCC.'*
>
> (Client, NACCC)

Both staff and clients thought that their experience of **using NACCC meant that they had saved a great deal of money, time and stress in avoiding having to go to court, as well as saving the cost of counselling** (as counselling and mediation were available through the project's social work support). However, not all those clients participating in the research realised that there were additional services available and some others chose not to use them.

One downside of the project which clients commented on was that the Parenting Plans had no legal force, which in many cases meant that ex-partners would ignore them.

The project did not work for all couples. Some clients simply used NACCC as a means of seeing their child/children rather than trying to reduce conflict or engender better communication. Others used it as leverage against the non-resident parent, showing that they were in control by forcing the non-resident parent to use the NACCC to see their child/children.

Some of the non-resident parents said that they felt uncomfortable being in such a heavily supervised and alien environment, while others felt that they were unfairly being grouped together with parents who had far more serious issues than they did such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, or drug dependency.

Non-resident parents also commented that the visits were not long enough, nor were the frequency of visits often and regular enough. This, it was said, was because visits were dictated by their ex-partner with no account being taken of their own preferences.

Pinnacle People provide a contact facility based on a city farm. In addition to providing non-resident parents contact with their children, they also provide a range of facilities such as cooking which both the parents and the child can engage in. Most of the clients thought the setting was both beautiful and relaxing and provided a very easy-going setting for visiting their children. The additional activities were thought to be age-appropriate and in many cases allowed ex-partners to talk with each other in a more relaxed manner.

Overall, Pinnacle People was highly regarded by the clients interviewed. A typical comment was:

> *'Overall using the service has been very positive – it has helped our lives move forward. It has put in place a regular timetable and more structure.'*

> (Client, Pinnacle People)

The contact arrangements **allowed non-resident partners to make, or improve relationships with their children**.

> *'…a closer bond with the older* [children] *and with the girls.'*

> (Client, Pinnacle People)

> *'It is better as we reached an agreement – she couldn't use our daughter as a weapon and have control over my life…having a timetable and rota makes it a lot easier as we don't have as much contact, I know when I can see my daughter and it makes it so that I can work.'*

> (Client, Pinnacle People)

This, in turn, meant that **the children were a lot happier and the non-resident parent benefited emotionally**.

In addition, **ex-partners gained in other ways, including gaining confidence by meeting people in similar situations, avoiding the cost and stresses of going to court and being supported to look for work**:

> *'I was able to meet other single parents, which I enjoyed…increased my confidence as a parent.'*
>
> (Client, Pinnacle People)

> *'[Organisations were telling me that] there wasn't anything they could do for me and we would have to hash it out in court…'*
>
> (Client, Pinnacle People)

> *'[The most useful element of the service] was the support I received to look for work… helped to create a CV…gained advice on different career paths.'*
>
> (Client, Pinnacle People)

As with other projects, Pinnacle People was not always successful as it was dependent on both partners engaging with the contact arrangements. For example:

> *'[Staff] could not really have done more…it was down to [the mother] not wanting to.'*
>
> (Client, Pinnacle People)

6.2 Project participants' views of the support received from project staff

Clients using the projects were universally positive about the quality of support they received from support workers, irrespective of whether they felt they had benefited or not from using the project's services.

Project staff were complimented for their knowledge and professionalism:

> *'[Legal adviser] was just brilliant. Not only did she really know her way round the law but she was lovely to deal with, always available and incredibly motivating when I got down.'*
>
> (Client, Sills & Betteridge)

> *'The person I was working with was extremely competent and extremely understanding. She clearly had great experience and was a very good listener and was very good at guiding the questions towards the right context.'*
>
> (Client, the Tavistock Centre)

The approach of project staff to parents was felt to contribute to the success of the projects. Project staff were considered to be: caring; good listeners; interested; very supportive; able to offer practical advice where appropriate; and trustworthy.

> *'They look like they really care about what's going on with the people. They actually want to know if they can help even more.'*

(Client, Malachi)

> *'I could say what I wanted…was given the opportunity to speak and someone took interest, never had that before.'*

(Client, Malachi)

> *'I felt that I was really listened to.'*

(Client, NACCC)

> *'It was really constructive that they took a particular thing which was important and needed action…they said to him, "well if you do have opinions then you need to research your opinions and do something about them".'*

(Client, Tavistock Centre)

> *'They* [staff] *support you in what's important.'*

(Client, NACCC)

> *'You feel you can trust them* [staff]*.'*

(Client NACCC)

> *'I found Children 1ˢᵗ really easy to talk to. The whole system – maybe just the people on the phone. You know how some days you can find people having a good day at work, and some days people are having a bad day at work. With CF they always seemed to be having good days.'*

(Client, Children 1ˢᵗ)

There were generally no negative comments about the frequency with which services were offered to clients, with projects being flexible and trying as best they could to fit in with clients' responsibilities.

As discussed in earlier sections of this report, some clients wanted more frequent access to services (e.g. more frequent contact arrangements for Pinnacle People clients). Others felt that services should have been extended as they were not long enough where ex-partners had very entrenched issues. Geography also played a part in making some of the services less accessible than required (e.g. the rural catchment of Sills & Betteridge) and called for more outreach services. Oversubscribed services were a potential issue for the Tavistock Centre, with some clients complaining that they were placed on a waiting list and that in cases had to wait a long time before they were brought into the project.

'Referral was not timely. It took months and there was a lack of transparency…they said we were on a waiting list. We waited 6 months and then were suddenly top of the list…It was very stressful as I was using this as an alternative to litigation.'

(Client, the Tavistock Centre)

'It took about 8 weeks for them to contact me and then it started after about 12…I rang to chase them up a couple of times because I obviously needed to know when it was going to hit so it would impact on my work, so it was a little bit annoying.'

(Client, the Tavistock Centre)

As such, in order to better meet clients' needs, even greater flexibility of provision would be of value, with evening and weekend services likely to be very well received.

6.3 Ability and willingness to pay

Project staff noted that many of their clients were either on a low income or were financially challenged because they may be supporting two households as a result of separating. Travel costs and current or past legal bills could also be taking a toll on their financial situation.

Consequently, **when asked about paying for the service they had received, clients were very mixed in their opinions**.

Clients who had used the **legal advice** projects – Howells and Sills & Betteridge – generally indicated that they would not be willing to pay for the same service. This was either because they were on a low income and could not afford to pay legal costs or, if they could afford to pay their legal costs, would have instructed a solicitor directly.

'What's the point in paying [for the legal service]. *I might as well go direct to the solicitor, not that I could afford it'*

(Client, Sills & Betteridge)

Some project clients had used private **mediation services** before and recognised the costs involved – often upwards of £100 per hour.

Clients that had used mediation services and had found them to be successful were more likely to express a willingness to pay in the future, but this was very dependent on whether they could afford to do so. Clients suggested anything between £5 and £70 as a possible contribution to the costs.

'I would pay it if it was financially possible to do it.'

(Client, Family Lives)

However, to pay anything like the true cost of a mediation session was generally out of people's reach and if there was a cost they would be unlikely to seek mediation.

'Unthinkable to spend that amount of money.'

(Client, Mediation Now)

'I'd be in a similar situation with my ex but I'd probably be bankrupt!'

(Client, National Family Mediation)

'If it had cost, I wouldn't have been in a position to use it.'

(Client, Family Lives)

'Single parents find it hard to manage financially…mediation comes bottom of the list.'

(Client, Family Lives)

Clients that had not found mediation to be beneficial were, unsurprisingly, very unlikely to be willing pay anything at all.

Should mediation become a paid service, clients thought that the payment structure should be based on the following, although as discussed above, fewer people would seek mediation:

• a free 'taster session';

• a guaranteed outcome;

'You need to know what you're going to get at the end of it.'

(Client, Family Lives)

'I'm not saying I wouldn't pay. If it was reasonable enough. As long as I'm going to get some justice out of it.'

(Client, Malachi)

'I'd want a guarantee that I was going to see my kid at the end of it. I wouldn't want to be paying all that money and then not seeing my child.'

(Client, Malachi)

• legally binding outcomes.

'What is agreed at mediation is legally binding.'

(Client, Mediation Now)

Clients using the **contact-based** services also expressed likely difficulties with paying for the service, although there was a willingness to make a contribution:

'I don't know how much I could pay. Possibly £20 for the session. But if the session cost, say £80 then I would wouldn't be able to use it…not see my children…couldn't afford it'

(Client, Pinnacle People)

Project staff were concerned that if charges were introduced there would be a significant drop in the number of people who used them – especially those on low incomes and those who needed the services the most. As a staff member at Malachi argued, asking people to pay for the services puts in place an additional barrier to engagement, especially when there are already numerous barriers that stop ex-partners seeking help and support.

Staff at Mediation Now also raised the issue of means testing and were concerned about whether (and how) this might work. In their view, means testing would introduce additional delays to people getting the support they need and it would need to be applied to both partners in the couple. As financial issues are often a key point of conflict within separating couples, they thought that means testing would simply add an additional stress point and place an additional barrier to seeking help.

Amongst the clients participating in the qualitative research, it was the fathers who were more likely to express a willingness to pay for the service they had received. But, as a staff member at Malachi noted, this could have a negative impact on the money available for the child:

> *'I think some of them would pay, though a few of our Dads don't work…If they are having to pay for the service and we are trying to set up a financial arrangement for the children, if you charge them they will give less to support their children as their budgets are so tight.'*

> (Staff, Malachi)

7 Relationship with DWP

This chapter focuses on the relationship between the projects and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), using feedback gathered from the qualitative research. It considers the nature of the support provided by DWP and how that was viewed by the projects.

7.1 Views about the support provided by DWP

In considering the relationship that projects had with DWP, comments fell into three broad categories: the initial bidding process; the management information (MI) that needed to be collected; and the overall relationship with the DWP project team.

In terms of the **initial bidding process** and subsequent negotiations, many of the projects commented on the complexity of the materials that needed to be completed and the considerable amount of work that had to take place in order to support and submit a bid. Some of the projects were used to bidding for financial support and while they recognised the amount of work that was required, they nevertheless considered it a fairly arduous task. For others, the bidding process came as a bit if a shock.

> *"In terms of engaging with the process and getting a contract, that was very hard work. This might put some organisations off. It was incredibly bureaucratic and a lot of organisations will say we are not going any further."*

> (Staff, Family Matters Mediate)

In addition, bidders were required to suggest their own targets and payment triggers as part of their bid and again some bidders were unfamiliar with this approach. However, many of the projects had never bid to provide services in this way before and were surprised that given the 'experimental' nature of the projects that the contract terms, targets and payment triggers would be enforced in such a rigid way. With hindsight, some of the projects realised that they had committed themselves to provide services with targets that they could not deliver, either because they had been unable to source sufficient clients or because clients were reluctant to engage. They had hoped for some flexibility, but realised that DWP's terms and conditions did not allow this.

> *'You've won the contract, you've got to accept our terms…"Can we renegotiate that element?" "No, those are the terms and you've got to stick to it".'*

> (Staff, Relate)

> *'It's a bit rigid/stuck…we're not paid on every outcome…too prescriptive'*

> (Staff, Spurgeons)

Projects recognised that they would have to **collect MI** as it was part of their contract. While this added to their administrative burden – and some of the projects commented that they had not costed for enough administrative support – projects nevertheless tried to build the MI requirement into their processes, some with more success than others.

Requests for additional information, or requests that were urgent made it difficult for projects. Projects rarely realised that they could be called upon to provide MI at very short notice.

'Sometimes there is a demand for something [from DWP] *and they need it yesterday. We have resource to deal with that, but for other projects it might be a nightmare… needs to be more advance planning, less red tape and more trust.'*

(Staff, the Tavistock Centre)

Despite some of the negative comments about the initial bidding process and the administrative requirements of collecting MI, projects were universally positive about their working relationship with DWP. DWP project staff were seen as understanding, encouraging, positive, engaging and wanting the projects to be successful:

'I felt that they [DWP] *wanted it to be successful.'*

(Staff, Mediation Now)

'They've been nothing other than supportive.'

(Staff, Mediation Now)

'Very hands on. Very engaged. Always available. Available for regular catch-ups and things like that.'

(Staff, Relate)

'Understanding…Patient…Encouraging…They want the projects to work.'

(Staff, Mediation Now)

'Positive, enough contact, but not overwhelming.'

(Staff, Family Lives)

'…relationship with DWP was strong and very good.'

(Staff, Pinnacle People)

'Absolutely fantastic, easy to deal with, really friendly. The initial process when you start applying is ghastly, but they put on a lot of workshops and it clicked. [DWP staff member] *said something and I could fill it in…the team* [at DWP] *were amazing.'*

(Staff, Mediation Now)

'DWP staff have been both enabling and supportive, for example, staff provide information when required and are very responsive to queries.'

(Staff, Family Matters Mediate)

'…clear expectations were set.'

(Staff, National Family Mediation)

Projects also had some comments that they thought would enable future working relations with DWP to be enhanced. These were:

- Greater flexibility and less prescriptiveness where the project is clearly experimental and techniques are relatively untried;

- Further understanding about how professional firms work and establish their costings, especially legal firms;

  'DWP need to have a better understanding of legal firms/providers, in particular their limitations…they are getting there.'

  (Staff, Howells)

- More lead time for marketing and establishing networks;

- Evaluation framework and output requirements to be specified prior to the project starting as this would enable the provider to develop appropriate data collection tools;

- Streamlined monthly reporting of MI data;

- More scope for sharing and learning between providers of the innovation projects. The events held in Birmingham and London were useful, but deemed to be too short.

  'In considering their dealings with the DWP project team over the course of the contract and the relationship that they had developed as provider and contract manager, the DWP project team were universally seen as a "Great department to work with."'

  (Staff, the Tavistock Centre)

8 Outcomes

This chapter examines a range of outcome measures and is based upon data collected at three different points in the parents' journey. The efficacy of parents' co-parenting skills was collected at the start of their interaction with the projects, immediately after their interactions with the projects had finished and, once again, an average of seven months after they started their involvement with the projects. These data on co-parenting skills are discussed in Section 8.2.

Section 8.3 draws upon survey data on a broader range of outcome measures including contact arrangements and court interactions – this was collected in the survey which took place around seven months after parents started their involvement with the projects.

8.1 Qualitative evidence of improved ability to collaborate

The qualitative research provided indicators in its own right of a range of benefits that would help parents collaborate including:

• increased self-confidence;

• safer and more effective communication;

• increased ability to communicate and negotiate with ex-partners;

• having greater respect for, and understanding of, the other person's point of view;

• the ability to remain calm in difficult and challenging circumstances;

• an increased sense of wellbeing;

• reduced hostility between ex-partners;

• changes in behaviour towards the ex-partner, including greater collaboration and less hostile communication;

• improved parenting skills; and

• increased knowledge of the legal and court processes.

8.2 Changes in levels of effective co-parenting as measured through PAM and Collaboration Question scores

8.2.1 Research questions and methodology

In Section 3.2, we introduced the Parenting Alliance Measure (PAM) used in the evaluation to measure parents' co-parenting behaviours (Abidin and Konold, 1999). Changes in parents' PAM scores have been used as the primary measure of 'improvement' among families receiving support from the projects (albeit recognising the shortcomings of not having counterfactual data in order to attribute improvements to the work of the projects,

see Section 3.3). Measuring changes in scores between the start and end of parents' involvement with the project (baseline and post-support) provides a measure of immediate improvement. Then, using data collected via the TNS BMRB telephone survey an average of seven months after the start of their engagement with the projects, we measure a more medium-term effect of the support provided, comparing parents' baseline scores with their scores a few months later. More information about the way we have used PAM data is provided in Appendices C1 and C2.

We use the PAM data from the three time points with the five following aims:

1   **To provide a baseline PAM profile of projects' clients**: how effectively are clients co-parenting prior to support, and what difficulties are they facing?

2   **To measure change in PAM scores from baseline to immediately post-support**: how effectively are clients co-parenting immediately post support, and how far has this changed since baseline?

3   **To measure change in clients' PAM scores from baseline to a point an average of seven months later**: how effectively are clients co-parenting at this time, and how far has this changed since baseline?

4   **To measure the sustainability of any improvement in PAM scores immediately post-support to the time of the survey**: do any post-support improvements in co-parenting sustain over time, and is there evidence of further improvement?

5   **To assess whether particular demographic groups achieve greater levels of change than others post-support**: do some groups of parents improve their co-parenting after support more than others?

In Appendix E, we document and describe (in text and graphs) the baseline, post-support and follow-up data from each project. In our analysis, for the projects using the PAM, we focus mainly on:

• the mean PAM score at baseline, post-support and follow-up;

• the mean PAM score change between baseline and post-support, and between baseline and follow-up; and

• the proportion of parents, at each data point, whose co-parenting is rated as 'dysfunctional' (score 20-42), 'problematic' (score 43-56), 'marginal' (score 57-63), 'within normal limits' (score 64-100).[25]

We take a similar approach to the analysis of the shorter collaboration measure used by three of the projects, focusing on mean scores, and mean score change[26].

Throughout, although we focus on changes which are statistically significant (at a 95 per cent confidence level), the small sample sizes for some projects mean that we also look for consistent (but sometimes non-significant) patterns in the data. Looking across the projects, baseline PAM sample sizes are as low as 47, post-support sample sizes are as low as 13 and survey sample sizes are as low as 27.

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[25]   In the project-level reporting in Appendix E, we also report on the proportion of parents moving up or down a level (e.g. from problematic to marginal) between the data points.

[26]   As the four questions do not form a validated scale, it was not possible to categorise participants into levels of severity comparable to the PAM scoring system.

In the text below, we summarise the key findings, including the pattern across the projects.

8.2.2　Overview of the PAM and Collaboration Question results

The PAM scores recorded prior to parents' involvement with the projects highlight the poor levels of co-parenting among parents turning to the projects. For 11 of the 13 projects, fewer than a third of parents scored within 'normal limits' at baseline – that is, prior to their involvement with the project – with two projects having fewer than one in ten parents scoring as normal. For all but one project, at least half (but as high as 85 per cent) of parents scored as 'dysfunctional' or 'problematic' at this stage.

Within the majority of projects using PAM, parents' mean PAM scores improved in the period between the start and end of their involvement with the project. In other words, by the end of their involvement with the project, on average, they reported statistically significant improvements in their co-parenting behaviours. For eight of the 13 projects, the mean change score was between seven and 14 points (on a scale from 20 to 100). One project saw a 21-point mean score change, and four saw mean improvements of between only one and four points[27].

However, for the majority of the nine projects with survey data, which provides parents' PAM scores around seven months after the start of their involvement with the project, parents' mean PAM scores had dropped by this point. On average, their scores were slightly higher than they had been at the start of their involvement with the project (sometimes statistically significantly so, sometimes not), but considerably lower than they had been immediately post-support. In other words, the level of improvement reported immediately post-support had not been fully sustained. Mean scores after seven months were between zero and five points higher (on a scale from 20 to 100) than prior to their involvement with the project.

While it is not possible to make direct comparisons between PAM and the collaboration questions used by the online/telephone-based projects, parents' scores on the collaboration questions suggest similarly high levels of poor co-parenting among the parents turning to these projects for support. Across the three projects, the parents' scores averaged 3.6, 4.4 and 6.3 (on a scale of 0 to 16). However, these three projects did not see the same levels of change as the 13 projects reported above. On average, parents' scores increased by no more than one point between the start and end of their involvement with the project (statistically significant for one project). These smaller increases may reflect a 'lighter touch' nature of support provided by these projects, which is discussed further below.

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[27]　For all but three projects, the change from baseline to post-support was statistically significant. Those with non-significant levels of change had small sample sizes (under 30 parents) providing both baseline and post-support PAM data. PAM has not been used previously in a UK context to measure change in levels of effective co-parenting in separated couples. Therefore, while we report on levels of change which are statistically significant and which projects led to smaller or larger levels of change, we cannot evaluate the extent to which projects with the smaller levels of change were or were not ineffective.

In the next three sections, as in earlier chapters, we divide the projects into those with a primary focus on (a) mediation or therapeutic intervention (b) contact and (c) information. We report on the pattern of change within each project type. In Section 8.2.6, we combine the data across all projects to test for differences in change scores across different parent sub-groups, in particular focusing on the length of time since parents separated, whether they are a parent with care or non-resident parent, and the age of their youngest child.

8.2.3   Talk-based projects

In this section, we focus on the following eight projects[28].

- Changing Futures
- Family Lives
- Family Matters Mediate
- Malachi
- Mediation Now
- National Family Mediation
- Resolution
- Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships

Changing Futures, Family Matters Mediate, Mediation Now, National Family Mediation and Resolution were offering mediation support, while Family Lives, Malachi and the Tavistock Centre were offering therapeutic interventions. These broad groupings hide variations in the aims, target groups and services offered by different projects discussed in Chapter 1.

Tables 8.1 and 8.2 provide some key statistics for each of the projects, grouped according to the nature of the support provided and the parenting collaboration measure that they administered. Statistically significant mean change scores (at a 95 per cent confidence level) are indicated with an asterisk.

As a general pattern, parents coming to the eight contact-based projects were entering with higher levels of co-parenting difficulties than those approaching the other projects. Between nine and 27 per cent of parents were within normal limits at baseline, compared to a range of 28 to 51 per cent among parents approaching the information and contact-based projects.

As a group of projects, these saw the greatest levels of change in parents' co-parenting, compared to projects offering information or contact. Comparing mean PAM scores as parents entered the projects with their scores immediately post-support, six of these eight projects saw a change of between seven (National Family Mediation) and 14 (Family Matters Mediate) points. And the average mean score change among Malachi's clients was 21 points (with a shift in the proportion of parents within normal limits from 14 per cent to 67 per cent). However, after (an average of) seven months from the start of the intervention, parents' mean scores had dropped compared to the immediately post-support level[29]. Although parents' mean PAM scores were still higher than they were prior to support, they were only three to five points higher, rather than the seven to 14 points reported immediately post-support.

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28   Measures prior to and immediately post-support are available for all these projects, and seven-month follow-up survey data are available for all projects except Malachi.

29   Note: There is no survey data from the four month follow-up for Malachi.

The exception within this group is the Tavistock Centre projects' parents. At baseline, their parents scored lower on PAM than parents in any other project, with only nine per cent within normal limits at this point, and 85 per cent scoring as dysfunctional or problematic. However, immediately post-support, their mean PAM score rose (non-significantly) by 1.7 points. By the follow-up survey, the change between baseline and survey was -0.1 (based on very small numbers). While the base sizes for the Tavistock Centre are too small to report individually, there is a consistent pattern of relatively small changes for all outcome measures, which could have significant impacts given the very challenging issues that this group of parents were experiencing. It is not possible to fully isolate the extent to which this is due to the nature of the intervention from the impact of the challenging profile of their parents. However, there may indeed be a correlation between the fact that the Tavistock Centre's parents were the most likely to fall outside the normal PAM limits at the start of their intervention and their relative lack of progress thereafter.

Table 8.1   Collaboration measure summary statistics, information-based projects

	Children 1st	OnePlusOne	Relate
Mean score			
Baseline	3.6	4.4	6.3
Post-support	4.3	4.1	n/a
Survey	n/a	3.6	[*]
Mean score change			
Baseline to post-support	1.2*	-0.02	n/a
Baseline to survey	n/a	-0.63*	[*]

[*] Scores not shown as base size below 40.

8.2.4   Contact-based projects

In this section, we focus on the following two projects:

• NACCC

• Pinnacle People

Unfortunately, what we can report on these two projects is very limited, so these results need to be considered in light of other evaluation data collected on these projects. The numbers of parents providing PAM data are quite low from each project (particularly post-support data), and neither have sufficient numbers of parents who both provided pre-support data and took part in the survey for us to report on them.

As shown in Table 8.1, involvement in neither of these projects resulted in statistically significant improvements in parents' co-parenting. However, for Pinnacle People at least, this probably reflects the small sample sizes – as there was a mean score improvement of 8.6 among these families between baseline and immediately post-support (with this level of change measuring as significant among projects with larger sample sizes). On the other hand, for NACCC clients, the mean score change was only 1.2.

Table 8.2   PAM score summary statistics[30]

| | Changing Futures | Mediation | | | Resolution | Therapeutic | | | Contact | | | Information | |
		Family Matters Mediate	Mediation Now	National Family Mediation		Family Lives	Malachi	Tavistock Centre	NACCC	Pinnacle People	Howells	Sills & Betteridge	Spurgeons
% within normal limits													
Baseline	19	9	27	11	26	27	14	9	31	41	28	31	51
Post-support[31]	47*	52*	56*	35*	37*	49*	67*	[*]	[*]	[*]	[*]*	34*	[*]
Survey[32]	38*	26*	31	28*	[*]	[*]	n/a	[*]	n/a	n/a	38*	35	n/a
Mean score													
Baseline	49.6	45.7	54.6	48.8	52.3	51.7	46.4	47.3	56.2	58.7	54.1	54.9	63.7
Post-support	61.7	61.7	64.8	56.9	61.6	65.4	67.3	[*]	[*]	[*]	[*]	56.1	[*]]
Survey	54.8	49.6	57.1	52.9	[*]	[*]	n/a	[*]	n/a	n/a	56.7	54.8	n/a
Mean score change													
Baseline to post-support	11.9*	14.2*	10.1*	7.2*	9.0*	12.4*	21.0*	[*]	[*]	[*]	[*]	1.8*	[*]
Baseline to survey	5.4*	4.9*	4.5*	2.7*	[*]	n/s	n/a	[*]	n/a	n/a	4.9*	1.1	n/a

[*] Scores not shown as base size below 40.

30 See Appendix D for precise sample sizes. Throughout this chapter, figures based on sample sizes of fewer than 40 are shown in square brackets. Note that mean score changes shown in the table are based on respondents who provided data at the two relevant time points (i.e. both baseline and post-support; both baseline and survey). Therefore, the change score will not necessary equate to the difference between the mean scores shown in the table.

31 An asterisk in this row marks a significant difference from baseline. The test is based on the sub-set of parents completing the baseline and post-support PAM.

32 An asterisk in this row marks a significant difference from baseline. The test is based on the sub-set of parents completing the baseline and survey PAM.

8.2.5 Information-based projects

In this section, we focus on the following six projects[33].

- Children 1st

- Howells

- OnePlusOne

- Relate

- Sills & Betteridge

- Spurgeons

All of these projects except Spurgeons had a relatively wide and 'generalist' approach, aiming to reach all separating and separated parents – although Sills & Betteridge were focusing on parents in rural areas and Howells were focusing on low to middle-income parents. So, it is appropriate to consider – and make comparison across – these five projects. Spurgeons, on the other hand, was focusing on young parents, and we therefore report on them separately.

For the five 'generalist' projects, levels of reported improvement in co-parenting were very modest in comparison to the projects offering mediation or therapeutic intervention (see Table 8.1). Among the information-based projects, the face-to-face (Howells, Sills & Betteridge) and telephone services (Children 1st) appear to have performed somewhat better than the online services (OnePlusOne, Relate). For most of the information-based projects, the amount of contact with parents was relatively limited and so we would not necessarily expect the projects to have had a large or immediate impact on co-parenting. Their performance in terms of other outcome measures was, however, more positive in some cases and this is discussed further in Section 8.3.

Parents working with Howells (who received individual rather than couple support) reported the greatest level of change among these projects. Among these parents, there was a statistically significant mean score change of 4.9 from baseline to seven-month follow-up survey, with an increase in parents scoring within normal limits from 24 per cent at baseline to 36 per cent in the survey. However, the other projects saw very small, and largely non-significant, improvements (if any) both between baseline and immediately post-support, and between baseline and survey follow-up. Sills & Betteridge clients had a statistically significant mean score change of 1.8 (on a scale of 30 to 100) between baseline and immediately post-support, falling slightly (and into non-significance) to 1.1 by the time of the survey. The picture for Children 1st is very similar (statistically significant mean score change of 1.2 on scale of 0 to 16). On the other hand, parents using the online services provided by OnePlusOne and Relate did not report significant improvements (although very few Relate clients provided post-support data).

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[33] For Howells, Sills & Betteridge and Spurgeons, the findings are based on PAM data, while for Children 1st, OnePlusOne and Relate, they are based on the collaboration questions. As well as the measures prior to and immediately post-support, we have (approximately) four-month follow-up survey data for Howells, OnePlusOne, Relate and Sills & Betteridge.

It is difficult to draw firm conclusions from the PAM data available from Spurgeons clients, as small numbers attended (47), very few of whom (13) completed PAM scores post-support. However, among these, we found a statistically significant mean score improvement of 13.2, with a doubling of the proportion whose co-parenting scored as being within normal limits.

8.2.6 Change scores across parent sub-groups

In this section, we report on the extent to which parents with different family demographics or circumstances reported differential levels of change in their co-parenting, as measured by the PAM scale[34]. For this analysis, we collate the PAM data collected by the 13 projects and combine it with parents' profile data from the Management Information System. We focus on three factors of particular interest:

- **Parent status**: Researchers and practitioners report that it is harder to engage non-resident parents than parents with care in support services for separated parents, so the extent to which non-resident parents involved in the projects reported improvements in their co-parenting is of particular interest to the evaluation of the projects[35].

- **Length of time since parents separated**: Once problems are entrenched, it can be harder to engage parents in ways to improve their co-parenting approach and, on average, the amount of contact that non-resident fathers have with their children decreases over time[36]. So, the relative success of the projects with parents who separated some time ago, in comparison with those separated more recently, is again of particular interest.

- **Age of youngest child**: Again, there is some, although mixed, evidence that co-parenting after separation is more difficult with older children[37]. Non-resident fathers are less likely to have contact with older children (although this may, to a degree, be driven by an association with the length of time since separation) and relationships are more complex. So, again, there is interest in the extent to which the projects were successful in changing the co-parenting behaviour of parents with children of different ages (measured by age of youngest child).

In our analysis, we were looking for evidence of whether the projects worked better for some parent sub-groups than others, or whether they appeared to work equally well across the separated parent population. Clearly, having aggregated the data from across 13 projects, we are identifying overall trends in the effectiveness of the relationship support provided across all the projects, rather than commenting on the effectiveness of particular projects (some of which focused on particular groups).

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[34] We had only very limited ability to analyse the collaboration question data by parents' profiles. Only a very limited amount of demographic data was collected for the three projects during the follow-up survey (rather than as MI data). Only OnePlusOne had a reasonable survey sample size and we found no statistical differences by demographics for this project.

[35] Burgess, A. (2009). *Fathers and Parenting Interventions: what works*.

[36] Bryson, C., Skipp, A., Allbeson, J., Poole, E., Ireland, E. and Marsh, V. (2013b). *Kids aren't free: the child maintenance arrangements of single parents on benefit in 2012*.

[37] Peacey, V and Hunt, J. (2008). *Problematic contact after separation and divorce? A national survey of parents*.

Table 8.3 shows that the effectiveness of the projects does appear to vary for different parent groups, but largely in the period immediately post-support:

Parent type: Projects appear to be effective for all parent types, at least in the short term, but most effective for parents with care. Immediately post-support, parents with care, non-resident parents and those with shared care all reported statistically significant improvements in co-parenting, as measured by the PAM score (indicated in the table by asterisks). However (as indicated by the greyed out cells), parents with care and those with shared care reported statistically significantly larger average changes than non-resident parents. By the time of the follow-up survey, only parents with care reported statistically significant improvements in their PAM scores since the baseline.

Length of time since separation: Projects appear to be effective for both parents who had separated recently and parents who separated longer ago. Our aggregate analysis initially appears to suggest that the co-parenting of those who separated more than a year ago changes more than those who separated more recently, both when measured immediately post-support and in the follow-up survey. However, this counter-intuitive finding is driven by project-level differences. Some of the talk-based projects specifically targeted parents who had been separated for more than two years and had entrenched difficulties. Conversely, parents who split within the last year were more likely than other parents to use information services (with lower mean change scores), rather than mediation and therapeutic services.

Age of youngest child: Again, projects appear to be effective for parents with children of different ages, with statistically significant mean score improvements immediately post-support and at the follow-up survey. However, immediately post-support, the level of mean score change increases with the age of the youngest child, suggesting that, overall, projects are working best for parents with older children. However, again, this may be due to project-level differences.

With this type of aggregate analysis, pooling parents using a diverse set of services and support, it is hard to disentangle whether differences in the levels of change observed for different groups of parents are driven by the families themselves or by the type of projects they have approached. The relatively low sample sizes mean that sub-group analysis at a project level is not possible. So, rather than concentrating on the size of the differences between parent groups, the key message to take from this analysis is that, overall, the projects appear to be working well for parents in different circumstances and demographic groups.

In addition to the three factors shown in Table 8.3, we looked at the following profile variables: parent gender; length of time together as a couple; highest qualification level; and number of children. We found no statistically significant differences in parents' mean score changes across these groups, apart from the number of children. Parents with one child (as opposed to two or more) reported a higher mean score change between baseline and survey (but not between baseline and immediately post-support). The mean change score between baseline and survey was 3.8 for parents with one child, and 1.0 for parents with two or more children.

Table 8.3   PAM change scores, by parent status, time since separation and age of youngest child

	Parent status			Time since separation (years)			Age of youngest child (years)		
	PWC	**NRP**	**Shared care**	**<1**	**1-5**	**>5**	**<4**	**4-10**	**11-18**
Baseline score	49.0	56.2	60.4	59.1	51.2	46.7	54.6	51.8	52.5
Mean score change: baseline to post-support	6.4*	3.9*	7.2*	3.7*	6.9*	7.5*	4.8*	6.6*	7.7*
Mean score change: baseline to survey	3.1*	1.4	-0.6	-0.1	2.4*	4.9*	2.4*	2.2*	3.0*
Bases:									
Baseline score	1,551	960	417	919	1,354	687	1,224	1,646	416
Mean score change: baseline to post-support	518	333	179	259	538	258	394	630	158
Mean score change: baseline to survey	385	177	99	184	344	165	267	387	101

The greyed cells indicate that the differences in mean scores between the groups within each top-row heading are statistically significant

8.3   Other outcome measures from the follow-up surveys

In addition to the co-parenting measures discussed earlier in this chapter, the evaluation programme also collected data on a number of other outcome measures, including changes in contact arrangements, presence of child maintenance agreements, usage of family courts and engagement with other support services. These data were collected an average of seven months after parents' involvement with the projects had started and were based on parents' perceptions of change at that time.

It should be noted throughout this section that base sizes are relatively small when looking at individual providers and that data based on base sizes lower than 40 are highlighted in square brackets and should be interpreted accordingly. Survey data are not reported for the smaller projects (Children 1st, Malachi, NACCC and Spurgeons).

Throughout this section we show the results for each provider as well as looking at findings amongst different sub-groups. We have highlighted the research method that was used for each project in the tabulation headings – telephone based (CATI) or web based (CAWI) – which reflects the way the projects were delivered. Face-to-face and telephony projects were evaluated using CATI and online projects using CAWI. When commenting on differences between sub-groups, the same provisos as outlined in Section 8.2.6 apply.

The online projects Relate and OnePlusOne have been excluded from the sub-group analysis as their parents completed a shorter questionnaire which did not include all of the profiling questions that fed into the sub-group definitions.

To give broad context to the following sections, the qualitative findings showed that it was much more difficult to engage with parents when there were entrenched attitudes, conflict, domestic violence, alcohol and drug addiction, mental health issues and learning difficulties. In these cases, projects indicated that they would either have to provide specialist services themselves (such as the Tavistock Centre for entrenched conflict) or be able to refer to specialist services.

Additional project-specific data relating to contact arrangements, child maintenance arrangements, use of courts and use of other support services are included in Appendix H.

8.3.1　Contact arrangements

Happiness with contact arrangements

There was considerable variation in the extent to which parents were happy with their contact arrangements seven months after their first contact with the projects (see appendix Table H.1). However, to a certain extent the variations from project to project are likely to be driven by the differing target groups of each of the projects, with some projects engaging with more challenging parents than others. It is worth noting that in spite of the fact that their target parents sat towards the challenging end of the spectrum, **National Family Mediation saw the highest proportion of parents who were happy with their contact arrangements to some extent (44 per cent)** seven months after contacting the project.

In terms of sub-groups, **parents with shared care were significantly less likely to be happy with their contact arrangements** than parents with care or non-resident parents[38]. Only 21 per cent of parents with shared care were happy with their contact arrangements to some extent, compared to 35 per cent of non-resident parents and 39 per cent of parents with care. This underlines the fact that simply **ensuring that both parents have substantial contact with the children is not enough**, and that it is important to work with parents to ensure that the contact arrangements are not an ongoing source of friction.

There was no significant relationship between happiness with contact arrangements and the length of time that parents had been separated or the age of their youngest child.

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[38]　For the purposes of the evaluation, 'shared care' was defined as a situation where the child(ren) lived with each parent for about the same amount of time.

Whether contact arrangements had improved

Parents were also asked the extent to which contact arrangements had improved compared to those that were in place prior to contacting the project (see Table 8.4). While the base size is small (32 parents), it is striking that the Tavistock Centre saw by far the smallest degree of improvement in contact arrangements (9 per cent). In contrast, National Family Mediation, who also targeted a challenging group of parents, saw a much larger positive change – 43 per cent of parents who engaged with them said that their contact arrangements had improved. Improvement rates for the other projects ranged from 25 per cent for OnePlusOne to 54 per cent for Mediation Now. There was no clear pattern in the proportion of parents seeing an improvement in contact arrangements according to the nature of the intervention (e.g. therapeutic versus information-based) – there was significant variation in the extent of change from project to project, regardless of their nature.

The qualitative research projects flagged that it was important to deal with issues before they become entrenched. However, it does appear that in terms of improving contact arrangements, it is possible to make progress with even the more challenging groups and the model adopted by National Family Mediation would appear to be relatively successful in this respect.

In terms of sub-groups, there was no significant difference in the extent to which contact arrangements had improved according to parent status, the length of time separated, or the age of the youngest child.

A relatively large proportion of parents saw their contact arrangements **get worse** in the seven months after contacting the projects (ranging from seven per cent for Relate to 34 per cent for the Tavistock Centre (though base sizes are low in both cases). As such, it is clear that the projects do not offer a solution for all parents in terms of contact arrangements.

Whether projects played a role in any improvement in contact arrangements

It is clear that those who saw an improvement in their contact arrangements generally felt that **the projects had played a role in this improvement**. However, reflecting their relatively light touch approach, online-focused information services saw a relatively low proportion of parents saying that these projects had played a 'big' role in any improvement (8 per cent for OnePlusOne).

Around six in seven (85 per cent) of the National Family Mediation parents who had seen an improvement in contact arrangements attributed at least some of that improvement to the project, again suggesting that their model was effective in this respect, in spite of the challenging nature of their parents.

Table 8.4   Whether contact arrangements had improved compared to those in place prior to contacting the project

	Mediation					Therapeutic		Contact		Information		
	Changing Futures (CATI)	Family Matters Mediate (CATI)	Mediation Now (CATI)	National Family Mediation (CATI)	Resolution (CATI)	Family Lives (CATI)	Tavistock Centre (CATI)	Pinnacle People (CATI)	Howells (CATI)	Sills & Betteridge (CATI)	OnePlusOne* (CAWI)	Relate* (CAWI)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Better than before	28	45	54	43	31	32	[*]	[*]	40	32	25	[*]
Worse than before	26	28	15	20	24	22	[*]	[*]	28	25	25	[*]
The same as before	45	26	29	36	40	44	[*]	[*]	30	37	44	[*]
Don't know/ refused	1	1	2	1	5	2	[*]	[*]	2	6	6	[*]
Base	**69**	**76**	**48**	**140**	**124**	**41**	**32**	**19**	**134**	**426**	**550**	**14**

[*] Percentages not shown as base size below 40.

8.3.2   Child maintenance agreements

Child maintenance agreements and payments

Seven months after contacting the projects, the majority of parents had a child maintenance agreement in place, regardless of the nature of support given by the project they were engaging with (see Appendix Table H.2). Parents with shared care were less likely to have an agreement in place than were non-resident parents (54 per cent and 71 per cent respectively). However, there were no significant differences in this respect according to the age of the youngest child or the amount of time that parents had been separated. The research did not try to investigate whether having an arrangement, per se, could be attributed to the project but looked at how it had been sustained since the intervention and whether there had been any improvements that the parents felt were due to the help they received.

The proportion of families where the non-resident parent had paid any child maintenance in the past three months was similar to (but slightly lower than) the proportion of families with a child maintenance agreement in place for virtually all projects (see appendix Table H.3). The chief exception was OnePlusOne, where the proportion of families in which a maintenance payment had recently been made was actually higher than the proportion where a child maintenance agreement was in place (71 per cent and 63 per cent respectively). This is likely to reflect the fact that OnePlusOne was a light touch intervention targeting recently separated families (who were also less likely to have deeply entrenched conflict than the parents engaging with many of the other projects) – as such, their clients were less likely to have formalised their arrangements.

There was no difference in the proportion of non-resident parents paying child maintenance according to the age of the youngest child or the length of separation. However, non-resident parents were more likely to report having paid child maintenance in the past three months than parents with care were to say that maintenance had been paid (70 per cent and 56 per cent respectively). It could be the case that there may be an element of selective recall coming into play in these responses, though differences between these groups discussed later in the chapter suggest that there may actually be fundamental differences in the types of parents from each of these backgrounds who engaged with the projects.

Whether child maintenance arrangements had improved

As shown in Table 8.5, the proportion of parents who had seen an **improvement in their child maintenance arrangements was markedly lower** than the proportion seeing an improvement in contact arrangements (see Table 8.4). This was the case for all projects, regardless of the type of support they offered and suggests that **child maintenance arrangements were more challenging for projects to address** (though it should be noted that maintenance arrangements were not a focus for some projects).

The proportion seeing an improvement in child maintenance arrangements ranged from 3 per cent for the Tavistock Centre to 22 per cent for Family Lives.

Overall, the proportion of parents who felt that their child maintenance arrangements had worsened was broadly similar to the proportion feeling they had improved, though there was variation from project to project in this respect. Changing Futures (20 per cent) and Mediation Now (23 per cent) saw the highest proportion of parents reporting that their child maintenance arrangements had worsened.

National Family Mediation scored broadly in line with the average scores for these metrics (13 per cent of their parents saw an improvement in child maintenance arrangements and 18 per cent saw a deterioration in this respect). The contrast between these figures and those discussed earlier in Section 8.2.1 suggest that it is **more challenging to address financial issues for families with the most entrenched difficulties than it is to have a positive impact on their contact arrangements**.

Family Lives, which actively targeted Muslim families, saw the most positive results in terms of participants saying that their child maintenance arrangements had improved since contacting the project (22 per cent had seen an improvement). However, even after this progress, their former clients were still amongst the least likely to have an arrangement in place (54 per cent). This would seem to suggest that **cultural issues may be at play**, with Muslim families (at least in the target area) less likely than others to engage with child maintenance arrangements. As such, continuing attempts to normalise the adoption of such agreements would seem to be potentially valuable.

There was no significant difference in the proportion of parents seeing an improvement in their child maintenance arrangements according to their parental status or the age of their youngest child. However, parents who had been separated for less than a year were more likely to have seen an improvement than those who had been separated for a year or more (21 per cent and 14 per cent respectively). This suggests that it is **beneficial to intervene in maintenance arrangements at an early stage**, before any ad hoc arrangements become embedded.

Table 8.5   Whether child maintenance arrangements have improved since contacting the project

| | Mediation | | | | | Therapeutic | | Contact | | | Information | | |
	Changing Futures (CATI)	Family Matters Mediate (CATI)	Mediation Now (CATI)	National Family Mediation (CATI)	Resolution (CATI)	Family Lives (CATI)	Tavistock Centre (CATI)	Pinnacle People (CATI)	Howells (CATI)	Sills & Betteridge (CATI)	OnePlusOne* (CAWI)	Relate* (CAWI)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Better than before	9	17	13	13	13	22	[*]	[*]	17	16	13	[*]
Worse than before	20	12	23	18	11	10	[*]	[*]	14	12	13	[*]
The same as before	51	57	52	62	58	44	[*]	[*]	43	46	54	[*]
UNPROMPTED – No previous arrangement	20	13	8	6	10	17	[*]	[*]	16	20	12	[*]
Don't know/ refused	0	1	4	1	5	0	[*]	[*]	2	3	4	[*]
Currently living with ex-partner	0	0	0	0	2	7	[*]	[*]	8	3	4	[*]
Base	**69**	**76**	**48**	**140**	**124**	**41**	**32**	**19**	**134**	**426**	**550**	**14**

[*] Percentages not shown as base size below 40.

8.3.3   Usage of courts

Past usage of courts

There was significant variation in the extent to which families had contacted the courts prior to their engagement with the projects. This is to be expected due to the differing referral mechanisms of the projects, some of which relied heavily on court referrals as the means of recruiting parents.

Reflecting this, families using information-based projects were less likely to have already been to the courts than families using projects which focused on mediation or therapeutic approaches (see appendix Table H.4). In particular, only 12 per cent of the families engaging with Howells had previously been to court, compared to 94 per cent of those engaging with the Tavistock Centre.

Reflecting the relatively early stage of their separation journey, parents that had been separated for less than a year (12 per cent) were less likely to have previously been to the courts than those separated for one to five years (40 per cent) or for more than five years (51 per cent). While not unexpected, it does underline the point that **early intervention is helpful in avoiding the escalation of issues to the extent to that they involve legal action**.

There was a similar, and possibly related, pattern in terms of the age of the youngest child. Only 25 per cent of families whose youngest child was under 4 had been to court prior to contacting the projects, compared to 41 per cent of families whose youngest child was aged four to ten, and 35 per cent of families whose youngest child was aged 11 to 18.

Parents with care (30 per cent) were less likely than non-resident parents (40 per cent) to have come from a family where at least one member had been to court prior to contacting the project. This suggests that there are differences in the profile of parents engaging with the projects, with non-resident parents perhaps tending to come from a background where conflict has become more embedded or formalised.

Planned future usage of courts

Appendix Table H.6 shows that parents engaging with therapeutic projects (42 per cent for Family Lives and 56 per cent for the Tavistock Centre) were also more likely than others to intend to use the family courts in the future. Amongst projects which focused on mediation, there was significant variation in the extent of planned future court usage, ranging from 15 per cent for Mediation Now up to 46 per cent for Resolution.

Perhaps more importantly, Table 8.6 shows the extent to which projects had contributed to parents deciding not to go (back) to court. The majority of projects saw between 20 per cent and 30 per cent of parents saying that the project had played at least some role in a decision not to use the family courts in the future. As such, it does appear that the projects can play a highly significant role in reducing the use of the family courts.

The only exceptions to this were the Tavistock Centre (12 per cent – albeit on a low base size) and OnePlusOne (7 per cent). The relatively low scores for these providers is likely to be attributable to the entrenched conflict of the target families of the Tavistock Centre and the relatively light touch approach of OnePlusOne. It is, however, worth noting the 29 per cent of families engaging with National Family Mediation said that the project had played a role in a decision not to go back to court, in spite of the challenging nature of their target

group. As such, it would appear that **National Family Mediation's approach would merit further examination if the avoidance of court usage was to be a feature of any future activities**.

There were no differences in the proportion of parents saying that the projects had played a role in a decision not to use the family courts according to their parental status, length of separation, or age of youngest child.

Looking specifically at the information-based projects, it is very striking that projects with a legal background were far more successful than non-legal projects when it came to parents deciding against going to court. Twelve per cent of parents engaging with Sills & Betteridge and 11 per cent of parents engaging with Howells said the project had played 'a big role' in their decision not to go to court, compared to only 2 per cent for OnePlusOne. While it is likely that this is at least partly attributable to the mode of delivery (OnePlusOne being an online service), it seems highly likely that the gravitas of legal organisations in this field does have an impact.

In the qualitative research, Sills & Betteridge highlighted that even amongst parents who were only using the project for legal advice, court action became less of a knee-jerk reaction, with users taking a more considered view about whether they wanted to pursue outstanding issues in the courts.

The qualitative research also showed that where a couple seeks court action, immediate referral to a mediation service was thought by project staff to be helpful in avoiding future court action. Both Changing Futures and National Family Mediation noted that early intervention with talk-based approaches was more likely to reduce court action and, as one of their service users noted, '*avoided the awfulness of going to court*'.

The overall consensus was that the longer it takes for couples to seek mediation the more likely it appears that attitudes and behaviours will become entrenched and more and more negative such that only court action will suffice.

The proportion of parents saying that the projects had played a role in their decision not to go back to court showed only small differences between those who had been in touch with the courts prior to their involvement with the projects and those who had not.

8.3.4   Other support services used

Parents were also asked whether they had talked to any other organisations about their relationship since contacting the project (see appendix Table H.7).

Engagement with other organisations was, unsurprisingly, reflective of the nature of support given by the projects. For example, parents engaging with solicitor-led projects were less likely to seek support from other solicitors. In the same vein, those engaging with information-based projects were more likely to go on to speak to mediation services.

For all projects, with the exception of Pinnacle People, more than half of parents had been in touch with another support service[39]. Where parents had gone on to contact another support service, they had typically engaged with two or more other services, suggesting that the majority of parents who had interacted with the projects were genuinely engaged with the idea that support organisations could be of use to them.

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[39]   The proportion for Pinnacle People was 33 per cent, albeit on a low base size.

Table 8.6   Whether project played a role in decision not to go (back) to the family courts

	Mediation					Therapeutic		Contact		Information		
	Changing Futures (CATI)	Family Matters Mediate (CATI)	Mediation Now (CATI)	National Family Mediation (CATI)	Resolution (CATI)	Family Lives (CATI)	Tavistock Centre (CATI)	Pinnacle People (CATI)	Howells (CATI)	Sills & Betteridge (CATI)	OnePlusOne* (CAWI)	Relate* (CAWI)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
A big role	12	16	15	18	6	10	[*]	[*]	11	12	2	[*]
Some role	10	11	10	11	11	10	[*]	[*]	18	14	5	[*]
Or no role at all	49	37	52	32	27	32	[*]	[*]	26	28	32	[*]
Don't know/ refused	3	3	2	3	2	2	[*]	[*]	3	3	5	[*]
N/A – planning/ don't know if planning to go back to court	26	34	21	36	53	46	[*]	[*]	42	42	55	[*]
Base	**69**	**76**	**48**	**140**	**124**	**41**	**32**	**19**	**134**	**426**	**550**	**14**

[*] Percentages not shown as base size below 40.

8.3.5   Overall opinion of project

As shown in Table 8.7, **projects were generally felt to have been helpful to parents**. For eight of the 12 projects participating in the survey, more than seven in ten parents said that the projects had been helpful to some extent (either 'very' or 'quite' helpful).

For the other four (Family Matters Mediate, National Family Mediation, the Tavistock Centre and OnePlusOne) at least half of the parents involved said that the project had helped.

Projects with a legal focus had a very high proportion of parents rating them as 'very useful' (63 per cent for Howells and 57 per cent for Sills & Betteridge), a markedly higher proportion than was seen for the other talk-based projects (19 per cent for OnePlusOne, 14 per cent for Relate). It is likely that this is at least partly due to the mode of delivery (as the lower scoring projects were delivered online), but the differing nature of the advice given is almost certainly also at play here and the legal-based projects also performed well compared to the mediation and therapeutic projects.

For talk-based projects, the proportion of parents rating them as 'very helpful' ranged from 58 per cent for Changing Futures to 25 per cent for the Tavistock Centre. The comparatively low score for the Tavistock Centre again underlines the challenges in dealing with those families which have the greatest needs and whose issues are deeply entrenched. It is striking that National Family Mediation, which also dealt with challenging families (and, as highlighted previously, had a relatively strong positive impact on contact arrangements and avoidance of court usage), also had a relatively low score in terms of the proportion of parents rating it as 'very helpful' (31 per cent). This suggests that for the most challenging families, successfully addressing issues such as the parental relationship (as discussed in Section 8.2.2) and child maintenance are key factors in their perceptions of the projects' value and addressing factors such as contact arrangements may not be enough to generate user satisfaction in isolation.

Non-resident parents were less likely than resident parents to say that the project had been 'very helpful' (43 per cent and 57 per cent respectively). As such, it would seem necessary to ensure that any future projects placed an emphasis on meeting the needs of the non-resident parent, though there are likely to be intrinsic challenges in this respect, due to their differing needs.

Those who had been separated for less than a year (58 per cent) were significantly more likely to have found the projects 'very helpful' than those separated for a year or more (48 per cent of those separated for 1-5 years and 47 of those separated for more than five years). **This again suggests the benefits of intervening before conflict becomes entrenched**.

Table 8.7   Whether felt contact with project was helpful overall

	Mediation					Therapeutic		Contact		Information		
	Changing Futures (CATI)	Family Matters Mediate (CATI)	Mediation Now (CATI)	National Family Mediation (CATI)	Resolution (CATI)	Family Lives (CATI)	Tavistock Centre (CATI)	Pinnacle People (CATI)	Howells (CATI)	Sills & Betteridge (CATI)	OnePlusOne* (CAWI)	Relate* (CAWI)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
A very helpful thing to do	58	39	44	31	42	51	[*]	[*]	63	57	19	[*]
Quite helpful	17	21	29	32	40	37	[*]	[*]	27	30	40	[*]
Not very helpful	13	17	15	20	6	7	[*]	[*]	4	7	17	[*]
Not at all helpful	12	21	13	14	9	5	[*]	[*]	4	5	10	[*]
Don't know/ refused	0	1	0	4	2	0	[*]	[*]	1	1	14	[*]
Base	**69**	**76**	**48**	**140**	**124**	**41**	**32**	**19**	**134**	**426**	**550**	**14**

[*] Percentages not shown as base size below 40.

8.4   Projects' self-perceived effectiveness

Across the 16 projects that remained functioning to the end of their contracts there was a universal view from the qualitative research that the various interventions had been effective, despite any difficulties in obtaining sufficient referrals or cases where certain aspects of the intervention were little used. Project staff identified a wide range of ways in which projects had demonstrated their effectiveness, many of which overlap with the areas already discussed in Sections 8.1 and 8.2. These included:

• Reducing couple hostility.

> *'Family Court Advisors have said the biggest impact, in a way because of how entrenched the hostility is…is parents actually meeting in a room together and it seems like a very very small thing but…they were using separate entrances in the court, they wouldn't look at each other…the outcome of that often is that arranging contact…just makes it easier.'*

> (Staff, the Tavistock Centre)

• Safer and more effective communication between partners.

> *'A good stepping stone from being in a bad place where parents can't communicate…* [to being able to] *communicate in a safe and secure environment.'*

> (Staff, NACCC)

• An overall change in behaviour between ex-partners.

> *'We've got some evidence that it changed behaviour in some people.'*

> (Staff, Relate)

• Positive impact on children's behaviour.

> *'*[She has told us] *she feels her boys are a lot calmer, especially* [the younger one]*…* [He] *can get very aggressive but now he's completely different. He's like a different person.'*

> (Staff, Pinnacle People)

• Improved parenting and collaboration.

> *'We are seeing improvements in parenting, self reports of how their relationship is working, improved collaboration, then that will lead to better outcomes for children and that's what effectiveness will mean.'*

> (Staff, OnePlusOne)

• Improved relationships between ex-partners.

> *'We work with separated families, even some carers and grandparents…we have worked with mum and dad to improve relationships, we address finances, contact arrangements…it's a bespoke service.'*

> (Staff, Malachi)

- Reduced court time.

    'Five weeks of court time is a massive saving.'

    (Staff, Mediation Now)

- Greater community support.

    'Lots of people did not know that seeking advice and help from your neighbours and friends…especially those who are trained, is an Islamic thing to do…and that they could sort it out without paying a lot of money to solicitors.'

    (Imam, Family Lives)

- Arranging parenting plans.

Projects also noticed that clients generally benefited from the interventions by:

- gaining an increased knowledge of their legal situation, and the processes of mediation and court action;

- a noticeable increase in emotional wellbeing and confidence;

- being better able to remain calm in difficult situations; and

- improved communication and negotiation skills.

All of these observations are highly consistent with the positive reports from parents who took part in the projects and felt that the reduction in hostility and improved communication was benefiting both themselves and their children. The only notable difference was the greater insight staff had into the reduction in court time required as a result.

9 Conclusions and scalability of projects

9.1 Improving service delivery

The process of delivering a successful service for separating parents is highly complex and each project must tailor its content to meet the needs of its target group and the specific aims of the project. However, there were some common lessons learned to develop a service that is effective and viable.

It was difficult for projects to estimate the likely number of referrals among their target population. If demand is overestimated, the project can be slow to start and staff are underutilised, whilst if it is underestimated, clients may have to be placed on a waiting list which risks problems becoming more entrenched.

Projects should make every effort to research the size and needs of their target group before launching. They should aim to be up and running quickly with achievable targets to maintain staff motivation, but build in contingency for unexpected levels of demand and, given the difficulties making accurate predictions, allow for early review of referral levels before planning for the long term.

The most successful referral processes leveraged established connections either with the courts and Cafcass or other sources such as Malachi's existing links with schools. Service providers that were already known in their field (such as Sills & Betteridge's reputation in family law) and endorsed by local organisations (such as Family Lives and the Barefoot Institute) were in a better position to expand and develop their services than those developing a new service.

Targeted marketing to parents, such as leaflets provided for clients of other relevant services, was more effective than blanket marketing (local radio or newspaper adverts).

If connections with intermediaries were not already strong, **considerable resources were required to sustain marketing and continue to remind organisations of the project's services** to encourage referrals.

Before launching, projects should develop referral mechanisms with organisations that already have an established relationship with (or strong brand perception amongst) the target group. Services must also assess resources required for targeted marketing activities to reach intermediaries and parents directly.

It was also essential that there was **minimal delay between the initial referral and the first consultation**. The longer the delay, the more likely potential users of the service would lose interest or attitudes between the ex-partners would become more entrenched.

Projects need to be sure of sufficient resources to meet the likely flow of referrals, especially at the early stages, to prevent potentially harmful delays. There are inevitably inefficiencies during the set-up phase of an organisation and it can take time to ensure that resourcing levels match referral levels – much of the hardest work comes during the launch window for any project.

It was important to promote the service with a **clear and transparent explanation of the offer** as couples seeking help were often unsure about the project aims.

Projects should have a description of their aims that can be clearly communicated to clients and assess whether each referral is genuinely suitable for their service. Projects should also consider the barriers to engagement (such as language difficulties, anxiety about the process or cultural factors)

The **skills of the support workers were paramount**. Project managers noted that support workers had a wide set of skills, often depending on the focus of the project. This would include: listening skills; empathy; befriending; independence and impartiality; negotiation skills; and managing difficult situations. Without the considerable skill of the support workers clients would not engage or their engagement would waver over time.

Additionally, a number of the projects benefited from staff with **highly specialised skills**, including providing legal advice (e.g. Howells and Sills & Betteridge) and psychiatric and psychological skills (e.g. the Tavistock Centre).

Services require sufficient support staff skills and time to ensure that both parents engage with the process and those who are reluctant to participate are aware of the benefits and that services are not trying to reconcile the ex-partners.

Services need to anticipate the full range of skills that will be required by staff, especially when dealing with parents with specific needs (e.g. abusive relationships; drug or alcohol-related issues).

When discussing their experience of the projects, clients **offered a range of services, either in house or through close working with other agencies, were more likely to have their needs met effectively**. For example, projects that provided legal services together with mediation were highly valued, even though not all clients used both of the services. By contrast, clients found that projects offering only one service, while effective in delivery of that service, left them with unmet needs.

Projects should be clear about their remit and its boundaries and identify suitable onward referral organisations for cases where parents have needs that cannot be met.

While clients preferred services that provided more of a 'one-stop-shop' approach, there was also a **preference for flexibility**. Projects noted that where they had a fully prescribed service clients were less positive; introducing flexibility in terms of the ability to select different elements of a service, the ordering of the elements and the overall length of the intervention was very much appreciated.

Projects should develop a range of services in terms of the type and length of the intervention to respond to the varying needs of parents.

9.2 Could projects be replicated or scaled?

In principle, projects did not feel that there were barriers to scaling or replicating their offers, although in practice there were challenges in terms of implementation.

These were:

- Funding arrangements, as there was little desire on the part of clients to pay for the service (see Section 5.3).

- Ensuring a regular flow of clients through creating partnerships with appropriate partners or providers and setting up effective marketing strategies – as discussed in Chapter 3, ensuring adequate referrals would be critical to the long-term success of projects. In addition, as projects noted, professionals (especially those in the health and social services sectors) tended to forget the projects over time. This would require projects to maintain continuous marketing and networking approaches for which funding would need to be available.

- Employing appropriately trained and qualified staff – projects worked with staff with wide range of skills: befrienders; counsellors; and clinical psychologists. In some cases, support staff and project workers were already fully trained, while others required some form of training before they could work with separating couples. In order to fully staff projects, there would need to be training available in order to ensure that, at a national level, there are a sufficient number of staff with the relevant skills to deal with the higher number of referrals. The Tavistock Centre, for example, thought that while there was an ample number of psychological clinicians nationwide, they too would need additional training to deal with couples with highly entrenched conflict.

  'People who are already trained, who are already mediators. You could then teach them these tools, follow the pro forma, adapt it to what the clients want to discuss.'

  (Project Manager, Mediation Now)

Sourcing suitable venues was seen as less of a problem for scaling up project services as many existing organisations in the health/social services may be able to provide rooms for consultations. It was also suggested that Relate and Citizens Advice may be able to provide suitable venues. Nevertheless, projects would need to ascertain – and build into their funding requirements – the costs of venue hire.

9.3 Considerations when replicating or scaling a project

Several projects – including both those delivering online and face-to-face services – highlighted that they would make changes to their offering were they to scale or replicate their project. Proposed changes were dependent on projects' existing offerings, and were put forward with a view to increase the impact of their project or to act as guidance for those hoping to scale or replicate their project elsewhere. Projects considered that there were seven issues to consider:

- **Suitable referral channels**: Projects that were able to get up and running quickly and saw a regular flow of referrals were those that tapped into existing networks. This included organisations that already had effective working relationships with the courts and Cafcass, as well as other local organisations. Malachi for example, made use of existing links with referrers and families to secure a steady flow of clients. This came with the additional benefit of having a thorough understanding of their clients' needs from the outset and meant project sessions could be targeted at the intervention rather than discovering clients' contexts or backstories.

Projects recognised that the referral process was key to their success. Ideally, projects would tap into their existing networks. Where these were not available, they would need to spend time working with local organisation (courts, health and social services, schools, etc.) to establish their credentials and encourage referrals – a process that would need to continue over time to ensure that organisations consistently refer. Projects recognised that where they do not have networks to tap into, it can take time for referrals to trickle through and for referral partners to ascertain whether the project meets their client's needs. This would also require initial up-front investment which could be substantial and may slow the replication and scaling process:

> *'It would be replication plus – to copy what we have done before we would be missing a trick…we would want to do more.'*

> (Project Manager, Pinnacle People)

- **Matching client needs**: Projects differed in the type of individuals that they were targeting (e.g. young people, long-term separated, specific demographic groups). Two issues arise. First, projects need to be very clear in their marketing and referral process about whom they are targeting; second, where clients are referred that do not meet the project specification, there needs to be a signposting process to allow these clients to be referred to a more relevant service.

- **The first consultation**: Clients often mentioned how they were nervous – and sometimes reluctant – to seek help from the projects. It was essential therefore that once referred that there was minimum delay between referral and the first consultation. As the Tavistock Centre found, being over-subscribed meant that they had to use a waiting list, but this could have a deleterious effect on clients' views about the service.

- **Language of delivery**: Online projects generally offered services in English, and in one case, Welsh. Increasing the range of languages supported (i.e. translating existing website content; using staff with other language skills) could increase the numbers of people they could serve.

- **The nature of the service**: Projects found that in some circumstances it was more appropriate and effective to deal with the wider family. For instance, National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC) believed that although they would always engage with a child's parents, engaging with the wider family (e.g. grandparents) and particularly a new partner could add significant value and drive the project's impact. This however, has a significant impact on the work required by the support workers and requires additional funding.

  In addition, projects found that the intervention could often be limited in impact as there were other issues that the parent(s) was dealing with. These could include housing and financial issues through to drug and alcohol dependency and domestic violence. Some projects were not geared up to deal with such issues, which limited the range of couples they could deal with successfully. Projects considered that was there was considerable merit in offering wraparound services. Pinnacle People believed that tying up their service offering in terms of employability services and support for substance abuse or debt, could enable underlying issues to be addressed. If this was not possible then referral to relevant services or contracting relevant professionals were seen as an alternative. It was essential, however, that there was no waiting for these additional services as they were often a significant issue in the couple's reason for conflict.

- **Counselling and group work**: Projects found that couples could be suspicious of counselling services and group work. This was particularly the case for men. While there was not felt to be an easy solution to this issue, projects did note that it is essential that the project aims are completely transparent and that they are clear they are not trying to reunite ex-partners. Projects also found that by working very closely with each partner on an individual basis, once trust had been established, they would sometimes be more willing to work as a couple. However, the intensity of the work required was rarely factored into projects' estimates – an issue that would require attending to in future funding discussions.

- **Developing or tailoring website content**: Although projects with an online offering were typically targeting all separating couples, there was a potential opportunity to tailor website content to particular audiences or vulnerable groups (e.g. those not currently separating, but considering it). If this approach were to be adopted it would be particularly important to have suitable referral channels.

    'In terms of scalability I think there is an enormous opportunity, I think that's one of the absolute joys of working online in this way. Totally scalable.'

    (Project Manager, OnePlusOne)

9.4 Economies of scale

Generally projects did not envisage there being significant economies of scale, although there were some differences between projects offering services face-to-face, compared to those offering online:

- Projects delivering services face-to-face (especially those relying on trained mediators, or therapists) did not expect there to be significant economies of scale in scaling or replicating their offers. This was due to the inherent staff and venue costs involved in most of these projects' offerings.

- Projects delivering online, however, generally believed they could be scaled easily and did expect there to be economies of scale, provided suitable infrastructure and payment triggers were implemented. This was because they would not need to make a further investment in project set up, providing they could use established technological systems.

9.5 Future funding

Clients generally could not afford to pay for services, or in some cases were unwilling to do so without some form of guarantee (e.g. a legally-backed parenting agreement). While there were exceptions, even those who were willing to pay could only afford a very nominal sum. Consequently, projects were highly reliant on Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funding in order to provide their services.

Projects were asked about alternative sources of funding. While a small minority of projects had prior experiences of seeking money from the European Union and grant making trusts, their view was that such funding took a great deal of time, effort and staff resource in order to apply for funds. They also highlighted the fact that there was no guarantee of success and that such funding was often short term. Others had no experience of seeking money other than from sources such as the health and social services (i.e. joint funding) and felt they lacked the knowledge and skills to fund raise in this manner.

None of the project staff interviewed as part of the qualitative research knew anything about **Social Impact Bonds (SIBs).** As such, it may be beneficial to promote awareness of this funding vehicle, though there are some question marks as to its suitability in this case. As discussed throughout this report, the different target for each project means that determining what constitutes a successful outcome in each case is challenging and a 'one size fits all' approach would not work – performance assessment metrics would have to be tailored to each project. Also, there are question marks around the attribution of effect to projects – effectively a separate counter-factual would be needed for each target group to identify how their outcomes would have changed in the absence of any intervention. The relative lack of fund-raising knowledge amongst some projects may also serve as an inhibitor to uptake of SIBs.

Of fundamental importance is the fact that none of the projects believed that they could be self-sustaining and all would require additional funding in order to continue to provide similar services. As such, the continuation of the projects would seem likely to require significant ongoing investment from the Government and it will be necessary to reflect further on the relationship between the benefit to families and the cost of the programme.