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Plymouth Family Intervention Project Longitudinal Review: 2008-2013

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1.0 Introduction

The Plymouth Family Intervention Project (PFIP) was set up in 2006 and began operating in 2007. It was created as part of the New Labour government's initiative to tackle anti-social behaviour and crime in local neighbourhoods. The Coalition government has subsequently continued to support Family Intervention as the main way in which 'troubled families' can be engaged with in order to tackle their problem behaviour and related issues.

PFIP operates using an intensive outreach programme for families with chaotic lifestyles and complex needs. PFIP works with whole families in their own homes, to assist them in addressing problems that have resulted in crime, anti-social behaviour, truancy and/or worklessness. The PFIP address these areas through a comprehensive assessment of thirteen 'critical issues' that represent five key substantive domains of interest which are: crime and anti-social behaviour, education, family functioning, health and employment.

The PFIP has been evaluated independently for each year that it has run (Browning; 2008, James and Gilling; 2009, James; 2010, James; 2011, James; 2012). Each evaluation of the PFIP has shown that families outcomes when they exit the intervention have improved across each of the thirteen critical issues assessed. Therefore, the evaluations show reductions in offending, anti-social behaviour, domestic violence and poor parenting. They subsequently show improved family functioning, health and community engagement, including some improvement in access to education and work. However, the sustainability of such change or the ability of families to really 'transform' their futures (Batty and Flint, 2012) has always been an issue that the PFIP has been keen to explore (as have researchers in this area nationally).

This report presents the findings of a small research study carried out by the PFIP manager in conjunction with the PFIP's independent evaluator. The research was designed to examine whether the initial positive outcomes for families on their exit from PFIP had been sustained. The report therefore represents a subsequent analysis to the annual evaluations of PFIP that can be read in conjunction with them.

2.0 Research Design

This research was carried out by retrieving information on the first twelve families that completed the PFIP process from 2007 in order to provide a longitudinal analysis of the journey travelled by families from PFIP intervention in 2007 until 2013. The research process required gaining access to the original assessments of those twelve families and up-to-date information on their circumstances. Clearly, this was not possible for every one of the thirteen critical issues addressed by the original intervention, due to data protection concerns. However, it was possible to gather information on four key areas for each family member for the twelve families included in the research. Those key areas were: offending and anti-social behaviour; child protection; housing, and; education.

The PFIP Manager attained detailed information on the current circumstances of individuals in families from the relevant agencies and compared them to the initial assessment of those families when they had entered the intervention. The PFIP evaluator then drew together the evidence in each area and compiled this report.

This report then initially addresses the problems faced by families in 2007 compared with their current circumstances in 2013. It then goes on to do a comparative analysis of the four key areas of offending and anti-social behaviour, child protection, housing and education. It pays particular attention to the current circumstances of 'high impact' children who would have been under eleven years old when they entered the PFIP.

3.0 The Sample of Families

As noted above, twelve families were included in this research and these were the first twelve families engaged by the PFIP. The initial evaluation of PFIP in 2008 noted that the families that were worked with in the first year of the project were generally very large. This study re-emphasises that as the average family contained six members, with the average number of children in families being four. Two of the families actually had seven children each and the fewest number of children in a family were three. On entry to the PFIP twenty two children were aged under-eleven and can therefore be identified as 'high impact' children. In other words, these children should have had the highest likelihood of the PFIP engagement impacting upon their future behaviour due to their youth, inexperience and lack of negative 'learned' behaviours which older children may have internalised.

The average length of PFIP intervention for the twelve families was 17.6 months. In the 2012 PFIP evaluation the average intervention length was 11.5 months. The extended period of intervention for the initial families entering PFIP is likely to reflect the size of families that were engaged at that time and the newness of the project (working in an entirely new format). In 2012, the average family size was only four people and the majority of the families were headed by a lone parent. The shifting demographic of troubled families is likely to reflect a changing society. Given the large family size of the initial families working with the PFIP, subsequent problems and issues faced by those families were likely to be complex and therefore the time worked with them longer. For example, one of the initial families was described by the police in their initial evaluation as being responsible for 70% of the anti-social behaviour in their locality.

The large majority of the twelve initial families that worked with the PFIP lived in accommodation owned by registered social landlords (11/12), with only one family owning their own home. Seven of the families had specific child protection issues raised during their intervention which required a Child Protection Plan to be in place, or children were recognised as a Child in Need. Referrals to the PFIP had come from a range of agencies however, including the police, the Anti-social Behaviour Unit, an Education Welfare Officer, Housing and Children's Social Care.

4.0 Problems Faced by Families: Then and Now

As noted above, the problems and issues faced by families engaged by PFIP are complex. Initial analysis of this research compared families issues overall, before considering how individuals within families had fared.

In relation to *crime and anti-social behaviour*, at the point of referral in 2007, 11/12 families were recorded by police as having committed serious crimes and all of the families (12/12) had high levels of anti-social behaviour recorded. In 2013 police records showed that only 1/12 families had committed serious crime recently and 10/12 families had committed some criminal offences in the post-PFIP period, though this had reduced significantly in comparison to criminal behaviour prior to the PFIP intervention. Further, in the period between 2007 and 2013, 4/12 families had committed some anti-social behaviour, but likewise this had significantly reduced comparative to pre-PFIP engagement.

One of the key issues raised by the PFIP evaluations has been that a large majority of families have been affected by *domestic violence*. The first evaluation in 2008 found that all families engaged by the project had experienced historic or current domestic violence. On entry to the PFIP, 8/12 families in this study were experiencing current domestic violence. In the time from 2007 to 2013, 5/12 families had reported current domestic violence. Of those five families, three of them had resolved domestic violence issues in their own home, but their children were involved in domestic violence in their new homes. This identifies the impact of experiences of domestic violence and the problem of learned behaviour: the victimised are likely to experience re-victimisation or to become a perpetrator themselves. Of the two families that continued to experience domestic violence in the original family home, one had increased reporting of this problem to police and was therefore accessing support for it.

In the original assessment of the twelve families in this study in 2007, the majority were considered to have their *tenancy at risk* (9/12). In 2013 only one family was found to have a tenancy at risk.

Child protection issues were identified as a particular problem for 7/12 families on their entry to PFIP in 2007. However, parenting problems were further identified in 11/12 families. In 2013, some poor parenting was identified in three families, with one family remaining under a Child Protection Plan and one child of a family member, no longer living in the original family home, also being under a Child Protection Plan.

At the point of referral in 2007, 10/12 families were identified as having school attendance issues and noted poor behaviour in *education*. In 2013, three families continued to have some poor attendance and behaviour issues, and a further three families had some poor attendance, but this had improved significantly.

One important finding of the 2012 evaluation of the PFIP was that young people were not sufficiently aware of *safe sex issues and contraception*. This issue is also particularly relevant

to this study as it was found that babies were born in 6/12 families after the PFIP intervention. In total, eight babies have been born, with seven of them born to young members of families and only one to a parent in a family.

Other problems faced by families on entering the PFIP process in 2007 were substance misuse (12/12), poor mental health (6/12), poor physical health (3/12) and debt (3/12). These issues could not be followed up in 2013, but are outlined here in order to contextualise the other areas addressed.

5.0 Outcomes for Individuals in 2013

Having set out the outcomes for whole families above, it is useful to consider where problems continue to lie in families and where the impact of the project has been most felt. There were seventy three individuals in the twelve families that initially entered the PFIP. In order to analyse the journey travelled by these individuals since their involvement with PFIP the report now considers how they are doing by initially looking in detail at high impact children, then the other children in households and finally by looking at their parents.

5.1 High Impact Children in 2013

There were twenty two children aged under-eleven in the initial twelve families that worked with PFIP from 2007. Analysis of the circumstances of these children identifies whether the PFIP has had a sustainable impact and therefore transformed their futures.

Police reports show that those children that were under-eleven when referred to PFIP commit far less *crime and anti-social behaviour* than their older siblings. Although 6/22 of these children were known to the police, only one of them had entered the criminal justice system by 2013.

Children's Social Care had some involvement with 4/22 of the children in the period between referral in 2007 and 2013. However, only two children, in the same family, remained under a *Child Protection Plan* in 2013.

One of the children was considered at risk due to the vulnerability of their home, as their parents *tenancy was at risk* in 2013.

In relation to *education* more issues arose with 10/22 children reported as having some attendance issues. However, only 4/22 had behaviour issues in school and none were permanently excluded in the period between 2007 and 2013.

Overall then, those children that were considered 'high impact' had very good individual outcomes in 2013. This would suggest that their futures had certainly been transformed by the PFIP.

5.2 Older children in 2013

All of the young people in families that were initially referred to PFIP in 2007 were aged over 16 in 2013. There were 31 of these young people. Many of the families' problems that were

noted at initial referral were manifested by this age group, particularly in relation to anti-social behaviour.

Analysis of the outcomes for these young people in 2013 shows a higher incidence of problem behaviours than was identified for their younger siblings above. However, some sustainability has been identified here, which is positive.

In relation to *crime and anti-social behaviour*, 7/31 young people had committed serious offences in the years' post-PFIP engagement and two of them were in prison in 2013. However, 9/31 had committed less serious offences, that had reduced over time and there were no recorded offences for them in 2013. Although this may simply be evidence of the natural attrition of offences as these people aged, it is also possible that the PFIP engagement facilitated the process of reduced offending by these young people. One of the 31 young people had suffered severe mental illness and had been hospitalised due to this.

As noted above, the problem of *domestic violence* was found to have been perpetuated by young people who had previously been victims of it. Five of the young people were experiencing current domestic violence in their own homes in the time between 2007 and 2013, whereas three young people continued to experience domestic violence in their family home.

All of the young people were in *education* or had completed their education subsequent to PFIP engagement, despite 7/31 having some poor attendance issues. None of the young people lived in *tenancies at risk* in 2013.

Overall then, young people in families were responsible for the majority of crime and anti-social behaviour in families in the period post-PFIP engagement to 2013. However, overall this had reduced significantly for the majority of young people. More troubling was the exacerbation of domestic violence in the new homes of young people, despite it having been tackled better in families overall.

5.3 Parents in 2013

There were twenty parents in the twelve households at referral to PFIP in 2007. Analysis of the outcomes for these individuals has been the most illuminating and unexpected in this study. Given that behaviour that has been learnt over many years is extremely difficult to change, it was not expected that parents in families would necessarily be able to significantly sustain change, despite the intensive engagement of the PFIP Key Workers. However, the outcomes for parents are perhaps the most positive in some respects.

Only one parent had a conviction for a *crime and* had committed *anti-social behaviour* since PFIP engagement, according to police reports in the period between 2007 and 2013. One other parent had committed a minor offence, but had received an Adult Restorative Disposal from the police, which does not constitute a conviction.

One family had a *tenancy at risk* in 2013 which related to one lone parent's home. Two further parents (a couple) continued to be living in a home that was over-crowded in 2013.

Of greater concern, as noted above, was that seven parents continued to experience *domestic violence* post-PFIP. However, as also noted above, some harm reduction had been enacted. One couple had separated and therefore the domestic violence had stopped by 2013. One parent had reported domestic violence to the police in the post-PFIP period to 2013, having previously suffered domestic violence for 23 years and never having reported before PFIP engagement. Therefore the couple's issues were being partially addressed by 2013 by virtue of the reporting process.

Overall then, parents had largely resolved their crime, anti-social behaviour and tenancy issues in a way that had been sustained in the period following PFIP involvement with their family.

6.0 Conclusion

This research study has examined and analysed the outcomes for the first twelve families that entered the PFIP process from 2007. These families were very large and had multiple, complex issues that manifested in crime, anti-social behaviour, domestic violence, substance misuse, insecure tenancies, child protection issues, poor education and worklessness. In order to examine the sustainability of the changes made in families by the PFIP, the research has mined police, local authority, housing provider and children's social care records to see how the families have fared in the period between referral to PFIP up to 2013. In doing so, this research has evidenced sustainable change amongst families' lives, both on a collective and an individual level.

The research has shown that parents and young children in families have experienced the most positive outcomes over time, with engagement in negative activities, such as crime and anti-social behaviour, being minimal in 2013. Further, it has evidenced that young people in families have reduced poor behaviour overall, particularly in relation to crime and anti-social behaviour. Most troubling is the finding that some of these young people have reflected their experiences of domestic violence in their childhoods by perpetrating such violence in their adulthood in their own homes. Further, the high rate of children born amongst this group suggests that they have not retained an understanding of the positive outcomes to be gained from safe sex and responsible contraception.

Overall, this small study has gone a long way to challenge our notion of 'learned behaviour' as unchangeable. It is clear from the outcomes below that troubled families engaged with PFIP have challenged their poor behaviour and engaged in positive action that has been sustained.

Outcomes for families 2007-2013:

- Sustained reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour across all age groups and particularly amongst high impact children and parents.
- Some sustained reduction in domestic violence, though some challenging behaviour amongst young people in their new homes.

- Tenancies far less likely to be at risk, so appropriate accommodation secured and retained.
- Child protection issues largely resolved, alongside parenting problems.
- Some school attendance issues, but overall sustained improvement.
- A lack of knowledge of safe sex and contraception.