

Briefing Paper
Proposal for a Collaborative Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care Service.
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01 February 2012

1. Summary

Commissioning work by the Regional Child Care Commissioning Initiative has concluded that Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) is the best available service for children and young people with chronically disruptive behaviours. Young people with challenging behaviours are a small but very expensive group in terms of support costs. Evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of current service provision for these young people has found little evidence that best value is being achieved.

To be feasible and sustainable, MTFC requires a level of demand beyond that experienced by small and medium sized councils. Collaboration between councils presents an opportunity for councils to offer a gold standard, evidence-based service to their children which they would be unable to deliver in isolation.

MTFC is not a cheap, quick fix solution and it is not suitable for all young people, but for those young people who are suitable for the intervention, the benefits in terms of improved life course chances are significant. MTFC treatments last for six to nine months after which time the young person will move back to the community – either home or to a mainstream foster placement.

MTFC requires up-front funding to establish the service, recruit foster carers and train the care team. It also requires considerable organisational and political support to bring it to fruition. The implementation of a licensed, manualised programme such as MTFC is a challenging process, however, with more than 15 operational MTFC sites across the UK (including one in Glasgow), there is ample opportunity for learning from others' experience. Moreover, the oversight provided by the MTFC National Implementation Team (based at Manchester University) means that this collaborative proposal would receive support and guidance at all stages of the process.

The alternative to delivering a MTFC service is to continue with business as usual. Young people with challenging behaviours will continue to require our care and support and our failure to properly address their complex needs will simply compound their distress and store up costs for the future.

2. Explanation of Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care

The objective of MTFC is:

To change the negative trajectory of negative behaviours by improving social adjustments across settings.

Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care is a structured and evidence-based treatment programme which was developed at the Oregon Social Learning Centre (OSLC). MTFC is based on social learning principles and systemic theory and uses a skills-based behavioural approach. This involves a team providing 'wraparound' care and close work with the young person, the foster

carers, and the birth family to bring about a change in the young person's difficult behaviours and attitudes.

Placements are intensive and tailored to individual needs with 24 hour support from supervisors. A specialised team of professionals is responsible for the planning and delivery of the programme and each practitioner has a clearly defined role. During placement the young person's behaviour is closely monitored and good behaviour is rewarded using a points-based system. The programme emphasises the importance of emotional regulation in the context of behavioural change and skills acquisition.

MTFC placements are not a destination – they are for treatment. Young people spend just six to nine months within an MTFC placement and are only regarded as being successful 'graduates' from the programme when they move on to a less restrictive placement such as home to birth family or into a mainstream foster placement.

3. Target Group

There are three versions of MTFC, each serving specific age groups. The version being proposed here is for MTFC-A: for adolescents aged 11-16 years. MTFC-A is designed for young people of either gender who display chronic problematic behaviours across a range of contexts, including offending and conduct disorders.

The entry criteria for MTFC programmes are deliberately broad enabling the clinical lead of the service to make individualised assessments of a young person's capacity to benefit from the service. Specific exclusions relate to young people who are not deemed safe to be placed in a carer's home; young people who are suicidal or psychotic; and young people who are sexual offenders. Those young people for whom a realistic suitable destination placement cannot be identified are also excluded.

Importantly too, young people must consent to involvement in the treatment.

4. Outcomes

MTFC has been subjected to 8 randomised control trials in North America and 1 in Sweden. A randomised control trial based on UK MTFC (and including the Glasgow service) is complete and is due to report soon. Research shows that MTFC is effective in improving immediate and long-term outcomes in several areas including:

- Return to birth family
- Transition to mainstream foster care
- High risk behaviours including sexual behaviours
- Offending behaviour including violence
- Behavioural and mental health problems
- Disruption of placements
- Absconding
- School attendance and homework completion

- Engagement in pro-social activities
- Attachment to caregivers
- Relationships with birth family
- Foster carer satisfaction.

Of all of the evidence based programmes designed for young people with chronically disruptive behaviours, MTFC delivers the most statistically significant improvements in outcomes.

MTFC is in its seventh year in the UK. There are currently six sites delivering MTFC-A across the UK. Evaluations show significant improvements across the range of indicators noted above and suggest that the programme has successfully transferred from the US to the UK context.

5. Cost Effectiveness

MTFC is the only service for young people with chronically problematic behaviours which is proven to be effective in improving behaviours and reintegrating young people into less restrictive placements. MTFC has been subjected to the highest standards of social research and has been found to be effective. No other service currently offers evidence based treatment or proven results.

When considered in the medium to longer term, the costs of establishing and delivering MTFC are less than those of 'specialist' services currently purchased by councils for young people with similar needs. Financial modelling work re MTFC conducted by the Department for Education in England found that there was a strong business case for MTFC even on narrow financial grounds, before the considerable benefits to service users were evaluated.

6. Demand and Potential Cost Savings

Needs analysis work within the participating authorities shows that there are a large number of young people who would be potential candidates for MTFC and many of whom are currently placed in external 'specialist' placements. Of those who are not currently in these placements, those who have experienced repeated placement disruption related to their behaviour or are otherwise categorised as having emotional or behavioural problems, are assessed as highly likely to progress to residential or 'specialist' placements.

As can be seen from the table below, MTFC costs significantly less than other placement options for young people with challenging behaviours. While candidates for MTFC are unlikely to be in 'mainstream' foster care, it is worthwhile noting that MTFC costs only about a third more.

The ideal duration of MTFC treatment is six to nine months after which time graduates move to a mainstream foster placement or return to birth family. Clearly, these destination placements for MTFC graduates represent significant savings when compared with the alternative of remaining in high cost, non-MTFC resources.

Table 1. Annual Cost of Different Placement Types

Type of Care	Annual Cost (current prices)
MTFC-A	£72,000 (*based on English calculations)
'Intensive' placement (eg Care Visions; Seamab; Sycamore)	£90,000
Independent foster care – non-specialist	£46,000
External residential (eg residential school)	£130,000
LA residential	£83,200 (Renfrewshire figures)

7. Timeline and Cost of Implementation

Implementation of an MTFC-A service is likely to take three years to reach the point where the service is operating seven foster placements and one respite placement. Financial modelling developed in England shows that a service needs seven placements in order to be sustainable and cost effective. The optimum team size is eight placements plus one respite placement and this should be achieved four years after beginning implementation.

The process of implementing an MTFC service – engaging with stakeholders, establishing premises, recruiting staff and foster carers, developing referral processes and the like – is a phased process taking up to two years before first placements become available. As such, funding of the service is gradual and necessitates a sequenced investment. The indicative costs are summarised below:

Year 1 - £170, 649

Year 2 - £267,097

Year 3 – £590,475

Total - £1, 028, 221

Based on the availability of eight MTFC placements and one respite placement, the cost per placement will be in the region of £1,500 per week.

8. Next Steps

The proposal for a collaborative MTFC-A service is being examined by Heads of Social Work from six interested councils: Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire and East Dunbartonshire. Once a decision has been reached as to the composition of the collaboration, a working group will be formed to develop an implementation plan. It is expected that those councils wishing to take forward the opportunity will make a commitment to do so by the end of February 2012.

9. Further Information

<http://www.mtfce.org.uk/>

<http://www.mtfc.com/>

