

Future 4 Me Evaluation for 1625 Independent People

Short Report

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Background and methodology

- Future 4 Me (F4M) is an innovative partnership project run by 1625 Independent People (1625IP) that provides specialist support to young people leaving care, leaving custody or young people who are at risk of entering custody. The project is delivered by a dedicated team with extensive expertise in resettlement, mental health, learning and work and participation.
- This evaluation covers phase 2 of programme delivery (January 2017 - December 2019)
- Engaging with participants over a 6 to 12-month period, the project is underpinned by an approach that builds trust, identifies positive opportunities that support wellbeing and personal development, and which seeks meaningful partnerships with young people and other stakeholders in the community.
- The evaluation comprised four main aspects of the F4M National toolkit (Informing Futures): Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE); Awareness and Acceptance Therapy (ACT); Reflective Practice (RP), and the Trauma Recovery Model (TRM).
- A mixed methods approach was deployed involving the use of quantitative and qualitative methods in order to gather data that assessed the extent to which the work of 1625IP had met its stated aims within the context of the F4M project.

Key findings

- Young people valued the simple referral process and the ability to talk about issues they felt were important in a supported and open way. Young people felt listened to, respected and valued. This created a space where opportunities and plans could be explored in respect of addressing things that mattered to them, providing a greater sense of agency and confidence. Opportunities for personal and professional development were explored with support from case workers. Young people felt more resilient and self-aware, and capable of focusing on positive action from a position of relative stability. This helped to re-establish routines and relationships which served to reinforce a greater sense of personal wellbeing, happiness and empowerment.
- For practitioners the F4M project provided a much-needed opportunity to enhance the delivery of important support services for young people in Bristol. Joining up with other organisations within the wider service landscape helped identify realistic and workable interventions, share collective knowledge and information, and identify solutions to problems in a challenging financial and political climate. This fostered a sense of greater responsiveness and effectiveness which helped avoid duplication and competition between local stakeholders. Organisational culture and practices could present potential barriers to these aspects.
- Flexibility and creativity were critical elements of the success of F4M. This applied to the way casework was approached, the way F4M worked with its partners, and the relationship with the evaluation team to ensure the methods reflected the complexities of delivery.

Young People's perspectives

Description & information	Example quotations
<p>The evaluation explored young peoples' experiences of the F4M project and what impacts this had in terms of supporting them with, for example, housing needs, health and wellbeing, relationships with others, and general perceptions of the project</p> <p>Young people had experienced, and were experiencing, challenging life situations which caused considerable disruption and hardship. To varying degrees, these led to poor mental health and issues with trusting others and communicating effectively with others.</p> <p>Young people valued the simple referral process established by the project and the ability to talk about issues <i>they</i> felt were important in a supported and open way. Young people felt listened to, respected and valued. This created a space where opportunities and plans could be explored in respect of addressing things that mattered to them, providing a greater sense of agency and confidence. Opportunities for personal and professional development were explored with support from case workers.</p> <p>Consequently, young people felt more resilient and self-aware, and capable of focusing on positive action from a position of relative stability. This helped to re-establish routines and relationships which served to reinforce a greater sense of personal wellbeing, happiness and empowerment. Young people valued the dynamic and person-centred approach provided by case workers which established a two-way relationship which shared responsibility for decision making.</p> <p>Having support close at hand provided reassurance that facilitated a journey towards greater independence and a greater ability to manage the complexities of their lives.</p>	<p><i>'I felt heard and grown up; the choice felt like mine. It was a bit nerve wracking but I felt like for the first time I was being encouraged to be independent. I felt like all of my needs were acknowledged, not just housing but also my emotional well-being and physical health needs'</i> [Young Person 1].</p> <p><i>'He introduced me to a few people [sic] places for education, all different classes and level of English...I found my own way to get into education...I knew some English but I always needed more and he found me places and put me in right direction which I found very useful'</i> [Young Person 12].</p> <p><i>'...it has just been great to have a worker who has time to see me and it isn't like 'right, we have one hour '. It's made me feel responded to in a way that social workers and PAs never have'</i> [Young Person 4].</p>

F4M Practitioners' perspectives

Description & information	Example quotations
<p>Interviews with practitioners working with young people together with evaluation observations were used to explore what partners and stakeholders perceived to be valuable and significant about the project</p>	
<p>The F4M project provided a much-needed opportunity to enhance the delivery of important support services for young people in the West of England. Joining up with other organisations within the wider service landscape helped identify realistic and workable interventions, share collective knowledge and information, and identify solutions to problems in a challenging financial and political climate. This fostered a sense of greater responsiveness and effectiveness which helped avoid duplication and competition between local stakeholders. The range of organisational cultures and practices across the voluntary and statutory agencies involved could present potential enablers, and barriers, to these aspects.</p> <p>Overall, the project provided a unique approach which had challenged traditional practices and assumptions. It was not always easy to embed the PIE framework and its constituent parts within all organisations. However, participants were unanimous in the opinion that the F4M toolkit had the potential to make significant improvements in practice.</p> <p>These improvements were in respect of staff skills and expertise and perceived outcomes for young people. Generally, staff felt better equipped to work with young people although there was a need for ongoing training and support to ensure practitioners felt secure in their knowledge and skills.</p> <p>The theoretical basis of the project and focus on values helped maintain the primacy of young people's needs and strengths over more traditional outcome measures. The opportunity to scrutinise young people's needs and strengths and the planning needed to support these was valuable. Consequently, the project provided scope for greater innovation and creativity by moving away from a focus on behaviour towards a focus on the causes of behaviour.</p>	<p><i>'...it's really good to keep abreast of what's going on, I can't do everything, knowing what's there and what we can do for young people. I literally work around the corner from these guys but didn't know what they did, the word doesn't necessarily get around' [Participant 6].</i></p> <p><i>'TRM and multi-agency meetings are very useful, we get people from different backgrounds on the same page. We can create a certain knowledge foundation, a base to draw from that is useful for all practitioners...that's really important for coordinating work for young people and getting the same consistent message to them' [Participant 1].</i></p> <p><i>'It's had a massive impact for me. We work with people who are difficult to impact, difficult situations that often have a lot of professionals involved, but that's not always what they need. It's about going to the right professional to get the right support, so the more you network the more you know people, the more you understand their role so I know that you are right for some of the people I'm working with. I can support them in that particular transition by getting them in contact with the right services' [Participant 5].</i></p>

F4M Toolkit – Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE)

Description & information	Example quotations
<p>Overall, the PIE framework created a space for exploring how trauma informed approaches could support all those concerned in the provision of services for example, through supervision processes for staff and techniques that led to meaningful engagement with young people</p>	
<p>The PIE approach helped staff to understand that there were different ways of thinking and talking about young people that went beyond more ‘traditional’ stances i.e. punitive or cynical mindsets. PIE was perceived to provide a practical needs-led approach that focused on young people’s strengths, and which was responsive to the complex reality of young people’s lives.</p>	<p><i>‘It allows us to think about how we can support staff as well as young people. It runs right through the organisation and helps us understand how to do things in a consistent way that values emotional and practical needs; it’s been a real spur for embracing a range of psychological approaches in the way we work and train people’ [Group Interview Participant 4].</i></p>
<p>Against a backdrop of increased emphasis on multi-agency working there was the recognition that organisations needed to look to wider stakeholders in order to devise more complete responses to needs of young people. The PIE approach was beneficial for helping develop and sustain conversations around how best to provide services, which was particularly important in a time when resources were stretched or scarce.</p>	<p><i>‘What we’re trying to do is look at cases where things haven’t worked and explore that and look at why that is and what we need to be doing differently. There’s a number of ways that’s feeding into what we do and identifying additional training and I think that happens anyway, but PIE really helps and support that as something we do as part of our culture’ [Group Interview Participant 2].</i></p>
<p>The PIE framework provided a collaborative device and helped establish clear standards for the way people thought about how they approached their work in supporting young people and how they thought about and responded to young people themselves. Through the sharing of cases in team discussions, practitioners were able to use the combined experience of other staff to identify possible courses of action that would assist young people. These discussions also provided a valuable opportunity for staff to actively reflect on the case at hand. Peer feedback and support from the psychologist also helped identify possible solutions that could be offered to young people as part of a more inclusive discussion. This helped practitioners work around challenging issues that might otherwise have been difficult to overcome were it not for the fresh perspective provided by applying the PIE lens.</p>	<p><i>‘The facilitator training is really good because it helps people grow outside of their roles. ‘To me, it seems like a much stronger model than just getting a psychologist in ... (we are) helping all staff understand that they can engage with and become experts in this approach’ [Group Interview Participant 1].</i></p>
<p>Incorporating reflective practice (RP) as an integral organisational component meant that staffing and logistical issues could be given full attention rather than being secondary to other issues. The PIE framework also provided an evidence tool which supported the rationale for focusing on the development of meaningful relationships rather than, for example, a preoccupation with size of the caseload.</p>	

F4M Toolkit – Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

Description & information	Example quotations
<p>1625ip are piloting the application of ACT as a process for supporting practitioners and providing tools for effective engagement. ACT contrasted with other tools that the participants had knowledge and experience of. There was a strong connection with the practical benefits of the model and its theoretical basis. Participants appeared to fully appreciate the underpinning notion of psychodynamic therapy which understands that who we are is shaped by dynamic processes.</p>	
<p>Participants themselves needed to undergo a process of reflection and self-evaluation in order to understand their own values, how the various theoretical elements could be harnessed and explored within specific situations, and how the model fitted with organisational objectives. The principles of ACT could, in some ways, potentially be at odds with the performance requirements of participants' organisations which were focused on outcomes that were clear and measurable rather than the more nuanced aspects encompassed by ACT - for example, forgiveness, which provided the basis of action rather than the outcome of an action. However, programme design and management has managed this conflict.</p> <p>The focus on values was perceived as particularly beneficial versus instructive or normative approaches which could disempower, disinterest and disengage participants. ACT was very much a two-sided process in which practitioners themselves needed to grapple with their own values and how these interacted with and related to the work in hand. ACT was perceived as a continual learning process, in that further training would be useful for helping consolidate and develop the skills needed to implement it effectively. For some, working out exactly where ACT fitted within the range of case management approaches used within their work was challenging.</p> <p>Participants recognised that ACT had a positive influence on their young people. ACT helped them to focus on what they felt and why, and to accept feelings as inherent part of life. ACT facilitated meaningful discussion around what the young people valued, what was important to them, and how to ensure that they could do things that were consistent with these.</p> <p>Recommendations for training improvements for ACT included reducing the time spent on background development and providing more relevant examples.</p>	<p><i>'I could see the logic of using it [ACT] straight away, I was totally on board and wanted to get on with it; come on, let's go!' [Group Interview Participant 2].</i></p> <p><i>'I had one particular case I was really struggling with, it was really frustrating. I'd tried a number of things but [the young person] just didn't listen, didn't respond in a positive way at all. I stepped back a bit and assessed where I was coming from and realized that it was probably me who was the problem; I was trying to get her to do things that I thought were good for her. Instead I could see that she needed to the things that she felt were important for her in her own way, and I could have sensible conversations around that' [Participant 1].</i></p> <p><i>'Being able to focus even on just one value created a space for us to discuss things, it allows you to shut out the chatter, suspend the other issues and look at things in a very particular way' [Participant 3].</i></p>

F4M Toolkit – Reflective Practice (RP)

Description & information	Example quotations
<p>The evaluation explored settings where RP was and was not established. A number of themes emerged which highlighted the utility of RP and also the challenges of implementing it within diverse organisational settings.</p>	
<p>Where RP was not established participants perceived potential in supporting case management in the context of increased strategic awareness of and focus on care leavers, and an emphasis on smoothing the transition between care and leaving care. Participants felt more confident in their reflective skills and reported that the process had helped them look at the cases in a more holistic sense. Having a facilitator come in to encourage a broader perspective of case management had helped foster a mindset that intentionally sought to consider the bigger picture. Participants felt better able to contact other practitioners e.g. probation and housing services.</p>	<p><i>'RP was about having space to think; in statutory services we don't really have time to think, to reflect on things other than focusing the job. For me it was about having some space to really think about my case load and how I could improve my practice. The sessions did help me with that, to really think about my young people...'</i> [Participant 3].</p>
<p>A lack of understanding and full management support in some organisations established barriers to implementation within those settings, with the onus on individual practitioners to develop the systems and processes that would support RP. Pressures of caseloads and competing organisational practices prevented the full adoption of the RP model in some settings e.g. local authority.</p>	<p><i>'It feels good when somebody else shares what they think or has done something that you have. Helps you feel ok about yourself. As practitioners, sometimes you forget about the wealth of knowledge we have'</i> [Participant 4a].</p>
<p>Where RP was established it provided the opportunity to share experiences, problems and concerns with peers. This provided an emotional outlet and an opportunity to listen, empathise and reassure others. RP sessions also provided practitioners with a voice which was not always heard in the busyness of daily routines. In doing so, sessions provided a safe space where participants could communicate over issues relevant to them. Participants were confident of the benefits for young people: skills acquired through RP had been incorporated into practice, young people being encouraged to be more reflective, share stories and discuss how to develop skills.</p>	<p><i>'As practitioners we often hold on to things which is never a good thing and RP helps us let things go, be able to signpost a bit more; not hold in all of the emotional responsibilities. By having mixed groups and hearing other voices helps us reach out to other colleagues outside of RP and let that ownership go, which also helps with cohesion within the organisation, which is also an important aspect of RP'</i> [Participant 4b].</p>
<p>There were mixed opinions on the place of managers within sessions because of the organisational lines of authority and accountability associated with these participants.</p>	

F4M Toolkit – Trauma Recovery Model (TRM) pilot for working with care leavers

Description & information	Example quotations
<p>The TRM provided a useful and effective tool for bringing agencies and young people together to identify and address needs. Organisational culture, practices and the complexity of young peoples’ lives were likely to have affected the extent to which these benefits were realised.</p>	
<p>The TRM care leaver pilot supported multi-agency working and offered a well-rounded view of the young person with whom participants were working. This helped reduce a sense of practitioner isolation. The tools were described as useful and accessible.</p> <p>The use of a trauma lens to explore the lives of the young people that they were working with offered an important basis for the development of client-centred interventions. Understanding trauma and awareness of trauma in early life were highlighted as important elements of the model, enabling the professionals to start to understand the impact of trauma and adverse events on behaviour and health. The focus on sequencing was beneficial and helped work out how to address the different events in young people’s lives. Participants also described how the opportunity to engage with theory, helped them to focus upon the relationship and ‘do some cognitive work’.</p> <p>One participant highlighted the development of a more mindful approach to practice and to their understanding of their work with the young person. Working with different professionals and understanding their role was beneficial and the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from Statutory and Charitable organisations highlighted different roles and approaches and fostered a sense of genuine inter-agency collaboration.</p> <p>Survey respondents were not wholly convinced that the TRM helped provide the care young people needed. This could have been related to a lack of practitioner confidence to advise young people on difficult subjects and the challenge of improving young peoples’ life skills. This would appear to underline the importance of providing ongoing training and support for practitioners to ensure that they feel sufficiently secure in their knowledge and confidence to apply the model.</p>	<p><i>‘forces professionals to see the bigger picture ... to stop and check Is this the right intervention ... is this the right time?’</i> For some it was an opportunity to; <i>‘help professionals to understand why they (young people) decide to act in a certain way’</i>.</p> <p><i>‘co-ordination can be really difficult and unintentionally one’s own work might undermine the work of others ... there is no blame here, but occasionally we might get results by accident rather than by intention’</i>.</p> <p><i>‘helps professionals to understand why they [young people] decide to act in a certain way’</i>. For others it was an opportunity to; <i>‘look back, look at the present and look to the futures ... to think about intervention support ...’</i>.</p> <p><i>‘... it helps ... to understand how to address the intergenerational effects of trauma and how we can explain to families about trauma’</i>.</p>

Recommendations

- Recommendation 1: Provide time for and emphasis on the building of relationships between keyworkers and young people;
- Recommendation 2: Provide time for and emphasis on the building of relationships between organisations and their staff and the securing of buy-in from senior managers;
- Recommendation 3: Provide time for and emphasis on the building of relationships between organisations and agencies seeking to support young people;
- Recommendation 5: Seek opportunities to promote the wider and fuller adoption of PIE with respect to the benefits for staff and young people;
- Recommendation 6: Understand people's needs and preferences to ensure that the education and training of Future 4 Me's core principles is pitched at the right level and in the right way;
- Recommendation 7: 1625IP should act as an advocate for PIE approaches in this sector to foster a common understanding and language concerning holistic approaches to working with young people.
- Recommendation 8: Ensure that overarching research methodologies are compatible with complex interventions such as F4M from the outset via thorough planning and mapping of the intervention delivery mechanisms;
- Recommendation 9: Explore opportunities to co-design research instruments with those at which they are targeted to ensure appropriateness and to minimise the negative impacts of engagement in research activities i.e. completing surveys;
- Recommendation 10: Adopt communicative approaches to evaluation management approaches and flexible research designs that incorporate opportunities for practitioners to assist with data collection with support from researchers.
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For further details concerning the methodology and findings, please refer to the full F4M evaluation report.