

UK Troubled Families Programme: Lessons from Local Authorities

Christina Economy and Gloria Gong

Introduction

The Troubled Families Programme (TFP), administered by the UK Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), seeks to provide targeted assistance to the UK's most vulnerable families. In particular, TFP targets families facing issues with health, crime, unemployment, truancy, child welfare, and/or domestic violence. The program uses a whole-family approach by assigning one dedicated key worker¹ to comprehensively tackle problems facing all members of the family. This approach aims to provide more streamlined services to the family, and has the potential to break down silos between government departments delivering different social services.

While an impact evaluation of phase one of the national TF program (published in October 2016) was unable to detect any “significant impact” on the families it served,² many local authorities have piloted innovations that are worth learning from. The programs were implemented in different ways across local sites, under an overarching national framework, and many have shown promising outcomes. In some cases local authorities have reengineered referral systems and incorporated more targeted matching of families to services, established mechanisms to evaluate outcomes, and broken down silos between departments that had traditionally worked parallel to one another.

For example, one local authority's TF program is working closely with the police and has developed a proactive referral system to identify children at risk of sexual exploitation.³ Another local authority's program has seconded employees from the local Job Centre⁴ and is

using this partnership to identify at-risk families who would otherwise not have been served.⁵ A third local authority has developed domestic violence safeguarding hubs, where representatives from the police, domestic violence agencies, social services, and mental health specialists meet daily to coordinate rapid responses for the high-risk domestic violence cases reported the night before.⁶ Similar innovations are being tested across many of the program's successful local authorities.

Over the course of this research, site visits and in-depth interviews were conducted with six local authorities. These case studies demonstrate how some local authorities used TFP to improve services for families, increase inter-agency collaboration, and use data more effectively in decision making.

Although this policy brief focuses mostly on the positive lessons coming out of the TFP initiative, it is important to note that the program faced many challenges. These include issues with impact measurement, model fidelity, and service delivery improvement. While the UK's TF program is far from perfect, it does offer potential solutions to common problems in the way social services are delivered, and provides a model that should be tested further.

Overview of TFP

TFP is a partnership between local and central government, which seeks to improve outcomes for vulnerable families, transform local service delivery, and reduce long-term public service costs.⁷ The program is based on a model of

¹ A *key worker* is the equivalent of a *case worker*

² Day, Laurie et. al. National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme: Final Synthesis Report. Department for Communities and Local Government, October 2016.

³ Streader-Goffman, Jenny. Bristol TFP Supervisor. Personal interview. 7 February 2017.

⁴ All local authorities have seconded Job Centre employees as part of a national government agreement with the

Department for Work and Pensions – there are 307 seconded employment advisors working in the 150 local authorities delivering the program.

⁵ Gill Wilson, Strategic Lead for Economic Wellbeing, Barking and Dagenham. Personal interview. 6 February 2017.

⁶ Wilkinson, Lesley. Leeds Families First Programme Manager. Personal interview. 9 February 2017.

⁷ Supporting disadvantaged families - Troubled Families Programme 2015 – 2020: Progress so far. Department for Communities and Local Government, April 2017.

whole-family based care, where one dedicated key worker engages with the family, develops a plan to tackle any issues that the family may be facing, and serves as the single point of contact for referrals to a range of supportive services. For example, one key worker might assist a family in finding affordable housing, work with the children on improving school attendance, and connect a parent to an employment specialist.

Phase one of the Troubled Families Programme was launched by DCLG in April 2012, spurred by then Prime Minister David Cameron's announcement pledging to turn around the lives of the nation's most vulnerable families.⁸ At its inception, the program targeted three outcome areas for 120,000 families: truancy, unemployment, and crime and anti-social behavior. In June 2013, DCLG announced plans to expand the program to serve 400,000 more families from 2015 – 2020.⁹ This second phase expanded the outcome areas of focus to include parents and children who have a range of health problems, children in need of help, and families affected by domestic violence.

In order to be considered part of the TF program during the current phase, families must meet at least two of the following six indicators¹⁰:

1. Parents and children involved in crime or anti-social behavior¹¹
2. Children who have not been attending school regularly
3. Children who need help (those identified as “in need” or subject to a Child Protection Plan)
4. Adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion, or young people at risk of worklessness
5. Families affected by domestic violence and abuse
6. Parents and children with a range of health problems

⁸ Cameron, David. Troubled Families speech. 15 December 2011. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/troubled-families-speech>

⁹ Financial Framework for the Expanded Troubled Families Programme. Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2015.

¹⁰ For more info see: Supporting disadvantaged families - Troubled Families Programme 2015 – 2020: progress so far. Department for Communities and Local Government, April 2017.

¹¹ Anti-social behavior refers to actions that cause harm or distress to another person not of the same household, and can include conduct problems in children.

Each participating local authority creates a Troubled Families Outcome Plan (TFOP) to set specific outcomes they hope to achieve for their families under each of the six headline indicators set out by DCLG. For example, in Bristol's TFOP under the headline indicator “parents and children involved in crime or anti-social behavior” the target outcomes include 1) no offending in the last 6 months by any member of family, 2) no known anti-social behavior committed by members of the family in the last 6 months OR the successful completion of behavioral intervention, and 3) reduction in police calls out to the family home by 60% for six months as compared to the previous six months.¹²

Once a family meets the required outcomes set out by a local authority's TFOP, DCLG grants a performance payment. In this way, the UK central government has taken payment by results to a massive scale. Local authorities are compensated in part based on performance - for every family that shows “sustained and significant progress”. In the current phase, local authorities are granted £1000 upfront for every family targeted, and then an additional £800 bonus as a performance payment for every family that successfully meets their outcomes.¹³

Introduction to Local Authorities Surveyed

This policy brief is based on in-depth interviews and site visits to six local authorities. The participating local authorities include: Barking and Dagenham, Bristol, Hampshire, Leeds, Leicestershire, and West Sussex. These local authorities were identified by DCLG as success stories, measured by improving the lives of families and implementing concrete systems transformation to the way services are delivered.

For each of the local authorities included, interviews were conducted with various stakeholders including elected councilors, TFP managers, supervisors, key workers, and families. The range of interviewees yielded a broad set of perspectives from all levels of program implementation.

¹² Bristol Family Outcome Plan. 2015.

¹³ Financial Framework for the Expanded Troubled Families Programme. Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2015.

Although this research is by no means comprehensive, lessons from these six local authorities provide valuable learning on aspects of the TFP initiative that were successful and can provide insights to help solve the complex challenges associated with effective social service delivery.

Meaningful Service Transformation

The local authorities surveyed were able to use TFP to spur meaningful service transformation by 1) breaking down silos between government departments and service providers, 2) improving referral processes, 3) institutionalizing the whole-family approach, 4) strategically using data to improve service delivery, 5) focusing on achieving meaningful outcomes, and 6) using lessons learned to inform future policy decisions. The following section lays out some of the ways local authorities have been implementing these innovative practices.

1. *Breaking Down Silos: Increased inter-agency collaboration*

One of the most difficult challenges facing governments, both in the U.S. and the UK, is their tendency to work in silos. In the UK, adult and children services typically work separately, with minimal collaboration with the police, health, education, or employment agencies. Because of this, families continue to reemerge in different parts of the government system without any single contact or agency keeping track of the different services they are interacting with.

Delivery of TFP in Leeds has supported a greater focus on collaborative whole family working, which recognizes how the needs of the adults in the household are impacting the children, and how issues children are facing can impact the adults. This approach is about stronger integrated working across Children's and Adult services.¹⁴ In this way, TFP sought to transform the more typical way of working - where agencies who could be working with each other towards a common goal are working in parallel. In Leicestershire, for example, the Department for Education has made strides to coordinate more closely with the children services agency – as many of their goals and target populations

directly overlap.¹⁵ The TF program “has brought agencies like this to work together, towards a common goal for the family.”¹⁶

On the ground level, the TFP key worker serves as the main point of contact between the family and the myriad of government agencies they may interact with. Many of the local authorities surveyed implement “Team Around the Family” meetings as a central component of the TF program. At this meeting, the key worker leads the family and agency professionals through a discussion of progress, obstacles, and next steps.

Team Around the Family Meeting in Bristol

Team Around the Family (TAF) meetings are designed to increase the collaboration and communication between the family, key worker, and agencies with which the family is interacting. At a TAF meeting in Bristol, representatives from the family's primary school (for the youngest child), secondary school (for the oldest child), a parenting specialist (currently working with mom), and the TFP key worker met to discuss the family's progress and any outstanding obstacles. Representatives from the school were concerned about the children's attendance, but were unaware of some of the issues happening at home. At this meeting, the professionals learned about substance abuse issues and criminal history on the part of the children's biological father. As a result of this meeting, they were able to redesign a plan for working with the family to help increase attendance. The plan included support for the mom (by the key worker) in the mornings to get the children to school on time. Without this collaborative meeting, the schools may have taken remedial action, resulting in the children being suspended or excluded from school.

¹⁴ Wilkinson, Lesley. Leeds Families First Programme Manager. Personal interview. 9 February 2017.

¹⁵ Ellie, Leicestershire TFP Manager. Personal interview. 10 February 2017.

¹⁶ Wilkinson, Lesley. Leeds Families First Programme Manager. Personal interview. 23 November 2016.

In addition to increasing inter-agency collaboration on work with individual families, TFP has also catalyzed changes at a more central level. All of the local authorities surveyed had seconded employees from Departments of Work and Pensions (DWP), Health, and police to work directly with the local TFP team to increase data sharing and collaboration. In Hampshire, for example, employees seconded from police and health worked with the TFP team to use their internal home systems to identify needy families that may have fallen through the cracks. Using the police database, the TFP team is able to see which families have been flagged for instances of domestic violence or abuse. This can help better target families for services.¹⁷ A similar approach is happening in Leeds, where employees seconded from DWP and the police are part of a multi-agency team to support TFP delivery. Using a marker system on the DWP database, they are able to ensure appropriate support is provided for those families who are receiving unemployment benefits and are part of the program. This information is also used to determine eligibility for the program.¹⁸

One of the most significant improvements in inter-agency collaboration came through the TFP partnerships formed with the Department of Work and Pensions. At the national level, getting families in to employment and off of benefits was identified as a top priority. As part of this, all of the local authorities surveyed discussed increased partnership between family services and the local DWP.

In Leeds, the TF program has a ‘Social Justice Team’ completely funded by the local DWP, which consists of two seconded employment specialists and three community work coaches. The community work coaches are DWP workers specifically tasked to work with TF families and have about half the caseload of a typical DWP worker.¹⁹ In Leicestershire, TFP has partnered with an innovative new jobs program called GREAT that offers families an array of specialist job services and trainings.²⁰ In Hampshire, the county reports helping 400 families get off of benefits and in to employment via the TFP partnership with JobCentre Plus staff.²¹

2. Improving Referral Processes: Systematically matching the right individuals to the right services

The emphasis on outcomes through the TFP initiative pushes governments to systematically focus on identifying the appropriate target population (those who met two or more of the outcome criteria). Traditionally, service delivery is impromptu, with providers serving people as referrals come through the door. In other words, there is often no systematic attempt to make sure the right people are getting the right services and that the highest need families are prioritized. Before TFP in Barking and Dagenham, complex families would frequently end up in social care, and different departments would all be working with families in their own way. Now, the Early Intervention department of the local authority has a centralized One Front

Collaborating with the Department for Work and Pensions in Barking and Dagenham

Maxine Martin, a JobCentre Plus employee with Barking and Dagenham’s DWP, is one of two employment specialists tasked with working directly with Barking and Dagenham’s TFP families. Maxine worked for DWP for 8 years, where she typically had caseloads of about 100 that she dealt with through a series of 10-20 minute appointments. In partnership with TFP, she now has a caseload no greater than 20 and discusses the “massive difference in the way of working” through the whole-family approach. Working with these high-need families, she is able to give them dedicated attention and flexibility to meet their employment goals. She talks about one family in particular, where she worked with a mother of two children – an 11 year old with hearing problems and an 18 month old. With this family, Maxine and the TFP key worker were able to find a specialized school for the 11 year old and child care for the 18 month old – and then turn the focus to finding a suitable employment opportunity for the mother.

¹⁷ Chief Inspector Julie Fry and Julia Dixon, Hampshire TFP Police and Health Specialists. Personal interview. 8 February 2017.

¹⁸ Employment Specialist, Leeds TFP. Personal interview. 9 February 2017.

¹⁹ Employment Specialist, Leeds TFP. Personal interview. 9 February 2017.

²⁰ Grower-Johnson, Janet. Leicestershire TFP Supervisor. Personal interview. 10 February 2017.

²¹ Langley, Ian. Hampshire TFP Strategic Lead. Personal interview. 8 February 2017.

Door referral system so that complex families can be screened for TFP and incidents of more intensive social care can be reduced.²²

Other local authorities have also developed comprehensive referral pathways as a result of the TFP initiative. In West Sussex, an integrated data system called Holistix gives the local TFP team a whole-population view of families involved with social services and relevant government agencies. This information is used both to identify families for outreach on the front end, and track a family's progression as they work with a designated TFP key worker.²³ Similarly in Bristol, a combined data system (drawing from 30 different data sources across several agencies) allows the TFP team to coordinate proactive referrals. Through this system the team has identified those families who are at highest risk for child sexual exploitation, one of the city's priorities, and reached out to proactively refer them to services.²⁴

In addition to new referral systems created as a result of TFP, there is also an increased focus on inter-agency collaboration to decide what services best meet a family's needs. In Leicestershire, multi-agency referral "hubs" meet monthly to discuss the moderate-to-low risk cases that come through the automated system in order to ensure these families are paired with the right services. Specialists from TFP, health, police, DWP, education, domestic violence, and social care are often present to discuss next steps for these high-need families. As a result of the learning from this process, the city is currently undergoing a structural change to have these monthly hubs with greater frequency – in order to respond more quickly to the needs of the families.²⁵

In addition to making sure that the right people are getting the right services, it is important to ensure that the neediest families are not falling through the cracks and getting missed altogether. In many of the local authorities surveyed, new ways of collecting data have helped to identify families previously unknown

to the child and family services system. For example, in Barking and Dagenham the local authority is "now working with families who [they] otherwise would not have found" and who need support.²⁶ These families are identified by partners, including through the collaboration with DWP's JobCentre Plus. For example, when JobCentre Plus staff identify a family with multiple risk-factors when they come in for employment services, they are able to refer them to more comprehensive TFP services.²⁷ The domestic violence safeguarding hub in Leeds, which involves a daily meeting from multi-agency stakeholders, is another example of an initiative making sure that 1) the neediest families are actually being identified, and 2) they are matched to the most appropriate services to fit their needs.

Domestic Violence Safeguarding Hub in Leeds

One of the top priorities in Leeds is to assist families who are dealing with issues of domestic violence or abuse. Through their close partnership with the local police and other partners, the TF team uses an innovative approach to rapidly respond to families dealing with these issues. Every morning, they hold an hour-long meeting where representatives from the police, domestic violence agencies, social services, and mental health specialists discuss the high-risk domestic violence cases that were reported the night before. These cases are flagged by the police department, discussed by this group the next morning, and immediately responded to by the most appropriate agency.

3. Redesigning Systems: Institutionalizing the whole-family approach

The TFP initiative uses a dedicated key worker to deliver the intervention to the whole family. A variation of this model was employed across all local authorities – a key worker meets with a family, works with them to develop a plan, provides in depth support, and connects them to

²² Wijayatilake, Lilani. Barking and Dagenham TFP Early Communications Lead. Personal interview. 6 February 2017.

²³ West Sussex TFP Data Team. Personal interview. 6 February 2017.

²⁴ Ingle, Emily. Bristol TFP Manager. Personal interview. 16 November 2016.

²⁵ Grower-Johnson, Janet. Leicestershire TFP Supervisor. Personal interview. 10 February 2017.

²⁶ Gill Wilson, Strategic Lead for Economic Wellbeing, Barking and Dagenham. Personal interview. 6 February 2017.

²⁷ Ibid.

other services as necessary. The key worker helps with issues like housing, benefits, debt, emotional support, parenting skills, and connecting the family to services or specialist support.²⁸ Key workers spend up to 18 months with a family, and the typical caseload for one key worker is about 6-10 families at any given time.²⁹

For families that had gone through the TF program, the relationship with their key workers was emphasized as a critical component to the program's success. In Leeds, one mom discussed her previous encounters with government agencies – describing numerous short-term contacts from multiple government agencies, none of whom seemed to have a vested interest in her success. Her TF key worker, however, had earned her trust and she credited that feeling of complete support, and no judgement, as critical to her family's successes.³⁰ In West Sussex a mom described her previous experience with government agencies, describing a large number of contacts in a short amount of time where she “felt like there was no support.” Subsequently, her work with the TF key worker “represented a complete flip.”³¹ The designated key worker model, providing in-depth intensive support to families to work collectively on overcoming all key challenges, represents a change to typical service delivery that has great potential.

Key workers similarly felt that the redesigned systems allowed them more flexibility to work with families in a holistic way. Claire, a key worker in West Sussex, described the job as “a real privilege” due to the flexibility she was afforded in serving families, the length of time she was able to spend with them, and the ability to tackle deeply entrenched foundational issues that could make a meaningful difference.³² Sam, a key worker from Barking and Dagenham, agreed. She discussed one family she had worked with - a single father whose children had been identified by the social care system as “in need of help”. A few months into the engagement, after several miscommunications

and frustrating encounters, Sam learned that the father was actually illiterate and that this was the cause of many of the family's problems – unresponsiveness to government notices, trouble cooking and shopping at the grocery store, difficulty applying for benefits, etc. No one had ever spent enough time with the family to realize this foundational issue and work with the family to fix it, until Sam came along through TFP.³³ Working with the entire family for a long period of time (on average 12 months) allows key workers to address core foundational issues that families were facing – rather than applying short-term solutions for a quick fix.

Many local authorities emphasized that the idea of whole-family working is not a new one. However, TFP provided both a platform and the resources to catalyze this approach within local social services. The ability to provide services in a holistic, comprehensive way has been greatly expanded through the TFP initiative. In some cases, TFP resulted in the creation of completely new services that had not been previously offered, such as in West Sussex; and in others it allowed for a large expansion of current services to reach a greater number of families. In Barking and Dagenham, the TFP initiative has allowed the local authority to serve over 2,500 additional families over 5 years.³⁴

“Whole family working isn't new; what is new is the degree of influence on other services. That part – the service transformation – is the part that is much more radical and interesting.”³⁵

Many local authorities attribute their ability to embed whole-family practices across government agencies to the length of the program and the amount of resources provided. Hampshire's TFP Coordinator Ian Langley says, “Having received funding for 8 years gives you enough time to make a real difference. Too often you get 2-3 years of funding, which is not enough time to embed a program.” Trainings with DWP, close relationships with the police, and collaboration with education professionals are a few examples of ways local authorities are encouraging city-wide institutionalization of the whole-family approach to social services.

²⁸ The first Troubled Families Programme 2012 to 2015: An overview. Department for Communities and Local Government, October 2016.

²⁹ Based on interviews with six local authorities.

³⁰ Leeds TFP participating family. Personal interview. 9 February 2017.

³¹ West Sussex participating mom. Personal interview. 6 February 2017.

³² Claire, West Sussex TFP Key Worker. Personal interview. 6 February 2017.

³³ Samantha Pitts, Barking and Dagenham TFP Key Worker. Personal interview. 6 February 2017.

³⁴ Kinder, Toby. Barking and Dagenham TFP Manager. Personal interview. 16 December 2016.

³⁵ Ingle, Emily. Bristol TFP Manager. Personal interview. 16 November 2016.

“When this program wraps up in 2020, I do truly believe it will have made a real difference and helped a lot of families.”³⁶

4. Strategically Using Data: Applying lessons learned to improve service delivery

When funding social services, governments typically pay upfront without an emphasis on tracking progress over the course of service provision. There is an enormous opportunity lost to strategically use data to improve and modify service delivery so as to best serve the target population.

Many of the local authorities surveyed discussed how the focus on data collection through the TFP initiative enabled them to drive important strategic decisions. In West Sussex, an elected councilor discussed the role TFP data has played in driving programmatic decisions, and how the city uses the Holistix data system to inform service provision. For example, through their TFP partnership, the city obtained data showing that reducing domestic violence has a direct impact on increasing employment. This information has been used to shift priorities towards supporting families affected by domestic violence (and through that increasing employment).³⁷

In many cases, local authorities have begun to share data amongst their TFP partners in order to ensure more coordinated care. In West Sussex, Hampshire, Leeds, Bristol, and Barking and Dagenham there are flags on DWP and/or police data so that these agencies know when a family pops up in to their system whether or not they are involved with TFP. This helps to provide improved, more nuanced services to families and also to reduce the number of contacts families need to have with different government agencies.

“TFP has really ensured that we are working in a collaborative way across agencies, so a family doesn’t have to tell their story 100 times over.”³⁸

³⁶ Langley, Ian. Hampshire TFP Strategic Lead. Personal interview. 15 November 2016.

³⁷ West Sussex Councilman. Personal Interview. 6 February 2017.

³⁸ Gill Wilson, Strategic Lead for Economic Wellbeing, Barking and Dagenham. Personal interview. 6 February 2017.

Customer Journey Maps in West Sussex

Spurred by the TFP initiative, West Sussex began to create customer journey maps in order to track the number of encounters a family had with government agencies. The journey maps are “about trying to get the whole system focused,” and realizing that “every contact counts” as an opportunity for real impact. In one case, a young girl at risk of sexual exploitation had over 30 contacts with over 5 agencies by the time she was 13. By mapping these journeys, the TFP team is able to better determine the pathway of a typical at-risk family and make strategic decisions regarding the intensity of services needed, the best point of contact for the family, and the appropriate timing for the highest potential of an impactful intervention. (*Hayley Connor, West Sussex Think Family Strategic Commissioner.*)

Some of the local authorities surveyed talked about how TFP has encouraged evidence-based decision making. In Barking and Dagenham, the TFP team started out creating a separate service with standalone key workers, but quickly discovered that they were not achieving their desired outcomes. As a result, they moved to an embedded system – where the key workers worked out of existing Children Centres and did not exclusively serve TF families – and were able to track significant progress in their achieved outcomes.³⁹ The TFP team in Hampshire, after conducting a survey, discovered that families were more responsive to the voluntary (non-profit) sector due to the perception that statutory agencies (like Children’s Services) could take their children away. As a result, the City relies heavily upon the voluntary sector to deliver the TFP initiative and families are much more willing to be engaged.⁴⁰

5. Shifting Focus to Impact: Aligning incentives around meaningful outcomes

Local authorities’ strategic use of data goes hand-in-hand with shifting the focus of services to creating impact. Using data to track outcomes can align incentives of key stakeholders and create a concrete mechanism for monitoring

³⁹ Kinder, Toby. Barking and Dagenham TFP Manager. Personal interview. 16 December 2016.

⁴⁰ Langley, Ian. Hampshire TFP Strategic Lead. Personal interview. 8 February 2017.

progress. Many of the local authorities surveyed revealed that the payment-by-results component of the TFP initiative shifted the focus at all levels – from leadership to service providers – to achieving outcomes.

All of the local authorities surveyed have mechanisms in place for tracking outcomes; these are necessary in order to make claims for performance payments. Some local authorities, such as West Sussex and Leicestershire, use dashboards with their key workers to ensure the steady focus on outcomes.⁴¹ Other local authorities, such as Barking and Dagenham and Leeds, have comprehensive multi-stage audit processes to verify outcomes are met and ensure families are meeting all of their goals.⁴²

Using dashboards to actively manage Leicestershire’s service provision

Through the TFP initiative, local coordinators are actively managing service provision by meeting frequently with key workers to review the status of families in their caseload, discuss any obstacles to success, and determine jointly how to better achieve results. In Leicestershire, TFP managers have developed dashboards that are used by key workers to keep track of their caseloads. Jane, a key worker in Leicestershire, discussed how these dashboards have been essential in retaining a strong focus on achieving outcomes – for both her and the families she works with. She says, “It’s so easy to get caught up in the crisis of a family – and just go from crisis to crisis to crisis – these [outcomes] are there for a reason. They bring us back in, and help us focus on what we can do.”

Teresa, a key worker from Bristol, shared sentiments common among many key workers – that while she is acutely aware of the outcomes focus, it is not the component that drives her to do the work. Instead, she feels that the program at its core is about “motivating families to succeed.” The outcomes as they were set out by

the program often did not reflect the progress a family made, so instead she focuses on the extent of improvement and works with families to set their own goals.⁴³ Frustrations with the restrictive outcomes set at the central level were expressed to some degree in all of the local authorities, and is an area that warrants further development. Nevertheless, local authorities maintained that a general focus on outcomes was very helpful in aligning incentives and measuring impact.

6. Informing Future Innovation: Building off of the Troubled Families Programme

Beyond 2020, when phase 2 of TFP officially wraps up, what will happen to the reengineered systems of service delivery, increased inter-agency collaboration, and the strategic use of data to inform decisions? Many of the local authorities surveyed are optimistic about the sustainability of the practices they have developed thus far. In Leeds, TFP coordinators discussed potentially losing some of the commissioned services if the budget was cut – but were confident that the infrastructure would remain. “The TF program, and the whole-family way of working we have developed, is embedded enough to be sustainable.”⁴⁴

Similarly in Leicestershire, TFP manager Janet Gower Johnson revealed that without the central funding, there would likely be less services offered, but the spirit of the program and the innovations they had piloted would remain.⁴⁵ The work that TFP spurred in reengineering referral systems and sharing data across agencies has already been spilling over in to other agencies. Ellie, a TFP program manager, discussed the impact on getting the early education sector interested in whole-family working. As a result of TFP, Leicestershire is now implementing an initiative to connect early education and social care data, in order to more comprehensively make referrals for appropriate early education services.

⁴¹ West Sussex TFP Data Team. Personal interview. 6 February 2017. Leicestershire TFP Key Workers. Personal interview. 10 February 2017.

⁴² Wijayatilake, Lilani. Barking and Dagenham TFP Early Communications Lead. Personal interview. 6 February 2017. Leeds TFP Data Specialist. Personal interview. 9 February 2017.

⁴³ Teresa, Bristol TFP Key Worker. Personal interview. 7 February 2017.

⁴⁴ Wilkinson, Lesley. Leeds Families First Programme Manager. Personal interview. 9 February 2017.

⁴⁵ Grower-Johnson, Janet. Leicestershire TFP Supervisor. Personal interview. 10 February 2017.

“The initiative funded a rapid shift in thinking and behavior, which the public sector normally doesn’t do. The programme has had a massive impact, changing children services in a good way.”⁴⁶

A few local authorities, such as West Sussex, shared concrete plans for ramping up the TFP initiative to expand past 2020. The city plans to combine the TF program with early years’ interventions, domestic abuse support, health specialists, and other supportive services in centralized hubs across the local authority. The idea is to create a comprehensive system of prevention and intervention, that all works in the same holistic way with the entire family and across multiple agencies.⁴⁷

“For the people doing the work, this transformation is a no-brainer.”⁴⁸

Evaluating for Impact in Hampshire

From the start of the TF program, Hampshire has partnered with local universities in order to conduct a local evaluation as part of their sustainability plan. The county hopes to learn from the innovation they have piloted in order to inform future decision making. The evaluation is being used to identify best practices – components that work for families, for professionals, and for the coordinators – to make program improvements, and inform ideas for expansion. Applying TF principles to individuals, like rough sleepers or substance users, has been identified as a potential next step for expansion. The evaluation is also measuring cost-avoidance as a result of the program, in order to make the case to different agencies for their continued support beyond 2020.

Spurring Nationwide Change through Payment by Results

The Troubled Families Programme represents a national roll-out of payment by results at an

⁴⁶ Ellie, Leicestershire TFP Manager. Personal interview. 10 February 2017.

⁴⁷ Hayley Connor. West Sussex Think Family Strategic Commissioner. Personal interview. 6 February 2017.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

unprecedented scale. Spanning two distinct phases, the budget of the program surpassed £1b, including over 150 local authorities and aiming to serve approximately 520,000 families.

The TFP initiative managed to spur local authorities and partners across the country to change their service delivery patterns fairly quickly. It is quite notable that this national government policy initiative led to concrete systems change on the ground, at the very least in some of the local authorities. The expansive nature of the program also allows much to be learned on both the opportunities and challenges of bringing payment by results structures to scale. The TFP initiative has provided an innovative model to delivering social services that should be tested further. In particular, there are four specific components of the payment by results structure that warrant further testing.

1. Selecting meaningful outcome targets to avoid narrow definitions of success

The central government made concentrated efforts to ensure that the outcomes set by the TF program could be contextualized to meet various local authorities’ needs. Local authorities set their own outcomes through TFOPs, based on the six headline outcome areas, which were reviewed by DCLG. Then, key workers created specific outcome plans for each family that they worked with. Once a family reached the outcomes set out in their individualized plan, the local authority would make a claim to DCLG to receive the performance-based outcome payment.

In addition to this local flexibility, DCLG expanded the headline outcomes from the first phase to the second based on feedback from the local authorities (to include domestic abuse, health issues, and children in need). Local authorities felt that the exclusive focus on employment, truancy, and crime left out some of the families in most need of assistance. In particular, it led to an unintentional neglect of families with children younger than school age.

However, even with some built-in flexibility and feedback mechanisms between the central and local level, many local leaders of the TF program felt that the outcomes resulted in a narrow definition of success. Some outcome targets were set at the central level, which imposed cross-the-board targets that all families in all local

authorities needed to meet to qualify as “successful.”

For example, children who were struggling with attendance were required to meet 90% school attendance to be considered “sustained and significant progress.” Children could enter the program with 0% attendance and get all the way to 60%, but would not be considered a success because of the strict outcome set by the central level.⁴⁹ Many of the local TFP leaders and key workers felt that rewarding improvements in outcomes rather than the absolute level of outcomes would be more effective. Local authorities have expressed these concerns to the central government, and DCLG is reviewing current policy.

When designing a system of outcome-based payments, it is important to ensure that selected outcomes are meaningful and will be able to accurately reflect *impact*. Narrow definitions of success can paint a false or misleading picture about a program. Inappropriate outcome targets can also sometimes lead to perverse incentives, resulting in a program that is not serving the target population as effectively as possible.

2. *Aligning incentives to serve the highest-risk families*

With any type of performance contract, it is important that governments are paying for *impact*. Therefore, it is critical to ensure that service providers are reaching the desired target population and that there are not incentives to cream skim (i.e., serve those families easiest to turn around).

In the first phase of TFP, a dedicated key worker for a family was not a necessary component for local authorities to make outcome claims. As a result, there was a risk that, in order to meet targets, local authorities made claims for families that had not been specifically served through TFP. They were able to track families using their regular databases to see if they had made any progress over a time period (for example, moved from receiving job benefits to being employed) and then claim these families for an outcome payment- even if there had been no additional services provided to the family.⁵⁰

The payment rules have been modified in the second phase, so that in order to make a claim a family needs to be served via a dedicated key worker. However, there are still challenges to ensuring that the highest need families are the ones being served. In many cases, families engaged with TFP are identified through standard referral processes where they are served as they come in through the door. Alternatively, a whole-population approach to proactively identify and target the highest-risk families can help ensure that the families in most need of services are being reached.

When constructing a payment by results or performance contract, it is important to consider the incentives that are created. It is critical to establish structures that will allow for the highest-risk families to be served, while avoiding incentives to game the system.

3. *Minimizing burdensome requirements for local providers*

Processes for claiming outcomes – receiving payment after proving success – can be complicated to implement. While it is important to ensure that these processes are rigorous enough not to be manipulated, they can sometimes be a burden to local providers. In the case of TFP, many local coordinators felt that the onerous requirements of submitting data to DCLG were not an effective use of time or resources.

As a few examples, Barking and Dagenham has an internal audit process where they have three full time employees responsible for checking and submitting outcomes claims.⁵¹ Representatives in Hampshire described the process as a “large hammer for a small nail,” and suggested that the scale of the reporting requirements were not necessary for what they were trying to accomplish.⁵² Overall, there was some concern among local authorities that while they were submitting quite a lot of data to DCLG, they were not getting much back out of it.

While it is important to collect data for evaluation purposes and to ensure that outcomes claims are truthful, care must be taken to ensure requirements are not overly onerous.

⁴⁹ Financial Framework for the Expanded Troubled Families Programme. Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2015.

⁵⁰ Based on interviews with six local authorities.

⁵¹ Wijayatilake, Lilani. Barking and Dagenham TFP Early Communications Lead. Personal interview. 6 February 2017.

⁵² Langley, Ian. Hampshire TFP Strategic Lead. Personal interview. 15 November 2016.

The right balance must be struck in order to have effective reporting requirements that do not impose on service delivery.

4. Adhering to model fidelity across a diverse and expansive target population

The TFP initiative was rolled out in over 150 local authorities, which were all given a great deal of autonomy over their local program's structure.

Some local authorities embedded the program in existing departments in attempts to maximize system transformation, while others created entirely new departments to deliver new services. Some local authorities entirely commissioned out service delivery, others provided services entirely in-house, while many had a mix of commissioned and agency-delivered programs. And while some local authorities used the TFP initiative as a catalyst to implement serious changes in the way social services were being delivered, others did not stray far from their status quo.

With such an expansive and diverse target population, spanning the entire country, getting all participating jurisdictions to adhere to the desired key-worker whole family approach was a major challenge. Local authorities were each given discretion to implement the program in their own way. While it is important that each program was contextualized to meet the needs of the particular local authority, it does make it difficult to draw broad strokes conclusions on the effectiveness of the program as a whole.

Lessons Learned

Payment by Results Component

The payment by results structure brought a lot of value to the TFP program. Firstly, it institutionalized the focus on outcomes, lending to the creation of a performance-oriented culture in many local authorities. In addition, the payment by results component drove agencies to improve data sharing and more comprehensively track outcomes for families, which in turn led to improved service delivery.

However, there were also a number of challenges in the implementation of payment by results within the TFP initiative. Of the six local authorities surveyed, many felt that the outcomes chosen yielded a narrow definition of

success. The language around “troubled families” was unhelpful both for families and local coordinators and key workers. Under the program, a family could make a great deal of progress but still not be considered a success by TFP's standards.

In addition, the outcomes selected by the TFP initiative shifted the focus away from families with small children due to the emphasis on school attendance. This was counteracted somewhat with the expanded outcomes of the second phase, particularly the inclusion of children in need of help. Other challenges that local authorities identified include onerous reporting requirements and difficulty meeting targets.

Two distinct elements of the UK TFP initiative combined to bring a lot of value to the program: the payment by results component and the whole-family approach (using a dedicated key worker). The payment by results structure served as a forcing mechanism for improved outcome tracking and data sharing between government agencies. The emphasis on a whole-family model with intensive key worker support catalyzed local efforts to collaborate across agencies and serve families more holistically.

Characteristics of Successful TF Programs

The local authorities surveyed in the course of this research were all identified as high-performers by DCLG. The innovations they have piloted can provide applicable lessons for other sectors and geographies.

While each program is quite different, there were a few common characteristics of each of these successful local authorities.

- 1. Comprehensive partnerships among government agencies and service providers:* The local authorities surveyed all had productive partnerships formed among other government agencies and relevant stakeholders. Seconded employees, shared data sets, and multi-stakeholder hub meetings are just a few examples of how these partnerships took shape.
- 2. Understanding of mission across all levels of leadership:* Buy-in from high level leadership within the local government seems to be an essential component of program success. Equally, it is important

that key workers on the ground are bought in to the mission of the program and committed to delivering impact.

3. *Relatively built-out systems for data collection:* Shared data systems, which can be used for both identifying high-risk families on the front end and subsequently tracking their outcomes on the back end, were helpful to a local authority's ability to deliver the TF program effectively.
4. *Embedded approach of whole-family working:* Working in a whole-family way, with dedicated support that took in to account any issue the family may be dealing with, was not confined to only those delivering the TF program. Successful local authorities were able to foster a culture of whole-family working that spilled over on to other government agencies and social service providers.

Applications to the U.S.

The whole-family approach to delivering social services, catalyzed in the UK through the TFP initiative, has many practical applications to social service delivery in the U.S. Many of the challenges faced in the UK are shared by their U.S. counterparts – agencies working in silos, difficulties sharing data, and families having numerous inconsistent contacts with various government agencies.

These challenges can be addressed by the uptake of a more comprehensive, whole-family approach to social service delivery in the U.S. While a dedicated key worker for each family facing multiple issues would be ideal, simpler strategies of more coordinated care between government agencies like Health and Human Services, Labor, and Education offer the potential to make a significant difference for families.

In the U.S., an initiative like TFP could be state, county, or city driven. For example, a state Health and Human Services agency could

attempt to replicate the UK TFP initiative by providing funding for dedicated case workers to serve each of the state's most vulnerable families. Headline outcomes could serve as guidelines for cities to create their own specific outcomes plans, while funding would be provided to allow dedicated case workers to serve families in a holistic, comprehensive manner. Successful outcomes demonstrating a family's progress could result in performance payments.

The UK Troubled Families Programme provides a ground breaking model of transforming service delivery for the country's most vulnerable families, tackling issues of health, crime, unemployment, truancy, child welfare, and domestic violence. The whole-family approach spearheaded by TFP has many benefits, including more streamlined service provision for families and increased inter-agency working between government departments that typically work in parallel. While there were many challenges to the national implementation of TFP, successful local authorities were able to use the program to catalyze meaningful systems transformation.

The Government Performance Lab at the Harvard Kennedy School conducts research on how governments can improve the results they achieve for their citizens. An important part of this research model involves providing pro bono technical assistance to state and local governments. Through this hands-on involvement, the Government Performance Lab gains insights into the barriers that governments face and the solutions that can overcome these barriers. For more information about the Government Performance Lab, please visit our website: www.govlab.hks.harvard.edu.

The Government Performance Lab is grateful for support from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Corporation for National and Community Service Social Innovation Fund, the Dunham Fund, the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, the Pritzker Children's Initiative, and the Rockefeller Foundation.

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