

Brighter Futures

Building consistent relationships around adolescents to support them to get to where they want to be



London Borough of Ealing

Challenge

Our traditional model of social work delivers standard results for very high unit cost. We know that what young people want is choice about the decisions that affect them; a consistent lead worker through their journey to adulthood; and to live locally with and near the people they trust. Our staff and foster carers share a high aspiration for young people, but our current model does not allow us to deliver this.

Innovation

The Brighter Futures programme is focused on building effective, consistent relationships with young people, families, communities and carers to bring about sustained change. We want to get better at supporting young people and families where there is a risk of breakdown, and to ensure that where children and young people are looked after by Ealing they can be placed with foster carers locally.

Partners Involved

Brighter Futures is a cross-agency partnership led by the London Borough of Ealing and including:

- West London Mental Health NHS Trust
- Ealing Clinical Commissioning Group Allied Partners
- South London and Maudsley NHS Trust
- Anna Freud Centre for Children and Families
- Dyadic Development Network
- iMpower Consulting

Our Innovation

November 2016

What we're doing

Devolving power and decision-making closer to the child and their key worker



Ealing is testing a range of tools that give staff greater autonomy to make decisions and pull together a package of support for the children they know best. Each young person is at the centre of developing their own plan, and has an input in choosing who they want to help them on that journey.

Reshaping the whole workforce to be flexible, dynamic advocates for children and families



Two new types of multidisciplinary team have been created. The multi-agency support teams (MAST) work with families and young people at risk of becoming looked after. The Connect teams work with those young people who are already looked after. Both teams work in real partnership with families wherever they are on the risk spectrum.

Creating a new cohort of advanced foster carers



We started with the aim of raising the bar of foster provision, being more ambitious in the development and abilities of its foster carers and creating a better foster carer journey. We want to attract and retain the very best foster carers, and support them as intensively as possible to look after some of our most vulnerable young people.

A leadership team of partners from across the system



We are working in partnership across the system so decisions are made by the right people, in the right place, at the right time. The message from all partners is clear and consistent: this is what we know will work for young people and families, and we are committed to making it work. All partner leads are clear that systems and organisations should follow practice.

What's changed

Listening to young people

Brighter Futures is an intensive engagement model that focuses on effectively listening and engaging with our adolescents, their families/carers and communities. It does this through enabling our workforce to build strong relationships and use those successful relationships to bring about change. Research into the needs and wishes of young people in care highlighted the importance of three factors, as described by young people themselves:

- having choice and control in the decisions that affect them;
- living locally, ideally with their birth family but, if not, in family placements with people with whom they can make strong and permanent connections; and
- having one lead worker who stays with them throughout their journey into adulthood.

A consistent key worker and flexible package of support

Teenagers and families have more choice about their consistent key worker, who may or may not be a social worker. Social workers and foster carers are able to draw on a range of new tools including 24-hour support helplines; extending the role of peer mentors; developing new efficient referral pathways; and more leisure activities. Personal budgets for young people allow them to access a range of new support, including education, training and employment opportunities.

Providing help and support when it is needed

Both the MAST and Connect teams include a range of professionals including fostering support workers, youth workers, youth justice workers and social workers. Teachers are also embedded in the teams, with a role of finding educational placements and building a relationship with each child to help them find the best next-step for them. Including youth workers, who more traditionally work in the evening and at weekends, is helping the teams to move towards round-the-clock support.

A bespoke joint training offer

All members of the team, including foster carers, have taken part in a compulsory, Brighter Futures Integrated training programme. Ealing commissioned leaders in their field from the Anna Freud Centre using: a mentalisation approach for teams working with young people; The Annex Project and the Dyadic Developmental network to provide Dyadic Development Programme Level 1 and Nurturing Attachments programmes; and the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust to provide the Family Partnership Model and the Helping Families Programme. Together these models delivered a comprehensive and holistic learning programme that has focused on how to work in a different way with families to achieve better outcomes.

Designing a new offer for foster carers

Our foster carers share our aspiration for young people, but our current model does not allow them to deliver it. They tell us that we don't always support them well enough and that with more support they would be able to understand and help young people better.

We have created a new offer, Fostering Plus, designed to train and support carers to look after the most complex young people. These carers are treated as part of the multidisciplinary team around the child, and are trained in the same approaches alongside social workers. This enhances their understanding and management of the impact of early childhood trauma and attachment, focusing on building trust with young people.

Recruiting a new cohort of foster carers

In addition to increasing the pool of foster carers, we have recruited especially for the Fostering Plus level. We originally recruited externally for these roles but did not receive any suitable applications. Following discussion with our existing pool of carers we realised that many of them would be fantastic but lacked some of the skills, resilience and - crucially - the confidence needed. Due to the complex nature of the work, Fostering Plus carers are offered an enhanced training package and a financial reward.

A clear vision for the future

The Brighter Futures model has five clear aims:

- to prevent placement and family breakdown;
- to reduce the number of children and young people who become looked after;
- to bring back to Ealing young people who are currently looked after in high-cost out-of-care placements;
- to increase consistency of support; and
- to promote the empowerment of teenagers and families.

Seeing the system from the child's point of view

We have used an activity with a powerful visual metaphor to demonstrate this vision. A staff member representing a child stands in the centre of the room, and every service who interacts with the child is invited to hand them a balloon. When every service has done this the 'child' is entirely hidden from view by balloons.

The new Connect team is represented by just one balloon, demonstrating how its simplicity allows everyone - including the child - a clear view of what's happening.

What we've learned

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“What we’ve really learned is the power and importance of being hopeful.”

Dorothy Duffy, Programme Lead, Brighter Futures

Creating a new team identity

The new model has created energy and enthusiasm for returning to real social work. There's a concerns about a loss of professional identity: what's the role of the social worker when everyone is delivering an intervention? Knowing that we are all sharing and learning from one another is hugely important. The teams have worked hard to tackle worries by talking them through in daily meetings.

It's crucial that there is trust within the team so everyone feels supported and safe in discussing anxiety, risk and asking for help. This is especially true for youth workers who are not usually part of these teams and can now bring issues quickly to a social worker or clinical psychologist.

Shared casework results in better support for professionals and young people alike

Reduced caseloads and increased administrative support have created time to dedicate to young people. Teams feel safer and supported, with an increased level of confidence in developing relationships. The regular group supervision enables discussion of issues or cases improving the quality of decisions and ability for professionals such as youth workers to take action.

In addition, because every member of the team is involved in discussions around every child, each is able to respond to urgent issues or questions from children, families and foster carers. This has already resulted in families saying they feel better supported and more confident in their ability to access help.

The value of the Dyadic Development Programme

The Dyadic Developmental Programme has allowed workers to develop a shared language of PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) and Family Partnership, which has been shared with foster carers. Staff and foster carers are able to use the tools learnt through DDP and the integrated programme to adapt a technique to suit a specific situation.

A number of children have moved from distant high cost residential placements to local, supported foster placements, with our new Fostering Plus carers. The wrap-around support provided has created stability for these placements and improved outcomes for these children.

New teams need new kinds of support and supervision

The MAST and Connect teams are overseen by a social worker operations manager and each team has a social worker team manager, clinical psychologist, family support worker and youth connexions worker. They are assisted by practice support officers who handle admin and logistics, and share a youth mentor and education specialist.

Daily meetings allow the whole team to discuss the young people, families and foster carers they will be interacting with that day, to discuss plans, interventions and support needed, and to learn from each other in real time.

This is coupled with a weekly three-hour supervision meeting of the team's casework, enabled by the reduction in overall caseloads by more than half, with a maximum number of seven complex cases per team member.

A detailed understanding of the challenge

Over half of our young people are placed a long way from home, and in residential care. We don't have enough local placements and too many young people are in out-of-borough care and residential care.

This impacts negatively on these young people and their families and makes it difficult for us to meet their support and development needs. Detailed analysis has shown that, with the right family interventions and support, we could have prevented 15-30% of young people coming into care.

Giving flexibility to team leaders

A core framework was developed for what each MAST and Connect team could look like but the teams themselves were allowed to flex and learn about what they were doing and what would be different. Now that the teams are bedded in, each works in a slightly different way. If things aren't working, the team can change it quickly. It's important not to assign blame if things don't work the first time.

Personal stories

Foster carer perspectives

“Support group gives us a chance to meet other carers, share experiences, share problems, meet other social workers and have insight into department workings.”

“I've been fostering with Ealing for the last three years and it's one of the best I've done. I love to be part of this amazing family. Ealing supported me throughout my journey and I'm blessed to be with Ealing.”

Staff perspectives

“I really value the support of the team, and working with experienced people from different professional backgrounds. The model encourages a very thoughtful approach to our work.”

“For me, group supervision provides a structured opportunity to reflect on goals, purpose and effectiveness of interventions with children and carers. It supports me to build meaningful relationships with my children and carers.”

Young people's perspectives

“I was angry all the time. I used to take it out on the people close to me and my loved ones. The things what changed was me going back in school. My anger's calmed down a lot.”

“The support that I am getting, helps me to achieve new things that I wouldn't do before.”

“It was so hectic. Drama. Problems on top of problems. Physical abuse between me and my parents. Harming myself. I just had enough. I couldn't take it.”

“My relationship with my parents changed. Calm, much more calmer.”

“The one thing that I think I found most helpful from MAST is finding out who I truly am, and where I want to be in life.”