




executive summary

early intervention: informing local practice

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The Local Government Association (LGA) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out a review of early intervention approaches to inform the practice of local authorities (LAs). This study complements three other studies funded or supported by the LGA to help authorities to evidence impact and assess value for money (VfM). These studies are:

- *Developing a business case for early interventions and evaluating their value for money* (Durbin *et al.*, 2011)
- *Early intervention, using the Common Assessment Framework Process, and its cost effectiveness: Findings from LARC 3* (Easton *et al.*, 2011)
- *How to sustain and replicate effective practice* (Southcott and McCrone, 2011).



Building on the literature search returns for the *Developing a business case for early interventions and evaluating their value for money* project, NFER researchers reviewed published literature exploring the impact of early intervention on outcomes for children, young people and families. The literature reviewed is not an exhaustive list of all available evidence on early intervention approaches shown to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. However, it offers practitioners:

- a summary of examples of early intervention approaches shown to improve outcomes for children, young people and families
- further evidence of which early intervention approaches are likely to improve outcomes for children, young people and families
- information on the financial costs associated with offering early intervention provision and the costs associated with negative life outcomes (where evidence was available).

Collectively, these reports help create further understanding of early intervention approaches and will support authorities and local and national partners to improve service commissioning and delivery. Ultimately, this will help to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

Key findings

Overall, the evidence reviewed shows that the case for investing in early intervention approaches to improve outcomes for children, young people and families and to bring about cost savings in the longer term is widely accepted and supported. Investing early in the life of a problem, or when children are younger, can have greater benefits in the long term and is therefore likely to be most cost effective. It is the extent of potential cost savings that increasingly needs to be identified and evidenced to enable policy makers and local commissioners to make informed decisions.

There is, however, a paucity of UK-based evidence on the cost effectiveness of early intervention approaches. Until recently, UK-based researchers and evaluators have rarely been asked to consider value for money when evaluating the processes and impacts of programmes. Increasingly, however, the landscape is changing, with researchers being asked to consider value for money when carrying out evaluations, and local practitioners, LA officers and commissioners being required to evidence the value of interventions, both on outcomes for children, young people and families and also on local and national assets.

The literature reviewed for this study highlighted the need for evidence based programmes to be offered to those children, young people and families most in need in local areas. Evidence shows that, where early intervention programmes with a strong evidence base are introduced to the UK, fidelity to a programme's design is essential for desired outcomes to be achieved. Research also shows the need for a well

equipped workforce that is knowledgeable and skilful in identifying families in need. In addition, the workforce needs to be equipped to support families to access appropriate service provision and there is a role for practitioners across services to be aware of local provision in order to signpost appropriately.

Changes in policy and practice in national and local government are likely to further support the early intervention agenda in the future as supported by Allen (2011a and b) and Munro (2011), amongst others.

Recommendations

Based on the evidence reviewed, we suggest the following recommendations:

- For desired outcomes to be achieved, policy makers, LA officers, commissioners and practitioners must ensure, when introducing, commissioning or delivering programmes of support, that fidelity to the programme's design is maintained.
- LA officers and practitioners should work with local families to develop a thorough understanding of the individual needs of different communities, as well as those shared across communities, so programmes can be targeted appropriately. This may also help empower and engage parents and families in early intervention programmes.
- Policy makers, national organisations and researchers need to improve the evidence base available to local and national decision makers; build on the availability of national cohort datasets to track outcomes longitudinally; and consider cost effectiveness, as well as impact on outcomes, when evaluating programmes.
- Policy makers, national organisations and LAs need to support the professional development of all practitioners working with children within universal and targeted settings. These practitioners require the skills and knowledge to be able to identify need appropriately and signpost families to suitable support services in order to help achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.

Further information

For more information about this report visit www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGLC02 or email Claire Easton at c.easton@nfer.ac.uk



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