



## Springfield Project Evaluation

Wendy Simpson & Morna Scriven

Playfield Institute

September 2010



Playfield Institute carried out an independent evaluation to gather foster carers' in-depth views by telephone about their experience of the Springfield Project.

### Method

A list of 29 cases closed to the Springfield project between April 2009 and March 2010 was provided to the Institute staff. Six of these cases were not included in the study due to: child in residential, not foster, care (3); input not provided following initial assessment (2); two children cared for by one foster care and only one child discussed in this study (1).

Foster carers of the 23 remaining cases were contacted by letter from the Institute outlining the aims of the evaluation and explaining the details and timings of the telephone interview. Recipients were explicitly given the opportunity to opt out of the telephone interview if they didn't want to take part. Confidentiality in the final report was assured. (see Appendix 1). None of those 23 opted out by contacting the Institute. All 23 foster carers were telephoned over two days set aside for the study. Seven were not contactable: four did not answer call; one was on holiday; two were too busy to speak when called and did not call back. Therefore 16 foster carers took part in the telephone interviews.

Of the 16 looked after children discussed, eight were 10 years or under; and eight were over 10 years. The mean age was 9.3 years. Eight were male and eight were female.

Each interview lasted about 5 minutes. A semi-structured interview schedule guided the conversation (see Appendix 2).

## Results

All 16 foster carers interviewed seemed to be content to discuss their experiences of the Springfield Project service on the telephone.

### ***Main concerns before coming to the Springfield Project***

The main concerns, according to the foster carers, can be summarised under:

Category of issue (number reporting this issue)	Description of concern by foster carer
Behavioural issues (13)	challenging behaviour, lack of control, tantrums, screaming fits, unable to play, stealing, problems with food, problems with hygiene, soiling, swearing, hitting other children, violence
Social / relationship issues (5)	no social boundaries, no empathy, not engaging with others, not engaging with carer, lack of social skills, blamed carer for everything, over-familiar with everyone, not settling in
Emotional issues (5)	attachment problems, no self-esteem, anger, emotionally detached, 'dark moods', anxiety
Carer issues (1)	support for carer needed

### ***Agreement about input from service***

Foster carers talked about what they remembered being discussed when they first met with the service.

Main themes discussed (number of foster carers discussing this issue) were:

- Counselling or support for carers - either to cope with child's behaviour or to help with relationship between carer and child (6)  
*'Agreed they would work with me, not child at this stage. I was really happy with that'*
- Type of therapy provision - play or art (5)
- Timing of therapy - how long it would last (3)
- Assessment of child (3)

- Input for carer and for child (2)
- No further help arranged following assessment (2) (help not required / moved away from area)
- Counselling for child (1)
- Referral on to other agencies for specific help (i.e. TT Club for wetting problems) (1)
- Affirmation of what foster carers' already doing well (1)
- Given choice of whether child should come or not (1)
- Doubt about whether child needed art therapy - but reported that it helped (1)
- Need for confirmation of permanent placement before intervention could go ahead. (1)
- Initially referred for one type of input, but when engaged, able to be supported in many ways. (1)
- Didn't remember what was agreed (2)

### ***Changes since coming to Springfield Project***

The foster carers talked about what changes they felt there had been since coming to the Springfield Project.

Nine of the 16 foster carers discussed positive changes in the child since coming to the project, covering the following themes:

- More settled and confident: *'She's in a better place now'*
- Better behaviour
- Attachment issues improved: *'massive improvements'*
- More positive outlook: *'Made her a more agreeable child...this only happened after she came to the project and she became more positive about things'*
- Better communication
- Some things changed but not all *'simple things were sorted out, not major things but everyday things'*
- More settled in foster care home
- Child has better understanding of what happened to them.
- Developmental changes *'she was able to speak out and not just go along with everyone. Advancements and developmental change'*
- Emotional state improved

Five of the 16 foster carers reported positive changes in themselves, covering the following themes:

- Knowledge of how to deal with behaviour: *'We know how to deal with tantrums now'*
- Coping better: *'(Worker's) wee suggestions helped'*
- Gained an explanation of child's behaviour
- Help for both partners: *'Helped husband and me and child. We valued our sessions with (Worker)'*
- Better relationship with child
- Affirmation of what foster carers' doing already: *'We fed back to (worker) all we were doing and she assured us most of the stuff she'd advise us to do anyway.'*

Six of the 16 foster carers reported no change in the child since coming to the Project:

- Low self esteem not improved *'the big thing was self-esteem and that has not really changed and is still very low'*
- No long term effect on carer - child relationship
- No change in child
- Reached a plateau *'(worker) stopped this because child had reached a plateau and she could not get him any further.'*
- Child did not want to be at service and felt that nothing happened when she was there: *'when picked up she said she just sat and looked at (worker) and said nothing.'*
- Child only assessed at the project - no intervention given

Two of the 16 carers commented on change in placement:

One was unable to comment about any changes in the child since coming to the Project as the child had moved to a new placement. The other Foster Carer described how placement change had made a difference as well as the input from the project *'she came on leaps and bounds with change of placement also'*.

### ***Evidence of change***

Foster carers were asked how they could tell things had changed since coming to the Springfield Project. Their responses fall under the main themes of: School, Relationships, Behaviour and Emotions.

Three foster carers mentioned changes at school:

*'Things have changed and school were involved. All worked together and child came through and within 18 months he became a normal boy.'*

*'School getting better but there are still triggers which upset him'*

*'School changed definitely'*

Two foster carers stated that nothing had changed at school:

*'School always positive for her'*

*'School didn't notice anything'*

Three foster carers talked about how they had noticed changes in the child's relationships.

For one, the change seemed fairly temporary:

*'Brought us closer together for a while, but it didn't last - placement broke up as a result of her behaviour'*

But the others were more positive about sustained relationship changes:

*'Now she has friends outside school - she has friends down for sleepovers and she's organising it herself'*

*'Developed much better and improved relationships with her teachers and peers. Could put herself in their shoes instead of always thinking about herself and it was brilliant'*

Two foster carers had noticed positive changes in behaviour:

*'He manages his behaviour very well'*

*'One notable thing which was really good was when he kicked me and I looked upset - he then rubbed the injury better - this was a huge achievement.'*

Two foster carers had noticed behaviour staying the same or becoming worse:

*'Things just the same - typical teenage behaviour at times'*

*'His behaviour got worse as placement went on'*

Two foster carers had noticed positive emotional changes:

*'He can talk about things without being angry'*

*'No bad moods - he can't remember the black moods now'*

### **What helped to make the changes?**

Carers were asked what they felt had helped to make any positive changes. They talked mainly about the therapy for the child and support for themselves as the carer.

Three carers talked specifically about the input for the child helping to make a positive change:

*'Never spoke about art therapy - enjoyed it - made her feel better'*

*'Intense therapy was helpful. Child needed love, nurturing and caring at home. We valued the work of the Springfield project'*

*'Support from Springfield Project was brilliant. She was easily led before but the project taught her to think for herself and to consider what she wanted. She could make much better informed decisions about her own life due to what she gained from the project.'*

Six of the foster carer talked specifically about how the support for themselves had helped to make a positive change:

*'Good to get viewpoint out with family counselling helps put things into perspective'*

*'help was going to a professional that you could talk things over with and gain confidence when you knew you were doing the right thing'*

*'Good to have someone to get worries and moans out on. Just talking to someone really helped.'*

*'On a daily basis I was unknowingly triggering things from the past which was upsetting for (child) but through encouragement, changes were made with the suggestions given by the project.'*

*'Very interesting and supportive to speak to (Worker) and I missed this contact when it ended. I found discussions and coming up with methods very useful.'*

*'I got more out of it than (child)'*

One foster carer talked about how medication had helped her to make a positive change in her situation:

*'Only change is medication which helped me cope. Nothing to do with project or how they worked.'*

### **General Experience of Springfield Project**

When asked if they had anything to add about their experience of the Springfield Project, all 16 foster carers interviewed made a positive comment about the service, even those who had not had much input from the service or whose child had not benefitted:

*'Fab, great - we were lucky to get a place'*

*'When engaged a lot more came out, a real Pandora's box. Service was brilliant and helped her to come to terms with a lot in her life.'*

*'Excellent service'* (talking about play therapy)

*'Made her more rounded - behaviour and attitude impact when older.'*

*'Excellent centre. When it works, it works. If anyone experiences problems like us, we would recommend the project. GP suggested Springfield Project and it was very good. Gave us confidence to put in our own ideas.'*

*'Would recommend this service to anyone in similar circumstances'*

*'Very friendly people and put themselves out for you.'*

*'It's a great thing. We were made very welcome, not just child but us too. We found the phone contact very useful and were kept up*

*to date with phone contact with (worker), which was good and she always made time for us. (Worker) always listened and took information on board. Art therapy work they did was very good.'*

*'Child loved going and getting one to one attention and really warmed to (Worker).'*

*'Brilliant project, particularly for both myself and (child). Basic stuff really was making (child) worse and project gave better ways of dealing with this. Play suggestions were particularly helpful. If I ever had another child with difficulties I would have no hesitation in coming back to the project.'*

*'It helped me look at (child) differently, talking with (worker) gave me different ideas on how to approach child. Even play therapy let me see how they tried to work with children but unfortunately this did not work for this child.'*

*'(Worker) still sees me and I think this is good - more for me than for child. Knowing I can lift the phone and talk to (worker) if I need is very helpful.'*

*'Fabulous staff, very friendly and accommodating.'*

*'Just a brilliant project'*

Six of the foster carers gave comments which may offer suggestions for future service development.

Two carers would have liked a clearer explanation of service provision:

*'I first went and did not know how it would work. I feel it could have been explained better as I was confused and could not discuss with child what would happen and what would be discussed.'*

*'Still a bit mystified about techniques used with child but did appreciate confidentiality. Got a little insight into what was going on by the end.'*



One carer felt that the child would have liked more opportunity to talk about his background:

*'Child reported to me that he would have liked to talk more about mum and dad and issues he had.'*

One carer commented that the location of the project was difficult for them:

*'At time had four placements so location of Springfield would have been very difficult.'*

Two carers commented that the project was not suitable for all children:

*'Very happy with Springfield Project and feel it would have been very helpful with another child but this child was not into it at all.'*

*'Can't expect 100% success rate. Different counsellor may have had different success - may have opened up - who knows?'*

One carer commented that it would be helpful to do the evaluation at an earlier stage:

*'Would be helpful to do this while I still have children as they have now moved on and it is difficult to remember'*

## **Summary**

This method of using a telephone survey worked successfully as a means of evaluating the Project. Foster carers were willing to chat on the telephone about their experiences and the whole process took no longer than 10 minutes of their time. Positive changes were noticed in over half of the children discussed since coming to the Project and nearly a third of the foster carers reported positive changes in themselves. Positive changes were described in terms of improved relationships, behaviour and emotional management in the children and better knowledge and coping skills in the carers. When asked what had helped to make the changes, support for the carers themselves was discussed more often than the therapeutic input for the child, although both aspects of the project were valued highly. Input from the Project had not worked for all of the children, but even so, all the foster carers valued the Project. It was clear from their comments that they felt the service was worthwhile,

that they would use the service again and that they valued particularly the warmth, support and encouragement provided by the staff.

# Appendix 1

## *Playfield Headed Paper*

Name

Address

Date

Dear .....

### **Re. Springfield Project evaluation**

We are writing to invite you to speak to us on the telephone about your experience of attending the Springfield Project. Your views are extremely important in helping the Springfield Project develop the best service for looked after children. So, we would really appreciate hearing from you if you are able to help us in this way.

Just to introduce ourselves - we work for the Playfield Institute. Part of the Institute's work is to carry out evaluations to ensure quality services for children and young people's emotional wellbeing.

Springfield Project has asked us to carry out an independent piece of research to gather foster carers' views about their experience of the Springfield project. The Springfield Project is keen to hear your views in order to ensure the highest quality of service to provide support and help for the child(ren) in your care.

Our plan is to phone you and chat to you for about 10 - 15 minutes. We will ask you questions about your initial concerns; what you expected from the service; what changes have been made if any; what helped to make the changes and views about your experience and the child's experience in general.

Springfield Project will use this feedback to help plan their service. **Your name will not be used in the report we give back to the Springfield Project.**

We would like to phone you during the day (between 9.30 and 2.30) of either Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> or Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> August. **If you would prefer not to receive a phone call from us, please call Morna (01334 696257) or Catriona (01334 696278) or email [Morna.scriven@nhs.net](mailto:Morna.scriven@nhs.net) or [Catriona.swanston@nhs.net](mailto:Catriona.swanston@nhs.net)** If you are happy for us to speak to you we will keep trying to get through to you on those days. Please don't wait in for our call. We will hopefully get hold of you at a time that is convenient for you.

If you are not available next Wednesday or Thursday, but you would still like to give us your views, please contact Morna or Catriona and we will try to arrange another suitable time to talk to you.

We look forward to speaking to you.

Kind regards

Wendy Simpson  
Institute Manager

Morna Scriven  
Institute Coordinator

## Appendix 2

### Springfield Project

#### Telephone Interview with foster carers

1. Can you tell me what your main concerns were about (child's name) before you came to see someone at the Springfield Project?

*Try to get 3 examples of concern(s)*

2. What do you remember about what was agreed when you first met with the project?

*What type of input was discussed?*

3. Thinking about these concerns, I would like to discuss with you any changes you feel there has been since coming to the Springfield project:

*What has changed, if anything?*

*For the child; for you; for your family?*

4. How can you tell that things have changed?

*Can you tell me what you notice being different about relationships / behaviour?*

*At school / at home / in other places?*

5. What do you think has helped to make these changes?

*Tell me about the support you received from the Springfield project. What did you feel about it? What in particular helped?*

*In what way?*

*Was there anything else that helped to make these changes?*

6. Is there anything else you want to add about your experience of the Springfield project?

Thank you for your time and patience. Your views will help us to improve the Springfield Project's service.