

Costs of family support services

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As part of the Costs and Effectiveness of Services for Children in Need research initiative, a study was carried out in which family support services were costed. The study presents information about 75 of the 79 families in the sample (95 per cent). Data were taken from an analysis of the Intervention Checklists completed by the families' key workers and the total interventions recorded are the total for each family over a six month period, irrespective of the length of their actual involvement with the service.

Unit Costs for family support services were estimated by:

- the hourly cost for staff working in family support services was identified;
- the ratio of indirect to direct care time was identified so that a 'weighted cost' per contact hour could be estimated. Separate ratios, and therefore costs, were estimated for centre based and outreach work;
- the number of family support workers involved in each intervention was assessed, including other staff such as crèche workers, assistants or trainers;
- an hourly 'service setting cost' (on-site overheads) was computed to add to the hourly cost of family support time;
- the total intervention cost was then multiplied by the duration of one session of each intervention and divided by the number of service users.

Costs presented are for services where one-to-one work is undertaken, and are for sessions which ranged from 45 minutes to 4 hours. The costs of family support services across the sectors, per service user per session ranged from £4 to £1,164. The lowest cost applied to a voluntary sector family support group work session, based in a family centre, at which fifteen families and one family support worker were usually present. The highest cost applied to a special assessment for children who had been sexually abused based again in a voluntary sector project. The next most expensive service cost £189.

On average, families received around three sessions of assessment and one and a half of care planning. They received three practical interventions and three other types, for example counselling or parenting skills. The most common therapeutic interventions were those directed at improving parenting skills. Families were on average unlikely to receive many sessions of family therapy or play therapy.

Table 1 presents costs for the range of interventions commonly offered by the projects and table 2 gives costs for the more costly activities. Excluded from the tables are estimates of the costs of specialist assessments; these were derived from four services and included the very large cost of assessment of sexually abused children noted above. The range of costs for assessment was £55 (centre based) to £142 (outreach) per family, the median cost £76, and the average cost £91 (standard deviation £45).

Table 1 Interventions most commonly offered — 2001/2002 prices

Counselling — One to one work with children and with family members, described variously as individual work, or direct work.					
Characteristics	Number of services	Range¹ £	Median £	Mean £	Standard deviation
Centre Based	18	32-117	40	42	9
Outreach	11	40-142	60	67	30
Voluntary sector	16	33-142	48	64	35
Statutory sector	13	32-56	48	44	10
All	29	32-142	48	52	23
Family Therapy — Including family work, family therapy, family/systematic therapy and family group conferencing.					
Centre Based	9	37-143	65	79	32
Outreach	12	37-143	73	81	37
Voluntary sector	8	37-143	124	106	43
Statutory sector	13	37-74	65	64	12
All	21	37-143	72	80	32
Early Years and Educational Interventions — with the common goal of promoting children's development and enabling their educational and social integration. Includes speech and language groups, classroom activities and planned activities, infant massage, baby groups and play and stimulation groups.					
Centre Based	16	10-77	19	24	17
Outreach	8	21-151	30	46	44
Voluntary sector	3	10-151	49	70	73
Statutory sector	21	10-77	21	26	15
All	24	10-151	21	32	30
Parenting Skills Interventions — Including group and individual work described as parenting support, parenting skills, behaviour management skills, parenting skills and the 'parent-child game'.					
Centre Based	21	4-89	16	29	23
Outreach	4	25-57	42	42	16
Voluntary sector	4	4-89	15	31	39
Statutory sector	21	9-65	26	32	19
Individually delivered	7	57-89	55	61	14
Delivered to groups	18	4-50	15	20	12
All	25	4-89	18	31	22
Group Work — Including support groups for parents, domestic violence support groups, groups for children of dual heritage, stress and depression groups, women's groups and a 'partners for protection' group.					
Centre Based	10	10-123	13	32	37
Outreach	3	12-69	20	34	31
Voluntary sector	11	11-123	12	30	35
Statutory sector	2	20-69	44	44	35
All	13	10-123	13	32	34

¹ Costs are for services where one-to-one work is undertaken and are for sessions which range from 45 minutes to four hours.

Practical Support — Including support from volunteers, sessional work, and groups offering cooking and budgeting skills and DIY classes.²					
Centre Based	8	7-39	27	24	12
Outreach	6	14-189	40	60	64
Voluntary sector	4	7-189	18	58	88
Statutory sector	10	14-42	38	33	10
All	14	7-189	34	40	45

Table 2 Characteristics of more costly activities³*Centre Based Activities*

Activity	Description (NB 'FSW' in table 2 can be qualified therapist, social worker, or teacher trained).	Cost per session per user	Length of session in hours
Family Activities	1 FSW working with 1 family using recreational activities	£114	2.5
Family Work	2 FSWs working with 1 family on issues of sexual abuse	£117	1.5
Partners for Protection Group	4 FSWs working with group of 8 non-abusing parents of children who have been sexually abused	£123	3.5
Assessment of need and risk	4 FSWs working with 1 child in intensive assessment of sexual abuse	£1,164	8
Change & control work	2 FSWs working with 1 child to strengthen child's resources and resilience	£117	1.5
Family Support Group	2 FSWs working with 2 families to establish case for child protection/needs and strengths of family	£143	4.5

Outreach activities

Activity	Description	Cost per session per user	Length of session in hours
Family Activities	1 FSW working with 1 family using community resources	£126	2.5
Family Work	2 FSWs working with 1 family on issues of sexual abuse	£131	1.5
Care Planning	1 FSW working with 1 family and other agencies to establish plan of work	£142	3
Parenting & Child Management	1 FSW working with parents and children of 1 family, individually and together to develop parenting and child management skills	£142	3
Family/Systemic Therapy	1 FSW working with 1 family to improve family interaction and functioning using Family/Systemic Therapy techniques	£142	3
In School Interventions	1 FSW working with 1 child in classroom and whole school setting	£151	3
Play Therapy	1 FSW working with 1 child using Play Therapy techniques	£118	2.5
Change & control work	2 FSWs working with 1 child to strengthen child's resources and resilience	£131	1.5
Counselling Solution Focused Therapy	1 FSW working with 1 parent or child individually using Counselling and/or Solution Focused Therapy techniques	£142	3
Assessment/Review	1 FSW working with 1 family to establish need for, and effectiveness of a family support intervention	£142	3
Cognitive Behaviour therapy	1 FSW working with one parent or child individually using Cognitive Behaviour Therapy techniques	£142	3
Practical Support	1 FSW working with 1 family to assist in practical difficulties. For example form filling, transport, housing	£189	4

2 Costs are not drawn from a consistent number of teams but only from those teams actually providing that intervention.

3 All activities had only one user, apart from 'Partners for Protection' Group (CB) which had eight users and Family Support Group (CB) which had two users.

Reference

Weatherly, H. & Byford, S. *Activities and Costs of Family Support Services*. For more information contact Jill Tidmarsh: J.W.Tidmarsh@durham.ac.uk.