



CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 April 2015

SECOND DESPATCH

Please find enclosed the following items:

Item 2	Early Help: Notes of Site Visit	1 – 30
	This includes:	
	(a) Notes of the IFIT visit held on 22 April 2015	1 – 4
	(b) Mystery shopping feedback requested at the visit held on 13 April 2015	5 – 6
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Enquiries to : Jonathan Moore
Tel : 0207 527 3308
Email : democracy@islington.gov.uk



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Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny Review: Early Help

Site Visit: 22 April 2015

On 22 April 2015, members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee met with service users, support workers and the Deputy Team Manager from the Islington Families Intensive Team (IFIT) at the New River Green Children's Centre.

The visit was attended by Councillor Kaya Comer Schwartz, James Stephenson, and Jonathan Moore and Zoe Crane from the Democratic Services section.

During the visit the following main points were made –

- IFIT was a consent based service which families must choose to engage with.
- Service users rated IFIT very highly, indicating that it acted quickly, was approachable, and provided comprehensive support to the whole family. Service users liked that support was offered to all members of the family.
- It was intended for service users to work with IFIT for one year. Support workers advised that this length of time was required as many service users had complex needs. The year was split into three stages: assessment, intensive intervention, and maintenance. Support reduces during the maintenance stage and families were encouraged to sustain the changes made during the intervention stage.
- Support could continue beyond a year in certain circumstances, such as if a family was slow to engage with the service.
- Support workers were described as dedicated, approachable, helpful and knowledgeable of social issues. Service users praised support workers for helping them to think positively about their situation.
- It was very important to service users that they had a dedicated support worker. It was emphasised that trust and strong relationships between service users and support workers was vital.
- Some support workers had provided support outside of usual working hours during crisis periods. It was highlighted that this required management approval, however families valued this flexibility. The importance of professional boundaries was stated.
- Service users compared the positive experience they had with IFIT to the negative experiences they had with other local services. In particular, service users said the service was much more approachable than social services, schools and housing providers.
- Support workers agreed that some services were not as sympathetic to service users as IFIT and some could improve their communications. However, it was suggested that service users' negative experiences of other services may be influenced by the purpose of their interaction with them. For example, service users were most likely to engage with schools, housing and social services when there was a particular problem. In such instances, the service often has statutory powers to sanction service users and this was more likely to lead to negative experiences than interacting with IFIT, the only purpose of which was to support parents and families.

- Support workers could attend meetings with service users as a form of advocacy. Service users suggested that this was particularly effective with schools, and support workers agreed that some schools seemed more willing to engage with professionals than parents. It was also commented that support workers could identify service failures due to their familiarity with the processes of schools and other agencies.
- Support workers commented that some housing providers could be more sympathetic. However, housing providers do not always know the background of service users; and service users often do not wish to disclose personal information to their housing provider.
- It was suggested that more could be done to promote positive and sensitive interaction between the Council's own services and service users.
- Some service users explained that through IFIT they had gained the self-confidence to engage with other services, whereas others did not trust other services, and worried that they would no longer be able to interact positively with other services after their advocacy support from IFIT ended.
- The IFIT service was supported by an Education Support Worker to specifically assist with educational matters. Support workers found this very helpful as she had a deep understanding of school processes.
- Service users considered that they had greatly benefitted from the service, however many service users did not want their intervention to end and were worried about what would happen afterwards.
- After IFIT intervention families were usually offered support from the Families First service. If this was accepted, joint home visits were carried out by the IFIT support worker and the Families First support worker to ease the transition.
- Support workers recognised the importance of the transition period and were keen to develop this in any way which would be beneficial to service users.
- Some service users had already used the Families First service. These users believed IFIT to be more comprehensive than Families First, and commented that only so much could be achieved in the six month timeframe used by Families First.
- Service users had initially been anxious about engaging with IFIT. Many had been referred from social services and spoke of the stigma attached to social services intervention. However, the parents interviewed were glad they had engaged with the service.
- Members of the Committee commented on the drastic change in service users; from being initially anxious about engaging with the service, to not wanting to end their intervention, within a year.
- Some service users had attended parenting programmes and rated these highly.
- Some service users indicated that they felt isolated. Some would be interested in attending social events for service users, and suggested that any events for children and young people should be age appropriate.
- In general, service users did not know of the IFIT service before their intervention.
- Support workers had a relatively small caseload for a support service, of around six families per support worker. Support workers considered that this enabled them to dedicate more time to each family than they would otherwise be able to.

Service users were asked if they could change anything about the service, what it would be:

- Service users were already very pleased with the level of service they received.
- It was suggested that intervention could last longer than a year.
- Service users would consider it helpful to have more joint meetings between their support worker and social worker.

Support workers were asked if they could change anything about the service, what it would be:

- It was thought that a dedicated meeting room for families would be helpful. This would be a modern space offering privacy and good quality resources, including games for children.
- Access to mobile technology would help support workers complete administration tasks outside of the office.
- Support workers were not permitted to work from home and it was considered that allowing this would ensure a better work/life balance.
- Independent external therapeutic support for workers was suggested. Although support workers were able to discuss their feelings with their manager, it was suggested that sometimes workers could not be entirely open with their manager.
- A small budget to help families in crisis would be considered useful, as would a budget to help families move house. It was commented that sometimes families need to move home to remove themselves from local issues.
- It was suggested that a budget to organise trips and visits for service users would be beneficial and could help to inspire young people.
- Some families would benefit from more direct mental health support within the team.
- Investing in staff personal development would help to enhance the skills of the team.
- It was thought that offering even earlier intervention, especially with younger primary school children, would stop problems developing in older children.

Those present thanked the families and officers for their cooperation and contribution to the scrutiny review.

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MYSTERY SHOPPING FEEDBACK – November 2014

Three service users and two managers took part in a mystery shopping exercise to provide feedback on how Families First was responding to potential service users.

Service users were briefed about the context and taken through the ratings in terms of what outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate are in relation to customer service and our expectations in Families First.

We agreed the case study (below) as the scenario that would form the basis of the mystery shopping exercise.

Case study is from the perspective of a mother who has a young son.

- Need help with contact with dad
- Dad is texting, calling all the time and has asked friends to pressure me to let him see son
- When we were together he used to keep my benefits, not let me see my friends
- He hit me a few times, but never any bruising
- My son is playing up a bit in school
- He is always asking me to see dad
- I struggle to get him up in the morning

The outcome of this exercise was two inadequate responses and one good (almost outstanding!) response, see quotes and feedback from the service users involved below.

'The whole call could have been a lot better. The worker showed no empathy, no concern'

'I expressed that I did not feel comfortable and I was told that I should think of my child's emotional wellbeing'

'Flat attitude and unwelcoming'

'Very friendly, pleasant, empathetic and compassionate'

'I felt comfortable and she asked about my son's school'

Another service user said *'I think it's important for Family support workers to say exactly what they do and what's on offer'*

'I was asked what I need help with but they did not relay it back to me'

'She (family support worker) praised me for being strong and said that Families First could help'

In another call the service user described how she had not been given an offer of help only a phone number.

Overall themes:

- Making sure name is given when answering phone
- Be curious, show interest, smile
- Know that the service user will be scared and will not call twice, so we really need to get it right!
- You will only be told what you ask for, if you don't probe you will not find out
- Don't dismiss or pass the buck, if it isn't us, then make sure you take ownership of that and "hold their hand" into the relevant service

Next steps:

- Each team to have training on customer care including role play
- New mystery shopping to happen before end of June 2015

Update: remedial action undertaken

- Feedback shared at Families First management meeting
- Each individual involved had one-to-one feedback
- Each team participated in customer care training
- New mystery shopping exercise planned for 28th April 2015.

DATA FROM EXIT INTERVIEWS WITH FORMER SERVICE USERS MARCH 2015

Background

As part of Families First service user involvement plan and for us to capture the difference our work makes, 45 former service users were contacted by telephone and asked for their opinions on the service they had received .

16 families agreed to take part in the exit interviews.

Background

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- **Families were randomly called.**
- **Aside from ensuring that cases did not close straight from referral, there was no other attempt to filter the sample.**
- **Cases had been closed to the service within the previous 6 months.**

Challenges ;

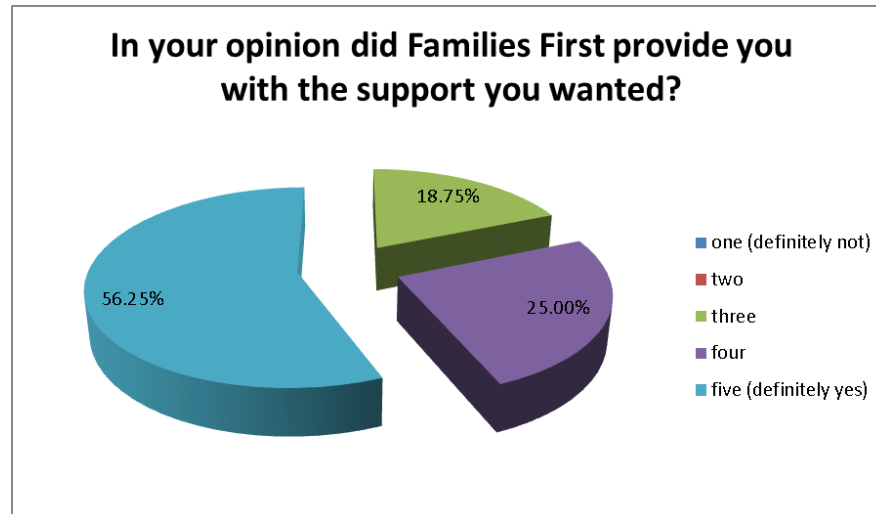
- **Engagement:** The interviews were with former service users, some of the cases had closed a few months ago and it was challenging for families to give specifics on work that had been completed.
- **More regular exit interviews** would be useful to capture specific data although this is a challenge given constraints on staff time.
- **Families who felt that they received a good service** are more likely to provide feedback which may affect the results.

Language barriers

- **Families who experience difficulties with spoken English were not interviewed as part of this exercise . This will require additional resource, not available at this time.**

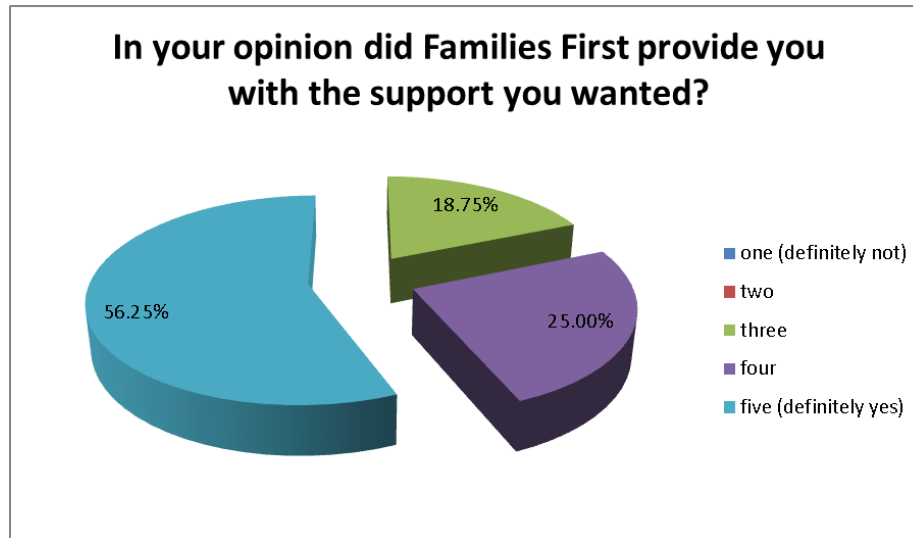
In your opinion did Families First provide you with the support you wanted?

one (definitely not)	two	three	four	five (definitely yes)	Total
0	0	3	4	9	16



Did you feel you had a say in planning the work?

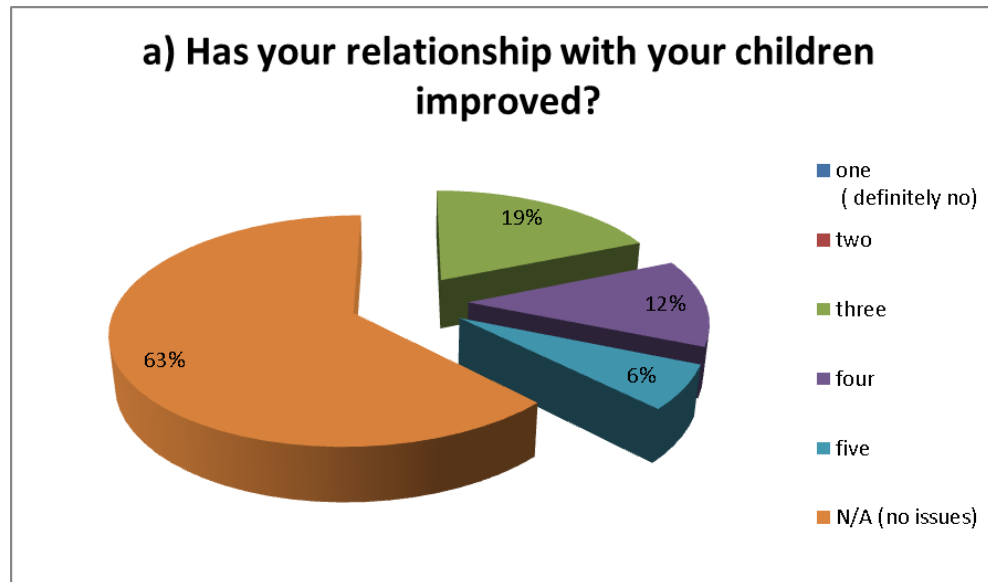
one (definitely not)	two	three	four	five (definitely yes)	Total
0	0	3	4	9	16



If there were issues around family dynamics a. Has your relationship with your children improved?

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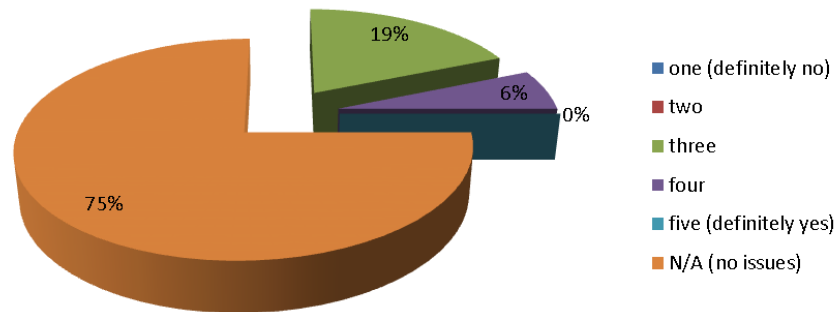
one (definitely no)	two	three	four	five (definitely yes)	N/A	Total
0	0	3	2	1	10	16



b. Are relationships with other family members better?

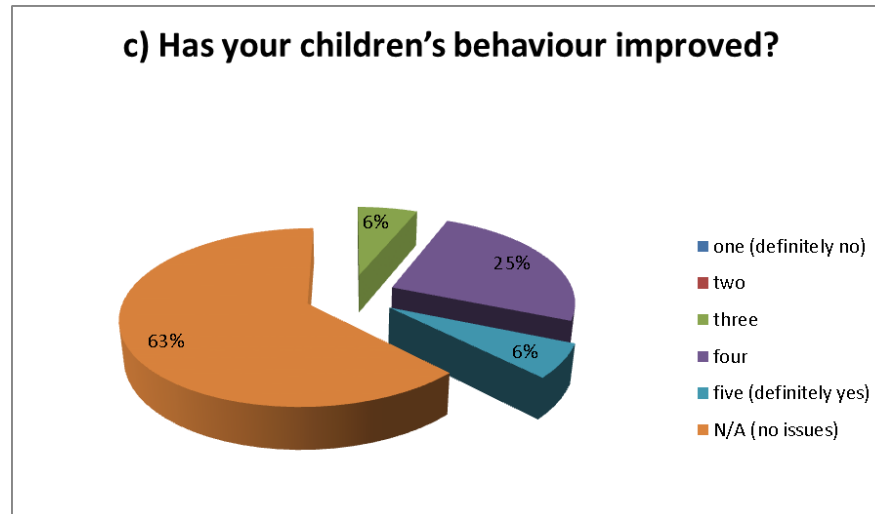
one (definitely no)	two	three	four	five (definitely yes)	N/A	Total
0	0	3	1	0	12	16

b) Are relationships with other family members better?



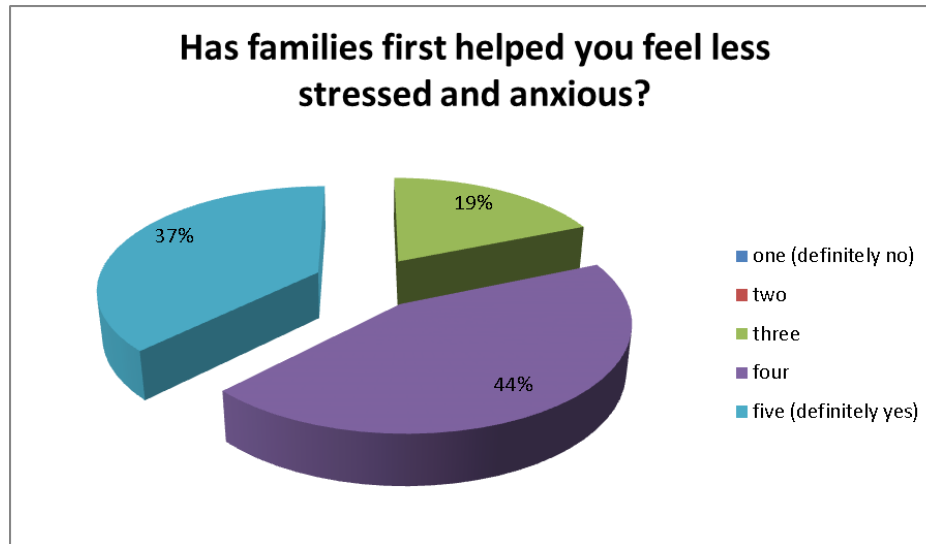
c. Has your children's behaviour improved?

one (definitely no)	two	three	four	five (definitely yes)	N/A	Total
0	0	1	4	1	10	16



Has families first helped you feel less stressed and anxious?

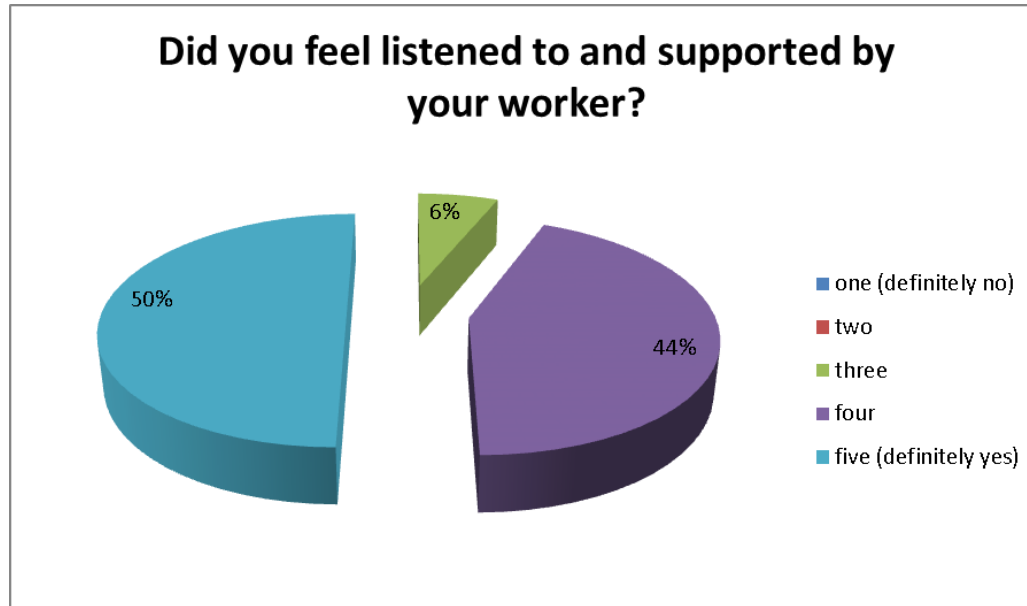
one (definitely no)	two	three	four	five (definitely yes)	Total
0	0	3	7	6	16



Did you feel listened to and supported by your worker?

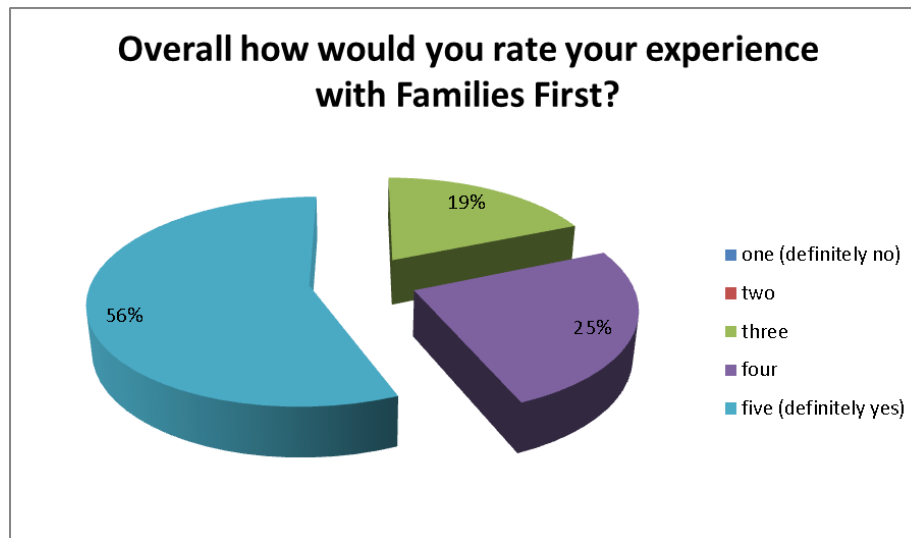
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one (definitely no)	two	three	four	five (definitely yes)	Total
0	0	1	7	8	16



Overall how would you rate your experience with Families First?

one (terrible)	two (not good)	three (fine)	four (good)	five (excellent)	Total
0	0	3	4	9	16



Findings

- We are getting it right! (generally)

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- 81% of the families that responded to the exit interviews scored 4 or 5 as an overall experience, indicating they thought the service was good or excellent. (This corresponds with findings in 2013 and in August 2014).

- There was no negative feedback on staff or the service in general, which shows a significant improvement on our previous performance.

What are our strengths?

94% of those families interviewed felt that they were well supported and listened to by staff.

As a result of developing an effective working relationship, families felt that they had moved on and were happy to recommend the service.

81% felt less stressed and anxious even though for 3 families their situation, (regarding housing) had not substantially changed. They felt more able to cope.

Areas for improvement

Engagement?

There were 3 families (19 %) who were neutral about the support they received and the reasons were...

One family were unable to engage effectively because of complications in keeping appointments (the family have said they would contact if they need help again).

One family felt that the service was ok but that there had not been a substantial change (this is in relation to housing).

One family were neutral because they did not engage with Families First due to their mental health issues, (this case has now been referred on to IFIT).

There was no actual negative feedback on staff or the service overall.

Where to next?

- Qualitative information has been included in this report to allow Managers to feedback to staff where they are doing well and also where there is scope for improvement.
- Is there a need to re look at how we manage expectations and have difficult conversations? E.g. housing issues? Is this a staff training need?

What next?

- Whilst the survey captures positive and negative feedback, how does it help us shape our service?

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1. Feedback is given to FSW and managers to help shape practice.

2. Moving towards co-production; where Service users are involved from beginning to end in a process...

- look to include those families who said in the exit interviews that they would be interested in helping us improve the service.

What next?

E.g. recruitment, service users being involved in writing JD's, shortlisting and interviewing. Service users took part in the recent recruitment for staff but only at the interview stage.

Former Service users (now volunteers) are currently involved in reviewing Family Action HR policies and practices.

- Are we as a service ready to consider that service users should be steering and shaping the service directly with stake holders?

What next in terms of capturing the impact of the service?....Broaden the scope of interviews

Page 26 **Targeted exit interviews to see how we are doing ?**

Look at :

- Specific areas of support e.g. how effective are we in working with families experiencing DV? Should this type of interview be more in depth and qualitative?
- Specific families: e.g. interview those families where there maybe a language barrier.
- Filter the sample so that we capture feedback on all staff?

Method of capturing exit data.

- Are 1:1 telephone interviews the most efficient and user friendly way of capturing feedback?
- Would an online exit interview capture more specific data and also enable families to speak more freely?
- Given the constraints on staff time would online interviews be more efficient?
- Could service user volunteers actually undertake the exit interviews and feedback to managers and staff?

What next in terms of service development?

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- Are we as a service ready to consider that service users should be steering and shaping the service directly with stake holders?
- What does this look like? Commissioning meetings, input on policy, ways of working. Review and editor rights on publicity, communications.
- Service users attending team meetings and Management meetings and raising issues, open scrutiny on all aspects of the work that we do.

Moving forward :

- Specific opportunities for volunteering using current as well as former service users.
- e.g. Ambassador roles in outreach, receptionist.
- Which offer learning opportunities for service users, as well as service users directly supporting the service.
- Peer review: Workers assessing their colleagues casework and impact on families.

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