

Evaluating the 'Systemic Practice in Family Interventions' Programme

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The provision of support to families is an important part of a system that effectively supports children and young people who are involved in offending behaviours. However, there has been a recognition that in the past there has not been sufficient capacity or skills in the social work workforce to work confidently with families (Schinkel, 2013).

In order to address this issue, the Scottish Government commissioned the Family Therapy Training Network (FTTN) to provide systemic family therapy training to practitioners working in the youth justice sector across Scotland. The Family Therapy Training Network is a multi-disciplinary professional network and members are the only Scottish based providers of accredited, post-graduate professional training in family therapy and systemic practice.

The Systemic Practice in Family Interventions Programme

The multi-stage post-graduate programme is accredited by the Association of Family Therapy (AFT) and includes a Foundation course, an Intermediate course, and a two-year Masters which is open to eligible participants who have successfully completed the Foundation and Intermediate stages. This factsheet is predominantly focused on the introductory Foundational element of the programme.

The Systemic Practice and Family Interventions programme in this context was specifically aimed at youth justice practitioners. Professionals working in this area completed two modules by attending six two-day trainer-led study days as well as independent study. Tailoring case examples to the relevant client group, the aim of the Foundation Course (FTTN, 2013) was to allow trainees to develop an in-depth awareness and understanding of theory related to systemic practice and family interventions as well as the skills necessary for reflective therapeutic practice. In order to assess whether the programme was useful to practitioners, CYCJ was asked to help the Scottish Government and FTTN evaluate the programme.

The Findings

The evaluation involved conducting a survey with Foundation course participants both prior to and immediately following completion of the course, along with consultation with line managers and Intermediate Stage participants.

Participants felt that their expectations of the course were broadly met, although some participants had overestimated the depth of content that a Foundation course would cover. Participants also tended to enjoy the course, despite the obvious challenges of juggling study with work and family life.

"Facilitators were enthusiastic and helpful, especially with feedback in prep for assignments."

Participants did also make some suggestions about the mode of delivery that would improve their learning experiences on the course, such as the need for improved audio-visual equipment. These suggestions have been taken on board by the FTTN and will be in place by the time the programme commences again in October.

Importantly, there were statistically significant improvements in participants' ratings of their knowledge, confidence and skills in systemic family practice. Participants appeared to benefit from the practical tools and skills that they gained on the course. This suggests that the key learning objectives of the course were met, although many participants reflected that they were still learning and that their journey as practitioners in this field was only just beginning.

"I have used all of the tools that I have been introduced to and have found them to be really helpful in my work"

In this respect, the impact on practice has so far been more incremental than transformational. However, many participants could outline changes that they had made, although this was not easy if there was not sufficient organisational support to embed the learning.

"There were clear benefits for my practice which stemmed from participation in the course"

The second stage of the evaluation will explore the impact of the programme on practice in more detail. However, it is still too early to know what the impact is on outcomes for young people and their families.

Further information

You can read the full evaluation report [here](#)

For further information about the Family therapy Training Network or to find out more about the programme visit: <http://www.familytherapytrainingnetwork.org/>. At the time of writing, the FTTN were still accepting applications for the Foundation Course that is due to commence in October 2014. Please email: lynne@familytherapytrainingnetwork.org for further information.

References

FTTN. (2013). Foundation training in systemic practice and family interventions. Course Handbook 2013-2014.

Schinkel, M. (2013). Systemic Practice and Family Interventions. CYCJ: unpublished document.

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