

National Fostering Stocktake – A Review of the Fostering System in England- Independent call for Evidence

Introduction

This call for evidence is submitted from the National Implementation Service which provides evidence based and research informed training and support for children (and their parents/carers) who are in care or on the edge of care or custody. The National Implementation Service has worked with over 2,600 foster carers through the delivery of Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO) (formally Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care), KEEP and TEND.

This submission is based on the experiences of NIS consultants implementing the above programmes using information gathered from social care staff, foster and kinship carers, children and young people as well as internal and external evaluations.

This submission follows the areas for review identified in the National Fostering Stocktake-call for evidence document.

- 1) The types of fostering that are currently provided, in order to understand the full range of provision which is available and when and for which young people it is best used**



Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO) is an evidence based treatment programme for children and young people aged between 3-17 years. The programme was developed by Dr Patricia Chamberlain and colleagues at the Oregon Social Learning Center (USA). There are three TFCO programmes (adolescent 11-17 years, child 7-10 years and pre-school 3-6 years) each of which recruit and train specific foster carers who provide single placements over a period of 6-12 months.

The programme was brought to the UK to provide a more intensive and specific intervention for the most challenging young people in our care system. The initiative was Government led and then driven locally by the need within Children's Services to manage children and young people who were often placed within expensive placements. Many of these had children had experienced numerous placement breakdowns and were difficult to place due to their complex presentation. The aim was to return these children to in-house foster placements by skilling up foster carers and clinical teams who work together to deliver a specific treatment programme which is tailored to each child's particular needs. TFCO seeks to decrease the number of child problematic behaviours – the ones that are most likely to lead to a placement disruption. It also aims to significantly increase their skill set and confidence levels. At the same time, foster carers are carefully supported to ensure their stress levels are well managed and that they are being successful in implementing all elements of the TFCO programme. The evidence base (including Sinclair et al 2016) shows that TFCO works most effectively with children and young people displaying higher levels anti-social behaviour.

“We have gone through an amazing transformation. I have no doubt that without the programme my family would have completely collapsed” (Parent of a young person placed on the TFCO-A programme)



Keeping Foster and Kinship Parents Supported (KEEP) is a training and support programme delivered to groups of 8-10 foster carers/kinship carers/special guardians.

There are 3 KEEP programmes according to the age of the child.

KEEP Safe- a 20 week programme for carers of 12-17 year olds

KEEP Standard- a 16 week programme for carers of 5-12 year olds

KEEP P- a 16 week programme for carers of 3-6 year olds

KEEP was also developed by Dr Patricia Chamberlain and colleagues at Oregon Social Learning Center (USA). It uses the same principles and theoretical base as TFCO but is aimed at children and young people who are placed with mainstream carers.

KEEP was also introduced by the Government. It was seen as a programme to skill up larger numbers of foster carers, train them in more effective parent management tools and support them within the group and individually to use strategies to manage carer stress appropriately.

The evidence base from the randomised control trial conducted by Oregon Social Learning Center shows that KEEP works effectively with all children placed in foster care. This was endorsed by an independent evaluation of KEEP Standard delivered in England which was conducted by Ipsos Mori in 2016.

“Beautifully delivered course with practical steps to help us resolve conflicts between us and the children we look after” (KEEP Foster Carer)



TEND Training to Enhance and Nurture Development (TEND) is a group programme for foster carers of babies and small children (0-4 years) aimed specifically at improving attachment and child development by targeting the carer-infant relationship. We know that parenting characterised by responsiveness, affection and encouragement has a direct relationship to an infant or child’s brain architecture and this is the basis of TEND.

TEND is a 90 minute long weekly group programme delivered over 12 sessions which uses video coaching to promote developmentally supportive parenting which is known to promote a more secure attachment.

The programme has been jointly developed by the National Implementation Service, the Department for Education and Professor Phil Fisher and his colleagues based at the University of Oregon, USA.

TEND is based on Filming Interactions to Nurture Development (FIND) which is a US-based video coaching programme for individual parents and carers. TEND is a UK-based adaptation which uses the same basis of “Serve and Return” but in a group format.

Research and internal evaluation (Summary of Road Test and Pilot Stage , National Implementation Service, 2016) suggests that TEND increases developmentally supportive parenting, reduces carer stress, improves child development, decreases maladaptive behaviours and increases positive, adaptive behaviour in children aged 0-4 years.

“I am more reflective and more intentional when engaging in play with her” (TEND Foster Carer)

2) What works best within fostering settings to improve outcomes for the children and young people placed?

When considering what works best to improve outcomes for children/young people in foster care, the National Implementation Service will cite specific observations from providing consultation to sites delivering programmes as well as feedback from foster carers using qualitative and quantitative measures.

Implementation of TFCO with 700 children across the 3 programmes has shown that the following key programme elements contribute to improved outcomes with this challenging group of children by having:

- Foster carers who are specifically recruited, trained and who receive 24-hour professional support which helps them to provide single treatment placements for assessed and eligible children/young people
- Foster carers who are placed at the centre of the treatment programme and who are part of the TFCO team, attending weekly meetings where they contribute to the development of treatment plans
- A team that works across all areas of a child's life; education, social, biological or extended family and foster family, to improve outcomes
- Specific attention paid to developing a young person's skills and capacity to maintain relationships, while addressing areas of difficulty. The foster carer and their relationship with the child/young person is seen as central in bringing about positive changes.

“Every week we focus on one target. It makes a difference. Their social skills are improved and they are motivated. The first child we had is now confident in going into a shop to ask for what he wants.” (TFCO Foster Carer)

The feedback received by the National Implementation Service relating to the 2,000 carers who have completed KEEP references the following as contributory factors to improving outcomes for carers and young people:

- Group based intervention so that carers do not feel on their own. They value training with other foster and kinship carers where they can share experiences and support each other

- The reassurance of the evidence base which helps facilitators and carers to be confident that the course content is tried and tested and shown to be effective
- The training is delivered informally through discussion and problem solving, not in a classroom setting – this gives carers space for reflection
- That whilst there is a recognisable KEEP curriculum, the training is responsive to the needs and concerns of individual carers and is not solely based upon a training agenda
- Empowerment and validation of carers, which is an essential component of the KEEP process inspires and motivates. This results in more resilient and invested foster carers
- There is evidence to link the positive approach taken by carers and the improvements noticed in a child's behaviour.
- Foster carers understand the "why" but rarely know how to translate this into the "how". KEEP gives carers real strategies to use which are practiced within the group, at home and then fine-tuned giving interventions which are relevant for their home, children and families

“After the first session, it was like, ‘Oh, that’s going to be different’ because the first thing they said was ‘We’re not going to preach things to you. The ideas are going to come from the group...’ (Foster Carer - after completing KEEP)

With TEND, the feedback from the 60 carers who have completed the 12 week programme suggests the following outcomes are achieved:

- Foster carers being supported through video coaching, group interaction and training to responsively interact with their infants in ways that have been shown to positively influence developmental outcomes and attachment

- Increase in the frequency and quality of foster carers developmentally supportive 'carer-child' interactions using the 5 elements of 'Serve and Return' referenced within the programme
- Decrease the likelihood of problematic behaviour patterns developing by providing evidence informed strategies and advice appropriate to common problems associated with infants and young children
- Decrease carer stress in the face of difficult behaviours
- Improved child development using standardised measures

"I am more reflective and more intentional when engaging in play with her" (TEND Foster Carer)

3) What improvements could be made to the way that fostering provision is commissioned, delivered, regulated and inspected to improve outcomes and value for money?

The National Implementation Service advocates that a range of fostering provisions is commissioned to meet the needs of all children in foster care. Specialist therapeutic programmes like TFCO will always be required for the most complex care needs. Having this intense care met in-house rather than moving to external placements is likely to have better outcomes for children, young people and their families. Children within mainstream foster placements should be cared for by carers who feel adequately trained and supported.

All foster carers should have access to high quality training using well recognised content. Programmes such as KEEP and TEND help carers to feel valued and equipped for their role; whether that be short or long term care or preparation for transition to adoption. Foster carers receive practical advice in terms of a toolkit to help manage behaviour which is stressful for them and society. Delivering a programme within a group setting helps foster carers support each other as well as exchange ideas and practices.

Any programme delivered to foster carers should collect and evaluate data to evidence that the intervention is having the positive impact it is intended to have.

The National Implementation Service is keen for Commissioners to be involved in the review of fostering support services and to have awareness of implementation science to support programme development and success. For example programme delivery may take time for the team to learn and feel confident with the model before becoming fully operational.

Investment in a programme is also investment in workforce. Staff who deliver evidence based or research informed programmes tell us that they feel re-skilled and valued. Staff should have appropriate time allocated to the delivery of a programme plus operational support such as admin time. The training, consultation and coaching delivered to staff are also key components. Staff value the ability to reflect and receive guidance within consultation to help them stay on track. Programmes such as TFCO, KEEP and TEND are delivered with high levels of model adherence by staff which results in the intended outcomes being achieved.

In terms of inspection, the National Implementation Service would like to see that HMIs challenge Children's Services to provide evidence of routine outcomes from delivery of services to children/young people and carers. We would like to see that inspectors have awareness of evidence based and research informed programmes so that if such a programme is being delivered, the implementation story and outcomes will be appropriately reflected.

4) The status, role and function of foster carers in relation to other professionals as part of the team working with a child in care

Foster carers are the most important people within a fostering service as without them there is not a service!

In TFCO foster carers are the eyes and ears of the programme. Carers attend weekly meetings and provide both information to shape weekly targets for the children/young people and behaviour management strategies to support skill building which is integral to the programme. This is done under the supervision of a team leader and as a professional member of the team.

Programmes such as KEEP and TEND help the carers to understand and feel confident in their roles. This includes giving a language to the care strategies they are implementing which increases their confidence when attending meetings such as reviews or when communicating with school.

"I am part of making a real difference in the lives of looked after children and setting them up for success" (KEEP Foster Carer)

“TEND makes you realise how much of a big part you play in a child’s life and what you do every day is broken down into bits” (TEND Foster Carer)

5) How the experiences of young people can be improved when entering foster care, transitioning between placements (between carers or into other settings), and leaving foster care

Good care planning to ensure timely identification of placements should be improved for children/young people when entering and transitioning foster care. One of the biggest challenges for a time limited programme such as TFCO is the identification of a move-on placement despite programme planning for an exit date. This has the potential to undermine work completed. The National Implementation Service advocates for greater use of a retainer system for foster carers so that early identification can secure transition placements allowing for appropriate planning, preparation of carers including individualised training and introductions.

TEND specifically targets the building of a more secure attachment between foster carer and child. This gives the child the best foundation for being able to make subsequent secure relationships in the future and is therefore key to successful transitions stable and happy forever families.

When tracking KEEP and TEND programme intake data, carers often report that they understand why a child/young person has behaviour difficulties but they feel unskilled and overwhelmed dealing with the behaviour. The National Implementation Service therefore advocates that all carers have appropriate parenting training and support to ensure that foster carers are prepared for the stress and changes in behaviour and emotional well-being associated with times of transition for children/young people.

“What we say about how we feel about [the possibility of the child moving on] is very, very similar and just to hear someone almost putting into words what I feel about it – well, you couldn’t get that anywhere else really.” (Foster Carer, after KEEP)

6) Any other issues which might contribute to better outcomes for children

Consistent approaches between foster care and other care provisions such as residential care and support to families where a child/young person is returning home will contribute to better outcomes for children.

Programmes which map on to similar theoretical approaches will ensure consistency of the foster carer's parenting style which will ease transition and provide successful management of a child/young person's behavioural and emotional needs. The National Implementation Service has seen this work well in authorities such as Suffolk and Oxfordshire who run both RESuLT (a whole team training programme for staff in residential children's homes) and KEEP Safe for carers of adolescents. Both programmes refer to the principles of Social Learning Theory whilst using carers' relationships with young people to influence their behaviour and new skill building.

When children/young people return home, it is crucial that a support programme is in place to help the family manage the transition successfully. A programme such as the MST Family Integrated Transitions (FIT) model uses standard MST principles with additional components to address the specific issues and contexts of young people returning home. The goals of the FIT programme include strengthening family relationships, improving the young person's mental health, increasing their pro-social behaviour and lowering the risk of offending where this is part of the presenting problem. The model also helps by connecting the family with appropriate community supports and supporting the young person in reintegrating into school and developing positive peer relationships.

Conclusion and Key Messages

I would like to conclude this call for evidence submission with the following key messages gathered from extensive knowledge of programme implementation and work with foster carers, children and young people.

- I. Children and young people present a range of needs and no single programme will fit all. There should be a constant focus on planning for a child's long term future and stability of care
- II. Foster carers should be highly treasured and regarded for the fantastic job they do
- III. The entire foster carer workforce should have access to high quality training and support. Without this there are risks to recruitment and retention as well as placement disruption
- IV. The group delivery dynamic is highly valued by foster carers as a support and learning forum

- V. Staff working with programmes such as TFCO, KEEP and TEND tell us they really value the training and consultation model of implementation. Although there is a cost implication for commissioning agencies, consultation helps to maintain standards and best outcomes
- VI. Evidence (both qualitative and quantitative) is required to show that whatever programme you are using with carers, it is doing what is intended

Website link and References for information on programmes supported by National Implementation Service

www.evidencebasedinterventions.org.uk

Sinclair, I., Parry, E., Biehal, N., Fresen, J., Kay, C., Scott, S., and Green, J.

(2016) Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care in England: differential effects by level of initial antisocial behaviour. *European Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 25, 843-852

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/560787/DFE-RR530-KEEP_Standard_training_programme_for_foster_and_kinship_carers.pdf

TEND Summary of Road Test and Pilot Stage (2016) National Implementation Service

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