

Case Study: POPLAR HARCA FIP

If you gave 200 residents of one of the most deprived areas of the country £100,000 they'd blow it on a party, wouldn't they? If you asked them how to tackle neighbours causing crime and nuisance they'd tell you to evict them, right?

Poplar HARCA's residents would make you wrong on both counts. At our Residents' Conference £100,000 was allocated for residents to spend. They bought a Family Intervention Project (FIP) to try to change the behaviour of the most challenging local families and support them in their homes. They chose FIP as they recognised the value it could bring to their community as a whole – and the life-changing difference it could make to individuals and families.

So, in 2008, Poplar HARCA's Enforcement Team was joined by an experienced FIP worker. The new model is based on a holistic 'whole family' approach which considers the needs of every family member, and provides an assertive, tenacious community outreach service. FIP families sign up to a contract which identifies sanctions and rewards with the aim of re-engaging the most disaffected families into mainstream services.

Poplar HARCA owns 8,500 homes in East London. HARCA stands for Housing and Regeneration Community Association: we take an innovative approach to tenancy management that is embedded in our community and regeneration ethos. It isn't just about administering a landlord tenant relationship – it's about how we support individuals to thrive, so that they can add value to their community.

We work exceedingly closely with statutory and 3rd sector agencies – sharing office space, staff and other resources with the Local Authority and Police to leverage in the expertise our residents need to achieve an improvement to their quality of life.

The key referral criteria for FIP is:

- Threat of eviction/homelessness
- Antisocial and offending behaviour that impacts on the local community
- Risk of exclusion from education
- Identified substance misuse which impacts on the community
- Families with children
- Families failing to engage with services over a period of time

Six families have engaged with FIP so far with contracts that address each family member's needs in a holistic manner; looking to the future and working towards families being able to cope independently, maximising the educational, training and employability chances of all family members. FIP provides intensive support and a range of specialist services e.g. educational and counselling resources, budget coaching and parenting support - including a specific "Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities" programme. All six families have made progress and imminent eviction has been avoided. Other outcomes are improved attendance and arrival on time at school by the children, improved parenting skills and reduced anti-social behaviour.

Prior to FIP, the final resort when behaviour continued to be bad despite warnings, was to ask a Court for possession. All six families engaging with FIP would have ended up in Court but for this intervention.

FIP costs Poplar HARCA £70,000 a year. It has already paid for itself in the saved costs of legal and other proceedings and in Poplar HARCA officer time investigating complaints and enforcing tenancy conditions. We believe it has also significantly contributed to helping to achieve 95% of Poplar HARCA residents feeling safe in their homes, according

to the most recent survey.

Our FIP operates in partnership with Tower Hamlets LBC, so that our FIP worker is part of a bigger FIP team and has access to the specialist advice, skills, training and support needed for this demanding role.

Our FIP has been independently evaluated and in just seven months:

- There is a strong and trusting relationship between the FIP worker, the housing management team and the local Police – co-location has been important to this.
- The number of complaints from neighbours and level of ASB associated with the core FIP families have reduced; evictions have been avoided; school attendance of the children has improved. FIP workers often need to work with families for a year or more so to have families engaged and achieving goals already is remarkable.
- FIP is cost effective with significant savings being made in the costs associated with enforcement and legal proceedings.
- In addition to the intensive support family members receive a range of specialist support – including parenting support, educational, counselling and budget coaching.
- The Parenting course complements the intensive support provided, and has a positive ripple effect into the wider community as it is available to all Poplar HARCA residents.
- The FIP worker is providing a secondary role acting as bridge between Poplar HARCA and support agencies for families who do not meet the FIP criteria but still need some support; enabling other Poplar HARCA officers to work more effectively and preventatively.
- Two of the Mothers involved with FIP were interviewed for the evaluation – these were tenants who were on the verge of losing their homes because of anti-social behaviour. Both felt they had benefited:

“I used to have a problem with “authority” but with the support of FIP I can deal with it better”

“There is always someone to go to now if there are things I don’t understand, rather than getting angry about it”

“Talking to the people at the FIP has helped me to realise that I can’t change the past but can improve things in the future for me and my children”

“The parenting course has helped as I now know I’m not the only one with these problems”

“Our life at home is better because I don’t feel angry all the time so don’t shout at the children so much”

“I did something stupid and I know that now”