

## Families into Work Evaluation

### Progress Update and Emerging Findings

This note provides an update and emerging findings from Ecorys' (formally ECOTEC Research & Consulting) evaluation of the Families into Work (FiW) project.

#### 1.1 Overview

The Families into Work initiative is a special project of the Haringey Guarantee. It is a multi-agency approach based in Northumberland Park to address wider social exclusion issues by working intensively with families to improve the life chances of all family members. The initiative aims to:

- Improve the life chances of people in Northumberland Park by working with families to identify and address their barriers to employment
- Support children and young people to achieve success in education and develop knowledge and skills to gain work with career prospects
- To increase family aspirations to succeed and gain independence

The project team work with families:

- to identify barriers to work for parents and older children
- to identify barriers to educational achievement for younger children
- to identify a family action plan, including a combination of services and projects
- to contact service providers to negotiate and agree access to the appropriate projects and services and shared action plans for the family which will support them into work
- to ensure services are provided in a sensible way for the family
- to provide support to reduce drop out when things get tough and troubleshoot any problems which arise with service provision
- to monitor progress against each family action plan

Although the project focuses primarily on reducing worklessness, it aims to help families deal with other issues in their lives which although not directly related to work, create problems for family members and become barriers to work.

#### 1.2 Evaluation methodology and progress update

Ecorys are utilising a range of methods to evaluate the FiW project. The specific strands of the evaluation and details of the tasks undertaken to date are provided below:

Approach	Progress to date
Qualitative in-depth interviews/focus group with project staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus group completed with Project Manager and 4 Family Support Officers</li> </ul>
Qualitative in-depth telephone interviews with partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews completed with 3 partners</li> <li>• <b>Still to be completed:</b> 3 further interviews with partners</li> </ul>
Qualitative in-depth interviews with beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews completed with 16 beneficiaries</li> <li>• <b>Still to be completed:</b> 2 further interviews with beneficiaries</li> </ul>

Focus group with Youth User Forum	• <b>Still to be completed:</b> FG arranged for Tuesday 8 <sup>th</sup> November
Analysis of MI and Family Action Plans	• Ongoing
Literature/document review to set FiW in context	• Ongoing

### 1.3 Emerging findings

#### 1.3.1 Project concept and operation

- The evaluation evidence available to date suggests that the concept behind the FiW project (i.e. to provide intensive help to families to deal with other issues which create problems for family members and become barriers to work) responds to the needs of workless families in Northumberland Park. Evidence from partners and beneficiaries suggests that other employment providers do not provide the same intensity and tailoring of support.
- The project team have successfully utilised a range of approaches to market and raise awareness of the project. The most effective referral mechanisms appear to be word of mouth and working in partnership with other organisations based in Northumberland Park. Useful lessons have been learnt about other referral mechanisms:
  - ▶ Whilst large scale advertising has been effective in achieving a volume of potential beneficiaries, this has generated interest from outside of the defined geographical boundaries within which the project is operating, so some referrals could not be registered.
  - ▶ Fewer than expected referrals have been received from Jobcentre Plus as a result of the defined geographical focus of the project (i.e. advisers would need to carefully check postcodes to assess eligibility for referral, as a result it is perceived that they are referring to other programmes).
- There is potentially a need to raise the profile of the FiW project and further establish its identity as a unique whole family approach to worklessness. Project staff and partners feel that FiW may not stand out sufficiently as one of several programmes that Jobcentre Plus advisers could refer beneficiaries to. Project staff also reported some confusion over their job titles as 'Family Support Officers' with some partners misunderstanding the employment focus of the project.
- The voluntary aspect of the project is considered by project staff, partners and beneficiaries to be important in facilitating initial engagement. Beneficiaries, in particular, reported that they were more likely to engage and maximise the support available if they felt they weren't being forced to engage.
- The range of employment support offered includes working to identify aspirations and barriers to employment, building confidence, updating and enhancing skills and job search assistance. In line with the aim to address wider issues that if unresolved become barriers to work, there was also examples of FiW staff providing support to deal with debts, including contacting providers on a beneficiaries behalf to agree an repayment plan, arranging alternative accommodation for a beneficiary to move away from domestic violence and facilitating relationships between parents and schools to address educational issues.

- Beneficiaries were generally very positive about the support and advice they had received from the FiW project. Beneficiaries particularly appreciated seeing the same adviser, who built up knowledge about their circumstances and who contacted them regularly to check on their progress.

### 1.3.2 Outputs and outcomes

- The FiW project has exceeded its targets in terms of beneficiary engagement. The target was to register 50 families in year one and a further 50 in year two, by the end of the first year, the project had registered approximately 70 families.
- To date there have been 33 positive outcomes for FiW beneficiaries. This includes 11 employment outputs. (*Figures as at September 2010*).
- Regardless of whether or not individuals have so far found work, the evidence suggests that FiW has impacted on soft outcomes and job readiness. Beneficiaries suggest that the support from FiW made for more effective job search, boosted their confidence and broadened their horizons.

- ▶ In many instances the beneficiaries was suffering from severe loss of **confidence** after lengthy disengagement from the labour market or from never having engaged with the labour market; in these cases FiW staff were supportive, providing reassurance and boosting confidence regarding skills and abilities as suggested by this beneficiary:

*"It [engaging with FiW] gave me a bit more confidence as I didn't really have confidence before I went there. It brought me out of myself. I now deal with 100s of students everyday, but before my confidence wasn't very high and I wouldn't have been able to deal with that." (Beneficiary 11)*

- ▶ The intensity and personalised support offered by FiW staff was felt by beneficiaries to have a **motivational** impact:

*"She [FiW FSO] showed a lot of interest right through the whole programme. She'd ring me up to find out how I was getting on and if everything was okay. The fact that my adviser rings me up to check on progress spurs me on to keep looking for work." (Beneficiary 5)*

*"I feel more focused and ambitious than before I went to them. Before I went to them I was feeling low that I couldn't do many things but they made me aware that this is not the end that I can build myself up." (Beneficiary 12)*

### 1.3.3 Case study

The following example is illustrative of the support and impact of FiW:

Beneficiary A was finding it difficult to find or focus on looking for employment as she had 3 teenage sons who were at risk of offending. After a period of building trust with the family, FiW engaged all members of the family through individual sessions; providing support and advice to the sons about college courses and job search and coaching support for the mother. The family is now thriving, with all three sons in college and Beneficiary A undertaking an apprenticeship working towards an NVQ in Business Administration.

## 1.4 Next steps

The next steps for the evaluation are to complete the programme of beneficiary and partner interviews and focus groups. The evaluation will continue to gather and analyse the MI data and evidence contained within family action plans. All strands of the evaluation will be brought together to produce a final report and findings will be disseminated at the celebration event planned for early December.