



# A Report on the Intensive Fostering Pilot Programme

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*



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## **Introduction**

The Anti-social Behaviour Act (2003) enabled courts to include a fostering requirement as part of a Supervision Order in cases where young people's behaviour was to a large extent due to their home circumstances and lifestyle. In 2005, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) commissioned agencies in three parts of England to pilot the evidence-based intervention Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) model which had been developed by the Oregon Social Learning Centre (OSLC) in the USA and which, in the context of the English youth justice system, was to be known as Intensive Fostering (IF).

This intervention is targeted at serious and persistent young offenders for whom the alternative to fostering would be custody or an Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP). Three years later, the passing of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 led to an administrative change to the circumstances in which young people may be sentenced to IF. Under this Act, courts may now require a minimum of six months in Intensive Fostering as a condition of a Youth Rehabilitation Order (YRO).

MTFC is a community-based intervention in which a multi-disciplinary team works intensively with young people and their families during a placement with specially trained foster carers, encouraging and reinforcing positive behaviours and diverting young people from delinquent peers.

The aim of the IF programme is that, in most cases, the young person will return to their family. To ensure that any gains made during foster placement are not lost when they leave, birth family therapists undertake work with parents or alternative carers during both the foster placement and the aftercare period. The intention is to ensure that the young person returns to an environment where they will receive a reasonable amount of consistent and authoritative care and support, and that desired behaviours will continue to be encouraged and reinforced in a positive manner.

The programme includes individual behaviour management plans, which are developed and regularly reviewed for each young person. Behaviour is closely monitored and positive behaviours are reinforced in a concrete manner, using a system of points and levels. At the start of the programme their activities are severely restricted but as the programme progresses, they move through a series of levels – each of which brings privileges and enhanced freedoms.

They are awarded points for any positive behaviours (including routine behaviours, such as getting up in time for school each day) and these points gradually accumulate, allowing them to move through the levels of the programme. Negative behaviours also have consequences, as points previously earned are deducted and sometimes young people may be demoted to the previous level.

Fidelity to the Oregon model is monitored both by the national co-ordinator of the IF programme (employed by the YJB) and through distance supervision, provided by a member of the OSLC. Each of the three pilot teams has a part-time programme manager who oversees the management of the team, allowing

the programme supervisor to focus on clinical work. The teams also have a family placement social worker, whose role is to recruit and support foster carers.

A full IF team comprises the following staff:

- a programme supervisor, to oversee the therapeutic work of the team with each young person
- a programme manager, to manage the team
- a family placement social worker, to recruit and support the foster carers
- an individual therapist, to undertake therapeutic work with the young person
- a skills worker, to work with the young person on developing social skills
- a birth family therapist, to work with parents or follow-on carers
- a Parent Daily Report (PDR) caller, to collect the from foster carers.

Work on behaviour, communication and life skills is delivered by the programme supervisors, individual therapists, skills workers and foster carers. Indeed, the foster carers' use of the points and levels system (as described above) is central to the work on behaviour. This work is closely supervised by the IF team, which monitors developments on a daily basis through the PDR calling system and offers weekly group supervision to the foster carers.

Individual therapists provide weekly individual therapy sessions to young people that include a focus on developing problem-solving skills and changing identified behaviours. Skills workers help the young people to improve and practise their social skills and try to involve them in positive recreational activities. The team works together to reinforce pro-social behaviour, discourage negative peer relationships and encourage positive ones.

The IF team aims to find appropriate education or training for young people, helping them settle into school or college and encouraging regular attendance. They try to systematically track young people's behaviour at school and encourage teachers to respond consistently and appropriately to them, sometimes acting as advocates for them within the school.

Where the plan is for young people to return home when the IF placement ends, birth family therapists work with parents to teach them and support them in practising more effective parenting strategies. The aim is for the young people to continue to receive consistent parenting and improved parental supervision when they return home.

The University of York Social Policy Research Unit, in collaboration with the University of Manchester and the London School of Economics, were commissioned to conduct an evaluation using both qualitative and quantitative data to explore the successes and challenges of IF implementation.

This study examines the experiences and outcomes of the first participants in the programme in England and compares them with the outcomes of a comparison group who were sentenced to custody or an Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP). This study also compares the cost of IF placements with custodial placements and assesses the cost of services used. This study draws on information provided by the IF teams and carers, and the views of young people and their parents.

## **Research design<sup>1</sup>**

### *Characteristics and circumstances of the sample*

Recruitment to the IF programme began in March 2005 and the evaluation began just over one year later. Funding was provided for 15 places and it was initially envisaged that these would be filled quickly enough to allow the evaluation to recruit two full cohorts (30 young people in total), thus providing a robust sample size.

In practice, it proved more difficult and protracted for the schemes to reach full operational capacity than had been anticipated. Despite extending the recruitment period, the IF scheme's early implementation difficulties meant that only 23 young people<sup>2</sup> were sentenced to IF during the study period.

The comparison group comprised 24 young people, of whom 20 were sentenced to custody under a Detention and Training Order (DTO)<sup>3</sup> and four were sentenced to supervision in the community under a Supervision Order with an ISSP.<sup>4</sup>

The sampling strategy for the comparison group was based on the eligibility criteria for the scheme. IF is intended for those young people at risk of custody, for whom parenting and lifestyle are perceived to have a substantial impact on their offending behaviour. Aside from the condition that young people should be at imminent risk of custody (or ISSP), the criteria for IF programme eligibility are based on the severity scores of two key variables on the YJB's Asset assessment tool: 'family and personal relationships' and 'lifestyle'. The plan was

<sup>1</sup> For more detailed information on methods see Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> There were initially 24 young people but one young person in the IF group died during the year after he was placed.

<sup>3</sup> The first half of the sentence is spent in custody while the second half is spent in the community, under the supervision of the youth offending team (YOT).

<sup>4</sup> Most young people will spend six months on ISSP. The most intensive supervision (25 hours a week) lasts for the first three months of the programme. Following this, the supervision continues at a reduced intensity (a minimum of five hours a week and weekend support) for a further three months. On completion of ISSP, the young person will continue to be supervised for the remaining period of their order ([www.yjb.gov.uk](http://www.yjb.gov.uk), 2010).

that young people could be referred to IF – and hence to the comparison group – if they scored at least three on each of these variables.

Once young people had been identified as potentially eligible, the outcome of their sentence hearing had to be determined to establish *actual* eligibility. If a young person was sentenced to custody or an ISSP, their YOT worker was then contacted to ask for help in gaining the young person's informed, written consent.

Two-thirds of the IF group remained on the programme for at least nine months (see Table 3 in Appendix B), while the average length of disposal for the comparison group was 11.5 months. The custodial element of a DTO is theoretically half the length of the sentence, although this can be shortened or lengthened depending on the young person's behaviour in custody. For those who were sentenced to a DTO (n=20), the average length of the custodial element of their sentence was 5.8 months – which is somewhat longer than the average 4.8 months (or 148 days) for the custodial sentence of the control group in a comparable Oregon study of MTFC (Chamberlain and Reid, 1998).

In comparison, while the young people in the IF group were in their foster placements and under close supervision, they were not locked in or physically restrained in any way and – although they were expected to obey certain rules, – they could leave at any time they chose. They were also allowed visits home (at which time they were not under supervision) and granted more freedom as they progressed up the levels of the programme. Therefore, the opportunity of those in the IF group to reoffend is approximately equivalent to that of the young people released from custody or on ISSP. However, it can be assumed that the young people in IF are more intensely supervised than those serving the community portion of their DTO sentence, and slightly more than those on ISSP.

In terms of demographic characteristics, there were no statistically significant differences between the young people in the IF group and those in the custody/ISSP group (see Table 4 in Appendix B). The proportion of girls was the same for both groups, with four in each.

Due to the much later start date of the London scheme, more young people were placed by the other two IF schemes during the study period (see Table 5 in Appendix B). Since all of the young people in the London sample were from Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) groups and two other young people from the other pilot areas were from BME groups, any effects of ethnic origin are likely to be confounded by area effects. Therefore, no firm conclusions about the impact of ethnicity on outcomes can be drawn.

At baseline, shortly after sentencing for the index offence, there were no significant differences in either the criminal histories or in the current offences of the two groups. Nor was there any significant difference between the mean total score on Asset for the comparison group (25.54) compared to the IF group (22.53). The only significant difference between the groups lay in the pattern of current offences for which the young people had been sentenced on this

occasion. The comparison group was more likely to have been convicted for offences of violence against the person at the index court hearing than the young people in the IF group. This must be kept in mind when interpreting reconviction rates. However, there was no difference between the groups in relation to other types of offence

Overall, 40% of the young people were reported to have had experience of being in care during their lives (other than through remand to care) and nearly one-quarter had recent experience of this. Ten of these were in the comparison sample and nine were in the IF sample. Some YOT workers had a limited knowledge of young people's past or current involvement with the care system and the legal context of their care status was not always well understood. For example, it was clear from the Asset forms that YOT workers did not always understand the distinction between a young person being in voluntary care and being on a care order to the local authority.

#### *Data collection*

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the young people at baseline, (shortly after sentencing for the index offence, and at follow-up, one year post-sentence/release from custody). These interviews explored their views of IF, while the parents of those in the IF group were also interviewed at both points in time. In addition, postal questionnaires were also completed by YOT workers, IF teams and foster carers.

Reconviction data on the IF group were examined at baseline, one year after entry to foster placement, and also one year after they had *left* their foster placement. Both of these follow-up periods were used in the key Oregon study on young offenders. For the comparison group, reconviction data were examined one year after release from custody or sentence to ISSP.

## **Key findings**

There are a number of limitations to this study which mean that conclusions regarding the impact of IF should not be generalised to a wider population. These limitations are:

- The IF pilot population was small and because of this it cannot be considered to be representative of all young people receiving IF, although it was indeed representative of all young people who received it up to the point at which the study was done.
- As a pilot study, many of the processes were under development and it should not be assumed that the programme is now operating in the same way or is achieving similar outcomes. Since the time this study was conducted in 2006, the IF programme has introduced many changes to ensure greater model fidelity and has improved its delivery of the programme, especially the aftercare phase.
- The IF intervention is intended to be an alternative to a custodial sentence. Although there is no precise equivalent comparison group against which to measure the reoffending of young people while receiving IF, the reoffending of young people was compared at one year from the date they *entered* and at one year after they had *left* their IF placements with the reoffending of young people one year after their release from custody/sentence to ISSP. In making this comparison great care should be exercised for the following reasons:
  - finding matched samples of young offenders that are similar in respect of risks, needs and outcomes is very difficult. Those that go to custody and those that are selected for IF are likely to be different in ways which may affect their reoffending rates after completing the programme
  - while it is sometimes possible to control for differences between groups and other extraneous variables, this was not possible in this small scale study.

Despite these limitations, the current report still provides key insights into the lives of these 23 young people and sheds light on the early challenges and successes of this pilot programme.

## **Implementation of the IF pilot programme**

The administrative boundaries and operational structures of the three IF schemes were all quite different: one scheme was provided by a local authority and the other two were operated by a national children's charity (an experienced provider of fostering services). This evaluation included young people placed at the very beginning of the IF programmes, before staff and carers had had time to gain experience in operating the MTFC model, or resolve initial problems in developing teams, recruiting young people and negotiating effective working relationships with other local agencies.

There were a number of challenges for the IF teams to overcome in the process of recruiting young people to the scheme. These included raising and maintaining positive awareness within the YOTs, 'selling' the scheme to the young people and their parents, and raising and maintaining positive awareness in the courts.

Unlike the IF teams in Wessex and London, the Staffordshire team did not experience major difficulties in obtaining referrals from the YOTs. The fact that the Programme Manager was also the Deputy Head of the Staffordshire Youth Offending Service may well have facilitated the referral process. The Wessex team, which was managed by a voluntary agency, experienced recruitment difficulties in the early stages due to the low numbers of referrals to the programme, as well as concerns about the suitability of the young people referred. Over time, this slowly improved, as awareness and understanding of the scheme among YOT staff increased.

Recruitment was the most problematic in London, where the process was hampered by the challenge of raising and maintaining awareness of the scheme across many independently-managed YOTs. It was subsequently recognised that available resources to maintain the team's profile across so many YOTs were being spread too thinly. A plan was therefore implemented to work more closely with fewer YOT teams.

### *The IF team and IF*

Perhaps the most serious obstacle to effective implementation of the model lay in the initial staffing problems experienced by the teams. In a third of cases, the teams had not been fully staffed during the course of the young person's placement. Staffing appeared to have been a particular problem for one team, which had difficulties in recruiting a birth family therapist, a family placement worker and a skills trainer, and often had to use sessional staff to cover these roles. One member of this IF team reported that the lack of a full team was problematic and hampered their work.

Staff in another team felt that work had been hampered by the fact that the programme supervisor had gone on long-term sick leave and had been replaced by temporary staff. This team was also without a skills trainer for a while and so the birth family therapist covered both roles. The third pilot team had particular difficulties because at the time this research was conducted, the programme had no dedicated team. This was due to the small number of

funded IF placements, which meant there were insufficient funds for a full-time team. Instead, this area used part-time staff and social workers in the fostering team, all of whom had been trained in the IF programme.

Despite these staffing challenges, the IF teams' reports on clinical supervision and support suggested that programme fidelity was good. All but one of the 15 foster carers who returned questionnaires indicated that they had received sufficient support. Many mentioned how well supported they felt and how helpful it was to be able to telephone the team for advice at any time:

*If support was needed, it was there 24/7. It ranged from simple clarification of a point to emergency respite. Very good, we felt fully supported.*

Foster carer, Wessex

*The IF team were brilliant. Always contactable and offered up great, practical solutions.*

Foster carer, Wessex

*We have been able to telephone when anything has occurred to get advice on how to deal with it, or how many points to take off.*

Foster carer, Staffordshire

One carer spoke positively about the team's work on finding a school place and arranging activities in the school holidays, while another felt that she had been well-supported "apart from him not being in education, so [we] had very little time apart".

A few carers mentioned the importance of having breaks from caring for the young people through the programme's provision of respite care. Around half (11) of the young people were reported to have stayed with a respite carer on a regular basis during their placement, although arrangements for the provision of respite were reported to have subsequently improved. Respite was clearly important to the foster carers and a lack of this could lead to dissatisfaction with the support available:

*The programme was not what we were promised. We were told that we would have three nights per month respite but it was two nights every six weeks, and then you had to have one of the other children from the scheme*

Foster carer, Staffordshire

However, to some extent, the lack of respite provision appeared to be due to the teams' recurrent staffing difficulties and a lack of respite carers.

When the IF team was asked at the follow-up interview about elements of the programme that had contributed to positive outcomes for the young people, the work on developing problem-solving and pro-social skills was mentioned most frequently. Not surprisingly, diversion from anti-social peers was also viewed as having been important in many cases (see Table 6 in Appendix B).

In nearly two-thirds of cases, the IF teams considered that the carer's implementation of the IF programme also contributed to a large extent to positive outcomes for the young people. The relationships which had developed between young people and carers, and between young people and one or more members of the IF team, were also viewed as an important ingredient in the process of change for over half of the young people (see Table 6 in Appendix B).

### *Young people and IF*

Given the choice between IF and custody, most young people thought that IF sounded the better of the two. Only two young people disagreed and one of these was the youngest person in our IF sample (by 18 months). Casey (all names used are pseudonyms to protect identities) was just 12 when he started his IF placement and had lived at home with his mother all his life. Unlike the others – and perhaps not surprisingly given his age – he did not want to go into IF and thought the idea of living with strange people was 'weird'.

Among the programme graduates, the young people who adapted more easily to the discipline of the programme tended to be those who had prior experience of spending time in an institution. Debbie, for example, had previously been in custody and had been in a rehabilitation unit immediately before starting her placement. She thought that, if she had come into the placement 'off the street', she would have found it hard. However, as she put it: "I've already been in a strict place, it's quite easy for me really".

Most of the others, who had not lived away from home before, seemed to adopt a relatively pragmatic approach to their new regime and accepted what most of them regarded as the 'initial hardships'. As one young person commented:

*I see it as more hard than prison 'cause in prison you can just sit back and wait for your time to come to leave, but with this you've got to work for what you want.*

Sean

Two young people reported having difficulty in settling in with their foster carers. Donna, who breached the IF programme shortly after being interviewed, observed: "wrong place, wrong people, wrong time". Owen, interviewed towards the end of his placement, expressed his dislike for his first set of carers in unprintable terms, although he remained with them for five months before the placement ran into real trouble.

In the early stages of placement, the IF teams reported that most of the young people already understood the points and levels system well, although one was reported to be constantly challenging it. The incentives worked very effectively for some of the young people, who specifically identified these privileges as a reason for complying with the system. For example, Curtis and Eric explained that they wanted to earn points because they felt the rewards were worth it:

*Yeah, 'cause if I, if I was good, I got to come home for like, I went into town for an hour with my Mum and then it gradually builded up to the weekend stopping here, and then I come home for Christmas.*

Curtis

*I completed, you, you get three weeks to complete Level 1 but you can take longer. I completed that in a week and a half 'cause I was just wanting to get off Level 1. I wanted to see my girlfriend, like, straight away. That's why I worked so hard.*

Eric

Some young people did not like the system because they thought it was unfair. Others conceded that it was fair, but thought it was strict and hard to follow. Lee, for whom outcomes were ultimately poor, thought the rules were unfair, both because of the restrictions on his freedom and the fact that he had to do chores to earn his privileges. He felt that he "lost points for stupid things, like fiddling with stuff" which, he elaborated, he only did because he was "so bored". Having completed the placement, he reflected that he would have preferred to go into custody because it would only have lasted three months instead of nine.

Debbie, on the other hand, for whom outcomes were positive at follow-up, thought:

*[The rules were] very, very strict ... but it did do me good though. I think it [the system] is fair.*

Debbie

At follow-up, we asked the fostering teams to reflect on the relationships between the young people and their carers. In the majority of cases, the IF teams thought that the foster carers had successfully engaged the young people they were caring for. However, they mentioned difficulties in the relationship between carer and child in relation to one young person, whose placement had broken down within a month. However, on the whole, they reported that carers had developed positive relationships with the young people and were generally liked and trusted by them (see Table 7 in Appendix B).

The young people were asked for their views on the input from the IF team and whether there was anyone in particular whose help they had appreciated. Most young people were positive, if relatively non-committal.

*Yeah, they were good ... my skills trainer, he took me out like to play pool or something, have a laugh. [My individual therapist] he like, talked to me – how my placement was going, so yeah, how the IF was going and that.*

Lee

Four of the young people, all of whom did well on the programme, went further and identified someone they had particularly appreciated. Both Debbie and Bradley (who were placed by the same IF team) thought their individual therapist was a 'really nice person'. Bradley went on to explain:

*She taught me how it makes my mum feel and stuff when I shout and argue [and] now [...] I don't shout at my mum as much because I know how she feels.*

Bradley

Vince singled out his skills trainer, whom he had found easy to get on with because “he’s just like, acts like someone like me really”.

#### *Parents and IF*

It was difficult to arrange interviews with the parents. At follow-up, nine of the 18 parents of graduates and one parent of a young person who did not complete the programme were interviewed. The distribution of these interviews by area was also very unbalanced, since eight of these parents were from one area (Staffordshire). We were only able to obtain one parent/carer interview in Wessex (the parent of a programme graduate), and one from London (the parent of a young person who did not complete the programme).

We asked parents/carers about who they had seen regularly from the teams and what had been discussed. Some appeared to have experienced the interaction more as a matter of liaison than anything specifically therapeutic. This was certainly true of Vince’s parents, who thought the person from the IF team who came to see them regularly was ‘brilliant’ at keeping them informed. However, this person was not a qualified therapist and was essentially undertaking a liaison role. These parents also thought they had been assessed as not needing family therapy.

Parents could not always be engaged to work on parenting. In the case of Curtis, once his parents made it clear that they were unwilling to discuss their own parenting, the therapist withdrew:

*[The birth family therapist] didn't seem to want to know about Curtis, she seemed to want to know about, about me and [my partner], you know, and I thought we were there for him, but she wasn't asking questions about Curtis, she was asking about our house, our life. In the end [my partner] said “Look, we're here for Curtis, we're not here to discuss this” and we never had no contact with her after that either.*

Curtis’ mother

Among those parents who were more receptive to the idea of working with a family therapist, there were mixed responses. Casey’s mother said that she ‘did’ family therapy but, for her, it consisted of “sorting [the points] out with [the family therapist] to adapt to my rules, ‘cause obviously everyone’s got different rules haven’t they”. Lisa’s mother was clearly disappointed by the quality of the therapeutic input she received:

*It was basically “have you got any problems?” “No”. That was it, you know, we had to meet every week and I weren't benefiting from it ... if I did have a question [the birth family therapist] couldn't answer it.*

Lisa's mother

The objective of working therapeutically with the parents seemed to be one of the most difficult aspects of the programme to implement successfully.

## **Initial outcomes for young people**

### *Variations in functioning*

In both the IF group and the comparison group, few of the young people were engaged in education, training or work in the six months prior to conviction – with the majority having large amounts of unstructured time. One year after sentence or release from custody, those members of the comparison group who were living in the community were much less likely to be engaged in education or training (30%) than the young people in the IF group (70%).

Over half of the IF group had returned to their family home, compared to less than one-third of the comparison group. Nearly 40% of the comparison group had begun another custodial sentence and one was sleeping rough, whereas none of the IF group were in custody or homeless at this point. However, one year after they had entered their IF placements, the young people in the IF group remained as likely to be associating with pro-criminal peers as those in the comparison group (two-thirds of those in each group).

There was little change in the IF group in relation to pro-social peers, with 67% continuing to have some positive relationships with pro-social peers. However, fewer of the comparison group (44%) reported having pro-social friends, although this difference might be due to the fact that nine of them were in custody at this point and so they were therefore separated from non-criminal peers.<sup>5</sup>

### *Improvers and non-improvers*

The qualitative data from our interviews with young people allows for the exploration of how, why and in what circumstances some young people sentenced to IF became ‘improvers’ – meaning they were either not reconvicted at all, or were reconvicted for few, relatively minor, offences. Of the 23 in the IF group, nine were classed as improvers, while there were eight whose offending had not improved up to one year after leaving their placements (and longer in some cases). There was also a third group of five non-graduates.<sup>6</sup> This group breached the terms of their sentence – in most cases through absconding – and entered custody between two and 16 weeks after their placements began.

Karl had begun offending at the age of 10 and, prior to the start of his IF placement (when he was just over 15 years old), he had accumulated 39 convictions for theft or shoplifting, and four for burglary. Karl’s offending history stretched back almost five years and he had already been sentenced to custody twice, which he had served in a secure children’s home. However, Karl is an example from the improver group and a number of factors appeared to contribute to the positive outcomes he achieved.

<sup>5</sup> Chi-square tests all non-significant.

<sup>6</sup> A lack of comprehensive follow-up data precluded the qualitative analysis of progress for the remaining young person.

In his IF placement, Karl felt that he got on ‘quite well’ with his foster carer and commented that he felt this was “an important part of it”. He found the discipline of the points and levels ‘quite strict’ and found some of the rules – such as no contact with family while on Level 1 – “quite annoying and hard”. On the other hand, he found the basic tasks he had to do to earn his points, such as getting up on time, cleaning his bedroom and helping around the house “just normal”. While in his IF placement, he became motivated to change his lifestyle. Karl said that what was good about the programme was:

*The way it's set out, the boundaries and that, it will keep, it can keep you out of trouble if you stick by it and you want to. Plus you get opportunities to go back – if you're not in education – go back into education. It's made me want to change the criminal activity in my life, and given me some goals, like what I want to do with my future and stuff like that.*

Karl

Karl’s motivation in relation to his behaviour and education was sustained when he moved to another care placement, rather than returning to his neglectful home environment. Apart from an early lapse, he also appeared to have been successfully diverted from his pro-criminal peers.

Conor, however, was one of the remaining eight IF graduates who did not show marked improvement in their offending behaviour. When these young people left their placements, their pre-placement offending patterns began to reassert themselves. Conor had a history of abuse and domestic violence. His difficult relationship with his abusive father (the onset of Conor’s disruptive behaviour in school had coincided with the time his father left home), his hyperactivity, detachment from school, and association with anti-social peers may have all contributed to his offending behaviour prior to placement. When asked what he felt was good about the IF programme, Conor identified ‘meeting new people’ and the help he had received in dealing with his anger.

Conor said at the follow-up interview “I used to always shout and everything, always going out looking for trouble but now I don’t, I don’t even go out as much any more”. He also liked his foster carers and the IF team reported that he ‘responded really well to the IF programme’. Conor then returned to live with his mother but was obliged to abandon the many sporting activities (e.g. football, basketball and rugby) he had become involved with during his IF placement.

Conor managed to stay out of trouble for eight months and began to study for his GCSEs at a local college but then began to reoffend. He went on to commit offences on six further occasions over a 12-month period, six months of which were spent in custody. His YOT worker noted at the time when Conor began to reoffend that there had been an “altercation” between him and his father and his behaviour subsequently deteriorated – he stopped attending college regularly, took up with pro-criminal peers again and began to misuse alcohol.

### *Progress with education, employment or training*

School places had been found for all of those who subsequently showed improvement. However, the fact that it had not been possible to find a school placement for those who were to become the non-improvers, suggests that inclusion in school is likely to be an important protective factor which may help to reduce the risk of reconviction. The young people's own perceptions of their experience of school and its relevance to their lives add further weight to this interpretation.

*Well before, before I come on the programme, I didn't like to go to school that much, but it's when I come on the programme I started going. [Intensive Fostering] helped me to go school, sort of thing, and learn, and obviously you need to go school and get good qualifications to get a good job and stuff like that. So it helped me to go [to] school and that, and now, obviously, I've finished [IF] and I still go every day, sort of thing.*

Kelvin

According to Kelvin's foster carer, Kelvin "achieved a great deal academically during that year, in which he received many awards for his improvements".

Another young person in this group was Duncan, one of the young people whose longstanding learning difficulties – in this case apparently due to dyslexia – were only properly recognised when he was in his placement. His IF team regarded the "vast improvement in his academic ability, due to all the support he received" as the factor that had contributed most to a successful outcome. After his placement came to an end, Duncan managed to maintain his 100% school attendance record.

Lisa, another improver, could not be interviewed at follow-up but her IF team identified her 'good educational placement' as the most helpful factor in achieving a successful outcome. The sixth young person in this group, Bradley, had to leave his school placement when he returned home. The subsequent deterioration in his attendance, when back at his old school and among his old friends, perhaps highlights the view of his IF team that "the monitoring of peer associations and a new school [were] key to his more positive path".

Four of the graduates were beyond compulsory school age when they began their placements, and none of them had been engaged in any kind of training or employment prior to their placement. Three of these four became improvers, including Debbie. Debbie wanted to go to college but was unable to do so during her placement, although a college place subsequently became available after her placement ended. Instead, she completed two work placements in hairdressing salons and she subsequently secured a college place to study hairdressing. Debbie was very clear about the benefit of her work placements, which had not only inspired her to take up a career in hairdressing but also gave her a real sense of achievement:

*They got me to do, like, the work experience and that, like with the hairdressers. I, I didn't really like it, even though I want to do*

*hairdressing, but then now – looking back at it – I think I'm glad that I did do it . . . [And now] I go to college, doing hairdressing . . . yeah, I love it.*

Debbie

Owen, who had been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome during his placement, attended a bricklaying course at college until a residential educational placement was eventually found for him. Vince managed to find a full-time job shortly after his placement started (apparently by his own efforts) and maintained a consistent work record throughout the placement. After he returned home, aged 17, Vince's parents reported that he had built upon the excellent work record he achieved during his IF placement and had found another job. They said he was maintaining the same degree of discipline he had developed in the placement, going to bed at a reasonable time during the week in order to get up every day at 6.00am.

Conversely, of the eight non-improvers, only two had a positive educational experience and neither of these were able to maintain this benefit beyond the time span of their placement with foster carers. It is perhaps no coincidence that all of the four graduates, for whom it was reported to be difficult to find a suitable educational placement, were in the non-improvers group.

Sean's foster carers explained that the IF team had not been able to find a mainstream school prepared to take him, due to his previous behaviour. A part-time place was instead found for him in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), but the foster carers said that this made his school days 'difficult'. Sean himself said that he "didn't go in a lot of the time" and that he had been temporarily excluded "loads of times". When asked what he thought might help to keep him out of trouble, he indicated that even though he clearly found it difficult to integrate into the limited educational activities that had been provided for him, he thought the lack of structure in his life might be a problem:

*Don't know, I think I just need to get into college or something, something to set my days to and that.*

Sean

#### *Encouragement of positive leisure activities*

The IF teams were successful in engaging many of the young people in new leisure activities. Two improvers, for example, developed an enduring interest in an activity they had been introduced to while in placement: Karl took up golf and described it as "relaxing [and] therapeutic"; Bradley was encouraged to develop his interest in fishing and joined two fishing clubs, where he made some new friends.

Apart from Debbie – whose IF work placements had triggered her ongoing interest in hairdressing – the remaining improvers did not mention any lasting interest in a particular activity. However they, or their carers, did report engagement with an activity during the placement: Eric started learning to play the guitar, Kelvin studied motorbike mechanics and Duncan went to army cadet sessions twice a week.

For the non-improvers group, these activities failed to develop into anything more than simply a way of occupying their time. Only one of the eight non-improvers (Conor) developed a strong leisure interest, gaining places in the school football and basketball teams, as well as the local rugby team. Unfortunately, he was unable to sustain these activities when he returned home. It was also difficult for one of the improvers to maintain her new found interest beyond the lifetime of the placement. Lisa developed an interest in drama when she joined the youth theatre in the area where her foster carers lived. However, there was nothing similar to this in her own area so this was not something she could pursue when she returned home.

### *Peer relationships*

The young people who were reported having pro-criminal peers prior to being sentenced for their index offence were nearly twice as likely to have pro-criminal peers one year after their placements began.<sup>7</sup> It was therefore very important for the IF team to attempt to divert these young people from friends who might have a negative influence on them. Diversion from anti-social peers is a key element of the MTFC programme.

Six young people from the improver group had made at least some change to their friendship groups. Two of these young people (Karl and Kelvin) remained in foster care and this environment helped them to sustain more positive friendships, even if they could not be fully diverted from other anti-social peers. A third, Debbie, returned home and initially renewed contact with her former anti-social peers, but then took the opportunity to go to college and separate herself from her former associates. The other three (Vince, Lisa and Bradley) all went home but nevertheless still made some changes to their peer group.

For the remaining improvers, their offending was not thought to have been peer-related. This group included Owen – the young person with Asperger's syndrome who clearly found social situations difficult to manage – and Eric, who appeared to be very much a loner. Eric was assessed as having a lack of pro-social peers too and, as his foster carer confirmed, while he was at ease with younger and older people, he did not find it easy to relate to people of his own age.

Of the eight non-improvers, four reported having made new friends during their placement, although they said that the pull of old friends when the placement finished was very strong. At the time of the follow-up interview (shortly after their placement had ended) they all intended to stay out of trouble – despite admitting to seeing old friends again – but were unsuccessful in staying out of trouble. Several non-improvers admitted that their return to a pro-criminal peer group after leaving their IF placement was one of the factors that led to their reoffending:

<sup>7</sup> Chi-square test significant at p=.038. Eighty per cent of those reported to have pro-criminal peers at baseline were reported to have pro-criminal peers one year after sentence/release from custody, compared to 44% of those not reported to have pro-criminal peers at baseline (n=43).

*Yeah, it [getting into trouble] was, well mostly with my friends.*

Sean

*I follow others most of the time. ‘Cause they do it, I have to do it, ‘cause I feel left out ‘cause I wanna do it. So what they do, I do.*

Curtis

*I did get in trouble a lot, I went in with the wrong crowd.*

Brendan

Bradley agreed with the rule that prevented him from seeing any of his old friends while he was on the programme. This view appeared to be related to his motivation to change, “it was better because then I didn’t get into any more trouble”. When he returned home, he said that he no longer saw much of his old friends and had made some new ones. Although Duncan said that he still saw his old friends, he added that he did not intend to be influenced by them any more. His mother was less convinced and, when interviewed, Duncan had just committed the one offence for which he was convicted post-placement. However, during the following two years he was not reconvicted for any further offences.

Although the IF team helped to successfully divert many young people from their anti-social peers, they were not successful in all cases. Continuity in these relationships – or a return to them once IF placements had ended – played a part in some young people’s return to offending. Sean, for example, had not been successfully diverted from contact with his former peer group while in his IF placement. He explained:

*Well I wasn’t meant to [see old friends] but I did, sometimes I’d go out and see them and stuff.*

Sean

Sean was still seeing his old friends when he was interviewed some months after he had returned home and had already committed two further offences. He was also reported to still be bullying others at follow-up, as he had done prior to his IF placement.

### *Motivation*

Other research on services for troubled and troublesome adolescents has highlighted the importance of young people’s own agency in the process of change and, in particular, their motivation to change their behaviour (Biehal, 2005; 2008). There was some indication that these young people’s own motivation to change – which in some cases was known to have been reinforced while in their IF placements – also contributed to positive outcomes.

Debbie’s account illustrates the importance of a young person’s own motivation. When her initial return to her mother broke down, she was offered a place in supported lodgings, as well as a college placement to study hairdressing, which

she had developed a strong interest in during her IF placement. These circumstances prompted her to re-think and she became motivated to change:

*But then, like, I got this place – well I done an interview for this place first but where, like – ‘cause I was [...] on drugs – they couldn’t let me [in] here. But then, like, I thought about it and everything and I wanted to – oh I had a college placement but I wasn’t going either – and I just like stopped and thought this is just ... you can’t keep carrying on ‘cause I don’t want to be locked up again and especially [after] what the Judge gave me is like a really good chance. So then I just, like, stopped taking drugs and everything and then got put into here [supported lodgings].*

Debbie

A number of factors appeared to have helped Debbie to keep on track. One of these was the specialist help she had received for her drug problems prior to starting her IF placement. Despite having drug and alcohol problems, an anti-social peer group and a poor relationship with her family, a number of factors gave her hope and motivation. The enthusiasm for a career in hairdressing that the IF team had helped her discover and the college place they had helped her apply for, in addition to the supported lodgings found for her, helped Debbie see that change might be possible.

The story of Bradley illustrates how placement on the programme could help to influence a young person’s motivation to change. Bradley was 13 years old when he committed the offence for which he was sentenced to IF. He had received his first conviction six months earlier and had since accumulated three further offences: two for causing harassment, alarm and distress; and one for theft. However, the offence for which he was sentenced to IF was the more serious offence of false imprisonment.

Bradley had started truanting when he transferred to his secondary school, where he became friendly with the boy who eventually became one of his co-defendants in the false imprisonment offence. The majority of Bradley’s offending was committed in the company of this new friend. Bradley lived with his mother and stepfather but his relationships with them began to deteriorate when he began truanting and became involved with this new friend. Following his arrest, Bradley was placed on remand in a children’s home. Found to be displaying symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) – which had been diagnosed previously as borderline – Bradley was reassessed and found to be in need of medication for ADD.

While in his IF placement, the team were able to reintegrate Bradley into school, divert him from his anti-social peers and engage his interest in positive leisure activities. Bradley reported getting on well with his foster carer as well as his individual therapist, whom Bradley felt had taught him to understand how others feel as a result of his actions. He said that IF made him want to change his attitude, which he realised had been “appalling” beforehand. As a result of his IF experience, Bradley explained:

*It's made me look at situations, different situations more positively. Like if I get into a fight or something, how to handle the situation without getting into a fight ... .Intensive Fostering made me feel like changing.*

Bradley

#### *Aftercare support*

IF placements were funded on the basis of a nine-month period in foster care, followed by three months of aftercare when young people leave the IF placement, during which time support would continue to be provided by the IF team. The three pilot teams confirmed that they were providing aftercare to all bar one of the IF graduates, who breached during the aftercare period and whose case therefore transferred back to the YOT. In most cases, aftercare was reported to include continuing contact between the young person and their individual therapist and skills trainer, as well as between parents/carers and the family therapist.

However, some families felt that they did not receive adequate aftercare after a young person had left their IF placement. Three parents – each from a different area – felt they had not received adequate aftercare support and were unhappy with this. For example, Lisa's mother commented:

*You feel like you've been abandoned when your, when your child comes out, 'cause they've had that kid for nine months and then all of a sudden they're home and you think "well where's me support now?" Because you're getting support for nine months and then nothing.*

Lisa's mother

The families we interviewed were unhappy with the process of case transfer and the low level of support they received from the YOTs, after the work of the IF teams had come to an end. The description by Curtis' mother of the process of case transfer, and the lack of support thereafter, vividly illustrates the difficulties experienced by young people in sustaining the improvements in behaviour made during their placements:

*He was supposed to go on 'Youth Offenders', but there's just been nobody here at all. I rang up Intensive Fostering two weeks ago and they just says "Oh he's not with us any more" and that was it ... .We had no letters to say that he'd finished the programme, we got told he'd have to go to – we'd all have to go to – a meeting so they could sign him off. None of that come about, none of it whatsoever. We didn't get a letter to say he'd finished the programme, I didn't know he'd finished it til, as I say, two weeks ago when I rang them up. While everybody was coming in and he had his education and everything, he didn't get into trouble, he was brilliant. But since everybody sort of washed their hands, he seems to be getting back into it, you know what I mean?*

Curtis' mother

This lack of aftercare support may shed some light on the process whereby Curtis ultimately became a non-improver, although of course other factors may also have played a part. Curtis' mother was frustrated because, while the IF team were being funded to provide aftercare, they would take him wherever he needed to go (such as the Connexions office). However, she complained that this aftercare had then 'just stopped' and there was 'nobody to take him there now'.

Similarly, when asked about the post-programme level of support, Duncan's grandmother complained:

*I've had none, I mean I ain't even heard from social services or nothing, nobody's been. As I say the, the probation officer come last week, that's the first time for weeks and months, you know.*

Duncan's grandmother

Duncan's grandmother felt that the low level of support had also affected Duncan's motivation, explaining that, because Duncan only had to see the probation officer once a fortnight for half an hour, he did not take this seriously and sometimes did not even bother to attend the appointment.

The way the programme ending is managed and the degree of support which is then put in place are clearly issues of vital importance. Young people and their families move from a situation of intensive support to a situation where there is very little support – or nothing at all, if the sentencing order did not extend beyond the time span of the IF programme. However, the IF programme is currently being developed to address this issue.

#### *Reconviction rates*

The information on reoffending was drawn from reconviction data and therefore reflects only *recorded* offences.<sup>8</sup> It should also be noted that, since this was an evaluation of a specialised pilot programme, the number of young people who took part in the study is small – 23 young people on the IF programme and 24 in the comparison group were followed-up. Nevertheless, all of the findings reported below are statistically significant (to this sample) and therefore may be indicative of patterns that might be found in a larger sample.

It is also important to note that, in theory, the young people in IF are more intensely supervised than those serving the YOT-supervised community portion of their DTO sentence, and slightly more intensely supervised than young people on ISSP. Although the young people on IF are theoretically free to leave their residence at any time, the overall level of supervision is greater than for

<sup>8</sup> Reconviction data on the IF group was examined one year after they entered their foster placements and one year after they had left their foster placements; and, for the comparison group, one year after release from custody or sentence to ISSP.

those who have left custody or who are on ISSP. Nevertheless, some absconded and some offended while in their IF placements.

However, the level of supervision decreases substantially as young people leave their IF placement and make the transition into the aftercare phase (usually after nine months). These differences in the level of supervision must be taken into consideration when reviewing the findings for the first year post-sentence for the IF group, and following release from custody for the comparison group.

In the initial year after the young people in the IF group were sentenced, 11 (48%) were reconvicted for any offence (including breach), compared to 19 (79%) of the young people in the comparison group.<sup>9</sup> Nine (39%) of the IF group were convicted for a *substantive* offence<sup>10</sup> during the first year post-sentence, whereas 18 (75%) of the comparison group were reconvicted for substantive offences.<sup>11</sup> Only four (17%) of the young people committed a substantive offence during their time in IF placement.

On average, during the year after the IF placements began (and the comparison group left custody or were sentenced to ISSP), the comparison group were convicted for five times as many offences as the IF group. During this period, the most serious offences for which the comparison group were convicted had a higher average gravity score (3.65) than the most serious offences committed by the IF group (1.87).

The IF young people also took roughly three times longer to commit their first substantive offence than the comparison group (a mean of 286 days, compared to 89 days for the comparison group).<sup>12</sup> Only five (22%) of the IF group entered custody during the year after their IF placement began, whereas 12 (50%) of the comparison group did so during the year they were followed-up.<sup>13</sup> The IF group as a whole spent an average of 32 days in custody during this period, compared to 79 days for the comparison group.

However, in the year after the young people completed their IF placements with their foster carers, the reconviction rate for substantive offences rose to 74%, which was virtually equal to that for the comparison group (75%).<sup>14</sup> During this period, there was no longer a significant difference between the groups, either in the number of recorded offences or in the gravity scores for the most serious

9 Chi-square test significant at p=.036.

10 In common with other research on young offenders, we distinguished between substantive offences ‘against the public’ and the ‘technical offence’ of breach (Moore et al., 2004a). The two most common substantive offences were theft and handling stolen goods, and violence against the person.

11 Chi-square test significant at p=.008.

12 Mann-Whitney U test significant at p=<.001, n=36.

13 Chi-square test significant at p=.043.

14 Chi-square test was not significant: p= .740.

offence. This similarity in the subsequent criminality of the IF group is further evidence that the reduction in their propensity to commit offences while in foster care was real. However, for those who completed the IF programme (n=18), the average number of days in custody was still considerably lower in the year after they left their placement (14 days) than for the comparison group (75 days).<sup>15</sup>

#### *The use of breach*

Some young people who absconded from IF placements at an early stage were breached and sentenced to custody as a result – thus pushing them further up the tariff of disposals when they had not actually committed a further offence. In the context of a youth justice system with very high numbers of young people in custody, this response may have serious consequences for both young people and the penal system.

The IF programme uses written warnings and other ways of dealing with absconding and the new Youth Rehabilitation Order (YRO) requires two written warnings, to be given following ‘wilful and persistent’ non-compliance, before a case is referred to court for breach proceedings. This is a difficult issue because the courts may not consider IF to be a robust alternative to custody, if young people are allowed to abscond repeatedly and are not referred to court for breach.

<sup>15</sup> Mann-Whitney U test (exact) comparing number of days in custody significant at p=.018.

## **Cost information**

Two sets of cost information were collected. Firstly, for almost all young people in the sample, data were collected about their IF and custody placements (from all 23 in the IF group and 20 of the 24 in the custody/ISSP group). Secondly, data were collected on the *Client Service Receipt Inventory* (CSRI), (Beecham and Knapp, 2001). This information was based on a smaller sample: 12 of the IF group and 22 of the custody/ISSP group at baseline; 13 (IF) and 16 (custody/ISSP) at follow-up. The CSRI data covered service use across a wide range of youth justice, health, social care and education services.

There were missing data on the CSRI which jeopardised the accuracy of these cost calculations, with even the full sample being too small to undertake the complex statistical processes required for a full cost-effectiveness analysis. The cost of IF and custodial arrangements can be compared for the larger sample above (n=43), but we do not explore the way additional services and supports are used by young offenders in this report.

This is a pilot study with only three teams providing the IF intervention. Thus – as caveated throughout this report – we give indicative costs for these schemes, rather than a figure that can be generalised or be concluded in a wider context. Should this programme be more widely rolled-out, there are many factors which can influence unit costs. For example, local prices will differ for staff/skills, team size and capacity and, of course, caseload. Given this, the analyses tentatively show that unit cost per placement day with IF tends to be lower than custodial facilities.

However, the length of placement – some of which were nine months for the IF group, compared to an average of around four months for the custody group – meant that the average ‘intervention’ cost per young person in the IF group was much higher than for those in the custody group. On average, the index IF placement cost £68,736 and the index custodial placement cost £53,980.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

The aim of this study was to evaluate how successfully the pilot programme was implemented and investigate whether placement in IF confers additional benefits, compared to alternative sentences for this group of young people.

Despite some of the initial administrative challenges, one of the major achievements of the IF teams was their success in reintegrating many of the young people into education, despite the fact that many had previously become detached from school through truancy and/or exclusion. However, in some cases, young people who had settled in new schools close to their placements could not be easily transferred to schools close to home after leaving their placement, as no places could be found. Indeed, the IF teams often also struggled to find suitable schooling or training for some young people while they were in their placements.

Despite these difficulties, the IF group were far more likely to be in education or training one year after entering their placements (70%), than members of the comparison group who were living in the community at that point (30%).

The IF teams were also successful in engaging a number of the young people in new leisure activities. At follow-up, one year after the start of the IF placements/release from custody, the IF group were more likely to be living with parents and less likely to be in custody than the comparison group.

It can be assumed that the young people in IF are more intensely supervised than those serving the community portion of their DTO sentence and slightly more than those on ISSP. Although far from precise, comparing reconviction rates does provide indications that the young people in IF reoffended less while they were subject to IF (surprisingly so, since they were living in the community and in the light of their antecedents).

During the year after they entered their foster placements, reconviction rates were significantly lower for the 23 young people in the IF group; they were reconvicted for fewer offences and the mean gravity score for those offences was considerably lower than for the comparison group. The IF group also spent fewer days in custody during this period. However, there remains the possibility that unmeasured confounds<sup>16</sup> may exist between these groups, which are not perfectly matched, while the sample sizes are very small so the conclusions need to be qualified by that consideration.

The fact that on release they rapidly reverted to reoffending patterns that replicated young people coming out of custody (stage 2) points to the need to rethink what resettlement from IF ought to look like, just as we are actively

<sup>16</sup> In the analysis, therefore, we have taken care to test our conclusions as robustly as we can against these potential threats to causal inference. A repeated measures design has been used, which has shown that the apparent association of IF with reduction of reconviction is reversed upon the removal of IF. This represents an 'ABA' design (showing that an assumed effect of intervention is reversed when it is removed); a recognised strategy for increasing the robustness of causal inference in a cohort study (Shadish et al., op cit).

rethinking resettlement after custody. When the young people returned to their homes and communities, there were a number of difficulties in sustaining the gains and protective effects made during the IF programme. For example, associating with pro-criminal peers appeared to swamp the positive effects of having been on the IF programme. These difficulties, and the rise in reoffending in the year after the young people left their foster placements, strongly indicate the need for intensive support in the community over a longer period – if the gains made during the course of the IF placements are to be sustained.

Although service use could not be analysed, it was possible to compare the average cost of an IF placement to a custodial placement because the sample size nearly mirrored the one used for the outcome analysis. Therefore, the analyses tentatively show that for the young people in this study, the unit cost per day placed with IF tends to be lower than for custodial facilities – although longer IF placements naturally led to higher costs.

The recommendations for policy and practice are:

- **continuing the IF programme**

The evidence from the interviews, coupled with the reconviction outcomes for the 23 young people (although this cannot be generalised), suggests that IF may be a better alternative to custody and should continue to be implemented. It is worth noting that IF has changed since it was researched in this report – namely, the IF team has now improved its delivery of the programme, especially the aftercare phase.

- **improving aftercare support**

Improved, longer-term support needs to be in place if the gains made while young people are on the IF programme are not to be rapidly lost.

- **improving access to education, during and after placement**

The difficulty of finding suitable education placements for young people, both during the IF programme and once they have returned home, requires serious attention from the Department for Education and local children's services departments.

- **reviewing non-compliance**

Although each case must be assessed on its own merits, it may be more helpful to review instances of initial non-compliance with IF, rather than move too rapidly to reconviction for breach of sentence.

- **improving assessment and support for vulnerable young offenders**

It is essential that YOTs develop a more comprehensive understanding of young people's care status and the reasons for which they are looked after, in order to improve both assessment and support.

Despite the evidence from North America, the case for IF as a direct alternative to custody in the UK is not yet fully made but there is enough here to warrant continuing to explore this option and develop a fuller understanding of what works.

This evaluation included young people placed in IF at the time the programme began, before staff and carers had had time to gain experience in operating the MTFC model and resolve initial problems in developing staff teams, recruiting young people, and negotiating effective working relationships with other local agencies. Given the timing of this evaluation, it is perhaps not surprising that these new schemes experienced a degree of difficulty at start-up. Further research could now, five years after its inception, capture a more accurate picture of an established and more widely-accessed IF programme.

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## **Appendix A: Methods**

### **Comparison group**

The plan was that young people could be referred to IF, and hence to our comparison group, if they were at risk of custody and scored at least three on the ‘family and personal relationships’ and ‘lifestyle’ variables on the YJB’s *Asset* assessment tool.

We therefore identified young people whose pre-sentence reports (PSRs) had recently been completed and then screened the YOT databases (YOIS and CareWorks) against the following criteria:

- Non-custodial PSRs were eliminated, leaving only those that had been requested by the court as either custody or ‘all options’ PSRs. These young people were identified as being potentially at risk of custody.
- The PSR *Asset* profile of this sampling frame was then screened for a score of at least three for the two relevant variables of ‘family and personal relationships’, and ‘lifestyle’.

However, it proved more difficult than anticipated to identify young people with the requisite scores on both *Asset* variables for our comparison group. It was evident that a number of the young people placed in IF did not score three or more on these sections of the *Asset* form. It was also the case that the IF teams carried out an extensive assessment procedure of their own to further determine the young person’s suitability for the scheme. It therefore appears that the IF teams tended to use the *Asset* scores as only a preliminary guide to the young person’s suitability for further assessment, rather than as a rule.

Following discussion with the YJB project board, it was agreed that the threshold score for inclusion in the comparison group would be lowered, but the researchers would then undertake a case-by-case investigation with the relevant YOT workers as to the significance, in their view, of the family and lifestyle factors to the young person’s offending behaviour to establish whether they would meet the eligibility criteria for IF

### **Measures**

The study gathered data on three groups of measures. The primary outcome measures for the evaluation were:

- reconviction
- frequency and gravity of offences for which convicted
- time to first offence for which reconvicted
- days in custody.

Secondary outcome measures included:

- The perceived risk of reoffending. This was measured in terms of the young people’s *Asset* scores. *Asset* scores have been found to have 67%

accuracy when predicting reconviction (Baker, Jobes, Merrington, & Roberts, 2002).<sup>17</sup>

- engagement in education, training or employment, stability of accommodation and peer affiliation.

Measures of cost included:

- young people's use of services, based on the CSRI (Beecham & Knapp, 2001)
- unit costs and cost profiles.

## Data collection

The baseline for all of the young people in this study was the date of their index sentence. Those who were sentenced to IF moved to their IF foster placements on that date – thus the sentence date and the IF placement commencement dates were the same. For the comparison group, the baseline date was the date they entered custody or, for a small number, the date they began their ISSP sentence. Outcomes for the IF group were compared to those for the comparison group at two points in time, which represented the end of the following two stages.

### **Stage 1**

Stage 1 was one year after the date of the IF group's index sentence. This was one year after the intervention began – one year from the date the young people *entered* their IF placements. At this point, we collected comprehensive data, both on patterns of reconviction and on a range of secondary outcome measures from young people, YOTs, IF teams and parents.

### **Stage 2**

Reconviction data on the IF group was also examined at a second point in time, which was one year after they had *left* their foster placements. The aim of the second follow-up was to measure the extent to which the intervention's effects persisted after it had ended. At Stage 2, we focused solely on patterns of reconviction, comparing official data on the sentencing histories of the IF group at this point with those for the comparison group one year after their release from custody/sentence to ISSP. For the comparison group, therefore, the date of follow-up was the same at Stage 1 and at Stage 2.

We were able to obtain complete data on our primary outcome measures as this was obtained from official records – the sentencing histories recorded by YOTs.

<sup>17</sup> Baker, K., Jones, S., Merrington, S. and Roberts, C. (2002). *Validity and Reliability of Asset*, London: Youth Justice Board.

**Table 1: Baseline data collected by group (n=48)**

	<i>Intervention group (n=24)</i>	<i>Comparison group (n=24)</i>	<i>Total</i>
Young person interview	13	23	36
Parent interview	11	-	11
IF team questionnaire	12	-	13
Foster carer questionnaire	11	-	11
YOT worker questionnaire	10	19	29
PSR Asset	24	24	48
Sentencing history	24	24	48

We had a complete dataset for the analysis of our primary outcome measures, with information on patterns of reconviction and disposals gathered from administrative data – the official records on young people's sentencing histories. In addition, we aimed to obtain data from the respondents listed above on the 19 young people in the IF group who consented to participate in the study and on all 24 in the comparison group.

**Table 2: Follow-up data collected by group (n=47)**

	<i>IF group</i>	<i>Comparison group</i>	<i>Total</i>
Young person interview	17	20	37
Parent interview	9	-	9
IF team questionnaire	19	-	19
Foster carer questionnaire	17	-	17
YOT worker questionnaire	7	11	18
PSR Asset	15	17	32
Sentencing history	23	24	47

## Data analysis

In order to compensate for potential problems of missing data, some factual questions (e.g. accommodation, family characteristics) were asked of more than one respondent. Where more than one response was received, derived variables were created. For example, a single variable on 'previous entry to care' was derived from the YOT worker and IF team questionnaires, from Asset and from interviews with young people. For each variable, explicit decision rules were made to deal with any problems of conflicting data.

Quantitative data from postal questionnaires and some interview data were analysed to provide descriptive information on the characteristics and histories of the young people, their behaviour, recent offending, offending histories, ratings of social functioning and emotional/behavioural difficulties.

Bivariate and multivariate analysis were used to explore any associations between these variables and outcomes at follow-up. Multivariate methods also allowed the comparison of outcomes for the IF and comparison groups, after taking into account the young people's characteristics and histories. All associations between the variables reported are statistically significant at  $p=.05$  or less. Due to the small sample size, exact tests of significance were used – details of the specific analyses are provided in footnotes throughout.

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using the software programme for qualitative analysis ATLAS-ti. Key themes emerging across cases were identified and individual case studies highlighted, where appropriate, to identify how, why and in what circumstances IF appears to have been either more, or less, successful in reducing reconviction.

### **Ethical considerations**

This study was conducted in line with the Social Research Association's *Ethical Guidelines 2003*, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998 and the Department of Health's guidance on research governance. Information leaflets were provided for young people, parents/guardians, foster carers and professionals. Informed, written consent was obtained from the young people. Consent was also obtained from the parents of young people under 16 years old. Where it was not possible to contact young people who had left the IF programme, we obtained anonymised sentencing histories and Asset data.

The storage and use of all data from participants has conformed to the requirements of the DPA. All data have been completely anonymised and pseudonyms have been used when referring to individual young people.

## Appendix B: Additional tables

**Table 3: Number of months in Intensive Fostering placements (n=23)**

<i>Months in foster placement</i>	<i>Young people % (n)</i>
< 4	22 (5)
6-8	17 (4)
9-12	48 (11)
13-16	13 (3)

*Note: actual numbers in brackets (n).*

**Table 4: Demographic characteristics of the two groups**

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>IF group (n=24)</i>	<i>Comparison group (n=24)</i>
Mean age	14.9 years	15.5 years
Male	83% (20)	83% (20)
Non-white	21% (5)	38% (9)
White	79% (19)	63% (15)
Black	4% (1)	25% (6)
Mixed origin (Caribbean/White)	8% (2)	13% (3)
Mixed origin (Asian/White)	8% (2)	-

*Note: actual numbers in brackets (n).*

**Table 5: Distribution of baseline sample by group and by area**

<i>Area</i>	<i>IF group</i>	<i>Comparison group</i>	<i>Total</i>
Wessex	11	12	23
Staffordshire	8	5	13
London	5	7	12
<b>Total n (%)</b>	<b>24 (50%)</b>	<b>24 (50%)</b>	<b>48 (100%)</b>

**Table 6: IF teams' views of what made positive contribution (n=19)**

<i>Element of the IF programme</i>	<i>To a large extent</i>	<i>To some extent</i>	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>
Carer's implementation of the programme	63% (12)	37% (7)	0	0
Work on problem-solving skills	79% (15)	21% (4)	0	0
Work on pro-social skills	79% (15)	21% (4)	0	0
Diversion from anti-social peers	58% (11)	42% (8)	0	0
Work on education	63% (12)	37% (7)	0	0
Support to young person in school	47% (9)	37% (7)	0	16% (3)
Work with birth family	32% (6)	68% (13)	0	0
Young person's motivation to change	26% (5)	74% (14)	0	0
The particular strengths of the foster carer	42% (8)	58% (11)	0	0
Relationship between young person and carer	53% (10)	47% (9)	0	0
Relationship between young person and one or more IF staff	53% (10)	47% (9)	0	0

*Note: actual numbers in brackets (n).*

**Table 7: Relationship between young person and carer**

<i>Relationship between young person and carer</i>	<i>A great deal</i>	<i>To a limited extent</i>	<i>Not at all</i>
Young person liked this carer	88% (16)	6% (1)	6% (1)
Carer engaged him/her well	94% (17)	6% (1)	0
Carer appeared fond of him/her	83% (15)	17% (3)	0
Young person trusted this carer	78% (14)	17% (3)	6% (1)
Young person and carer developed a positive relationship	88% (16)	6% (1)	6% (1)
The relationship between the two was difficult	6% (1)	17% (3)	78% (14)

*Note: actual numbers in brackets (n).*

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