An Innovative Approach to Real-World RCT Recruitment and Data Collection: A Screening, Referral and Data Collection App for Social Workers

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Overview

• The intervention (*Safe Families for Children*)
• Public Social Partnerships
• The RCT (and wider evaluation)
• The app – what does it do?
• Benefits of using an app in an RCT
The Intervention

SAFE FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN
Scale up

From USA.

Pilot in North East, funded by the Vardy Foundation.

‘Extended pilot’ in Greater Manchester, Mersey, East Midlands and West Midlands, funded by DfE.
Three ways to help...

- **Safe, short-stay accommodation for children**
- **Befriending support for parents**
- **Donations of basic goods and services**
Who do they help?

GROUP ONE:
PROBLEMS EMERGING & ESCALATING

In keeping with Safe Families’ ethos of wishing to respond to any family’s cry for help they operate a referral hotline
Economic impact: Long-term benefit of early intervention

GROUP TWO:
PREVENTION OF CARE

Safe Families offer a screening tool to local authorities to help identify specific families who may receive an alternative to care
Economic impact: Immediate saving through care diversion
Prevention of care

GROUP TWO: PREVENTION OF CARE

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:
10 OR UNDER/S20/<14 DAYS

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT c. 15% OF CHILDREN ENTERING CARE IN ENGLAND FIT THIS PROFILE. OVER 4000 CHILDREN PER YEAR.
PSPs

PUBLIC SOCIAL PARTNERSHIPS
### What is a Public Social Partnership (PSP)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Lightbulb]</td>
<td>An <strong>organisation</strong> - typically a charity - with limited cash flow comes up with an <strong>innovation</strong>, a new but unproven way of improving human development</td>
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<tr>
<td>![Currency]</td>
<td>An <strong>investor</strong> - typically a philanthropist - who wants to act as a catalyst for change</td>
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<td>![Building]</td>
<td>A <strong>public system</strong> - for example a local authority Children’s Services department - looking to improve human development and reduce costs to the taxpayer</td>
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<tr>
<td>![House]</td>
<td>An <strong>independent evaluator</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>![Target]</td>
<td>Impacts on <strong>human development</strong> that matter to all the partners: the innovator, the investor and the public system</td>
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1, 2, 3 agrees binding contract between &

to improve in specified period

1, 2, 3 independently monitors whether are achieved

pays for delivery of in for the specified period

If achieved pays for for a further specified period
Safe Families for Children bring 3 types of volunteer to provide *respite, resources* and *friendship* to families on the edge of care.

In ≥5 geographical hubs comprising ≥25 Local Authorities in England.

DfE is the funder, covering costs of delivery for this financial year.

Dartington Social Research Unit is the independent evaluator.

If goals are achieved, will pay for for 24 months.
The RCT (and wider evaluation)

TWO-ARM SUPERIORITY TRIAL
The evaluation

1. [Image of two figures pushing gears]

2. [Image of a graph with 'BENEFIT' and 'COST']

3. [Image of a rising graph]
1. Process evaluation

- Profile of families that receive support
- How the intervention is implemented (including any geographical variation)
- Contextual factors that might affect the support
- Views of families and host volunteers
- Effect of the intervention on the host volunteers and their children
2. Cost-benefit analysis

- *Investing in Children* model will be applied to produce a conservative, consistent, real world estimate of the worth of Safe Families.
3. Impact evaluation (RCT)

- Random allocation to Safe Families
- Primary outcomes of child emotional and behavioural functioning and parental anxiety
- Will also consider: interpersonal support, nights away from home, re-referrals to care system (frequency and time-lapse).
The App

WHAT DOES IT DO?
Screening

• The app screens against the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

• The following criteria are applied:
  – At least one child 10 years or under
  – Otherwise accommodated under Section 20
  – Parent/carer contact has parental responsibility
  – Safe to regularly visit the home
  – Low to medium risk status of family members
Referral

• The app allows for a common referral pathway.

• Once a family screens positively, an automatic alert system generates an email to the local Safe Families team.
Data collection

• Permission has been granted by the outcome measure developers and/or owners to put the questionnaires onto the app.

• The data is streamed straight to a secure database, where CSV files can be downloaded and exported into statistical software packages for analysis.
Using an app in an RCT

THE BENEFITS
Easy access

• The app can be accessed by a desktop computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone, but requires a username and password.
Engagement

• The screening and referral tool has been described as “wonderful” by social workers.
  – It’s easy to access, cuts down on paperwork and social workers can be confident action is being progressed in a timely way.

• The tablet is more engaging than masses of paper forms and an audio function allows the parent/carer to respond independently, even if reading ability is low.
Data security

• Only the family ID, generated by Safe Families’ database is entered into the data collection app.

• All data is streamed to a secure database immediately (no paper forms need to be carried or stored!).
Time

• Although some set-up time is required, time is saved later in the process as no researcher screening or data entry is required!
Cost

• Set up costs apply, but money is saved later in the process as there are no printing costs or data entry fees.
Questions?

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