

**Manuscript version: Published Version**

The version presented in WRAP is the published version (Version of Record).

**Persistent WRAP URL:**

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/55909>

**How to cite:**

The repository item page linked to above, will contain details on accessing citation guidance from the publisher.

**Copyright and reuse:**

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions.

Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

**Publisher's statement:**

Please refer to the repository item page, publisher's statement section, for further information.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: [wrap@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:wrap@warwick.ac.uk)

# BRINGING FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS TOGETHER

GIVING CHILDREN IN HIGH-POVERTY AREAS  
THE BEST START AT SCHOOL



**Save the Children**

# **BRINGING FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS TOGETHER**

**GIVING CHILDREN IN HIGH-POVERTY AREAS  
THE BEST START AT SCHOOL**

**GEOFF LINDSAY, STEPHEN CULLEN  
AND CHRIS WELLINGS**

**Save the Children works in more than 120 countries. We save children's lives. We fight for their rights. We help them fulfil their potential.**

### **Acknowledgements**

This report was written by Professor Geoff Lindsay and Dr Stephen Cullen from the University of Warwick, and Chris Wellings, UK Head of Policy at Save the Children.

With thanks to FirstGroup for funding this research project.

Published by  
Save the Children UK  
1 St John's Lane  
London EC1M 4AR  
UK  
+44 (0)20 7012 6400  
savethechildren.org.uk

First published 2011

© The Save the Children Fund 2011

The Save the Children Fund is a charity registered in England and Wales (213890) and Scotland (SC039570). Registered Company No. 178159

This publication is copyright, but may be reproduced by any method without fee or prior permission for teaching purposes, but not for resale. For copying in any other circumstances, prior written permission must be obtained from the publisher, and a fee may be payable.

Cover photo: Akosua, four, and her mum take part in 'special play' as part of a Families and Schools Together programme at a school in Ealing, England. This involves 15 minutes of play during which the parent attentively follows the child's lead. Receiving undivided attention in this way is proven to improve a child's relationship with her parents, reduce hyperactivity and improve self-esteem. (Photo: Teri Pengilley)

Typeset by Grasshopper Design Company  
Printed by Page Bros Ltd

# CONTENTS

Preface	iv
Purpose and structure of the report	v
Recommendations	v
<b>1 Poverty and early learning and development</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 The early intervention debate</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3 Evidence-based parent support</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4 The Families and Schools Together programme</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>5 Early versus late intervention</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>6 Conclusions</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>7 Recommendations</b>	<b>30</b>
Annex I: Save the Children FAST sites	31
References	32

# PREFACE

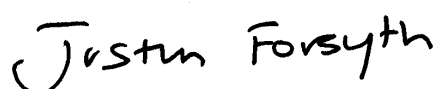
## **“FAMILY-BASED SUPPORT IS NOW RECOGNISED AS A CENTRAL FEATURE OF SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN IN HIGH-POVERTY AREAS.”**

Goodall and Harris (2009) *Helping Families Support Children's Success at School*

At Save the Children, we believe that no child should be born without a chance, and that the link between deprivation and low educational attainment must be broken. We welcome the Pupil Premium and greater school-level accountability to boost the attainment of children from poor homes. But this problem cannot be solved through school reform alone. Research detailed in this report shows that the rich–poor attainment gap becomes established before children start primary school. It is not right that the poorest children fall behind before they are even five years of age.

We need a sustained programme of early intervention that gives children from poor homes the strong foundations they need to thrive. To help build these foundations, we must unlock the skills that parents have to improve their children's early educational outcomes.

The coalition government should ensure family support programmes that help parents to engage with their children's early learning and development are more widely available in every community and a universal entitlement in deprived neighbourhoods. Save the Children is running an exciting programme (FAST) with amazing returns that does just that. By breaking down barriers between home and school, and empowering parents to do what they can to help their children learn, we can remove some of the obstacles that prevent children from poor homes realising their potential.



Justin Forsyth  
Chief Executive  
Save the Children

# PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This report was commissioned by Save the Children to explore:

- how the Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme can give children in high-poverty areas the best start at school
- how this new wave of voluntary educational partnerships would sit with the emerging early intervention infrastructure
- why decision-makers should prioritise early intervention and proven parent support programmes.

First, the report reviews the latest data on early learning and development gaps between children from different socio-economic backgrounds. It also describes the impact these gaps can have on later outcomes and parents' ability to reduce the effects of deprivation on children. Second, it highlights the

key arguments in high-profile early intervention reports by Frank Field, Graham Allen, Clare Tickell, Eileen Munro and Michael Marmot, and reviews the government's first child poverty strategy. Third, it shows that proven parent support programmes, as a key way of delivering early intervention, have a beneficial impact on children and families, and represent good value for money. But it also shows that coverage is too patchy; most programmes have limited reach and do not focus on children's education. Fourth, it explores the FAST programme as a cost-effective way of helping all children in deprived areas make a good start at school, referring to new evaluation data from Save the Children's first 15 FAST projects in the UK. Fifth, it examines the costs of late intervention and the cost-benefits of intervening early. Finally it makes a series of recommendations.



PHOTO: TERI PENGILLEY

# RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Evidence-based programmes that help parents to support their children's early learning and development should be more widely available in every community and a universal entitlement in deprived neighbourhoods.
2. The coalition government and local authorities should ensure FAST is offered in many more primary schools in disadvantaged localities (around 70% of primary pupils eligible for free schools meals attend the most deprived 30% of primary schools).
3. Local authorities should have to report annually to their electorates on how they spend early intervention funds and their impact on the early years achievement gap.
4. An Early Intervention Foundation should be established to evaluate parent support programmes.
5. Impact from even the best early intervention programmes may fade over time. Policy-makers need to consider how we design and fund a continuum of services where gains are reinforced and sustained from birth to adulthood.
6. The Early Intervention Grant must be increased over time.



# POVERTY AND EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

**The education gap between children from poor homes and their peers becomes established before they even start primary school. These early inequalities heavily influence children's later outcomes. But parents and good home learning environments can reduce the educational effects of deprivation.**

## EARLY-YEARS DISADVANTAGE AND LOW ACHIEVEMENT

The evidence on how socio-economic background affects early learning and development is stark. Using data from the 1970 British Cohort Study, Feinstein (2003) found that differences in children's cognitive development linked to parental background can be seen as early as 22 months and that the highest early achievers from deprived backgrounds are overtaken by lower achieving children from advantaged backgrounds by the age of five. Using data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), which tracks children born in 2000/01, Kiernan and Mensah (2011) showed that those who experienced persistent poverty or episodes of poverty scored markedly less well at the age of five in English schools than those who grew up free from poverty.

Learning and development outcomes in the early years frequently correlate with later-life outcomes. Government analysis shows that pupil scores on the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) at age five are typically closely linked with those at age seven. This is particularly the case for children's language and early literacy scores. In a recent study as part of the Better Communication Research Programme, Snowling *et al* (in press) found that the

Communication, Language and Literacy scale of the EYFS profile at five years accounted for about half of the differences between children's Key Stage 1 (KS1) attainments at seven years. Similar analysis of England's National Pupil Database shows that around 55% of children who are in the bottom 20% at age seven remain there at age 16 and fewer than 20% of them move into the top 60%.

Many children from poor homes fall behind early and never catch up. To ensure that every child gets the best start at school we need to understand and challenge the factors that hold children back.

## DISADVANTAGING CONDITIONS

There are many factors that influence the lives of babies and young children and their later life chances. A UNESCO study of development and the reduction of inequalities in a range of differing socio-cultural contexts identified seven disadvantaging conditions that impact negatively on children's early lives:

- poverty
- inadequate nutrition and healthcare
- unsatisfactory physical and home environments
- deficiencies in the socio-cultural system
- detrimental effects of structural changes in the family
- inadequate parenting behaviour
- physical or mental problems on the part of the child or family members.

(Schneewind)

These risk factors can have profound effects on a child's physical and mental well-being, cognitive functioning, educational attainment and, hence, poor life outcomes in terms of employment, income,

poverty, and physical and mental health. In turn, these outcomes can be transmitted from one generation to the next. It is only “by preventing [this] loss of developmental potential that affects millions of children worldwide [that] it is possible to interrupt the cycle of poverty and help promote equity in society.” (Goodall and Harris, 2009, p 9)

Schneewind’s seven risk factors are, of course, closely inter-related; poverty, for example, underpins and reinforces all other risk factors. Here, we discuss the factors under three headings – family resources, parents and child development, and parenting – which incorporate Schneewind’s risk factors.

## FAMILY RESOURCES

The lack of access to resources, both material and social, can have profound effects on families and children. The effects of poverty in childhood have been widely documented (eg, Duncan *et al*, 1994; Korenman *et al*, 1995; and Alhusen *et al*, 2005). In a recent study, Snowling *et al* (in press) found that the proportion of children scoring above the national expectation at the end of Key Stage 1 (at level 3) increases from 42% in the most deprived homes (deprivation ranks 1 and 2) to 70% in the least deprived homes (see Figure 1, opposite). There is a corresponding decrease in the proportion of children performing below the national standards, from 17% for children from the most deprived backgrounds to 4% from the least deprived backgrounds.

In the UK, a series of cohort studies have produced a body of evidence showing the effects of poverty on children and young people. Most recently, the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) provides valuable data on the life chances of UK children born in 2000/01. The MCS is a multi-disciplinary research project following the lives of around 19,000 children who are being tracked throughout their early childhood years. The four surveys of MCS cohort members carried out so far – at nine months, three years, five years and seven years – have built up detailed data.

Drawing on the MCS for the first three surveys of the cohort up until 2008, and using a definition of family poverty that considers equivalised income that is 60% below the UK median before housing costs (Ketende and Joshi, 2008), Kiernan and Mensah (2011) show the effects of the persistence of poverty during a child’s life. They demonstrated that 61% of children were not living in poverty at any of the surveys, but 14% had been living in poverty at all three, referred to as *persistent poverty*. The remaining children had experienced periods of living in poverty, referred to as *episodic poverty*.

The differential impact that not living in poverty, living in episodic poverty and living in persistent poverty had on children at the Early Years Foundation Stage in English schools was notable.

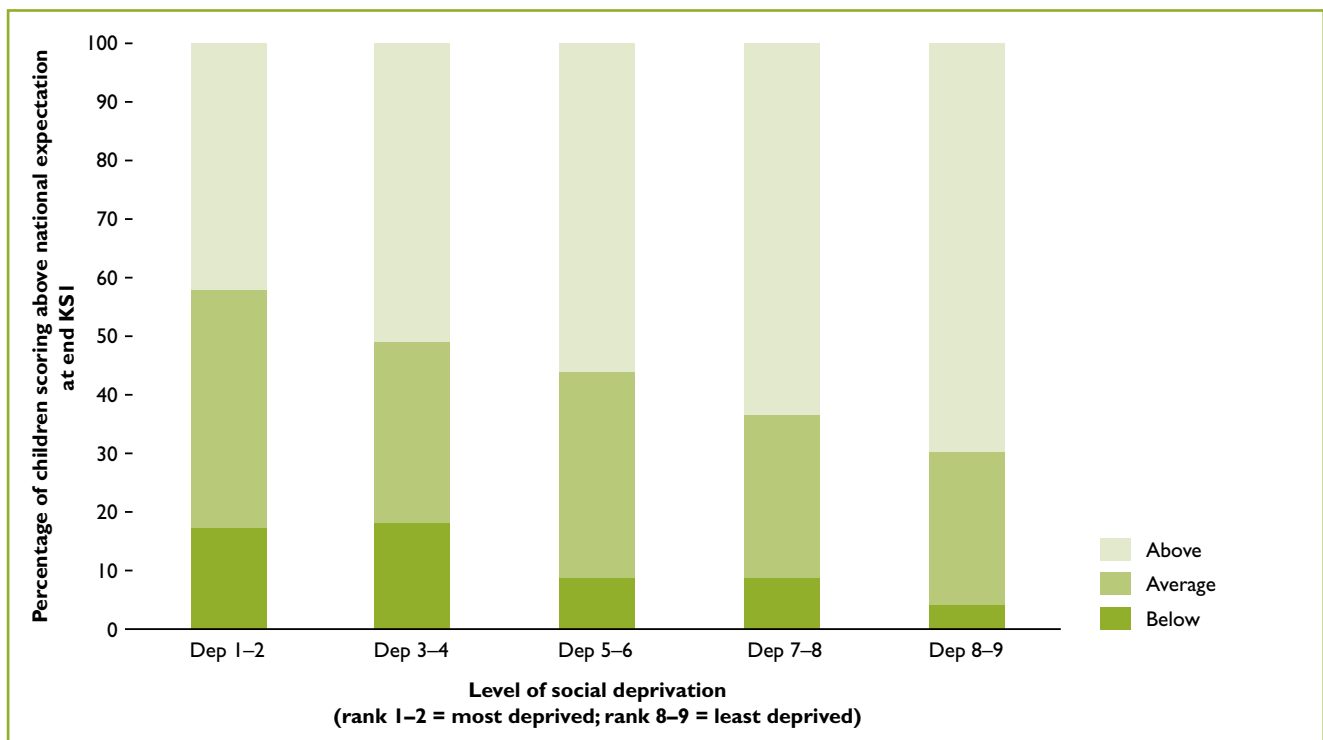
- 60% of children who had not lived in poverty in any of the three surveys were high achievers, compared with
- 40% of the children who had experienced episodic poverty, and
- 26% of the children who had lived in persistent poverty.

Kiernan and Mensah (2011) developed a measure of family resources that encompassed:

- income
- mother’s education
- employment
- housing
- the quality of the local area for raising children
- family structure
- mother’s age at birth of first child
- child’s birth order
- ethnic origin
- language spoken at home.

Matching this composite index using data from the MCS with data on parenting, Kiernan and Mensah concluded that parenting could have a significant mediating effect on poverty and a lack of family resources. The poorest achievement was seen among children in persistent poverty who had the lowest level of parenting:

- Only 19% of children who had lived in persistent poverty and experienced the lowest level of parenting were high achievers, whereas

**Figure I National curriculum levels at KSI according to social deprivation**

Source: Snowling *et al* (in press)

- 58% of children who had lived in persistent poverty but with high parenting scores, had substantially higher achievement levels and
- 73% of children who had not experienced poverty and had high parenting scores, were the highest achievers.

These results indicate that positive parenting can have a notable impact, not only on the negative pressures of poverty at the age of five, but also on the outcomes for children at all levels, whatever their socioeconomic status.

“Our findings show that parenting is a key mediator of poverty and disadvantage in relation to children’s achievement in the first year at school and are in line with, and extend on, similar findings in relation to these children’s cognitive development at age three [...] and are in accord with analyses of children’s achievement at age seven using Entry Assessments at ages four or five and Key Stage 1 assessment data.”

(Kiernan and Mensah, 2011, pp 328–9)

The same study concluded that “more positive parenting matters at all levels of resources” (Kiernan and Mensah, 2011, p 328). These conclusions reflect those of an earlier study, which argued that attempting to redress inequality through school-based education alone was insufficient unless policies are developed that support children’s learning before they start school.

“The primary preschool institution is for most children, of course, the family, but it is differences between families in terms of such facts as, for example, parenting skills, transmission of ability and school choice that appear to be the primary determinants of educational success or failure.” (Feinstein, 1998, p 30)

The impact of parenting is, therefore, significant in terms of the life experiences and chances of all children, but more so of children living in poverty. In terms of what parenting means in this context, “It is both who you are and what you do that is important in terms of parenting – both *behaviours*

such as breastfeeding, and personal and background characteristics such as interpersonal sensitivity and education are predictive of parenting behaviour...” (Gutman *et al*, 2009, p vi).

## PARENTS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

A child’s early experiences of parenting have significant effects on the development of the child’s brain. Parental nurturing has the capacity to ensure lasting developmental changes for children, or to prevent them. Recent developments in neuroscience show that early years nurturing has profound implications for lifelong learning and education (The Royal Society, 2011). The implications of this in terms of children’s development in their early years have featured prominently in both the Munro Review (2011) and, earlier, in the Social Exclusion Task Force’s *Reaching Out: An Action Plan on Social Exclusion* (2006). The latter noted:

“It is ... known from research just how important a child’s early experiences are to the development of the brain ... The child who is nurtured and loved will develop the neural networks which mediate empathy, compassion and the capacity to form healthy relationships ... Unfortunately, this window of opportunity is also a window of vulnerability. If a child is not talked to she will not develop speech and language capacity, if she is not given opportunities to use her developing motor systems, she will not develop motor skills, and, most devastating, if she is not loved, she will struggle to love others.”

(Social Exclusion Task Force, 2006, p 24)

The Munro Review noted that:

“Neuroscience also offers lessons on the importance of the early years... The worst and deepest brain damage occurs before birth and in the first 18 months of life when emotional circuits are forming.”

(Munro, 2011, p 71).

For a child to benefit from their early life development, particularly in the first year, the parenting he or she receives must be characterised not just by attention to the child’s material welfare, but also to his or her emotional development, founded on the development of a secure attachment between parent and child. Such parenting is characterised by sensitivity, that is, “the parent’s ability to be responsive and attuned to their children’s needs and to the developmental tasks they face across childhood” (Gutman *et al*, 2009, p 3). To ensure the best developmental outcomes, parenting during the first year of life is “best promoted by attentive, warm, stimulating and non-restrictive care giving” (Gutman *et al*, 2009, p 4).

The complexities of parenting increase as the child develops across the early years, and the skills and demands on parents change and grow:

“As children enter their second and third years of life ... parenting becomes more complex as new skills are needed. During this period, children gain mobility and explore their environment; thus, parenting involves more teaching and control. Parents need to provide greater supervision and instruction in order to help their children become more independent ... During the pre-school period (ages three to five), the needs of children change yet again. During this period, high levels of nurturance and control seem to provide the best combination to foster children’s ability to engage others in a friendly and cooperative manner, as well as to be resourceful and motivated.”

(Gutman *et al*, 2009, p 4)

The universal skills that parents need to be able to deploy to nurture their children with positive parenting are care, discipline and instruction. These elements are essential to the effective and loving upbringing of children. However, parents’ capabilities in relation to positive parenting are subject to their own circumstances and knowledge. Some of the most potent of the influences on parenting can be seen to take the form of stresses.

## PARENTING

The stresses on parents are numerous, and the greater the number and duration of stress factors, the less able parents are to deliver positive parenting for their children. Socioeconomic status (SES) is a key variable, and the literature on the impact of socioeconomic stress factors suggests that low SES is linked to inhibited child development (Bradley and Corwyn, 2002). Conversely, children of parents with higher SES tend to benefit from the parenting they experience (Belsky *et al*, 2007). It appears that the association between SES and many aspects of children's development begins early in life.

Numerous studies have documented that characteristics of low SES are related to lower levels of cognitive, language, social and motor development in infancy and early childhood (Gutman and Feinstein, 2010). In terms of ensuring that children are 'school ready', and that parents are supportive of their children's schooling, SES is also key: "A major factor mediating parental involvement is parental socioeconomic status, whether indexed by occupational class or parental (especially maternal) level of education. SES mediates both parental involvement and pupil achievement" (Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003, p 42). Desforges also highlighted the findings of Sacker *et al* (2002) that SES "had its impact in part negatively through material deprivation and in part through parental involvement and aspiration" (Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003, p 42).

For parents, stressful life circumstances impact strongly, and negatively, on their parenting. The combination of financial hardship associated with low SES, plus additional stresses such as social isolation and exclusion, also impact negatively on parenting (Gutman and Feinstein, 2008). The effect of low SES on parenting can be magnified by the lack of access to support networks. Those parents who can benefit from support networks are more likely to be able to offer their children positive parenting (Cochran and Niego, 1995; Gilby *et al*, 2008; and Hashima and Amato, 1994). Huge numbers of children are affected by family stress. Some 5.3 million people in the UK suffer from multiple disadvantages, with, for example, nearly 2 million children living in workless households (Department for Work and Pensions / Department for Education, 2011, p 14). Combined, the multiple stresses resulting from low SES and the consequent increase in the likelihood of children experiencing poor parenting:

"...have a detrimental effect on children's progression and well-being, which can impact right through into their adulthood, in turn affecting the subsequent generation. The way that disadvantage perpetuates is shaped by the experiences, attainment and outcomes of children growing up in socioeconomic disadvantage and by the way that negative parental activities experienced through childhood may repeat in adulthood."

(DWP / DfE, 2011, p 15).

# THE EARLY INTERVENTION DEBATE

**There is an emerging consensus in favour of early intervention as a way of tackling the cycle of deprivation and helping children escape poverty. A number of high-profile reports have made the case for increased emphasis on the first five years of a child's life.**

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'EARLY'?

There is now a consensus across political parties, based on research evidence, that early intervention is a key policy imperative. But it is important to be clear what 'early' means. Often, 'early' refers to the stage in a child's life – that is, the argument is to intervene at as young an age as possible. Indeed, some interventions are pre-birth: improving pregnant women's nutrition and helping them give up smoking, for example. But 'early' can also refer to the stage when difficulties first start to occur; for example, some difficulties that are related to adolescence will be addressed only at that time, although they may have their origins in the child's earlier years.

The early intervention debate, therefore, encompasses both of these definitions of 'early'. But they share the common characteristic of seeking to focus action at a point in time when the purpose is either to prevent problems occurring at all or else limit their negative impact on a child's life outcomes.

## THE DEVELOPING POLICY CONSENSUS

The coalition government's first child poverty strategy, *A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming families' lives* (DWP, DFE, 2011), sets out the government's approach to tackling poverty, indicating the direction of that policy, and its goals, up to 2020. The background to the strategy is the Labour government's Child Poverty Act 2010, which "established income targets for 2020 and a duty to minimise socioeconomic disadvantage" (DWP, DFE, 2011, p 8). The child poverty strategy has, as one of its core elements, the declared policy aim of addressing the contexts of poverty and early intervention, including parental support. It is structured around an approach that stresses the benefits of work in terms of material, social and emotional well-being; of supporting family life and children's life chances; and of the role of community and localism in the overall strategy. To attain the goal of supporting family life and children's life chances, there is particular reference to the role of early intervention:

"the importance of going beyond income to consider the family, home environment, housing, early years, education and health"

"... we will reform funding structures to enable early, sustained, decentralised and targeted support for children and families"

“... the importance of enabling children to achieve their potential by improving their attainment, aspiration and progression at all stages of education and empowering practitioners to have more impact on the most disadvantaged young people.”

(DWP, DfE, 2011, p 9)

In her foreword, Sarah Teather, Minister of State for Children and Families, argued that the government's child poverty strategy has:

“at its heart ... strengthening families, encouraging responsibility, promoting work, guaranteeing fairness and providing support to the most vulnerable. It requires a radical reform of the welfare state, increasing children's life chances, a greater emphasis on early intervention, and a concentration on whole-family and whole-life measures. We want to change behaviour and ensure that there is a stronger focus on policies that genuinely benefit children and families. We are clear that, particularly in the current fiscal environment, evidence-based practice and services that can genuinely transform lives must drive local prioritisation.”

(DWP / DfE, 2011, p 6)

The strategy was developed after a number of recent reviews and reports to government. Foremost among these were works by Field (2010), Allen (2011a), Tickell (2011), the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (2010) and Marmot (2010); while others, including Munro (2011) and Allen (2011b) have effectively reinforced key aspects of the coalition government's child poverty strategy. Further, the early intervention message also partially characterised the previous government's policy on matters such as family, children and schools; for example, in *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury 2003), and *Your Child, Your School, Our Future: Building a 21st-century school system* (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2009).

Frank Field's review of poverty and life chances, *The Foundation Years: Preventing poor children*

*becoming poor adults* (2010), focused on poverty as an influence on the life chances of children. But it also addressed other influences, and proposed the establishment of the Foundation Years, covering a child's life from conception to five years. During this time, the key drivers of outcomes in childhood and young adulthood were identified as:

- During pregnancy:
  - mother's physical and mental health
  - parents' education
  - mother's age
- Birth:
  - birth weight
  - parental warmth and attachment
  - breastfeeding
  - parental mental health
- Five years:
  - parenting and home learning environment
  - parents' education
  - high-quality childcare

(Field, 2010, p 39)

Field argued that the most consistent factor throughout a child's development is the role of parents and families, and:

“There is now a significant consensus amongst academics and professionals that factors in the home environment – positive parenting, the home learning environment and parents' level of education – are the most important.”

(Field, 2010, p 38).

The Field Review's recommendations included a call to re-focus funding to early years provision, starting from pregnancy, and that funding should be targeted:

“high-quality and consistent support for parents during pregnancy, and in the early years, support for better parenting; support for a good home learning environment; and high-quality childcare.”

(Field, 2010, p 7)

The early intervention argument was also forcefully delivered by Graham Allen in his two reports, *Early Intervention: The next steps* (2011a), and *Early Intervention: Smart investment, massive savings* (2011b). Allen's first report argued that a child's life experiences in the early years are central to future outcomes, and outlined the negative impact – on individuals, society and the economy – of failing to adopt a uniform national policy of early intervention. Allen called for a strong cross-party commitment to prioritising early intervention.

*Early Intervention: The next steps* recommended the widespread adoption of early intervention programmes, based on rigorous standards of evidence, and offered an initial list of programmes that are proven to be cost-effective. To support this, Allen also recommended the establishment of 'early intervention places'; with 26 local authorities acting as pathfinders in putting early intervention at the heart of their strategies. In addition, an Early Intervention Foundation was also proposed to act as the inspirational, funding and networking hub of the early intervention policy.

The central thrust of the report was that early intervention should aim to "provide a social and emotional bedrock for the current and future generations of babies, children and young people by helping them and their parents (or other main caregivers) before problems arise" (Allen, 2011a, p v). This understanding was built upon the literature on 'what works' with children, young people and families, and recognition that late intervention was characterised by high costs and limited outcomes.

In many respects, the report built upon the earlier report by Allen and Smith, *Early Intervention: Good parents, great kids, better citizens* (2008). This report was premised on the argument that "the policies of late intervention have failed and the alternative must be tried" (Allen and Smith, 2008, p 20) – that alternative being early intervention. The report argued for the establishment of a 'foundation package' as a 'volume programme' which would have an "impact on a high proportion of children in providing the best base for future parents. In the areas of greatest need it is entirely possible that

almost every 0–18 year old will be touched by at least one intervention." (Allen and Smith, 2008, p 75)

The core of the suggested foundation package would be:

- a prenatal package
- postnatal (Family/Nurse Partnership)
- Sure Start children's centres
- primary school follow-on programmes, focusing on parenting support, language, numeracy and literacy, and the development of children's social competences
- anti-drug and alcohol programmes
- secondary school pre-parenting (ie, pre-conception) skilling.

(Allen and Smith, 2008, p 74)

Allen presented his second report, *Early Intervention: Smart investment, massive savings*, in July 2011. It outlined the cost savings associated with a shift from late to early intervention, and argued that a shift to early intervention could also occur in association with the development of new methods of funding for policies. In particular, it was proposed that an Early Intervention Foundation could, as one of its functions, provide advice on social investment opportunities related to early intervention. In this analysis, early intervention as the foundation of policy would lead not only to a reduced burden on public finances, but also act as a method for drawing private sector funding into tackling key social problems at the earliest stages.

Dame Clare Tickell's report, *The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning* (2011), reviewed the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, which was established in 2008. It reiterated the early intervention message in relation to children's experiences, citing neuroscientific evidence:

"The evidence is clear that children's experiences in their early years strongly influence their outcomes in later life, across a range of areas from health and social behaviour to their employment and educational attainment. The most recent neuroscientific evidence highlights

the particular importance of the first three years of a child's life. A strong start in the early years increases the probability of positive outcomes in later life; a weak foundation significantly increases the risk of later difficulties."

(Tickell, 2011, p 8)

In this context, home life is seen as the single most important influence on a child's early years. The report recommended a range of measures to strengthen the EYFS framework, and support parents, carers and practitioners involved in early years provision.

The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO) report, *Grasping the nettle* (C4EO, 2010), reaffirmed this argument, noting that:

"...early intervention clearly works – when it is an appropriate intervention, applied well, following timely identification of a problem; and the earlier the better to secure maximum impact and greatest long term sustainability ..."

(C4EO, 2010, p 4)

Incorporating findings from other countries, International Experience of Early Intervention for Children, Young People and their Families 2010 (Hoskins and Walsh, 2010), argues that although more research is needed into the cost effectiveness of early intervention strategies, there are five "golden threads" to early intervention. These are:

- support for parents from pregnancy to birth
- support for language acquisition in children's early years
- support for positive parenting
- more effective deployment of family and child-focused services
- more effective use of data – for example, on the effectiveness of interventions.

One of the key messages from the report was that:

"Positive parenting should be publicly celebrated, alongside recognition that most parents need some support at some time. Systematic support should be encouraged nationally, but with

particular emphasis on meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged. Parents should be engaged as early and as positively as possible, ideally before their babies are born, with helpful information from the outset about the importance of their role, and the local services available."

(Hoskins and Walsh, 2010, p 12)

This is also a central message of the Marmot Review, *Fair Society, Healthy Lives* (Marmot, 2010). It argues that reducing health inequalities requires major policy action, utilising early intervention, in which priority is given "to pre- and post-natal interventions that reduce adverse outcomes of pregnancy and infancy" (Marmot, 2010, p 16). It also emphasises the need to ensure that parents are supported through the use of "parenting programmes, children's centres and key workers, delivered to meet social need via outreach to families". In addition, the review stresses the need to develop programmes to facilitate the transition to school, and to ensure that children are "school ready" (Marmot, 2010, p 16).

The Munro Review's final report, *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report. A child-centred system* (Munro, 2011) contains a strong endorsement of the case for early intervention, and sits firmly in line with the other key reviews:

"Like the reviews led by Graham Allen MP, Dame Clare Tickell, and the Rt Hon Frank Field MP, this review has noted the growing body of evidence of the effectiveness of early intervention with children and families and shares their view on the importance of providing such help. Preventative services can do more to reduce abuse and neglect than reactive services."

(Munro, 2011, p 7)

The striking element in all of these reviews and reports is the commonality of approach to differing, though related, questions of well-being, education outcomes, family life and life chances – the key being the argument that early intervention is an efficient and effective way of gaining positive outcomes across these issues. Emphasising the common

analysis contained in the reports by Tickell, Field, Allen and Munro, the Allen Report, *Early Intervention: Smart investment, massive savings* (Allen, 2011b) is prefaced by a joint statement by all five authors:

“We have all recently conducted reviews for Her Majesty’s Government in this field and while we agree on so much, we would like to particularly underline that all five of us strongly support this Report’s emphasis on the

cost-effectiveness of Early Intervention. We feel it is vital that the Government now begins the groundwork to enable our late reaction culture to be transcended by an early intervention one. Our collective view is that the moment for a serious, sustained programme of early intervention, which is promoted inside and outside government, has arrived.”

(Allen, 2011b, p ii)

# EVIDENCE-BASED PARENT SUPPORT

**Evidence-based parenting support is a key way of delivering early intervention. High-quality programmes benefit children and families and represent good value for money. But programme coverage remains patchy. Most programmes are intensively targeted on a small number of families and do not focus on children's education.**

## EVIDENCE-BASED PARENT SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

Policy recommendations focusing on parent support as a way of improving results for children and families stress the importance of evidence-based practice. The gold standard is the randomised controlled trial (RCT). This rigorous approach requires that the results of the intervention are compared with those from a control group, which may be the subject of another intervention or no intervention – for example, a group waiting to receive the intervention being tested. Randomised allocation of participants to the two groups is also important as this helps to ensure that there is no bias in the selection of those in the intervention group. There are other requirements that can strengthen the quality of the trials, including making sure they meet a list of specifications and that they are registered before they start. This approach is now the model of choice for intervention research (Society for Prevention Research [www.preventionresearch.org](http://www.preventionresearch.org)) and there are regulations for trials in the UK for health interventions, ([www.ct-toolkit.ac.uk](http://www.ct-toolkit.ac.uk) Accessed 25 September 2011).

The importance of evidence-based programmes was emphasised by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in its *Compilation of Evidence-Based Family Skills Training Programmes* (UNODC, 2010). The UNODC's review of programmes that had been subject to RCTs reinforced the message that evidence-based programmes provide the gold standard necessary for successful early intervention in terms of parental support:

“UNODC strongly recommends practitioners, clinicians and others working in the area of prevention to use evidence-based programmes rather than start developing their own from scratch. There are two main reasons for this: firstly, while efforts in the area of prevention to help and support others are undoubtedly founded on good intentions, research has shown that good intentions can sometimes cause unintended harm. Evidence-based programmes are based on a vast body of scientific research that has undergone peer review to ensure that the results are safe and beneficial to those targeted by such programmes. Secondly, that research not only shows that evidence-based programmes are effective and have a positive impact but also indicates how those results are achieved. Evidence-based programmes therefore offer the assurance that positive results will be obtained, that the programme will benefit those targeted and that close adherence to the programme structure and content will ensure that implementation will have no negative effects. This translates into huge savings in terms of the funds used to implement such programmes.”

(UNODC, 2010, pp 3–4)

There are a number of well-researched parent support programmes that have been investigated using RCTs. The UNODC review presents the 24 considered to have the best evidence. Other reviews of parenting programmes have also drawn on RCTs and shown that well-developed parenting programmes are successful (eg, Barlow *et al* 2010, Barlow *et al* 2011, Dretzke *et al* 2009, Nowak and Heinrichs 2008).

As a general rule, proven parent support programmes are designed to support parents to develop or enhance their parenting skills, with a particular focus on improving the child's behaviour and socialisation. A very large number have been developed by groups of practitioners. It is essential that these are rigorously evaluated to test their usefulness.

This requires:

- the development of a programme based on sound evidence of effective strategies that address important aspects of parenting skills and child development
- the creation of a manual that sets out the programme – this promotes fidelity, providing a framework so that programme delivery can be consistent and true to the original design that was evaluated.
- development of a training programme to ensure that those who deliver the parenting programme are knowledgeable, skilled in its implementation and immersed in the rationale and values of the programme
- at least one rigorous trial to examine efficacy. This is often conducted by the programme developer so, in addition, independently run trials are desirable. These trials evaluate the programme's efficacy, typically under optimal conditions. The strongest method is an RCT allowing a test of the programme's efficacy compared with either no intervention or an alternative one.
- effectiveness in 'real life' community settings should also be examined, with different practitioners implementing the programme, to test its applicability in community services.

## BENEFITS

The potentially positive impact of parenting as part of early intervention has been known for some decades. In the 1980s, for example, a literature review of the effectiveness of early intervention noted the benefits of involving parents (White *et al*, 1985). A more recent review has concluded that:

“Systematic interventions demonstrate what is possible. Family-based support is now recognised as a central feature of successful outcomes for young children in high-poverty areas. It is one of the most significant contributors to children's continued success in the education system, particularly during periods of educational transition when families need greater support.”

(Goodall and Harris, 2009, p 9)

Similarly, an important review of RCTs relating to the clinical effectiveness of parent support programmes for children with conduct problems concluded that “On balance, parenting programmes are an effective treatment for children with conduct problems” (Dretzke *et al*, 2009).

A longitudinal evaluation of the England-wide roll-out of evidence-based parenting programmes carried out by the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) at the University of Warwick provided further strong evidence of the effectiveness of parenting support in terms of a range of outcomes for children and parents (Lindsay *et al*, 2011). The Parenting Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) ran from 2008 to 2011 in all local authorities in England. It was developed from a pathfinder in 18 local authorities, which had indicated that the three programmes investigated could be rolled out effectively across these local authorities (Lindsay *et al*, 2008).

The main parent support programmes included in the PEIP had been subject to efficacy trials, using RCTs. But the evaluation of the PEIP was, in part, designed to examine the effectiveness of the parenting programmes when implemented in a large number of community settings across

England. This is important. Evaluation of an intervention by RCTs shows that the intervention can work under those conditions. However, RCTs for parenting programmes are typically small in scale, with perhaps 100 parents or less. In terms of national policy it is also important to examine whether such an intervention will work – and work as well as it did in the trial – when it is rolled-out across many sites in different parts of the country.

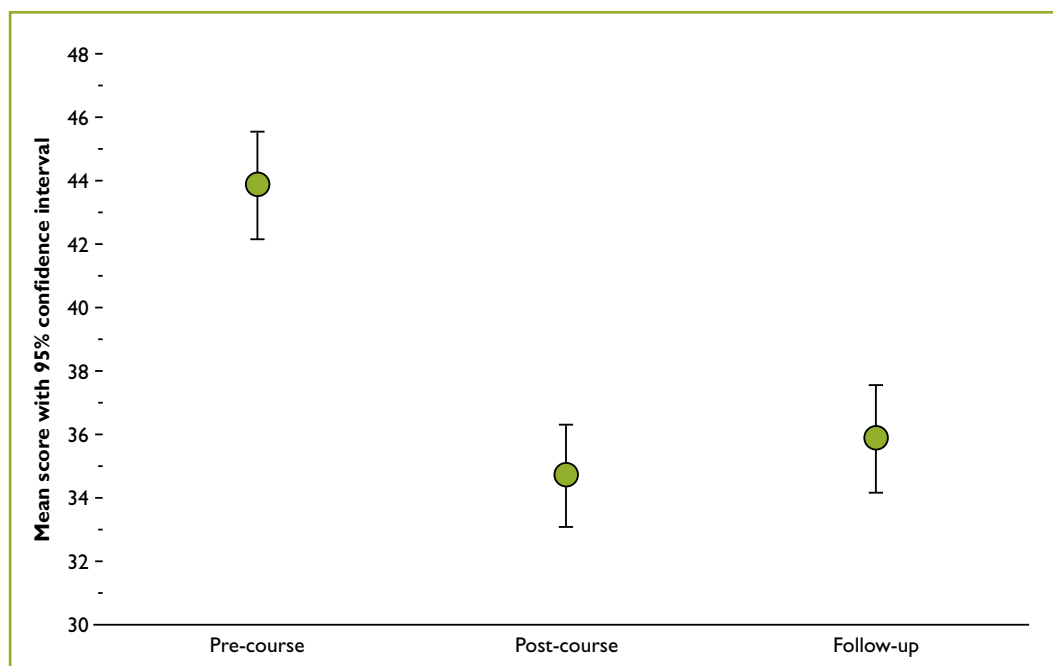
The five parent support programmes initially selected by the government for use in the PEIP were Families and Schools Together (FAST), Positive Parenting Program (Triple P), Strengthening Families Programme 10–14 (SFP 10–14), Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities (SFSC), and The Incredible Years. The evaluation showed that the rollout of evidence-based parent support programmes through the PEIP was successful on a national scale and significantly increased support for a large number of parents. The parent support programmes have had positive effects on the parents' mental well-being and the style of parenting, as well as their children's behaviour. A follow-up study also showed that the positive effects were maintained a year after parents' participation in the courses ended (Lindsay *et al*, 2011). In summary, key findings from the PEIP evaluation were as follows:

- Programmes were made available to over 6,000 parents in the 43 local authorities examined.
- Parent outcomes in all four programmes for which sufficient data was available were significantly improved after course completion:
  - overall, 79% of parents showed improvements in their mental well-being
  - the average level of parental mental well-being increased from the bottom 25% of the population to the national average.
- A considerable proportion of parents changed their parenting behaviour over the course of the programme:
  - 74% of parents reported reductions in their parenting laxness
  - 77% of parents reported reductions in their over-reactivity
  - the percentage of parents who reported that their child had serious conduct problems reduced by a third, from 59% to 40%.
- When followed up one year later:
  - improvements in parent laxness and over-reactivity were maintained
  - improvements in their children's behaviour were also maintained.
- Figure 2 (overleaf) shows the highly significant reductions in less-effective parenting styles of laxness and over-reactivity between the time the parents joined their course and the end of the programme, and again one year later (Lindsay *et al*, 2011).
- There was a small reduction in the improvement of parents' reported mental well-being one year after the programme but this remained significantly higher than when they had started their parenting programme.
- Parents were highly positive about their experiences of the parenting groups they attended.

## COSTS AND COST-EFFECTIVENESS

During the Parenting Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) the average cost per parent attending the parenting group (ie, the reported costs divided by the number of parents starting a parenting group across all local authorities and across all financial years of operations) was £1,244. However, once the completion rate of 73% is incorporated into the calculations, the average cost per completed (or 'successful') parenting intervention (ie, the reported costs divided by the number of parents completing the parenting group) was £1,658. Costs varied between the parenting programmes because they were of different durations and there were variations in costs of training, programme materials and numbers of staff involved. This also included the infrastructure costs to the local authority to administer the PEIP and provide the parenting groups.

**Figure 2 Mean parenting style total score at pre-course, post-course and follow-up**



Source: Lindsay *et al* (2011) *Evaluation of the Parenting Early Intervention Programme*

These results may be compared with other recent studies that have reported costs of £571 per parent (Scott *et al* 2001), £2,380 per child (Scott, O'Connor *et al*, 2010a), £1,343 per child (Scott, Sylva *et al*, 2010) and £1,289 per child (Edwards *et al*, 2007).

The PEIP also examined the cost-effectiveness of the overall programme by comparing costs with the gains made by those parents completing the programmes. The estimated gain on the mental well-being metric stood at 0.79 of an effect size, the gain on the parenting laxness stood at 0.72 of an effect size, while the estimated gain on parenting over-reactivity stood at 0.85 of an effect size. Lindsay *et al* (2011) estimated the average cost per standard deviation improvement (1.0 of an effect size).<sup>1</sup> The analysis shows that the indicative cost of achieving an increase in mental well-being effect size is between £2,100 and £2,400; the cost of achieving a one-effect-size reduction in parenting laxness of

between £2,300 and £2,600, while the estimated cost associated with achieving a one-effect-size reduction in parenting over-reactivity stood at between £2,000 and £2,200.

The analysis also provided some indication of the impact of the parenting interventions on child outcomes, using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. The indicative cost of achieving a one-effect-size reduction in conduct problems was between £3,800 and £4,300, similar to that reported by Scott, Sylva *et al* (2010b).

The PEIP study also identified substantial variation in cost-effectiveness that appeared to be a result of the efficiency of different local authorities and the costs associated with different programmes. For example, the average cost per parent nationally was £1,658 but in one local authority it was as low as £534 per parent.

<sup>1</sup> This method allows comparison of costs for a unit of improvement. The sums presented are indicative only, as a linear relationship between effect size and cost cannot be assumed. See Scott, Sylva *et al* (2010) for another example of this approach.

**Table 1 Estimated costs per parental effect size**

	Outcome		
	Mental well-being	Parenting laxness	Parenting over-reactivity
Effect size	0.79	0.72	0.85
Cost range	£2,112–£2,381	£2,317–£2,613	£1,963–£2,213

Source: Lindsay *et al* (2011) *Evaluation of the Parenting Early Intervention Programme*

Note: All monetary values expressed in 2010/11 constant prices.

## REACH

### Access is patchy

Graham Allen's report, *Early Intervention: The next steps*, argued that "the provision of successful evidence-based early intervention programmes remains persistently patchy and dogged by institutional and financial obstacles" (Allen 2011a). This reinforces the view expressed by Pricewaterhouse Coopers in its 2006 report, where it described family and parent support services as "highly fragmented, patchy and complex", despite a high and rising demand for making preventative services more broadly available. The demand and need for parent support programmes was also demonstrated in a study of GP practices by Patterson *et al* (2010).

We know that over 6,000 parents in England received some help through the Parenting Early Intervention Programme, because they returned evaluation questionnaires. But we do not know how many groups did not engage with the study. The largest number of parents we know were supported in one local authority was at least 754, but the median was only 113. Even assuming there were twice as many parents supported than we are aware of – ie, 12,000 in the 43 local authorities – it still cannot be said that evidence-based parent support programmes have been mainstreamed.

### Lack of focus on education

Even where proven parent support programmes are provided they are often targeted at a small number of families experiencing severe problems, and they are rarely focused on children's education. The main focus of most evidence-based programmes is on helping parents to develop parenting styles that support positive behavioural development in their children. Their origins were typically in concerns about children's behaviour and the relationship with less effective parenting styles. This support is clearly necessary and important, but it needs to be available to more parents and combined with interventions that have a broader reach if we are to improve the life chances of all children affected by deprivation. In its 2011 response to the government's child poverty strategy consultation, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation argues that "tackling child poverty and the rich-poor attainment gap requires significant changes to the outcomes of around 20 per cent of the population – not just the bottom 5 per cent" (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2011, p 3). It says we must act to "expand the evidence of effective interventions for broader groups".

Evidence for the combination of parenting interventions that address both children's behaviour and their attainment is available, but only on a limited scale. Scott *et al* (2010a) carried out a randomised controlled trial using a parenting programme (Incredible Years) in association with

a programme that focuses on literacy development, with positive outcomes for the children in terms of both behaviour and literacy. There is more extensive evidence for parental involvement with reading development as a separate activity. There is a well-established tradition in the UK of involving parents in supporting their children's reading in preschool and Key Stage 1, with positive results (eg, Hannon, 1987; Leach and Siddall, 1990; Lindsay *et al*, 1985; Tizard *et al*, 1982; and Topping and Lindsay, 1992). In her recent review Sénéchal (2008) suggests that there is good evidence in general; however, she argues that we need more detailed evidence for specific interventions:

“Training parents to teach their child specific reading skills can have a large effect on children's reading performance... but the effectiveness of the different types of teaching interventions remains to be investigated. ... The interventions differed in the nature of the instructional program as well as the skills that were taught. Educators will want to know what is the most effective way to train parents to teach their children reading skills.”

(Senechal, 2008, p 19)

These conclusions were supported by the findings of the National Early Literacy Panel (2009) in the United States. There is clearly scope for well-researched programmes that address different aspects of parent support for children's development, especially in disadvantaged communities.

### **Lack of follow through**

A further factor is the frequent lack of follow through. In the pathfinder which preceded the Parenting Early Intervention Programme (PEIP),

it was common for parents to complete a parent support programme – which they had enjoyed, had valued and from which they had benefited – but with little prospect of subsequent support building on that programme. Of course, not every parent wants or needs this. There is good evidence that the positive effects of evidence-based parent support programmes persist at least one year later (eg, Lindsay *et al*, 2011; McMahon, 1994) and even as long as 10 years later (Webster-Stratton *et al* 2011). However, this is not the case for all parents, especially those with significant needs or life challenges. In those cases, beneficial effects can fade and follow through is necessary if the benefits are to be sustained.

During the PEIP, the research team's recommendations on this point were addressed and it was more common to find that the local authorities were implementing a range of further support. This could be as little as 'keeping in touch' social support activities, but in other cases a complementary parent support programme was provided. We are currently a long way from providing this level of needs-related follow through support to optimise the benefits gained from taking part in parenting programmes.

The Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme, discussed in detail in the next section, builds this approach into the programme. FASTWORKS is the continuation stage of the FAST programme. Led by the FAST parent graduates with support from the school, the multi-family group meetings start within two weeks of FAST graduation and continue for two years.

# THE FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS TOGETHER PROGRAMME

**Through the Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme we can give all children in deprived areas the best start at school. This new wave of educational partnerships – whereby parents come together with schools at the start of a child’s formal education – will complement and sustain gains from the current early intervention infrastructure (preschool education, health visitors, Children’s centres etc).**

In the context of the policy debate on early intervention, and given the weight of evidence about its cost-effectiveness, Save the Children is putting forward a timely proposal – that parents in deprived communities with children preparing for or starting primary school should be entitled to participate in the FAST programme. The overall goal is to ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are supported to thrive during the early years, and is founded on the argument that:

“We will never close the education gap and give the poorest children a decent chance of escaping poverty unless we act early [given that] the gap in outcomes between children from different socio-economic groups becomes entrenched before children start school, [and that] prior attainment is the most significant factor behind later attainment gaps. From the start of school the poorest children are playing catch-up; even if they make as much progress as their peers at every stage of schooling there will still be a significant gap.”

(Save the Children Briefing to the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research, 27 June 2011)

Save the Children’s intention is to set up 400 new FAST groups by 2014, with the aim of helping to close the early years achievement gap, and helping to remedy the lack of voluntary, first-engagement family services (Allen, 2011a). In this section, we explore the FAST programme and consider evidence of its effectiveness in the 14 UK schools where it has been operating.

## FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS TOGETHER

Save the Children has identified the evidence-based FAST programme as a contribution to early intervention measures. The programme stresses the importance of parent and community engagement and the home learning environment to children’s early achievement and development (and the importance of this early achievement to their later life chances). FAST brings together the key influences on a child’s life, and supports them to work together to ensure that every child thrives.

FAST was developed in 1988 by Dr Lynn McDonald (McDonald *et al*, 1997; McDonald and Sayger, 1998; McDonald *et al*, 2006) who is currently Professor of Social Work Research at Middlesex University, London. FAST was recently introduced in England (2009), but has been systematically replicated across 2,500 schools in 14 countries. Based on randomised controlled trials and replication studies, FAST has been reviewed and identified as an evidence-based family skills programme by governments in the UK (2009; 2010; 2011), the US (2007; 2009; 2010) and the UN (2010).

The programme has a number of key advantages:

**1. It is voluntary with high retention rates in poor communities and the focus is on education**

FAST is offered as a voluntary first-engagement service in disadvantaged communities. This non-stigmatising approach and the quality of programme activities lead to high retention rates. It is located in schools and aims to improve children's ability to achieve in the classroom.

**2. It reaches large numbers of disadvantaged children and families**

Each cycle within a school can benefit up to 80 children. We know that many children from low-income households fall behind their better-off peers in the early years. FAST is a good way of helping many more parents give their children the best start and to create excellent home learning environments. FAST therefore addresses both the social mobility agenda (the bottom 20%), as the programme is widely available in poor communities, and the social justice agenda (bottom 5%), as it can be a useful mechanism to engage hard-to-reach families and then later to direct them towards more intensive support.

**3. It is empowering rather than prescriptive**

The emphasis is on empowering parents and communities to give their children the best start rather than prescribing a set of values or behaviours. It challenges the 'deficit model', whereby interventions try to 'fix' children and parents, and instead looks to develop their strengths.

**4. It strengthens relationships within and between families and breaks down the barriers between home and school**

At its core FAST is about strengthening relationships. It aims to improve parent-child interactions and subsequently children's outcomes, while ensuring that parents have support networks and feel comfortable in the school environment. The programme therefore builds social capital and brings together the key influences on a child's life – parents, the school and the community.

**5. It is community-led – the Big Society in action**

FAST is co-produced with and ultimately sustained by parents themselves. It is bottom-up community action as opposed to top-down state intervention. It aims to strengthen support networks and help parents come together as a community with local schools so that children get the best possible start.

## THE THEORY BEHIND THE PROGRAMME

Four RCTs have been carried out, including an independent trial, which provide evidence for the effectiveness of the FAST programme. It has a strong theoretical foundation based on the following:

- attachment theory, which argues for the importance of the parent-child bond in the early years in ensuring that the child develops into a psychologically balanced adult
- family systems theory, which proposes the importance to the child's healthy development of strengthening family cohesion, supporting parents and avoiding conflict
- family stress theory, which suggests that social support for parents and a positive attitude can help families to survive social and economic crises
- risk and protective factor theory, which argues that even one strong protective factor, such as the support of a caring adult, can override multiple risk factors for a child
- social learning theory, which proposes that specific positive parenting behaviour can have a positive effect on a child's mental health
- social ecological theory, which proposes the importance of interventions that encompass parent-child, family, school and community domains
- group dynamics theory, which suggests the benefits of membership of a small group in reducing stress and isolation.

Furthermore, other research has influenced FAST, including:

- new brain research which indicates that early reduction in cortisol levels and early exposure to dopamine and serotonin reduce susceptibility to drug addiction later in life
- adult education strategies based on experiential learning and small group processes, which have been shown to empower socially marginalised populations
- the importance of encouraging local leaders to sustain the benefits of brief group interventions over time.

## PROGRAMME APPROACH AND VISION

FAST has the following programme approach which indicates values as well as operational factors.

- **Experiential learning**  
To supplement existing classroom education with a school and community-based after-school forum, where content is replaced with process and instructor-led verbal interaction is replaced with group interactivity and shared leadership. Teacher-student lecturing is supplemented by whole-family activities that promote self-esteem, self-respect, values and family rules.
- **After school**  
A core belief is that there are two fundamental ways that people receive education: instruction and experience. Instruction is the transfer of knowledge through the use of didactic classroom instruction, reading and homework. While tutorial interaction is indispensable to children's development, it is limited to a particular kind of stimulation and knowledge dissemination. On the other hand, 'experience' is exposure to – and participation in – processes that frame our lives by shaping our personal and family values.

- **Partnership**  
Every community should provide an opportunity for families to embrace both aspects of nurturing, so that more class time can be devoted to educational interaction. It is also important that schools take some role in strengthening families and family values.
- **Holistic**  
Most importantly, FAST stresses mediation that allows the whole family to remodel their approach to the child and re-establish proper roles, responsibilities and accountability within the family structure. This is designed to empower families to understand the problems they face, within a mutually supportive environment along with other families.

The FAST vision stresses the following:

- **Parent empowerment**  
FAST stresses that all parents love their children and want what's best for them. Parents today are faced with enormous challenges when bringing up kids. But with the proper guidance, all families can act on their natural desire to do what is best for their children. FAST can help give parents the resources, platform and support to act on their hopes and dreams.
- **Family function**  
FAST aims to support families by strengthening parent-child relationships. This includes parents showing their children that they can act responsibly as parents, can improve the rules of the home and focus on the needs of their children. This helps introduce a powerful catalyst for family renewal.
- **Universal and voluntary**  
FAST is designed to be preventative and universal. Families are not screened for specific problems. If families need additional help or support, they are encouraged to seek guidance.

## HOW THE FAST PROGRAMME WORKS

The FAST programme is an after-school, multi-family group programme which is offered to all children and their families (including older siblings, grandparents and other family members) in a school year group. The course runs for eight weeks, and participants are encouraged to take part in a peer-support network, 'FASTWORKS', for at least two years after they have completed the course. It is a "multisystemic intervention [that] brings together family, home, school and community to increase child well-being by strengthening relationships and factors that protect against stress" (UNODC, 2010, p 66).

The whole family comes together in the children's school to take part in family activities and share a family meal. Families are divided into groups of up to 10 families each (known as 'hubs'). FAST requires multi-agency community-based teams crossing education, health and social care. The groups are led by trained teams comprising local parents, school staff and other professionals. An important requirement of FAST is that members of the community are involved alongside parent partners. Most activities are carried out by the hubs. The FAST goals are:

- strengthening the family and the parent-child bond
- increasing the child's achievement at school
- reducing family stress and social isolation
- improving family-school communication and relationships

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in its compilation of evidence for FAST highlights positive outcomes for the family and the child (see box opposite).

FAST course evaluation is required as part of training for each new course. A certified FAST trainer visits each eight-week FAST group three times and provides direct observation using a quality-of-implementation checklist. The trainer provides corrective feedback to the team, as well as celebrating the local adaptations made by the team to fit local values. The certified FAST trainer also conducts a reflective view of the FAST programme integrity checklist with the implementation team two months after its completion, organises a panel of service users (parent graduates) to provide feedback on their experiences to the team, and ensures that pre-post questionnaires are completed by teachers and parents for each participating FAST child and sent to FAST UK at Middlesex University for analysis.

Evaluations of each of the first 15 trained FAST UK sites were aggregated in 2010. In addition, the aggregated evaluation results for Save the Children's first 14 FAST UK sites were aggregated in 2011 (and are summarised later in the chapter). Although FAST was one of the PEIP programmes that took part in the University of Warwick national evaluation, there was insufficient FAST data available for quantitative results to be generated (Lindsay *et al* 2011). Robust evidence from randomised controlled trials has been reviewed in connection with the delivery of FAST with families of seven-year-olds from low-income communities in the USA (Kratochwill *et al*, 2009); with rural, low-income native American children (Kratochwill *et al*, 2004); low-income African American families in New Orleans (Layzer *et al*, 2001); and low-income Mexican American families (McDonald *et al*, 2006).

## EMERGING EVIDENCE IN THE UK

Save the Children has supported 15 FAST projects in 14 schools between April 2010 and August 2011. Evidence has been collected by Middlesex University.

- 446 families were invited to take part
- 338 (76%) came to FAST at least once (average 23 whole families per group)

- 80% of those 338 families attended at least six of the eight sessions and graduated.

### Who attended?

The following information provides a picture of those who attended and completed pre- and post-FAST questionnaires ( $N = 209$ ). They were from

## EVIDENCE FOR THE IMPACT OF FAST

### Family outcomes:

- High retention rates (72–95 per cent) among socially marginalised, low-income, immigrant, inner-city and single-parent families, minority groups, families of political refugees, mobile groups, families of children with behavioural problems and Native Americans living in rural areas. Only 20% of participants drop out of the programme
- Increased adaptability and closeness; reduced conflict, stress and social isolation
- Similar impact across low-income and minority-group families in Australia [...] Austria, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands (Holland), the Russian Federation, England and 48 states in the United States

### Parent outcomes:

- Increased parent involvement in schools and increased social capital; parents of classmates get to know each other better
- At two-year follow-up, 86–90 per cent of parents who have completed the programme report that they still see friends they met during the eight weekly sessions

### Child outcomes:

- Positive child mental health outcomes and increased social skills; improved academic and school behaviour; reduced aggression and anxiety

- Parents reported a small to medium decrease in children's externalizing behaviours [...]
- Teachers reported a large decrease in children's externalizing behaviours [...] and small to medium improvements in academic performance
- A comparison of a universal Families and Schools Together group with a group that received parenting pamphlets by mail once a week for eight weeks found a significant positive impact on the academic behaviour of children in the Families and Schools Together group as reported by teachers after two years, but no significant decrease in those children's externalizing behaviours [...] except the Latino subgroup [...]
- The same study also found that Families and Schools Together reduced aggressive and delinquent behaviours after eight weeks and that both that result and academic outcomes were maintained after two years [...] but only among the Latino subgroup
- Another study showed that, at one-year follow-up, parents who had completed a Families and Schools Together programme were significantly more likely to engage in community volunteering and community leadership.

(Taken from UNODC, 2010, pp 71–72)

a broad cross-section with a tendency to less-advantaged circumstances:

### **Children** (Details of the FAST focus child)

- Age: 5 years 6 months (average)
- Gender: 51% female; 44% male; 5% no data (ND)
- Ethnicity: 73% white; 20% black or ethnic minority; 7% ND
- 3% had special educational needs

### **Parents** (Details of the parent that completed the questionnaires)

- Age: 32.7 years (average)
- Gender: 85% female; 5% male; 10% ND
- Ethnicity: 72% white; 21% black or ethnic minority; 7% ND
- Employment: 3% employed full-time; 19% worked part-time; 50% looking after home and family; 15% unemployed; 5% students; 8% ND

### **Family structure**

- Size: average 4 members
- Marital status: 37% married for the first time; 1% remarried; 2% divorced; 4% separated; 23% single; 22% cohabiting; 1% widowed; 8% ND
- Tenure: 23% owned their home; 71% lived in rented accommodation; 7% ND
- Income: ranged between under £5,000 to £80,000. 85% of families (that provided the information) had an annual income of under £20,000 (47% had an annual income under £10,000).

## **What were the outcomes?**

Parents and teachers completed FAST questionnaires – both before and after they had completed the eight-week FAST course – about their relationship with their children, the way their family functioned and about the child's behaviour. Final results were compared with their responses at the start of their FAST programme to measure change. The Middlesex research team analysed the pre-post change data using paired t-test one tailed analyses. Statistically significant improvements associated with participation were reported across the domains of child, family, school and community. The asterisks show the statistical significance of improvements between the start and end of the

programme (\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ) in terms of the confidence that can be placed in these differences (\*\*\* shows there is only a one in a thousand chance the results occurred by chance; \*\* shows there is a one in a hundred chance the results occurred by chance and \* shows there is a one in twenty chance the results occurred by chance). Several standardised instruments with established validity and reliability (strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQs), family environment scale (FES)) are included in the questionnaire, which was developed by McDonald (2007) for quality-assurance purposes.

### **In the home**

Parents answered questions about their relationships with their children, the way their families functioned and about their child's behaviour.

#### *Parent-child bond*

- Parent-child relationship improved\*\*\*
- Parental self-efficacy increased\*\*\*

#### *Family functioning*

- Family cohesion improved\*\*\*
- Family expressiveness increased\*\*\*
- Family conflict reduced\*\*\*
- Total family relationships improved\*

#### *Child behaviour at home*

- Pro-social behaviour increased
- Emotional symptoms reduced\*\*
- Conduct problems reduced\*\*\*
- Hyperactivity reduced\*\*\*
- Total difficulties reduced\*\*\*
- Impact of difficulties reduced\*\*\*

### **At school**

Teachers judged the changes from pre-to-post FAST in the child's behaviour in the classroom and changes in academic competence related to reading, writing and maths, as well as motivation to learn. In addition, teachers assessed aspects of their relationship with parents and their opinion of parents' level of engagement and involvement with the school and their child's education. The parents reported on their own engagement and involvement. There were statistically significant improvements across all these areas as a result of

participation in the FAST programme. These are summarised below.

#### *Child functioning at school*

- Teachers reported improving child academic competence\*
- SDQ Pro-social behaviour improved\*\*\*
- SDQ Emotional symptoms decreased\*\*\*
- SDQ Conduct problems decreased\*
- SDQ Hyperactivity decreased\*\*\*
- SDQ Peer problems decreased\*\*\*
- SDQ Total difficulties decreased\*\*\*
- SDQ Impact of total difficulties decreased\*\*\*

#### *Parent involvement/engagement with school*

- Teacher relationship with parent improved\*
- Parent involvement in school increased\*\*\*
- School-to-parent contact increased\*\*\*
- Parent-to-school contact increased\*\*\*
- Total parent involvement in education increased\*\*\*

### **Social capital, social support, parent empowerment, community relationships and engagement**

Parents reported changes pertaining to their relationships with their communities and with other FAST parents from their child's school. They were also asked about support that they both received and provided. There were statistically significant improvements in all these areas associated with taking part in the FAST programme.

- Social relationships between the parents and their communities improved\*\*\*
- Tangible support increased\*
- Emotional support increased\*\*\*
- Total social support increased\*\*\*
- Support provided to others increased\*\*\*
- Support received from others increased\*\*\*
- Total reciprocal support increased\*\*\*
- Social self-efficacy increased\*\*\*
- General self-efficacy increased\*\*\*

After completing the FAST course, parents also reported more community involvement:

- 14% attended more religious services
- 16% became more involved in parent-teacher organisations

- 21% had become more involved in community-centre activities
- 26% had sought further education, training or courses
- 14% had taken up volunteering or charity work
- 12% had become involved in community leadership

### **Satisfaction with FAST**

80% of those who came once completed six or more of the weekly sessions to graduate from FAST. Across the 15 projects in the 14 schools, parents were asked to rate their satisfaction with FAST. They scored it as an average of 9.4 out of 10, which combined with the outcomes shown above makes clear how effective this programme is in engaging families, strengthening relationships both within and between those families, and between the families and their local community and child's school. Moreover, it has a marked positive effect on the children themselves, who not only benefitted from the improved relationships and engagement their parents experience, but also enjoyed improvements in their confidence, academic competence and behaviour.

## **HOW MUCH DOES FAST COST?**

Assuming that the parents of 160 children are engaged in each programme Save the Children estimates that the cost of FAST is **£163 per child** over the two-year programme. These costs include workforce training and capacity building. It is reasonable to expect that costs will reduce significantly as the programme is rolled out. Once the programme is up and running in schools, costs per child will reduce as there will be a much lower cost for training, essentially limited to the cost of replacing staff when trained staff leave.

If engagement rates of the order predicted can be achieved, the costs associated with FAST will be substantially lower than those reported in the literature for evidence-based parenting programmes.

# EARLY VERSUS LATE INTERVENTION

**Late intervention can be hugely expensive and inefficient. Evidence-based early intervention could transform the life chances of children from deprived homes and save significant amounts of public money through cutting the costs of social failure.**

## THE COST OF LATE INTERVENTION

The central argument advanced by Allen in his two reports to government (2011a,b) is that early intervention is not only more desirable because of its benefits for children's well-being and development, but that it offers major public finance cost savings. In his second report, *Early Intervention:*

*Smart investment, massive savings*, he highlights typical costs of late intervention (see box below).

The costs of late intervention are a constant theme in the policy literature. The Field report, for example, stressed the financial impact of attempting to 'treat' generational poverty, associated unemployment, ill health and criminal activity, arguing that "there is a strong economic case for reducing the causes of poverty by revolutionising the life chances of poor children" (Field, 2010, p 29). These arguments received strong underpinning support in a series of papers which appeared in 2008 that were commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to examine the costs of child poverty.

### LATE INTERVENTION: WHAT IT COSTS

- Each child with untreated behavioural problems costs an average of £70,000 by the time they reach 28 years old – 10 times the cost of a child without behavioural problems.
- The cost of youth crime in 2009 was estimated by the National Audit Office at £8.5–11 billion.
- The average cost for a youth offender to be placed in a young offenders' institution is £59,000.
- It is even more expensive if a child is placed in a secure children's home (£219,000) or a secure training centre (£163,000).
- The cost of each additional young person not engaged in education, employment or training is approximately £45,000.
- The productivity loss to the state as a result of youth unemployment is estimated at £10 million every day. The average cost of an individual spending a lifetime on benefits is £430,000, not including the tax revenue.
- The costs associated with mental health problems in the UK are estimated as £105.2 billion. This represents an increase of 36% since 2002–03, and an increase in the health and social care share of these costs of over 70%.

(Taken from Allen, 2011b, p 3)

## COSTS FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY

Griggs and Walker's review of the literature on the costs of child poverty for individuals and society in industrialised OECD countries concluded that "the consequences of child poverty are serious, far-reaching and multi-faceted" (Griggs and Walker, October 2008, p 24). Reviewing work on the short-, medium- and long-term costs of child poverty in the areas of health, education, employment, behaviour, finance, family and personal relationships, along with individual well-being, the paper noted that relatively little work had been undertaken to accurately estimate future costs of child poverty. Nonetheless, the authors argued that:

"Although it is unlikely that we will ever be able to precisely calculate the full cost of child poverty to individuals, society and the economy, current research on the substantive impact of poverty together with more sophisticated ways of assessing cost will certainly enable better estimates to be produced. Existing approximations offer a useful marker of the economic cost associated with not ending child poverty (£40 billion per year according to TUC 2007 figures) and are of great importance in light of evidence that the UK population continues to underestimate the extent, severity and the structural basis of child poverty, and so fails to appreciate its true personal and social costs."

(Griggs and Walker, 2008, p 24)

There are difficulties in making exact measurements of future costs, but the consensus is that the costs of child poverty are substantial and long-term. While it is clear that the costs of treating problems from childhood at a later date are considerably higher, it is not necessarily the case that all these costs would be removed through early intervention. Nonetheless, comparisons between early and late intervention can be made. For example, "a child with severe conduct disorder costs £70,000 (1995 estimate); with indirect costs seven times that [figure, which compares with] parent training [at] approximately £600 per child" (Allen and Smith, 2008, p 34).

With regard to modelling future costs, Birmingham and Manchester city councils, along with the Greater London Authority, are currently funding a project to translate the Washington State Institute for Public Policy economic model for use in the UK. In his report, *Early Intervention: Smart investment, massive savings*, Allen noted, "I do not see this model as the only way to calculate the costs and benefits of the [early intervention] approach, but I am impressed by the conservative nature of its estimates and its relevance to day-to-day investment decisions by local and central government" (Allen, 2011, p 78).

## PUBLIC SERVICE COSTS OF CHILD POVERTY

Figures relating to the public service costs of child poverty are substantial, and represent significant costs to public finance:

- "A lower estimate of £11.6 billion and a higher estimate of £20.7 billion for the cost of child poverty to UK public expenditure. Adjusting to 2008/09 values (relative to GDP, based on six per cent nominal growth rate over two years as shown in budget estimates of GDP between 2006 and 2008), these figures rise to £12.3 billion and £21.9 billion respectively. The biggest items in cash terms are personal social services, school education and the police/criminal justice, which account for well over half the total cost (on the lower estimate)
- Spending on social services stands out as comprising the greatest concentration of expenditure in deprived areas. Most of the spending on the service is associated with child poverty – ie, the service is needed in large part because children growing up in deprived families face particular problems."

(Hirsch, October 2008, p 9).

In their analysis of child-poverty-related costs incorporating personal social services, health services, school education, housing, police and criminal justice, fire and rescue, local environmental services, and area-based programmes and grants, Bramley and Watkins estimate that "the cost of

child poverty to UK public expenditure based on reasonable assumptions is at least £11.6 billion and could be up to £20.7 billion. The largest elements in our lower estimate are Personal Social Services, School Education and Police/Criminal Justice” (Bramley and Watkins, 2008, p 42).

## CHILD POVERTY AND LOST EARNINGS

Not only are there substantial public service costs in the short-, medium- and long-term arising out of child poverty, there are also significant revenue losses to public finances and to individuals who grew up in poverty. Blanden *et al* (2008) used data from the British Cohort Study to estimate lost earnings resulting from childhood disadvantage. Making conservative assumptions about the likely ability of the economy to absorb a workforce that had higher levels of education as a result of early intervention policies designed to tackle child disadvantage, they state “it is reasonable to conclude that the benefits of abolishing child poverty in terms of foregone earnings, employment and benefit savings correspond to about 1 per cent of GDP [£13 billion at 2008 levels]. Of this 1 per cent, between one quarter and one third will be transferred to the Treasury through direct taxes” (Blanden *et al*, October 2008, p 15). As Hirsch says, broken down, this figure:

- “comprises approximately £2 billion in benefit costs and £11 billion in foregone earnings.
- Of the earnings sacrifice, £3 billion would have been paid to the Exchequer in extra income tax and National Insurance, and £8 billion would be kept by private individuals.
- Therefore, of the £13 billion that might be gained from ending child poverty, about £8 billion represents more money for those adults from families lifted out of poverty (and extra spending that could help boost the economy), while £5 billion would be a gain to the Exchequer.”

(Hirsch, October 2008, 11)

Taken together the short-, medium- and long-term costs of children growing up in poverty and suffering from the range of consequent disadvantages gives an estimated “total identifiable cost [of] £25 billion a year [...], of which £17 billion comprises savings to the Exchequer” (Hirsch, 2008, p 11). It is against this background that Save the Children and others are arguing that late intervention as a strategy has failed.

## THE COST BENEFITS OF EARLY INTERVENTION

Notwithstanding the difficulties in accurately estimating the future costs of childhood disadvantage, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests that early intervention is a more cost-effective strategy. For example, although Statham and Smith’s 2010 review “found little robust research on which to make an assessment of the cost effectiveness of earlier compared to later intervention”, they also noted that:

“In general, targeted approaches tend to be judged more cost effective than universal approaches; and there is some evidence that within targeted programmes, such as the Nurse Family Partnership and the Webster-Stratton Incredible Years parenting programme, cost effectiveness is likely to be greater for the individuals with higher levels of need. It has been argued that interventions when children are very young (including interventions with their mothers before birth) achieve the best returns, because neuropsychological research suggests that there are sensitive periods within the early years when there are ‘windows of opportunity’ for certain developments to take place. It has also been suggested that interventions earlier in a child’s school career are more cost effective, since longitudinal data shows this has the most impact on educational attainment.”

(Statham and Smith, 2010, p 6)

The authors still expressed some caution about the lack of comparative data on the costs of early

intervention with comparatively large numbers of children, as opposed to late intervention with much smaller numbers. However, the argument that early intervention is a much cheaper option is strongly advanced in many papers (for example, Allen, 2011a, b, Munro, 2011). An example of this argument is:

“The costs of comprehensive drug and alcohol education for every 11-year-old in Nottingham would be seriously lower than meeting the costs of a dozen people on drug rehabilitation, each of which costs around £200,000 per year and most of whom will re-offend. Or suppose that we help a young mother and a toddler with £1,000 worth of health visiting at the time she and her baby need it most: that makes more sense than waiting 16 years in order to pay £230,000 to incarcerate that baby in a young offenders’ secure unit for a year when he has gone astray.”

(Allen and Smith, 2008, p 114)

## THE EXAMPLE OF MENTAL HEALTH

An important report by Knapp *et al* (2011) to the Department of Health focused on the role of early intervention in preventing mental health problems. Around 5% of children aged 5–10 years have conduct disorders, which are the most common type of childhood psychiatric disorder. These problems lead to adult anti-social personality disorders in about 50% of cases, and are associated with a range of adverse long-term outcomes, particularly delinquency and criminality (Knapp *et al*, April 2011, p 6). A single prolific offender suffering from conduct disorders might cost the public purse between £1.1 million and £1.9 million over a lifetime (Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 2009, p 6).

Knapp *et al* examined interventions to reduce childhood mental health problems and their associated costs. One intervention was evidence-based parenting groups. The authors’ findings in relation to this intervention were that without

intervention, conduct disorder will persist in about half of children. They estimated the median cost of an 8–12 week group-based parenting programme at £952 per family compared with individual interventions at £2,078. Assuming 80% of people receive group-based interventions and 20% individual interventions, in line with guidance from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, the average cost of the intervention increases slightly and works out at £1,177 per family.

Knapp *et al* go on to build in various necessary factors into their model – for example maximising the engagement of “at-risk” families, as some services suffer from low rates of take-up and high rates of drop-out.

Estimating the costs/savings for five-year-old children with conduct disorder whose parents attend a parenting programme, they propose that gross savings over 25 years amount to £9,288 per child and thus exceed the average cost of the intervention by a factor of around eight to one. So, under the assumptions made, the intervention will provide a positive return to the public sector and to the NHS even assuming no benefits accrue from a range of other potential wider impacts such as improved employment prospects, reduced adult mental health issues, and improved outcomes for the child’s family and peers. In fact, Knapp *et al* argue that these benefits are likely to be substantial, making the intervention an even better investment (Knapp *et al* 2011).

These powerful findings were also identified when Knapp *et al* examined the impact of school-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programmes designed to prevent conduct problems in childhood. Severe conduct problems affect 6% of children aged 5–10 years, and 19% have mild conduct problems (MCP). These figures rise to 9% of adolescents with SCP, and 29% with MCP. The costs of untreated conduct problems have been estimated at £150,000 [per person] for SCP and £75,000 for MCP (Knapp *et al* 2011). These costs relate to crime and mental illness in adulthood, allied to lower lifetime earnings.

Modelling a conservatively based assumption of a 9% reduction in conduct problems as a result of school SEL interventions, they propose that:

“the SEL intervention is cost-saving overall after the first year, while education recoups its costs in five years. A key driver of net savings is the crime-related impacts of conduct problems that can be avoided. Reducing the assumption about the impact of SEL to 3% (down from 9%) produces cost savings to the NHS after four

years; assuming an impact of just 1% across the ‘health state’; the model is cost saving to the public sector after five years.”

(Knapp *et al*, p 10)

In a similar vein, Allen’s figures for conduct problems were that each person with such problems costs the public purse around £70,000 on average – some 10 times the cost of children without conduct problems (Allen, 2011b, p 3).

# CONCLUSIONS

There is now strong evidence for the importance of early intervention, which is accepted by policy-makers. It is also clear that early intervention is particularly important for our most disadvantaged children, including those who live in poverty. And we have shown that parenting support is a key component in early intervention. We also stress that interventions must be evidence based. There is a great deal of practice that is based on good ideas drawn from theory, research and practice. This is fine for starting to put together interventions, but it is not sufficient. We need rigorously evaluated methods that have proven efficacy and are effective when rolled out on a large scale. Our children deserve nothing less.

There are many parent support programmes, but not all have the necessary evidence to support investment. Furthermore, many of the best programmes do not focus on improving educational achievement. This is not to say that such programmes may not have an impact in this area. Programmes designed to improve parenting skills may also improve the general ethos within the family, and release energy and time to allow support for education-focused activity. The children, being happier and more settled, may then be better able to engage with their schooling and be more motivated. However, there is also a need to focus *specifically* on improving educational achievement and to reach the broad numbers of children who experience educational disadvantage.

Save the Children is therefore calling for programmes that help parents to engage with their children's early learning and development to be more widely available in every community and a universal entitlement in deprived neighbourhoods. Targeted, more intensive interventions are necessary for some families but we do need to broaden these opportunities for positive parenting for all families. Save the Children also want local authorities to report annually to their electorates on how they have spent early intervention funds and their impact on the early years achievement gap, in the same way that schools will have to report to parents on how they are allocating the Pupil Premium.

There are cost implications of broadening the coverage of parent support programmes. However, these can be limited by the nature of the interventions selected. This is why Save the Children is supporting the FAST programme. Working with schools at the cusp of preschool to compulsory education has the potential for whole-school engagement and reaching a high proportion of parents and children. FAST is also designed to empower communities and has, through FASTWORKS, a follow through programme to maintain and develop the initial gains made. FAST's evidence-base, team structure, requirements for community engagement including cultural representation, and its systems of support and quality assurance, provide a firm foundation for scaling up across the country.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Evidence-based programmes that help parents to support their children's early learning and development should be more widely available in every community and a universal entitlement in deprived neighbourhoods.
2. The coalition government and local authorities should ensure FAST is offered in many more primary schools in disadvantaged localities (around 70% of primary pupils eligible for free schools meals attend the most deprived 30% of primary schools).
3. Local authorities should have to report annually to their electorates on how they spend early intervention funds and their impact on the early years achievement gap.
4. An Early Intervention Foundation should be established to evaluate parent support programmes.
5. Impact from even the best early intervention programmes may fade over time. Policy-makers need to consider how we design and fund a continuum of services where gains are reinforced and sustained from birth to adulthood.
6. The Early Intervention Grant must be increased over time.

# ANNEX I: SAVE THE CHILDREN FAST SITES

## 2010

- Aspinal primary school, Manchester
- St Vicar's Green primary school, Ealing
- Linnvale primary school, West Dunbartonshire
- Upper Rhymney primary school, Caerphilly
- St Bernadette's primary school, Belfast
- Black Mountain primary school, Belfast
- Markham primary school, Caerphilly

## 2011 – COMPLETED

- Edward Wilson primary school, Westminster
- Montem primary school, Ealing
- Ashbury Meadows primary school, Manchester
- Abbey Park primary school, Halifax
- Bournville primary school, Weston-super-mare
- Sacred Heart primary school, Belfast
- St Vincent De-Paul primary school, Belfast
- St Joseph's primary school, West Dunbartonshire

## 2011 – TO BE COMPLETED BETWEEN SEPTEMBER AND DECEMBER

- Cheetam primary school, Manchester
- Birchfields primary school, Manchester
- Marshfield primary school, Bradford
- Adderly Children's centre, Birmingham
- Kingswood primary school, Lambeth
- Underhill Cluster primary school, Barnet
- Gallions primary school, Newham
- Springwood primary school, Cardiff
- Pentrebane primary school, Cardiff
- Graig-Y-Rhacca primary school, Caerphilly
- St Eunan's primary school, West Dunbartonshire
- Craigroyston primary school, Edinburgh
- Quarry Brae primary school, Glasgow
- Ripple primary school, Barking & Dagenham
- Camelot primary school, Southwark
- St Therese primary school, Derry
- Edenbrooke primary school, Belfast

\*This only includes first cycles of the project.

# REFERENCES

- Alhusen, V., Belsky, J., Booth-La Force, C., Bradley, R., Brownwell, C.A., Burchinal, M. (2005), 'Duration and developmental timing of poverty and children's cognitive and social development from birth through third grade', *Child Development*, 76 (4), 795–810
- Allen, G., and Smith, I. D., (2008), *Early Intervention: Good parents, great kids, better citizens*, Centre for Social Justice and Smith Institute, London
- Allen, G., (January, 2011), *Early Intervention: The Next Steps. An independent report to Her Majesty's Government*, HM Government, London
- Allen, G., (July, 2011), *Early Intervention: Smart Investment, Massive Savings. The second independent report to Her Majesty's Government*, HM Government, London
- Barlow, J., Smailagic, N., Ferriter, M., Bennet, C., Jones, H. (2010) 'Group-based parent-training programmes for improving emotional and behavioural adjustment in children from birth to three years old', *The Cochrane Library*, Issue 3
- Barlow, J., Smailagic, N., Bennett, C., Huband, N., Jones, H., Coren, E. (2011) 'Individual and group based parenting programmes for improving psychosocial outcomes for teenage parents and their children', *The Cochrane*, Issue 3
- Belsky, J., Bell, B., Stallard, N., and Stewart-Brown, S.L., (2007), 'Socioeconomic risk, parenting during preschool years, and child health age 6 years', *European Journal of Public Health*, 17 (5), 508–513
- Blanden, J., Hansen, K., and Machin, S., (October 2008), *The GDP cost of the lost earning potential of adults who grew up in poverty*, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York
- Bradley, R.H., and Corwyn, R.F. (2002) 'Socioeconomic status and child development', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53, 371–399
- Bramley, G., and Watkins, D., (October 2008), *The public service costs of child poverty*, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York
- C4EO (2010), *Grasping the Nettle: early intervention for children, families and communities; a practice guide to the challenges and opportunities in supporting children, families and communities through early intervention, based on effective local, national and international practice*, C4EO, London
- Cochran, M., and Niego, S. (1995), 'Parenting and social networks', in Bornstein, M (ed), *Handbook of Parenting*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, 123–148
- Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2009), *Your Child, Your School, Our Future: Building a 21st century school system*, The Stationery Office, Norwich, Cm 7588
- Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)/Department for Education (DFE) (April, 2011), *A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming families' lives*, HM Government, London
- Desforges, C., with Abouchaar, A. (2003), *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A literature review*, DfES, Research Report RR433
- Dretzke, J., Davenport, C., Frew, E., Barlow, J., Stewart-Brown, S., Bayliss, S., Taylor, S., Sandercock, J., Hyde, C. (2009) 'The clinical effectiveness of different parenting programmes for children with conduct problems: a systematic review of randomised controlled trials', *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 3 (7)
- Duncan, G.J., Brooks-Gunn, J., and Klebanov, P.K. (1994), 'Economic deprivation and early childhood development', *Child Development* 65 (2), 296–318
- Edwards, R.T., Ó Céilleachair, A., Bywater, T., Hughes, D.A., Hutchings, J. (2007). 'Parenting programme for parents of children at risk of developing conduct disorder: cost effectiveness analysis', *BMJ Research*, doi: 10.1136/bmj.39126.699421.55
- Feinstein, L. (1998), *Pre-school Educational Inequality? British children in the 1970 cohort*, Centre for Economic Performance, LSE, London
- Feinstein, L. (2003). 'Inequality in the early cognitive development of British children in the 1970 cohort.' *Economica*, 70, Issue 277, 73–97
- Field, F., (December, 2010), *The Foundation Years: Preventing poor children becoming poor adults. The report of the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances*, HM Government, London
- Gilby, N., Hamlyn, B., Hanson, T., Romanou, E. and Mackey, T. (2008), *National Survey of Parents and Children: Family life, aspirations and engagement with learning in 2008*, DCSF, Research Report RR059
- Goodall, J., and Harris, A., (2009), *Helping Families Support Children's Success at School*, Save the Children, London
- Griggs, J., with Walker, R., (October 2008), *The Costs of Child Poverty for Individuals and Society: A literature review*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York
- Gutman, L.E., Brown, J., Akerman, R., (2009) *Nurturing Parenting Capability: The early years*, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Research Report 30, IoE, London
- Gutman, L.E., and Feinstein, L. (2008), 'Children's well-being in primary school: pupil and school effects', *Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No: 25*, Institute of Education, London

- Gutman, L.E., Feinstein, L., (2010), 'Parenting behaviours and children's development from infancy to early childhood: changes, continuities and contributions', *Early Child Development and Care*, 180 (4), 535–556
- Hannon, P. (1987). A study of the effects of parental involvement in the teaching of reading on children's reading test performance. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 57, 56–72
- Hashima, P., and Amato, P.R. (1994), 'Poverty, social support, and parental behaviour', *Child Development*, 394–403
- HM Treasury (2003), *Every Child Matters* (Cm 5860), The Stationery Office, London
- Hirsch, D., (October 2008), *Estimating the Costs of Child Poverty: Round-up, reviewing the evidence*, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York
- Hosking, G., and Walsh, I., (2010), *International Experience of Early Intervention for Children, Young People and their Families*, The Wave Trust, Croydon
- Ketende, S., and Joshi, H. (2008), 'Income and Poverty', in Hansen, K., and Joshi, H. *Millennium Cohort Study, Third Survey: A user's guide to initial findings*, Centre for Longitudinal Studies, IoE, London
- Kiernan, K.E., and Mensah, F.K. (2011) 'Poverty, family resources and children's early educational attainment: the mediating role of parenting', *British Educational Research Journal*, 37 (2), 317–336
- Knapp, M., McDaid, D., Parsonage, M. (eds), (April 2011), *Mental Health Promotion and Mental Illness Prevention: The economic case*, Department of Health, London
- Korenman, S., Miller, J.E., and Sjaastad, J.E. (1995), 'Long-term poverty and child-development in the United States: results from the NLSY', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 17 (1–2), 127–155
- Kratochwill, T.R., McDonald, L., Levin, J.R., Bear-Tibbetts, H.Y., and Demaray, M.K., (2004), 'Families and Schools Together: an experimental analysis of a parent-mediated multi-family group program for American Indian children', *Journal of School Psychology*, 42 (5), 359–383
- Kratochwill, T.R., McDonald, L., Levin, J.R., Scalia, P.A., and Coover, G. (2009), 'Families and Schools Together: an experimental study of multi-family support groups for children at risk', *Journal of School Psychology*, 47 (4), 245–265
- Leach, D.J., & Siddall, S.W. (1990). 'Parental involvement in the teaching of reading: A comparison of hearing reading, paired reading, pause, prompt, praise, and direct instruction methods', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 60, 349–355
- Lindsay, G., Cullen, S.M., Band, S., Cullen, M-A., and Strand, S. (2009), *Evaluation of the Parenting Early Intervention Programme: 1st interim report*, Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), Research report DCSF-RR193, London
- Lindsay, G., Davis, H., Band, S., Cullen, M-A., Cullen, S.M., Strand, S., Hasluck, C., Evans, R., and Stewart-Brown, S. (2008), *Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder Evaluation*, Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), Research Report DCSF-RW054, London
- Lindsay, G., Evans, A. and Jones, B. (1985) 'Paired reading versus relaxed reading – A comparison', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 55, 304–309
- Lindsay, G., Strand, S., Cullen, M-A., Band, S. and Cullen, S.M. (2010), *Parenting early intervention programme: 2nd interim report*, (2010) Department for Education, Research Report DFE-RR047, London
- Lindsay, G., Strand, S., Cullen, M-A., Cullen, S.M., Band, S., Davis, H., Conlon, G., Barlow, J., and Evans, R. (2011), *Evaluation of the Parenting Early Intervention Programme*, Department for Education, Research Report DFE-RR121 (a), London
- McDonald, L., Billingham, S., Conrad, T., Morgan A. and Payton, E. (1997) 'Families and Schools Together (FAST), Integrating community development with clinical strategies', *Families in Society – The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 78 (2): 140–155
- McDonald, L., & Sayger, T. (1998). Impact of a family and school based prevention program on protective factors for high risk youth, *Drugs and Society* 12, (61–85)
- McDonald, L., Moberg, D.P., Brown, R., Rodriguez-Espiricueta, I., Flores, N.I., Burke, M.P., & Coover, G. (2006). After-school multifamily groups: A randomized controlled trial involving low-income, urban Latino children. *Children & Schools*, 28 (1), 25–34
- McMahon, R. (1994). Diagnosis, assessment and treatment of externalizing problems in children: The role of longitudinal data. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 62, 901–917
- Marmot, M., (February 2010), *Fair Society, Healthy Lives; The Marmot Review; Strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010*, The Marmot Review
- Munro, E., (May 2011), *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final report; A child-centred system*, Department for Education, Cm 8062, London
- National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) (2005), *Parent training/education programmes in the management of children with conduct disorders*, NICE, London
- National Institute of Literacy (2009) *Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel: A scientific synthesis of early literacy development and implications for intervention*. Jessup, MD: National Institute for Literacy. <http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NELPReport09.pdf> (Accessed 25 September 2011)
- Nowak, C. and Heinrichs, N. (2008) 'A comprehensive meta-analysis of Triple P Positive Parenting Program using hierarchical linear modelling: effectiveness and moderating variables.' *Clinical Child Family Psychology Review*, 11, 114–144
- Patterson, J., Mockford, C., Barlow, J., Pyper, C., and Stewart-Brown, S. (2010). 'Need and demand for parenting programmes in general practice', *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 87, 468–471
- PricewaterhouseCoopers (2006a). *The market for parental and family support services*. <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RW72.pdf> Accessed 6.09.2011
- PricewaterhouseCoopers (2006b). *Review of capacity in the parenting support market: Final report*. <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RW105.pdf> Accessed 6.09.2011
- Royal Society (February 2011), *Brain Waves Module 2: Neuroscience: implications for education and education and lifelong learning*, The Royal Society, London
- Sacker, A., Schoon, I., and Bartley, M. (2002), 'Social inequality in educational achievement and psychological adjustment throughout childhood: magnitude and mechanisms', *Social Science and Medicine*, 55, 863–880

- Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, (2009), *The Chance of a Lifetime: Preventing early conduct problems and reducing crime*, Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, London
- Schneewind, K. (1981) *Inequalities of children and families in different cultural contexts. Studies on development and on the reduction of inequalities in different socio-cultural contexts, especially with regard to children and family life-styles*, UNESCO, Doha
- Scott, S., O'Connor, T.G., Futh, A., Matias, C., Price, J., & Doolan, M. (2010a). 'Impact of a parenting program in a high-risk, multi-ethnic community: the PALS trial'. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 51 (12), 1331–1341
- Scott, S., Spender, Q., Doolan, M., Jacobs, B., & Aspland, H. (2001). Multicentre controlled trial of parenting groups for childhood antisocial behaviour in clinical practice. *British Medical Journal*, 323, 28 July, 1–7
- Scott, S., Sylva, K., Doolan, M., Price, J., Jacobs, B., Crook, C., & Landau (2010b). 'Randomised controlled trial of parent groups for child antisocial behaviour targeting multiple risk factors: the SPOKES project'. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 51 (1), 48–57
- Sénéchal, M. (2008). The effect of family literacy interventions on children's acquisition of reading: from kindergarten to grade 3. *Encyclopedia of Language and Literacy Development* (pp. 1–7). London, ON: Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network. Retrieved 25 September 2011 from <http://www.literacyencyclopedia.ca/pdfs/topic.php?topId=251>
- Sharp, C., and Filmer-Sankey, C., (2010), *Early Intervention and Prevention in the Context of Integrated Services: Evidence from C4EO and Narrowing the Gap reviews*, C4EO, London
- Snowling, M., Hulme, C., Bailey, A.M., Stothard, S.E., and Lindsay, G. (in press) *Language and Literacy Attainment of Pupils during Early Years and Through KS2: Does teacher assessment at five provide a valid measure of children's current and future educational attainments?* Better Communication Research Programme: Research Report. Department for Education, London
- Social Exclusion Task Force (2006), *Reaching Out: An action plan on social exclusion*, HM Government, London
- Society for Prevention Research. *Standards of Evidence: Criteria for efficacy, effectiveness and dissemination* [www.preventionresearch.org/](http://www.preventionresearch.org/). Accessed 25 September 2011
- Statham, J., and Smith, M., (March 2010), *Issues in Earlier Intervention: Identifying and supporting children with additional needs*, Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), DCSF Research Brief, RB205, London
- Tickell, C., (2011), *The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning; an independent report on the Early Years Foundation Stage to Her Majesty's Government*, Department for Education, London
- Tizard, J., Schofield, W.N., & Hewison, J. (1982). *Collaboration between teachers and parents in assisting children's reading*. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 52, 1–15
- Topping, K.J., & Lindsay, G.A. (1992). *Paired Reading: A review of the literature*. *Research Papers in Education*, 7, 199–246
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2010) *Compilation of Evidence-Based Family Skills Training Programmes*, UN, New York
- Webster-Stratton, C., Rinaldi, J. & Reid, J.A. (2011), Long-term outcomes of Incredible Years parenting program: Predictors of adolescent adjustment. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 16, 38–46
- White, K.R., Bush, D.W., Casto, G.C. (1985), 'Learning from previous reviews of early intervention', *The Journal of Special Education*, 19, 417–428

# BRINGING FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS TOGETHER

GIVING CHILDREN IN HIGH-POVERTY AREAS  
THE BEST START AT SCHOOL

*Bringing Families and Schools Together* shows that many children from poor homes fall behind in their learning and development before they arrive at primary school and that these achievement gaps persist and widen into adulthood contributing to a cycle of poverty.

The report charts the debate around early intervention and examines the role of evidence-based parent support programmes in addressing these early years inequalities. It proposes that programmes to help parents improve their children's learning and development should be more widely available in every community and a universal entitlement in deprived neighbourhoods. It profiles the Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme including new data on Save the Children's first 15 FAST projects in the UK and it evaluates the cost-benefits of early intervention.

*Bringing Families and Schools Together* shows how a new entitlement to evidence-based family support programmes during children's early years could remove some of the obstacles that prevent children from poor homes realising their potential.

NO CHILD  
**BORN WITHOUT**  
A CHANCE

