

CYPE(6)-04-22- Paper to note 3

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Request for information on working with the third sector to provide mental health support services for children and young people

Response from: Short Term Intensive Support Team for children with autism and learning disabilities during Covid-19

Why was the service set up?

The service was set up at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to support children with autism and learning disabilities. It was aimed at children with the most complex needs who were already receiving support from the Child and Adolescent Learning Disability Service (CALDS) to prevent/postpone placement breakdown.

Who was involved in leading and delivering the service?

The team was led jointly by Psychology lead for Children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Sparkle Children Centre Manager (third sector organisation). Day to day service delivery included: Behavioural Support Practitioner, Assistant Psychologists, Learning Disability Nurse, Assistant Practitioner and Play Workers from Sparkle team.

Referral, Aims of Service and Service Delivery Pathway

Referral by the Child and Adolescent Learning Disability Service (CALDS)

Criteria:

- Known to CALDS with a moderate to severe learning disability and/ or autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and displaying complex behaviours
- Not currently accessing an education provision or alternative educational facility
- At risk of family breakdown without intensive support

Aims

1: Giving families a chance to rest: While children and young people attend sessions, families get a much-needed break.

2: Individually tailored support: The team develop Positive Behaviour Support plans based on assessments completed with children and young people, and those important to them.

3: Skills development: The team support children and young people to develop skills to improve their quality of life.



Day to Day Service and Program delivery by the Health Board and Sparkle Play Team

The Short-Term Intensive Service delivered sessions between April 2020 and August 2020. The children had between 1 – 4 sessions a week. The duration of these sessions varied between 30 minutes to 3 hours.

Child and young person sessions

Under supervision from the Behaviour Support Practitioner, Health Board and Sparkle Play Workers delivered sessions with the child which focused upon the following:

- Regulation and Play
- Skills development programmes (promoting communication, engagement with others, cooperating with waiting, promoting independence (e.g., toileting) which were tailored to the needs of the child.



Service Ending

The Short-Term Intensive Service ended August 2020. All children who were being supported by the Short-Term Intensive Service were transitioned to the Intensive Positive Behavioural Support Service for further support.

The total number of sessions that were delivered during the Short-Term Intensive Service was around 140.

Where were the sessions delivered?

The service was based in a local Children's Centre (Serennu) which is a purpose built centre that provides treatment and activities for children and young people with disabilities and developmental difficulties. The children's centre has multiple treatment rooms and leisure facilities including a sensory room and a self-contained flat. Whilst outside, there is a playground and a short sensory walk in landscaped grounds.

Benefits and challenges of joint working between health and third sector

Within the Short-Term Intensive Service there was a cohort of 3 children. For consistency, where possible, these took place on the same days and times each week. The number of staff needed varied dependent on the needs of the child. The core set of staff included at least one health board member and at least one Sparkle play worker, which enabled the children to feel contained, with the familiarity and consistency of staff.

Using this Children's Centre, we feel contributed to the success of the partnership working as the children who were attending the sessions were already familiar with the Children's Centre including some of the play workers. Also, the facilities at the Children's Centre enabled the children to access both indoor activities such as the sensory room, and outdoor activities such as the park and/or gardens.

Reflecting on both health board and play workers running the sessions with the children there was a range of skill sets and strengths amongst the core teams. There was an opportunity to learn from each other and work together collaboratively. We feel that the mix in skill set, familiarity of Children's Centre and of Sparkle staff alongside building rapport

with health board staff, enabled the child to feel regulated in sessions and therefore engage in skills development activities which were person centred to each child.

There were also challenges to partnership working including one of the main difficulties we found was the apparent difference in support style at times (preventative vs reactive techniques). Also, some members of the team had training in 'team teach' which can be used when a child puts themselves or others in danger, whilst other members of the team had not received this training.

The team was established extremely quickly due to the wider context of Covid-19, and had never worked together previously. Upon reflection, it felt as though one of the main challenges was not having enough time to get to know each other as a team. This led to, at times, a breakdown in communication during the sessions, and high levels of frustration and anxiety. To combat this, regular debriefs were implemented, facilitated by a senior staff member to reflect on the sessions and whether any necessary changes would be required prior to the next session. We found this to be very beneficial, particularly to have a safe space to repair any ruptures within the team. If in future we were to run such sessions, we feel that it would be helpful to establish regular team debriefs from the outset to ensure team cohesion.

Conclusions and Outcomes of the Short-Term Intensive Service

The Short-Term Intensive Service highlights how ABUHB and Sparkle have worked in collaboration to provide support to children and young people, and their families, during a global pandemic. We have highlighted the benefits of working together as well as some of the challenges. We just wanted to finish by sharing some of the outcomes for the children attending the Short-Term Intensive Service

- X's ability to engage in an activity for a prolonged period of time compared to earlier sessions.
- X's tolerance of close contact from staff e.g., sitting next to him or carrying him.
- an increase in his verbal communication.

- an increase in his engagement levels in terms of his tolerance of staff joining in with his activities.
- an improvement in regulation levels resulting in a decrease in distressing behaviours.
- an improvement in relationship in terms of seeking close contact from staff as a form of reassurance, instigating physical play with staff and an increase in him requesting help.

- using appropriate alternatives including making requests using his Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) book and asking for help when he needs it.
- using toilet in sessions and at home.
- Approaches staff for interaction, links arms with staff when walking outside, approaches staff to ask for help and will look for reciprocated emotion from others.