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The longer-term outcomes associated with families who had worked with Intensive Family Support Projects

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The longer-term outcomes associated with families who had worked with Intensive Family Support Projects

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Executive summary

This is the third and final report to be published as part of a three-year evaluation of six Intensive Family Support Projects (IFSPs) . When the research began in January 2004, IFSPs were in their infancy and the six projects included in the evaluation were unique. Recognising the damaging consequences of cycles of eviction and repeat homelessness, they sought to provide a new and more sustainable approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour. The particular form of support employed by IFSPs varies from family to family but commonly comprises of practical assistance in the home, provision of advice, liaison and advocacy support, sign-posting to other relevant services, help in managing finances and claiming benefits, personal skills development, anger management, parenting skills training, and behaviour management.

Following the successful completion of the evaluation of the costs, benefits and effectiveness of six IFSPs, in June 2006 Communities and Local Government and the Respect Task Force[1] commissioned the team of researchers at Sheffield Hallam University to explore the longer-term outcomes associated with IFSP interventions. Employing a qualitative study methodology involving interviews with project managers, key stakeholders, family members and agencies working with families, 28 families who had worked with IFSPs during the period 2004 to 2006-07 were successfully tracked to examine the following key research themes:

- The sustainability of IFSP interventions in terms of family functioning and behaviour;
- The impact of interventions on existing support and supervision services;
- The community impacts of IFSP interventions;
- Media portrayals of IFSPs.

The sustainability of interventions in terms of family functioning and behaviour;

Findings in relation to an overview of the longer-term changes associated with families once they had exited projects indicated that for seven out of ten (20/28) families positive change had been sustained and/or had occurred since exiting the IFSP and no significant further complaints about Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) had been received. For these families the risk of homelessness had been significantly reduced and the family home was secure at the point of the final interview.

The cessation of ASB complaints and reduced risk to the home however, represent only two dimensions of sustainable outcomes and do not reflect the multiple difficulties that continued to impact on families. Over half of the (16/28) families had moved home since exiting the project and while for some of these families moving to a new neighbourhood

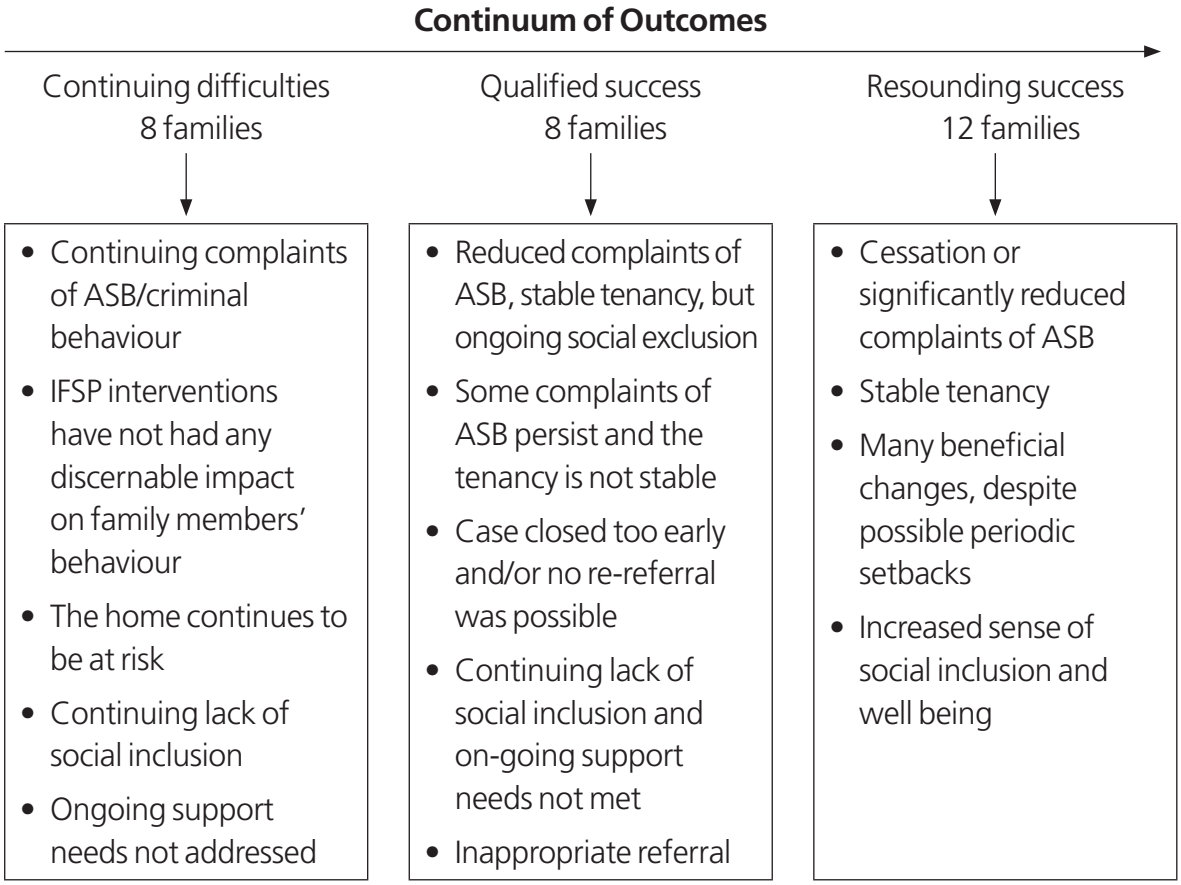
[1] In the Machinery of Government changes of 28 June 2007, the Respect Task Force moved to the newly created Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and became the Youth Task Force. The responsibility for Family Intervention Projects moved to the DCSF Families Group.

represented a chance to start again others had exchanged secure tenancies for less secure accommodation either renting from a private landlord or living in temporary accommodation pending a decision about re-housing. For just under a third (8/12) of families continuing complaints about anti-social and/or criminal behaviour continued to place the family home at risk and for these families the IFSP interventions did not appear to have had any discernable impact on family member's behaviour.

A continuum of outcomes

In order to reflect the complexity of many families' situations at the time they were interviewed, a continuum of outcomes has been developed derived from families' and other agencies' accounts of the extent to which the IFSPs' four core objectives had been met. These objectives were:

- **Prevention** of repeat cycles of **homelessness** and **family breakdown** arising as a result of anti-social behaviour;
- **Addressing unmet support needs** and ensuring that families are able to sustain a positive lifestyle without being the cause of anti-social behaviour;
- **Promotion of social inclusion** for families and assisting in **providing better outcomes** in relation to **health, education and well-being**;
- **Increasing community stability** by enabling and supporting families to live peacefully and to fully participate in their communities.



The majority of families interviewed were located towards the right of the continuum, with the outcomes occurring following the IFSP interventions viewed as being successful. For four out of ten (12/28) tracked families, the changes that had occurred since exiting the IFSP were significant, with family members stating that they no longer faced insurmountable problems (section 3). More mixed outcomes were associated with a further eight families (two of whom were inappropriately referred to an IFSP) who continued to experience ongoing problems which required skilful management. In this context, while some families had achieved housing stability and were living peacefully in their communities, they were not enjoying positive outcomes with regard to other indicators of social inclusion (section 4). In the remaining 8/28 families the IFSP interventions had not been successful in stimulating sustained change and the lives of these families continued to be dominated by complaints about anti-social behaviour, homelessness or risk of eviction, and family breakdown (section 5).

Pathways to successful outcomes

For the 12 families located at the far right of the continuum of outcomes, positive change had been sustained since exiting the IFSP and the outcomes were viewed by family members and agencies working with families as 'resoundingly successful'. Members of these families reported stories of relatively straightforward change in which their current circumstances were described in sanguine terms.

- In a small number of cases (3) a single issue usually concerning children's behaviour had led to the referral to an IFSP. For these families once their tenancy was stabilised positive change was achieved comparatively swiftly.
- Even where families had entrenched and difficult personal histories IFSP interventions were found to be helpful in stimulating change and enabling families to live peacefully within their communities.
- For most families with very high levels of need the support provided by the IFSP was seen as being pivotal. Pathways to successful outcomes were critically informed by the following factors:
  - the careful management of exit routes;
  - the self-motivation and willingness by family members to seek change;
  - project workers' ability to establish relationships of trust;
  - recognition that change is not a linear process but is defined by episodes of setback and progress, stability and crisis and that for some families re-referrals to an IFSP can play a key role in helping families get back on track.

Factors informing 'partial success'

The term 'partial success' reflects the conflicting outcomes associated with just under a third (8/28) families. While for the majority of these families, there had been a reduction/ cessation of ASB complaints at least one (but often a number) of the projects' core objectives had not been met and families' circumstances remained complicated and troubled.

- Reflecting the nature of the continuum of outcomes no single factor was found to distinguish families who had achieved 'partial success' from those who had achieved greater stability and those who were experiencing serious difficulties which continued to put the home at risk. Rather it was a matter of degree with on-going problems continuing to detrimentally impact on family stability.
- For these families while project interventions had helped change behaviour so that complaints had ceased or reduced there was evidence of a continuing lack of social inclusion and on going unmet support needs resulting in negative impacts on their quality of life and well being. Factors which informed these families' situation included:
    - Gaps in service provision resulting in inappropriate referrals;
    - A reduction in ASB and increased housing stability countered by a lack of social inclusion;
    - Ongoing problems managing children's behaviour.

Families for whom there were on-going difficulties

Just under a third of the families tracked (8/28) faced on-going difficulties and the IFSP intervention appeared to have been less successful. For these families, their lives continued to be dominated by complaints about anti-social behaviour, managing ongoing support needs, homelessness, risk of eviction and/or family breakdown. When referred to the IFSP, the majority of these families had been provided with outreach support, with only one family provided with a residential form of intervention and one other accommodated in IFSP dispersed accommodation.

- A key characteristic shared by virtually all the families for whom IFSP interventions had not been successful involved ongoing concerns about the criminal behaviour of one child or young person.
- Families for whom the IFSP interventions appeared to have had little impact were frequently reported by support agencies as exhibiting the most deep-rooted and 'challenging' behaviour, with individual family members well known to local welfare and criminal justice agencies.

- In many families, the behaviour of children/young people appeared to be symptomatic of structural disadvantage, combined with long-standing cognitive and psychological problems, which had not been addressed by welfare and educational agencies at an earlier stage.
- The findings from the study highlight the importance of timely intervention, the need for families to have access to specialist support when exiting an IFSP and the important role of re-referrals to help families sustain a positive lifestyle.

Children's well being

The evaluation report published in 2006 highlighted how children working with IFSPs were amongst the most disadvantaged in the country (Nixon et al 2006b). Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), for example, affected children in as many as one in five families, compared with the national average which predicts that ADHD is likely to be prevalent in between 3% – 8% of school-age children (Mytars 2001). Within this context, it is not surprising that at the point of the last interview in 15/28 families the well-being of children remained a cause of concern. In just over half the tracked families, despite stable tenancies and reduced complaints of ASB, parents' continued to experience difficulty in successfully dealing with their child/ren's challenging behaviour.

- Broad improvements relating to reductions in complaints of ASB and the families' housing stability were often punctuated by episodes where children's behaviour again became the cause of parental concern.
- Project interventions in relation to children and young people most commonly focussed on positive parenting skills supplemented by direct work with children and the provision of diversionary activities. Such interventions met with varied success and for children with pressing educational, social and behavioural needs achieving change was difficult.
- While changes in family structures including the birth of new family members was largely welcomed in many families changes in domestic circumstances were less positive. Family violence remained part of the narrative of some families' lives and where the violence was inter-generational it was particularly difficult for parents to access help.

The neighbourhood context and structural disadvantage

The report findings in relation to the neighbourhoods in which families were living is important in terms of contextualises both the behaviour that led to complaints and the process of 'taking responsibility' that families are required to adopt when working with projects. Families tracked predominantly lived in deprived urban areas '*experiencing the most difficult social and economic condition in the whole country*' with '*limited*

opportunity to improve their conditions' (Caci 2004:19). Within this context defined by multiple and complex deprivations families' narratives of the process of change were dominated by accounts of resilience and personal agency.

- Ongoing concerns about personal safety dominated families' accounts with many reporting that since exiting the IFSP they had been victims of crime, subject to ASB from neighbours, and in a few cases were living in fear.
- Contrary to popular belief, the evidence suggests that rather than constituting a distinct minority distinguishable from the 'law abiding majority' families tended to conform to the norms and values of the communities in which they lived.
- For many families deep-rooted social exclusion was compounded by the debilitating impact of mental health disabilities and in these circumstances, achieving change required a high degree of personal agency and courage.

The impact of IFSPs on exiting support and supervision services

In addition to providing details on families' current situations, interviews with referral and other agencies were also used to explore the relationships between the IFSPs and partner agencies, the impact projects have had in terms of an increased or decreased demand for services, and the perceived cost-benefits and cost consequences of this form of intervention.

- Generally IFSP interventions were viewed very positively with the intensity and commitment of project workers singled out as a defining feature of IFSP practices.
- While the provision of core residential interventions were identified as a valuable resource for the most chaotic families, it was also recognised that core units carry with them resource implications for local schools which need to be addressed.
- Although local stakeholders could not place a precise financial value on the impact of IFSP interventions or the value to the wider community the projects were perceived to offer excellent value for money.

Lessons learnt from the experiences of IFSP providing a residential form of intervention

Three of the six projects included in the evaluation provided residential interventions for families who were already homeless or at acute threat of homelessness at the point at which they were referred to the project and/or who had particularly complex needs. Families living in core accommodation, typically self-contained flats within the IFSP building, are required to adhere to a set of rules and regulations.

Providing families with a residential intervention was very resource intensive and not all the IFSPs considered that investing in this type of work was either desirable or represented value for money. It was also recognised that there could be a 'fad' element to such provision, which runs the risk of becoming the target for local community disquiet (Nixon et al 2006b). The lessons learnt from the experiences of those running residential units included:

- The need for carefully selection of an appropriate site
- The importance of clear communication strategies
- The need to establish good relationships with local residents
- Establishment of robust management and admissions procedures

The wider impact of IFSP in building safe and sustainable communities

One of the aims of the IFSPs is to ensure that families are able to sustain a positive lifestyle without being the cause of ASB to the communities in which they live. Therefore the projects have a role in increasing community stability. As a result of confidentiality requirements combined with the fact that over half the sample of families had moved neighbourhoods since exiting the IFSP, it was not feasible to interview residents in areas where families are currently living. Valuable data however, was collected from representatives of agencies who were involved with family members to obtain their views on the impact of behavioural change on the wider community. Housing officers along with community wardens, specialist ASB officers and local police beat officers were best placed to report on the impact of interventions on the wider community.

- IFSPs interventions were believed to be a more effective and sustainable solution to ASB as compared to other forms of enforcement action;
- Local stakeholders and residents were reported to welcome IFSPs role in breaking the cycle of deprivation and poor behaviour;
- A number of stakeholders highlighted the way in which IFSP interventions were effective in bringing relief to communities which had been troubled by persistent ASB.

Media portrayals of IFSPs

Since the Dundee Families Project was established in 1996, family support projects have attracted high profile media attention. Although core residential interventions were used for a small minority of families, it is this element of project interventions that has consistently been highlighted by the media as the defining feature of IFSPs. Much of the commentary, particularly in the tabloid press, has been polemically informed by a *'not in my back yard'* discourse. Employing pejorative language, residential interventions have variously been referred to as 'sins bins', 'tearaway towers', and 'cages for the neighbours from hell'.

More recently, as family support projects have been actively promoted by the Respect Task Force, the construction of the projects and the families referred to them has become more nuanced, as is reflected in the rise of a 'rights-based critique' and 'a sustainable solution' media discourse. Despite these changes, it remains very hard for individual project managers to exercise control over the way in which IFSPs are portrayed or to effectively challenge the very negative and pejorative ways in which service users are constructed.

Media discourses are extremely powerful and have a direct impact both on the willingness of families to engage with IFSPs and on the extent to which communities are prepared to tolerate IFSP residential core blocks. If polemical assertions are left unchallenged, the aims and objectives of IFSPs risk being compromised by the very nature of the ASB rhetoric in newspaper articles.

Conclusion

The six IFSPs set up in 2003-04 have developed a 'new' way of working with families at risk of losing their home as a result of anti-social behaviour that is seen by key stakeholders as being highly cost-effective in the short term and the longer term. The findings from the third phase of the evaluation make an important contribution to the existing evidence base, illustrating the beneficial outcomes associated with IFSP interventions whilst also highlighting the limitations of this approach. It is too early to make claims with any certainty about the longer-term sustainability of the changes that IFSPs had helped engender. This is partly because some families had only recently exited the IFSPs, but it also reflects the fact that families working with IFSPs often had deep-rooted problems suffered from multiple deprivations and were therefore likely to continue to be vulnerable to external influences.

Lessons learnt from the experiences of IFSPs include the importance of early intervention, the need for families to have access to specialist support when exiting an IFSP, and the critical role of re-referrals to help families to sustain a positive lifestyle. Equally important is the need to challenge negative media discourses which directly impact both on the willingness of families to engage with IFSPs and on the extent to which communities are prepared to tolerate IFSP residential core blocks.

Section 1: Introduction to the evaluation and the study methodology

Introduction

This is the third and final report to be published as part of a three-year evaluation of six Intensive Family Support Projects (Nixon et al 2006a, 2006b). When the research began in January 2004, Intensive Family Support Projects (IFSPs) were in their infancy and the six projects included in the evaluation were unique. Recognising the damaging consequences of eviction and repeat homelessness, they sought to provide a new and more sustainable approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour.

On the basis of growing evidence that this type of approach can be successful in helping families sustain tenancies, during the course of the research the government's Anti Social Behaviour (ASB), policy agenda has evolved with control measures increasingly focused on the provision of 'supportive' family and parenting interventions. Following the launch of the cross-governmental Respect Taskforce, the Respect Action Plan was published in January 2006 and set out "a 'new' approach to the most challenging families". A key part of this was the commitment to develop sustainable solutions to ASB by injecting £28m of funding to roll out a national network of 50 Intensive Family Support Projects across England and Wales. The government delivered this flagship policy and in April 2007 announced that a network of 53 'family intervention projects'[2] (FIPs) had been established to support around 1,500 families across England a year.

About the study

Following the successful completion of the evaluation of the costs, benefits and effectiveness of six Intensive Family Support Projects, in June 2006 Communities and Local Government and the Respect Task Force commissioned the team of researchers at Sheffield Hallam University to undertake a further piece of work. The extension to the original evaluation involved tracking a sample of families who had worked with six IFSPs during the period 2004 – 2007 to examine the sustainability of outcomes once families had exited the project. The focus of this follow up study has been on the following key research issues:

- The sustainability of interventions in terms of family functioning and behaviour;
- The impact of interventions on existing support and supervision services;
- The community impacts of interventions;
- Media portrayals of IFSPs.

[2] Including the six in this evaluation

The study methodology

A qualitative study methodology was employed to address these wide-ranging research issues, based on the collection of data from an equally wide-ranging number of local stakeholders and families who had worked with IFSPs during the period 2004-07.

Sources of data on families' circumstances

Over the course of the evaluation 38 families had provided the research team with informed consent to access their contact details and to contact their landlord or other agency to ascertain their housing situation and any on-going problems with anti-social behaviour. This group of 38 families formed the target group for the on-going tracking element of the study. Establishing where families were living and making contact to invite them to take part in further in-depth interviews proved to be very resource intensive. Following extensive enquiries contact was made with 26/38 families of which 21 agreed to be interviewed while five declined to take part in the study. In a further seven cases additional information about families' current circumstances was obtained from interviews with local housing officers or other agencies. Thus, out of the original sample of 38 cases, information on families' current circumstances was obtained in respect of 28 households. This represents a 74% response rate, which provides a robust evidence base for analysis of the outcomes associated with IFSP interventions and the issues that continued to affect families once they had exited the project (see further sections 3 -7 below).

In all key respects the tracking sample of families were found to be representative of the wider population of 256 families who had worked with the six IFSP over the period 2004-06. The majority of families had exited the project within the previous 12 months and had been living independently in the community for some time. Six families however, had only recently left the project and in these cases it was harder to establish the longer-term impact of the IFSP interventions. Further details of the study methodology are provided in Appendix 1.

Measuring the impact of IFSP interventions on local communities

Collecting data to establish the impact of IFSPs on communities troubled by persistent anti-social behaviour presented the research team with a number of challenges. The majority of the families working with IFSPs are provided with outreach support, with three of the six projects operating an *outreach only service*. Referrals to projects are made from a wide range of agencies operating in numerous neighbourhoods within any one local authority area. When talking to key stakeholders it emerged that there was little consistency in the extent to which complainants were informed about the work of IFSPs. While some referral agencies adopted a policy of providing those affected by nuisance behaviour with information about the type of intervention being used, more commonly complainants were not made aware that their neighbour had been referred to the IFSP. Indeed, some stakeholders felt strongly that it would be a breach of confidentiality to inform the local community of exactly what action was being taken in individual cases, as one Housing Manager explained:

> *"I don't think we'd go into detail of what action … because of confidentiality reasons. …. It would be a breach of confidentiality to provide members of local communities with information."* (Housing Manager)

Given these varied professional practices, IFSPs providing outreach only services tended to have a relatively low public profile at a neighbourhood level, making a direct assessment of community impacts problematic.

A further difficulty in measuring community impacts became apparent through tracking families who had worked with IFSPs. Although some families included in the tracking sample had relatively stable housing histories and had been members of a single neighbourhood for a considerable length of time, the majority of families had experienced significant changes. Not only had household compositions altered since families had exited projects, but also over half (16/28) of the families had moved homes and were living in new communities.

In light of the above methodological difficulties it was not possible to interview residents in areas where families were living. However, valuable data were collected from representatives of agencies who were involved with family members to obtain their views on the impact of behavioural change on the wider community. Further, a series of in-depth interviews was carried out with key stakeholders, including lead LA officers; local ward councillors; neighbourhood managers; housing officers; neighbourhood wardens; ASB co-ordinators; local police beat officers; head teachers; and – last but not least – residents living or working in the communities in which IFSP residential accommodation is located. These interviews explored perceptions and understandings of the impact this form of intervention has had on the local community (see sections 9 and 10 below).

The report structure

Based on the analysis of the above sources of data, this report presents the key messages from the tracking study under the following headings:

- Section 2: An overview of outcomes for tracked families
- Section 3: Pathways to successful outcomes
- Section 4: Families achieving 'partial success'
- Section 5: Ongoing difficulties and the limits of IFSP interventions
- Section 6: The sustainability of interventions on children's well-being
- Section 7: Sustaining change: personal agency and struggle
- Section 8: The impact of IFSPs on existing support and supervision services
- Section 9: Managing community relations and core residential accommodation

- Section 10: The wider impact of IFSPs on building safe and sustainable communities
- Section 11: Media portrayals of IFSPs
- Section 12: Conclusions

Section 2: An overview of outcomes for tracked families

There are a wide range of factors that can be used to measure the sustainability of IFSP interventions in terms of individual family functioning and behaviour. The following section of the report provides an overview of changes families had achieved once they had exited an IFSP. In order to reflect the complexity that characterised most families' situations the longer-term outcomes associated with IFSP interventions are conceptualised in terms of a continuum of outcomes. The continuum has been constructed by reference to the IFSP four key aims with 'resounding success' at one end and continuing 'difficulties' at the other.

- For seven out of ten (20/28) families, positive change had been sustained and/or had occurred since exiting the IFSP and no significant further complaints about ASB had been received. For these families the risk of homelessness had been significantly reduced and the family home was secure at the point of the final interview.
- The cessation of ASB complaints and reduced risk to the home however, represent only two dimensions of sustainable outcomes and do not reflect the multiple difficulties that continued to impact on families.
- Over half (16/28) the families had moved home and while for the majority moving to a new neighbourhood represented a chance to start again others had exchanged secure tenancies for less secure accommodation either renting from a private landlord or living in temporary accommodation pending a decision about re-housing.
- Just under a third of families (8/28) continued to experience difficulties with complaints about on-going anti-social and/or criminal behaviour placing the family home at risk. For these families the IFSP interventions did not appear to have had any discernable impact on family member's behaviour.

The section starts with a snapshot of families changing circumstances since exiting the IFSP and proceeds to report on the range of longer-term outcomes associated with IFSP interventions[3].

Broad indicators of change

An overview of the range and type of changes that had occurred for families are provided in Tables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3, which outlines families' circumstances at the point at which they were referred to the IFSP, the form of support provided by the IFSP and their situation at the point of the final tracking interview.

[3] It is important to note that while this research highlights the evidence primarily about the role of the project in helping families achieve positive change, in a number of cases families also pointed to the valuable support provided by other agencies, including practitioners working for social services, mental health teams and YOTs.

Table 2.1: Type of IFSP intervention by levels of engagement and length of time families worked with the IFSP for the 28 families successfully tracked

Type of IFSP intervention	Range of months families worked with the IFSP	Levels of engagement at the point of exiting the IFSP[3]		
		Engaged	Partially engaged	Disengaged
Outreach/dispersed support (24)	3 – 24+	14	8	1
Core residential (4)	4 – 36+	3	–	1
Total no. families tracked (28)	**3 – 36+**	**17**	**8**	**2**

The length of time that family members worked with projects varied from less than six months to just over three years with those living in project core residential accommodation more likely to have worked with the project for a longer period of time. At the point when the fieldwork was completed, with the exception of two families who had been re-referred, the remaining families were living independently in the community. It should be noted, however, that six families had only recently exited the project and in these cases it was harder to guage the longer-term impact and sustainability of the IFSP interventions.

In just under two thirds of cases (17), data collected from project files indicated that families had taken an active part in the project interventions, with a further 8 families deemed to have engaged at least in part with the project support plan. Only two families were reported to have disengaged from the IFSP, which meant that they had exited the project prior to the completion of the support plan. These levels of engagement are slightly higher than those found amongst the total sample of service users included in the evaluation in 2006, where 17% of families disengaged compared with only 7% in the tracking sample (Nixon et al 2006b).

The majority of families were provided with outreach support, with only four families receiving a residential form of intervention. The research found no evidence of a causal relationship between the type of intervention and longer-term outcomes. Thus although the earlier evalution report (Nixon et al 2006b) found that the ranges of health problems and support needs associated with families provided with IFSP core residential accommodation were often more acute than for families provided with outreach support, the longer term outcomes associated with such families were not found to differ from those for families provided with outreach support with similar levels of success reported by both family members and agencies working with the family.

[4] In one case it was not possible to establish what level of engagement had been achieved at the point the family left the project.

Table 2.2: A comparison of families' circumstances at the point of referral and at the final tracking interview for the 28 families successfully tracked

Key Variables	Circumstances at the point of initial referral to the IFSP	Circumstances at the point of the final interview
Complaints about ASB	3/28 (11%) there were either no or very minor complaints about ASB For 25/28 (89%) families, complaints about ASB placed the home at risk	For 20/28 (71%) families, no significant further complaints of ASB were reported For 8/28 (29%) families, complaints about ASB and/or rent arrears continued to place the family home at risk[4]
Risk of homelessness	9 written warnings 12 Notice of Seeking Possession/Suspended Possession Order 3 homeless 2 D/K For 24/28 (86%) families, the family home was at risk at the point of initial referral	In 21/28 (75%) of tracked families, their current home was secure For 7/28 (25%) families, the family home was at risk[5]/or the family were in temporary accommodation having been evicted for ASB

As Table 2.2 indicates, for just over two thirds of cases (20/28), families and/or referral agencies reported that positive changes had been sustained since exiting the project to the extent that no significant further complaints about ASB had been received. In six families there had been some ongoing ASB problems associated with family members, which had resulted in the family being referred back to the IFSP. In the majority of these cases, returning to work with the IFSP for a short period enabled families to get back on track and at the time of the last interview, there had been no further complaints about ASB. Thus, for three quarters of the tracked families[6] (21/28) the risk of homelessness had been significantly reduced and the family home was secure at the point of the final interview.

These findings illustrate how, for the majority of families, positive changes been sustained and/or had occurred since exiting the IFSP. However, the cessation of ASB complaints and reduced risk to the home represent only two dimensions of sustainable outcomes and do not reflect the complexity and struggle that many families continued to experience.

[5] In 1 family there were continuing complaints about ASB but given this family were owner occupiers the family home was not at immediate risk.

[6] In 2 of these families there had been no further complaints about ASB, but the home was at risk either due to rent arrears or because a Suspended Possession Order was outstanding.

[7] Although there were still ongoing complaints about anti-social behaviour in one family, they had bought their own home and therefore the home was not at risk.

Table 2.3: Changes in families' circumstances at the point of the final tracking interview	
Change in family composition	In total, 14/28 (50%) families had experienced change: • 4 families had new babies • 10 families had experienced relationship breakdown or children were living with friends/relatives, with 6 children being 'looked after' by the local authority; in 4 families young people were in custodial care
Concerns about children's well-being	In 13/28 (46%) of tracked families there were ongoing concerns about children's well-being.
Housing change	16/28 (57%) families had moved home during the course of the evaluation

For half (14/28) families tracked significant changes in the household composition had occurred since exiting the project. While for some families these changes were welcomed, with four babies having been born, ten families had suffered some form of relationship breakdown most frequently involving children going to live with relatives/friends, or being taken into the care of the local authority or serving custodial sentences (see further section 5 and 6 below). Concerns about children's well-being continued to effect just under half the families, with many parents facing difficulty in dealing with their children's challenging behaviour.

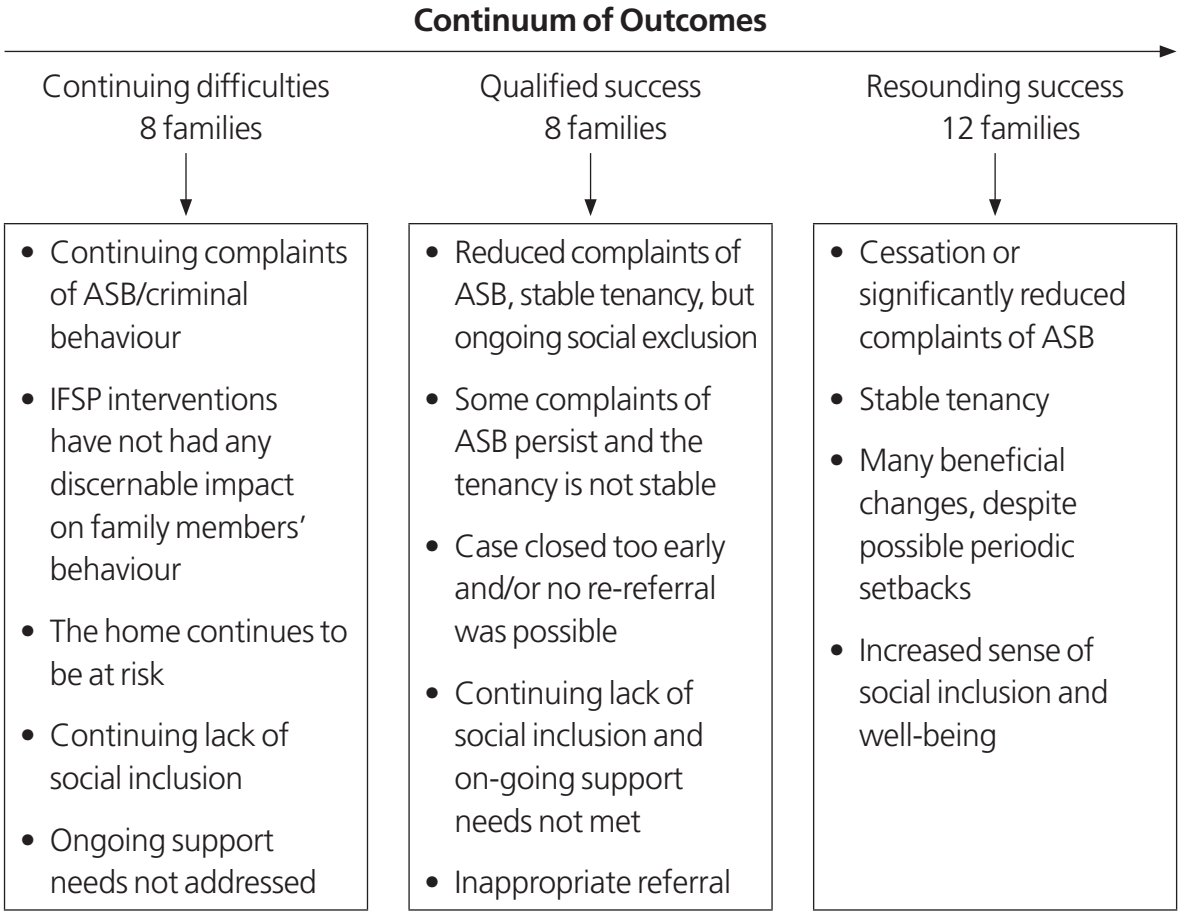
A further characteristic of the sample of tracked families was a high levels of housing mobility. Over half (16/28) the families were no longer living in their original tenancy at the point that the fieldwork was completed. There were a wide range of reasons why families had moved home which could not be explained simply by reference to families housing histories. Whilst some families had suffered repeat incidence of homeless and housing insecurity prior to referral to the IFSP others had had a stable housing history sustaining secure tenancies in the same neighbourhood for over 35 years.

For the majority of families moving home was seen as a positive step and represented a chance to start afresh. The opportunity to move to a new neighbourhood was particularly welcomed by families supported in project core residential accommodation who when exiting the project had been provided with new secure tenancies. For six families however, moving had involved giving up a secure tenancy to live in non-secure private rented or temporary accommodation. Such moves were often involuntary arising as a result of eviction action, or on-going difficulties with neighbours. Three families were renting accommodation from a private landlord and three were living in non-secure accommodation (e.g. temporary accommodation provided by the local authority homelessness services or lodging with family/friends) pending a decision on re-housing by the local authority.

A continuum of outcomes

The findings from the tracking study highlight the limitations of outcome measures based solely on the stability of a family's tenancy and the cessation of complaints of ASB, which provide only a partial indication of the complex, and sometimes contradictory, changes that had occurred for families. There is a need to get behind these indicators, which not only serve to disguise ongoing struggles and difficulties but also may mask wider successes achieved by families and IFSPs. In order to reflect the complexity of many families' situations at the time they were interviewed, a continuum of outcomes has been developed derived from families' and other agencies' accounts of the extent to which the IFSPs' four core objectives had been met. These objectives were:

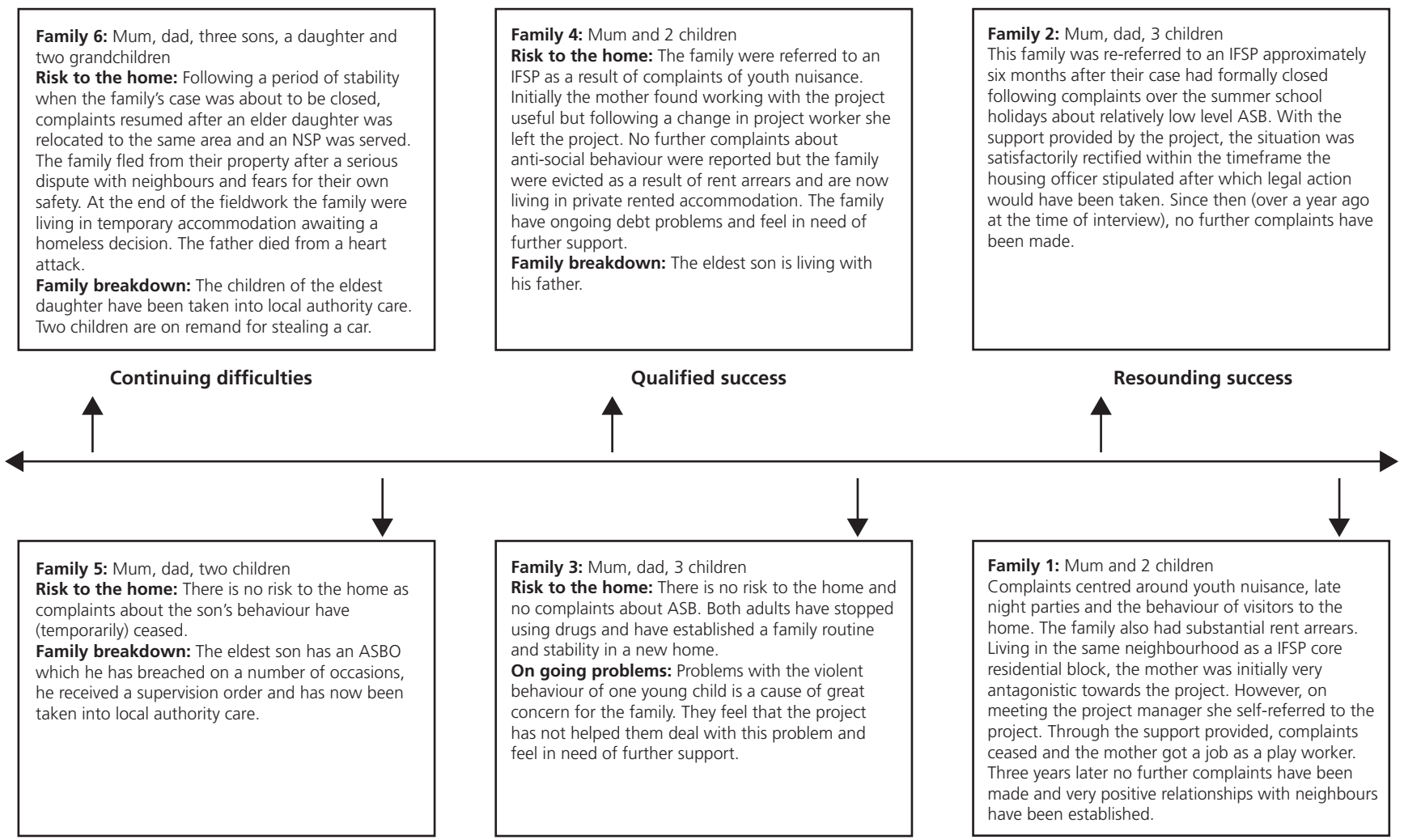
- **Prevention** of repeat cycles of **homelessness** and **family breakdown** arising as a result of anti-social behaviour;
- **Addressing unmet support needs** and ensuring that families are able to sustain a positive lifestyle without being the cause of anti-social behaviour;
- **Promotion of social inclusion** for families and assisting in **providing better outcomes** in relation to **health, education and well-being**;
- **Increasing community stability** by enabling and supporting families to live peacefully and to fully participate in their communities.



The majority of families interviewed were located towards the right of the continuum, with the outcomes occurring following the IFSP interventions viewed as being resoundingly successful. For four out of ten (12/28) tracked families, the changes that had occurred since exiting the IFSP were significant, with family members stating that they no longer faced insurmountable problems (section 3). More mixed outcomes were associated with a further eight families (two of whom were inappropriately referred to an IFSP) who continued to experience ongoing problems which required skilful management. In this context, while some families had achieved housing stability and were living peacefully in their communities, they were not enjoying positive outcomes with regard to other indicators of social inclusion (section 4). In other cases, some ASB complaints persisted and the home was not stable. In the remaining 8/28 families the IFSP interventions had not been successful and the lives of these families continued to be dominated by complaints about anti-social behaviour, homelessness or risk of eviction, and family breakdown (section 5).

Case study examples of where families were located along the continuum of outcomes is provided in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Case studies of families located along the continuum of outcomes



Although the continuum is a useful method of drawing attention to the key differences in families' circumstances, it is intended for heuristic purposes only and there are a number of important limitations in its use. Firstly, the measures of 'success' on which it is based are derived from the projects' key aims and it must be recognised that for many families alternative measures of 'success' or 'failure' were significant. Secondly, the multi-disciplinary, multi-agency approach adopted by IFSPs renders attributing 'success' to any one agency problematic and it was difficult to ascertain with any certainty the exact role that the projects played in bringing about particular outcomes for individuals and families. Indeed, many other factors were present in families' lives that may have effected change and/or countered the potential impact of project, such as mental health problems, addiction, experiences of crime, and relationship breakdown (see further section 6 below).

While the concept of [dis]engagement with the IFSP does not fully portray the depth and complexity of families' narrative of change, it nevertheless plays a defining role in accounts of 'successful outcomes' by practitioners and IFSP workers. Evidence from the tracking study clearly indicates that levels of 'engagement' or 'disengagement' with IFSP interventions cannot be straightforwardly correlated with positive or negative outcomes. For example, two of the three families who formally 'disengaged' from IFSPs were reported by referral agents to be in stable tenancies at the point of the final tracking interview. Furthermore, the impact of the multiple disadvantages that families working with IFSPs were subject to also renders 'engagement' a difficult concept to measure (Section 7). 'Engaging' was clearly more difficult for some families than others and did not necessarily reflect a straightforward lack of willingness to commit to a programme of support. The difficulty in correlating 'engagement' with 'successful' outcomes is illustrated by the following example involving a family that was homeless at the point of the final interview. Although the family had fully co-operated with the IFSP, two housing/ASB officers working with the family described the mother in passive terms and as a consequence believed she had not dealt effectively with the behaviour of her youngest son, the threats to her home and the prospect of her grandchildren being taken into care.

> *"She's not setting any rules down for these kids and she's just letting them run riot and [name: son] is not going to school and she's doing nothing about making him go to school."* (Housing officer)

Yet, in the same interview it was acknowledged that this mother's ability to achieve change was constrained by ongoing domestic violence she suffered from her husband and the abusive behaviour of her children. She had also been subjected to physical abuse in the past and suffered from depression. This example indicates how lack of active engagement rather than a failure on the part of the family to co-operate with IFSP interventions could be symptomatic of a wide range of structural and personal problems, such as the prevalence of mental health problems (particularly depression) and the incidence of family violence (see further sections 6 and 7).

Summary

An overview of changes that had occurred since families were initially referred to an IFSP indicates that for the majority of families positive change had occurred. Most notably, in seven out of ten families complaints about anti-social behaviour had largely ceased and as a result the family home was secure. At the same time, however, a significant proportion of these families continued to suffer from social exclusion with unmet support needs. Outcome indicators based solely on the cessation of complaints and the stability of the home do not adequately reflect the dynamic and complex nature of families' lives. Furthermore, there was not a linear relationship between project interventions and outcomes achieved by families and, as a result, measurement of the extent to which IFSP interventions stimulate change is problematic. To overcome the difficulty in measuring and defining 'success' or 'failure', a continuum of outcomes has been devised to reflect the complex differences in outcomes that were associated with different families. In the next section of the report the pathways to 'success' are explored in greater detail.

Section 3: Pathways to successful outcomes

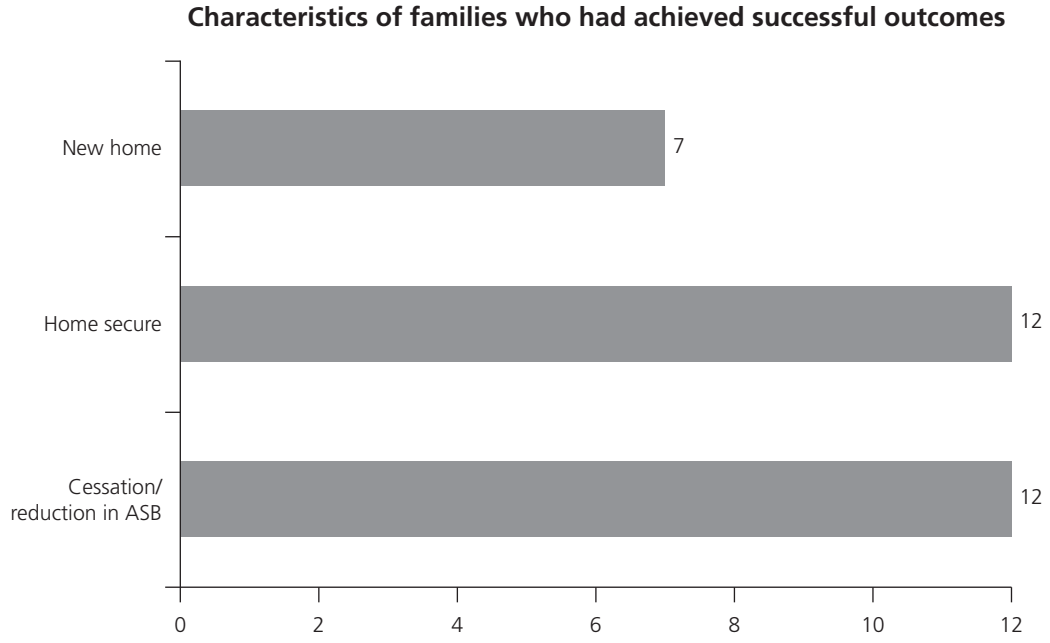
There were 12 families within the tracking sample of service users who could be located at the far right of the continuum of outcomes, having sustained positive changes since exiting the IFSP. Members of these families reported stories of relatively straightforward change in which their current circumstances were described in sanguine terms. Not only was the support provided by the IFSP seen as being pivotal in helping achieve housing stability and reduce ASB complaints, but also there had been wide-reaching benefits in terms of increased social inclusion and well-being.

- In a small number of cases (3) a single issue usually concerning children's behaviour or a clash of lifestyles had led to the referral to an IFSP. For these families once their tenancy was stabilised sustaining change was comparatively easy to achieve.
- For the majority of those who had achieved successful outcomes however, the underlying problems (of which ASB was a manifestation) were complex and multi-faceted. The study findings illustrate that even where families have entrenched and difficult personal histories IFSP interventions can be helpful in stimulating change and enabling families to live peacefully within their communities.
- For families with high levels of need pathways to successful outcomes were critically informed by the following factors:
  - the careful management of exit routes;
  - the self-motivation, willingness and emotional capacity of family members to make changes;
  - project workers ability to establish relationships of trust;
  - the value of re-referrals.

These findings illustrate that for most families change was not a linear process but was defined by episodes of setback and progress, stability and crisis and that for some families re-referrals to an IFSP could play a pivotal role in helping families get back on track. Notwithstanding the different pathways families had taken the following factors were found to characterise families who were now living peacefully in the community:

- Cessation of complaints about ASB;
- Improved management of behaviour;
- Increased capacity to deal with underlying problems.

Graph 1: The characteristics of the 12 families sustaining successful outcomes Cessation of complaints of ASB



Cessation of complaints of ASB

Graph 1 indicates the scale of change that had occurred for families who had achieved 'resounding success' was remarkable. At the point of referral to the IFSP the majority (8/12) of these families were at a severe risk of eviction. Either legal action in the form of a NOSP was pending, or eviction proceedings had commenced or they were already homeless. In the remaining four cases, formal warnings had been issued to the family. By the time the fieldwork was completed in early 2007 these families had been successful in meeting two of the IFSP interrelated objectives. They had modified the behaviour that had lead to concerns about anti-social behaviour and had in turn managed to stabilise and sustain the family home, often in a new tenancy. In these cases, complaints of ASB had ceased completely or had reduced to the point that families were no longer at risk of homelessness on grounds of anti-social behaviour:

> *"I haven't received any complaints, well not as I know of. I think if there were complaints, then I think [housing association] would have automatically sent something out, but up to now I haven't received no complaints."* (Service user 19)

> *"Every month, without fail, they have to say if there's been any anti-social behaviour problems whatsoever. I mean we haven't had one, not one at all, do you know what I mean? So I mean that's really good for a start because that's what they're trying to stop isn't it, let's face it."* (Service user 28)

Housing officers confirmed that families – some of whom had been regarded as 'notorious' – were now living peacefully within their communities without being the cause of any further troublesome behaviour:

"Not a single one [complaint of ASB], nothing, nothing, no ... I think the entire family has been a success, they've all really put effort in and definitely improved their behaviour." (Housing officer)

While in a few cases there had been the occasional incident that had been brought to the attention of a housing officer, such incidents were not serious or persistent and so had not put the tenancy at risk in any way.

The critical pathway to such resoundingly successful outcomes varied from one family to another, but commonly focussed on improved management of behaviour and/or increased capacity to deal with underlying problems to address social exclusion. These two issues are considered further below.

Improved management of behaviour

A common feature of families who were now living in the community without being the subject of complaints of anti-social behaviour was the way in which family members had addressed or were better managing problems that may have contributed to or been at the root of perceived ASB. Their newfound ability to sustain a positive lifestyle was in marked contrast to their circumstances when initially referred to the projects some years before and interviewees reflected on the positive changes that had taken place since their time working with a project:

"Without [IFSP] I wouldn't be here, seriously, and I think my son [name], he'd got to the point where he was just going to get into trouble, and more trouble and more trouble and more trouble and end up in jail, and he's not. Now we are a family. I really don't know what we'd been before." (Service user 25)

Family members variously described feelings of stability and a new sense of quiet, calm and coping that defined their present lives.

Six families had moved into new tenancies whilst working with an IFSP. Regardless of whether the family were living in a new community or not, for most of these families, the cessation of complaints about anti-social behaviour had brought improved relations with neighbours and families were now living peacefully within their community, as one adult explained:

"[It's] changed dramatically … life's more peaceful now. I don't have to worry about the neighbours putting complaints in. You know, I can go and speak to them now, whereas I couldn't before." (Service user 8)

Improved relations with neighbours had also contributed to families' sense of well-being and self-esteem, as is evidenced in the following comment about the benefits associated with the IFSP intervention:

> *"Me family back and work. I think just getting me family back and being accepted again as a decent person to live next door to and not some … you know, piece o' dirt. … I can walk up the street now without having to put me head down."*
> (Former service user)

The changes achieved had often not only brought the benefits of housing stability but had also enabled family members to achieve personal goals, such as gaining paid employment and carrying out volunteering work. Indeed, one woman had recently become a 'street ambassador' in her local community:

> *"It's like now I'm a street ambassador. … It involves, if people have problems with complaints, we take down, they can come to us, we'll write it down and we talk to [the housing association] about it and …I know quite a lot of people on this estate, so what I tend to do is if somebody comes to me and says, 'Well look', and it's mainly about children fighting or squabbling, and I'll say, 'Well look, what I'll do is I'll go and have a word with the parents about the child and we'll see if we can sort it out, but if it carries on, then I advise you to phone [the housing association]'."* (Service user 19)

While is was difficult to ascertain with any objectivity the extent to which change had been stimulated solely as a result of IFSP interventions, a view was expressed by agency representatives and families that it was the impact of the project alone or in partnership with other agencies that had been key to helping families bring about a reduction in the complaints of ASB and effect wider changes that had proved beneficial. A number of housing officers professed that the family would have been evicted without the support of the project.

Increased capacity to deal with underlying problems

When families were initially referred to the IFSP they were in situations characterised by extreme stress. This was caused not only by homelessness or threats to their tenancy but also by numerous additional factors that contributed to their adversity including mental ill-health, debt, physical health problems, substance misuse, histories of family problems, domestic violence, behavioural and educational problems, and repeat cycles of homelessness. The IFSP interventions appeared to help families increase their ability to manage such problems and participants described stories in which they were managing and coping with a wide range of personal and social difficulties associated with ASB. This brought benefits with regard to health, education, well-being and other indicators of social inclusion.

For two families supported in IFSP core residential accommodation, the transition to permanent housing had only recently been achieved. However, in both cases participants were confident that they would be able to sustain their new found sense of stability. Both women described their current situation in positive terms and gave accounts of how they had not only moved from homelessness into a secure tenancy but had also addressed a number of familial and personal problems. These included overcoming an alcohol misuse problem, successfully managing depression and other mental health and emotional problems, addressing the behavioural and educational concerns of their children, and rebuilding family relationships:

> *"I still have me off days, but I don't self-harm anymore."* (Service User 26)

Interviews with practitioners involved with the families confirmed how IFSP workers had helped families to achieve positive change in a context of multiple problems and complex needs. In one case, a housing officer explained how the tenant s/he referred is schizophrenic and was using cannabis and crack cocaine when many of the problems were occurring at and around her home. Managing the case was difficult for the housing officer due to a fierce 'no grassing culture' that prevailed in the area together with widespread fear of retaliation and therefore reluctance on the part of complainants to act as witnesses. When the family were referred to the IFSP, the housing officer claimed that the situation 'improved dramatically'. Although social services and the mental health team were already supporting the mother, the intensity of support provided by the IFSP was felt to be key to effecting change, resulting in the 'vast majority' of the transformations that occurred at this time.

Three of the families who had changed their behaviour had been provided with support in an IFSP core residential unit. These families tended to have more challenging and entrenched difficulties and the provision of residential support did not suit all participants (Nixon et al 2006b). In the following example, although the family formally 'disengaged' from the project, opting to leave the core accommodation and move into a private rented property, the impact of the project, according to the family's education welfare officer, was substantial. The family were described as leading a 'chaotic lifestyle' at the time they were referred to a project with their life characterised in terms of high levels of drug use, drug-fuelled domestic violence, fractious family relationships, schooling concerns, little routine, and no financial security. The IFSP worked to lever in support from other agencies to help the mother control her drug use, provided support around parenting, budgeting, establishing routines, ensuring the children attended school, and assisted in generally helping the family to 'develop a mainstream lifestyle'. Without the intervention of the project, the interviewee did not think the family would have been able to 'move-on'. S/he believed that they would have still been 'trapped in the same situation' and that they would have eventually fallen apart due primarily to the destructive impact of the domestic violence. Changes had also accrued for the children. Although school attendance of the children is still not perfect, it has improved and the mother's attitude towards her children's education was reportedly transformed. The project was thought to have offered the family

a 'new lifestyle' and although it was believed that the family may have benefited further had they stayed in the core for a longer period of time, the family social worker felt that the project had been 'successful' and had helped the family achieve a level of stability which could be sustained.

Pathways to positive outcomes and the factors that influenced 'success'

At the point of referral to an IFSP all of the families were at risk of homelessness and potential family breakdown, and could therefore be defined as having a high level of need. However, in 3/12 cases where families had achieved positive outcomes, the behaviour complained about involved 'minor' but persistent nuisance such as children knocking on neighbours doors, playing in the street or family noise. In these cases, where the focus was on children's' behaviour or life style clashes, families often disputed the validity of complaints and felt that they in part reflected a lack of tolerance by neighbours. This group of families, although in need of action to protect the home, tended to have few deep-rooted difficulties and the main focus of the IFSP intervention was to help stabilise the tenancy. In this context the work of the project was relatively straightforward and sustainable change was achieved comparatively swiftly.

In the majority (9/12) of the 'successful' cases, however, underlying problems – of which (often serious) ASB was a manifestation – were complex and multifaceted. For many of these families, notwithstanding the very positive changes that had been achieved, family life was far from trouble-free or uncomplicated. As one IFSP housing worker pointed out, ongoing difficulties will always be present within the family with which she had been involved:

> *"Saying about past history of abuse and stuff, [mother is] still you know, dealing with, or not dealing with, the abuse that she suffered as a child and you know, two abusive relationships and that's something that she hasn't dealt with yet so that's … going to be an aspect of her life and something she's going to have to deal with, you know, ongoing. There's always going to be issues."* (IFSP housing worker)

In the following section of the report we explore the factors that informed pathways to positive outcomes for these 'chaotic' families. In so doing, we highlight the factors that appeared to have helped families achieve positive change and the role played by the project.

Managing exit routes

Families who had achieved positive change were characterised in terms of feeling that the IFSP had met all their needs and/or other agencies were providing them with support when their cases where closed. Therefore, service users did not feel that they had been abandoned to face problems alone, as others had where success had not been

forthcoming (see section 5). At the point that these families exited the IFSP, family members were either confident that they could cope without the support of outside agencies or a network of support had been put in place through the work of the IFSP. Thus some families continued to be supported by a range of organisations, such as CAMHS, YOT and social services after the projects had withdrawn their support. Although adults were apprehensive about losing regular contact with the project worker, they acknowledged that they no longer had a high level of need and felt that there was nothing more the project could offer them:

> *"Q: Did you feel you needed their support anymore?*
> *A: No, it was just nice for them to be there."* (Service user 8)

Given that each individual family's circumstances are unique and many had a number of inter-related high level needs, the time needed to support families varied.[8] Where projects had been successful they had taken as much time as was necessary to resolve problems before cases were closed. Managing the process of exiting the project required sensitive and skilful management. This was a factor recognised by all service users as being critical to fostering their ability to manage alone. All those who had sustained 'successful' outcomes expressed the view that their cases had been closed at the right time and there was nothing more that they needed from the project:

> *"'Cos, as I says, a three, six month thing wouldn't have scratched the surface."* (Service user 21)

These findings highlight the importance of ensuring that an effective multi-agency network is in place for families who have ongoing support needs and the need for IFSPs to develop well-managed and agreed exit strategies prior to closing a case.

Self motivation and commitment to change

As highlighted in previous reports (Nixon et al, 2006a, 2006b), many families had been at crisis point when they were referred to the IFSP and were desperate for help. Indeed, for single parents, dealing with multiple indicators of exclusion – including living in poor housing, substance misuse, domestic violence, debt and health concerns – their need for help and support was acute. Some families had approached social services and other agencies for help in the past for help, but resource constraints had often meant that no help was forthcoming. In this context, the IFSP was seen to offer an alternative and welcomed source of support:

> *"I mean, I blame Social Services, do you know what I mean, before I even came in here I asked them for help and they were like basically 'Your kids are not at risk, we can't do anything really'. … Same as with police and everything. I mean, I've asked police for help."* (Service user 25)

[8] IFSPs working with the families for between four months to over 36 months.

Where project intervention appeared to have the most beneficial impact, families often displayed self-motivation, commitment and – importantly – had the emotional capacity to make changes. For these families, the opportunity to work with an IFSP was welcomed:

> *"Yeah, I was, I was hoping that, you know, I'd get some support because it was sort of to the point where I didn't know, I was getting in too deep, I was thinking, you know, I was grabbing at anything really, you know, to try to help me."* (Service user 7)

During case assessment processes, projects workers reported that judgements about the appropriateness of a referral tended to be based around adults' willingness to engage with the project. As outlined earlier in the report, the concept of 'engagement' is difficult to define and measure, but evidence from the tracking sample indicates that change is perhaps easier to achieve amongst families who were actively seeking to alter their lives and were looking for support. It should however, also be recognised that some families who were initially reluctant to work with an IFSP also reported very successful outcomes.

Relationships of trust

A central part of the support package offered by IFSPs was recognition that for many families setting boundaries and reinforcing routines required a new way of working. Not uncommonly, when families were referred to IFSPs their lives were defined by transition – they had moved away from family and friends, were often in conflict with neighbours, and had very few support networks. In this context, the projects provided a route into support and interviews revealed the vitally important ways in which project staff helped family members enhance their capacity to cope.

It was the creation of relationships of trust and the emotional support that these provided that was overwhelmingly described by family members as the most positive and beneficial aspects in helping them achieve change when working with the projects. This support took the form of phone calls from the project workers to check how the family was and if there was anything with which they needed help and chats over a cup of tea, as well as the more structured developmental work. For interviewees, project workers were seen as a source of support, somebody they could turn to in times of difficulty/crisis to 'unload' worries. In many cases, projects appeared to offer valuable support in an environment in which there were few alternative sources of support:

> *"Yeah, it's been support for me that I really, really needed. Because before this, I didn't have anything really."* (Service user 7)

What emerged very clearly from the interviews with families who had achieved successful outcomes was the importance placed on 'knowing somebody is there' should they need them when, as one interviewee put it, 'the going gets tough'. This appeared to provide the research participants with reassurance and gave them peace of mind. For example, it allowed one mother to 'sleep better, knowing that they are there'. Furthermore, the independence of project workers was valued by some, as friends and/or family members were depicted as being too close and judgemental.

A further element of project practices which participants felt was critical in helping them change their lives was the way in which they had been provided with support to deal with their children (see further section 6). Some parents were not fully confident in their ability to set boundaries and introduce routines and in this context the development of parenting skills and help with children was seen as a priority.

> *"At one time I wouldn't ask for help, do you know, bringing up the kids on me own. I don't like asking for help. And that caused a lot of problems in itself 'cos where I needed to ask for help I wasn't asking for help, and it caused, like, problems in their upbringing and things like that."* (Service user 21)

IFSP practices and the importance of re-referrals

As has been documented in previous reports, IFSP workers, were frequently described by service users as being 'like a friend' or even 'best friend' or 'family friend' and their methods of working appeared to be crucial to project success. Project workers were often evaluated against negative experiences of dealing with staff from other agencies (particularly social services and social landlords). It was clear that families felt project workers treated them with a level of 'respect' that they had not received before:

> *"Whereas here, you come and they say, 'Right, no matter what's happened, we're starting from fresh, we're starting from scratch' you know, and they speak to you."* (Service user 26)

> *"I think they treat you with more respect. … They're mostly on your side and that's nice to know that they're on your side … 'cos with the council, they're on the [side of the] person who's actually complained."* (Service user 10)

Although the IFSPs are formally defined by an approach that is about the provision of 'support' backed up by enforcement, a number of interviewees placed a premium on an approach that was not about being 'forced' or 'told' to do anything. Implicit in this were references to very effective means of communication and methods of persuasion adopted by project workers. Interviewees valued the way in which project workers were explicit about why a particular suggestion (e.g. around managing children's behaviour) that they were proposing may be beneficial in addressing particular problems and meeting aims and objectives. However, they would also listen to the families' views and thoughts on suggestions, and take a flexible and non-judgmental approach:

> *"They had the proper approach, the right approach. They'd sit us down and listen to you and not tell you and … they'll give you an idea like, 'Try this for a week; see if this will work' and like they came the week after, 'No, it didn't work, that' or 'Right, that didn't work, we'll try something else'. They're not telling you what to do, they're saying, 'Right, that's not working. We'll do this. We'll try it this way, if that's not working, we'll try it another way'. It was brilliant, absolutely brilliant."* (Service user 19)

For these families, project workers had clearly found the right level at which to pitch the content of their work and were responsive to the needs and thoughts of families.

Case study 1: Positive change

Family X were re-referred to a support project approximately six months after their case had formally closed following complaints over the school summer holidays about relatively low level ASB, including the family using a trampoline in the garden late at night and causing a disturbance until the early hours, as well as noise nuisance caused by the children and their friends using a caravan outside the property. The family had been issued with a written warning when they were re-referred to a project. The family's housing officer explained that the mother was finding it hard to cope at that time largely due to difficulties arising from a number of family members having diagnosed mental health conditions, including schizophrenia, autism and learning difficulties.

With the support provided by the project, the situation was satisfactorily rectified within the timeframe the housing officer stipulated after which legal action would have been taken. Since then (over a year ago at the time of interview), no further complaints have been made. The interviewee described how the family are keen to ensure that their tenancy remains stable and have on occasion contacted the housing officer themselves to ensure no complaints have been received. He felt that the family are now coping better and are unlikely to cause any further problems for their neighbours. He did suggest that if any problems around the family's behaviour were to arise again, then the likelihood is that it will be resolved at a neighbourhood level without the involvement of housing management, as neighbour relations have improved dramatically.

Three families who had achieved 'positive change' with regard to the IFSP four key aims had had their cases closed and reopened for a second time. The second intervention by a project was generally only on a temporary basis and short-lived. It acted like a refresher course to get families back on track when situations had again become troubled. Although these families have been re-referred to the project, the end result at the point when the interviews were carried out was positive and interviewees as well as practitioners reported housing stability and a general sense of well-being. Where social and individual difficulties persisted, these families were managing either independently or in with the support of other agencies.

What this evidence suggests is that the path to stability and well-being is not a linear trajectory of improvement, but is often more complex and defined by episodes of setback and progress, stability and crisis. These cases demonstrate that sustainability is hard to achieve, particularly in light of the multiple problems (especially mental health conditions) that many of the families continue to manage on a daily basis (see chapter six). Illustrating

this, one interviewee who had been re-referred to a project described how, despite achieving success in a number of areas and demonstrating commitment throughout, initiating change and sustaining positive change was not always easy:

> *"A: [I] stopped putting music on loud, stopped having the youths hanging out in me garden.*
> *Q: Was that an easy thing to do, to put a stop to that?*
>
> *A: Not at first, no. Because I had to like, I had to go out of me house a lot. 'Cos they weren't listening. They'd bring screaming babies over early in the morning and they'd be here all day. I didn't mind that, it was the neighbours that minded it. So I'd have to get up early, get us all ready and get out for the day so we weren't here at all. But, 'cos as soon as they'd see us coming in they'd make their way over and it took, it took me a long time to get the message across. But I got it across in the end."*
> (Service user 8)

One housing officer reflected on the persistence and intensity of support an IFSP had provided to a family who had been evicted on two occasions for ASB during the time they were supported by the project. At the new property (where the family are still living), the behaviour that was the cause of complaints more or less ceased and the case with the project had been closed. However, the housing officer reported that a different set of problems – associated with a younger son's behaviour – had begun to surface, which gave rise to new complaints of ASB. A second referral was made to the project, which intervened for a short period of time to resolve the situation. The project's involvement was primarily concerned with helping the young person access appropriate support services and they used their brokerage role to get the YOT involved. Once the YOT became actively involved with the family, the project withdrew their support. The housing officer reported that the tenancy is not currently at risk, as the son's disruptive behaviour has subsided.

Evidence from the tracking study illustrates the critical role that re-referrals can play and indicates the need for IFSPs to adopt a long-term view of outcomes and effectiveness, especially with families who are experiencing multiple problems.

Summary

The study findings in relation to the situation of families who had achieved substantial changes are very positive, illustrating how – even for families with very high levels of need – IFSP interventions can be helpful in stimulating change, thus enabling families to live peacefully within their communities. It is, however, too early to make claims with any certainty about the longer-term sustainability of the changes that IFSPs had helped engender. This is partly because some families had only recently exited the IFSP, but it also reflects the fact that families working with IFSPs often had deep-rooted problems and suffered from multiple deprivations, meaning that they were therefore likely to continue

to be vulnerable to external influences. The varied impact of external factors is explored in greater depth in the following section of the report, which focuses on the group of eight families for whom the IFSPs were only able to help achieve partial success.

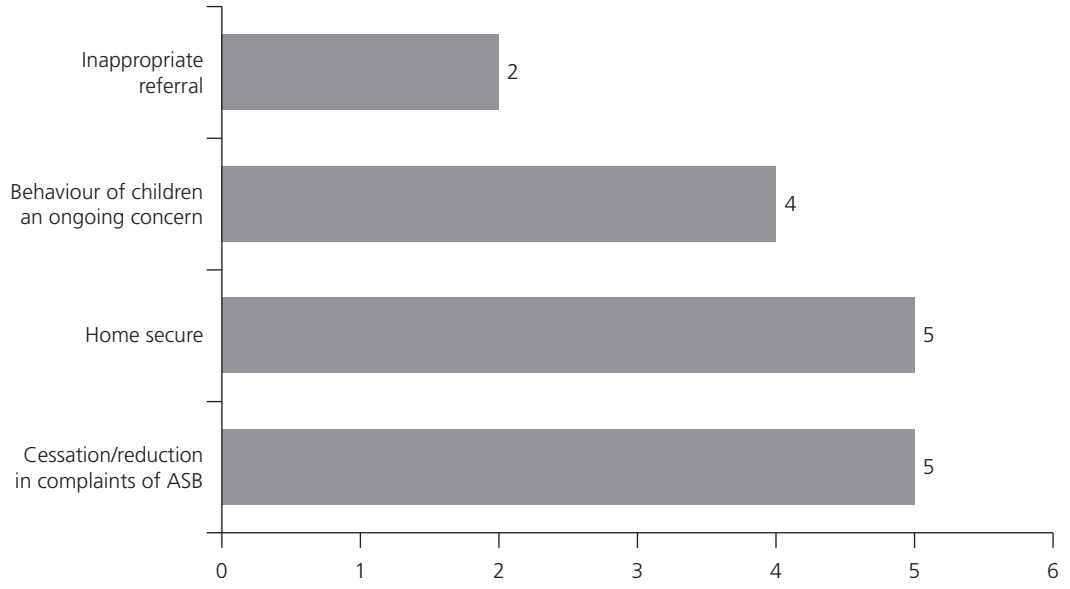
Section 4: Families achieving 'partial success'

The term 'partial success' reflects the conflicting outcomes associated with just under a third (8/28) families. While for the majority of these families, there had been a reduction/ cessation of ASB complaints at least one (but often a number) of the projects' core objectives had not been met and families' circumstances remained complicated and troubled. These more mixed outcomes were not always viewed as representing a 'failure' of the IFSP, but indicate that both families and other agencies perceived the IFSP interventions to have had only limited effective and families' ability to sustain positive change was somewhat precarious.

Key findings informing 'partial success'

- Reflecting the nature of the continuum of outcomes no single factor was found to distinguish families who had achieved 'partial success' from those who had achieved greater stability and those who were experiencing serious difficulties which continued to put the home at risk. Rather it was a matter of degree with on-going problems continuing to detrimentally impact on family stability.
- For these families while project interventions had helped change behaviour so that complaints had ceased or reduced there was evidence of a continuing lack of social inclusion and on going unmet support needs resulting in negative impacts on their quality of life and well-being.
- Factors which informed these families situation included:
  - Gaps in service provision resulting in inappropriate referrals;
  - A reduction in ASB and increased housing stability countered by a lack of social inclusion;
  - Ongoing problems managing children's behaviour.

Graph 2: Characteristics of the eight families achieving 'partially successful' outcomes



Gaps in service provision and inappropriate referrals

By the end of the evaluation period in 2007 all the IFSPs had established clear criteria and referral protocols. During the initial set up phase in 2004-05 however, inappropriate referrals were not uncommon, often reflecting gaps in local service provision and in a small number of cases families were referred even though there were no complaints about anti-social behaviour (Nixon et al 2006a). This was the case for two of the 28 families included in the tracking sample where referrals were made not as a result of ASB complaints but in order to address other support needs. The outcomes in relation to these families are considered below.

When initially referred to the IFSP, one family was suffering harassment and repeat burglaries, mainly arising out of the father's involvement in drug dealing. They were not, however, the cause of complaints of anti-social behaviour. After the parents separated, an IFSP intervened to help the mother relocate to a private rented property. Although the family's situation initially stabilised, when the third interview was carried out the mother explained how their circumstances had deteriorated. She was desperate to move house because of issues of over-crowding and other factors that were having a detrimental impact on the family's wellbeing. Furthermore, the family was suffering severe racially-motivated harassment, including property damage, threats and verbal abuse. In addition, the mother was being sexual harassed by her private landlord. All of these issues had been reported to the police, but no action had been taken. The IFSP had withdrawn their support due to there being no reports of ASB and the family could not be re-referred to the IFSP for further support because they had moved to a different LA area. The mother felt extremely let down by various statutory authorities, including the police, social services and housing organisations. On the verge of making herself intentionally homeless, she described herself as being in desperate need of help and felt she had no one to whom

she could turn. Although the family clearly do not fit IFSP referral criteria, the termination of project support contributed to the mother's sense of having been let down by welfare support agencies and the IFSP restricted intervention had, in part, contributed to negative outcomes for this family:

> *"I always thought they could do something more to help. It's like we're just stranded … and they turn around and ask if I've got a social worker, and I don't have one of them, I've never had one of them and so I answered I don't even know where to get one from and then when you phone up and you know try and explain things like this they turn around and say, 'No you don't need us and such and such a thing' but we do need a bit of help."* (Service user 1)

In a second family who also appear to constitute an 'inappropriate referral', the primary reason for the referral was very serious concerns about the welfare of a teenage daughter. The daughter, who was 12 at the time, was running away from home, playing truant from school, and engaged in sexual activity with older men (possibly prostitution). Although the daughter was clearly at risk, the family were not the subject of complaints from neighbours and the situation was far beyond the remit of the project. Social services took the lead role in seeking to resolve the child concern issues but asked the IFSP to assist the family in establishing routines and boundaries. Further, the IFSP helped the family to relocate from their poorly maintained and overcrowded private rented property to a secure LA tenancy. The family's case is now closed, but concerns about the daughter's welfare continue and at the time the study fieldwork was completed she was still being looked after by the local authority.

Given the particular nature of these cases, the outcomes associated with these two cases have been excluded from the following analysis of partially successful outcomes.

A reduction in complaints and increased housing stability countered by a lack of social inclusion

In five of the six 'partially successful' cases, two core project objectives of housing stability and a cessation of ASB complaints had been met but there was evidence of ongoing unmet support needs which impacted on families' well being and social inclusion. For example, some parents continued to experience difficult in managing children's challenging behaviour whilst others struggled with on-going debt problems and family breakdown. Notwithstanding these difficulties, families had successfully changed their lifestyles so they no longer had a detrimental impact on those living around them and were maintaining stable tenancies (three in new homes). In common with families who had achieved outstanding success, the distinctiveness of the present situation of these families was brought into sharp relieve as interviewees reflected on the past:

> *"I remember when we was doing all the drugs and everything, I mean, I never liked doing it anyway so me life was just, it was just hectic. It was people in and out all day,*

> *people I didn't even know coming in and out and you never knew where you was going, what you was doing, where you was going. It was horrible that, really horrible. … If, I mean, if I get me down days … then I think to meself, well, you know it's not as bad as what it was three years ago."* (Service user 23)

> *"I mean, it's not an ideal situation where I am, but it's a hell of a lot better than where I was, you know".* (Service user 17)

Such achievements were recognised by families as having helped transform their lives but families narratives continued to reflect a concern about the precarious nature of their newfound stability. Thus notwithstanding these largely positive outcomes families were still struggling to manage unmet support needs that were negatively impacting on their quality of life and well-being. In this context not all of the four project outcomes can be said to have been met and interviewees pointed to persisting problems many of which focussed on parenting concerns and managing children's behaviour.

Ongoing problems managing children's behaviour

Although each family's circumstances are unique and we can only draw on six cases, ongoing problems commonly oscillated around issues of behaviour management and parents' continuing difficulties in dealing with the challenging behaviour of child/children. One family had been re-referred to a project due to continuing complaints of anti-social behaviour which put their tenancy at risk. At the time the fieldwork was completed, this family's case had only recently re-opened and their situation showed no sign of imminent resolution, with the teenage son having been expelled from school and placed on an Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC). In another case, a child had received a supervision order for burglary. In a further two cases, although a child's aggressive and threatening behaviour was not causing complaints of ASB, it remained a private trouble for the family concerned. Mirroring the circumstances of those families whom we have characterised as representing 'ongoing difficulties' (see section 5), the project had limited impact on the behaviour of these children, possibly because problems were somewhat entrenched and beyond the ability of a project worker to deal with and/or because the child concerned was not willing to engage with the project:

> *"They [project workers] were at a complete loss of what to do with her really, because they wanted to try her on anger management and they said she was too young for that and they was going to come up with the idea of her writing a story, for her to write a story for them to sort of like explain how she gets angry and why, but then that never come off. So we never, I never really got any help with her, which is what I needed really."* (Service user 23)

There were other examples where positive outcomes in terms of a secure tenancy and a cessation of ASB were countered by factors not associated with the behaviour of children, including debt problems and family breakdown. Indeed, in the latter case, two children

had been taken into local authority care and the impact of this had had a devastating impact on the well-being of the parents. For these parents the decision to take children into the care of social services represented the realisation of their worst fears. While IFSPs can be seen to have a critical role in alerting social services to child protection issues which might otherwise have remained unacknowledged (and thus care proceedings can be constructed as a positive outcome for children), the loss experienced by the parents was enormous. One mother bleakly reflected on the impact of her child being taken into care in the following terms:

> *"She can't come back until she is 16. She is only 9 now … and then when she moves on she'll be on her own then. We're coping now both of us without kids."* (Service user 18)

The role of the project

As with the cases where families had achieved 'resounding success', most families viewed the intervention provided by a project in positive terms and were grateful for the support they had received, particularly with regard to the provision of emotional support and practical help securing the home.

> *"I don't know what I would have done without 'em really."* (Service user 17)

This said, families had mixed views of the IFSP, seeing them as neither wholly beneficial nor entirely ineffectual. Despite appreciating elements of the support provided by the project workers, the latter had failed to meet some of the families' expectations and thus the IFSP intervention was not viewed as being entirely successful. For example, one service user rated the project less highly in a third interview than she had done in previous interviews, feeling that the criteria for support by IFSPs were too narrow and that her case was closed prematurely. There was an expectation that long-term support needs would be met, but the project had failed to address these needs either by levering in support from another organisation or through direct intervention by project workers themselves.

> *"Maybe [they could have] got somebody else involved knowing that there's trouble that I'm still having with the kids, even though it's not anti-social. Even if [project worker] could put you in contact with somebody else that they knew would be able to help me … they didn't really have a clue on how to deal with [daughter] even though I'd mentioned it so many times, in fact [daughter] put a knife to [son] whilst [project worker] was here and they didn't have a clue, because she was just so young like. [Project worker] said about anger management and doing stories but all them was not appropriate for her because she was so young."* (Service user 23)

In contrast to this view, another mother felt that, despite limited 'success', the project worker could not have done more to help and that her case was closed at the right time because everything had been tried:

> *"They [the project] went through everything they possibly could. They tried absolutely everything, and, like I say, we'd got to a point where [project worker] turned round and said, 'Well, we don't know what to do for you now, we've tried everything'. So, I just went, 'Right' and he said, 'I'm gonna have to speak to me boss, but we're gonna have to close the case'. He said, 'Is that okay with you?', so I said, 'Yeah, so just close it'."* (Service user 22)

These cases highlight the complex and pressing long-term support needs present within referred families, the high thresholds that characterise access to existing mainstream services, and the subsequent lack of support by other welfare agencies. Such a nuanced analysis of families' circumstances was not always reflected in interviews with practitioners involved with the families. This was especially apparent for housing officers, who identified stability of tenure and a cessation of ASB complaints as representing a resounding success, which was usually attributed to the project.

As the cases referred to above indicate, the well-managed case closure procedures that worked for families who had achieved 'resounding success' were not followed in these 'partially successful' cases[9]. This was either because the project did not formulate an agreed exit strategy or because the family themselves decided to sever contact with the project, which was the case in one instance.

Summary

Six families (excluding the two who were deemed to be inappropriately referred) achieved partially successful outcomes at the point when the fieldwork was completed in early 2007. Apart from the extent of the difficulties faced by these families, nothing distinguished them either from families who had achieved more positive changes or from those with ongoing difficulties. This underscores how our continuum of outcomes is based on differences of degree rather than qualitative differences per se. Although some positive outcomes had been achieved, these families did not have the same level of stability and well-being that defined families who had achieved 'successful' outcomes (as described in section 3) and the project support was perceived to have been less effective.

[9] Two cases were still open, having been recently re-referred.

Section 5: Ongoing difficulties and the limits of IFSP interventions

Given the high levels of multiple disadvantage and social exclusion associated with families working with IFSPs, it is not surprising that for a just under a third (8/28) of the tracked families the IFSP interventions had not been effective in resolving deep-rooted difficulties. For these families, their lives continued to be dominated by complaints about anti-social behaviour, managing ongoing support needs, homelessness, risk of eviction and/or family breakdown. When referred to the IFSP, the majority of the families had been provided with outreach support, with only one family provided with a residential form of intervention and one other accommodated in IFSP dispersed accommodation. Two families had worked with the IFSP for over 2½ years and at the time the fieldwork was completed in early 2007 they had only recently exited the project.

- Families for whom the IFSP interventions appeared to have had little impact were frequently reported by support agencies as exhibiting the most deep-rooted and 'challenging' behaviour, with individual family members well known to local welfare and criminal justice agencies.
- A key characteristic shared by all but one family for whom IFSP interventions had not been successful was ongoing concerns about the anti-social and criminal behaviour of one child or young person.
- In many families the behaviour of the children appeared to be symptomatic of structural disadvantage, combined with long-standing cognitive and psychological problems, which had not been addressed by welfare and educational agencies at an earlier stage.
- The findings from the study highlight the importance of timely intervention, the need for families to have access to specialist support when exiting an IFSP and the important role of re-referrals to help families sustain a positive lifestyle.

The following section of the report focuses on the pathways these families had taken since exiting the IFSP by reference to the following key factors:

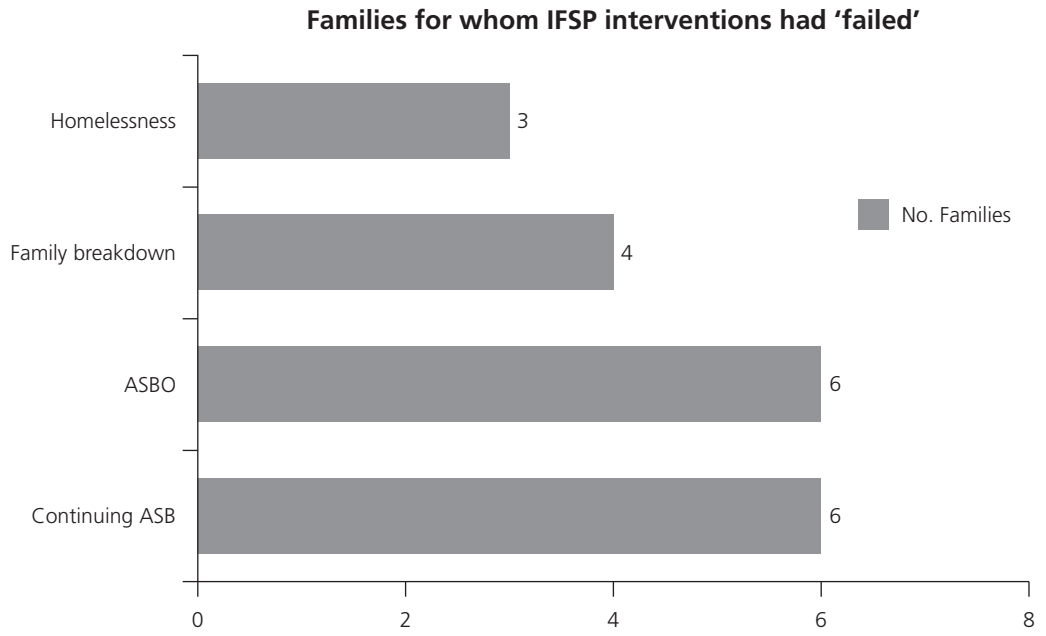
- Deep-rooted multiple disadvantages;
- Criminality and anti-social behaviour;
- Family breakdown.

The section concludes with a summary of family members' reflections on the impact of the IFSPs and an analysis of critical factors that contributed to the lack of sustainability of project interventions.

Deep-rooted multiple disadvantages

As Graph 3 illustrates, for the eight families where IFSP interventions had failed to address troublesome behaviour, family members continued to be the subject of anti-social behaviour complaints, with families severely affected by ASBOs, family breakdown and homelessness.

Graph 3: The characteristics of the eight families for whom IFSP interventions had 'failed'



The earlier evaluation report (Nixon et al 2006b) identified that anti-social behaviour was often symptomatic of other underlying and unmet support needs for families referred to IFSPs. Families were frequently living under extreme stress caused by complex and mitigating factors arising from personal histories. These were compounded by economic hardship and other structural factors that diminished parents and children's ability to change. Referrers and other agencies involved with these families were very aware of the volatile and precarious nature of families' lives and pointed to the ways in which achieving lasting 'success' with this group of families was not only extremely difficult but potentially unrealistic, given the raft of inter-related problems and complex needs experienced by the families concerned.

In this context, the circumstances of eight families had either changed little since being referred to the project or in some cases had deteriorated, with three families facing homelessness at the point of the final phase of the fieldwork. Where housing stability and other core IFSP objectives had not been achieved, it was felt by practitioners that particular problems and the underlying causes of ASB were intractable. Despite the best efforts of the IFSPs (and other agencies) to help families desist from behaviour that was the cause of complaints, ASB continued to affect their well-being adversely and to deplete their capacity

for social inclusion. An illustration of the enduring nature of structural and behavioural disadvantage is provided by reference to the experiences of one family who had worked with an IFSP for about three years. The family, which comprised of a couple with four sons and a daughter who had two children of her own, were described as being 'chaotic'. Despite encouraging signs of change at the point when the fieldwork was completed, the family were homeless, two grandchildren had been taken into the care of the local authority, the father had died as a result of a heart attack, and two of the sons were on remand for vehicle theft and criminal damage (see further Case Study 2 below). The ASB/housing officer involved with the family described the feelings of despair experienced by the range of agencies involved with family members:

> *"At the last meeting I had with social services and the [IFSP] and YISP, I've never had such a negative meeting because everybody felt that they'd given everything and it had all reverted back to how it was in the first place, if not worse. It had gone full circle and, as I say, worse, and all the agencies felt that they couldn't offer any more than they'd already offered. They were just going to have to pull all the services out because there was nowhere else to go with it. … YISP wasn't even willing to take [one of the sons] on any out-of-school activities because of his behaviour."* (ASB/Housing officer)

Drawing on similar experiences, practitioners reflected on how the risk factors appeared insurmountable for families with deep-rooted, inter-generational problems and in this context dysfunctional behaviour and cycles of repeated homelessness were difficult to counter:

> *"They seemed to take 10 steps forward but then seemed to have gone back about 15. You know, they made such great progress to the actual point where you were thinking, 'Oh, it's brilliant, you know we are going to exit them from the scheme' to actually being probably as bad or worse than when the [IFSP] got involved. … If they can't sustain a tenancy when they've got so much intense support, I honestly can't see them sustaining any sort of tenancy, you know."* (Housing officer)

Where IFSP interventions had not been successful, the inability of the IFSP to effect sustained change was perhaps not a reflection of 'failure' on the part of the project. For families suffering from deep rooted disadvantage achieving change was found to be easier when families were self motivated and were actively committed to change their lives (see further section 3 above). In the absence of such factors some problems appeared to beyond not only the remit but also the ability of project workers to resolve.

Some of the families included in the tracking sample were referred to an IFSP when the project had only recently been established. During this period, projects were often mistakenly viewed as an alternative to other mainstream services. The evidence from the tracking study reaffirms the importance of clear referral and admissions procedures to

prevent IFSPs being used to fill service gaps (see further section 8). IFSPs clearly cannot take the place of more specialist forms of therapeutic interventions and admission practices need to be refined to ensure that referral procedures reflect IFSP workers' competencies and capacities.

Criminality and anti-social behaviour

A key characteristic shared by all the families for whom IFSP interventions had not been successful was often ongoing concerns about the anti-social and criminal behaviour of one child or young person. Most commonly, it was the behaviour of young men (rather than young women) which continued to impact very negatively on the well-being of other family members. Out of the eight families where the IFSP interventions were deemed to have failed, eight young people in six families were the subjects of an ASBO. Amongst this group of families, the terms of the order had been breached in three out of the eight ASBO cases and the young people were reported by family members to be serving custodial sentences at the point of the final interview. The potential of ASBOs to bring young people into the criminal justice system has been the subject of much controversy (YJB 2006). In these cases however, ASBOs were most commonly employed to deal with the persistent behaviour of young people already known to the youth justice system. For example, the mother of a 14-year-old son who was the subject of an ASBO described his behaviour in the following terms:

> *"He's a persistent offender, you know, because he keeps offending all the time, street robbery, common assault, theft."* (Service user 2)

Where children had been given custodial sentences while the underlying causes of ASB had not been effectively addressed, complaints tended to cease, at least on a temporary basis.

In other families, however, young people's behaviour was once again putting the family home at risk, as was illustrated by the experiences of a family who was homeless at the point of the final interview. In this case the family, comprising a lone parent woman and six children, had been referred to the IFSP when the three eldest sons were issued with ASBOs as a result of group-related anti-social behaviour. Local publicity about the terms of the ASBOs resulted in reprisal attacks on the family, who were forced to flee their home and move into an IFSP dispersed property. The sons, however, refused to engage with IFSP interventions and continued to gravitate back to their old neighbourhood, breaching the terms of their ASBOs. The mother, who had a long-term heath disability, felt powerless to control their behaviour. For this family, the anti-social behaviour only ceased when the family were evicted from the IFSP accommodation, one of the sons received a custodial sentence, and another went to live with his grandfather pending a hostel place becoming available. At the point of the final tracking interview, the mother and four of her children were living in Bed and Breakfast accommodation and it was unclear whether the family would be offered a further secure tenancy. The decision to evict the family was not supported by all agencies

involved with the family, with the YOT worker questioning whether this was an appropriate response to the situation. She considered that two of the children were making significant progress and had the potential to effect further positive change:

> *"I think that their general attitude and demeanour when they have come to their appointments has changed. … He's a lovely, lovely young man, and so in spite of the eviction, of being separated from his family, sleeping sometimes on mates' or granddad's floor, he still maintains that … so I think that says a lot about him and his character."* (YOT worker)

Notwithstanding this glimmer of hope, the future appeared to be very bleak for this family, despite the intervention of the IFSP.

Two other families had lost their homes as a result of the behaviour of one or more of their children. In one case, the family (comprising a single parent with three children) was evicted from their home of 35 years as a direct result of the behaviour of the youngest son, who was aged nine at the time. During the period that this family was working with the IFSP, the eldest son had been issued with an ASBO and the teenage daughter threatened with an ASBO. While supported by the IFSP, these interventions appeared to be effective in reducing nuisance complaints in relation to the behaviour of the two teenagers. However, on exiting the IFSP the youngest child started to exhibit very disturbed behaviour, accompanied by suicidal tendencies. His mother was at a loss as to explain what had gone wrong:

Case study 2: Ongoing difficulties

Family X may be described as multi-problem: the father suffered from a long-term limiting illness, there was a history of domestic violence, the mother suffered from depression and has attempted suicide in the past, and one child has ADHD and learning difficulties for which he attends a special school. Complaints giving rise to the referral concerned groups of people gathering outside the property, playing music and drinking, domestic disturbances and more serious incidents (some criminal) in the local neighbourhood, including harassment of shop-keepers and bus drivers, and vandalism. An older daughter who was no longer part of the immediate household visited the property frequently with her two young children. She was thought to provoke many of the incidents that gave rise to complaints. Following a referral to an IFSP the situation stabilised for the family, particularly after they were moved to the other side of the city, where the eldest daughter could no longer visit regularly.

Case study 2: Ongoing difficulties *(continued)*

However, despite a period of stability, when the family's case was about to be closed, complaints began again after the daughter was also relocated to the same area. This gave rise to the same set of problems that had occurred at the previous address. In addition, the daughter regularly left her young children with her mother, who found it difficult to manage them as well as her youngest son, who has severe behavioural problems. Due to continued complaints, a Notice of Intention to Seek Possession (NOSP) was served and because of child protection concerns the grandchildren were eventually taken into local authority care. After this, the complaints intensified as the two sons moved back to the home and the elder daughter began spending even more time there. At the time fieldwork was completed, the family had fled from their property due to a serious dispute with neighbours and fears for their own safety. They were living in temporary interim accommodation awaiting a decision about rehousing. Sadly, the father died of a heart attack soon after. Two of the children were also on remand for stealing a car.

> *"John got expelled from school because he went at somebody with a pair of scissors, but I mean a few months before that he was fine and then it was sort of like something's gone inside of him and took hold of him, that's the only way I can describe it, it's something in him that's took over."* (Service user 9)

Following this serious incident the child was referred to a child psychiatrist and while the mother recognised that the problem would not easily be resolved, she hoped that eviction action could be prevented:

> *"But you've got to understand that John at the moment is just, there's something wrong and I'm getting it sorted out and he has calmed down, you know. He really has calmed down, he's come a long way, but he's not right yet. … We're hoping they will just give us a bit of leeway."* (Service user 9)

In practice, the behaviour of the youngest child continued to give rise to complaints and by the end of the fieldwork the local housing officer reported that the family had been evicted and were living in private rented accommodation.

The circumstances of the third family who faced homelessness were also acute, reflecting long-standing and entrenched problems (see further case study 2 above).

Analysis of the circumstances of families in which the IFSP had not been effective in stimulating change suggests that in many families the behaviour of the children was symptomatic of structural disadvantage, combined with long-standing cognitive and psychological problems, which had not been addressed by welfare and educational agencies at an earlier stage. The negative experiences of these families on exiting an IFSP

illustrate the importance of early intervention work to address deep-rooted disadvantage and other cognitive and attitudinal risk factors which predispose both the onset and continuation of 'anti-social' behaviour. A study by the Youth Justice Board (YJB 2001) identifies both risk and proactive factors in terms of the following categories: 'individual', 'family', 'school' and 'community'. The study concludes that the interaction between exposure to multiple risk factors (offending, illegal substance abuse, mental disorder, educational under achievement, etc) combined with poor neighbourhoods, family and peer group factors increases the risk of involvement with life course criminality and impacts negatively on life chances, well-being and social inclusion. The findings from the tracking study reinforce this evidence and indicate that if interventions are to be targeted effectively, the development of responses to ASB must be based within a wider paradigm of 'risk focussed prevention' (Prior and Paris 2005:29).

The impact of family breakdown

A further defining feature of families in which IFSP interventions had not been successful was the high incidence of family breakdown. While in a few cases parents sought to avert problems by arranging for children to live with relatives, in the majority of cases breakdown occurred as a result of a statutory intervention. Most commonly this involved children and young people being taken into custodial care as a result of breaching an ASBO or because of other criminal offences. Family breakdown had also occurred as a result of statutory action being taken by the local authority and in four families children were taken into the care of the local authority.

In a number of these families, relationships between carers and child/ren had completely broken down and for these carers the intervention of a statutory agency was viewed with some relief:

> *"He's not stuck to this ASBO, in all the time he's had it he's not, not stuck to it. I'm surprised they've not said, 'Right, well, we've tried this, we've tried everything, we've tried everything we can and it's not worked, so we're just gonna have to send him to a young offenders'. I'm surprised that they haven't. It's like, every time he goes to court he walks out, and I don't like it. I don't know how he manages to walk out of there."* (Service user 2)

This mother explained how, after a lot of soul searching and careful consideration, she made "*the hardest decision I've ever had to make in my life*" to have her child taken into local authority care, since neither she nor the IFSP had been able to stem her son's criminal and anti-social behaviour:

> *"For years and years I kept threatening with, threatening him with a Children's Home. I kept saying, 'If you carry on and you keep doing what you're doing I'm gonna put you into a Children's Home and you won't like it and we'll see how you like it then',*

> *and I never ever actually did it. I gave him chance after chance after chance, until in the end I just thought, 'I'm gonna have to do something because I can't keep living like this, I can't keep going on like this'."* (Service user 2)

Where family breakdown had occurred as a result of children's behaviour, parents reported very mixed views on the outcome of the IFSP intervention. While on the one hand they appreciated the respite that had been gained for the rest of the family, they were also very aware of the cost in terms of the welfare of the child no longer living in the family home. A mother of a 16 year old son who had just been sent to a young offenders unit for criminal assault and breaching the conditions of his ASBO described how she had been 'gutted' when her son was given a custodial sentence, as preceding the sentence his behaviour had generally been much better.

For parents faced with such intractable problems, their sense of powerlessness to safeguard their children from harm was a source of extreme concern and distress. One mother, for example, reflected on the concerns she had about her 14 year old son who was being looked after at a LA residential unit but who frequently absconded:

> *"Two weeks before Christmas he was placed in a Children's Home, you worry, it doesn't stop because he is not under your roof any more. I'm thinking, 'Well, suppose he hasn't stayed out, supposing he's been drugged-up or something, suppose he's been attacked or you know anything could have happened'."* (Service user 2)

Another mother explained how her difficulty in coping with the behaviour of her son who had severe ADHD was not a reflection of her lack of care for him:

> *"I can't cope with him, that doesn't mean I don't care for him. I don't wanna 'cos I love him with all me heart. … There is only one person who can stop Steve's anti-social behaviour – Steve. He has he's gonna he has to want to stop before he will stop."* (Service user 17)

While it is beyond the scope of this study to speculate what would have happened if referrals had been made at an earlier state for these parents, both referral agencies and the families themselves felt that the intervention of the IFSP had come too late to broker sustained change. The study findings in relation to the extreme difficulty parents experienced accessing appropriate support to help them control their children's behaviour also reflects the high thresholds that characterise existing mainstream services and the lack of appropriate welfare support input once families have exited the IFSPs (see further section 8).

Families' perceptions of the impact of IFSP

Despite the apparent 'failure' of the IFSP to help these families achieve stability and meet the four core IFSP outcomes, the majority of families interviewed professed to having benefited in some way from the support provided by the project. For one family who had been evicted, although the mother was upset and aggrieved that she no longer had the support of the project, she explained how the support provided by the IFSP workers had helped her acquire the skills and ability to manoeuvre her way through the processes and procedures involved in homelessness. Thus, despite the fact that core objectives had not been met, the project was still viewed favourably as it was perceived to have helped individuals develop new skills and build self-confidence.

There were, however, a few families where the failure of IFSPs to help parents deal with particularly pressing problems effectively resulted in more negative assessments, with the interventions deemed not to have been worthwhile/satisfactory at all:

> *"They might as well have not bothered. They might as well have not bothered, because they didn't, they didn't do anything. They didn't help in the slightest, in fact it could, it probably made things worse. It caused arguments with [the son] and me 'cos it was something I really wanted him to do, you know, 'cos I thought perhaps he has a chance of sorting himself out before he gets any worse."* (Service user 4)

Analysis of cases where the IFSP was not perceived to have had any lasting impact highlights the difficulty many teenagers experienced in engaging with project workers. Therefore, although the parents may have engaged fully with the IFSP support plan, it was often teenage children who were reluctant to commit to change. The possible reasons for the difficulty projects experienced in engaging young people are explored in further detail below.

Factors contributing to the lack of sustainability of outcomes

Analysis of the data collected in relation to families for whom the IFSP was not a success indicates that there are a number of key issues which played a critical role in determining the sustainability of outcomes once families exit an IFSP.

- ***Criminal behaviour***

In the majority of families, the behaviour giving rise to continuing concerns was criminal in nature. As such, young people in these families could perhaps be more accurately described in terms of 'life course persistent' rather than 'adolescence- limited' offenders (Prior and Paris 2005:28). Most were reported as having disengaged from education and to have been involved in street drinking and petty crime from an early age. They were now progressing to more serious crime and drug use. For example, in one family where the

eldest son was the subject of an ASBO, the ASB officer described the situation at the time of the final interview as hopeless – "everything under the sun has been tried" but nothing had impacted on the son's criminality:

> *"He's basically been the ringleader of a particular group of youths on the [xx] estate where he lives and he's kind of grooming these individuals into joining with his criminal and ASB activity in the form of stringing them up on trees by the ankles and burning them and things. It is now a hot spot area and it is solely down to [the son]. He commits all his crime there. … And his antecedent history with the police is just phenomenal. I think it's something like seventy pages long."* (ASB officer)

In this case, the family had disengaged from the IFSP and bought their own home, making it more difficult for enforcement action to be taken. This was a cause of some frustration for the ASB officer, who explained that it was increasingly problematic to enforce the terms of the ASBO and curtail the criminality associated with the family:

> *"It's been taken out of our hands really. I mean we have kind of done all that we can for it to have got it up to that state. It's then a police matter really, it needs to be taken to the criminal courts, as you know, but we're just getting let down there."* (ASB officer)

The outcomes associated with these cases raise an important issue about the extent to which IFSP are equipped to deal with young people with criminal trajectories and who are already known to the criminal justice system. Indeed, the evidence suggests that interventions to prevent re-offending by children involved in criminal behaviour may more appropriately lie within the province of specialist criminal justice agencies (Prior and Paris 2005:36).

- ***The stage at which referrals were made***

The optimum point for referral to an IFSP was considered in the earlier evaluation report (Nixon et al 2006b). As the projects matured, there had been some movement towards referrals at an earlier stage to enable IFSPs to 'prevent behaviour escalating'. The importance of this finding is reinforced by the evidence from the tracking study, where one of the features of cases where the IFSP interventions had not been successful was the relatively late stage of referrals. In this context, projects were perhaps set up to fail. The importance of referrals being made prior to young people's behaviour becoming entrenched and criminal in nature is an issue that was recognised both by ASB officers and by families themselves as being critical to the success of IFSP interventions:

> *"The only thing I have got against it is the lateness of the referral, for the amount of time they had they did wonders, you know. Between them coming to meet me here and me going to court they really did do wonders."* (Service user 9)

> *"The best ones are the ones that are caught early. We've had two at another area that were caught very early and it's been brilliant. They nipped it in the bud within a few months and they were actually only with the service probably four or five months before they were ready to exit."* (ASB officer)

A further explanation for the 'failure' of the IFSPs to achieve positive change, offered by front line officers, focussed on a perception that in some cases families only agree to a referral to a project for short-term instrumental reasons (e.g. to avoid eviction) but were not committed to engaging with the project and making long-term changes. One interviewee felt that when families are threatened with homelessness they will (reasonably) take any support offered and "*jump through hoops*" to avoid eviction. However, once the situation has stabilised, then the family may 'disengage'. Accordingly, interviewees described how this results in an initial reduction in anti-social behaviour, which appears to indicate that the project intervention is working, but once the threat of eviction has waned the problem behaviour re-emerges.

Both these sets of findings underline the importance of establishing effective multi-agency admissions panels where alternative forms of intervention can be appraised prior to a referral to an IFSP.

- ***The time limited nature of IFSP interventions***

A number of IFSP interventions were time limited, with cases automatically closed after 12 months regardless of whether underlying issues had been addressed and/or complaints had ceased. Such practices appeared to impact adversely on families where children were exhibiting the most entrenched and challenging behaviour. Many of the families where the intervention had not been successful expressed the view that their case had been closed too early and in these cases families were often keen to return to work with the IFSP. One mother reflected how much she valued the support provided by the project and had not wanted the case to close but was powerless to prevent it:

> *"They're starting to wrap the case up 'cos there's nothing more else they can do for me. … I mean, my daughter's at me every two minutes, swearing and everything. The nine year old just slams the doors and stomps upstairs. The five year old, he's copying the other two."* (Service user 3)

Although at the point of exiting the IFSP most families reported that they had been told by their IFSP worker that they could contact them if they needed to, this was not considered the same as having the ongoing support of a dedicated project worker. Project practices in relation to re-referrals differed across the six projects and where it was not possible for families to be re-referred, family members, expressed frustration that their case could not be re-opened:

> *"Well, at the moment, we need somebody there as sort of like a support, somebody to help us. We're alone and we're getting complaints like this, you know, it's ridiculous."* (Service user 4)

Where IFSPs accepted re-referrals, the evidence suggests that it is often possible to get families get back on track fairly quickly and it is therefore recommended that IFSPs should not limit the time they can work with families or operate blanket exclusions in relation to re-referrals.

- ***The varied effectiveness of the IFSP brokerage role***

One of the key roles undertaken by IFSPs is to liaise with other agencies to ensure that families have access to other services to meet on-going support needs. Within the IFSPs included in the study, the extent to which projects were able to effectively broker on-going support for families once they exited the project varied considerably from one area to another. For the sample of families for whom the IFSP interventions had not resulted in positive outcomes, welfare and support agencies were sometimes reported as being very reluctant to get involved. In these circumstance a number of parents felt they had tried everything they could to control the behaviour of their child[ren] and expressed deep frustration and anger at not only the apparent intractability of the situation but the limited help they had received from outside agencies, most notably social services. Indeed, a number of parents had actively sought help numerous times but to no avail, usually because their children were not deemed to be 'at risk' in any way. As IFSPs mature and become more embedded within local community safety and welfare structures, it should be easier to ensure that appropriate packages of support are provided to families on exiting the project.

Summary

For a minority of families the IFSP intervention had not been effective in resolving deep-rooted and often intractable problems. Most commonly, it was the criminal behaviour of one member of the family that continued to cause disruption and distress, not only to the immediate neighbours but also to other family members. The outcomes associated with these cases raise an important issue about the extent to which IFSP are equipped to deal with young people with criminal trajectories and who are already known to the criminal justice system. Indeed, the evidence suggests that interventions to prevent re-offending by children involved in criminal behaviour may more appropriately lie within the province of specialist criminal justice agencies. The findings from the tracking study highlight the importance of early intervention, the need for families to have access to specialist support when exiting an IFSP, and the important role of re-referrals to IFSPs to help families to sustain a positive lifestyle.

Section 6: The sustainability of interventions on children's well-being

The evaluation report published in 2006 highlighted how children working with IFSPs were amongst the most disadvantaged in the country (Nixon et al 2006b). ADHD, for example, affected children in as many as one in five families, compared with the national average which predicts that ADHD is likely to be prevalent in between 3% – 8% of school-age children (Mytars 2001). Within this context, it is not surprising that at the point of the last interview in 15/28 families despite stable tenancies and reduced complaints of ASB, parents' continued to experience difficulty in successfully dealing with their child/ren's challenging behaviour. Broad improvements relating to reductions in complaints of ASB and the families' housing stability were often punctuated by episodes where children's behaviour once again became the cause of parental concern.

- Project interventions in relation to children and young people most commonly focussed on positive parenting skills supplemented by direct work with children and the provision of diversionary activities. Such interventions met with varied success and particularly for children with pressing educational, social and behavioural needs long-term change was difficult to sustain.
- While changes in family structures including the birth of new family members were largely welcomed, in many families changes in domestic circumstances was less positive. Family violence remained part of the narrative of some families' lives. Where the violence was inter-generational it was particularly difficult for parents to access help.

Drawing on individual parent's accounts, supplemented by the views of referral and other agencies, the following section of the report focuses on:

- The varied impact of parenting interventions;
- The impact of direct work with young people;
- On-going schooling concerns;
- Changes in family structures and on-going family violence.

The varied impact of parenting interventions

At the point at which the majority of families were initially referred to the IFSP, the behaviour of one or more children was problematic. Responding to these concerns, IFSPs sought to foster parenting skills either through one-to-one work or by arranging for parents to attend courses. Talking to parents who had attended such courses revealed mixed views on the effectiveness of such interventions. This may in part reflect differences

in the quality and rigour of such courses. For some, particularly those who had achieved positive change, parenting interventions were valued highly and a number of interviewees spoke about how training in parenting skills had been very important in helping them manage their children's behaviour and build improved familial relationships. For these parents, this aspect of IFSPs work had been invaluable, with one referring to the parenting course she attended as 'absolutely brilliant'. Learning skills of 'active listening' and the ability to negotiate to resolve conflict were particularly valued, as the following parent explained:

> *"To be quite honest, I've brought seven children up and I have found it very hard. But I took a lot on board from that [the parenting course], and achieved quite a lot, and I have achieved a lot more communication with me children, especially with me younger children. ... There was one week where you listen and ask your child about an incident and I found it really good with my three younger ones, mainly my youngest one. He goes to special school, and he were forever losing his rag and then walking out of school and that. I felt a bit silly first time I tried it, I did, I felt really silly … and it did work really well and I use that quite a lot."* (Service user 19)

For those who had gained from parenting interventions, the benefits went beyond help in addressing their children's troublesome behaviour and in some cases had resulted in major changes in parent child relationships. One mother explained how living in IFSP core accommodation had enabled her to set boundaries and as a result her son's attitude had changed dramatically. This mother concluded that she now had more confidence to deal with the generic difficulties associated with parenting teenagers:

> *"I mean, everyone should have it [parenting support] seriously because teenagers – nobody can prepare you for teenagers. I'd lost my way. I mean, when I were bring them up on my own I found them easier when they were younger. Don't get me wrong, but it's just when, for me, when they got to a certain age and they've got their own minds when they're teenagers and everything and I just totally I just lost the plot and with everything else that were happening I mean I didn't want to even live."* (Service user 26)

Parenting interventions were not, however, a solution for all families, with a number reporting that the techniques promoted through the courses they attended did not work for them. When exploring why parenting interventions had met with such mixed success, issues of the age and the gender of children were thought by many parents and other agencies to be relevant:

> *"I went on a couple of parenting courses, not that I thought they did any, any good. … I mean, they were just talking about setting out boundaries and things like that. Well it, it's hard when you've got a bloomin' 15 year old lad."* (Service user 27)

Another parent described how she tried adopting a rota for household chores but found that she spent too much time "nagging" her children to conform to it, which led to further arguments and conflict. There appeared to be an optimum time when help with developing parenting skills was most effective. As one YOT officer explained, the older the children the more difficult it was for parents to achieve change:

> *"She did attend some of the parenting programmes that were put on and I think she really enjoyed that, I think she enjoyed mixing in a group environment. I think she got a lot out of that, but I still think she found it easier to put that into place for her daughters, where there was more scope to be able to effect change, rather than her sons who, I suppose really that track that they're on is very heavily worn and it was more difficult to change their behaviours"* (YOT)

Beyond the general problems associated with parenting teenagers for families with child/ren who had pressing educational, social and behavioral needs, behavioral change was particularly difficult to achieve. Often such children had a disability – such as ADHD – which had only recently been diagnosed and parents described feelings of exacerbation and despair at the debilitating effects of trying to manage their children's very difficult and challenging behaviour:

> *"And it is scary. I mean, I hold me hands up. I try not to show it, but I am scared when she gets into that rage, definitely".* (Service user 23)

Interviews with family members and referral agencies were used to explore understandings about the underlying causes of such behaviour. Some parents felt that their child's problematic behaviour was largely the result of peer group pressure and young people's general sense of alienation and disengagement from society (Millie et al 2005). Others however, were at a loss as to explain what had gone wrong.

For lone parent mothers, problems with teenage sons were felt to be exacerbated by the lack of an effective male role model, as one mother explained:

> *"'Cos like I think that's what boys need, they need a male model type, you know, they don't listen to women and other mums. They need a man."* (Service user 27)

This issue was also raised by project managers, who identified the lack of positive role models for adolescent boys as one of the underlying causes of problem behaviour.

IFSP direct work with young people

In addition to working to support parents, most of the IFSPs also undertook direct work with children and young people. In some cases IFSPs worked in partnership with other agencies – such as YOTs and dedicated youth services – and a number of parents talked

about how projects had helped them access other services for their children and drew their attention to out of school activities:

> *"Even now that I'm not with family project, I get YIP coming and they'll say, "Right, we've got this going. John, Charlie and Natalie said they want to go, but can you just sign these consent forms?"* (Service user 19)

In other cases, rather than simply providing families with access to diversionary activities, IFSP workers undertook direct work with young people to address their physical and psychological support needs. While the specific forms of interventions employed varied from one family to another, there was a common understanding amongst parents that IFSPs could play a critical role in raising young people's awareness of the impact their behaviour had on the wider community and the potential consequences for the family if the anti-social behaviour continued. Parents often reflected that the project workers had been able to 'get through to' and communicate with their children in a way they had not been able to do. They described how the intervention of a project worker had indeed helped their children understand the seriousness of the complaints of ASB and the potential impact these may have on the family's tenancy.

> *"I think it's the fact that we've all sat down together and communicated and they realise it's not me being paranoid and moaning at them and having a go at them. This is a real thing what's happening. I'm not threatening them and you know saying if you don't do this, I'm going to make, I'm going to get complaints and it's actually, they know it's real. So it's sort of sunk in a bit. … John's been quite good with it actually, you know, he'll make an effort, you know, just closing that, keeping the bedroom window closed. If you want to put your music on, keep it low. He won't have loads of people in the house."* (Service user 7)

Local housing officers also confirmed that when young people engaged with IFSP workers they were more likely to appreciate the seriousness of the situation and the fact that their behaviour could jeopardise the family home. Reflecting on a case involving a single mother with two teenage daughters, the local housing officer felt that the intervention of the IFSP had directly led to a change in her daughters' behaviour and resulted in them 'taking some responsibility' for the situation.

Many parents recognised that the ongoing difficulties that they encountered in caring for their teenage children was part of the normal process of growing up, in which pushing boundaries and exploring new identities was all part of becoming an adult:

> *"I feel confident in meself. I know that the children have grown up. I'm going through a stage now with all this teenager thing and they all think at this minute that they know it all and … you know, you get the odd backlash with the mouth and what not. But overall, I'd say that it's OK."* (Service user 19)

An illustration of the difficulty in defining 'success' and 'failure' in relation to work with young people was provided by an IFSP worker who had undertaken work with a young adult suffering from a diagnosed personality disorder with associated Tourette's Syndrome and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. She described how following the project intervention the young man had taken up a place at a training course but had subsequently left. Rather than this outcome being viewed as a 'failure', the IFSP worker explained that, given his disability, leaving work was an appropriate decision for him and pointed to the positive changes that had occurred since he joined the project:

> *"[The son] is not in training any more but just by going and seeing him and knowing him, I know he's better now he's not in training but on statistics that looks terrible … But he's having medication and seeing a psychiatrist – seeing pretty much an entire team – at [the hospital] and really engaging with them. And that's the first time since he was about twelve that he's agreed to it and engaged, which is brilliant, but when it comes down to statistics he's no longer in training, which looks terrible. But actually his life has improved tenfold since eighteen months ago, but in black and white it's, 'Oh, he's on benefits now whereas eighteen months ago he was in training' so it looks like he's taken a step back."* (Housing officer)

Ongoing schooling concerns

At the point of referral to the IFSP, problems associated with children's schooling were common across the majority of families. At least one child in most of the families who took part in the research was either a frequent non-attender, had been excluded (either permanently or temporarily) from school, played truant, was being bullied and/or had special educational needs. Project staff worked with families to help resolve education concerns (e.g. ensuring children were up in time for school; taking children to school; getting children back on the school role) and also put parents in contact with education welfare officers. As a result of these interventions, issues around schooling improved considerably. However, educational concerns could once again come to the fore when families had exited IFSPs, with children reluctant to attend school or attending infrequently:

> *"Well, I'm having a lot of problems with me youngest son. He doesn't want to go to school."* (Service user 7)

Where young people had been the subject of bullying at school, progress was often uneven with attendance fluctuating from month to month. One mother reported that attempts by the IFSP to resolve difficulties associated with bullying by talking to the school had resulted in her daughter being subject to retaliatory action. Ensuring that children regularly attended school was also particularly problematic for parents whose children were in their last year at school. For one young person who was interviewed with his mother, this meant that he had not been registered for his GCSEs exams:

> *"He's got to have months left in school and what's he gonna achieve in twelve months because he's been out of school for twelve months, he's had no education for twelve months. The past six month of it he had been in school he hasn't hardly ever been there so he's missed like two years, about two years of schooling behind and he's never gonna be able to catch that up for twelve months, even if he decided to sort hisself out. He'll never do it."* (Service user 2)

Within the sample of tracked families, a number of children had been formally diagnosed with ADHD, while others had other special educational needs and either attended specialist schools or had been provided with a mentor. For these children, maintaining a good attendance record was particularly difficult and periods of regular attendance could easily be disrupted by a single incident.

Changes in family circumstances and the impact of family violence

In five families, changes in family circumstances had been largely positive. In one family, a child who had been looked after had returned to live with her mother, while in four other families new children had been born. Such additions to the family were very much welcomed, although where teenage children had become pregnant parents were aware of the potential for this event to be construed as yet another failure:

> *"I thought they could use [xx] to say, 'Oh, this is what happens, teenage pregnancy, anti-social behaviour … .blah, blah'."* (Service user 26)

For many families, however, changes in domestic and personal circumstances had been less positive, occurring as a result of relationship breakdown and/or children leaving home, sometimes as a result of custodial sentences (see further section 5).

The earlier evaluation report highlighted the very high levels of family violence associated with families working with IFSPs (Nixon et al 2006b) and in this context issues around family violence remained part of the narrative of some families' lives. In particular, ongoing mental health problems were often related to past experiences of sexual violence and abuse:

> *"We're in the court proceedings, there was another psychologist who, who then assessed that she'd [mother] had this mild learning difficulties and you know, it's probably been there for, for, for quite a while. I think it's compounded by her life experiences too, you know, she's come from a horrific family background in terms of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and so forth by, at the hands of her father, and you know, and we, we do know that she was abused by him into adulthood."* (Social services)

Where the violence was inter-generational, it was particularly difficult for parents to seek help, as one mother explained by reference to the behaviour of her 17 year old son:

> *"Yeah, he tries to rule me, tells me when I can't go out, when I can do things and when I can't. … The police have seen the bruises, they've seen the bruises on me, as well. Why I won't take anything further is because I get it all off the family, and I don't need it basically, so, that's why I won't take it any further because when I got the police out, they all turned up and they started having a go at me, said I was out of order for getting the police on him. So what am I supposed to do then, just let him do it? 'But he's your son, at the end of the day.' He might be, but why should I put up with that? If he, if he gets away with it then obviously he's gonna keep doing it, and if, and if he's got people that actually believe him, and not me, he's laughing, isn't he? … So, I mean, he's not been violent for a while now, so I'm quite lucky."* (Service user 22)

Stakeholders recognised that the issue of inter-generation violence (which was often a hidden and unacknowledged source of conflict) played a pivotal role amongst families working with IFSP, as one head teacher explained:

> *"We find it difficult and we are trained and experienced. How much more so for Mums who have little support?"* (Head teacher)

IFSP managers were also aware of the association between anti-social behaviour and domestic violence. It was not uncommon for teenagers in lone parent families to perceive themselves as being 'in charge' of the home It was recognised that there was an urgent need to reconfigure resources to facilitate direct work with young people to address some of the underlying concerns and causes of violent and abusive behaviour.

Summary

Talking to parents after they had exited IFSPs provided an opportunity to reflect on the impact of IFSP interventions on children's well-being. In just over half the tracked families, children's behaviour continued to be an issue of concern for parents, though for most of these families the troublesome behaviour was simply seen as being part of the normal process of growing. Parenting interventions and the provision of diversionary activities were the principal interventions employed by IFSPs to promote children's well-being. Here the focus was on fostering more constructive relationships between parent and child as well as addressing the lack of stimulating activities for young people.

Section 7: Sustaining change: personal agency and strength

The following section of the report focuses on the neighbourhoods in which families were living and serves to contextualise both the behaviour that led to complaints and the process of 'taking responsibility' that families are required to adopt when working with projects. Understanding of the neighbourhood context provides an important focus on the strength and agency required by families to achieve and sustain change within a context defined by multiple, complex and ongoing deprivation.

- Ongoing concerns about personal safety dominated families' accounts of their neighbourhoods, with many reporting that since exiting the IFSP they had been victims of crime, subject to ASB from neighbours, and were in a few cases living in fear.
- Contrary to popular belief, the evidence suggests that rather than constituting a distinct minority distinguishable from the 'law abiding majority' families tended to conform to the norms and values of the communities in which they lived.
- For many families deep-rooted social exclusion was compounded by the debilitating impact of mental health disabilities. In these circumstances achieving change required a high degree of personal agency and courage.

Drawing on data from interviews with both parents and agencies involved with families, this section of the report focused attention on firstly, the wider structural disadvantage evident at the neighbourhood level and secondly, the personal agency and strength required by families to not only change habitual patterns of behaviour but also to cope with the multiple disadvantages in their lives.

Neighbourhood context and community safety

To generate a broad overview of the kinds of areas that families referred to the projects are living in, we identified the ACORN profile that classifies the neighbourhoods in which families lived.[9] These are shown below in Table 7.1 and demonstrate that almost three-quarters (20/28) of the families who took part in the research were living[10] in areas characterised in the ACORN classification system as 'hard pressed'. This category purportedly contains the poorest areas in the country, where unemployment is high and incomes are low: *"these people are experiencing the most difficult social and economic conditions in the whole country, and appear to have limited opportunity to improve their*

[9] ACORN stands for 'A Classification Of Residential Neighbourhoods.' The marketing data firm CACI has produced this classification to include every street in England, Scotland and Wales, fitting all 1.9 million UK postcodes into 17 distinct groups and four categories which, in turn, contain 56 'typical' ACORN neighbourhood categories, described using over 125 demographic statistics and 287 lifestyle variables.

[10] For the three families who were homeless when the fieldwork was completed, we used their previous address.

conditions" (Caci 2004:19). The highest proportion of people within this category was classified as 'type 51', which comprise the group 'burdened singles'. Many who live in this sort of postcode are typically single parents and pensioners living in council or housing association properties that tend to be small terraced houses and flats in urban estates. The age breakdown of the population is unusual, with high numbers of people over 60 and children under 16. Unemployment levels are high and income levels are low. This ACORN type also has the lowest level of qualifications of all ACORN types. This supports the evidence that ASB tends to be concentrated in deprived urban areas (British Crime Survey) but also highlights how those accused of ASB are facing deprivation and social marginalisation and thus lends weight to the view that ASB is often a symptom of social exclusion (Millie et al 2005).

Table 7.1: Neighbourhood in which families lived by ACORN type

Acorn type	**Acorn category**	**Number of families**	**% families**	**% UK pop**
26: Younger white-collar couples with mortgages	'Comfortably off'	1	4%	26.6%
40: Young family workers	'Moderate means'	1	18%	14.5%
43: Older rented terraces		4		
45: Low income larger families, semis	'Hard pressed'	3	71%	22.4%
47: Low-rise terraced estates of poorly-off workers		4		
48: Low incomes, high unemployment, single parents		3		
49: Large families, many children, poorly educated		2		
50: Council flats, single elderly people		1		
51: Council terraces, unemployment, many singles		5		
54: Singles & single parents, high-rise estates		1		
55: Multi-ethnic purpose-built estates		1		
Core	N/A	1	N/A	N/A
Don't know	N/A	1	N/A	N/A
Total		**28**	**100%**	

In light of the fact that those accused of perpetrating ASB are often also victims of ASB

(Nixon et al 2006b), interviews with families were used to explore perceptions about local facilities, community relations, personal safety and fear of crime/ASB.

Reflecting the deprived and marginalised nature of their environment, many interviewees expressed negative views about their immediate neighbourhood. The lack of amenities for young people was highlighted as a primary concern by many, reflecting not only a simple need for more facilities such as youth clubs and play areas but also a desire for 'safer' public spaces for young people and children to use. A number of respondents, for example, described how they would not allow or were extremely reluctant to let their children play or meet with friends in local public parks due to perceived risks associated with vandalism, groups of older 'threatening' teenagers, drug dealing and drug paraphernalia, as well as risks from 'dangerous others' such as sex offenders:

> *"Well, we've got a park that is behind us, it's full of glass, it's full of kids that are smoking weed, it's full of heroin needles, it's full of bigger kids that are just, like, picking on the other kids. There's a paedophile running around. We've got people watching people in bushes and I'd rather have him at the front of the house playing football, plus there's no signs up saying 'No football'."* (Service user 9)

As a result, parents were often happier for their children to play in or around the family home so they could keep a close watch of them. In many cases, however, this method of parental risk management ran the danger of encouraging groups of children to gather in or about the home – exactly the behaviour, which had led to the original complaints about noise and youth nuisance. To avoid a repetition of complaints, parents reported that they used alternative approaches, either trying to confine their children to the home by encouraging them to spend their free time playing indoors or by taking them out on organised activities. The need to take action to restrict children's use of private space around the family home and public space in the neighbourhood was often seen as inequitable, particularly as many interviewees felt that their children had already been unfairly targeted and had therefore been punished in a way that others' children had not:

> *"I stopped them from even playing outside the house, I stopped their friends from calling for them ... and yet people who was complaining, their children were allowed to ride up and down the streets on bikes, screaming and shouting and laughing, and also their children were allowed to play ball games outside my house. But my children weren't allowed."* (Service user 19)

Related to the above concerns about children's safety, fear of crime also featured as a concern amongst individuals interviewed. This was in some cases based on specific experiences, which included violent and unprovoked assaults, sexual and racial harassment, and property damage:

> *"My son has to stay in now because he got attacked. … A bottle on his head, a vodka bottle smashed on his head and he was punched in the face and kicked in the ribs."* (Service user 10)

Furthermore, some families reported that on exiting the IFSP they were victimised by neighbours, as one family explained:

> *"We are victims of unfounded complaints, yes, especially when I'm getting accused of having a car that I haven't got, or playing music that's not even wired up."* (Service user 4)

In yet other instances, perceptions about risk were informed by particularly high profile crimes that had occurred in the locality:

> *"Well, last year some time there was about, I think there was a young lad who got caught for about, he must have done about six, seven rapes and at the time, it was on the path where we used to take the kids to the park and he was doing it to all people that had prams and babies with them."* (Service user 23)

Concerns engendered by these type of 'signal crimes', together with more generalised fears about personal safety, meant that many adults interviewed described not feeling safe in their local neighbourhood, particularly at night. Beyond issues associated with crime, interviewees also talked about wider problems of anti-social behaviour that was prevalent in the community. This included the presence of intimidating groups of young people, drunken behaviour, graffiti, litter, and noise nuisance:

> *"Weekends you'd have the local youths from the middle of the estate. They drink on this bridge here and they're a, they're a noise nuisance. I can't stop this happening, all I can do is ask them to move on."* (Service user 8)

Interestingly, in the same way that families referred to projects were perceived to be lacking in effective parenting skills, those who complained about the behaviour of young people commonly attributed the problem to poor parenting:

> *"I really blame the parents, because there's kids on this estate of like four, five, six and they're out till nine, ten o'clock at night playing. I find that disgusting. My kids are in. Jack's in bed at seven o'clock at night. Glen's in bed at half past. Nick, he's twelve, he's in bed at eight, nine o'clock at night. No way they're out till that time. … The parents don't want them in house."* (Service user 19)

These narratives of fear and anxiety illustrate the way that families who had worked with IFSP, rather than constituting a distinct minority with a lifestyle and set of values easily distinguishable from a 'law abiding' majority, tended to conform to the norms and values of the community in which they lived.

Disability and the prevalence of mental health conditions

Many of the families who took part in the research were living in circumstances characterised by extreme stress. This was caused not only by homelessness or by threats to their tenancy but also by the debilitating impact of mental health conditions that dominated both service users' and practitioners' accounts. In particular, depression-related illnesses impacted on both children and adults in a large number of families supported by IFSPs:

> *"I'm on a course for depression. I've always been, I've always had depression. It comes and goes. One minute I can be as high as a kite and about three months later I'm right at the bottom again. That's just the way it is. And it gets worse at Christmas. Through the winter months I'm really bad. Through the summer, summer months, though like, dipping back down to go to winter and it's just really hard work, trying to keep, keep above it, without being on medication."* (Service user 16)

As well as depression, there was also a high incidence of other serious, diagnosed mental health conditions, for which many were receiving medical support. Schizophrenic disorders affected four individuals in three families. At least two of these individuals had been sectioned under the mental health act and three had been treated during stays in psychiatric facilities. It is important to highlight both the role that these disabilities played in individuals' behaviour which was viewed by others to be 'anti-social' and the added challenges they posed for families in overcoming homelessness and housing insecurity:

> *"I hear voices and sometimes, I used to put me music on to distract myself but sometimes I'd have it banging out, because it'd be overpowering and obviously someone on this road who knows about my illness, has put a complaint in and said that, that I use my illness as a, that I play up on it. I don't know which neighbour it was, but obviously it's someone who knows me."* (Service user 8)

Where social tenants suffer from a mental health problem, under the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 a psychiatric assessment must be carried out prior to enforcement action being taken. The tracking study provided anecdotal evidence that such practices could be undertaken in a cursory way. For example, although the mother in one family suffered from a recognised schizophrenic disorder, the assessment concluded that when she felt the need to play loud music she should use headphones.

Personal agency and strength

As outlined in earlier sections of the report, the majority of the families referred to IFSPs were distinctly disadvantaged in a multitude of ways and could be described as suffering from 'deep' social exclusion (Levitas et al 2007). Despite shared socio-economic profiles and backgrounds, the outcomes associated with families differed widely across the sample, illustrating the complex relationship which exists between structural constraints, individual choices and action.

Regardless of the range of outcomes associated with different families simply surviving within *'the most difficult social and economic conditions in the whole country'* (Caci 2004:19) required families to exercise high levels of personal agency and strength. As participants told their stories, it was clear that narratives of struggle were interwoven with examples of resilience and agency. For example, in many families, particularly those headed by lone parent women, the absence of effective networks of support meant that achieving and sustaining change required strength and courage. A common theme emerging from participants' accounts focussed on the need to stay strong in the face of numerous adversities, as is illustrated in the following excerpt from an interview with a lone parent with six children:

> *"When it is all going on and like when you're actually stood there and you're in shock, and you're panicking because nobody believes you. … I've got six kids, I can't afford to like breakdown or anything else and then the kids are going to get took off me, so I just have to stay strong."* (Service user 1)

Through the experience of working with the IFSP, some service users reflected that they had gained in self-esteem and as a result now felt better equipped to deal with potential difficulties:

> *"I know full well that I'm stronger as well, that like you know, if I start getting a problem with a gang I wouldn't even know, I wouldn't let it get even started. I'm not having that rubbish anymore."* (Service user 26)

Even where family members were suffering from mental health problems, participants described how they were able to exercise more control over their lives, as one mother explained:

> *"I've found ways to deal with it, whereas before it was like, it were all just getting on top of me and I even went to the doctors at one point and got anti-depressants and, and then in the end I sorta like sat back and I thought, 'No, why am I taking these? I don't need 'em'. And, and then, since then I've never looked back so I won't go on 'em. I mean, I had me odd days where I'd feel really, really down, but, I've picked meself back up again and carry on."* (Service user 22)

Many of the participants attributed their improved ability to manage alone in part at least to the skills that they had developed whilst working with the IFSP. Furthermore, whilst they were sad to have lost the support of the IFSP worker, they felt that they had a renewed sense of optimism:

> *"I'll be lost without him but … I shall have to cope. I coped before and I can cope again."* (Service user 3)

Summary

The neighbourhoods in which families lived were typically amongst the poorest in the country, with high levels of unemployment, deprivation and social exclusion. Ongoing concerns about personal safety dominated families' accounts of their lives, with many reporting that since exiting the IFSP they had been victims of crime, subject to ASB from neighbours, and were in a few cases living in fear. The evidence suggests that in practice the boundaries between notions of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' are frequently blurred, with those constructed as 'perpetrators' of anti-social behaviour frequently also being the 'victims' of crime and anti-social behaviour. Furthermore, a number of families were suffering from the debilitating effects of mental health disabilities. Within this context of sometimes acute structural disadvantage, sustaining change required families to exercise a high level of personal agency and strength.

Section 8: The impact of IFSPs on existing support and supervision services

In addition to providing details on families' current situations, interviews with referral and other agencies were also used to explore the relationships between the IFSPs and partner agencies, the impact projects have had in terms of an increased or decreased demand for services, and the perceived cost-benefits and cost consequences of this form of intervention.

- Generally IFSP interventions were seen as a very welcome additional resource with the intensity and commitment of project workers singled out as a defining feature of IFSP practices.
- While the provision of core residential interventions were identified as a valuable resource for the most 'chaotic' families, it was also recognised that the provision of core units may have serious resource implications for local schools who are being asked to deal with children likely to have severe behavioural problems.
- Although local stakeholders could not place a financial value on the impact of IFSP interventions or the value to the wider community the projects were perceived to offer excellent value for money.

In the following section of the report the impact of IFSPs on existing support and supervision services are reported by reference to the following themes:

- The distinctive nature of IFSP interventions;
- The impact of IFSPs on other agencies;
- The impact on schools;
- The perceived cost-effectiveness of IFSPs and research on their longer-term financial consequences.

The distinctive nature of IFSP interventions

Local front-line officers generally described their relationship with IFSPs in positive terms, with interviewees frequently referring to the projects as "brilliant" or "very good". One interviewee went as far as to suggest that: "*I think it's the only government initiative around housing that I feel is positive*". Nearly all had only positive comments to make about the project with which they had worked and praised the project workers highly. In particular, interviewees from different agencies applauded the way in which IFSPs achieved a balance between a 'soft' and a 'firm' approach, effectively finding solutions for the most 'chaotic' families. There was also appreciation of the consistency and commitment demonstrated by project workers, with respondents highlighting both the unique nature

of IFSP interventions and the way project workers go 'over and above' what might be expected of them and simply will 'not let go', even when a case is particularly difficult. A majority of those interviewed acknowledged that IFSPs provide a service that other agencies could not. The distinctiveness of IFSPs was believed to be founded on the relatively small case-load of each project worker, which facilitates the intense level of support that was seen as the key defining characteristic of IFSPs.

The impact of IFSPs on other agencies

As the above comments illustrate, the majority of front-line officers felt that IFSPs offered a more intense and comprehensive form of support compared with that provided by other agencies. Social workers in particular felt there was a definite role for such projects and singled out residential interventions as being a useful additional resource. In part, this was thought to reflect the high thresholds of need required before social work teams will get involved with a family, but it also reflected concerns that with the development of strategic case management it was not always possible for social workers to obtain a full picture of a family's situations. In this context, the provision of residential family-centred interventions was very much welcomed. Front-line housing officers also felt that IFSPs filled a service gap and welcomed the brokerage role played by project workers in levering in support from other agencies, some of whom were seen as being very difficult to engage (e.g. social services and education). Furthermore, a number of housing officers felt that, in contrast to other social care agencies, IFSPs understood the need to protect the wider community whilst also addressing the needs of individual family members.

Given the valuable role that IFSPs have in brokering multi-agency support for families, interviews with local front-line officers were used to explore the extent to which agencies continued to support families once they had exited from the project. While in a few cases on-going support was provided by YOTs and social workers, many families described how they felt 'lost' when their case was closed and would have valued more input from other agencies.

A number of representatives from welfare agencies confirmed that there was a lack of integrated provision for families struggling to maintain their homes and deal with the troublesome behaviour of teenage children. In particular, education authorities were often singled out as failing to meet the needs of children who had been excluded from school. One YOT worker, for example, was critical of the fact that two young men she worked with, both of whom were the subject of ASBOs, had not been provided with school places when the family was rehoused the other side of the city:

> *"I don't want to condemn my colleagues in the education system, but I am very dismayed at how long it took [x] and [y] to be offered an education place. … A year down the line it still hadn't been resolved".* (YOT officer)

While working with IFSPs, many families had accessed services which had not previously been available to them and thus there is the potential for IFSPs to increase the work load for local agencies. This issue, which was explored further in interviews with a range of front-line officers, elicited a range of different responses. Some officers felt that, in practice, the work of IFSPs represented an extension of social work or YOT interventions. One social worker suggested that the IFSP worker had carried out much of the work that would normally be the responsibility of a social worker in the case in which he had been involved:

> *"She was sort of helping the parents, she was helping with the housing stuff but I thought that was the main focus, but she was also helping them with sort of boundaries, guidance, sanctions. That is something we would have done normally."* (Social worker 1)

In these circumstances, although the commitment exhibited by IFSP workers was commended, it was also of concern that project workers are not necessarily professionally trained and a number of respondents felt that there was a danger in employing people who had not been trained in professional values and principles:

> *"They are not professionally trained, they are cheaper to employ and they're easier to control."* (Social worker 1)

> *"There is always the worry that somebody might miss something that, as a qualified social worker, is something you might see."* (Social worker 2)

Reflecting these concerns, it was generally agreed that even when the IFSP was involved with a family there was still a very important role for mainstream services, as the following comment illustrates:

> *"What people have to realise is that [the IFSP] or a service like this, is not the sole service that works with this family. They are part of a menu of services; the other mainstream services still have their part to play. You can't buck pass and say, 'Oh this service is involved, therefore we are going to pull out.'"* (YOT officer)

The perspective offered by housing officers differed slightly from other welfare agencies, with many housing officers feeling that although initially IFSP interventions resulted in an increased workload – for example, involving attendance at review meetings – in the longer term it enabled cases to be resolved more quickly and reduced the need to take resource-intensive enforcement action.

Impact on schools

IFSP core residential accommodation has the potential to impact on local schools in a negative way. Many of the families living in core residential accommodation either have children who have been excluded from school, or who are infrequent attenders, or who are required to move schools as part of the programme of support. In two of the areas in which

residential accommodation was located, Head Teachers were interviewed to gauge the extent to which the IFSP had impacted on their work load. In one school, the Head Teacher initially had a number of reservations about the potential impact of accepting a large number of children from the IFSP. However, in practice the small number of pupils referred to the school had not presented a problem and on reflection the respondent felt that the IFSP made a very positive contribution to the local area:

> *"I had reservations, they knew that there would be families coming into the area with behavioural problems, which would be likely to impact on the neighbourhood. But the unit is relatively small and I knew that there would only be a small number of children requiring a primary school place every year – so far we have only had three referrals – one a year. If we had been deluged it would have been different and I would have been very concerned. In practice, it is delightful to see the children blossom when they move to the [IFSP] – it is very rewarding and sad when they leave."* (Head teacher, Project A)

At the same time, it was also pointed out that providing residential interventions did have serious resource implications for local schools, which should be recognised:

> *"But we are being asked to deal with the most difficult and damaged children and are not being given any additional resources. It has increased the workload of the school, I spend more time on child protection issues and have no additional resources. I could really do with some support and additional funding for more teaching assistants. I am in full support of projects like [the local IFSP] but it should be recognised that there are resource implications for local schools, who will be asked to take on extremely damaged children."* (Head teacher, Project A)

Other stakeholders also recognised the potential for IFSP residential interventions to impact on local schools:

> *"Some families that have been in the core unit have moved the children out from the schools where they were, and actually they've gone to the school opposite or to a local school. Now, that could potentially have an impact, because you could say we've got children who are going to those schools who have not had any boundaries put in place, had poor attendance at school, their educational levels might be lower than other families. I mean, we know all that. The research that we've done before tells us all that and so the schools might think, 'Well, do we want these children in our school?'"* (Lead officer, Project B)

The perceived cost effectiveness of IFSPs

The cost analysis of IFSPs reported in the earlier evaluation report (Nixon et al 2006b) found that projects (which in most cases had not reached maturity during the period of the fieldwork) offer excellent value for money as they have the potential to reduce considerably the short and longer term costs of many agencies, including those providing services

relating to housing, criminal justice, police, education and health. In addition, it was found that IFSPs deliver many intangible benefits – such as keeping families together and improving their quality of life and their prospects – and to society – for example, by making neighbourhoods and communities safer and more pleasant places.

As part of the final phase of the evaluation, further work was undertaken to explore whether agencies working with IFSPs could identify in any more detail the cost consequences associated with IFSP interventions. A number of stakeholders spoke about the paucity of robust data on the costs and cost consequences associated with different forms of ASB interventions:

> *"I don't think you can deal with one item of anti-social behaviour in isolation. … If you've got a family that's creating anti-social behaviour, the cost on the health care of the people that are suffering from the anti-social behaviour, there is all these hidden costs that we don't look at. The neighbours' quality of life will be affected, so it may affect their productivity at work, maybe it affects their health. … Then there is the family themselves. If the children's anti-social behaviour and the way the family has been run stops them from going to school, then from there, there is the issue of access to education or a job. There are long-term implications on the Benefit system right the way through to pensions, the health service with people becoming depressed and wanting medication, needing a doctor's time."* (LA lead officer, Project C)

In this context one authority was considering commissioning a piece of work to evaluate the costs associated with a 'typical' disruptive family:

> *"To take an average disruptive family and then look at, you know, how much it costs for the police to come out so many times, how much it costs for them to be excluded from school, how much it costs to have, you know, set up sort of panels in school. We want to establish how much it costs in terms of the realistic outcomes for a family. Chances are the oldest children are going to end up in a young offender institute or are going to end up tagged and how much does that cost?"* (LA lead officer, Project A)

In the absence of such data however, none of the representatives from local welfare and community support agencies were able to place a financial value on the impact of IFSPs interventions nor could they estimate the value to the wider community:

> *"It's hard to quantify that, really, because you can talk about the benefits to that family themselves and the fact they they've managed to keep their home and a roof over their heads and they may have a better quality of life because they've changed their behaviour, but then there is also the benefits to the wider community and whoever they might live next to and that's hard to quantify, isn't it? So my personal view is that it is cost-effective, you know, even though they have to put a lot of money and time into it, the wider benefits are worth it, although it's hard to quantify."* (Housing Officer, Project B)

As the above excerpt from an interview with a local housing manager illustrates, not withstanding the difficulty respondents had in identifying the financial impact of the project, almost without exception representatives from local welfare and community safety agencies affirmed that very significant cost savings were being made as a result of IFSP interventions. The potential savings to social landlords were thought to be particularly significant, with housing officers pointing to the reduction in the need to take expensive and resource intensive legal proceedings:

> *"I can't give you a precise and exact cost say, for instance, of actually, you know, taking legal action ... but if we can take early intervention to stop that, I mean, it's obviously going to cost less to the local authority [than] the cost of serving a notice and seeing that notice out through the courts."* (Housing Officer, Project D)

Housing officers also suggested that, beyond the potential savings in terms of reduced legal costs, IFSP interventions also impact positively on the wider housing management task, as one Housing Manager explained:

> *"You only have to have one, one problem family on an entire estate, which can just bring down the whole estate, and it's the old broken window scenario: If it's not fixed people will vote with their feet and they will move out and before you know it there's a rental loss because people are not in the properties and there's damage after that to the empty properties and then people dumping rubbish. And if all that can be addressed by intensively working with that problem family in a place like this, to try and curb that behaviour, then that itself will help to sustain the area and reduce costs"* (Housing Manager, Project A)

Furthermore, it was recognised that – unlike other ASB measures which may result in the displacement of problematic behaviour – outcomes associated with IFSPs have brought wider benefits to communities. Measuring the impact of such benefits was considered to be particularly difficult, as a number of respondents pointed out:

> *"You can't measure the social impact, you can't measure it, can you? The social capital."* (Councillor, Project B)

> *"It's people, it's not money. … Increasing social capital, that's a big one, it's invaluable because it makes people feel better, they feel safer and there is less fear of crime."* (ASB officer, Project B)

Stakeholders also spoke about the benefits in terms of improving individual family members' sense of well-being as well as reducing homelessness, with all the associated costs to the wider society:

> *"It's about giving that family at least the tools and the knowledge and the know-how … and that in itself it priceless, you know. You can't put a cost on families".* (Housing Manager, Project A)

> *"I have no idea of the actual costs, but in terms of the school you cannot put a price on the benefits for the children – the benefits are really priceless."* (Head teacher, Project A)

To accurately establish the cost consequences of IFSPs, it was believed important to try to capture the impact of IFSPs interventions on individual neighbourhoods, though it was recognised that there was no clear methodology for this type of work. In particular, it was considered to be very difficult to isolate the impact of one intervention from wider initiatives, as one LA lead officer explained:

> *"You're taking people from the whole of [X city] so what community do we go to, to sort of say that this is the impact? You can't, can you really? Why is it [the IFSP] that's done something? It might be serving an ASBO on a particular young person or it might be a health worker or a teacher suddenly realising that actually they can help a particular child."* (LA Lead officer, Project A)

While it was not possible to estimate the cost consequences of IFSP interventions on existing support and supervision services, the overwhelming message from a wide range of stakeholders involved with IFSPs was that such interventions were extremely valuable and brought with them a range of benefits:

> *"I mean, you know, what would you say? You just know intuitively that, or instinctively that it's the right thing to do and it's saving society an awful lot of future costs."* (LA Lead officer, Project A)

Recent research on longer-term financial consequences

The earlier report for this research (Nixon et al, 2006b) included a considerable amount of data from various studies about some of the possible short-term and longer-term cost consequences associated with anti-social behaviour. Table 8.1 summarises the main cost consequences associated with the IFSPs.

Table 8.1: Summary of main cost consequences associated with IFSPs

TO THE EXCHEQUER

Current Short-term Costs/ Resource Savings		Potential Short-term Costs Prevented	Potential Longer-term Costs Prevented
Possible Increase	**Possible Decrease**		
• Education • NHS • Social Services	• Housing • Police • Criminal Justice	• Legal and other costs associated with eviction • Foster/residential care (including secure provision) • Criminal Justice (e.g. Young Offenders Institute)	• Benefit payments • Police and Criminal Justice • NHS Plus: • Additional revenue via taxes on wages and family expenditure and NI contributions

TO INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

Short-term and Longer-term Benefits

- Improved family functioning and cohesion – less risk of family breakdown
- Improved financial management skills (including receiving all benefits to which entitled)
- Improved access to support and other services (e.g. for treating existing problems relating to health and education)
- Improved education and training, leading to acquisition of qualifications and skills which enhanced employment opportunities and life chances
- Improved lifetime earning potential
- Less reliance on benefits (and criminal activity) as source of income
- Better health (including mental health)
- Inter-generational benefits

Table 8.1: Summary of main cost consequences associated with IFSPs *(continued)*
TO NEIGHBOURHOODS, COMMUNITIES AND SOCIETY
• Reduced ASB, crime and fear of crime • Reduced neighbour disputes and tensions • Lower stress levels (leading to better health and improved productivity at work) • Neighbourhoods do not become run-down (reducing crime and numbers of voids and knock-on impacts for police and housing providers) • Improved social capital within communities • Potential to contribute to improved workforce productivity and international competitiveness

Since the evaluation report published in 2006 two valuable additions to the evidence base on the longer-term consequences associated with IFSP have been published. The findings from these reports are outlined in some detail below.

Financial Benefits of Employment

A recent report for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (Freud, 2007) has considered ways of reducing dependency and increasing opportunities in the context of exploring options for the future of welfare to work. Part of this research explores the fiscal benefits of increased employment. For example, it estimates that:

- The gross annual savings to the DWP of moving an average recipient of Incapacity Benefit into work is £5,900, with the wider exchequer gains (offsetting direct and indirect taxes paid with additional tax credits) raising this figure to £9,000 per year;
- The equivalent figures for a recipient of Job Seeker's Allowance are £4,100 and £8,100, respectively.
- The DWP's gross savings on lone parents are £4,400 (with no further Exchequer savings because of the weight of extra childcare elements of the tax credit system balancing other tax revenues).

The report also recognises that those on benefits often do not work for many years. For example, once a person has been on incapacity benefits for a year, they are on average on benefit for eight years. If the full annual Exchequer saving of getting a person on incapacity benefits into work is around £9,000, a genuine transformation into long-term work for such an individual is currently worth around £62,000 per person to the State[11]. Although the IFSPs do not have increasing employment as a stated objective, these figures provide a good indication of some of the potential longer-term cost consequences for the Exchequer

[11] This figure is the Net Present Value of eight years' worth of total Exchequer savings from an incapacity benefits recipient, discounted at HM Treasury's recommended Social Time Preference Rate of 3.5%.

of periods of unemployment. Improving family members' education, skills and training (e.g. through or as a consequence of the project's intervention) will reduce the likelihood of unemployment and therefore of such costs being incurred by the Exchequer.

The importance of acquiring education and qualifications is also recognised within the DWP research. Data are presented from the UK's Labour Force Survey showing that about half of working age adults with no qualifications are not in employment. Data for OECD countries on education levels show that relatively high proportions of adults in the UK have low or no qualifications. Over time this could damage the UK's competitiveness and entrench poverty, given the increasingly global nature of the world economy and its need for skilled workers. The DWP report also emphasises some of the benefits for health and well-being associated with work, based on other research undertaken for DWP (Waddell and Burton 200612), which finds that:

> *"There is a strong evidence base showing that work is generally good for physical and mental well-being. Worklessness is associated with poorer physical and mental well-being. Work can be therapeutic and can reverse the adverse health effects of unemployment. That is true for healthy people of working age, for many disabled people, for most people with common health problems and for social security beneficiaries. The provisos are that account must be taken of the nature and quality of work and its social context: jobs should be safe and accommodating. Overall, the beneficial effects outweigh the risks of work, and are greater than the harmful effects of long-term unemployment or prolonged sickness absence. Work is generally good for health and well-being."* (Waddell and Burton, 2006)

Therefore IFSPs have considerable potential to improve long-term health and well-being (with benefits to the Exchequer and the individuals themselves) if they can increase the employment opportunities and prospects for family members.

The Costs of Exclusion

The Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics has undertaken some research for the Prince's Trust on the costs associated with youth disadvantage in the UK (Prince's Trust 2007). This work focuses on three main aspects:

- Youth unemployment;
- Youth crime;
- Educational underachievement.

It draws on data from a wide range of sources and explores the inter-relationships between the above aspects and their impact on social exclusion. It also considers some of the costs for individuals and for the economy (including the UK's productivity and international

[12] Gordon Waddell and A Kim Burton. *Is Work Good for your Health and Well-being?* A review for the Department for Work and Pensions, The Stationery Office, September 2006.

competitiveness) associated with young people being 'not in education, training or employment' (i.e. being 'NEET'). For example, there is a significant cost to the individual in terms of reducing their lifetime chances and opportunities (e.g. youth unemployment has been estimated as imposing a wage scar on individuals of between 8% and 15% over time). Youth unemployment and inactivity are estimated to cost the Exchequer about £20 million per week in Job Seeker's Allowance and to result in a productivity loss to the UK economy of over £70 million per week. The estimated cost of youth crime in Great Britain is in excess of £1 billion per year. Furthermore, underachievement at school (with its resultant impact on skill levels and the workforce) is also partly responsible for the relatively poor performance of the UK economy and the productivity gap between the UK and its competitors. The UK has between 10% – 25% lower output per hour than France, Germany and the US, much of which can be attributed to poorer levels of skills (and a shortfall of capital investment). Being NEET also has knock-on consequences on health status (including on mental health/depression), which in turn imposes long-term costs on individuals and society.

The following quotes are taken from the report. They illustrate the importance and cost-effectiveness (for individuals, neighbourhoods and society) of initiatives such as the IFSPs that reduce anti-social behaviour and youth offending and promote educational achievement:

> *"The cost of educational underachievement in the labour market in terms of unemployment and wage penalties is significant. And underachievement at school appears to increase the probability of turning to crime and negatively affects the health and emotional well-being of the individuals concerned."*

> *"[This research] reveals that interventions helping young people get into work, stay on in education or avoid crime represent excellent value for money given the measurable costs of social exclusion."*

Summary of Cost Consequences

The fieldwork interviews showed clearly that although stakeholders could not quantify the economic impacts of the IFSPs, they were in no doubt that they delivered many benefits for individuals, families and local services as well as for neighbourhoods and communities. The two recent research reports reinforce some of the longer-term consequences (including those relating to costs) if employment opportunities are not enhanced through promoting education and training to gain qualifications and develop skills.

Section 9: Managing community relations and IFSP core residential accommodation

Three of the six projects included in the evaluation provided residential interventions for families who were already homeless or at acute threat of homelessness at the point at which they were referred to the project and/or who had particularly complex needs. Families living in core accommodation, typically self-contained flats within the IFSP building, are required to adhere to a set of rules. These vary between projects but usually comprise a requirement for family members to be in the accommodation by a set time in the evening, with visitors only allowed if prior permission has been granted.

The earlier evaluation report highlighted how this type of intervention was commonly employed for the most 'challenging' families (Nixon et al 2006b). Providing families with a residential intervention was very resource intensive and not all the IFSPs considered that investing in this type of work was either desirable or represented value for money. It was also recognised that there could be a 'fad' element to such provision, which runs the risk of becoming the target for local community disquiet (Nixon et al 2006b). The tracking study provided an opportunity to explore these issues in greater depth. The following section reports on:

- The rationales for core residential units;
- The context within which residential interventions were developed;
- Residents' and stakeholders' views on the impact of the IFSP on the wider community;
- Lessons learnt from IFSP experiences.

The rationale for residential interventions

As the earlier evaluation report illustrated, providing families with highly structured residential support was identified as one of the most controversial and challenging aspects of IFSP work. Project managers identified a wide range of advantages and disadvantages associated with this type of provision and concluded that the decision whether or not to use residential interventions could only be determined by reference to local service priorities (Nixon et al 2006b). This final element of the evaluation provided an opportunity to explore these service priorities in greater depth. Interviews with lead stakeholders who had been centrally involved in the decision to set up core residential accommodation revealed that in all three case study areas the rationales for developing a residential form of intervention were remarkably similar, clustering around the following themes:

Avoidance of displacement

The IFSPs were devised as part of well-developed ASB strategies, which recognised the inter-related nature of prevention, enforcement and resettlement action. In this context, displacement caused as a result of enforcement action was a major cause of concern:

> *"We were well aware that the families were moving away, going from one part of the city to another part of the city. And whilst we were sorting the issue out for residents where the family used to live, we were actually just creating another problem in another part of the city where they then went on to live."* (Lead officer, Project A)

Respite to communities

Stakeholders were aware that some communities had been very adversely affected by anti-social behaviour associated with a small number of families. Such families were perceived to have the knowledge and skills to 'work the system', which meant that even where enforcement action had been taken, families re-emerged in the same neighbourhoods. The failure to stop the nuisance behaviour in turn impacted very negatively on community relationships, with residents feeling powerless to take action and lacking confidence that anything would be done:

> *"We saw it as an integral thing really that was certainly part of our homeless prevention service because we have, we had a core group of people that would come through the service over and over again."* (Lead officer, Project C)

Addressing deep-rooted underlying problems

Stakeholders recognised that for many families ASB was a symptom of a wide range of underlying problems. By providing families with a highly structured environment, it was hoped that it would be possible to address some of the underlying causes of the problem behaviour:

> *"It fits in to our closing the gap policy and, you know, giving everybody a chance, getting kids into school. So it's addressing lots of those wider concerns as well as just being about anti-social behaviour." (Councillor, Project B)*

The need for an intensive and structured form of intervention

For families with particularly complex needs, the provision of outreach support was not seen as being sufficiently intense to successfully help families achieve change. In these circumstances it was felt that a more intensive and structured form of intervention was required. Thus, the motivation to establish residential interventions in part reflected stakeholders' views that such families deserve to be given a second chance:

> *"As we were beginning to work with the most challenging families, we were finding that some needed to be taken out of their lifestyle that they were in and to sort of be given some respite and a fresh start. And that's what the core unit offers in a way. … And some families were so chaotic that you just couldn't support them on an outreach basis at all."* (Lead Officer, Project B)

When the three IFSPs were being set up in early 2003-04, ASB strategies tended to be dominated by enforcement approaches. In the absence of any established schemes in England, it was unclear whether the use of residential units would prove to be an effective response to persistent ASB problems. In this context, there was agreement amongst lead officers that an essential element of the development process was the need to secure political support. Indeed, obtaining the support of local councillors was pivotal to the successful integration of the project within the wider community:

> *"I worked very closely with [the lead LA officer who] kept me completely informed by email what was going on all the time and I, I used to pass on all my complaints direct to her and we used to work together".* (Councillor, Project C)

It was not only councillors who had to be persuaded of the value of this type of intervention. Equally important was the need to reassure front-line housing and social care officers, who were initially very apprehensive:

> *"I was a bit concerned that we might be ghettoising in terms of the residential bit, that we, we'll, we perhaps might be lumping all of these families together".* (Social worker, Project A)

Once it had been agreed in principle that a core residential intervention would be established, a suitable building and site had to be found. This required careful management of relationships with the communities within which the core unit was to be based.

Areas in which residential services are located

The three case study projects providing residential interventions are located in very different types of areas and therefore adopted different methods of managing relationships with the wider community. Levels of visibility varied between the three projects. In two projects, after a high profile inception phase with local residents expressing high levels of fear and anxiety, positive relationships have been developed with members of the local community. In the third project providing residential support, the project was launched under the umbrella of a successful and established NCH Neighbourhood Family Centre which had been in existence for over 10 years. In this area, positive relations had already been established between NCH and the local community and a strategic decision was taken for the IFSP to maintain a low profile in the area.

These three different approaches to managing community relationships were determined by the particular circumstances within which each of the projects was established. These are outlined in some detail below.

Project A: The residential element of the project is located in an area described as a hard pressed, inner city existence with the majority tenure being LA low-rise houses and high-rise flats (ACORN classification system). Interviews with local stakeholders confirmed that the area was one of the most deprived in the city, with high levels of unemployment and a lack of local facilities. The area was described by one stakeholder as *"an anti-social behaviour hotspot on its own, really"* and had been the subject of a wide range of anti-social behaviour interventions, including two dispersal orders. Local residents confirmed that the neighbourhood has a reputation for being undesirable and problematic, as the following description illustrates:

> *"Run down and a little bit on the rough side … when I first moved to the area 20 years ago we found we was harassed on the first night of moving in. Youths throwing stones at the windows, knocking on the doors. … It looks rougher now in parts than what it is because it's, it's like derelict, there's lots of waste ground. There's nothing for the little ones, so they're left to play on the street and neighbours' gardens, and before you know it they're 12, 13 and jumping on people's cars and … it's a game to them, they don't see any, any wrong in it, it's a game."* (Resident 2)

Although the area was not perceived to be a very popular neighbourhood, many people referred to high levels of social cohesion amongst residents, many of whom have lived in the area all their lives. Residents living near Project A reflected that the area had a strong sense of community, with people looking out for each other:

> *"An undesirable area, isn't it, for outsiders that don't know the area. But for people that are born and bred round here, they don't see it as a problem. I mean a few years ago it did have quite a bad reputation, and I think it's unemployment and you know, youth culture the way it is at the moment. But things are changing, you know, people want to stay because of the regeneration that's going on".* (Resident 1)

In common with many hard pressed areas, while it was acknowledged that there were high levels of anti-social behaviour, respondents also reported that there was a strong 'no grassing' culture:

> *"They do have this culture about they tell you nothing because it comes back to them and I can, I can, I can understand it. They don't report things to the Police, they sort it out themselves."* (Police Beat Officer)

The rationale to locate the project in this area was in part informed by the fact that it is close to the city centre and there is a good infrastructure of schools and health services and well developed partnerships between community safety agencies. It was also perceived as "*an area that actually had the need as well, where we had the sort of families who would benefit from the service*" (LA officer). This view was not shared by local residents, and the decision to locate the project in their neighbourhood was initially deeply unpopular. A local resident who had subsequently become a neighbourhood warden for the area explained how frightened people felt:

> *"We just thought, 'They're going to put all the criminals and the crooks and the hooligans all in this place, all in the middle of [the estate] and we're all gonna get robbed and…'. That was my initial thought … and I remember seeing a picture in the paper and thinking, 'Oh my god, it's round the corner from where I live'."* (Resident/ Neighbourhood Warden)

A residents' action group was set up opposing the City Council's plans and a number of large public meetings were held. The strength of the local opposition was fuelled by adverse media coverage. As one local stakeholder explained: "*the media got hold of it and, and, and we had a, an uphill struggle, I think*" (see further Section 11). It was widely believed that the IFSP would bring increased levels of criminality to an area that already had its own ASB problems:

> *"There was fly posters everywhere. Fly posters, 'We don't want these families'. Paedophiles, drug dealers … we were gonna get robbed. They were gonna be those kinda families that were really … kind of this. It was just like a nightmare 'cos we thought, 'Well we've got enough with what we're living with, we don't want anymore coming to the area'. … You're looking at three, four hundred people turning up every night in hail, rain and snow."* (Resident 2)

The City Council and the IFSP responded to community disquiet quickly and, through the skilful negotiations of project staff, relationships with the local community improved. When the renovation work started on the building, however, residents' concerns were further fuelled by the perceived inequity of the investment, as the local Housing Manager explained:

> *"This block was almost derelict when they took over … and that was the biggest bugbear from local residents. When they saw how much money was being pumped into it, and they saw that their communal doors were forever getting broken and the graffiti, the staircases and it was getting all the new windows and the doors and everything. … People were quite rightly saying, 'If you can do it for them, why not us? You know, we live here and we've been telling you for months and years about the condition of the place'. … All you could do was kind of throw your hands up and you know, it's a different budget and it was this and that, but it did not go down well, it really didn't and understandably."* (Housing Manager)

In response to these concerns project staff were proactive in promoting the project as a resource to the community. The project manager established regular meetings with the local residents' association and introduced clear protocols for dealing with complaints and monitoring responses. Residents were invited into the project premises and offered use of the facilities. An open day was held and project staff became involved in developing diversionary activities for local young people, including running a football club and a homework club. Working closely with the Chair of the local residents' group, the IFSP

sponsored the development of a memorial garden in land adjacent to the core unit. A number of residents described how effective this approach had been in gradually changing people's attitudes toward the IFSP:

> *"This building as a whole it's been open to the community in terms of letting the community use the resources and I think that has been fantastic. … We were having residents arguing amongst themselves as to who was going to be on board here, 'cos they wanted to get involved, they wanted to be part of the change. I think it was a case of if you can't beat them join them. And it really did happen, where residents were coming in and saying, 'Where can we help, you know, how do we fit in?' They wanted to know how they could best work with [the IFSP]."* (Chairman of the Residents' Association)

A further factor that was influential in changing local opinion was the fact that one of the leading opponents of the project self-referred to the project and started to work with them on an outreach basis. This resident described how initially she had been reluctant to tell other people that she had sought help from the project, but as her confidence grew she became an active ambassador for this form of intervention:

> *"I kept it quiet for a while, I wouldn't let on, I'd rather go round to the office than them come to me at home. But then after a while I thought, 'Nothing to be ashamed of' and then I started telling people. Then I got a job as a play worker with the local Family Support unit. … You're labelled and that is it, you're just labelled, unless you do something about it. Like now, people say to me, 'Oh, I do think you're a good un', you should be really proud now you're back at work."* (Resident 3)

Three years after the residential unit was established, local agency staff described how attitudes towards the IFSP had changed with many local residents using the facilities offered by the project.

> *"The local, the residents have gone full circle now, they use the facilities here for their meetings and so they're quite willing now to come in, use the room as their meeting room for the Local Residents' Association. The Police use it a lot for local tasking meetings … there are good facilities and also the kids … come and ask to use the sports equipment next door."* (Local Police Beat Officer)

While there was evidence that the relationship between the IFSP and local residents had been transformed, it was also acknowledged that a small minority of residents were still antagonistic to the project being based in their neighbourhood. This view was not believed to be held by the majority of residents, who were reported to be fully in favour of the IFSP and now thought that it was a positive way of working with families. The dramatic change in the attitudes of members of the community towards the project was in part thought to reflect a more nuanced understanding of this type of intervention, combined with concern to give families a second chance:

> *"Because a lot of the families, now especially old ones, are respecting the project because it is here and there's things going round saying everybody deserves a second chance".* (Resident 2)

The extent to which the IFSP had been successful in changing people's attitudes was acutely summed up by the Chair of the local residents' group, who concluded that the IFSP was:

> *"Not the monster people thought it was, it's just a building with people in it. It's just as though [the project] are next door neighbours, they've accepted them and adopted them."* (Resident 1)

Project B: Here the decision about where to locate the project was made after a six month, borough-wide feasibility study had been carried out, in which it was established that there was a need for both an outreach support and residential service. After considering a number of different locations it was decided to locate the project in an out-of-town estate in which NCH already had an established presence. Suitable premises comprising a block of 6 flats was identified and while necessary works were being undertaken to convert the building to office accommodation and 2 residential units, the IFSP was co-located in the nearby NCH Family Centre offices.

Like Project A, the area is characterised as being a hard pressed, impoverished area with high levels of unemployment (ACORN classification system). The majority tenure is single dwelling council housing, which was described as being low demand. Although the area is served by local facilities with a small shopping centre and a local housing office, they were referred to as "*not the best of facilities*". More detailed descriptions of the area varied between stakeholders, but most frequently it was typified as being an area well known for anti-social behaviour problems, including youth-related nuisance and general lifestyle clashes involving noise nuisance. The area was described as having a 'no grassing' culture, with low levels of trust between residents and the police. The local secondary school had recently come out of special measures and the head teacher spoke of the poor reputation of the area which he believed reflected very high levels of deprivation:

> *"It's statistically one of the poorer areas in the country, seventy percent plus of the students that come here are in the twenty percent worst deprived areas in the country and thirty percent from the worst five percent. And the deprivation indices are based around nine areas of deprivation, which would include education, housing, employment, crime etc, abuse of substances. So all those combined indices, there are some pretty bad figures for this area. The perception is that it's not a place to want to come."* (Head Teacher)

Like local stakeholders in Project A, a number of stakeholders in Project B expressed the view that the area was a suitable location for an IFSP because it would be offering services to people who lived in similar areas:

> *"I hate to say this, but I think if you are an affluent area you'd have difficulty, I think it's because it's on a council estate it's integrated better."* (Councillor, Project B)

Interestingly, this perception that better integration could be achieved by locating IFSPs in areas of social housing was challenged by the approach taken in Project C, where the residential element of the project was located in an affluent conservation area (see further below).

For the first 18 months, Project B's IFSP operated an outreach only service. This had the benefit of giving staff time to establish a base in the neighbourhood and to make contact with local residents prior to the opening of the residential element of the project. Consultation with local residents was restricted to people living within the immediate vicinity of the core block, with letters sent explaining what the project aimed to do and inviting people to open information sessions. In contacting residents, a joint decision was made by the IFSP and the local Housing Manager to avoid using the term 'anti-social behaviour', which was seen as a label that provoked fear and anxiety amongst local residents and also served as a disincentive to families' engagement with the project. The project preferred to describe the IFSP in more neutral language, using alternative terms such as 'families with challenging behaviour':

> *"We basically told local residents this derelict block of flats that you've had to put up with looking at, this eyesore for the last two years is, it's now going to be brought back into use, this is what it's going to be, but very brief. … 'Helping families change behaviour to become sustainable tenants', it was put in a very positive way to people."* (Housing Manager)

The low profile approach taken by Project B was seen as being critical to forming successful relationships with the local community. Furthermore, as the project took an active role in regenerating a building which had empty for a number of years, feedback from residents was reported as being very positive. One of the local councillors reflected on how initially he had been concerned about the profile the IFSP would have in the community and feared that people would perceive the project as bringing, "*The worst families in the world into their estate*". In practice these concerns were not realised and he concluded that the project, "*Just gets the job done. Nobody knows they're there really, they probably do know it but it doesn't alter their lives*". This view was shared by a number of other local stakeholders, who agreed that the low visibility of the project was in part the result of the discrete style of management but also could also be attributed to the small, self-contained nature of the provision, which consisted of only two residential units:

> *"I'd say the project has very little impact on the local community because most of the time the, the people that are in the two residential units within that project aren't from this area anyway. I mean when you think they have only got two units for the whole borough, they're not usually local people and the local, the local community don't even know they're there. The project operates very discretely and people, most of the local residents don't even know it's there."* (Housing Manager)

A further factor that was thought to be an important element in the successful integration of the core unit within the immediate neighbourhood were the strict protocols about visitors and the intensive support provided to families when they moved into the residential unit. While these measures were thought to be effective in the long run for both the project and, more importantly, the individual families concerned, it was recognised by the lead officer from the borough that living in such conditions could be extremely challenging for family members:

> *"Initially those families are seen every single day. And they do come and they are chaotic, and we've got strict policies in place. Generally they're not allowed visitors for eight weeks at all. And that's usually the first thing. The biggest problem that they've got in the community, that in their home, how they live their lives in the community is that it's just an open house. And the house has become what residents call a doss house and it's got all kinds of people coming in from all over. Just staying all day and night, beeping, this that and the other. So that, for them to come into the core unit and have like a no visitors approach for eight weeks is really tough."* (Lead Officer)

The strategy adopted by Project B to maintain a low visibility within the community proved successful in preventing community conflict and three years later the project is fully integrated into the neighbourhood. No complaints had been received about any of the families who had lived in the IFSP core unit and levels of ASB in the local area were reported as being unaffected by the presence of the IFSP. Project B continues to maintain a low profile in the area with some key stakeholders (including the local beat officer) unaware of exactly where the residential unit is located. This can be seen as a positive indicator that moving families into core accommodation had not had any detrimental impacts on the neighbourhood. On the contrary, relations with the project's immediate neighbours were reported as being harmonious, with a number of families from the core unit working with other residents on a community arts project to produce a series of decorative tiles for the block.

Project C: In common with Projects A and B, in Project C the choice of where to locate the residential element of the IFSP was governed in part by pragmatic concerns as to the availability of suitable accommodation. However, the type of neighbourhood chosen differed in many significant respects from the other two projects. Rather than being based in a hard pressed council estate, Project C was located in a leafy conservation area comprising large Victorian stone built houses, most of which are privately owned. The area is characterised as being a prosperous area populated by multi-ethnic, young educated, urbanites (ACORN classification system). More detailed descriptions of the area were sought from local residents, who agreed that the area was indeed an affluent area containing a mixture of migrant student households and longer-term permanent residents.

Located close to the city centre, the local hospital and the university, the area has had a chequered history and until the early 1990s had been a notorious red light district. During the 1990s a very active residents' association was set up to campaign for traffic

calming measures and action to address problems caused by street prostitution and drug abuse. Close relations were formed with the local police beat officers and a strong sense of community developed. One resident who had lived in the area for almost 30 years described how there was a strong sense of cohesion amongst the more permanent community:

> *"We're right on the sort of dividing line between two quite different areas. To our right, towards the unit there are large stone built houses. … Round the corner you've got terraced housing – some of them quite large. Again, a mixture of students or multi-occupation and private properties. In both parts … there is, there are a core of people who have been here for quite a long time. … this area, which is an old upper class Victorian housing estate, there is the [residents'] association, 'cos it's a conservation area. So people meet together, and you know, they're the same sort of economic group and you know, they have cheese and wine parties every now and again and that sort of thing."* (Resident 3)

The IFSP was situated in a council-owned property which had previously been used as temporary homelessness accommodation. Due to funding constraints, the project had only a very short time to become operational. Within three months the building had been refurbished to provide 3 self contained flats and office accommodation and the IFSP started to receive referrals. At this time, in early 2003, there were no similar projects up and running in England and there were few guidelines on how such a project should be managed. This meant that initially the project operated with under-developed referral processes and security systems. There was also a problem in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced staff. For the first six months the project was staffed via secondments from Housing, Social Services and other LA departments.

Within 2 months of families moving into the core residential accommodation, local residents became very concerned about a dramatic increase in serious incidents of ASB. When asked when they first became aware that the building was being used by the IFSP, residents described what had happened in the following terms:

> *"I think it might have been with the handbrake turns burning rubber in the middle of the night."* (Resident 3)

> *"And cars being set on fire." (Resident 4)*

Although immediate action was taken by the IFSP to curtail the problem, serious disturbances and trouble continued with "*the police becoming very, very heavily involved*". The lead LA officer explained how part of the difficulty was caused by the fact that none of the children living in the core residential unit were in school and throughout the first summer the project was operational there were very high levels of ASB incidents in the neighbourhood. As relationships between the project staff and local residents became increasingly strained, the local councillor became involved:

> *"There were, there were problems when it was first set up and it was set up very, very quickly and the reason I got involved in it was because I was getting lots of emails and telephone calls from local residents about these children running wild around the area, cars being damaged etc."* (Local councillor)

Not surprisingly, at this stage local residents were united in being firmly against the unit being located in the neighbourhood:

> *"At the time they wanted the whole place closed down and what they said to me was, you know, 'You do, you do realise we're gonna take every legal form of action within the law we can to get you closed down'."* (LA Lead officer)

Following a series of meetings between residents, local councillors and the project management, some families were moved from the residential unit on to outreach support, others were evicted, and more robust admission and security procedures were put in place. As the incidence of ASB in the neighbourhood decreased, local residents began to accept the unit. Reflecting on their experiences four years after the IFSP core block was established, residents were clear that the measures undertaken by the IFSP had been successful:

> *"The housing services realised that this thing was going horribly wrong and I think it was very stressful for the people managing it. So I think what happened was the council realised that they needed to get these families out, but actually it was very difficult for them to just evict these people. They had to go through this process so eventually by, I think it must have been by October, they must have moved the troublemakers out and they started again. The families had gone and we've never had a problem since, which is absolutely amazing, isn't it?"*
>
> *Q: "So are you quite happy for the core unit to stay in this area?"*
>
> *A: "Absolutely, yes, absolutely, I have no problem with it at all, I can't praise the management highly enough".* (Resident 1)

While some local residents still felt that in an ideal world they would prefer the project's residential accommodation to be located elsewhere, they acknowledged that once the initial teething problems had been overcome there had been no further disturbances. Indeed, perhaps contrary to expectations, a number of local residents expressed the view that citing the IFSP in an affluent area was a positive attribute since it provided an opportunity for project residents to experience living in a cohesive community where individuals took responsibility for their behaviour:

> *"And not putting it in a middle class neighbourhood where people expect certain things, is actually, what's the point? Because if you just put them next to their neighbours who are exactly … who are not as bad as them, but you know could be,*

given the right circumstances. I mean, we all could be given the right circumstances, but you know, when somebody … when you live in a street where they have high expectations. And you're told when you move in here, you know, they don't like, they don't do that here. I mean you know, 'What do you mean, don't do that here?' Well they just don't; that's not how they live, you know". (Resident 2)

Lessons learnt from the experiences of the case study IFSPs

The IFSPs with core accommodation have all been operational since 2003-04 and by the conclusion of the field work in 2007 had reached a level of maturity that enabled stakeholders to reflect on what lessons had been learnt from their experiences. Analysis of these responses highlighted a number of interrelated themes which were thought to be important considerations when setting up this type of intervention.

Careful selection of an appropriate site

There was no blue print as to what type of neighbourhoods IFSP core accommodation should be located in, with the selection of a site dependent on the availability of a suitable building located in an area with an adequate infrastructure of transport, shopping and other facilities. Also important was the existence of a local network of community safety agencies that, if necessary, could act as ambassadors for the project within the neighbourhood. While residents' views were also considered to be important, it was also clear that the choice of area in which to locate residential accommodation should not solely be determined by this factor.

Development of clear communication strategies

There was unanimous agreement amongst stakeholders that once a suitable site for residential interventions had been found it was important to develop a proactive strategy to 'market' the initiative within the local community. Within the case study projects a range of different 'marketing' strategies were employed. Some involved a high profile presence whilst others were more low key, but they all shared the aim of reassuring residents and taking action to combat preconceived fears and address misconceptions that the IFSP would stigmatise the neighbourhood. At the very least, it was thought important that people living in the immediate vicinity of the IFSP should be provided with basic information about the work of the project and given clear guidance about whom to contact if problems arise.

The need to establish good relationships with residents

The type of relationships IFSPs develop within local residents varied from one project to another, reflecting the needs of the individual neighbourhoods. While in one project good relationships with the local community had been established by encouraging residents to use the project facilities, in other areas IFSPs had become integrated into the community simply by ensuring there was no cause for complaints. In one of the case study areas

community responses were believed to have been fuelled by negative media coverage and this could cause problems for the roll-out programme of IFSPs, which have been universally described in the popular press as 'sin bins' (see section 11).

Establishment of robust management and admissions procedures

Perhaps the most critical lesson learnt from the experiences of IFSPs with core accommodation was the need to ensure that robust management and admission procedures are in place prior to accepting referrals. Running a residential intervention was seen as being skilled work, with a need to balance the needs of individual families with the needs of the community. Thus in deciding which families should be offered a residential place it is important to examine the collective profile of the families living in the core unit.

Summary

Although core residential interventions were used for a small minority of families (for example, only 11 out of 256 families were provided with residential support over the period 2004 -2005), it is this element of project interventions that has consistently been highlighted by the media as the defining feature of IFSPs. Employing pejorative language, residential interventions have variously been referred to as 'sins bins', 'tearaway towers', and 'cages for the neighbours from hell' (Section 11). While these simple, apocryphal labels do not reflect the reality of this form of intervention, they have been very influential in [in] forming the public profile of IFSPs. They can be seen to have had a significant negative impact on community relations in the areas in which the residential units are located.

As the above vignettes of the three case study areas in which residential IFSP interventions were located illustrate, establishing such interventions can be fraught with difficulties and requires skilful management by experienced officers. Lead officers were well aware of the need to manage relationships with local stakeholders and the wider community, "*You've got to understand that you're going to go through the grief, you're going to go through very difficult time*" . The specific approach adopted in each of the case study areas to managing relationships with local residents differed significantly from one area to another, but as the projects have matured strong and supportive relationships with the local community have successfully been established in all three areas. Indeed some stakeholders felt that the presence of the IFSP brought a range of benefits to the local area. These benefits included greater security, better-maintained buildings, joint activities for community members and project residents, and – in the case of Project A – increased facilities for residents in a hard-pressed area.

Section 10: The wider impact of IFSPs in building safe and sustainable communities

Introduction:

One of the aims of the IFSPs is to ensure that families are able to sustain a positive lifestyle without being the cause of ASB to the communities in which they live. Therefore the projects have a role in increasing community stability. Evaluation of the impact IFSPs have on communities troubled by persistent anti-social behaviour has proved particularly difficult to address for a number of methodological reasons (see further section 2). As a result of confidentiality requirements combined with the fact that over half the sample of families had moved neighbourhoods since exiting the IFSP it was not feasible to interview residents in areas where families are currently living. Valuable data however, was collected from representatives of agencies who were involved with family members to obtain their views on the impact of behavioural change on the wider community. Housing officers along with community wardens, specialist ASB officers and local police beat officers were best placed to report on the impact of interventions on the wider community. Analysis of these data revealed that a range of measures were used to gauge the extent to which IFSPs may have a positive impact on local communities.

- IFSPs interventions were believed to be a more effective and sustainable solution to ASB as compared to other forms of enforcement action;
- Local stakeholders and residents were reported to welcome IFSPs role in breaking the cycle of deprivation and poor behaviour;
- A number of stakeholders highlighted the way in which IFSP interventions were effective in bringing relief to communities which had been troubled by persistent ASB.

Better than eviction

As outlined in the previous section of the report (Section 9), one of the rationales for developing an IFSP was to take action to prevent the displacement of ASB from one area to another. The extent to which this underlying aim had been achieved was explored with local stakeholders, many of whom reflected that there had been a sea change in the way in which ASB was dealt with in their area. Previously the first response of many agencies was to seek to evict troublesome families. More recently however, there has been increased recognition of the need to address some of the underlying problems that families face. This change in approach was summed up by one respondent who had moved from being a housing manager to a community safety officer with borough-wide responsibilities:

> *"When I was in housing, I dealt with all the problems and the anti-social bit. And I was, I was always pushing for 'Let's evict them'. You know, they're causing me problems on my estate and causing this and that. 'Get them out.' But now, and the last job before I came here, I dealt solely with neighbour nuisance. Now I'm on a different side of the fence and I can accept how and why some families are falling apart."* (Housing/Community safety perspective, Project A)

This change in approach to ASB was also reported as evident within some communities, with a number of respondents highlighting how members of the public were hesitant of complaining because they did not want to see a family evicted. One officer described how people frequently said, "I don't want 'em out on the streets, I just want it to stop". Another commented:

> *"I mean you'd be amazed actually on how many people that make reports, you get some that'll think that, you know, that's all we do, evict people, but a lot of them are quite reasonable where they'll say, 'I don't want them evicting'."* (Housing Officer, Project A)

When asked to reflect on whether the IFSP had played any part in this change of attitude, some respondents were unequivocal that where families had successfully exited from the IFSP they were in a much better position to sustain their tenancies. In these circumstances the IFSP interventions were believed to be a more effective form of intervention compared with other forms of ASB action:

> *"And I've seen the interventions worked and I've seen, you know, the easy option is to kick somebody out."* (Housing/Community safety perspective, Project A)

Breaking the cycle and sustaining communities

A recurrent theme referred to both by housing officers and by other local stakeholders was the need to devise interventions that break the cycle of deprivation and poor behaviour. Inter-generational problems and lack of parenting skills were described by many as being one of the key underlying causes of ASB and, in this context, IFSP interventions were seen as potentially having positive long-term effects which helped to sustain communities:

> *"It's about breaking that cycle, you know, generation after generation we see it ourselves, you know, on estates. So I think projects like the families project break, do break that cycle, you know, by teaching them different behaviours, 'cos it's to do with the parents isn't it? And their different behaviour then that knocks on and that carries on to the next generation, hopefully." (Housing Manager, Project B)*

In addition to the valuable work that projects do in addressing parenting problems, it was also recognised that IFSPs can have a wider role in breaking down established power bases within troubled communities, as one lead ASB officer explained:

> *"These families have lived there for generations and generations, they sort … you know, these problematic families had a power base because they sort of did have a hold. And once you've got three or four families like that in an area, with that kind of reputation, then people become really frightened."* (Lead ASB officer, Project B)

As IFSPs have become more established, it was reported that residents welcomed such an intervention and felt it offered a more sustainable way of dealing with ASB. This view was strongly expressed by a number of stakeholders, as the following comments illustrate:

> "I think people … recognised that it was a good way to be taking action and working with them … and most people are quite happy to give somebody a second chance to let, you know, 'See what they do, let's see what this unit can do, let's see what outreach can do for them'." (Lead LA officer, Project B)

> *"You can talk about the benefits to that family themselves and the fact that they've managed to keep their home and a roof over their head and they may have a better quality of life because they've changed their behaviour. But then there's also benefits to the wider community and whoever they might live next to, and that's hard to quantify, isn't it?"* (ASB officer, Project B)

The micro impact of interventions on both family members and the communities in which they lived were positively reported by a number of agencies. For example, one family who were described as being "notorious" when they were referred to the IFSP have since changed their behaviour to the extent that the complaints ceased almost immediately and the estate where they live is now regarded as very quiet. The impact of the IFSP intervention was described in glowing terms as being "brilliant", with the housing officer reporting that s/he would have no hesitation about referring other families to the IFSP.

For some referral agencies the work of the IFSPs was seen to provide a wider benefit of helping to facilitate improved community relations. In one case, not only had the family sustained their tenancy but also disputes within the immediate neighbours had been neutralised as previously feuding neighbours got to know each other better and built bridges. The local housing officer went on to explain how community relations in the whole neighbourhood had improved and there had also been a notable increase in residents' capacity to resolve disputes informally without recourse to official complaints.

Respite to communities

As outlined earlier in the report (see section 5), not all the outcomes for families were as positive, with around a half of the families having moved homes either during the time they worked with the IFSP or shortly after they left the project. Interviews with the original referring officer were carried out to establish what impact the removal of the family had had on the wider community. In cases involving a prolonged history of complaints over many years, taking action to move the family was reported as bringing very welcome relief for the immediate community. For example, one housing officer described how a family's eviction had "a massive impact" on the neighbours. Although initially the main complainant had not wanted the family to be moved, the problems were reported as being so persistent and severe and causing such a great deal of stress that the family were in fact evicted . At this point the complainants were extremely relieved, with the housing officer stating that "*their wellbeing has really improved*" .

In another case, following the IFSP intervention the family moved out of the local area and this was said to have had a discernable impact on the whole neighbourhood. The main problems associated with the family had been persistent noise and youth nuisance, with as many as twenty to thirty young people reported to hang out around the house drinking alcohol. As soon as the family left the area there were no further incidents of youth nuisance. While the housing officer speculated that the problem had simply moved to an adjoining estate, for that community the problems ceased completely and no further complaints have been received.

Summary

The community impacts of outreach interventions are difficult to define and measure, but evidence from front-line officers indicates that there can be a number of benefits to local communities arising as a direct result of IFSP interventions. Not only are IFSPs seen to play a key role in breaking the cycle of poor behaviour, but also IFSP interventions were perceived as achieving more sustainable outcomes compared with alternative forms of action. Furthermore, a number of stakeholders reported that IFSP interventions were effective in bringing relief to many communities which had been troubled by persistent ASB.

Section 11: Media portrayals of IFSPs

Over the last ten years the issue of anti-social behaviour, fuelled by public concern, has become a political and policy priority, attracting a correspondingly high level of media attention. There has been a proliferation of articles and radio and television programmes commenting on and reviewing the varied measures that have been introduced to control behaviour. It is clear that 'anti-social behaviour' sells papers and consequently the six IFSPs included in the study have been the focus of intense – and sometimes intrusive – media interest.

In this final section of the report we examine the way in which IFSPs have been portrayed in the public domain and the influence this has had on strategies employed to promote their work. Drawing on an analysis of articles published in the UK national press and in local newspapers operating in areas where IFSPs are located, we consider the varied ways in which IFSPs have been constructed and how these constructions reflect on families working with projects. The section concludes with a brief analysis of the way in which media discourses have influenced and informed the strategies employed to promote IFSPs within the communities they serve.

How are IFSPs constructed in the media?

The articles reviewed in the following media analysis vary. Some sought to provide an account of the utility value IFSPs, others documented 'success' stories in which the details of particular cases are provided and the voice of the service user is heard, others still offered a polemical commentary. Across the diverse range of reporting that focuses either on specific IFSPs or on intensive family support more generally, it is possible to identify certain themes that frame the way in which interventions are constructed. Three dominant arguments can be depicted, which are generally attributed to certain actors or the author, and these are summarised in Table 11:1 below. Contained within each of these public narratives are particular portrayals of both the role of the project and the families referred.

Table 11.1: Dominant themes emerging from media discourses of IFSPs

	Portrayal of families	Portrayal of projects	Actors' voices
Against IFSPs 1: **'not in my back yard'**	• Dangerous, violent, feckless • In need of policing and/or punishment.	• Focus on residential interventions • Waste of taxpayers money • Likely to impact negatively on neighbourhoods • Decrease value of houses and increase crime • Neighbourhoods will become ghettos and no-go areas • Projects are a 'soft option' • Projects are not an answer to ASB, but a political gimmick/publicity stunt.	• Local residents • Councillors • MPs
Against IFSPs 2: **'rights-based critique'**	• Families are vulnerable • Recognition of structural disadvantage • Need for support, compassion and assistance • Defence of their rights.	• IFSPs as punitive and stigmatising • Virtual prisons that punish families who have not committed a crime • Likened to a "Stalinist project" and "penal colonies" • Fails to address real problems and root causes • Draconian/regressive • Expansion of the 'nanny state'.	• Civil liberties groups • Councillors • MPs • Academics

Table 11.1: Dominant themes emerging from media discourses of IFSPs *(continued)*

	Portrayal of families	Portrayal of projects	Actors' voices
In favour of IFSPs: **"a sustainable solution"**	• Families are vulnerable and disadvantaged • In need of support, compassion and assistance • Difficult/ problem/ dysfunctional/ chaotic families and/or feckless and disruptive.	• Gets to the root of problems • Rehabilitation is more effective than enforcement • Eviction doesn't work • It is not a soft option • Helps families overcome their problems • Cost-effective • Prevents eviction and breakdown of vulnerable families.	• NCH • Project staff • Government ministers • Service users – 'success stories' • Councillors • MPs.

In keeping with the standard style of many newspaper articles, on the surface, the majority of articles analysed sought to take account of the views and provide comments from specific key actors, including local residents' groups, local councillors, government ministers, project staff, and representatives from NCH who promote the projects. While the function of this is to make articles appear objective and balanced, further analysis of the articles revealed there to be a somewhat negative bias in the press coverage, albeit that this message is often implicit rather than explicit, as a key stakeholder in one authority explained:

> *"Because it's in the newspaper doesn't mean to say it's true and there's always a slant, you know, they'll put a slant, they'll sell it the way they want to sell it." (Local Councillor, Project A)*

Scrutiny of articles published in both tabloid and broadsheet papers confirms that the portrayals both of families and of IFSPs do not reflect a neutral or balanced account, but instead often act as an intervention in the debate which is largely dependent on the paper's political ideology.

Although more common in the tabloid press, prominence and priority is given to presuppositions and discourses associated with the 'not in my backyard' and the 'rights-based critique' approaches and this is variously evidenced by the way in which articles sensationalise the public reaction. Certain arguments are privileged and attributed more space (and are often covered in opening paragraphs), while opposing arguments come later in a story[13]. In particular, the wording of the headline and opening paragraphs work

[13] These first two points were particularly prominent before IFSPs became a Government priority and prior to residential units being established.

to provide the 'reader' with the crux of the argument and inform the way in which the rest of the article is understood. With regard to the latter, the idea is that the (always carefully chosen) headline will encapsulate the story and grant the reader an indication of what the article is about.

Some headlines about family support projects are tabulated in Table 11:2 below and illustrate how this process is played out in practice.

Table 11.2: Headline stories

Source and date of article	**Headlines**
Daily Mail, 9 October 2005	"Colditz camps plan for ASBO families"
Sunday Express, 5 November 2006	"New War on Yob Families: 50 secure units planned for neighbours from hell"
Independent on Sunday, 5 November 2006	"Anti-social adults to be sent to sin bins says respect tsar
Independent on Sunday, 5 November 2006	"The 'sin bin' society"
Daily Mail, 11 April 2007	"Disruptive families are threatened with sin bins"
Daily Telegraph, 12 April 2007	"State Sin bins for Britain's Worst Families"
The Express, 12 April 2007	"Asbo families face sin bins"

The origins of such sensational and negative portrayals can be located in the press coverage of the pioneering Dundee Families Project, which was set up in 1996. Learning lessons from this experience, by the time the six IFSP included in the evaluation were established in 2003-04, all attempted to maintain a low public profile to avoid the media fuelling or creating a negative local backlash. Consequently, there has not been a great deal of press coverage with regard to specific projects, although one IFSP was targeted by both national and local press and fell victim to negative reporting. The majority of articles about this IFSP were published prior to the residential unit being established and in a context of disputes with local residents. The following headlines provide an indication of the style of the reporting employed.

Table 11:3: Portrayals of one IFSP	
Source and date of article	**Headlines**
[Local City] Evening News, 15 October 2003	'The Sin Bin'
The Star, 16 October 2003	'Hell Neighbours Caged'
Daily Mail, 16 October 2003	'The family sin bin'
The Express, 16 October 2003	'Yobs Sin Bin: Problem Families to be Caged in Council Effort to Sort Out their Bad Attitudes'
Daily Star, 20 October 2003	'Scum in: Sin Bins are Open'

As the headlines outlined in Tables 11:2 and 11:3 indicate, at both a national and local level the majority (but not all) of newspaper reports constructed IFSPs in pejorative terms, with the labels used to describe projects carrying a host of negative connotations. Indeed, as the emphasis is often on the nature of the core units with their strict rules and regulations that the families must adhere to, the projects are most commonly labelled as "sin bins".

The term 'sin bin' is derived from sports parlance to refer to a "penalty box" where players are sent to sit out part of a game following a penalty or offence. It is a place that most would want to avoid. Hence, when applied to IFSPs, 'sin bin' connotes a place where outcast families must be relegated following 'offences' of bad behaviour. This construction firmly establishes projects not as a supportive intervention but as a form of punishment where families are penalised. Obviously the colloquialism 'sin bin' also has connotations to the act of committing a sin or violation that is regarded as being immoral, reprehensible and utterly wrong. Naming the projects in such a way incites clear value judgements which act as defining statements on the projects.

How are families constructed in the media?

A similarly distorted discourse is apparent in the way in which families working with IFSPs are constructed. As the headlines cited above illustrate, media articles commonly draw on discourses which view 'the anti-social' as a distinct and homogenous category. Indeed, families are viewed unproblematically through the prism of terms such as: "scum", "neighbours from hell"; "trouble makers"; "yob families", "problem"; "nightmare neighbours"; "nightmare families"; "hell families" and "yobs". The labels are unmistakably divisive and construct the families in stereotyped ways that perpetuate an 'us and them' mentality. The following extracts demonstrate these points:

> *"**Neighbours from hell** will be caged in a real-life ghetto of grief in a scheme to crack down on antisocial behaviour. Problem families will be moved into fenced housing under the 24-hour gaze of attitude experts."* (The Star, 16 October 2003)

*"**Neighbours from hell** to get live-in therapy."* (The Observer, 13 February 2005)

*"**Yob families** who terrorise neighbourhoods are to be sent to 'sin bins' under radical plans to keep Britain safe." (The Express, 28 September 2005)*

*"**Problem families** could be sent to high-security 'sin bins' as part of the government's latest crusade against anti-social behaviour."* (Daily Mail, 10 October 2005)

*"Britain's **neighbours from hell** are to be thrown into 'sin bins' to make them behave…Yobs who blight the lives of communities will be subject to round the clock supervision and tough curfew orders. Mothers and fathers will be taught how to control their children, who are often running wild in the streets."* (Sunday Express, 5 November 2006)

*"Britain's 1,500 **worst families** face being evicted and moved into "sin bins" under a new Government initiative to tackle anti-social behaviour."* (The Express, 12 April 2007)

Families working with IFSPs are constructed as dangerous 'others' who terrorise communities and are in need of 'caging', inferring that their behaviour is wild and animalistic. Furthermore, interventions are presented as part of a "crackdown", "crusade" or "war" that is being waged on a minority of families to bring their feckless behaviour under control. While some pro-IFSP voices are given print space, these are largely incorporated into an existing discursive framework that works to undermine any alternative viewpoint on the project.

Changing terminology and opposing arguments

Following the University of Glasgow's positive evaluation of the Dundee Families Project (Dillane et al 2001), IFSPs have been hailed as an example of good practice in tackling ASB. Since 2005, family intervention projects have been actively promoted by the Respect Taskforce as an essential part of a twin track approach[14] to anti-social behaviour and, as a result, the six IFSPs were the subject of increasing media attention. More specifically, press coverage of projects has clustered around specific policy developments, for example:

- The introduction of intensive family support to 50 Together Anti-Social Behaviour Action Areas (February 2005);
- The Respect Action Plan and the publication of the evaluation interim findings of this study (January 2006);
- Publication of main evaluation report for this study (October 2006);

[14] The twin track approach involves both action to address the underlying causes of problem behaviour and the use of appropriate sanctions to support and protect the wider community.

- The announcement of 40 Respect Areas (January 2007);
- The Government delivering its promise to establish a network of 53 family intervention projects (April 2007).

As government commitment to family support interventions has increased there have been significant changes in media representations of the projects, with the emergence of more reflective articles in which the projects are presented in terms of a 'sustainable solution' discourse. For instance, on the basis of the evidence provided in the earlier evaluation report (Nixon et al 2006), one IFSP has been hailed as a "huge success" (The Sheffield Star, 13 April 2007) and has been identified as one of the "flagships for the Government's Respect Action Plan" (Yorkshire Post, 12 April 2007). Similarly, the stories of particular families supported by individual projects have also been reported in a more sympathetic light:

> *"As a result of intervention by this assisted families project, Michelle has been helped to address the issues that were causing trouble. She has saved her home and the council has saved the considerable costs of eviction and the family's consequent homelessness."* (The Guardian, September 2006)

With the development of 'a sustainable solution' discourses there has been an exposure of some of the mythmaking elements of other media reports. To emphasise the benefits of the IFSP approach, supporters of projects are allowed to take centre stage in newspaper articles:

> *"...The trouble is, there is no cage, and the only bars of any height around the unit are to protect the cars of staff and residents. Furthermore, the project is not compulsory and residents will be free to come and go as they like. The media hype and ensuing news blackout is overshadowing what could become one of the most positive and progressive initiatives of recent years."* (The Guardian, 18 February 2004)

> *"[The] project manager is keen to avoid branding the families at risk of eviction as "problem families". She says: 'We keep saying there are no such things as problem families. We are working with families with problems'. It is a distinction some would dismiss as mere political correctness. But [the project manager] insists that only a non-judgmental approach will enable her team to reach families where other agencies have often given up."* (This is Lancashire, October)

This change in emphasis has brought with it a deeper exploration of who exactly the "neighbours from hell" are and some reflection on the use of defamatory terminology and the connotations this carries. More space is given to the voices of those supported by the projects and the reporting draws attention to the multiple problems faced by families referred to the projects.

Changes in the way in which projects are constructed by the media mirror changing government and policy discourses. Over the period 2005-2007 the role envisaged for IFSPs has become more contested and complex and this new level of complexity is reflected in the emerging family support discourses. For example, initially family support projects were most commonly labelled by reference to the area in which they operated (e.g. the Dundee Families Project). Subsequently, projects have been referred to more descriptively in policy documents as "intensive family ***support*** projects" or "family ***support*** schemes". Here the emphasis is on the supportive dimension of the intervention, which in turn informs the 'sustainable solution' discourse in which projects are constructed as an effective way of dealing with dysfunctional families. More recently, the projects have been relabelled "family ***intervention*** projects", with an associated repositioning of the role of projects in which support is reinforced by sanctions if rules are broken – including proposals to withhold housing benefit from families who decline to work with family support projects. This in turn has stimulated the rise of a 'rights-based critique' in which IFSPs are variously portrayed as punitive and stigmatising, representing a dangerous expansion of the nanny state.

Interestingly, despite significant changes to the way projects have been constructed both in policy and media discourses, the term 'sin bin' has endured as a ubiquitous label for family support projects. The use of this term is potentially very damaging, reflecting a distorted and very partial account of the work undertaken by projects. Nevertheless, it has become a staple of press coverage – both tabloid and broadsheet. An example of the negative way in which the term 'sin bin' is used was provided by one project, which had been subjected to intense media interest when their core residential block was being constructed. In an article printed in the local paper bearing the head lines 'The Sin Bin', a textual description of the project as a place in which 'anti social' families were to be incarcerated was reinforced by an accompanying image of the project premises. The photograph had been taken in such a way as to suggest that the building was fortified. The reality was very different, as one stakeholder explained:

> *"[X project] has got a fence around it, but it's quite a nice fence and it's about three foot high, just a garden fence. And one of the reporters must have actually laid down on the pavement to take the photograph that looked like it was a twenty foot fence and the building is behind this twenty foot fence and then they superimposed what people would probably describe, you know, as a black shadow of a hoodie in front of it."* (LA lead officer, Project B)

Publicising the projects locally

The largely negative media portrayal of IFSPs and the families supported by them is difficult for individual projects to counter. Interviews with project managers and other local key stakeholders were held to explore how they viewed their relationship with the media and what strategies were employed to promote their work. There was a consensus among project managers that media profiles were influential and important. Indeed, it was felt

vital for projects to develop a relationship with local media in a bid to assert some control over the type of coverage given to the project. This was considered to be important for two key reasons:

1) Stipulating what can and cannot be covered in press reports
One project now stipulates that there should be no photographs taken of the residential core and that anonymity should be respected. Another has a policy that no photographs of families will be released and no information about the location of the core will be provided. It was felt that much of coverage by the tabloid press and other media is voyeuristic and manipulative, exposing both IFSP staff and residents. It was believed that by controlling what information is presented it is possible to influence the way in which projects are constructed by the quality press, although it was acknowledged that it was much harder to achieve this when dealing with the tabloid press. As such, one project has now adopted a position where they have a general rule of not talking to the media, although this has given rise to some tensions with the parent body, who are keen to promote the projects as part of their marketing strategy as leaders in the field.

2) Promoting 'good news' stories
Project managers were very aware that dominant media discourses present their work in a distorted way and felt they had a responsibility to promote a more accurate portrayal of IFSPs and the work that they do. This seemed particular pertinent in areas where the local press tended to focus on negative portrayals of young people and it was felt there was a need to counter that agenda. If IFSPs fail to actively challenge media stereo types it was felt that they were acquiescing in them. On a more encouraging note, it was also recognised that positive media reporting was very good for the IFSP local profile and for staff morale.

Reflecting on the contested way in which IFSPs have been portrayed by the media, project managers felt that although there is a need to actively engage with the media, media promotion and publicity should be managed by the parent body, whether that is a charity or a Local Authority.

Summary

Since the Dundee Families Project was established in 1996, family support projects have attracted high profile media attention. They are portrayed as a controversial form of intervention to deal with anti-social behaviour and much of the commentary, particularly in the tabloid press, has been polemically informed by a 'not in my back yard' discourse. More recently, as family support projects have been actively promoted by the Respect Task Force, the construction of the projects and the families referred to them has become more nuanced, as is reflected in the rise of 'a rights-based critique' and 'a sustainable solution' media discourses. Despite these changes, it remains very hard for individual project managers to exercise control over the way in which IFSPs are portrayed or to effectively challenge the very negative and pejorative ways in which service users are constructed.

Across both the tabloid and broadsheet publications, family support projects are defined principally by reference to the residential elements of the interventions, which are constructed as 'sin bins'.

Media discourses are extremely powerful and have a direct impact both on the willingness of families to engage with IFSPs and on the extent to which communities are prepared to tolerate IFSP residential core blocks. If polemical assertions are left unchallenged, the aims and objectives of IFSPs risk being compromised by the very nature of the ASB rhetoric in newspaper articles.

Section 12: Conclusions

The final element of the evaluation of Intensive Family Support Projects has focussed on the sustainability of interventions once families exited the service. Using a qualitative methodology, 28 families who had worked with IFSPs during the period 2004 – 2006 were tracked to provide a detailed account of changes that had occurred. To reflect the complexity of many families' situation since leaving the IFSP, a continuum of outcomes has been developed, based on the extent to which IFSP four core objectives had been met.

For the majority of families, positive change had been sustained to the extent that in seven out of ten families, complaints about anti-social behaviour had largely ceased and, as a result, the family home was secure. The cessation of ASB complaints and the reduced risk to the home however, represent only two dimensions of sustainable outcomes and do not necessarily reflect changes linked to the promotion of social inclusion or outcomes in relation to health, education and well-being. A more nuanced analysis of the process of change showed that more than forty percent (12/28; 43%) of the families had achieved resoundingly successful outcomes. More mixed outcomes were associated with a further eight families who continued to experience ongoing problems which required skilful management. In the remaining eight families, the IFSP interventions had not been successful in resolving deep-rooted and often intractable problems. The lives of these families continued to be dominated by complaints about anti-social behaviour, homelessness or risk of eviction, and family breakdown.

The evidence suggests that the path to stability and well-being is not a linear trajectory of improvement but is often more complex and defined by episodes of set-back and progress, stability and crisis. Sustainability is hard to achieve, particularly in light of the multiple problems – including physical and mental health disabilities – that many families continued to manage on a daily basis.

The neighbourhoods in which families lived were typically amongst the poorest in the country, with high levels of unemployment, deprivation and social exclusion. Ongoing concerns about personal safety dominated families' accounts of their lives, with many reporting that since exiting the IFSP they had been victims of crime, subject to ASB from neighbours, and in a few cases were living in fear. In practice the boundaries between notions of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' were frequently blurred, with those constructed as 'perpetrators' of anti-social behaviour frequently also being the 'victims' of crime and anti-social behaviour. Within this context of acute structural disadvantage, sustaining change required families to exercise a high level of personal agency and strength.

In addition to evaluating the extent to which families had been able to sustain positive change in terms of family functioning and behaviour, the study also sought to establish the impact of IFSP on the wider community. Managing community relations in areas in which IFSP core residential accommodation is located was found to demand skilful

negotiation. The specific approach adopted in each of three IFSPs using a residential form of intervention differed significantly from one area to another, but as the projects have matured strong and supportive relationships with the local community have successfully been established in all three areas.

The community impacts of outreach interventions are perhaps more difficult to define and measure, but the study provides some evidence that there can be number of benefits to local communities arising as a direct result of IFSP interventions. Not only were IFSPs seen to play a key role in breaking the cycle of poor behaviour, but also interventions were perceived to achieve more sustainable outcomes when compared with alternative forms of action. Furthermore, a number of stakeholders reported that IFSP interventions were effective in bringing relief to many communities which had been troubled by persistent ASB.

The final element of the tracking study involved a critical analysis of the way in which IFSPs have been portrayed in the public domain and the influence this has had on strategies employed to promote their work. Since the Dundee Families Project was established ten years ago, family support projects have attracted high profile media attention. Much of the commentary, particularly in the tabloid press, has been polemically informed by a 'not in my back yard' discourse. More recently, as family support projects have been actively promoted by the Respect Task Force, the construction of the projects and the families referred to them has become more nuanced, as reflected in the rise of 'a rights based critique' and 'a sustainable solution' media discourses. Despite these changes, it nevertheless remains very hard for individual project managers to exercise control over the way in which IFSPs are portrayed or to effectively challenge the very negative ways in which service users are constructed.

Although core residential interventions were used for a small minority of families (e.g. only 11 out of 256 families were provided with residential support over the period 2004 – 2005), it is this element of project interventions that has consistently been highlighted by the media as the defining feature of IFSPs. Employing pejorative language, residential interventions have variously been referred to as 'sins bins', 'tearaway towers', and 'cages for the neighbours from hell'. While these simple, apocryphal labels do not reflect the reality of this form of intervention, they have been very influential in [in]forming the public profile of IFSPs and can be seen to have had a negative impact on community relations in the areas in which the residential units are located.

The six IFSPs set up in 2003-04 have developed a 'new' way of working with families at risk of losing their home as a result of anti-social behaviour that is seen as being highly cost-effective in the short term and the longer term. The findings from the third phase of the evaluation make an important contribution to the existing evidence base, illustrating the beneficial outcomes associated with IFSP interventions whilst also highlighting the limitations of this approach. It is too early to make claims with any certainty about the longer-term sustainability of the changes that IFSPs had helped engender. This is partly

because some families had only recently exited the IFSPs, but it also reflects the fact that families working with IFSPs often had deep-rooted problems suffered from multiple deprivations and were therefore likely to continue to be vulnerable to external influences.

Lessons learnt from the experiences of IFSPs include the importance of early intervention, the need for families to have access to specialist support when exiting an IFSP, and the critical role of re-referrals to help families to sustain a positive lifestyle. Equally important is the need to challenge negative media discourses which directly impact both on the willingness of families to engage with IFSPs and on the extent to which communities are prepared to tolerate IFSP residential core blocks.

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Appendix 1: The research design and research methods

About the study

In June 2006, the specialist research team evaluating six Intensive Family Support Projects (IFSPs) was awarded a further research grant to track a number of families who took part in the original qualitative element of the earlier evaluation undertaken over the period 2004-06. The focus of the work was on a qualitative appraisal of the following key research issues and associated research questions:

1. The sustainability of interventions in terms of family functioning and behaviour

- Is the provision of intensive interventions to challenge behaviour and address underlying causes of anti-social behaviour effective in the longer term?
- To what extent are the positive outcomes associated with IFSP interventions sustained once families cease contact with projects?
- Are there any differences in longer-term outcomes depending on whether the family received outreach support or residential support?

2. The longer- term impact on family project interventions on existing support and supervision services

- What are the discernable impacts of Intensive Support interventions on local welfare and supervision services?
- Do interventions result in an increased demand for particular support services or a decrease in demand once families exit intensive family support projects?
- What are the cost consequences to other agencies of Intensive Family Support Interventions?

3. The impact of interventions on the wider communities

- What strategies have projects with a core residential units employed in developing positive relationships with local communities within which they are based?
- How do local community-based agencies and key stakeholder view the effectiveness of interventions and their wider impact on building safe and sustainable communities?

4. What strategies have been employed to promote IFSPs within the wider community, which they serve

- What sort of media coverage have Intensive Family Support Projects been subject to?
- What role has the local media (local papers, community broadsheets, TV and radio) played in promoting Intensive Family Support Projects?

The study design

In order to address these wide-ranging research questions a qualitative study methodology was employed based on the collection of data from an equally wide-ranging number of local stakeholders and families who had worked with IFSPs during the period 2004-2006. Use of in-depth interviews and focus groups provided a range and depth of views from multiple perspectives and, while the study findings do not represent an exhaustive range of possible outcomes associated with IFSP interventions, they do provide a rich data source for the analysis of outcomes associated with this form of ASB intervention and the issues which continued to affect families once they had exited projects.

Sources of data on families current circumstances

Over the period 2004-06, a total 38 families[15] using the IFSP service had provided the research team with informed consent which included an agreement for the researchers to access their contact details and to contact their landlord or other agency to ascertain their housing situation and any on-going problems with anti-social behaviour. This group of 38 families formed the target group for the on-going tracking element of the study. Making contact with families to invite them to take part in a further interview proved to be very resource intensive. Initially the researchers collected information from projects' closed case files to establish last known contact details. Using these data, attempts were made to contact families by phone or letter. Where this approach was not successful, further attempts were made to track households using data obtained from referral and other agencies who had worked with family members prior to or as part of their IFSP support plan. This strategy boosted the sample of families who agreed to be interviewed to 21. In 17/21 of these cases, additional information about the families' current circumstances was obtained from interviews with local housing or other agencies. In a further seven cases where it proved impossible to contact family members, an update on their circumstances was obtained through interviews with local housing officers or other agencies.

In relation to the remaining ten families, the research team were unable to collect any up-to-date information. This was because either the families declined to take part in this on-going element of the study (5) or neither the IFSP nor other agencies who had worked

[15] Over the course of the evaluation data in relation to 256 families was collected from IFSPs case files, of which 38 families agreed to take part in in-depth qualitative interviews.

with the family had managed to maintain contact. This information gap most commonly arose because the family had either moved out of the local authority area or was living in private rented accommodation and was no longer in contact with local agencies. Thus, out of the original sample of 38 cases, information on families' current circumstances was obtained for 28 households.

Details of the sources of the data for the 38 families included in the tracking element of the study are provided in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1: Sources of data in relation to the tracking sample of 38 families who had worked with IFSPs during the period 2004-2007

	Face-to-face interviews with family members	Families where no direct contact was achieved but data were obtained from other sources	No data available	Total no. (%) in the tracking sample
Declined to take part/No contact made			10	**10**
Interviews with family members only	4	–	–	**4**
Interviews with local housing officers	11	6	–	**17**
Interviews with other agencies: YOTs, Social Services, ASB Officers	6	1	–	**7**
Total no. families	**21 (55%)**	**7 (18%)**	**10 (26%)**	**38 (100%)**

Where family members agreed to take part in the follow-up study, a third round of interviews was carried out between March and Sept 2006[16]. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed in full before being analysed both manually and using a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (Nvivo)

[16] One interview was carried in January 2007.

Sources of data on the impact of interventions on the wider community

In order to examine the longer-term impact of IFSP interventions on local support and supervision services across the 6 IFSP local authority areas face to face and telephone interviews were carried out with a total of 46 officers working with local support and supervision service providers to examine their views on the impact that the IFSP had had on service provision within their authority. Representatives from the following agencies were included in this element of the evaluation:

- Neighbourhood housing officers
- Neighbourhood wardens
- Social service representatives
- Youth Workers, YOTs
- Police Beat Officers
- Head teachers
- Local Ward councillors
- ASB co-ordinators
- LA lead officers

In addition interviews with a selection of residents living or working in the communities in which IFSP residential accommodation is located were undertaken to explore perceptions and understandings of the impact this form of intervention has had on the local community.

Face to face interviews with participants were completed over the period September 2006 to January 2007 supplemented by telephone interviews conducted over the same period of time. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed in full before being analysed both manually and using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (Nvivo)

The role of the media in promoting IFSPs

In order to capture the various ways in which IFSPs have been promoted within the wider communities in which they are located a documentary analysis of relevant media coverage was undertaken. The collection of relevant press coverage was facilitated through the use of the LexisNexis, online search engine of national and local newspapers published in the UK. Initially a broad search criteria was employed using the terms 'anti-social behaviour' 'nuisance neighbours' and 'family support'. These terms were subsequently refined to reflect the more precise focus of the enquiry to include the names of the six case study IFSPs as well as other high profile projects such as the Dundee Families Project. The search was restricted to articles about projects specifically established to provide support to families at

risk of eviction as a result of anti-social behaviour. In total over 104 articles were identified which were then sorted into two periods, those published between 1995-2003 (when the first Intensive Family Support Project was established in Dundee and the commencement of the evaluation) and those published during 2003-07 (from when the 6 projects were established to the completion of the field work). Data obtained from these sources were cross referenced with details of articles and publications obtained directly from the Dundee Families Project, the six IFSPs projects and NCH (Northwest). A detailed discourse analysis of all articles was undertaken manually with a focus on the changing ways in which IFSPs and families who work with them are constructed. These data were supplemented by further interviews with LA lead officers and a focus group with project managers to explore what strategies have been employed to raise public awareness of the role that IFSPs can play in developing sustainable solutions to ASB.

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