



Building  
stronger  
families



# Independent Evaluation of the Hackney WellFamily Service

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Summary

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# Background - mental health and wellbeing

One in four people in the UK will be challenged by a mental health problem in the course of a year<sup>i</sup>. The cost of mental ill health to the economy in England has been estimated at £105 billion, with treatment costs expected to double in the next 20 years<sup>ii</sup>. Mental health is high on the government's agenda, with the 'No Health without Mental Health' strategy published by the Department of Health in 2011. The strategy takes a cross-government approach focused on outcomes for people with mental illnesses.

Today doctors and all health professionals are under constant pressure to respond to the needs of patients. Every day they see disadvantaged and isolated individuals and families for whom social and emotional support would be a better solution than NHS services.

## Introduction to Family Action WellFamily Service Promoting health and wellbeing through support services in community-based settings.

The WellFamily service was established by Family Action in 1996 after a research study in a Hackney GP practice had shown that some groups of patients suffered from a lack of social support which adversely affected their general well-being. Funding was provided by the Department of Health to employ a Family Support Co-ordinator to run a WellFamily service based in the practice to provide a generic service, offering advice, information and support for individuals and families.

### The Service

WellFamily provides a 'single door' for a wide range of support so that users with complex problems don't need to deal with a number of agencies. It tackles the social problems underpinning medical referrals, offering help at an early stage to prevent more serious problems developing.

Key interventions provided by our WellFamily service include:

1. Advice and information regarding housing, debt, welfare benefits or employment support
2. Counselling for emotional problems including anxiety, depression, bereavement and relationship difficulties
3. Promotion of leisure, social and physical activities and volunteering opportunities
4. Signposting and referral to other services
5. Carer and peer support

Family Action's WellFamily service offers short term counselling, advice and practical support provided by professionally qualified staff over six to eight sessions, with the option of assessment for ongoing support and services from Family Action and other providers.

WellFamily can be jointly commissioned and supports delivery of a wide range of indicators across the NHS, Adult Social Care, and Public Health and Commissioning outcomes frameworks.

By integrating the service with primary care using the emergency medical services (EMS) system, Family Action has enabled a swift referral and follow-up process. WellFamily also works effectively in community hospital settings, where people can be signposted to other services which cover higher, medium or lower intensity pathways, offering tailored interventions and group support

Well Family could also be located in hospital Accident and Emergency units, working as part of a triage system, so that individuals who repeatedly visit for social rather than medical reasons can easily be referred to the service

i The Office for National Statistics Psychiatric Morbidity report, 2001)

ii Department for Health, 2011, 'No Health without Mental Health: A Cross Government Mental Health Strategy for People of All Ages', HMG/DH, p2, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-mental-health-strategy-for-england>

# Independent evaluation of Hackney WellFamily Service

This evaluation was carried out by Dr Alison Longwill. She worked intensively with the service, service users and other stakeholders and this report is a summary of her findings.

“WellFamily is a great resource for addressing patients’ welfare and signposting to the patients and doctors the available services in the community for support. By addressing the social circumstances of my patients WellFamily helps me reduce my workload and be more effective.”

Dr C, GP, Hackney.

## Evaluation of WellFamily in Hackney

Evidence indicated that the Hackney WellFamily Service achieved strong positive outcomes for its service users and Family Action presented this information to current and future commissioners as a valuable complement to health services.

An independent evaluation was commissioned in order to qualify the value of the service model and to support the development of new and existing WellFamily services.

The evaluation of the WellFamily Service was conducted by Dr Alison Longwill, Director of Mental Health with Improving Health and Wellbeing UK.

The review included:

1. A selected review of local and national policy documents relevant to the WellFamily Service
2. In-depth interviews with key stakeholders including senior managers from Family Action, a GP Clinical Lead, a Commissioner, a Manager of the IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies), a Clinical Supervisor and a Practice Manager
3. A team workshop with the WellFamily team
4. Observation of WellFamily worker sessions in GP practices
5. Design and analysis of surveys for GP referrers and clients of the WellFamily Service
6. Analysis of WellFamily cost-effectiveness and impact on service user wellbeing and social adjustment
7. Recommendations for future development of the service

## Results and findings

The evaluation demonstrated that the service is highly regarded by referrers and service users, achieving demonstrable cost effective, positive outcomes including a reduction in mental health symptoms, enhanced social recovery and participation and a reduction in use of specialist services.

### In-depth interviews with key stakeholders

Face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted as part of this evaluation and the key findings are presented below.

#### Results

##### • Generic/holistic focus

The WellFamily service is generic and includes emotional support, taking a more family-centred approach to treatment. The service fills a gap in support, formerly undertaken by social workers, which is no longer available. Social problems are complex and often relate to housing, welfare benefit, migration and disability issues. The service is well-regarded for providing an integrated package of welfare and social benefits advice and for supportive counselling. WellFamily also looks at improving quality of life, including supporting people back into paid employment. Service users will be referred on to other agencies and also links people with practice counsellors.

##### • Easy access

It is easy for clients to access the WellFamily service for advice. WellFamily is engaging and provides accessible services for people who usually struggle to connect to an array of services that might be available to them. These people are often disengaged and socially excluded. WellFamily is embedded in primary care and regarded as an important and well-integrated aspect of the overall primary care service with a successful track record of delivery.

##### • Links with Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) Service

The WellFamily service is closely linked to IAPT and City and Hackney Adult Mental Health Point of Entry

(CHAMHPE) services. A Psychological Wellbeing IAPT practitioner undertakes sessional work at Arbutus House in Hackney and can provide assessments on site. When people will not engage with IAPT WellFamily can be a bridge for the client. WellFamily can encourage people to access adult psychological services at a later date. WellFamily also provides some pre-IAPT space for short defined interventions. The IAPT service offers case management consultation support and clinical supervision to WellFamily workers and the two services provide an integrated and seamless approach locally in terms of access to psychological therapies.

- **Local knowledge and networks**

WellFamily is well-embedded in Hackney and workers have an extensive knowledge base of local services. They are skilled at linking and brokering services for clients. The service is long-established and well-regarded by a number of statutory and non-statutory agencies in the area. WellFamily's links with GPs and other members of the primary care team, schools, social services and voluntary organisations in Hackney makes it an invaluable service.

## Team workshop with the WellFamily team

A two hour workshop with the Hackney WellFamily team was held on 4th November 2013. The discussion included:

- A snapshot of the work undertaken and main presenting problems
- Communication with GPs
- Impact of service in terms of outcome measures and user feedback
- Links with other network services
- Issues related to engagement and attendance
- Service gaps
- Resourcing

### Results

- **Accessible service**

Many service users are chaotic and do not engage well with statutory services. WellFamily workers have a successful track record of promoting engagement with services.

- **Primary care focus**

The WellFamily service was originated in primary care. GPs have ownership of the service which is primary care based and is delivered in familiar, informal surroundings which reduces barriers to access. There is good formal and informal communication with GPs who can directly book patients into the service. WellFamily is the only voluntary organisation with access to the EMIS GP clinical information system.

- **Cost-effective**

Engagement with WellFamily reduces frequency of repeat appointments for non-medical issues and enables GPs to focus on medical problems. Patients' medication use is monitored and can be better targeted. Overall there is a decrease in depression and anxiety and a decrease in psychotropic medication use following WellFamily intervention. WellFamily filters referrals to other agencies and can signpost to other mental and physical health services as required. The service therefore "adds value" to GP services.

- **Safe, reliable service**

WellFamily workers have a high level of skill and experience in dealing with people presenting a complex level of psychosocial need. They provide a high level of containment for people in chaos and have experience in risk assessment and management. They are trained in safeguarding of vulnerable adults and children and have good associated governance and operational policies. The service is reliable, offers continuity and workers understand their boundaries and limits, with realistic expectations. Workers provide structured interventions and have good time management skills. Non-attendance rates are relatively low.

- **Culturally competent**

Staff are fluent in a variety of languages (English, French, Croatian, Albanian, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Turkish, Urdu, Punjabi, Kurdish, Somali, Bengali, Russian, and German) and reflect the communities they serve.

- **Integrated approach**

The service is single agency and offers an integrated approach with streamlined record keeping and avoidance of multiple assessments, with good communication and information sharing.

- **Practical support and “can-do” attitude**

Workers are flexible and offer a mix of practical support to those with mental health and emotional problems e.g. in relation to housing debt and welfare issues. They are good resource investigators (e.g. grant application skills, investigation of funding sources).

- **Skilled and knowledgeable workforce**

Workers have a high level of skills and counselling, family therapy, analytic psychotherapy qualifications. This is combined with a high level of knowledge of welfare benefits, housing issues and other network support available in the locality. Workers are resilient and have many years of experience and this is reflected in their grading and remuneration. They are required to be autonomous and self-managing and their skills are broadly equivalent to those triaging in mental health assessment services.

- **Management and supervision**

The service is well-managed and flexible staff working is encouraged. The staff turnover is low, reflecting a stable and engaged workforce. The diverse, experienced background of the workers is a strength of the service. All staff receive a high level of management and clinical supervision to support their work.

- **Accountable and outcome oriented**

The service is accountable and routinely collects outcome data regarding socio-demographic profiles of service users, symptoms and recovery outcomes.

- **Community links**

The service has excellent local knowledge of services and encourages the use of volunteers to add capacity to its services. Community engagement is encouraged through participation in local events, and celebrating festivals appropriate to local cultures. Family Action has a long track record of service in Hackney and is well understood, respected and embedded in the local community.

- **User involvement**

WellFamily encourages service user participation by involvement in client forums, a collaborative approach to co-production of interventions and regular satisfaction and feedback surveys.

- **Identity**

WellFamily staff feel they have a strong identity and culture for the service which is respected by others. They respect each other, are non-judgemental and offer a high level of mutual support. The service has a systemic/family focus and is a sustainable project.

## GP survey 2013

The survey was designed and conducted using an online survey provider.

Overall 27 GPs completed the survey. Around 65% of respondents were relatively frequent referrers to the WellFamily service. The survey asked respondents how they perceive the service and what they value most about it.

### Usefulness of WellFamily service

95% of respondents found the WellFamily Service very or extremely useful for their patients.

### Impact if WellFamily service were not available

The majority of respondents agreed that if the WellFamily service was not available to the GP practice, it would have the following impacts:

- More GP appointments focused on psychosocial issues
- Increased waiting time for help
- More referrals to other agencies
- More intensive/expensive intervention from other services
- More patients presenting with medically unexplained symptoms
- Increase in mental health problems
- More prescription of psychotropic drugs
- More A & E attendances
- More complaints from patients and their families

### What priority should commissioners give to continued funding of the WellFamily service?

90% of respondents felt commissioners should give high or very high priority to continued funding of the WellFamily service.

### Would GP recommend WellFamily services to other practices?

95% of respondents would recommend the WellFamily services to others.

### Overall rating of quality of WellFamily Service

68% of respondents rated the service as excellent and 23% as good, indicating very high levels of satisfaction amongst GPs.

### Feedback from GPs

**“This is one of the most useful services we have connected to our surgery and has really benefited patients who often feel isolated with nowhere to turn.”**

**“Fantastic service with highly skilled workers, takes a lot of pressure off GP’s as more appropriate support with longer appointments can be given.”**

## Client survey

Family Action conducts its own client satisfaction surveys on an annual basis.

### Respondent profile

The online client survey was completed in December 2013 by 92 service users (male: 27; female 65). The active team caseload is approximately 120 at any one time, therefore the client feedback response rate was 77% and likely to be representative.

### Did clients get the service they wanted?

Around 87% of clients reported that they mostly or definitely got the service they wanted from WellFamily.

### Has the service enabled clients to achieve their goals?

Around 81% of respondents felt the WellFamily service had mostly or definitely helped them achieve their goals and a further 9% felt it had helped a little. Only 1% of respondents felt it had not helped at all.

### Would clients recommend the WellFamily service to others?

Around 98% of respondents would recommend the WellFamily service to friends and family.

### Client’s overall rating of service quality

Around 81% of respondents rated service quality as excellent and a further 18% of respondents rated the service quality as good with only one person providing an “unsure” rating.

### Client feedback about WellFamily

The following comments were provided by clients regarding the WellFamily service:

**“Try to keep it going at all costs. Being able to see my worker regularly and flexibly has improved the quality of my life enormously, has given me strategies and allowed me to make significant changes in my life and reduce my anxiety. A really, really important service. The only improvement would be to make it more widely available.”**

**“Andrea is an excellent and helpful person who is obviously very experienced, I wish I could see her for longer and get extended help with the job market. I am grateful for the hard work she puts in and for her kindness and understanding, she is very supportive.”**

**“I have been looked after so well Hamra is caring considerate and very thoughtful person she has helped me so much thank you so much.”**

## Analysis of WellFamily cost-effectiveness and impact on service user wellbeing and social adjustment

The WellFamily outcomes clearly link to National Policy Performance Indicators in relation to Social Care, NHS services and Public Health Outcomes including:

- Enhancing quality of life for people with care and support needs
- Improving experience of healthcare for people with mental illness
- Supporting people who have experienced domestic abuse
- Improving levels of social contentedness and self-reported wellbeing

### Cost-effectiveness of WellFamily Service

A recent analysis of the Hackney Social Care Forum Infrastructure carried out by Bristol University suggests a Social Return on Investment (SROI) of £5.96 for every £1 invested in WellFamily. The high return observed was attributable to Family Action's service having:

- Specialist support available to meet growing demand and different client needs
- A strong business model with clear processes for successful client intervention
- Outcomes that are likely to be long term with lasting changes in quality of life
- Value in the work conducted with other institutes such as schools

If every WellFamily attender had just one less GP appointment per year (at a unit cost of £300 per attendance - to include overheads, prescriptions and GP time), the WellFamily service would be "cost neutral" to the health economy. However, the impact is much greater (e.g. in terms of specialist mental health service reduction in attendance, reduced Accident and Emergency Hospital attendance, reduced social work costs etc). It is probable that investment in the WellFamily service could demonstrate net cost savings to the health and care economy of over £100,000 per annum on a recurring basis.

The above may represent a conservative estimate of the social return on investment (SROI) as the recent Bristol University research would estimate an SROI of circa £1.8 million from the WellFamily service cost of £310,500, indicating a significant positive impact on the health and social care economy.

### Impact on wellbeing and social adjustment

There is clear evidence that the WellFamily service achieves clinically significant impact on clients' wellbeing and social adjustment and represents a cost-effective investment for commissioners.

Measure	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention	Difference	Significance
GAD7 (screening tool for the presence of generalised anxiety disorder)	12.3	9.9	2.5	P<.001
PHQ9 (facilitates the recognition and diagnosis of the most common mental disorders)	13.8	10.7	3.1	P<.001
CORE10 (ten itemed system that provides a generic measure of emotional problems)	20	15	5	P<.001

The service achieves sustainable outcomes and a decreased rate of re-referrals to GPs services. In fact, evidence from the WellFamily service in Hackney where it is used extensively showed that:

- 90% of GPs using the service said WellFamily reduced repeat or inappropriate visits
- One patient sample shows a 70% reduction in unnecessary GP visits
- 25% of people supported by the WellFamily service had a decreased reliance on mental health services
- 291 people may have been prevented from attending A & E representing a cost saving to the NHS
- GPs appreciated the WellFamily workers role which included writing letters to housing/benefits agency which would otherwise attract a fee of £35-£50 per letter.

## Recommendations for future development

The WellFamily Service can be effectively replicated in other locations and could successfully extend its support to people in a diverse range of settings outside primary care, including:

- Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) as a partner by providing low intensity/psychological wellbeing interventions for people with common mental health problems as part of integrated care
- Accident and Emergency provision to address psychosocial problems and divert people to more appropriate cost-effective help and intervention
- Early intervention, providing support to children and young people
- Support through criminal justice system (prison and community) by addressing emotional ill health and promote social reintegration
- Increased support to people with severe mental illness
- Support with dementia, providing assessment advice and social prescribing
- Extended family support and group work with families
- Social Prescribing – WellFamily’s holistic support compliments the signposting services of Social Prescribing.

## Conclusion

Family Action’s Hackney WellFamily Service is a very well-regarded service which addresses complex psychosocial needs of service users in a timely and holistic fashion.

The WellFamily service achieves demonstrably cost-effective positive outcomes in terms of mental health symptom reduction, enhanced social recovery and participation and reduction in use of specialist services. The service is highly regarded by referrers, service users and commissioners.

To access the full report please visit [www.family-action.org.uk/impact](http://www.family-action.org.uk/impact)



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