

NOTHING QUITE LIKE HARD EVIDENCE

"I have never seen someone so happy with a service as his grandmother. She feels that someone out there is not judging her and is actually helping her mokopuna as she can see so much improvement in his behaviour".

CYF Social Worker speaking about her client's experience of FFT Therapy.

It is a common challenge for a country as distant as New Zealand, that intervention models successfully tried and tested for decades internationally, may be viewed with suspicion when applied in a kiwi context. It was against this backdrop that Youth Horizons introduced the evidence based models Functional Family Therapy (FFT) and Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) to New Zealand in 2009. Following a comprehensive due diligence process, including reviewing cultural appropriateness with kaumatua and other Maori elders, Youth Horizons were confident both treatments could provide significant opportunity for young people with conduct issues and their families/whanau.

Nearly two years later, anecdotally, both programmes are a success, with great support from funders and some amazing feedback from families and whanau who have participated. However, evidence of successful outcomes is the key and Youth Horizons are very pleased to be commencing formal research programmes assessing the efficacy of FFT

and MTFC within a New Zealand context.

FFT therapists operate within the family home for 3 – 6 months, supporting the family/whanau to communicate and function effectively. The FFT research is expected to take 18 months and is jointly funded by Child Youth and Family, the Tindall Foundation and Youth Horizons Trust.

We have also been fortunate to succeed in our application for funding from the DIA Community Lotteries Research Fund, researching the effectiveness of MTFC. Key to both research projects is to assess how effective they are for Maori families. MTFC is delivered by trained caregivers in their homes for 6 to 12 months, after which the young person is integrated back into their planned permanency placement. MTFC provides a wrap-around approach. As well as the close engagement with a trained caregiver, the young person receives support from an Individual Therapist, a Skills Trainer and an Education Worker who helps to utilise educational and activity based programmes, and the birth family receives support from a Family/Whanau Therapist.

MTFC PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION ACHIEVED

Youth Horizons' MTFC (Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care) programme has achieved certification just 22 months after its launch in July 2009.

"Few programmes accomplish certification within two years," says Gerry Bouwman, President of Oregon-based TFC Consultants. "The achievement is even more impressive in light of the fact that cultural accommodations were developed and pioneered during this period as well."

MTFC has already proved itself as a very successful programme internationally. This latest achievement by Youth Horizons reflects the fine efforts of a dedicated specialised team.

The certification process assesses an organisation's ability to implement the MTFC model as recommended and to maintain adherence to the model over time.

Contributing factors to speed of certification

Gerry believes several factors contributed to Youth Horizons' fast and successful development of the programme. "First, the unwavering support of Youth Horizons leadership. This created an atmosphere of purpose and expectation and set the tone for programme staff and others in the organisation. It also meant that the development of the programme was adequately resourced. Second, and perhaps

most importantly, a level of mutual trust developed between YH and TFC that allowed for open and honest communication, a willingness to reconsider established practices and a sense of common purpose."

Strong team delivering MTFC programme

"Belinda Seymour-Wright, the MTFC programme's first supervisor, is not merely extremely competent, resourceful and creative, she was also very quick to grasp

this new treatment model and to adapt the concepts of the model from one case experience and apply them to subsequent cases," says TFC Consultants' Rena Gold, VP of Implementations. "She became very dedicated to the treatment model and an advocate for programme fidelity. Her leadership of the treatment team was a big reason that staff turnover did not translate into programme development setbacks. Jon Stoddart, the new programme supervisor, certainly has big shoes to fill, but with the benefit

of Belinda's coaching and support is growing rapidly in his new role." (Belinda Seymour-Wright has now exchanged roles with former Educational Psychologist Jon Stoddart.)

Youth Horizons' achievement:

- **First organisation in the Southern Hemisphere to become an accredited MTFC provider.**
- **First worldwide to implement the programme within an indigenous environment.**

Other team members include Youth Therapist Jennifer Garton, Family/Whanau Therapist Faye Hunt-loane, Leslie Tipene, MTFC Caregiver Support, four Skills Trainers, Cori Pomatagi, Rhea Van Ross, Anthony John, Jessica Gerbic, and nine foster parents, all of whom have been trained in the MTFC model.

Competent and dedicated foster parents are crucial to the operation of a successful MTFC programme. "Youth Horizons' carers are top notch and this really contributed to the development of the programme," says Rena. "Many of these carers have been associated with Youth Horizons for many years and are very much part of the YH community. This is not what we see in most of the programmes we work with.

"The skills and qualities of the MTFC staff also greatly contributed to the quality of the programme. Faye Hunt-loane has been with the programme from the start and has played an important role in developing and implementing culturally relevant service

WHAT MTFC OFFERS

MTFC is a wrap-around, evidence-based, and strengths-based programme of six to twelve months duration. It is aimed at adolescents aged 12-16 years old with antisocial behaviour difficulties whose needs cannot be adequately met by regular services. The programme offers a cost-effective alternative to regular foster care, group or residential treatment, and incarceration for youth who have problems with chronic disruptive behaviour. MTFC operates a point and level system incorporating a high degree of reinforcement to help shape behaviour.

delivery. Leslie Tipene has also been working in support of the programme since the first day, as has Anthony John, the team's most experienced skills coach."

Maori involvement and support essential

The programme could not have succeeded with the population it serves without the involvement, approval and support of Maori leadership. A calculated process of assessing the match between Maori cultural values and the principles underlying the MTFC treatment model took place. The conclusion was that, with some accommodation, MTFC can be a meaningful tool to help young people and their families in the Maori community achieve stability and a positive future direction.

"We were impressed by Pita Te Ngaru's efforts to educate us in all things Maori – including basket weaving – and his attentive eye on programme operations," says Gerry. "The encouragement and kindness of Kaumatua Ngarau Tupaea and his wife Puhanga and the guidance offered to the MTFC team by Hakaraia Moke were all indispensable in building the Youth MTFC programme."

Youth Horizons' MTFC success rate

The programme works with young people who are placed in residential care or at risk of such placement. The excellence of the programme operated by Youth Horizons is demonstrated by the 75 per cent success rate, comfortably exceeding the 66 per cent certification standard. Successful treatment is defined as the percentage of young people who are able to return to the community to live with family, permanent foster carers or independently.

Eight (six boys, two girls) of the original 12 young people involved in the programme successfully completed the programme between July 2009 and March 2011. Since then an additional three boys and one girl have graduated from the programme, one of whom returned to biological parents and two were placed in the home of a relative and a fourth in long-term foster care.