



## Topic Exploration Report

Topic explorations are designed to provide a high-level briefing on new topics submitted for consideration by Health Technology Wales. The main objectives of this report are to:

- Determine the quantity of evidence available for a technology of interest.
- Identify any gaps in the evidence.
- Inform decisions on topics that warrant fuller assessment by Health Technology Wales (HTW).

<b>Topic exploration report number:</b>	TER347
<b>Topic:</b>	Intensive family preservation services (IFPS) aim for families in crisis
<b>Summary of findings:</b>	<p>Intensive Family Preservation Services (IFPS) are short-term, intensive interventions aimed at families in crisis, where there is an imminent risk of out-of-home placement or children entering care.</p> <p>Health Technology Wales researchers searched for evidence on the effectiveness of IFPS for the prevention of out-of-home placement of children.</p> <p>We identified three systematic reviews that reported on the effectiveness of intensive family preservation programmes for the prevention of out-of-home placement. No primary evidence, additional to that included in the systematic reviews, was identified. In the most recent systematic review (2020), seven studies reported on cost effectiveness, but no studies involved a full economic evaluation. Four studies drew conclusions on cost-effectiveness and all four found that IFPS was cost effective.</p> <p>The more recent evidence suggests that intensive family preservation services may be effective at preventing children entering care, however there is uncertainty on whether this effect is seen for more than two years. There is also uncertainty on how the delivery and implementation of the IFPS impacts on these findings.</p>

## Introduction and aims

Intensive Family Preservation Services (IFPS) are short-term, intensive interventions aimed at families in crisis, where there is an imminent risk of children entering care. IFPS work intensively with families to try to reduce family crisis, improve family functioning and keep children safely living at home with their birth parents.

Although this model is the basis of the Integrated Family Support Service in Wales, the topic proposer has highlighted that at least some Welsh regions may have moved away from the original model. It has been proposed that moving back to the original model and expanding it to a wider range of families may have promise for reducing the high rates of looked after children in Wales.

Health Technology Wales researchers searched for evidence on the effectiveness of intensive family preservation services for the prevention of out-of-home placement of children.

## Evidence overview

This section summarises sources deemed to be most relevant; other sources of evidence identified are listed in the brief literature search results section for completeness.

### Secondary Evidence

We identified three systematic reviews that reported on the effectiveness of intensive family preservation programmes for the prevention of out-of-home placement.

Bezczky et al. (2020) included 33 studies; 29 of these were carried out in the USA, three were from the UK and one was from Canada. Children participating in the studies included ranged from three to 13 years. Some studies focused on children of both genders and some focused on male children only. The authors carried out a meta-analysis that included 18 studies (6 randomised controlled trials and 12 controlled studies), with 30,283 child participants. Of these children, 2,938 were allocated to intervention groups and 27,345 were in comparison or control groups.

The authors found that at child level, IFPS were effective in preventing children from entering care at 3, 6, 12 and 24 months after the intervention. Placement outcomes reported at family level demonstrated a significant reduction in out-of-home placements overall but not at the individual time points. Bezczky et al. (2020) also found that seven studies reported on cost-effectiveness, but no studies involved a full economic evaluation. Four studies drew conclusions on cost-effectiveness and all four found that IFPS was cost-effective.

The second systematic review by Al et al. (2012) included 20 studies, which were mostly carried out in the USA. Only one of the included studies was carried out in the UK. The meta-analysis in the review included three studies involving 479 families and found that intensive family preservation programs had a medium and positive effect on family functioning. However Al et al. (2012) concluded that IFPS were generally not effective in preventing out-of-home placement. The authors did not report any cost-effectiveness evidence. As most of the studies were conducted in the USA, it is unclear whether the findings can be applied to Wales.

The final systematic review included 10 studies from a literature search covering 1977 to 1993. Five studies were randomised trials, and 5 were quasi-experimental studies (non-randomised). Heneghan et al. (1996) used two reviewers to independently assess the methodological quality of the studies. Only

two studies were rated as acceptable, four were considered adequate and four were unacceptable methodologically according to the authors' criteria. Heneghan et al. (1996) reported that rates of out-of-home placements were 21% to 59% among families who received FPS and 20% to 50% among comparison families. The relative risk of placement was significantly reduced by IFPS in only two studies. Also, a large proportion of children in control groups did not enter care, therefore suggesting that out-of-home placements were not imminent.

#### Primary Evidence

No primary evidence, additional to that included in the systematic reviews above, was identified.

#### **Areas of uncertainty**

The more recent evidence suggests that intensive family preservation services may be effective at preventing children entering care, however there is uncertainty on whether this effect is seen more than two years later due to shorter follow up periods in the studies. There is uncertainty on how the delivery and implementation of the IFPS impacts on these findings, for example the evidence shows variation in whether caseworkers were available to families outside of normal office hours and variation in contact time per case. There is uncertainty around the appropriate comparator, the evidence identified compares IFPS with usual care, however it is unclear at this point what usual care is in Wales.

Additionally, studies evaluating the impact of IFPS in a UK/Welsh context, that includes cost effectiveness considerations, would strengthen the evidence base.

## Literature search results

### Health technology assessments and guidance

NICE. (2012). Social and emotional wellbeing: early years. Public health guideline [PH40].  
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph40/chapter/1-Recommendations#recommendation-2-identifying-vulnerable-children-and-assessing-their-needs>

### Evidence reviews and economic evaluations

Bezczky Z, El-Banna A, Petrou S, et al. (2020). Intensive Family Preservation Services to prevent out-of-home placement of children: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Child Abuse & Neglect. 102: 104394. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104394>

Heneghan AM, Horwitz SM, Leventhal JM. (1996). Evaluating intensive family preservation programs: a methodological review. Pediatrics. 97(4): 535-42. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8632942/>

Al CMW, Stams GJJM, Bek MS, et al. (2012). A meta-analysis of intensive family preservation programs: Placement prevention and improvement of family functioning. Children and Youth Services Review. 34(8): 1472-9. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2012.04.002>

### Individual studies

No additional primary evidence was identified

### Ongoing research

No additional evidence found.

### Date of search:

March 2022

### Concepts used:

Looked after children, out of home placement, integrated family support services, intensive family preservation programmes, IFPS