



Report of the Director of Social Services

External Funding Panel – 3 October 2018

Welsh Government Invest to Save Bid for Family Finding Project

Purpose:	To approve the funding application for the WG Invest to Save expression of interest for the Family Finding Project
Policy Framework:	Social Services and Wellbeing Act Wales (2014) Signs of Safety Framework
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal and the Family Support Continuum Steering Group
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that the External Funding Panel approve the Family Finding Invest to Save application
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Finance Officer:	Chris Davies
Legal Officer:	Debbie Smith
Access to Services Officer:	Rhian Millar

1. Introduction

1.1. Welsh Government's Invest to Save Fund for 2018-19 bidding round opening in July 2018. Since 2009 the fund has supported projects across a number of areas including:

- Procurement;
- ICT;
- Workforce;
- Improving ways of working; and
- Service delivery.

The Invest to Save Fund has allocated £174 million to over 180 projects since 2009 and the majority of Welsh public sector organisations have used the fund to support some of their initiatives.

- 1.2. This financial year the Fund has up to £5 million available to distribute to support the right projects which are ready for implementation. All projects will be considered however they are particularly interested this year in projects which have the potential to make an impact either regionally or nationally or which will improve the outcomes for looked after children
- 1.3. A funding bid for the Family Finding Project was submitted to the Welsh Government Invest to Save as an expression of interest on the 30th July 2018 in accordance with guidance provided from the Welsh Government.
- 1.4. The bid asks for support in developing an innovative team to drive the implementation of the 'Family Finding' model in Swansea to support the reduction in number of looked after children.

2. Current Service and Key Issues

- 2.1. Among the key strategic priorities for Child and Family Services (and Swansea Council more generally) are the Safe Looked After Children Reduction Strategy and the Sustainable Swansea programme. There are strong interdependencies between these initiatives and their prospects for success hinge on our capacity to support greater numbers of families to care for their own children, where safe and appropriate to do so.
- 2.2. In 2016/17 the financial costs for Child and Family Services (not including the costs for partners in Education, Health etc.) of supporting our looked after population was approximately £23,000,000 - around 65% of the total Departmental budget. If we do not reduce the need for children to become looked after there is a risk we will not have sufficient resources to consistently and effectively meet the needs of those who have to come into or are already in our care.
- 2.3. One of the primary ways for taking forward the above strategies and improving our capacity to support families to care for their own children has been the development and implementation of the Signs Of Safety (SOS) approach to practice.
- 2.4. Over the last 5 years Child and Family Services has been able to evidence considerable progress in terms of delivering its strategic objectives – i.e. improving outcomes, reducing the number of looked after children, and ensuring financial sustainability. However progress has stalled in the last 18 months as a consequence of increasing social and financial pressures:-
- 2.5. The total numbers of children who are looked after in Swansea have grown in the last year:

Date	LAC
31 st March 2017	481
30 th June 2017	492
30 th September 2017	478
31 st December 2017	502
31 st March 2018	522

- 2.6. Almost 200 children became looked after in Swansea last year. This is a high number to be able to ensure the right placement is always available at the right time. It is also a high number to ensure that we have sufficient resources to be financially sustainable.
- 2.7. Given the increasing numbers becoming looked after, the numbers of children looked after in high cost residential care placements has risen from 30 to 37.
- 2.8. To be financially sustainable, Child and Family Services needs to reduce the looked after population to 450 and the number in residential care needs to below 25 over the next 3 years.
- 2.9. It is important to acknowledge that this can only occur if our practice is strengthened. An essential component of the SOS practice framework is to identify and support a robust and committed family network. A recent review of the implementation of SOS in Swansea has recognised this to be the biggest gap in the successful delivery of the approach locally. As a result, it is thought that children are becoming looked after because we have failed to identify robust support networks and alternative informal family carers

3. Proposal

- 3.1. The proposal is to create an innovative team to drive the implementation of the 'Family Finding' model in Swansea. The team and senior managers will promote an integrated approach in order to enable the model to be embedded throughout the Department.
- 3.2. Family Finding is a set of strategies, tools, skills, values and beliefs created by Kevin Campbell. It is an evidence-based approach that is mandated by United States federal law. It has also been extensively implemented in a number of Canadian provinces.
- 3.3. Family Finding aims to ensure children's safety and wellbeing through strengthening family connections and support networks. The more a family is able to build support and resilience within their own network, the more effective and less time is needed of statutory services.

- 3.4. Family finding uses various search and engagement techniques to locate connections and stresses the importance of including family in decision-making. Family Finding engages with and enables families to have the responsibility for safety, permanence and wellbeing of the child. It is a model that helps create a strong foundation for collaborative family engagement and can be used across the continuum of child and family services involvement with a family.
- 3.5. The process identifies relatives and other supportive adults, including those who are currently estranged from or unknown to the child, especially those who are willing to become permanent connections for him/her. Upon completion of the process, children and young people have a range of commitments from non-paid adults who are able to provide permanency, sustainable relationships within a kinship system, and support in the transition to adulthood and beyond.
- 3.6. Keeping safety at the forefront and using a family-driven process, families are empowered to formulate highly realistic and sustainable plans to meet the long-term needs of children and young people.
- 3.7. Some of the outcomes that are expected to be achieved as a result of successful implementation of the Family Finding model include:
 - Reduced numbers of children becoming looked after.
 - Increased rates of reunification to family for children already looked after.
 - Improved well-being outcomes.
 - Improved placement stability (there are existing performance indicators for placement stability).
 - Quality transition out of the looked after system for care leavers.
 - A reduction in the number of children becoming looked after on more than one occasion.
 - Reduction in the number in high-cost residential care.
 - Stronger sense of belonging for children.
- 3.8. The model uses 6 steps which family finding workers assist children's social workers to implement. These are well-defined and tactical procedures and activities that are tracked with a fidelity tool. As an integrated approach the goal is to embed the principles, tools and strategies throughout practice in Swansea.
- 3.9. There has been 26 evaluations of the Family Finding model across America and Canada. Key findings of these evaluations include:-
 - Increased family contact and permanent connections.
 - Increased numbers of children adopted, reunified with family or placed with parent and returning home.
 - Developing functioning life time networks made up of relatives siblings and other important adults.

- Changes to general approaches to working with families
- 3.10. In Ontario, Canada, it was found that 91% of the 75 young people considered in a 2 year study are connected to at least one enduring non paid relationship of support expected to last a lifetime
- 3.11. Surveys regularly demonstrate considerable savings through achieving earlier permanence with families. Moreover, these level of results have been consistently replicated in the 26 Evaluations sites across America and Canada
- 3.12. The proposal will create savings by reducing the numbers of children who need to:-
- enter care proceedings;
 - become looked after; and
 - be looked after in expensive independent foster and residential placements.
- 3.13. It will also help to reduce the average time children are looked after for.
- 3.14. For every placement with local authority foster carers that the project avoids then it will mean we avoid costs to the sum of £20,800 - £23,400 per annum. For every placement with an independent foster agency this figure is £49,400 per annum and for every residential placement it is £169,000 per annum.
- 3.15. Swansea has ambitious targets – that are necessary for financial sustainability - for the size of its looked after children population (450), dependency on independent foster placements (nor more than 25%) and residential care population (no more than 25). If these are realised then the level of spend on placements will reduce considerably.
- 3.16. A reduction in the LAC population by 25 children for each of the next three years (thereby achieving the target of 450), this would mean savings on the cost of placements of approximately £815,000 per annum (a total avoidance of £2.445m by the end of year 3). Please note that this is only the direct costs of providing accommodation and does not capture the myriad of other costs associated with looking after a child.
- 3.17. By increasing our capacity to divert children from entering independent foster and residential care placements then there would be further potential savings. For instance, if the population in residential care fell from 35 to 25 as we hope this would realise annual savings of around £1,690,000.

4. Legislative Requirements

- 4.1. The Family Finding model supports the principles and ethos of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014 in relation to voice and control,

co-production, early intervention and prevention and promoting wellbeing. Moreover, it is entirely aligned with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

4.2. The model compliments the Care Crisis Review which considered the factors which have led to the numbers of children in care being at their highest since the implementation of the Children Act in 1989. The Review recommends that: local authorities better draw upon support from family and friends; that local authorities better promote their duty to support families to promote children’s upbringing with their families; that local authorities make arrangements to support families to make safe plans for children; and that improvements need to be made in exploring potential carers within the child’s family.

5. Equality and Engagement Implications

5.1. The Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) and must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

5.2. Our Equality Impact Assessment process ensures that we have paid due regard to the above.

5.3. We have completed an EIA Screening Form and will complete a full EIA report pending the success of the pilot, which will include engagements and consultation with service users.

6. Financial Implications

6.1. The total costs of the project are £342,288 per annum equating to £1,026,864 over the course of 3 years as outlined in the following table:

Item	Cost (inc. on-costs) per annum
Family finding Boot Camp (x3) £15,000	£45,000
Family meeting workshops (x3) £9,000	£27,000
4 x Family Finding staff	£186,218
Family Finding Manager	£62,338
Young people’s Family finding Boot Camp x3 £3,000 per year	£9,000
Principal Social Worker involvement in policies, training, communications etc.	£6,101
Project management	£6,631

TOTAL (annual cost)	£342,288
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6.2. The local authority is seeking funding from Invest to Save totalling £750,000 which is 73% of the total costs of the development and implementation of the Family Finding Model in Swansea.

6.3. The remaining costs will be resourced within current budgets as shown below:

	2018-19 £	2019-20 £	2020-21 £	2021-22 £	Total
Invest to Save Bid	£125,000	£250,000	£250,000	£125,000	£750,000
Local Authority contribution	£46,000	£92,000	£92,000	£46,000	£276,000

6.4. A continually annual cycle of review will be implemented to enable us to move resource around to meet need and make the model sustainable for the future to enable the investment to be re-paid.

6.5. This will help us to support children in a more responsive way and meet budget saving targets as austerity continues. Ongoing annual review will inform decisions in terms of future commissioning and enable us to move resources around to meet need and make the model sustainable for the future. This will in turn, enable the investment to be re-paid within a 4 year period.

6.6. The repayment profile of this funding is as follows:

	2019-20 £	2020-21 £	2021-22 £	2022-23 £
Revenue	£100,000	£100,000	£250,000	£300,000

7. Legal Implications

7.1. It will be necessary to ensure that all terms and conditions attached to WG Invest to Save grant funding are complied with and that the Council's Financial Procedure Rules Regarding Grant Applications and Acceptances are followed, if successful.

Background Papers:

Invest to Save Expression of Interest

Appendices:

Appendix A - EIA Form