

# Entry for the 2015 RAID Awards for Working with Challenging Behaviour: **The Family Action Support Team (FAST), North East Lincolnshire Council.**

## **SUMMARY**

The Family Action Support Team (FAST) work with parents/carers with children who have attention and behavioural difficulties often associated with Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and other neurological conditions affecting social understanding, communication or global development. We promote a whole family approach to maximise positive support and intervention.

We are a specialist targeted service providing small parallel group work with parents/carers and their children. We offer evidence based educational and therapeutic programmes (including Webster Stratton; Tripple P; Strengthening Families; Systemic Family Therapy) to assist parents/carers and children to understand and manage behaviours. Programmes utilise Applied Behavioural Analysis; ABC behavioural analysis and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

Our ethos incorporates a non-judgemental approach focussing on promoting positive behaviours whilst avoiding inadvertent reinforcement of negative behaviours to assist parents/carers to understand and manage their child's challenging behaviours.

Children with additional hidden needs (e.g. autism) often behave in ways that cause difficulty for themselves and others. FAST works with parents/carers and children to:-

- promote understanding of the child's perspective
- assist social/communication and emotional development
- teach strategies to enable children to manage and cope in the world that they experience
- assist parents to understand and support their child's individual needs
- promote positive relationships
- reduce challenging behaviours
- help people experience control in their lives
- relieve discomfort and promote emotional wellbeing.

The Family Action Support Team (FAST) is part of North East Lincolnshire Children's Health Service focussed on early intervention and prevention. The service was created in 2003 to meet the growing needs of families with children who have attention and behavioural difficulties often associated with Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and other neurological conditions affecting social understanding, communication or global development. We promote a whole family approach to maximise positive support and intervention.

FAST provides a specialist targeted service. Our ethos incorporates a non-judgemental approach focussing on promoting positive behaviours whilst avoiding inadvertent reinforcement of negative behaviours to assist parents/carers to understand and manage their child's challenging behaviours. Using a parallel approach children are supported to understand and manage their feelings, develop social/communication skills and emotional literacy. Thus promoting self-esteem, confidence and self-regulation. Our approach is designed to build resilience and enhance family relationships. A positive approach to managing challenging behaviours in children with additional needs increases their ability to participate, reduces social isolation (parent/child), promotes inclusion and positively impacts learning assisting children to reach their full potential. Research suggests that positive early intervention reduces the risk factors for anti-social behaviour, criminality, drug/alcohol abuse and mental health challenges (DFE 2012).

Utilising messages from research and evidence based practice, the team offers supportive educational and therapeutic interventions requiring commitment from parents/carers and children to practice strategies in different settings. Reporting back on progress enables trouble shooting and skills development.

Working with parents, FAST parallel programme 'Empowering Parents Enabling Children' starts with understanding the needs of the individual child and that all behaviour has a function. We can all display challenging behaviour; what challenges one person may not challenge another. Challenging behaviour results from a complex interplay between internal factors, external factors and emotional understanding. It follows therefore that where children have delayed emotional development, social, communication, attention difficulties and/or sensory sensitivities they may express greater challenging behaviours.

Applied behavioural analysis underpins programme delivery including social learning theory and social reinforcement with consideration for inadvertent reinforcement of negative/ challenging behaviours. This is encompassed in the broader understanding of positive parenting including an understanding of social/communication difficulties and how these may impact on the child's understanding and behaviour. Parents are encouraged to consider their own behaviours in relation to their child's understanding and learning; changing their behaviour can be pivotal to bringing about positive change for their child. Consideration is given to the sensory sensitivities (associated with additional hidden difficulties) and environmental factors and how these impact on behaviour. The value of positive play in relation to social/academic and emotional learning is promoted. Parents/carers are encouraged to think about the function of their child's challenging behaviour using the ABC model of behaviour analysis and behavioural charts. Consideration is given to the

child's predominant style of temperament and personality and parenting styles. Strategies to manage are explored including increasing understanding, positive reinforcement, distraction, redirection, manipulation of the environment, avoidance, progressive exposure and de-escalation.

Working with children starts with understanding the needs of the individual child. Applied behavioural analysis underpins the programme delivery. Continuous schedules of reinforcement promote desired behaviours whilst extinction strategies reduce the effectiveness of some problem behaviours. Consideration is given for the child's internal state and for the environment (restructuring where appropriate). Visual supports and clear consistent communication are used to enhance understanding, provide structure/ routine and reduce anxiety. Planned learning activities are delivered through structured and unstructured play. Positive play experiences motivate children and promote cognitive, affective, social, physical, attentional and language development. Care and consideration are given to the individual child's understanding of the concept and meaning. The Team Teach approach ([www.teamteach.co.uk](http://www.teamteach.co.uk)) is used within the sessions to de-escalate and manage challenging behaviours that may create risk to the child or others.

As part of the programme sessions parents/carers and children spend time together engaging in positive play activities designed to reinforce learning and social understanding. Parents/carers are encouraged and supported to practice positive reinforcement strategies and consider the reasons behind their child's behaviours. Staff provide positive role models.

Outcomes are determined using Goodman's strengths and difficulty questionnaire, service developed parent and child perception scores and observations.

FAST provide further programmes to assist the understanding and management of behaviour:-

- **Supporting secure attachment**

Professional training to understand the importance of secure attachment and the impacts of insecure attachment on infant/child development and behaviour.

Targeted programme to assist parents of infants to promote secure attachment and understand the benefits for brain development, behaviour and relationships.

- **Social skills**

This parallel programme is designed to assist parents to understand social skills deficits and enable them to coach emotions and social communication skills development with their child. Children explore their understanding of feelings and through role play and structured activities practice a range of social skills enhancing their understanding and behaviour.

- **Understanding and managing anger**

- **Understanding and managing general anxiety**

Utilising a cognitive behavioural approach these programmes consider the thoughts, feeling, behaviour triangle. Parents are encouraged to look at their own emotions and management of these; consider how they can assist their child and how they can help their child to develop their own understanding and management strategies.

Children through play and structured activities are assisted to understand their feelings and practice more appropriate ways to express/communicate their feelings.

Workshops:-

- **Understanding Autism**

- **Understanding ADHD**
- **Understanding Dyspraxia**
- **Understanding and managing oppositional behaviour**
- **Visual Supports and understanding schedules of reinforcement**

Workshops are delivered parent/carer only and are designed to enhance understanding of more specific behaviours often associated with additional needs and learning difficulties.

Children with additional needs often behave in ways that cause difficulty for themselves and others. FAST works with parents/carers and children to:-

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- assist parents to understand and support their child's individual needs
- promote positive relationships
- reduce challenging behaviours
- help people experience control in their lives
- relieve discomfort and promote emotional wellbeing.

## **REFERENCES**

Scott S., Doolan M., Beckett C., Harry S., Cartwright S., HCA team (2012) 'How is parenting style related to child antisocial behaviour? Preliminary findings from the Helping Children Achieve Study. Department for Education

Team Teach [www.teamteach.co.uk](http://www.teamteach.co.uk)