

**An
impact
evaluation
of the Family
Crisis Support
Service**

**Twins
trust.** We support
twins, triplets
and more...

Dr. Louise Gilbert and Dr. Karen McInnes, 2019

Foreword

Firstly, my thanks to the amazing team at Norland for kindly carrying out this evaluation. Our partnership with Norland has always been extremely appreciated by the charity and our families. I'm frequently blown away by the kindness of the volunteers that offer their time to help our families that are in such desperate need.

I'm delighted that for the first time we're able to evidence the impact of the Family Crisis Support service. This evaluation shows that following intervention from the Family Crisis Support team, the improvement in daily family living activities such as sleep, routine, getting out and about and feeding is significant. The evaluation also shows that the stress levels of the families improved significantly.

In addition, the evaluation noted that anxiety and depression were also commonly cited by families supported by the service. Since the completion of the evaluation we have started to use the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADs) measurement scoring with our families. This pool of data still requires full analysis, however, on initial review it is indicative that the HADs scoring reduces as a result of receiving support from the service.

This unique service with statistically significant improvements really does change lives. We want to support even more families so if you can volunteer or donate towards the cost of expanding the service please do

<https://twinstrust.org/get-involved/fundraising/donation.html>

My thanks to all involved and a special thank you to the families that kindly agreed to take part in this evaluation.

Keith Reed, CEO, Twins Trust.

Executive Summary

A Mum dealing with the grief of losing her husband suddenly 'Helped us survive and keep surviving an incredibly traumatic and painful loss'

A Mum faced with mental health challenges finding it difficult to cope with her twins 'I struggle to put into words how much this has helped me! I am at a point now, as a result of the help I received, where I enjoy my twins immensely.'

This evaluation of the Twins Trust Family Crisis Support (FCS) service evidences a service that successfully offers practical support to parents of multiples that have been identified as 'in severe need or in crisis.' The service exists for families who are in dire need – they are either struggling with mental health challenges, struggling with ill health, coping with a bereavement or other extreme extenuating circumstances. These families have exhausted all other avenues of help and have nowhere left to turn.

A sample of FCS case study family records (n=34), were analysed to identify: the demographics of parents; their needs; the services they accessed; the effects of FCS on parents' levels of coping with daily family living; and their confidence as parents. Changes in levels of stress was also evaluated. Of the 34 families who were a case study in the evaluation, 30% were triplet families.

Extreme parenting challenges was given most frequently as the reason for requesting FCS. These are families who find themselves coping with raising twins, triplets or more as well as an unexpected change in the family's circumstances.

Extreme parenting challenges could be one parent families with older children that have additional needs, families that have moved to a new area and the main wage earner has been made redundant or families that are living in accommodation that makes it extremely difficult to get out of the house – particularly when there is an older child that needs to get to school. These families do not have any other support, no family that can help and they are not financially able to access the support they so desperately need.

Anxiety and depression were also commonly cited in the evaluation, so needs were complex. All families received support in their home from family support practitioners, most frequently for 2 (range 1 to 14) days. The support offered varied depending on individual circumstances, but all practitioners worked with the families to devise an action plan. Other support was also offered to some families. This included access to phone support, Twins Trust factsheets and videos and online support. Some

families were provided with toys, vital for healthy brain development and stimulation, clothes and equipment. These families would not otherwise have had access to these items, something many families would take for granted.

Parents using the service perceived FCS to be non-judgmental, level-headed and professional. FCS families reported statistically significant improvements in feeding, establishing a routine, getting out and about, sleep patterns and behaviour. Parental stress significantly reduced whilst coping levels increased as a result of the support. Even where stress levels remained high through the changing demands of caring for multiples and the complexity of family life, confidence in parenting ability significantly increased.

There is much to celebrate in this first evaluation of the FCS service, which through its support of parents of multiples and its contribution to child health and wellbeing is invaluable.

This service relies on funding trusts and individuals. It also relies on the very kind volunteers that give up their time to help these families. Without funding and volunteers these families would be left in despair with nowhere to turn.

Report Recommendations

The FCS service is greatly valued by all those who contributed to this report. Below is a summary of the resulting recommendations, which are discussed in greater detail at the end of the report.

- Family support practitioners, with an approach that is described as empathetic, professional, knowledgeable and non-judgmental, are powerful brand-ambassadors for the FCS service. However, with the prevalence of depression and anxiety often co-existing with other problems, it could be useful to ensure that all family support practitioners are trained and feel confident to work with parents who are likely to be experiencing anxiety and /or depression alongside other issues.
- Allied support professionals need to be aware of what FCS can provide for families in need and they need to be clear about the eligibility criteria and referral procedures to ensure effective liaison.
- Completion on the referral form of all questions related to parents' demographics including family structure, would build up a clear representation of current and changing service users.
- A review of the ordering and wording of the FCS evaluation forms should reduce their complexity and potential positive bias of some of the questions.
- The standardization of Likert-type scales to measure changes in behaviours and perceptions would improve the consistency of scoring (Hartley and Betts, 2010)
- To acknowledge the emotional and physical support that spouses contribute to caring routines (Wenze et al., 2015), it might be useful to gather data regarding their contribution as well as their ongoing mental health and wellbeing. This could contribute to a more holistic assessment of family need.