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Informing debates about the sustainability of the Head, Heart, Hands programme. Report to the Fostering Network

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Informing debates about the sustainability of the Head, Heart, Hands programme June 2015

Samantha McDermid, Lisa Holmes and Helen Trivedi

1. Introduction

This paper has been produced by members of the Head, Heart, Hands evaluation team from the Centre for Child and Family Research (CCFR) at Loughborough University as a follow up to an initial paper produced in November 2014 (Holmes, McDermid and Trivedi, 2014) to explore the potential economic impact of Head, Heart, Hands. The Head, Heart, Hands demonstration programme activities in the sites will end in December 2015, and as such, at the time of writing many of the sites are exploring sustainability models and how they might continue with social pedagogic practice beyond the timeframe of the programme. Consequently, the need for a better understanding of the cost implications of Head, Heart, Hands and social pedagogy at this critical juncture has become apparent. This paper has been prepared to inform discussions and decisions around sustainability.

This paper forms part of an extensive evaluation into the impact of the Head, Heart, Hands programme¹. It is not designed to provide an overview of all the evaluation findings to date. Rather, it applies an 'economic lens' to data gathered from interviews with Site Project Leads and Strategic Managers from the participating demonstration sites to focus specifically on the issues associated with costs. This paper is designed to support the funders, The Fostering Network programme team and the sites to address sustainability issues, discussions and decisions. Existing research has demonstrated the need to consider costs in relation to the needs and circumstances of children and their families and the outcomes achieved (Ward, Holmes and Soper, 2008; Holmes and McDermid, 2012). Therefore, the evaluation team acknowledge the wider context within which this economic analysis has been carried out. However, it is too early to undertake a comprehensive economic analysis of Head, Heart, Hands. Such an analysis will be undertaken in the final stages of the evaluation, whereby a synthesis of all of the findings across the evaluation programme, including the potential future cost savings, or costs avoided, and evidence of the impact of the programme on children and young people, foster carers and the system that supports them, will be brought together.

The analysis presented in this paper builds on the learning from the evaluation to date, most notably those elements of the evaluation which explore the implementation of the programme to explore the key economic issues facing sites that need to be considered as the programme moves towards the final stages of the demonstration period. To this end, at this stage of the evaluation, the paper is designed to *initiate and inform the discussion* around the costs of Head, Heart, Hands, rather than to provide a conclusive analysis of the costs associated with the programme.

¹ For more information about the wider evaluation please go to:
<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/ccfr/research/exploring/project---head-heart-hands.html>

2. The parameters of the economic analysis

2.1 *The costs of Head, Heart, Hands or the costs of social pedagogy?*

As the evaluation progresses it is evident that it is necessary to consider *what* is being costed. Previous evaluation reports (Ghate, McDermid and Trivedi, 2013) have highlighted the need to distinguish *between social pedagogy per se*, the approach, philosophy, framework, or set of values underpinning practice, and the *Head, Heart, Hands programme*, the programme designed to introduce that approach to seven fostering services in the UK. It has been widely acknowledged that social pedagogy must be enabled to emerge within an environment that encourages co-creation. As such Petrie (2007) notes that it may be more valuable to refer to ‘pedagogies’ than social pedagogy as a single entity. However, there are commonalities emerging across those sites which have been shaped by the central programme design. Therefore ‘Head, Heart, Hands’ refers to both ‘the programme’, and ‘the approach being developed within the participating fostering services’ (Ghate, McDermid and Trivedi, 2013). To this end, while it is *not* possible to have Head, Heart, Hands without social pedagogy, it *is* possible to have social pedagogy without Head, Heart, Hands.

Within the parameters of this evaluation it would not be appropriate or even possible to provide an overarching economic analysis of social pedagogy in the UK *per se*. The data that will be utilised for the economic analysis will be gathered from the Head, Heart, Hands demonstration sites, and their costs and experiences will inevitably be viewed through the lens of the programme. Moreover, the outcomes that will be assessed throughout the evaluation will need to be attributable to the particular activities and practices which have been moulded through the programme, including the particular learning and development provided by the Social Pedagogy Consortium. During interviews gathered as part of the wider evaluation, site representatives themselves made the distinction between those costs and impacts associated with a change in practice as they move towards social pedagogic approaches, and those which were a result of being part of a demonstration programme.

To this end, the primary aim of the economic analysis is to explore the costs, costs avoided and sustainability arguments associated with the Head, Heart, Hands demonstration programme. However, given the relationship between the programme and social pedagogy, it is expected that the economic analysis of the programme will contribute to a better understanding of the potential costs associated with future routes into social pedagogy, and the wider exploration of the use of social pedagogy in the UK. Moreover, the sites have reported the intention to continue to embed social pedagogic approaches (albeit in different ways) beyond the Head, Heart, Hands programme. The economic evaluation will therefore consider the financial implications for the sites if they choose to continue elements of the programme beyond December 2015.

2.2 *The overall costing approach*

When agencies engage in a demonstration or pilot of a new practice, intervention or approach, the costs incurred can be organised into three ‘cost categories’ (adapted from Saldana *et al.*, 2014):

1. *The ongoing costs associated with the new practice.* These may include the costs of the staff time associated with new or additional processes, assessments or practices; meetings, groups or sessions provided as part of the practice; and any additional staff required to deliver the approach or intervention.

2. *The costs associated with implementing the new practice.* These costs may include the costs incurred through training or coaching in the new practice; the recruitment of new staff; and planning and review activities that form part of the installation stage of implementation.
3. *The costs associated with being part of the demonstration or pilot programme.* These costs may include the costs of travel to programme meetings or steering groups; and staff time to undertake additional monitoring, reporting or evaluation activities.

These costs may be offset through costs avoided as a result of the impact of the programme. Holmes, McDermid and Trivedi (2014) identified a number of potentials costs avoided associated with Head, Heart, Hands. These can be organised into two broad types:

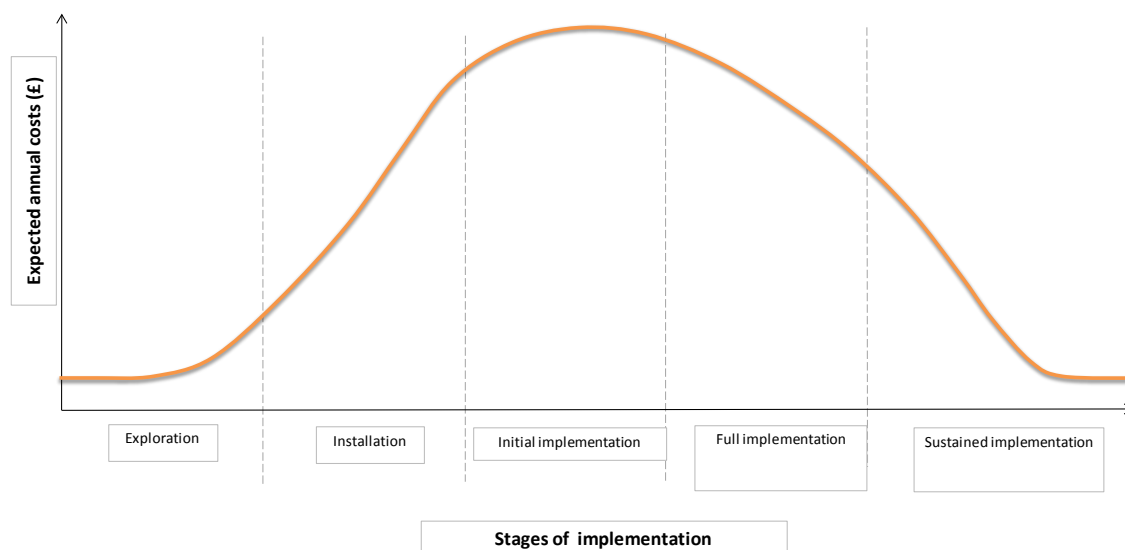
1. *Child level outcomes*, which relate to the impact of the new practice on individual children. One such example is improved placement stability resulting in a reduction in placement changes.
2. *Organisational outcomes*, which relate to changes in wider organisational functions as a result of the new practice. One such example is the reduction in the costs associated with recruitment and retention of foster carers.

It will be vital to capture each of these costs to fully understand the economic impact of Head, Heart, Hands (*c.f.* Ward, Holmes and Soper, 2008; Holmes and McDermid, 2012; Saldana *et al.*, 2014). Distinguishing between the different types of costs will facilitate both a retrospective and prospective analysis of costs. A picture of the costs associated with the programme will be explored retrospectively. A prospective analysis will facilitate an understanding of the likely impact of programme activities on future budgets. The financial implications of continuing Head, Heart, Hands related activities beyond the life of the programme can also be considered.

3. Emerging evidence about the costs of Head, Heart, Hands

The expenditure associated with introducing a new practice or intervention will change as the agency moves through the various stages of implementation (*c.f.* Fixsen *et al.*, 2005; Holmes, Westlake and Ward, 2008; Ghate, McDermid and Trivedi, 2014). Figure 1 below is intended to provide a hypothesised illustration of how these costs are likely to vary over the course of the programme, based on the different levels and types of activity associated with each stage of implementation. As the graph shows, the costs that are likely to be incurred increase over the Installation stage, peaking during Initial Implementation as the activities required to introduce the new practice are underway. It is possible to hypothesise that the costs should start to reduce during the Full Implementation stage and into Sustained Implementation as practice starts to embed and those activities are no longer necessary. The costs are lowest when the site reaches Sustained Implementation as the new practice has now become the norm and the financial benefits are realised.

Figure 1 Illustration of anticipated distribution of costs across the stages of implementation²



As Figure 1 suggests, the evaluation to date has been undertaken during the stages that the costs associated with the Head, Heart, Hands programme are likely to be at their highest. This will be taken into account in any economic analysis, to ensure that the potential costs of continuing with social pedagogy beyond the life of the programme are not overestimated.

3.1 Costs associated with a change in practice

A systematic analysis of the impact of changes in practice precipitated by Head, Heart, Hands, on resources³ will be undertaken in the final year of the evaluation. However, the picture emerging is a varied one (Holmes, McDermid and Trivedi, 2014; Ghate, McDermid and Trivedi, 2015). Evaluation participants are of the view that certain changes in practice will increase the time required, while others can be easily incorporated into existing workloads. For example, an average home visit is estimated to take approximately one hour (Ward, Holmes and Soper, 2008). A number of supervising social workers have reported using the Common Third⁴ to enhance the relationship between the child, the foster carer and themselves. However, it has also been reported that some Common Third activities may require the supervising social worker to spend longer than an hour with the fostering family. It should be noted that not all Common Third activities require substantial amounts of time, or that all visits will involve a Common Third activity. Moreover, if outcomes are improved and potential costs are avoided then these activities might well be perceived to be cost effective. However, some workers have highlighted the impact that such activities may have on the time required. By contrast frontline social work staff reported that some core models, such as the

² These figures have been hypothesised based on the existing expertise of the evaluation team, and draw on knowledge that can be found in Ward, Holmes and Soper, 2008; Holmes and McDermid, 2012.

³ Through this paper, the term 'resources' refers to both financial resources and personnel time, which in turn has a cost.

⁴ A Common Third activity is one that is used to strengthen the relationship between individuals, including the foster carer and the child. The activity can take any form, such as cooking, fixing a bike or colouring in. The activity must however, create a commonly shared situation that brings the individuals together in a way that creates equality between them.

'Three Ps' and the 'Four Fs' do not require any additional time or resource. Moreover, by the second wave implementation report there was a growing consensus that once the key principles of social pedagogy have been internalised, these can relatively easily become woven-in to the everyday practice of carers and of staff without great additional effort (Ghate, McDermid and Trivedi, 2015).

3.2 Costs associated with components of the programme

The *direct costs* of the programme were seen by Site Project Leads as broadly manageable and to be expected in a programme of this size. The Learning and Development courses have been identified as a core component of the Head, Heart, Hands programme and overall, foster carers have reported finding these to be a vital starting point in their understanding of social pedagogy (McDermid *et al.*, 2014). The sessions were delivered by two members of the Social Pedagogy Consortium and as such, the substantial cost of these were covered by central programme funding. However, the sites also reported that they had incurred additional and unanticipated costs associated with the Learning and Development courses, including the costs of room hire, refreshments and in some cases child care.

Some sites have established groups and sessions designed to enhance engagement of foster carers and social care staff in the programme. These can be defined broadly as 'momentum groups'. While representatives in each of the sites reported that such momentum activities are key to the implementation of Head, Heart, Hands, there was considerable variability in the extent to which this was being achieved in the groups. Representatives from three of the sites reported that the momentum groups have helped to further embed the practice of social pedagogy, which in turn has helped to improve the retention rates. As one interviewee noted: *"I think one of the spin-offs from the momentum group is that foster carers feel very much more skilled in what they're doing, and feel more equal within the team. That's been really, really beneficial."* (Social Work Team Manager, quoted in Ghate, McDermid and Trivedi, 2014:36). A number of foster carers have reported that the momentum activities have been fundamental to embedding and enriching their understanding of social pedagogy. Moreover, there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that new carers are being attracted to the site through momentum and awareness raising activities because of their own resonance with the principles of social pedagogy introduced in the fostering service. It was noted by a number of the interviewees that while there is a cost associated with delivering such activities, it is anticipated that these costs will potentially be offset by the costs avoided due to a reduction in future, long term expenditure associated with the marketing and recruitment of new foster carers.

By contrast, some of the sites reported that there had been little or no evidence of a change in their recruitment and retention rates to date. Interviewees reported that, while in theory they felt that momentum activities are an important component for embedding social pedagogic practice, on the whole they had not been well attended. These interviewees questioned the impact that momentum activities were having on the site as a whole, and therefore their cost effectiveness.

3.3 The costs associated with being a demonstration site

It has been previously noted that the Site Project Leads have reported finding the requirements of being a demonstration site had been far greater than anticipated. The costs associated with being a demonstration site, as distinct from those incurred through the introduction of social pedagogy, include the time and travel requirements associated with additional meetings to discuss programme wide strategies and the reporting and monitoring requirements of the programme. There is a lack of consensus across the sites regarding the usefulness of these activities, with some interviewees

reporting that the opportunity to discuss ideas and experiences with colleagues has been extremely valuable. Others have reported concerns regarding whether these activities are undertaken in the most (cost) effective way possible. These concerns are discussed in Ghate, McDermid and Trivedi (2015) and will therefore, not be repeated here. While it should be noted that these costs are likely to reduce considerably, or disappear altogether, upon the end of the programme, it will be necessary to capture these to present a comprehensive economic analysis of the Head, Heart, Hands programme. However, as outlined in section 2.2 above, these will be separated to ensure transparency and that they do not skew any sustainability decisions.

4. Contextual considerations

4.1 The economic context

The Head, Heart, Hands programme is being implemented at a time of prolonged public austerity due to the global economic situation. Concerns about the impact of financial cuts to local authority budgets are rife in the current discourse and research suggests that greater pressure is being placed on Children's Social Care Departments (Holmes *et al.*, 2012; Ghate, McDermid and Trivedi, 2015). Previous evaluation findings have highlighted the impact that the current context has had on the sites to date, and may continue to have as the programme continues (Ghate, McDermid and Trivedi, 2015). The evaluation has found that resources are being increasingly restricted both within local authorities, and in Independent Fostering Agencies. As a result the availability of resources for the additional interventions beyond statutory provision are becoming increasingly limited. A small number of the sites report that the impact of the programme on factors such as placement stability may have been lessened due to wider systemic and market changes.

Moreover, some sites have highlighted that the resources to participate in activities that are associated with being part of a demonstration programme, including travel for additional meetings, and other 'non-essential' activities are becoming more difficult to obtain. The 'Champions' Course' was cited by a number of Site Project Leads as an example of an initiative that was seen as time-consuming and costly for sites. Most notably the costs for the Champions' Course residential training were perceived to be particularly high and difficult to approve during a time of considerable budget restrictions. While fluidity of resources needs to be built into a programme such as Head, Heart, Hands to enable responsiveness to local contexts, it may be advantageous to consider the impact of substantive changes to the overall programme model on fostering services, or the wider system within the site, that may already be under considerable financial scrutiny.

While at present there are no plans to roll out the Head, Heart, Hands programme as it is to new sites, wider discussions to inform the development of a 'route to social pedagogy' in UK foster care will need to take the current economic climate into account. It will be important to ensure that fostering services do not exclude themselves from adopting the approach on the basis that it is perceived to be too costly. A sustainable model for supporting the development of social pedagogic practice may encourage more fostering services to explore the adoption of the approach. The evidence on the costs avoided, along with the outcomes achieved which will be provided by the evaluation team in October 2016, will further inform the debate.

4.2 Differences between sites

Variations in the way in which different organisations implement the same model or approach are to be expected in any new programme or approach (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Munro *et al.*, 2011; 2012;

Saldana *et al.*, 2014) and these variations are likely to impact on the outcomes achieved and the costs incurred. It is evident from the evaluation to date that while there are many commonalities between the sites regarding the core activities undertaken as part of Head, Heart, Hands, there is also a great deal of variation, both in the types of activities being undertaken as part of the programme and the way in which common elements have been adapted to reflect local contexts. For example, some sites were already familiar with social pedagogic approaches prior to the introduction of Head, Heart, Hands, or had incumbent social pedagogues as part of their existing staff team. Others have undertaken a range of 'awareness raising' and engagement activities or explored how existing policies and procedures might be adapted to incorporate a 'social pedagogic lens'. Some sites have embarked on activities and innovations that are not part of Head, Heart, Hands, but with a focus on social pedagogy. For example, at least two sites have employed additional social pedagogues in other service areas. The most variance can be found in the way in which the social pedagogues' roles have developed over the course of the programme: with some being case holding (albeit with a reduced case load), some not holding a case but providing 'social pedagogic interventions', and others have a more developmental role. Each of these variances will have an impact on the costs and outcomes identified through the course of the programme.

These differences must be taken into account (Saldana *et al.*, 2014). The Head, Heart, Hands demonstration sites represent a diverse range of fostering services, varying in size and type (including independent, voluntary and local authority provision), along with the characteristics of foster carers and children and young people engaged in the programme. For instance, the different sizes of the demonstration sites may result in a variation in the impact that the costs of Head, Heart, Hands, the costs avoided and the outcomes of the programme may have on individual fostering services. Larger sites may benefit from economies of scale in some areas, while the impact of costs avoided may be proportionally greater in the smaller sites.

Moreover, it is likely that some, although not all, economic issues faced by the independent and voluntary providers will differ from the local authority sites. For instance, previous research undertaken by CCFR has highlighted the difference in overhead and organisational costs estimations between independent and local authority providers (Selwyn *et al.*, 2009; McDermid and Holmes, 2012). Local authorities are responsible for all the functions associated with placing children and young people in care, including the child case work functions, in a way that independent and voluntary providers are not. The economic evaluation will consider the extent to which the different scope of the work carried out by the different demonstration sites affects the impact of the programme as a whole.

Allowing for these variances in the economic analysis will be vital to ensure that a true picture of the costs of Head, Heart, Hands is presented. To this end the economic analysis that will be completed in the final stages of the evaluation has not been designed to be representative *across* all of the sites. Rather, it has been designed to reflect a true picture *within* each of the sites and to identify the different drivers for the costs of Head, Heart, Hands, in different types of contexts.

5. Moving towards a model of sustainability

Of central concern to the demonstration sites at the time of writing, is the extent to which the models of Head, Heart, Hands that have been developed are sustainable beyond the life of the

programme. The evaluation team have identified a number of sites who are currently developing a Business Case for continuing the work after the formal programme activities in the sites cease in December 2015. There are some early indicators that foster carers, social workers and fostering services have experienced positive outcomes since the introduction of Head, Heart, Hands (McDermid *et al.*, 2014; Ghate, McDermid and Trivedi, 2015). Sufficient resources need to be available to ensure the work, and the outcomes, can be sustained. Moreover, within the current economic context the feasibility of introducing social pedagogic approaches (albeit in a differing format from Head, Heart, Hands) is salient to wider debates about the practice across UK fostering.

5.1 Moving towards independence

At the heart of the sites' exploration of sustainability is the question of how the sites move into independence from the wider programme in preparation for the programme end. The ultimate objective of a sustainable model is that the sites are enabled to continue to apply the new intervention or practice with minimal external support.

A core component of the programme is the social pedagogues, and the evaluation findings to date have highlighted the vital role that the pedagogues have played in the programme. The funding for the social pedagogues has been shared between The Fostering Network and the sites, with each contributing 50% of the funding for each appointment. Some sites have expressed a commitment to retaining their social pedagogues beyond this date financed through their own resources. Other sites are in the process of exploring whether this is feasible. Data collected from the sites suggests that the remit of the social pedagogue has implications for that feasibility. On the one hand evaluation evidence to date suggests that a case holding social pedagogue is essential to embedding understanding of 'social pedagogy in action' across the site. However it is widely acknowledged that the social pedagogues have an important wider strategic and developmental role. The workload pressures precipitated by the dual role have been addressed by some sites by giving the social pedagogues a reduced, or no case load. However, it was noted by the sites that at a time of additional economic pressures, it may be difficult to approve the extension of a post with a reduced case load.

The sites are clear that the social pedagogues are vital to the long term embedding of social pedagogic principles and are committed to ensuring that their roles are sustained, albeit with an altered remit to account for differing resource demands. The sites point to the costs avoided associated with better child outcomes, through social pedagogic interventions, to offset the additional costs of the post. Essentially the pedagogues are generally viewed by the demonstration sites to be good value for money. This will be explored further in the economic analysis to be undertaken in the final year.

To date, the demonstration sites have had support from the Social Pedagogy Consortium (SPC) site support lead, who offers social pedagogic supervision to their social pedagogues, along with strategic and reflective support for the project as a whole. Other programme team led activities have been offered such as the Practice Forum, the Review and Reflection Groups and Group Supervision for the social pedagogues. As part of the demonstration programme the sites have also had access to a number of SPC resources such as the Learning and Development courses and the Social Pedagogy Reference Tool.

At present work is still ongoing to determine whether, and to what extent these activities and resources will be in place beyond December 2015. Input from the SPC Site Support Lead, although utilised to varying degrees, has been reported to be useful. Most notably, the specialist expertise in social pedagogy along with the independent perspective offered by the SPC Site Support Lead, was valued by the sites. However, some sites reported that they were unsure of how feasible it would be to continue with this support, which was perceived to be prohibitively costly. Furthermore, it is as yet unknown whether the various groups will continue beyond the life of Head, Heart, Hands, or whether the demonstration sites will continue to have access to the resources and in what form, including the Learning and Development Course materials.

5.2 'Scaling up' and embedding

A core consideration for the sites as they explore a sustainable model for independence is the ongoing costs of scaling up both within the site in the final year of the programme, and beyond the programme into the future. Three of the site project leads reported that the number of foster carers that have accessed the Head, Heart, Hands Learning and Development courses are a '*drop in the ocean*' of their overall foster carer population. The percentage of foster carers who attended the 10 day Learning and Development programme is shown in Table 1. As the table shows the 'reach' of the programme varies across the sites, and therefore the issue of scaling up is a greater concern for some sites than others. Moreover, in the larger sites, the impact that can be achieved through accessing a small proportion of their foster carers and children and young people is reduced, limiting the 'return on investment' that can be achieved.

Table 1 The proportion of foster carers reached by the Core Learning and Development courses⁵

Site	Percentage of foster carers reached by the Core Learning and Development courses
Aberlour fostering	100%
Capstone Foster Care (South West)	24%
Edinburgh City Council	13%
London Borough of Hackney	40%
Orkney Island Council	100%
Staffordshire County Council	10%
Surrey County Council	15%

Some of the sites have reported that replicating the Head, Heart, Hands Learning and Development model, which includes 10 days of training delivered by external facilitators, would be prohibitively resource intensive. In light of this a number of sites have explored alternative models for reaching a greater number of foster carers and staff. Some sites are exploring applying a 'social pedagogic lens' to existing courses and the potential for including social pedagogy training in mandatory or standardised training packages. It is anticipated that incorporating social pedagogy training into

⁵ Adapted from Gbate, McDermid and Trivedi, 2015.

existing learning programmes will lead to costs avoided by drawing from existing training budgets. However, some Site Project Leads have raised concerns regarding the extent to which this incorporation would be possible, or desirable, without the expert assistance of the SPC. Moreover, concerns have been raised across the programme about achieving a suitable balance between ensuring that the widest cohort of foster carers and social care personnel are able to access the training, given the limited resource available, while maintaining the quality of that learning and not offering a reductive version of the Head, Heart, Hands programme or 'social pedagogy light'.

A small number of the sites raised the question of whether other national organisations could explore the potential of embedding a social pedagogic lens to existing training, for example, Skills to Foster. There was the suggestion that some efficiencies may be obtained through the adaptation of existing tools for use by fostering services to reflect a social pedagogic approach. It was suggested that embedding the principles advocated by Head, Heart, Hands through both local (through frontline foster carers and social care personnel) and national means (through organisations such as the Association of Directors of Social Work, Local Government Association, Ofsted, the College of Social Work as well as the Fostering Network) may be the most efficient way to further debates regarding the impact of social pedagogy.

However, sites report that currently there is a lack of clarity regarding what will be available for them, in what form and with what resource implications, most notably the Learning and Development course materials. This is limiting the extent to which some sites are able to develop plans beyond the life of the Head, Heart, Hands, programme. The emerging evidence highlights the need to finalise an 'exit strategy' and a clear programme of what will be available following the end of the formal Head, Heart, Hands activities. The evaluation team acknowledge that this work is being undertaken by The Fostering Network at the time of writing. However, the timing of this exit strategy being finalised and shared with the sites is crucial to ensure that sufficient resources are in place to continue the work from January 2016.

5.3 Increasing the capacity of fostering services

Amid concerns about the capacity of fostering services to meet demand, some sites have noted that Head, Heart, Hands may lead to costs avoided through increasing the capacity within their own service. While recent Ofsted figures suggest that the numbers of new foster carers are exceeding the numbers leaving (Ofsted, 2013), a supply of foster carers to meet the needs of the children in their care is essential to providing good quality outcomes (McDermid *et al.*, 2012). There is some suggestion that foster carers feel more part of the team around the child and empowered in their role as a foster carer. This may lead to foster carers feeling able to take on more complex placements, to continue with placements that previously may have resulted in placement breakdown, multiple placements or continue caring. Thus, costs avoided may be achieved through a reduction in the resources required to recruit and retain carers.

Recent analysis has raised concerns regarding the recruitment and retention within the social work workforce. The latest figures suggest that the number of vacant social work posts in September 2014, was around 10%, compared to 7% in the previous year (Ofsted, 2015) and the turnover rate of children's social workers was estimated to be 17% nationally (Department for Education, 2014). These figures are compounded by high caseloads (Ofsted, 2015) and the resultant strain placed on case workers. In addition to examples of good practice, a synthesis of Ofsted inspections has raised concerns regarding the impact that these pressures being placed on case workers may be having on

the quality of care they are able to provide (*ibid*). There is some anecdotal evidence that Head, Heart, Hands, may address some of these issues. It is hypothesised that increasing the capacity of social workers to support complex cases will address the impact those cases have on their own wellbeing, thereby reducing staff sickness and turnover and the costs associated with filling vacant posts. These ambitions may be realised in the longer term and these findings are, at present, anecdotal and should be treated with some caution, but might assist with broader system wide debates about the potential role for social pedagogic practice in the future. It may be possible to test the hypothesis in the final year of the evaluation.

6. Emerging evidence on the potential costs avoided

At the heart of sustainability arguments is the extent to which the costs incurred through implementing a new practice may lead to financial benefits along with improving outcomes for children and young people. Existing evidence suggests that those children with higher levels of need are more likely to incur higher costs. These higher costs are the result of the need for more specialised placements and additional support (such as CAMHS and therapeutic interventions) along with the costs incurred through events such as placement breakdowns (*c.f.* Ward, Holmes and Soper, 2008; Holmes and McDermid, 2012). As a result, aggregated local authority budgets can be skewed by a small number of children with higher needs, and less positive care experiences. To this end, it is reasonable to expect that improving the experience of care for both children and young people and foster carers is likely (but not exclusively) to lead to lower costs.

There is emerging evidence to suggest that some practice changes are resulting in positive financial outcomes through costs avoided. For instance, some sites reported that they are observing increased empowerment of foster carers, which in turn reduces their reliance on their supervising social worker, and consequently results in a reduction in the time spent both by the supervising social worker and the child's social worker to support the placement. Improved relationships between the foster carers and the fostering service may be leading to a decrease in complaints and allegations, or are enabling these to be addressed in a more time effective way. The costs avoided associated with complaints are explored in the previous report on the costs of Head, Heart, Hands (Holmes, McDermid and Trivedi, 2014) and will be included in the full cost analysis in the final evaluation report.

At this stage in the Head, Heart, Hands programme the associated evaluation evidence is not yet comprehensively available to explore the potential or actual costs avoided that result from Head, Heart, Hands placements. This will be completed in the final year of the evaluation, by bringing the data gathered about the impact of the programme together with the economic analysis. However, anecdotal evidence from and preliminary analysis carried out by the Head, Heart, Hands demonstration sites has identified and has been referred to throughout this report. The following outcomes which may lead to avoided costs at both a child level and an organisational level were identified in previous evaluation reports:

- Improved relationships between foster carers who have attended the Head, Heart, Hands Learning and Development courses and their supervising social worker;
- improvements to the recruitment and retention of foster carers;
- improvements to school attendance and academic attainment;

- better placement stability, including an increase in managed and planned moves and a reduction in unplanned placement disruptions, and;
- reduced need for specialist interventions and placements.

At this stage of the evaluation, these outcomes appear to still be relevant to the sites, with the following additions where further evidence has emerged:

- Prospective foster carers enquiring about fostering due to the underlying principles of Head, Heart, Hands;
- increasing the capacity of staff and the resultant impact on recruitment and retention, and;
- incorporating social pedagogy training into existing training modules for foster carers.

It is also apparent that different outcomes are being experienced across different sites, and some of the factors are more nuanced than originally outlined. The economic analysis will take these variations into account. Moreover, it is evident that these costs avoided speak to both the financial and experiential outcomes emerging as a result of the programme.

7. Conclusion

This report has highlighted some of the complexities around the costs associated with Head, Heart, Hands. These are not unique to this programme and the approach to the economic analysis has been designed to reflect some of those complexities. A comprehensive exploration of the costs of the Head, Heart, Hands programme is vital to understand the impact of the programme on all stakeholders, including fostered children and young people, foster carers and the wider system. Consequently the costing approach to be taken by the evaluation team will endeavour to capture and provide a comprehensive and transparent picture of the costs of Head, Heart, Hands, exploring the costs of different components, and different types of costs avoided.

The report has also highlighted the different types of costs that are associated with introducing any new practice, including the costs of implementation and of being part of a wider programme. It will be necessary to capture these to present a comprehensive economic analysis of the Head, Heart, Hands programme. The economic analysis will explore the costs of the Head, Heart, Hands programme as part of the overall evaluation, and provide the evidence that the sites will need for their business cases and sustainability planning.

Sustainability, at both a local and national level is a key consideration at this stage in the programme. The findings of this report have highlighted the role that both local fostering services and national organisations have in furthering the debates around the potential for social pedagogy. The sustainability of both bottom up (at a front line, local level) and top down (at a national level) approaches to furthering debates should be explored.

The Head, Heart, Hands programme is being implemented at a time of prolonged public austerity due to the global economic situation. The debates around social pedagogy will and must be framed by this context. As such the economic analysis proposed in this paper will provide vital evidence to inform wider debates. However, at the heart of all social care, are the children and young people that are being cared for. This economic analysis is one part of a wider evaluation which will explore

the impact of Head, Heart, Hands on the system, foster carers and the children and young people they support. It will be vital that the costs, and costs avoided of Head, Heart, Hands, are analysed in light of the outcomes that are achieved, to ensure that all fostered children are given the best opportunity to thrive.

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