

## The FIP “stepping down” group breakthrough – mothers with multiple needs start working together and taking responsibility for themselves

This short case study offers an overview of a Hidden Insights project working with a Family Intervention Project (FIP) team and a group of ten mothers, all with significant, multiple issues, chaotic lives and many with mental health problems. These mothers had been supported intensively by the FIP and had reached the end of the allocated individual support and parenting programmes. It is known that there can be a risk of reverting to old behaviour when intensive support ends, so it was decided to use the Hidden Insights approach to recruit and support mothers who were at risk.

Establishing the group was a significant achievement in itself and the FIP team leader later reflected that they were not the people she would have expected to join or stay with a team project. During the course of the project the group of mothers and FIP staff identified a shared issue they wanted to address- self esteem- and found ways to address this issue.



The key achievement was that the mothers took personal responsibility for getting out of their situations. They grew in confidence, built friendships and took on additional projects outside of the HI project; including to re-model the FIP Centre’s family room.

FIP workers were astonished at the level of creativity, insight and understanding displayed by the women – it was totally unexpected and resulted in a powerful realisation by some FIP staff, particularly the manager, that they tended to make judgements and assumptions about the capacity of service users.

### Inputs

Hidden Insights’ Audrey Asamoah supported the FIP to hold two-hour meetings to work on the Hidden Insights project every Thursday from February 2014 to August 2014. This was efficient for FIP staff because they made it part of their usual weekly drop-in sessions. A group of mothers were invited to these meetings through peer networks and through their personal relationships with the FIP team members. Attendance was voluntary and initially mothers dropped in at different times but then became more confident to work together as a group. By July, five were attending most weeks and a further five attended from time to time. The FIP team supported the HI project by attending themselves, referring in parents and through their commitment to learn from working with the group. The FIP contributed £5000 of their own budget to enable Hidden Insights staff to support this project more intensively than other projects in Haringey and hoped to increase this budget.

## Outcomes

The FIP manager said *“Although we’ve had group sessions before, they have never really worked together as a group. It’s made our resources more productive here.”* In a period of four months, the group of mothers identified a shared problem with confidence and self-esteem. They either didn’t feel able to tackle some problems on their own, or found that the way they did tackle things didn’t lead to the results they wanted.

By learning to use the Hidden Insights<sup>®</sup> approach, treating the mothers as equals, asking searching questions and really seeking to understand their point of view, the FIP team enabled the women to take responsibility for their situation and find solutions to specific problems, which they discovered for themselves and consequently owned. *“This project is about us and not someone from authority telling us what to do or what our problems are. They are listening to us.”* – parent.

The FIP team realised that the women were capable of much more than they had originally thought. They learned not to jump in and offer solutions. A key factor in achieving this was that the FIP team leader actively encouraged the team to try working with the women as a whole group and to treat them differently. *“The impact is massive, but it’s hard to measure. The group suddenly have been able to find areas of strength”* – FIP practitioner

*“I’m blown away about what the women have achieved. I didn’t expect anything like this, it’s amazing”* – FIP team manager

Although all of the mothers had received intensive support, none had previously taken personal responsibility for the situation they found themselves in. Now they accept they had a part to play in where they ended up.

The group has become much more socialised and empathetic. They now listen to each other. At the beginning some dominant individuals tried to decide for everyone. In terms of self-confidence, the women have grown from about 1/10 to 7/10 (practitioner feedback). They have also overcome some initial cultural differences.

Some would not previously take advice from experts such as solicitors and social workers. There has been a major breakthrough in this – achieved by helping all the participants to realise that other people’s experience and points of view are valid. The mums also learned to ask for help.

One mother, who recently had two of her six children returned to her from care, had to demonstrate to professionals that she could cope. She had been continually late in picking up her daughter from school and had been reprimanded for this. To demonstrate she could be punctual, she used a technique she learnt on the Hidden Insights project, the 5 How’s, to persevere until she found a solution. Her solution was successful and another mum with the same logistical problem of getting from one school to another on time also has used it successfully, and the issue has not been escalated. Here is some of her feedback.

What are the main things you have got out of being part of the Hidden Insights project?

I can solve my problems in a better way, never to give up and think deeper.

Practitioners have been surprised at how much more they learned about the parents. *“It’s hard just listening, really listening, without bringing in my professional knowledge about them. And when I do really listen I’m learning things about them that I didn’t know and asking myself - why didn’t I know this if I’d been really listening in the first place?”* FIP team member.

How would you rate the difference between you now and you when you started?

1 = not at all, 10 = completely

	Score at start	Score at end
Self confidence	3	9
Working with others	3-4	9
Understanding other people’s point of view	3	10
Working through problems to a solution	2	10
Organising activities	2	10
Asking questions	2	9
Learning from others	2	10
A sense of hope and belief that more could be possible	3	10

### Impact

This project’s continuation and success has been achieved because the FIP team has integrated the Hidden Insights approach into their existing routine, getting more value for the time they spend in their drop-in sessions, and reflecting on what is new and different. The team leader has embraced it as it is in line with the existing values of the FIP team.

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How would you rate the difference between you now and you when you started?

1 = not at all, 10 = completely

	Score at start	Score at end
Self confidence	6	9
Working with others	8	10
Understanding other people’s point of view	9	10
Working through problems to a solution	8	9
Organising activities	9	10
Asking questions	7	9
Learning from others	5	10
A sense of hope and belief that more could be possible	7	9

If Hidden Insights group work is extended, the FIP team can support more parents with the same resources. The project has taken things to a deeper level and created a sustainable group. Our experience from elsewhere is that groups who have used the Hidden Insights approach are still together up to three years later.

If the mother who had just had two children returned to her had been unable to demonstrate her ability to manage, they could have been taken back into care. This would have cost the Council at least £310,000 (local authority) and £350,000 (independent/voluntary/private) a year<sup>1</sup> if placed in residential care; or alternatively if placed in foster care, this would cost £66,000<sup>2</sup> (LA) to £120,000 (private)<sup>3</sup> a year. There could also have been future costs to the Local Authority because children in care are shown to have worse educational outcomes than others, and are likely to be NEET as young people.

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<sup>1</sup> (PSSRU Unit Costs 2013 excl London multiplier)

<sup>2</sup> (PSSRU Unit Costs 2013 excl London multiplier)

<sup>3</sup> (Everychild Fostering Better Care 2011)