



# Information sheet

## Specialist services

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### Improving specialist services for UK families

Sometimes it doesn't take much to help a family develop their understandings and free up their strengths; sometimes difficulties are more complex and serious, and families may need specialist help to find solutions that work for them.

Highly skilled and fully qualified Family Therapists (known as Family and Systemic Psychotherapists) are needed in specialist clinical and social care services and multidisciplinary teams to support families with more complex and serious problems and to support staff supervision, training and service development.

In some UK areas, Family Therapists and other professionals trained to high levels in systemic practice have key roles in specialist services. These include alcohol and drug misuse teams, child and adolescent mental health services, adult mental health teams, hospital paediatric liaison teams, eating disorder services, Youth Offending services, pupil behaviour teams, social care outreach services, services for families who have experienced violence, Looked After Children services, services for minority communities, and much more. Yet such provision is a postcode lottery. Some areas of the UK still have no Family Therapists in designated posts.

- **Children, adults and families** with serious, urgent and multiple needs require skilled supports that acknowledge the complexity of their difficulties and circumstances - and support the relationships that support them.

- **Staff working with families in key services at all levels** need access to specialist consultation and supervision in family working from qualified professionals if they are to

- intervene effectively with families experiencing less serious difficulties
- recognise and respond when families need referrals to more specialist supports
- work safely, ethically and effectively within their competencies. Without robust structures of training, supervision and consultation with highly qualified clinicians, staff can find themselves in roles they are neither trained nor qualified to perform.
- consolidate and develop their skills in family sensitive practice. Research<sup>1</sup> shows trainings that are not consolidated in practice and supported by supervision from qualified staff make little impact over time as skills and learning are lost.

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<sup>1</sup> Burbach, F. and Stanbridge, R., (2006) Somerset's family interventions in psychosis service: an update, *Journal of Family Therapy*, **28**: 39-57