



# Information sheet

## Research

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Research into the effectiveness of family-inclusive systemic therapy and practice in health, social care, education and other public and Third Sector services highlight benefits to family members and to the staff supporting them. These benefits include:

- **Improved outcomes**, helping children, young people, adults, couples and families struggling with a broad range of difficulties and circumstances, from the commonplace to the extremely serious, reducing the risks and costs of problems cascading through generations, relationship networks and communities <sup>1</sup>
- **Improved client engagement with other therapies and interventions** when combined with systemic family therapy in multi-disciplinary working <sup>2</sup>
- **Effective, and cost-effective, resolution of psychological and relational difficulties of children, young people and adults** <sup>3</sup>. A compilation of 20 meta-analyses concluded 'marriage and family therapy [the US term for Family Therapy] is now an empirically supported therapy in the plain English sense of the phrase - it clearly works, both in general and for a variety of specific problems.' <sup>4</sup>
- **Dramatic reductions in health care use among previously 'high utilisers'**. In a recently published large-scale US study <sup>5</sup>, frequent health service users who participated in family inclusive therapy showed significant reductions of 68% for health screening visits, 38% for illness visits, 56% for laboratory/X-ray visits, and 78% for urgent care visits. In many cases the greatest reduction in use of health services was for the partner of the referred person.
- **Lower client drop out rates**. Comparison trials regularly show that clients are more likely to stay in family therapy until the end of treatment <sup>6</sup>
- **Reductions in relapse and readmission** for people experiencing serious mental health and other difficulties <sup>7</sup>
- **Resolution of common problems in service delivery**. Seeing parents and children together bridges gaps between child and adult services. Practitioners trained in a full systemic approach are skilled in co-ordinating and facilitating multi-disciplinary networks across health, social care, education and other sectors when this is what the family needs. <sup>8</sup>
- **Higher job satisfaction, confidence, and reduced burn-out and staff turnover** among professionals working in demanding areas <sup>9</sup>
- **Practice skills and understandings supporting families and staff teams, multi-disciplinary working and 'service user' involvement, across sectors** <sup>10</sup>. For more information, also see AFT information sheet: Training and visit [www.aft.org.uk](http://www.aft.org.uk)

AFT is the UK's leading body for professionals working therapeutically with families.

Visit [www.aft.org.uk](http://www.aft.org.uk)

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## Research references

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- <sup>1</sup> For overviews of research please see  
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AFT (2009) *Current Practice, Future Possibilities*. [www.aft.org.uk](http://www.aft.org.uk)
  - <sup>2</sup> Carr, A (2009a) The effectiveness of family therapy and systemic interventions for child-focused problems. *Journal of Family Therapy*. 31. 3-45.  
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  - <sup>3</sup> As above. Also  
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  - <sup>4</sup> Shadish, W. R., & Baldwin, S. A. (2003). Meta-analysis of MFT interventions. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*. 29, 547.
  - <sup>5</sup> Crane D.R. & Christenson, J.D. (2008) The Medical Offset Effect: Patterns in Outpatient Services Reduction for High Utilizers of Health Care. *Contemporary Family Therapy*. 30: 217-138
  - <sup>6</sup> Leff, J., Vearnals, S., Brewin, C. R., Wolff, G., Alexander, B., Asen, E., Dayson, D., Jones, E., Chisholm, D. and Everitt, B. (2000). "The London Depression Intervention Trial: Randomised controlled trial of antidepressants v. couple therapy in the treatment and maintenance of people with depression living with a partner: clinical outcome and costs". *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 177, 95-100
  - <sup>7</sup> Sydow, K. v., Beher, S., Schweitzer, J. & Retzlaff, R. (in press). The efficacy of systemic therapy with adult patients: A meta-content analysis of 38 randomized controlled trials. *Family Process*.
  - <sup>8</sup> AFT (2009) *Current Practice, Future Possibilities*. [www.aft.org.uk](http://www.aft.org.uk)
  - <sup>9</sup> Burbach, F. and Stanbridge, R., (2006) Somerset's family interventions in psychosis service: an update, *Journal of Family Therapy*, **28**: 39-57;  
Brennan, G. and Gamble, C. (1997) Schizophrenia, family work and clinical practice, *Mental Health Nursing*, **7**: 12-15
  - <sup>10</sup> See, for example,  
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The Way We Do Things Here – <http://www.hackney.gov.uk/rsw-way-we-do-things-2008.pdf>  
Reclaim Social Work – <http://www.hackney.gov.uk/rsw-november-2008.pdf>