

Committee: **Social Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **17th March 2021**
Report Subject: **Update on Progress of the My Support Team**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr John Mason**
Report Submitted by: **Tanya Evans, Head of Children's Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
4.2.21	9.2.21	24.02.21			17.3.21	14.04.21		

1. **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the work of the My Support Team for the period January 2020 - January 2021.

2. **Scope and Background**

2.1 After the establishment of a joint My Support Team (MyST) between Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire in May 2019, a first report was presented to Scrutiny in February 2020 regarding the activity of this new team between May -December 2019.

2.2 For member's information, MyST provides a multi-disciplinary intensive **therapeutic fostering service** for Children Looked After. The Team work intensively with children currently in residential care with the aim of bringing them back to live closer to Blaenau Gwent and be placed with foster carers or family members. The Team also works with those children in care who present with complex needs and are at risk of going into residential care, to prevent this from happening.

2.3 In the summer of 2018 a bid was made via the Children and Families Partnership Board for Integrated Care Fund (ICF) grant money to develop a Gwent wide approach in developing a joint multi-disciplinary intensive **therapeutic fostering service** for Children Looked After. As Torfaen and Caerphilly already had a MyST in place the Partnership Board agreed Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire should be the next authorities to develop this service. It was already well evidenced by Torfaen and Caerphilly how MyST had improved outcomes for children looked after with complex needs and how it had made savings and cost avoidance for the local authorities.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1**

For scrutiny members to accept the report and acknowledge the positive work MyST has undertaken in demonstrating good outcomes for our children looked after and the positive impact the work of the team has had on the Children's Services budget.

Option 2

For scrutiny members to contribute to the continuous assessment of the effectiveness of the directorate by making appropriate recommendations to the Executive Committee whilst acknowledge the positive work MyST has undertaken in demonstrating good outcomes for our children looked after and the positive impact the work of the team has had on the Children's Services budget and recommend to Executive any future additional work required.

4. Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

The work of the MyST supports the achievement of the following priorities for social services under the corporate plan:

- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater;
- To work with our partners including Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and neighbouring authorities to deliver integrated responsive care and support;
- To promote and facilitate new ways of delivering health and social care involving key partners and our communities.

The My Support Team was also a key part of the Safe Reduction of Children Looked after Strategy 2017- 2020 and will remain a significant part of the new strategy for 2020-2025.

5. Implications Against Each Option

6. *Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)*

6.1 During the past 12 months (January 2020 – January 2021) the MyST successfully moved 4 children from residential care into foster care.

6.2 The costs relating to these children are as follows:

Figure 1

	weekly residential costs	Current costs
Child 1	£4,250	£983 (IFA carers)
Child 2	£5,671	£450 (BG foster carers 1:1 scheme)
Child 3	£4,000	£352 (BG foster carers)
Child 4*	£4,750	£177 (family / kinship carers)

*Child 4 moved from residential care to family care where he remained for 8 weeks (April-June 2020); however, the step down happened during COVID 19 pandemic and unfortunately the family placement became unmanageable in the absence of school provision and other community services. Child 4 moved into another residential provision, but maintained contact with his family and remains open to MyST for further work.

It should be noted that throughout the COVID 19 pandemic, MyST has continued to provide direct interventions to young people during lockdown, including 24 hours on call and managed risky complex situations and young people. All four children mentioned above were stepped down from residential care during extremely difficult conditions (three of them in the first lockdown period and one during the summer of 2020).

6.3 Figure 1 demonstrates the savings made due to the change of placement for the 4 children who have moved from residential care to foster care or back to family.

6.4 This has had a positive impact on the Children's Services budget which is projecting an overspend Q3 20/21 of £468,285. A note of caution must be made as this situation could change if other children are admitted to residential care during the remainder of the financial year.

7. ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

7.1 **Risk 1**

Increase in the numbers of children being placed in high cost residential placements which doesn't always achieve good outcomes for the children

7.2 **Mitigation**

- The continued work of MyST to reduce the numbers of children currently in residential care and continue to prevent children entering residential care will help to mitigate against this risk.

8. ***Legal*** N/A

9. ***Human Resources***

9.1 As Monmouthshire is hosting the MyST, there will be no implications for Blaenau Gwent Organisational Development department.

10. **Supporting Evidence**

10.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

10.2 As previously mentioned, the MyST became operational in May 2019. In May 2019 Blaenau Gwent had 18 children in residential care. In January 2021 we had 12 children in residential care. There was, also, one child in secure accommodation who moved on 18th January 2021 into supported care leaving accommodation. MyST has been supporting this transition.

10.3 The following information outlines three key areas of work undertaken by MyST between January 2020-January 2021:

1. Numbers of Blaenau Gwent children the team have supported to move out of residential care;

2. The numbers of Blaenau Gwent children the team have supported to prevent going into residential care;
3. The number of Blaenau Gwent practice consultations undertaken.

10.4 **Numbers of Blaenau Gwent children the team have supported out of residential care.**

Since January 2020 MyST has successfully worked with 4 children to move them out of residential care into foster placements. At the heart of this work is the relationship the MyST workers build with the children and their support networks. The small numbers the MyST work with at any one time allows their work to be very intensive, providing 24/7 support to the child and their carers. It is this intensive support that has enabled **3 children to move successfully in a planned way into foster care and 1 child to be placed with family members** (albeit this arrangement lasted only for 8 weeks).

The MyST is also working with **1 other child** who is currently in residential care who has a plan to move back into the care of birth family. This plan will take some time to realise but good progress is being made. The MyST continues working with **2 other children** who accessed residential care following intensive intervention being offered to remain with family or in foster care. One child was placed in foster care and then with family and supported by MyST for 18 months before escalating to residential care. Another child moved in with family for 8 weeks but returned into residential care due to pressures under COVID 19 pandemic. Both children remain open to MyST and benefit of intervention with a purpose to step down into foster care when it's safe to do so and they are ready for transition.

10.5 **The numbers of Blaenau Gwent children the team have supported to prevent children going into residential care**

Since January 2020 MyST has worked intensively with **4 children** whose foster or family placements were at high risk of breaking down. If the placements had broken down the only option for these children would have been residential care. Providing hands on intensive 24/7 support to the child and foster carers has enabled these placements to remain stable, enabling the child to remain local and continue in the same schools and maintain contact with their family and friendship groups.

10.6 **The number of Blaenau Gwent practice consultations undertaken**

MyST provide practice consultations to Social Workers and Foster Carers when they are struggling to understand and support a child whose needs are starting to become complex. These consultations provide advice and guidance in managing emerging complex needs by trying new approaches when managing various risks/behaviours. For the past 12 months MyST has provided **22 practice consultations to staff, 2 ongoing consultations** related to children currently in residential care with very complex needs and **25 consultation sessions for foster carers**. The feedback has been very positive.

The views and feedback from the children and young people, foster carers and professionals experiencing the service is critical to evidence the improved outcomes for our children looked after. Examples of the comments received are below:

- **BG Young Person 2** – *“My worker (MyST) helps me to talk about my feelings and worries. He helped me to get back home with my Dad after moving with many other families before. He knows me better than I know myself and he even knows when I’m not telling the truth”.*
- **BG Young Person 2** – *“I enjoy being visited by MyST and talking to him (MyST worker). I feel he really cares about me and knows me. He has learned about my interests and what’s important to me. He listened when I said about moving out of residential to foster care as I was ready for this move for a long time.”*
- **BG foster carer** *“I feel so happy that I’ve spoken to you and less overwhelmed”* (FC clinic); *“Nice to be able to discuss and get other ideas and know we’re not on our own with it.”* (FC clinic)
- **BG therapeutic foster carer** *“I find the support from MyST extremely beneficial. After speaking with the MyST worker, I come down from feeling very anxious about things that are taking place with the child in placement. This give me strength and confidence in my fostering role. I will contact MyST for advice and want this support to continue”*
- **BG parent** – *“Mum was really positive about MyST on call and in particular she was really positive about when MyST worker acted as Appropriate Adult.”*
- **BG Social Worker 1:** *“I was provided with some helpful suggestions about developing a pathway/building the bridge technique between the current placement and the new placement which will help with the transition. It’s helpful to draw on other professional’s knowledge and expertise so I will look forward to our consultations in the future. There may be times when we are unintentionally raising anxieties, so it’s helpful to have the opportunity to check that out and adapt our interventions. It was reassuring to have some positive feedback on my practice as a social worker supporting child A.”*
- **BG Social Worker 2:** *“I have found joint working with MyST crucial to the success of the placement”*

11. ***Expected outcome for the public***

11.1 The work of the MyST work to achieve the following outcomes for children:

- Children placed closer to home which will enable sustained relationships with their families and friends;

- Increased placement stability;
- Improved school attendance;
- Improved emotional wellbeing.

11.2 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

As part of the ongoing monitoring there will be consultation with the children and young people, foster carers and staff receiving a service from MyST

11.3 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The development of the service outlined in this report is aimed at enhancing and improving services for children looked after and young people in the longer term. Bringing children closer to home will enable them to form local support networks and communities which will no doubt benefit them into the future.

11.4 ***Preventative focus***

MyST aims to improve outcomes for children who have experienced multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and who have the most complex and challenging needs. If successful MyST interventions will reduce the use of expensive and sometimes ineffective out of area placements. MyST works in close alignment with the Gwent-wide attachment service, to achieve psychologically-informed environments, including an ACEs-informed workforce.

11.5 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

MyST is an excellent example of how the Children and Families Partnership is working together to improve outcomes for children and young people who present with complex needs.

11.6 ***Integration (across service areas)***

MyST engages with the whole support network around the child. This includes school, youth workers and any community activities/clubs. The work undertaken to date by MyST has evidenced very close working relationships with schools both inside and outside of Blaenau Gwent.

MyST has delivered virtual training to staff in the Placement Team and have recruited two therapeutic foster carers in Blaenau Gwent.

12. **Monitoring Arrangements**

12.1 The following will monitor the MyST arrangements:

- The Children and Families Partnership Board;
- The Regional Partnership Board;
- The Regional MyST Steering Group;
- The Project is included as part of the action plan in the Blaenau Gwent Children Looked After reduction strategy which will be monitored on a quarterly basis.