

TOGETHER TO THRIVE



Evaluation, August 2025





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We are the UK charity focusing on the prevention of poor mental health. Mental health is one of the most important foundations for a healthy and long life. We believe no-one living in the UK should be deprived of the opportunity for good mental health because of who they are, the community they come from or where they live.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Together to Thrive (TtT) launched in April 2023 and is a multi-agency collaboration between the Mental Health Foundation, NHS Tayside Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Dundee City Council, third sector organisations, and schools. The programme provides support to families in Dundee with a child on the CAMHS waiting list for neurodevelopmental (ND) assessment or who has been identified as having emerging ND differences.

The programme is based on a task-sharing model, and community-based practitioners from partner organisations are trained by CAMHS staff and aligned experts in six areas: sleep, sensory, trauma, positive behaviour support, reflective parenting and communication. TtT practitioners then work with parents and carers on either a one-to-one or group basis to provide information and support on these areas.

Context

In the last four years, referrals to CAMHS ND pathway in Tayside have increased by 400%, and at the same time there has also been a decrease in the number of specialist staff. This has resulted in families waiting in excess of four years for assessment. In March 2025, the waiting list for the ND pathway closed to new referrals. The lengthy waiting times combined with a recognition that families should be supported based on need rather than diagnosis was the foundation of TtT. The aim of TtT is to provide more immediate support to families and therefore improve the mental health and wellbeing of children with ND differences and their families. A secondary aim of the programme was to reduce the number of children referred to the ND pathway where it was not required, however this has become less relevant with the closure of the waiting list.

The evaluation

The aim of this evaluation was to investigate the impact that the TtT programme is having on the families who receive support. It follows on from a process evaluation which was completed at the end of the pilot stage in October 2024¹.

A mixed methodology approach was used involving analysis of interviews and focus groups with TtT practitioners, parents and carers, and of data collected through TtT's referral and tracking system, FORT (Fast Online Referral & Tracking). A total of 24 TtT practitioners and 18 parents and carers were consulted for this evaluation.

Key findings

Families

- As a result of participating in the TtT programme, parents and carers feel better able to support their children's needs. This is as a result of increasing their understanding of their own emotions and behaviours and those of their children, and through the information and techniques provided.
- There has been some evidence of children also understanding themselves and being better able to recognise and regulate their emotions and behaviours, leading to happier children, less challenging behaviours and calmer homes.
- Parents and carers feel valued and listened to by TtT practitioners, often for the first time, which has helped them feel more confident and supported.
- The peer support present in TtT groups is highly beneficial. Parents and carers feel less alone, are able to pass on advice to one another, and support each other outside of the group.
- There was some evidence that families with more complex needs or nearer crisis were less positively impacted.

1. The pilot report can be accessed at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/programmes/programmes-families-children-and-young-people/together-thrive>

Practitioners

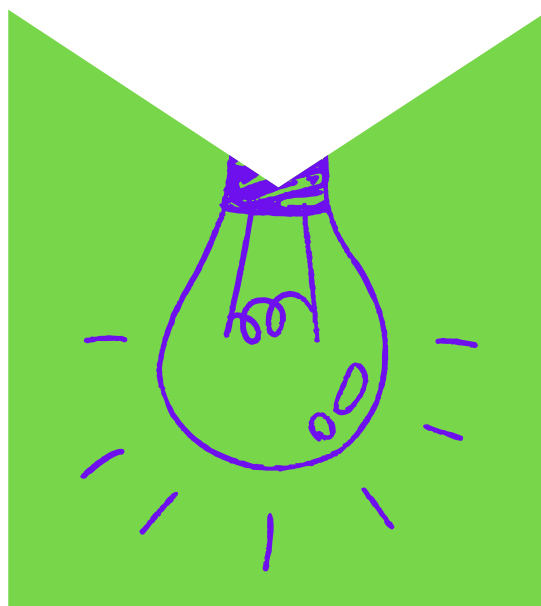
- Practitioners' understanding and skills relating to ND differences were significantly enhanced, with reflective parenting being valued highly.
- The increased knowledge, skills and tools provided by TtT helped practitioners to provide more flexible and tailored support to families and to do so confidently.
- TtT improved collaboration between organisations by increasing networking opportunities and providing shared language and frameworks.
- Many practitioners were applying the knowledge and skills they had gained through TtT in their wider practice, using them to support families beyond those referred through TtT or identified as having ND needs.
- Practitioners valued the quality of the training, finding the content engaging and the trainers knowledgeable. The follow up coaching support was highlighted as a particular benefit, allowing them to seek ongoing and case-specific advice.

Demand for specialist support / diagnosis

- The programme had a nuanced impact on families' views on the need for specialist support and diagnosis for ND differences. Most families highly valued assessment and diagnosis and felt it was essential for receiving support, but that TtT had made it easier to cope while they waited. There were some individual examples of families who felt they no longer required specialist support as a result of what they received through TtT. Practitioners emphasised that the current culture still focuses on assessment, diagnosis and specialist support, with changes needed at a systemic as well as individual level.

Recommendations

- Continue to develop a formalised network where TtT practitioners can access and share resources and tools to support practitioners to provide consistent support which meets families' needs and ensure that all practitioners are aware and can access this.
- Consider continuing to widen the range of practitioners trained in TtT – for example to include early years and secondary school settings and those with strategic input to both widen TtT's reach and support positive cultural changes. It is understood that following the evaluation period, some early years practitioners have already become involved in the programme.
- Actively explore funding options to both sustain and expand TtT, while also considering how third-sector organisations can continue to be supported and included in TtT in a financially viable way.
- For policymakers, consider how the task-sharing model of TtT could be applied elsewhere, how strategic priorities and funding could be aligned and best utilised to support the sustainability of TtT and explore where culture and systemic barriers still place an overemphasis on assessment and diagnosis.







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