

Special Guardianship

Siblings Anna and Blake

What were the issues at referral?

Brother and sister, Anna and Blake, were referred to MST due to concerns about their behaviour at home. They had been living with their grandmother under a Special Guardianship Order for 18 months and she was finding it difficult to cope. Anna and Blake could be verbally, and sometimes physically, aggressive towards their grandmother. The siblings often had physical fights with each other too. The local authority was worried that Anna and Blake's placement with their grandmother may break down and it had initiated family court proceedings with a plan for Anna and Blake to go into foster care.

What did MST do with the family and systems around the young person?

MST intervention was focused on helping grandmother to set clear expectations for behaviour at home and establishing a system of rewards and consequences to reinforce positive behaviour. MST also worked with grandmother to develop strategies to establish safety by developing skills to de-escalate aggression at home and prevent behaviour from getting out of hand. MST worked intensively with grandmother to grow her confidence as the primary carer for Anna and Blake. By using the de-escalation steps, grandmother was able to avoid getting drawn into conflict which helped her to feel less overwhelmed. The wider family were sometimes involved in MST sessions, including the birth parents, as the MST Therapist worked to develop more consistent support for grandmother from the natural ecology.

It was identified during treatment that a primary cause for Anna and Blake's behaviour could be the early trauma they had experienced. The MST Therapist worked with grandmother to develop her understanding of childhood trauma which helped her to take a different perspective on some of the behaviours and change the way she was responding to them.

Although Anna & Blake's behaviour at school was generally quite settled, the MST Therapist worked with school staff to identify what was going well for them and drew on these strengths in the work that was done with grandmother. For example, Anna was very good at Art and had won praise for this at school. When the family developed rules for behaviour at home, Anna agreed to create posters for some of the rules that could be put up around the home.

What is the impact?

At the end of treatment, grandmother reported that verbal and physical aggression at home had significantly reduced and this was sustained for several weeks. Grandmother was using strategies to de-escalate behaviour at home and was feeling more confident about managing any future challenges. MST Therapist worked with the local authority to highlight the positive changes grandmother had made – as well as her consistent positive engagement with the MST sessions. This encouraged the local authority to change their plan for Anna & Blake to go into foster care. The court case concluded towards the end of MST treatment and the judge agreed for Anna & Blake to remain in the care of their grandmother – a plan supported by the local authority, the children's guardian and the birth parents.