

EFFECTIVE CHILD PROTECTION PROJECT

Bulletin 2



This is the second bulletin of the Effective Child Protection project. It aims to give an overview of the progress made, some of what we've learned so far and our future plans.

What is the project?

The Effective Child Protection project formally started in April 2019 once the role of the practice mentor was in post. The project launched officially in early May as planned for the pilot area of Meirionnydd - Dwyfor. The launch was celebrated with a workshop to provide an opportunity to remind everyone of the 4 components of the framework:

- **Conversations** - effective communication through practicing 'collaborative conversations'
- **Thresholds** - consistent decision making when assessing risk
- **Change** - a clear focus on the change that is needed to prevent harm
- **Measure** - measuring our progress towards outcomes

An overview (Dafydd Paul, Project Lead)

Overall we've had a very successful initial phase to this transformation project. The essence of the project's approach is in using a resource to put training into practice. It is very much this practice mentor role that is considered the critical success factor. We plan and ensure that each worker has a minimum of three individual mentor sessions. In addition they attend a reflective practice group with their colleagues, as well as three key training events linked to the project. In providing this practice support we aim to create the best conditions to promote the use of this new approach in day to day work.

Behind the scenes there is a lot of other activity. I describe these as support functions and include the redesign of work processes and forms, creating material to communicate the ideas and designing training.

One statement that comes to mind about how it's going is "It's really tough out there; but people are so enthusiastic and committed". It is really challenging in front line practice at the moment. Because of this, workers are already under pressure and facing increasing demand and complexity. At the same time, this project is asking for change in practice; for them to do more and for it to be more meaningful. Despite all of the reasons this may be just too difficult to do; people are so positive. It is a testament to the quality of the workforce; they are ready to try. Across the service, workers and their managers welcome the approach and are eager to experiment in practice. Staff talk about being excited about the opportunity.

Looking at the model itself, I have initial observations about the four cornerstones of the framework:

- **Are we seeing a more collaborative approach?** Staff have been trained in the approach and mentoring is assisting the process of reflection. Individual workers provide accounts of their experiences, the successes and also those times in child protection where it's difficult to use the approach. It feels very early in our practice application of collaborative conversations in child protection.
- **Are we focussed on good quality decision making?** The use of the Risk Model is well embedded. Because of this we need to guard against becoming complacent. As work pressure increases there is always the possibility that staff take short-cuts in how decisions are reached and evidenced. Refresher sessions are provided and the practice mentor focusses on application of the Risk Model in individual discussions with staff.
- **Are we seeing a clear focus on the change that is needed to prevent harm?** In many ways I think this has been our greatest success to date. Our aim was to create this focus across our processes. We are already seeing this in reports and case conferences. As a concept it has proven very practical for staff. We can talk about becoming increasingly focussed. I believe we are already seeing this.
- **Are we measuring our progress towards outcomes?** This element of the framework seems most difficult for staff to apply in practice. It is quite difficult as a technique to understand and apply; requiring time with families to develop. Not all Core Groups seem to be suitable for this discussion. Whereas we can talk about becoming increasingly focussed on change; with measuring we are either doing it or alternatively we are not yet measuring. Where staff have used it they find it difficult to sustain the activity across processes. The second Core Group often described as a challenge to just keeping focus. However, we remain ambitious and optimistic. I recall trying to embed the use of Risk 2 into practice and faced that same early hesitancy.

What have we learned?

Sharing information and supporting each other's learning has been evident throughout this project. Collaboration and co-production have underpinned the approach to designing many of the project's products. This extends from processes to forms to websites.

Collaborative conversations are difficult in child protection. Whilst mentoring offers a safe reflective space for workers, it is also important for the team managers and senior managers to support this way of working. Their leadership role is critical in emphasising that wherever possible, this is the expected way of undertaking their day to day work.

It has also been important for the mentor to be able to work flexibly. Frontline workers have to deal with unexpected and unavoidable situations and crises daily in their work. The mentor has to be willing to work around this. Ensuring that staff have the reflective time and space without being too demanding of their time. This is a fine balance between supporting staff and maintaining that project focus on progression and improvement.

Sharing our experiences with others

Over the course of the project so far, we have taken opportunities as they have arisen to share information through presenting to wider agencies and authorities. Other Authorities have been keen to hear about what is happening in this project as well as some of the other initiatives across Wales. Making a change to work processes and cultures can take time, and it isn't always easy. People have wanted to know more about how we are trying to do this; what challenges we've encountered and how we've addressed these. They have been interested in implementation lessons for them in similar practice improvement initiatives. They have also been interested in the potential benefits to their agency or authority in other aspects of the model. We remain eager to share our experiences as we progress with anyone interested to know more. We appreciate that for others, they await to project's outcome to determine if it has value for them as a whole system approach.

The next steps

The focus of the work began in the Children's Team in the Meirionnydd and Dwyfor areas. In accordance with our plan we are now moving into the Arfon area. We will be focusing firstly on the Children's Team and then on the Integrated Team for Disabled Children and the 16+ team.

Our implementation process allows time to collaborate with workers and agencies, to gather feedback on processes and forms, and to consider any issues as they arise. We continue to learn as we travel through the different stages of the project, and it is exciting to see the project develop.

We continue to think ahead to what will be useful to support workers to embed their learning into practice and also to share information easily with others. We have developed the website and intranet to promote this. We are currently looking at developing visual training and guidance such as whiteboard videos, training videos and eLearning modules.

The feedback that we have been receiving from our discussions with workers and wider agencies has been positive, with people feeling that the focus on the change offers clarity and consistency for families and workers. We have received positive messages about the 'Steps to change' tool and how it offers families a visual way of understanding the changes needed to safeguard their child. Breaking progress to smaller steps makes it easier to follow but workers note that it can also be a challenge, demanding more paperwork for them to complete at this point.

2020 vision

As we look forward to 2020 and the project's maturity we expect to see the cumulative benefits of a lot of the support functions. The websites and intranet sites that are now ready to go live will make access to material a lot easier for staff and wider audiences. As we refine our approach to mentoring, working individually and in reflective groups we gain confidence and skill.

As a project team we are reflective. We have high ideals and ambition but are kind to each other about the reality of implementation. It cannot always be perfect and results aren't always those that can be measured. We will maintain an inquiring mind-set, aware that in difficulty there is learning and growth.

For further information please visit the website at
www.effectivechildprotection.wales



“Having the opportunity to provide a reflective space to revisit the key elements of the project and embedding learning into practice with the workers is really valuable. From the initial conversations and through the individual and group sessions, you see understanding developing; something that may not happen as easily without investing in this.”

Practice Mentor

“As someone who attends child protection case conferences regularly as part of my work, since the introduction of the project, I’ve noticed an increased focus in social workers’ reports on the changes required in a child’s circumstances to reduce the risk of harm. This in turn positively informs case conference discussions and provides a framework on which core group members, including the family, can develop the child protection plan.” **Associate Specialist in Community Paediatrics**

“Child Protection Case Conferences discuss sensitive, emotional and challenging real life situations where risk is identified and plans are made. There’s always a lot to take in and parents can be overwhelmed or confused. Sometimes professionals and parents don’t share the same wavelength and it all looks pretty impossible. In chairing from Initial to Review conferences I have seen the impact of defining areas for change, scoring what’s “not good enough now” and being clear about “what would it be like if it were good enough” as this gives a clear pathway and endpoint for parents and professionals in conference and core groups. I have also seen the effects of persistent and focused practice by social workers, colleagues and families which has led to reduction of significant harm and de-registration.” **Gwynedd**

Child Protection Co-ordinator