

Issue

Wokingham's Family First partner agencies were mindful of the increasing demands on finite partnership resources to meet increasing children and family need. Senior Leaders of statutory partner agencies reached agreement to invest in training all members of the workforce in a restorative practice methodology (from children's services staff, to police officers, to school staff, voluntary, community and faith sector staff). This was supported by a shared vision to support frontline staff and volunteers to:

- Instill shared principles, strategies and techniques to work 'with', not do 'to' or 'for' others
- work more effectively 'with' children, young people, parents/carers to enable meaningful engagement in family led holistic assessments
- work more effectively with each other in a multi-professional context; including working collaboratively towards shared goals and aspirations; and the effective identification and mitigation of risk.
- Include 'significant others' around a family or young person in assessment, planning and review processes.
- Instilling 'hope with families and professionals that change was possible.

The national Troubled Families investment was used as the catalyst for introducing and testing this methodology; referred to locally in Wokingham as the Family First programme.

South East Region Social Care Workforce Project

WOKINGHAM Good practice example

Evidence and Knowledge

The Family First partners drew on national and international restorative practice research and evidence, particularly focussing on:

- New Zealand's national restorative framework for child protection and safeguarding, ensuring that the role of the family and significant others is routinely considered in all child welfare decisions e.g. through Family Group Conferencing (FGC).
- National and international application of restorative justice methodologies to enable 'victims' and 'offenders' to come together and understand the impact and 'affect' of destructive or criminal behaviours, and in turn, to repair the harm associated with those behaviours and prevent recidivism.
- UK Children's Services Authorities, seeking to introduce a restorative methodology to their children's services design, with a particular focus on how to use the methodology to support early intervention approaches.
- Wokingham consulted and co-designed with national experts in the restorative field, including members of the UK Restorative Justice Council to design a local restorative methodology that would be applicable in all day-to-day practice with vulnerable children and families. This approach combined Family Group Conferencing, Restorative Conferencing and Restorative Mediation

Outcomes

100% of families who we have worked with so far have stopped offending, a figure we never thought possible.

- o 100% of families had significantly reduced their offending and all but two families had stopped entirely
- o Over two thirds of children and young people had increased their school attendance to over 85% (including over 10% of students returning to education after periods of being children missing from education) and had significantly reduced exclusions
- o 41% of families had returned to employment; many of these households had an individual enter employment for the first time.

Overall reduction in Anti-Social Behaviour in the borough of 33% in (2012/13) and a further 11% in 2013/14.

Key Players

- That partnership ownership of changes both at senior management level, and by frontline staff is key.
- That establishing an operational managers forum to collaboratively operationally manage changes in practice and risk manage/mitigate cases where child protection concerns or criminality need a co-ordinated multi-professional response, encourages embedding of the model.
- That sharing the impact on outcomes for local children and families is crucial – in the words of children and their families, to sustain momentum and encourage persistent with challenging families. We are having conversations with the Health and Wellbeing Board about what this means for system change.

Approach

- Wokingham merged together Family Group Conferencing, Restorative Conferencing and Restorative Mediation which proved very powerful tool for working with families who have a history of conflict.
- Wokingham designed a bespoke restorative practice training programme, which is applicable to the whole of the workforce (i.e. accommodating very different professional backgrounds).
- We invested in nine pilot schools, working with Headteachers. This led to notable outcome changes across school populations.
- We learned from these families life journeys by listening to the feedback from families who had been previously unwilling to engage with statutory partner agencies to seek support and we commissioned:
 - New posts in Wokingham's new PRU provision
 - A new CAMHS post and physical health post (Staff Nurse),
 - A commissioned voluntary sector resource
- We made an additional investment in training operational managers how to quality assure the key workers and in what to look for when quality assuring an assessment

Learning points

Clarity of the message from the top down was important. Challenges included:

- o Agreeing together how a restorative model could be most effectively linked to child protection and safeguarding activity – building integrated restorative practice guidance, that directly linked to the 'Signs of Safety' model has been a key contributor to this.
- o Safely supporting and enabling staff who had not previously held keyworker roles to have a fulfil these functions – a multi-professional keyworker guide, supervision checklist for managers and adaptations to training have been key components of ensuring this change.
- o Ensuring coherent and consistent multi-professional identification and mitigation of risk, particularly in context of significant operational risk or high professional anxiety – a monthly Operational Managers meeting reviews cases of concern or cases where risk is identified that requires multi-professional co-ordination.

"If doing this again I would..."

Have trained Operational Managers in the approach before training frontline staff and volunteers. Taken a more robust approach to the supervision of key workers from the beginning, helping people to understand what good supervision looks like and what to be aware during supervision e.g. hidden harm, disguised compliance, CSE.

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Next steps

Adult Social Care, Housing, the Police, Health and CMHT have requested that the model, guidance and training is adapted and rolled out across adult service areas

- We are piloting two community restorative projects, which are designed to enable communities to lead restorative change in outcomes in their local areas. Areas of persistent ASB and criminality have been targeted.
- Community Safety Partner arrangements are now adapting their approaches to learn from the methodology and apply it to achieve sustained outcome change i.e. Integrated Offender Management (IOM).