

Highland Pathfinder Learning Changes emerging across culture, systems and practice in Highland

This learning update is drawn from practitioners who have been involved in pathfinder development. A group of over 80 practitioners from different agencies took part in the first stage of an Appreciative Inquiry in the autumn this year to consider what improvements have occurred as a result of *Getting it right for every child* and what added value it has brought about. They were also asked to say what further changes they would like to see.

There are four clear areas of change emerging:

- * **Increasing equality for services users**
- * **More focused and inclusive professional activity**
- * **More clarity about targeted services that are needed**
- * **More consistency in assessment and decision-making.**

Increasing equality for service users

- Families are giving positive feedback on their part in assessment through the use of the *My World Triangle*. They say it makes them feel more involved and not only do they know what partners to the plan are signed up to doing, but they understand better what they can do to help their child(ren). In some cases, where engagement was difficult to secure, the use of the triangle assisted with communication and planning, and helped parents understand the impact of their lifestyles on their children.
- School staff report they are finding it easier to talk to parents and children about what has been happening and about their difficulties because more information is shared early. This is contributing to a culture of early engagement with families on what previously were felt to be 'sensitive' areas so it enables them to widen their remit from a purely educational focus.
- Schools also report in some situations, if the Police have been involved, parents want to give their version of events before the police do. Some parents are 'beating a path to the school door'. This is seen as very positive. 'Engagement is engagement' whatever the circumstances.
- For disabled children, *Getting it right for every child* provides a more inclusive approach, and is also less stigmatising for siblings who need help. It takes a whole family approach and families report they feel 'more equal', because the same process is used for all children. For them, this promotes a 'child first, disability second' approach.
- Parents are involved in working groups on strategy and feel they are influencing development of practice.

- Some children are reported to be taking a much greater part in the direction of their plans – in some cases looked after children have chaired their own meeting.
- Voluntary agencies report there is real evidence of depth and quality of involvement of the children and young people in their assessments and plans and evidence of a 'clear presence' of the young person they are asked to work with.
- Previously, more often than not, children had to be on the register to get services. This is not happening now – needs are more often met without registration.
- One travelling family remained in the area because they weren't registered –and are still here, responding to help.

More focused and inclusive professional activity

- *Getting it right for every child* is changing practice at the front line –this is a real step change from a top down approach.
- The 5 questions about practitioner involvement and action have really helped focus on early action across different agencies.
- Social work is getting requests for services much earlier, rather than children's needs having to reach a crisis.
- Education policies and procedures are no longer written in isolation – there is more involvement and consideration on the impact on and of other agencies, therefore ensuring consideration of the wider impact of change.
- Midwives and health visitors feel they're no longer 'scrabbling' about in the search for services and resources. They are clearer about what is needed, who can help, and how they can access that help.
- Changing the focus of the Public Health Record evidences why a health practitioner is doing something which, in turn, prioritises the workload.
- Voluntary agencies have been included in working groups and feel they have more of a say in planning services. One voluntary organisation worker reported she felt much more of an equal partner in a school setting because she 'spoke the same language'. She reported her experiences of schools changing to see a wider level of need as 'our responsibility'.
- Some voluntary agencies are reporting much greater involvement in plans, they are receiving relevant information effectively and they feel more included in the team around the child.

- Where agencies in the voluntary sector are to become involved as part of a child's plan, they report a real improvement in quality and range of the information they receive.
- The National Autistic Society who are now invited, when relevant, to a child's meeting, reported feeling clearer about who needed to do what. They also thought the appointment of a lead person made it less stressful for parents at point of contact with them and other services.
- As a result of the new role of the police attending incidents in the home, where there are children in the family, identifying where there is adversity, and then sharing that information relevantly, there is growing evidence of fewer 'hidden young carers'
- A culture of sharing concerns early across other parts of Highland is now emerging – more **discussion** taking place between police, health education and social work at an earlier stage, although *Getting it right for every child* is not yet 'rolled out'. Improved practice is being recognised by those outwith the Pathfinder area and is being put into place in preparation for the change to come – 'if it works better why wouldn't we use it?'
- The pulling together of training for child protection and *Getting it right for every child* into an integrated training approach has been seen as a necessary component and a real benefit to the pathfinder activity. It has begun to improve and accelerate integrated working. Staff reported they would now like to see more multi agency and less single agency training as they have benefited considerably from the training so far delivered.

More clarity about targeted services that are needed

- There is an emerging improvement in trust in the assessments of the other agencies, and this is reducing duplication for staff, but importantly, for children and their families.
- Child protection registrations have reduced across Highland with meetings being much more focused. For those children who needed to come to a meeting as a result of a child protection enquiry, and who were not registered, most had multi agency plans put in place, with professionals from *across the agencies* taking the lead professional role, not just social work.
- There has been a reduction of looked after/accommodated children to well under 500 (from well over 500).
- Referrals to the Reporter are down (of 250 potential referrals in a 9 week period, only 53 referrals were needed). More supervision requirements are in place, suggesting that the right children are now being referred

- Social work team managers report a big reduction in inappropriate requests for a service from a professionally qualified social worker. This is saving time in weeding out what is required/requested.
- By being clearer about the assessment and plan, a more targeted approach to use of services is emerging thus adding value to the whole process.
- Practitioners from education using the well-being indicators to plan for a child have reported 'It makes you realise that someone else may need to be involved'.

More consistency in assessment and decision-making

- *Getting it right for every child* is formalising what was already part of a culture of early intervention in early years services, but the standard approach to assessment is speeding up the process so that children are getting help earlier.
- Using the well-being indicators at meetings keeps a focus to the meeting and is child centred.
- Concern forms are informing teachers early on of difficulties and they are able to help earlier.
- Concern forms have considerable resource demands for police but the added benefits for children are recognised.
- Health visitors report the helpfulness of the *Getting it right for every child* practice tools and the supporting structures that are now in place. They feel better able to understand the needs of children and families and are more confident in assessing and accessing what is needed.
- The shared language has been seen as a great step forward in working together and brings a more focused approach to meetings.
- The language and model of *Getting it right for every child* is now spreading in to other authorities meaning that children and families who move to another area can have their needs recognised in an 'equal playing field'.
- The value of a single meeting is recognised – it is less resource intensive, and the direction and focus on solutions mean that children and young people can have more involvement.
- *Getting it right for every child* has brought to the fore a greater understanding of the importance of sharing information rather than relying on or 'hiding behind' confidentiality.

A full external evaluation of the Pathfinder is also taking place and this will provide much more rigorous, research based, evidence of the challenges and achievements in the Highland Pathfinder.