

LET'S TALK!

FAMILY EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICES EVENT

13 November 2019

Summary report

Introduction

Underpinning our approach with families in Leeds, are the key Leeds Practice Principles: **always working WITH, relationship based** – assuming that engagement and best outcomes are achieved through trusting and respectful relationships with each other, taking responsibility for creating and maintaining effective relationships at all levels; **enabling the utility of the family** – putting the family at the heart of everything we do; recognising and enabling the networks and skills within the family; and wherever possible families determining the direction of care and intervention.

In 2019 the Deputy Director, Children and Families began to develop an authorising environment to enable an exploration of and a re-imagining of the nature of working relationships with families and importantly of the concepts of 'expert' and 'problem-solver'.

The idea for this event in Leeds emerged following a workshop organised by the London Borough of Camden's Children's & Adults Social Work Service in December 2018. This event was designed to showcase some of the work being undertaken in Camden to harness the power of parents. Guest speakers from New Zealand, USA and Holland combined with British academics and representatives of both Camden and Leeds Social Work Services in an engaging event that felt powerful and inspiring.

A small group of staff from within Leeds Children's Social Work Services (CSWS) began to meet to map out the practicalities and responsibilities associated with the design and execution of a plan to invite parents, whose children had received a service from CSWS, to come together. The purpose was to actively listen and hear views as well as to consider how families can shape and design services that are useful to them.

A key theme from the Camden event was the power of relationships, social work authenticity, the power of listening and developing a corporate culture that genuinely developed a process around parent's active participation in the shaping of a culture and ethos that reaches out to parents and prompts organisational learning and challenge.

In simple terms, this event was regarded as a first step toward the ambitions outlined above.

Process

There was already another working group in Leeds looking to harness the support of parents whose children had been successfully returned to their care from being looked after to assist other parents, who were just beginning this reunification process. Some of these parents were visited and invited to attend the event. In addition, other parents and adult family members who had experienced a variety of involvements and interventions by CSWS were nominated by staff and these too were visited. The purpose of the event was explained, parent's thoughts obtained and invitations provided.

In preparation for the event, the Deputy Director, Children and Families, was invited to attend and provide an introductory overview of the event to the attendees. The structure of the event was set within a small number of round tables populated by parents and by the staff who had been involved since the inception of the event. Cue cards were provided to stimulate discussion around areas that were felt to be pertinent but also leave sufficient flexibility for parent's to have the freedom to introduce their own reflections, feelings and analysis around what is it like to have a social worker arrive at their home. A crèche was provided for younger children with an illustrator in attendance to capture the morning and the key areas that emerged.

Inevitably some parents dropped out during the process with a few not arriving on the morning. In total, 22 adults, predominantly but not exclusively female, attended the event at the Carriageworks on 13 11 19. Transport costs were reimbursed with a small buffet provided at the conclusion of the morning.

Those that had attended had vast experience of working with CSWS and other agencies. There were adults whose children had been subject to Child Protection Plans, Care Proceedings and some parents children had been placed for adoption. There were parents, grandparents, Aunts and Uncles present. Some adult were adopters and others had an SGO for children within their family. Family members attended from all areas of Leeds from the most deprived areas to the most affluent.

On the day a pause in the discussions was provided periodically with parents themselves feeding back and summarising the views of their table. There was a real vibrancy and animation in the atmosphere as the morning progressed. Confidence grew amongst parents that this was a 'safe space' within which to share feelings with some very personal and sometimes painful experiences and reflections described and shared.

Feedback

There was a rich and powerful quality to the feedback provided by the parents collectively which should be regarded as a key messages for a listening CSWS on their journey forward toward genuine parental collaboration and dialogue. In summary, the themes were:

**SAL
TARIQ**

Assistant
Director
LEEDS CHILDREN
& FAMILIES



'Everything starts by listening to parents'

" EVERYTHING STARTS
WITH
LISTENING



'First impressions between a social worker and a parent can be both powerful and shape future relationships'

**FIRST
IMPRESSIONS**



BASIC THINGS



'Get the basics right – shake hands, rapport, words are carefully chosen and thoughtful'

'People skills are what all social workers need to exhibit'

'Calmness assists an explanation – words are very powerful!'

PEOPLE SKILLS



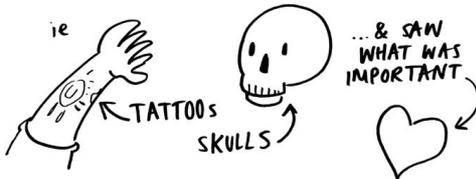
POSITIVE 😊



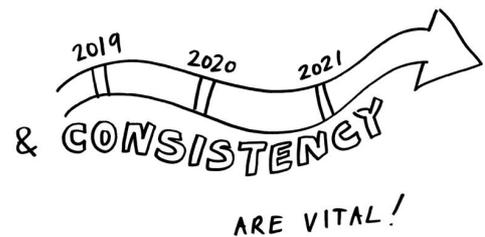
'Care and compassion – even if the message is a difficult one to receive / deliver'

THEY SAW PAST THE
SURFACE...

'Look past the obvious'



'Do what you say you are going to do and be consistent – eg time keeping - don't say you will arrive at 2-30pm and not turn up until 3-15pm – otherwise we are already off on the wrong foot.'



LACK OF COMMUNICATION



'A lack of communication – not returning calls when a lack of trust & transparency' IS INVOLVED WE FEEL



'When a social worker

arrives – we feel FEAR - are you going to remove my children?’



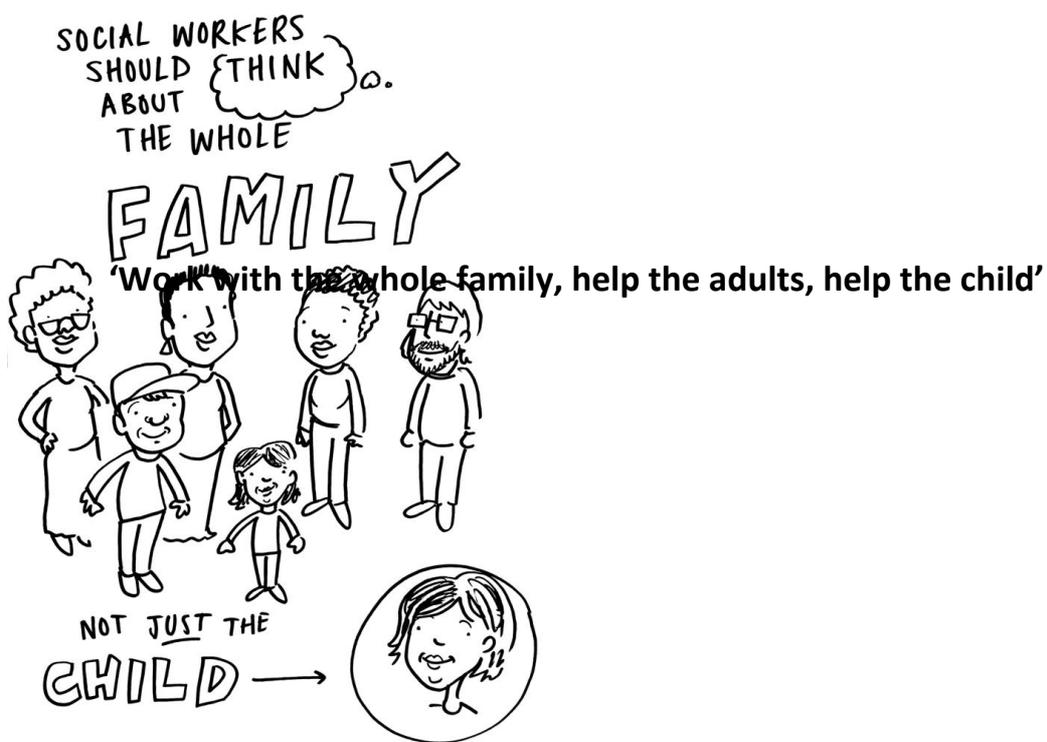
‘Praise is a very powerful motivating factor’

‘Judgements were made about me that were not accurate or fair’

‘See past the surface’

‘See things from a parent’s perspective’





Additional comments:

- I felt alone – I had no-one
- Can I have the same social worker please – not 3-4 in 12 months- consistency breeds results
- It's not the process – it's how it's done
- Felt friendless / voiceless in meetings
- Support from a parent or advocate who has been where I am
- Do not pre-judge me, see me as an individual
- Social workers reveal a bit of themselves – careful self-disclosure can be powerful
- If CSWS get in wrong – say it / own it
- You took my children and just left me on my own without help or support
- Social worker was nice – but ineffective
- Are you aware how powerful social workers feel to me?

Evaluation Summary.

Overall 21 parents completed the evaluation form at the end of the session. The responses were overwhelmingly positive, with all parents saying they enjoyed the session and all

expressed an interest in coming to future citywide events and engaging in other opportunities. There were no negative comments or feedback about the session itself. The comments made are summarised below:

Right now I feel?

- Optimistic x 6 (Optimistic it may help, that change can/will happen, about the future of the services and it's developments)
- Good x 2 (Good as I got what I wanted)
- Really good x 2 (really good sharing my experience with other people)
- Positive x 2
- Happy x 2 (Happy was listened to)
- Relax, safe
- Very encouraged, I'm very impressed with the children's social work service that these discussions are going on
- Like some good things could come out of this
- Excited for future of social care
- Learned things
- Everything discussed should be considered and worked on
- Thankful to be given the opportunity to give views and ideas, feeling emotional now
- This is a good beginning of better relationships both with parents and the social workers for a more sustainable work ethics
- Encouraged by the direction social workers are moving towards

The best part of today was?

- Being listened to x 5 (Having my say and being listened to, people listening to me)
- Listening x 5 (listening to the others and being part of this group, Hearing everyone else's comments)
- Talking x 4 (and sharing my experiences, saying how things could change, talking with other parents and professionals learning I am not the only one, sharing feedback)
- Meeting new people x 2
- Meeting other people like us
- Being able to share my thoughts for the good things and my concerns with Saleem.
- Being able to express my feelings and share experiences both positive and negative
- Knowing people in charge know things need changing and are wanting that change
- Knowing everyone is on the same page
- Everyone being open and honest and listened to
- Not being judged
- Seeing common themes
- When the issues were highlighted
- All of it
- Worth it, great

What surprised me most about today was?

- Willingness to change x 4 (How open to change social care management seem to be; Willing to change, genuine desire to improve things despite how busy everyone must be)
- How much everyone had in common x 3 (..and that my views are common, how much in common all comments were)
- How many people attended x 2
- People listen/ willing to listen to each other x 2
- Professionals ACTUALLY listening and the vibes with EVERY one in the room
- How well everyone came together
- Each other's empathy
- How easy it was to say what is wanted
- All the lovely staff and parents I have met and networked with
- Other things happening
- Feeling emotional
- Feeling like just coming today helped me feel less alone and supported
- Nothing really

Maybe next time we could...?

- Feedback on changes / actions taken x 3 (review actions and know what work has been undertaken, report on changes, show what has happened since last time, meet up in 3 months' time to check on social workers, work with people)
- Longer session x 2
- More discussion time x 2 (more time to talk and share)
- Do more of the same
- Have more positive than negative
- Record our comments in a better way for you. I will text you
- Have social workers come along to hear our views

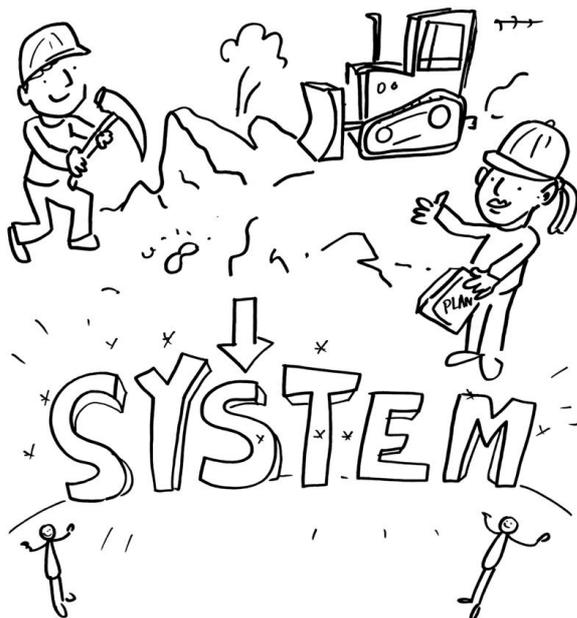
Further opportunities I'm interested in?

Number of responses

Attending another city wide let's talk session like today	21
Sharing my views and experiences at events	17
Developing Regular area based parent voice groups with area teams	16
Taking part in training skills session	16
Taking part in training for social care staff	16
Sitting on interview and commissioning panels	14
Helping to make films using training	11
Being a parent buddy/ help with panel course	1

Next Steps

LET'S BUILD A BETTER



It is important to ensure we 'catch this wave' of understanding and learning to create the two-way relationships aspired to above. It may not mean that CSWS and parents are always aligned when trying to understand a set of family circumstances. However, whether that is the case or not, the principles set out above by parents around relationships, building trust and respect are paramount to establishing fairness, transparency and compassion.

Following the positive feedback to the first session, we have planned a follow up **Let's Talk and Plan** session on 27th January 2020 from 10-1pm.

All parents who participated in the first session have been invited to take part in the next session before Christmas.

In response to feedback and suggestions from parents, the 'Let's talk and Plan' session will include an update on key learning from the first session. There will also be the opportunity to work in smaller groups again with lots of time for parents to share their ideas and experiences. The group discussions are likely to focus on the following themes:

1. Developing a Leeds parent pledge
2. Developing questions / scenarios to be used in monthly social work interview panels
3. Planning question and answer sessions (conversations), involving family members, with social workers in each geographical/service area
4. Exploring and reviewing approaches to family led decision making with active involvement of family members.
5. Working with fathers
6. Development of a 'Total Respect – The Family Perspective' training course.
7. Developing a 'Family Advisory Board' in each geographical area.
8. Planning a family led Children and Families Conference for 2020.

Family Voice Planning Team