

Leith Children and Families Team - Multi-Cultural Family Base Post

First Year Progress Report

February 2008

Executive Summary

This report outlines the joint service delivery model which has been developed between Leith Social Work Centre and Multi-Cultural Family Base. It sets this innovative cross-sector development in the context of policy, in particular 'Changing Lives' and 'Getting it Right for Every Child'.

The report details the work undertaken since the postholder took up the post in October 2006. This includes:

- 35 reports in the first year of operation
- Supervision either directly or by supporting the postholder of 6 children subject to statutory orders from the Children's Hearing
- Direct work and initial assessment
- Ongoing work with a number of families undertaken by students based at Leith Social Work Centre and supervised by the postholder
- Additional work undertaken directly by the postholder.

The report also details wider benefits of the joint model including:

- Building stronger connections between the statutory and voluntary sectors
- Supporting the development of the English as an Additional Language service
- Recruitment of staff
- Retention of staff
- Improving service user feedback and
- Developing a culture of learning.

The arrangements for accountability and ensuring that quality of service as well as quantity are assured are described, and the report evidences the contribution made by this project towards meeting the aims of the Service Improvement Plan.

Finally, the report outlines financial considerations and argues that this innovative development provides excellent value for money in meeting policy objectives.

Introduction

This initiative arose from discussions in 2005 between Nita Brown and Jo Thorne (then general manager and service and learning manager at MCFB) and Joyce Wood, practice team manager of the Leith Children and Families Team, about how to improve the service to children and families by developing a joint service delivery model of practice. A further aim was to increase the number, diversity and quality of practice learning opportunities for social work students undertaking the new degree course, leading to improved recruitment and retention of professional social workers in children and families work across all sectors.

These aims agreed well with Scottish Government's children and families' policies (as set out in "Changing Lives" and particularly with the requirements for joint planning to remove obstacles to children's developments put forward by "Getting it right for every child") and the requirements of the new honours degree in social work. Because of this, approval was given for a joint post at senior social worker level, funded by the City of Edinburgh Council for two years. Janice Gammie was appointed and took up post on 23 October 2006.

The postholder's role is defined as: participating in operational activities in the children and families team as a member of the management team, direct practice teaching and overseeing the allocation and accountability of work allocated to student social workers at MCFB.

This report aims to set out the progress made since October 2006, demonstrating the benefits that have accrued to all stakeholders (in particular the City of Edinburgh Council Children and Families Department).

Summary of Work Undertaken

Work undertaken on behalf of Leith SWC by social work students linked to the postholder

Students were first allocated specific work on 14 December 2006.

Statutory reports

A total of 31 statutory reports were undertaken by students in the year commencing November 2006. These are summarised in the following two figures. When added to the 3 Social Background Reports and One Case Conference Report completed by the postholder, the total number of reports attributable to this post in one year is 35. While much of this work involved the preparation of stand alone reports, a significant number involved ongoing support for the family. In one case a three year old child disclosed sexual abuse while a student was preparing a social background report. The postholder, as a manager in the children and families team, was able to conduct the interagency referral discussion with health, police and CPIRT colleagues and arrange a joint police, social work interview of the child. The student was thus able to continue their involvement with the family and, in fact, prepared the report for the case conference. Feedback from the family was that they valued this type of joint service delivery. The student also valued the experience. In fact, from being clear about not wanting employment in the statutory children and families sector, the student's increased confidence led them to obtain employment in another children and families team in Edinburgh City upon qualifying.

Figures 1 and 2, below, show the breakdown of these reports graphically.

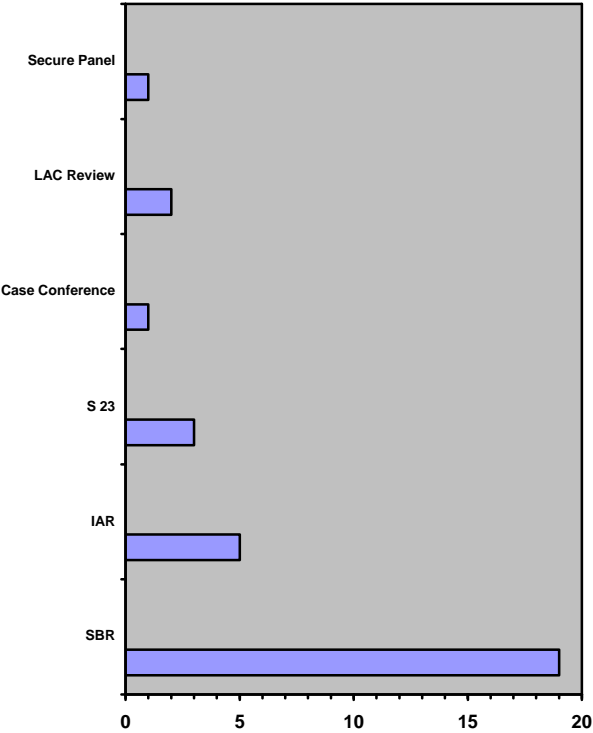


Figure 1: Student Reports November 2006 – November 2007 (Bar Chart)

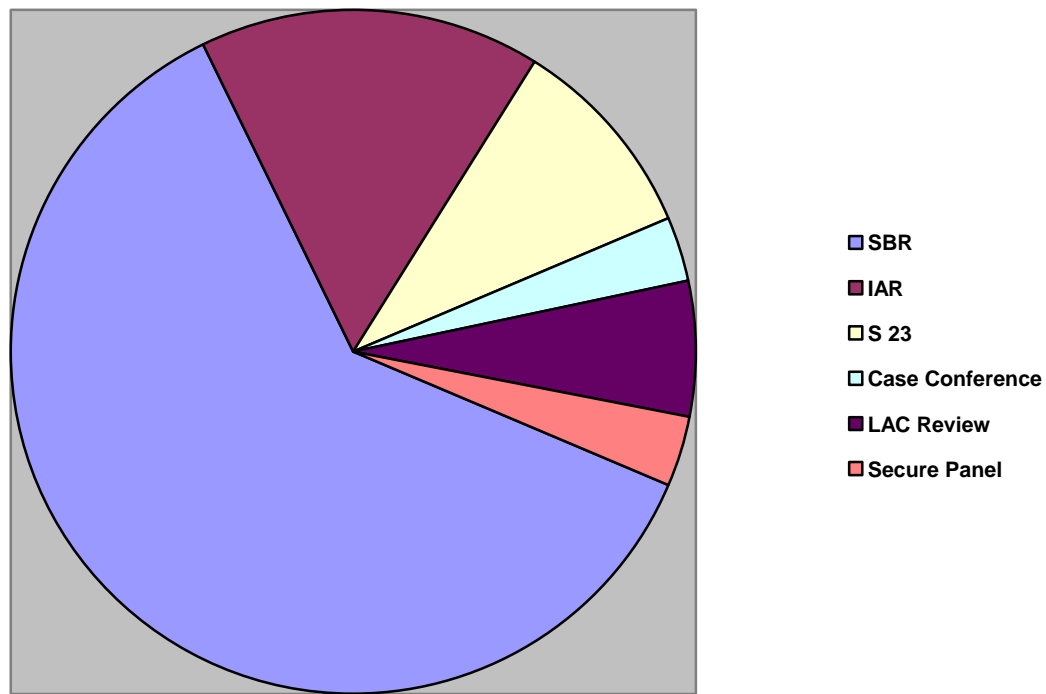


Figure 2: Student Reports November 2006 – November 2007 (Pie Chart)

Work as Supervising Social Work (with children subject to a supervision requirement from the Children's Hearing)

Six children on supervision orders (from three families) have been allocated to students from MCFB in the past year. In two of these cases, the student was the allocated worker and, with appropriate supervision, managed the day to day handling of the case.

In the third case, students (two consecutively) assisted the allocated worker with monitoring the welfare of the four children and also provided additional opportunities for social interaction and resilience building. These four siblings were also on the child protection register.

Other direct work with children and families

- Direct work with one 14 year old boy and his family re aggressive behaviour and tensions in relationship between young person and parents. This work was carried on over a period of nine weeks. Arising from an initial referral to duty the work resulted in a significant improvement in family relationships and obviated the likely need for compulsory measures.
- Initial assessment (on a duty basis) of the risks to two siblings due to their mother's mental health declining. This work involved liaison with extended family and ESWS to ensure adequate monitoring was in place to ensure risk levels were acceptable. At the end of this time the family situation was improved enough for the case to be ceased to the children and families team with ongoing support being provided by MCFB, a good example of a family benefiting from the joint service delivery model at the heart of the collaboration.
- Initial contact with a family re an assessment of their child's disability. This work did not continue as the family declined to participate in the assessment process.

Work undertaken by students based in Leith Children and Families Team (managed by the postholder)

Two students have been completely based at Leith children and families since November 2006. In addition to statutory reports, described above, the students undertook the following work:

Ongoing case work, including assessment of need and risk, for an 11 year old boy whose mother's ability to care for him was impaired by drug use, mental health issues, domestic violence and previous sexual abuse (of the mother). The outcome of this work was that the child was placed with relatives and a report submitted to the Reporter to the Children's Hearing. An important step in this process was the student's organisation of a multi-agency meeting to share information and agree a multi-agency care plan for the child.

Management of the supervision order for a 15 year old boy in residential care. This involved assessment of risk and a consequent referral to the secure panel. A secure place was obtained (ratified by a children's hearing) and the day to day case management was undertaken by the student. Weekly case management meetings led to a decision to return to residential care that was ratified by a LAAC review.

Work with a family of six siblings from a black Asian background. Issues centred around the father's mental health and housing. After a period of assessment and joint work with another student based at MCFB, a decision was taken that ongoing support should be provided by MCFB. Later child protection issues resulted in a reopening of the case to Leith Children and Families.

Work with a 14 year old boy whose school attendance was 7%. Following the submission of a Social Background Report, a Children's Hearing placed the young person on a supervision order. Ongoing monitoring and support continued to be provided by the student. On the student's departure, a student based at MCFB continued with this statutory work (managed by the postholder).

Assessment of risk and need for a 15 year old boy whose mother's mental health issues and lack of school attendance were causing concern.

Assessment of risk for a 5 year old boy due to his mother's problem substance misuse. A formal multi-agency meeting was convened by the student, under the protocol for the assessment of drug-misusing families, and a plan to monitor the situation and work on change was agreed and implemented.

Work undertaken by the postholder

In addition to managing the above work by student social workers, the postholder has undertaken the following work directly:

- Direct work with children and families through holding a small caseload.
- Participating in the management of the team as duty senior.
- Contributing to the management of the team through participation in seniors' meetings.
- Providing informal consultation and support to social workers.
- Promoting continuing professional development in the team.
- Setting up systems to ensure work done by students is appropriate, safe and accountable.
- Participating in meeting with SWIA staff/organizing service user focus groups with SWIA staff.

Direct work

Since November 2006, the postholder has been the responsible social worker for four siblings subject to a supervision requirement from the Children's Hearing. These

children were also initially on the child protection register however, after a review case conference in May 2007, their names were removed from the register.

Participating in the management of the team

I undertake the role of duty senior social worker on an ad-hoc basis, as required by the needs of the team. This provides additional cover for the rest of the senior team and increases the capacity to manage the demanding and complex situations that occur regularly on duty. From January 2008, it has been agreed that 10% of my time (one day per fortnight) will be spent as duty senior, thus integrating my role more fully into the day to day operation management structure of the team.

Participation in senior group meetings

I attend these meetings where allocation of work to social workers and students is agreed.

Providing informal consultation and support

As an experienced practitioner with 12 years experience, I regularly offer support and advice to student social workers, unqualified staff, main grade workers, senior practitioners and, occasionally, other managers.

Promoting continuing professional development

By involving and supporting staff from the children and families team as link supervisors, I am able to enhance their experience of supervision and management. By helping students to reflect on their learning needs, staff become more aware of their own learning needs.

Workers from the team have also had the opportunity to help with and attend training sessions run by MCFB staff.

Setting up systems to ensure accountability

Initially, a large part of my role was to devise and implement systems to ensure work was carried out to appropriate standards, statutes and procedures and that the Local Authority remained accountable for this work. Systems for logging on SWIFT the work allocated to students were devised, along with procedures to ensure case recording followed departmental policy. Guidelines were written for students undertaking work and lines of accountability agreed between the postholder, the practice team manager and the chief executive of MCFB.

Participation in Inspections/Promotion of service user feedback/Evaluation of post

SWIA inspectors have met with myself and the chief executive of MCFB, former students that have benefited from the project and service users. The requirement for

student social workers to obtain service user feedback provides an opportunity for the City of Edinburgh to benefit from this additional feedback. Service user feedback is now an essential component of all Local Authority social work audit and evaluations, as described in Changing Lives.

Update since November 2007

In December and January 2008, the following additional work was undertaken by students supervised by the postholder:

- 5 statutory reports (2x social background reports, 1x initial assessment report, 1x assessment of disability, 1x home circumstances report for Sheriff Court).
- One student has participated (with the writer) in a single agency child protection investigation.
- Three students (in addition to the above) are continuing to work with families on an ongoing basis on behalf of Leith Children and Families Team.

Wider benefits resulting from this post

Strengthening partnerships with voluntary organizations

“Getting it right for every child” states that agencies should “move away from the practice of transferring responsibility and accountability from one agency to another” and that they should “break down the barriers” and “develop and implement shared principles, policies and practice tools”.

With a joint post in existence and clear lines of accountability, the collaboration with MCFB provides clear evidence that the City of Edinburgh is already doing the above.

The above is also in accordance with the City of Edinburgh’s Service Improvement Plan, particularly “Aim 1 – effective information sharing” and its requirement to “develop asset based community development models”.

Aim 2; “to develop strategies for improving EAL” is also enhanced by MCFB’s existing joint project with EAL and by the writers participation on the MCFB service and learning sub-committee along with school based EAL staff.

Recruitment and retention of staff

As discussed above, there is already one clear instance of a social work student who, upon qualifying, has chosen to work for Children and Families based on their experience of the joint initiative. I am directly aware of a number of other former students who are currently working as professional social workers for the City of Edinburgh and a number

of continuing students who have expressed an interest in working in children and families for the City of Edinburgh.

The project will also mean that new graduates entering the workforce will have had a well-managed experience of undertaking statutory work.

Again, this is in accordance with Aim 1 of the Service Improvement Plan which seeks to reduce caseloads for frontline workers to a maximum of 14.

Improving service user feedback

The ongoing requirement for student social workers to evidence their practice by seeking service user feedback means that there is an existing mechanism available to the City of Edinburgh to access the views of children and their families who are receiving a service from the City of Edinburgh (through MCFB). This links directly to Aim 4 of the Service Improvement Plan; to “Develop a communication and engagement strategy” and to one of the main strands of the “Changing Lives” initiative.

Developing a culture of learning

For members of Leith Children and Families Team and other Children and Families staff in contact with MCFB and myself, access to the very sizeable body of practice teaching knowledge at MCFB, along with greater contact with student social workers and their educational institutions, will promote a culture of reflection, learning and development. This already takes place both informally, through ad-hoc discussion and consultation, and formally through feedback from training events and sharing of topical research and practice information.

This is in agreement with the goals of “Getting it Right for Every Child”, particularly the aim to “improve knowledge and understanding of the unique contribution that each professional discipline brings to the lives of children and young people”.

“Changing Lives” states that “It is clear that social workers must be capable of reflecting on their own practice, able to make informed judgements and have the ability to review and adapt their practice when necessary. This has implications for how we train and educate social workers to ensure they are effectively prepared for current and future practice.

This means that it is vital that strong working partnerships between employers and Scotland's universities and colleges are developed”.

Financial considerations

The postholder is currently employed and funded by City of Edinburgh Council. Any day to day overheads associated with this post are shared between Leith Children and Families Team and Multi-Cultural Family Base. Given that the postholder spends approximately 50% of her time in each agency, the actual spend for stationary, admin

support and IT resources will be equitable. The postholder's view is that the majority of the Children and Families overhead will be associated with service provision to children in need.

Income associated with the post comes primarily from student practice learning fees. There is an agreement between Joyce Wood, practice team manager, and Cathy Macnaughton, chief executive, MCFB, for Leith Children and Families to claim placement fees in respect of students placed through MCFB but based in the practice team. There is also an arrangement for the children and families team to claim 50% of the fee for 15 Day observational placements arranged through MCFB and where there is significant additional input from MCFB. Clearly, fees relating to students placed in the practice team through City of Edinburgh Council training and development section will be claimed by the Council as normal.

Conclusion

In this summary I have demonstrated the depth and breadth of the partnership between Leith Children and Families and MCFB, outlining the steps taken to ensure work is carried out in a safe and accountable way with due regard to the roles and boundaries of each agency. I have summarized the financial implications and balanced these with the benefits to the City of Edinburgh, both in practical terms of work done (showing I hope the self-evident value for money) and in more structural growth towards an organization that can better meet the demands of recent policy and legislative changes. These demands mean that it is no longer acceptable for agencies to work in isolation and to require others to conform to their standards. Instead, as "Changing Lives" puts it; "communities and networks of professionals will need to support each other, learn from best practice and share ideas and resources. In this way the leadership and management agenda will be dynamic, forward thinking and self-enhancing".

Given the above, I believe this innovative joint post with MCFB represents an excellent model for the type of joined up work that governments (and inspection agencies) now expect to see.



Janice Gammie
Senior Social Worker, Children and Families Leith
Service and Learning Manager, MCFB

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