

The Role of Lead Practitioner

Briefing for Child Review Board 18.04.2016

Background to the Lead Practitioner Role

The Lead Practitioner role was introduced as an integral part of the reorganisation of Children's Services in October 2015 and the refocussing on relationship-based practice. There was recognition from across the service of a need for a bespoke role designed to drive service improvement, support relationship based practice and promote excellent social work informed by evidence-based research. Overall, it was considered that a key aim for the role was to embed relationship-based practice and develop the expertise and authority of social workers in order to promote the safety and stability for children that social workers intervene with.

Who are the Lead Practitioners?

Four Lead Practitioners were employed into the role, Anna Bacchoo, Chrissy Bulling, Francis King and Rebecca Watts. They have a range of background and experiences relevant to the role. They work alongside all social work teams in Children's Services but sit outside the line management structures of these teams and are directly line managed by Tom Stibbs, Principal Social Worker.

Key Outcomes Lead Practitioners are Working to Achieve

The Lead Practitioner role is designed to develop social worker's knowledge in specialist areas of social work practice including domestic abuse, adult mental health, sexual risk, court work and assessment skills. In conjunction with this, the Lead Practitioners are working to support social workers to develop skills across a range of areas including communication, assessment and intervention skills. The Lead Practitioners promote the integration of research in order to achieve good outcomes for families. A fundamental aspect of the role involves supporting children's social work teams to develop as a resilient workforce where experienced social workers benefit from ongoing continuing professional development and are retained on the front-line.

Main Tasks Undertaken

Since starting in post every Lead Practitioner has taken responsibility for a specialist area of social work practice and has an action plan outlining key objectives for each. These action plans incorporate a range of activities including establishing effective links with key partners across the city; providing training workshops addressing these key areas; providing consultation and mentoring for social workers with identified learning needs in these areas. This has included follow-up support and accompanying social workers on visits to embed these skills. The Lead Practitioners have also successfully secured opportunities for social workers to develop skills by enabling them to undertake joint work at the Clermont Assessment unit and RISE (local domestic abuse charity).

The Lead Practitioners are also responsible for facilitating 17 reflective practice groups attended by practitioners across Children's Services. These groups run monthly for an hour and a half and follow a clear structure with individual social workers presenting a practice example. These groups provide social workers with an opportunity to explore their feelings in respect to the work, strategies for engagement and intervention and the different perspectives of all involved. The Lead Practitioners

are closely involved in the evaluation of the reflective groups which is being undertaken by the Centre for Social Work Practice.

A central focus for the Lead Practitioners is the dissemination of best practice and research. They have begun to establish a research hub of recommended tools and direct work interventions that social workers can apply to their practice in a range of different areas. In addition The Lead Practitioners are leading and participating in undertaking local evaluation and research in partnership with local universities to assess the efficacy of the relationship-based model.

In addition to mentoring and consultation in relation to specific areas of social work practice the Lead Practitioners also provide individual support to individual social workers with more generic identified developmental needs. This might include workload and time management; emotional resilience and team dynamics. They are also supporting whole teams to develop in specific areas.

Key Achievements to Date

Since starting in post the Lead Practitioners have undertaken 62 individual interventions (consultations and mentoring support) with social workers to support their practice with families in Brighton and Hove.

Consultations have ranged from exploring strategies for assessment and intervention; informing decisions for the outcome of legal proceedings; helping social workers formulate effective analyses; creative techniques for engaging with individual family members and the integration of research. The Lead Practitioners have received positive feedback regarding the impact of these consultations including:

"It was great to have input from a professional who has lots of experience but is just a little bit removed from the case so can give an objective view." (Newly qualified social worker)

"Gave confidence to begin an assessment without feeling overwhelmed and, I think, helped the worker to have a broader/more open approach." (Manager of social worker who also attended the consultation)

"I will pay more consideration to the cultural context when working with families from the traveller communities. I will look at mum's engagement beyond the surface and unpick what professional interventions mean to mum and why she sees these as a threat in order to creatively consider alternative ways of working with her. I will be more alert to the risk posed to these children instead of feeling risk is diminished due to time lapsing and there being no incidents of DV/DA. This has enabled a reflective space to stop, take stock and consider more in depth a case than would be achievable in supervision." (Experienced Social Worker)

"Thanks this consultation has been of great help to us and we'll give you and your team more in-depth feed back later in the process, but so far excellent stuff" (Manager of the social worker who attended the consultation).

Individual training and workshops have been delivered on a range of practice areas including decision-making in respect to contact; personality disorder; domestic abuse and contact; use of chronologies and genograms in assessment practice.

Reflective practice groups have been embedded across Children's Services with an expectation that all social workers attend. Anecdotally, social workers talk of the value of having a forum attended by social workers located in teams across the organisation, an opportunity to explore their feelings and the benefit of hearing from different perspectives in the journey of the child.

Effective links have begun to be established between children's social work and key services across the city with Lead Practitioners serving as the interface for this. This has included specialist adult mental health services; domestic abuse services; drug and alcohol services and the local family justice board.

Work has been undertaken to establish the Senior Social Worker role within the reorganisation, supporting Senior Social Workers to develop their leadership and intervention skills and ensuring they are retained on the front-line.

Guidance has been written that has been implemented nationally which has included assessments of parents with a learning disability, templates for private law court reports and tools to support the assessment of child-parent contact when domestic abuse is a concern.

Effective links with social work departments at the University of Sussex and Brighton have been established with the development of a 'Practitioners who Teach' support programme for Brighton and Hove social workers keen to develop their teaching experience and influence the next crop of social work graduates who will work for Brighton and Hove. A number of Brighton and Hove social workers are active participants in a community of practice researchers and are embarking on plans to participate in research locally,

Future Priorities

The Lead Practitioners recognise that they have only been in post for four-five months and there is still much work to be done.

A key priority for the next six months will be to continue to embed the role and establish the Lead Practitioner identity with the role recognised in key services across the city.

The Lead Practitioners will continue to embed the reflective practice groups and ensure that attendance is prioritised and secured in the longer-term.

Best practice guidance will be published on-line addressing all areas of specialist practice that can be accessed by all practitioners and integrated into day-to-day practice.

The Lead Practitioners will continue to develop and deliver bespoke training that will enable social workers to offer a suite of interventions to reduce risk and promote change in families.

Links with partner agencies will be further developed with Lead Practitioners representing children's social work with key groups across the city.

Evaluation and research of local practice will be undertaken and published with key messages disseminated to the teams.

The Lead Practitioners will continue to work to develop a community of practitioners with interest and skills in particular areas of practice and support them to extend their skills in these areas.

The development of the Senior Social Worker role is also a key priority with support offered to senior social workers to further embed their leadership skills and retain their skills and experience on the front-line.