

Practice example: Practitioner champions group – North Somerset

Background

Effective multi-agency working is key to supporting families affected by parental mental ill health. However, research and serious case review findings have shown deficiencies in joint working between services. This includes problems around information sharing and lack of joint assessment.

To improve joint working between practitioners, North Somerset established a 'practitioner champions group'.

Intended outcomes

The group had the following terms of reference:

- **Highlighting best practice** in joint working between services
- **Learning lessons** from serious case reviews, to link with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), and follow through lessons with practitioners
- **Developing mutual understanding** and knowledge across statutory services
- **Furthering information exchange** across agencies, regarding resources, law, eligibility thresholds, and practice developments
- **Highlighting unmet need** and identifying services that may be available
- **Discussing specific cases**, providing peer review, highlighting problems and propagating joint working solutions where these are required.
- **Reviewing implementation** of joint protocol when it is formally adopted by the LCSB, and to ensure that it is widely disseminated across teams in all relevant services.
- **Acting as a link with teams** – 'champions' to take these issues back to their teams, and to bring issues to the group from their operational unit.
- **Fostering a Think Family approach** in accordance with research findings and in conjunction with the SCIE project team.

Practical actions

Key stakeholders in the mental health trust and children's services were consulted on the role and structure of the group. Representatives from a range of frontline teams across adult mental health and children's services were then selected. An initial launch meeting was held, followed by regular bi-monthly meetings.

What actually happened

The group meets bi-monthly and is attended by frontline practitioners from a number of services across adult mental health and children's services. There are currently around 20 members of the group, representing four main staff groups, as shown in the figure below.

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Children’s services locality teams</p> <p>Education Welfare</p> <p>Education Family Support</p> <p>Assistant Locality Leader</p> <p>Mental Health Worker</p> <p>Parenting Co-ordinator</p> <p>Children’s Centre staff.</p> | <p>Children’s services specialist teams</p> <p>CAMHS</p> <p>Youth Offending Team, Children’s Social Care</p> |
| <p>Adult mental health – primary</p> <p>Positive Steps</p> <p>Wellness Advisor</p> | <p>Adult mental health – secondary</p> <p>Community Mental Health Teams</p> <p>Community Psychiatric Nurse</p> <p>Mental Health Social Workers</p> <p>Family Therapist</p> <p>Lead Professional.</p> |

Since it was established, the group has:

- developed a job description for the champions, including their role in sharing information with others in their organisations
- heard ‘a day in the life of’ presentations from various members of the group with different roles
- compiled a bank of information about different services and job roles
- identified issues, particularly regarding training needs, to feed in to the strategic steering group.

Early feedback suggests that the group has been a useful space for people to ask basic questions. For example, many people were not familiar with the acronyms and terminology used in other services, and the group has been a useful forum to clarify structures and terminology. It also provides an opportunity for its members to network and get to know each other.

In the future, the group hopes to:

- collect examples of families falling through the gap between adult mental health and children’s services, to feed back to their respective clinical governance groups

- share more examples of good practice
- undertake job shadowing and 'buddying' to better understand each other's roles.

Advice for others

Support from senior managers is vital in enabling staff to attend meetings and fulfil the role of champion.

Getting 'official status' for the group within the relevant agencies has been challenging. Recently, the group has started reporting to the LSCB as a way of linking in to existing governance systems.

It is also challenging to ensure that the position of champion becomes embedded within people's roles. Useful approaches include embedding in appraisals/objectives and job descriptions.