

SCIE conference 2005: Workshop 3 – Putting practice into research

Workshop 3, 'Putting practice into research', looked at collaborative working and how this could be used to improve practice. The example looked at was collaborative working around fostering services. The workshop addressed the following key questions:

- What are the big issues regarding contact in foster care?
- How do agencies support practitioner-led change?
- What has helped the collaborative and practice partner networks?

The key issues from the discussions were:

- Practitioners felt there was a lack of suitable venues and resources to support contact meetings. For example, contact may be contracted out to agency staff with little experience.
- Social workers lack confidence when presenting their knowledge base, particularly in court settings.
- Geographical separation can be an issue when the foster placement is far away from the child's birth family.
- Foster parents can play an important role in mediating contact.
- Courts sometimes impose contact arrangements that do not reflect the child's wishes.
- If practitioners hold meetings to pool together information, this helps increase professional confidence.
- Local authorities need to build collaborative and critical discussions into practitioners' workloads. Ideally, the organisation should have a policy framework to put resources into research, collaboration etc.
- Social workers are being trained as critical practitioners but organisations may not be ready for this. Organisational changes are required to enable critical practice.
- The local coordinator role is vital when setting up collaborative working in order to facilitate meetings and collect and analyse data.