

Practice example: Planning, providing and reviewing care - embedding staff across teams

Background

Children's Centres can play an important role by promoting good mental health, providing early intervention, and delivering or connecting to support provided for parents with mental health problems and their children. However this role is challenging. Not all Children's Centre workers have the specialist knowledge required to identify parents with mental health problems, and may find it difficult to negotiate complex mental health service pathways.

Two of the sites, Liverpool and Southwark, have introduced new posts to improve links between mental health services and Children's Centres. These use two slightly different models to achieve similar aims. In Liverpool, Family Support Workers were attached to Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs). In Southwark, a team of senior adult mental health workers worked across the Children's Centres in the Borough.

Intended outcomes

Both projects had similar intended outcomes, namely:

- improving early help and identification
- promoting good mental health amongst parents
- improving awareness and skills in relation to adult mental health within Children's Centres
- improving pathways of care between adult mental health and children's services.
- increasing numbers of parents with mental health problems who are registered with, and make use of, their local Children's Centre.

Practical actions

In Liverpool, four Family Support Workers were recruited, based in each CMHT. This was initially on the basis of a 12-month pilot. The aim was for them to focus on working with parents receiving a service from the CMHT who had children aged 0-5, linking in with Children's Centres. The FSWs were commissioned by the central Sure Start Children's Centre Unit but line managed within the mental health trust. The workers receive additional reflective practice supervision from a senior clinical psychologist.

In Southwark the work is delivered by a 'core team' of three senior adult mental health practitioners. One oversees the project, and is responsible for clinical

supervision. The other two practitioners cover Children's Centres in the north and south of the Borough, respectively.

The team is funded by Southwark Council's Children's Centre programme, and managed by South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust. The team take referrals from across the Borough and work with parents experiencing mental distress who would not meet secondary mental health thresholds, as well as those already in touch with secondary services.

What actually happened

The project in Liverpool is now reaching the end of its 12-month pilot, and is being evaluated on an ongoing basis. The workers have so far worked with 140 families, supporting them in a wide range of issues – from parenting and support for young carers, to helping parents build their confidence and find paid employment. The funding has been extended until March 2012, with the PCT jointly funding the project from April 2011. In line with the PCT request, the criteria for families accessing family support has broadened to encompass children of any age.

The workers in Southwark have been in post since 2006, and an evaluation report of their role has been produced. It was found that the specialist adult mental health workers have played a positive role in:

- providing advice and consultation to other professionals, including help staff to understand client diagnoses and brokering access to assessment and treatment
- direct work with parents with mental health problems via home visits, drop-in clinics and planned appointments
- referring parents on to specialist mental health services, and other related services such as domestic violence support services
- providing training for children's services staff in basic mental health issues
- co-facilitating groups such as fathers' groups, stress management groups and a therapeutic mother and baby group.

Advice for others

Both initiatives have been developed within the context of an overall Think Family strategy, which helps to ensure that the roles are valued by senior managers.

It is also beneficial to have a genuinely multi-agency steering group to guide the project's development, as well as commitment and 'buy in' from the host agency.