

Who's Hard to Reach? Developing Services to Engage Families

Notes to accompany the Powerpoint presentation given as part of FWA's workshop at Lambeth Children Centre's 2nd Annual Conference, November 2007

Introduction

The theme of this workshop is thinking through work with families with the emphasis on how easy it is for families to engage with our services (and how this can be made easier), rather than how 'hard to reach' families are.

The presentation is based on practice-based findings from FWA's Family Support work in Lambeth, and learning throughout the organisation.

Case study

Below is a version of the case study presented during the workshop. Extra effort has been taken to remove any potentially identifying features to protect the confidentiality of the family involved.

... speaking family, recently arrived from ..., granted Indefinite Leave to Remain. Mother and children have no English language and Father has limited English. Mother has restricted mobility and mental health problems due to experience of trauma and loss. Father is on Job Seekers Allowance, trying to establish a small business. Mother discouraged from leaving the house due to cultural views. Two children under 5 not really leaving the house (one of the children has rickets). The family are living in substandard housing, and are sleeping in one bed due to lack of resources.

People we work with in Lambeth

FWA Family Support & Outreach Team works with a wide range of people in Lambeth – reflecting the diversity of the borough.

The 'issues affecting families' slide represents a snapshot of some of the issues facing families we work with, but this is not an exhaustive list.

As a team we seek to work in partnership with families and other agencies to ensure various needs can be adequately addressed, especially where specialist support is required.

Families are unique and are not defined by the issues they may face.

Support we offer

PARENTING ISSUES	Could include concerns about children's behaviour, support around boundaries and guidance, play, etc.
FAMILY ISSUES	Could include domestic violence / relationship breakdown and its effect on children, family relationships, mental health issues, isolation...
PRACTICAL ISSUES	Examples include support finding a particular service, applying for a nursery or school place, filling in forms, accompanying to appointments, concerns about benefits, debt, housing etc.
EMOTIONAL SUPPORT	Listening not judging, empathy, someone to talk to when things are difficult – referral on to specialist services where relevant.

This confidential support is delivered through home visits, one to one meetings in community venues, telephone support, drop-ins and groups.

We always seek to work in partnership with families, and with other agencies providing / or able to provide complementary or specialist support. Sometimes this involves initiating a CAF assessment, and sometimes a referral to Social Services is necessary.

Challenges we face (as Early Years professionals)

DIVERSITY	Sometimes the amount and range of need facing us feels overwhelming. We won't ever be able to meet all the needs that are there.
AGENDA OVERLOAD	The rapidly changing service delivery context and government agendas are difficult for staff and families to keep up with and this presents a challenge to those of us attempting to make our services easy to engage with – eg explaining to families that what used to be called Sure Start is no longer there and is being replaced by Children's Centres, but we're not sure yet when those services are going to be up and running.
NO MAGIC WAND	The next section is about things that have worked in engaging with families in our experience. However, they don't always work, and we don't always get it right.

What we've learned from working with families

The slide gives the structure of a 10 minute presentation about things we have found that work in engaging with families with a range of needs.

We may be able to share this, and other aspects of this workshop in other settings. Please contact Doreen Cornish for further information.

Workshop presenters

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