5 CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR INNOVATION IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

What does it take for innovation to flourish in children's social care?

Creating new services and practices in isolated pockets will not create the step-change required of children's social care system to deliver dramatically different, better outcomes for children and families. For the best new approaches to be embedded, sustained and scaled, we must also change the local and national system conditions that enable, and constrain, innovation.

True partnership working across organisations with a shared vision and common values can support whole-place approaches. Training, data capture, budgets and risk can be shared across the statutory, private and third sectors; across local authorities and regions; and between practitioners, families and young people.

New commissioning, funding and delivery models allow joint commissioning across agencies, new cultures where innovation can thrive, and incentives for providers to innovate. This includes alliance contracting and social impact bonds; trusts, mutuals and Community Interest Companies; and spin-outs.

Building the capacity to innovate across the sector requires local authorities, agencies and organisations to commit to learning together. This means everyone working on behalf of the whole sector; supporting one another to innovate, evaluate and build the evidence base, test and take risks collectively. Crucially, it means learning about what doesn't work, as well as learning from success, and understanding better how to ask for and provide help.

All of the above both require and enable a renewed focus on the outcomes that matter, co-producing these with young people and families, involving them in every stage of this process.

Insights from the sector

Partnership working

FAMILY SAFEGUARDING: multi-disciplinary teams to tackle the 'toxic trio'

Hertfordshire County Council has created 22 co-located, multi-disciplinary Family Safeguarding Teams to tackle the toxic trio of domestic abuse, substance misuse and parental mental ill-health. The Family Safeguarding Partnership is part of a whole-system change approach in Hertfordshire, and includes the county council, CCGs, police, probation, Recovery Service and Mental Health Trust. Adult specialists operate under a unified management structure, with posts funded by all partners. Teams share Motivational Interviewing as a core practice, and information sharing between agencies is enabled at strategic and operational levels. Hertfordshire is now helping four other councils to implement the model.

Read more about Family Safeguarding in the project storyboard springconsortium.com/hert/story/ and Programme Directory springconsortium.com/hert/dir/

GROWING FUTURES: thinking differently about tackling domestic abuse

Doncaster Children's Services Trust has developed Growing Futures, an approach to domestic abuse that focuses on delivering therapeutic practice to all family members, including perpetrators. The programme's success is underpinned by broad and deep partnerships between the Trust, council, police and probation, housing, VCS providers, NHS trusts and CCGs, and the University of Central Lancashire. New Domestic Abuse Navigators deliver effective therapeutic interventions and act as whole-system enablers to affect whole-family joint working across relevant agencies.

Read more about Growing Futures in the Programme Directory springconsortium.com/don/dir/ and evaluation summary springconsortium.com/don/eval/

Commissioning and delivery models

IT'S ALL ABOUT ME: social investment to de-risk the adoption process

It's All About Me (IAAM) is a ten-year scheme to find permanent homes for harder to place children. IAAM is the first provider-led social impact bond in the UK, delivered by a collaboration of Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The bond is designed to pay out more up-front: as the process of adoption nears successful completion, the local authority repays the investment funding via its contract with the Voluntary Adoption Agency. This means that the social impact bond takes the initial risk of non-completion and gives Voluntary Adoption Agencies additional up-front resources to recruit adoptive parents for these children.

It's All About Me is not part of the Innovation Programme. Find out more at data.gov.uk/sib_knowledge_box/node/183

ACHIEVING FOR CHILDREN: spinning out for increased autonomy

Achieving for Children is a social enterprise created by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to provide children's services across both boroughs. Though owned jointly by the two LAs, Achieving for Children has the autonomy, for both leadership and practitioners, to design, commission and develop services to deliver their contract with the councils. This includes Better by Design, an intervention framework founded on social learning theory and systemic practice.

Read more about Achieving for Children in the Programme Directory springconsortium.com/afc/dir/ and evaluation summary springconsortium.com/afc/eval/

Learning together

COUNCIL FOR DISABLED CHILDREN: structuring learning to test new solutions

CDC worked with five LAs, each committed to embedding a culture of co-production and learning, to design and test new practice in assessing disabled children and their families. A structured learning model created a supportive framework for LAs to co-design approaches to pre-assessment preparation, peer support and self-assessment, building social work capacity, workforce development and volunteer training, including using parents as project managers. Every local model was informed by the work of the group but tailored to context and need, with LAs coming together throughout the process to share learning and engage in peer support.

Read more about the work of Council for Disabled Children in the Programme Directory springconsortium.com/cdc/dir/

SERIOUS CASE REVIEWS: synthesising learning alongside professionals

NSPCC and the Social Care Institute for Excellence are testing mechanisms to enable better learning from serious case reviews and improve their quality. A synthesis of 38 recent SCRs on the effect of inter-professional communication and decision-making has supported training for lead reviewers and a pilot for centrally commissioning SCRs. This includes creating materials alongside professionals and testing with three Local Safeguarding Children Boards, training lead reviewers and piloting the central commissioning of five SCRs.

Read more about Serious Case Reviews at nspcc.org.uk, the Programme Directory springconsortium.com/nspcc/dir/ and evaluation summary springconsortium.com/nspcc/eval/

KEY ENABLERS FOR SUCCESSFUL INNOVATION

Focus practice on strong relationships and shared decision-making

Balance safe placements with supportive and secure relationships: reducing placement moves, providing consistent key workers and prioritising the existing bonds in children's lives.

Develop personalised interventions and solutions: finding new ways to listen to children and families, generating a shared understanding of need and responding with flexible models of support.

Change culture to create an enabling environment for professionals

Build a supportive environment for professionals and practitioners: integrated, interdisciplinary and cross-agency teams; rethinking roles and career paths for social workers; and thinking differently about recruitment and retention.

Adopt evidence-based practice across the whole workforce: better use of evidence and data, cultures of learning and new models of training.

Lead and govern in partnership with a shared, practical vision

Articulate a clear and shared vision, purpose and set of values that is championed by leaders but owned by everyone, aligning values across organisations and bringing together teams from multiple agencies.

Translate this into governance, structures, partnerships and ways of working, including multi-agency governance groups and distributing leadership.
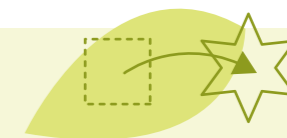
Change whole systems to enable new approaches to embed and scale

Design new models of commissioning, funding and delivery: build cross-agency partnerships to enable joint commissioning, create alternative funding and delivery vehicles and decommission what does not work.

Balance fidelity and flexibility at scale: scaling models across multiple locations, implementing evidence-based programmes that have been developed elsewhere and helping others to learn from innovative practice.