

Systemic Practice

What is it?

We have a project in Calderdale called Safe, Successful Families which is overseeing the introduction of systemic social work practice in the borough. The council has been really encouraged by improvements to practice but wanted to take those changes further. We were impressed by the changes associated with the introduction of systemic practice elsewhere, particularly in terms of achieving lasting change for families and improved staff morale and retention.

What does it look like?

Children's social workers have been placed in small teams called pods which share caseloads and have high levels of management support. In each pod there is a practice manager who supervises the work of 3 social workers and 1 pod coordinator who offers administrative support. The pod works closely together and has a weekly 'Reflect' meeting where they discuss cases in detail, and they are assisted in this task with clinical input from Calderdale Therapeutic Services.

Key elements of the systemic method include more sophisticated use of genograms and eco-maps to try to get a clearer sense of family functioning in order to intervene more effectively. The staff have learned new techniques for questioning which depart from purely information gathering to encouraging families to think differently about their situation, and gain increased insight into their relationships with others and the impact of their behaviour on their family. Social workers can explore in detail how the family's way of life has evolved, what function it serves and how interventions need to be designed so that they can be most effective.

Tell me more about the Pods

The social work pods are based in the four localities across the borough. There are 8 Child Protection/ Child in Need pods, 6 Children Looked After pods, and 2 specialist pods. The specialist pods comprise the Connected Carers pod based within the Fostering service and the specialist pod for children with a disability is

based in the Disabled Children's team and supports children on the edge of care or with a Child Protection plan. There are no plans to change the Multi Agency Screening Team (MAST) or Child Assessment Team (CAT) at present.

When does it begin?

The social worker pods were launched on 1st June 2015

How does it affect me as a child?

We have implemented this change because we want to improve services to children, providing consistency of both service and social worker. Lasting change is aimed for so that children don't need to keep receiving inadequate care and going through repeated assessments by different services.

How does it affect me as a parent?

We hope that parents will be reassured that if they try to make contact with the social worker, there are a number of staff familiar with the case who can respond. We hope that they see practice improved, feel better supported and understood, and that they are helped to be better parents. The systemic model is intended to improve staff performance and retention so there should be fewer changes and better help.

How does it affect me as a practitioner?

We want social workers to have better grasp of the family system including the agency system that surround their families. We hope for improved collaborative working and more effective interventions with families alongside agency partners.

Where can I get more information?

For more information please contact Principal Child and Family Social Worker Bernadette Johansen on 01422 392492 or Bernadette.johansen@calderdale.gov.uk

Calderdale Council Web Link: www.calderdale.gov.uk