

Parent support advisers

Practice and impact – summer 2009

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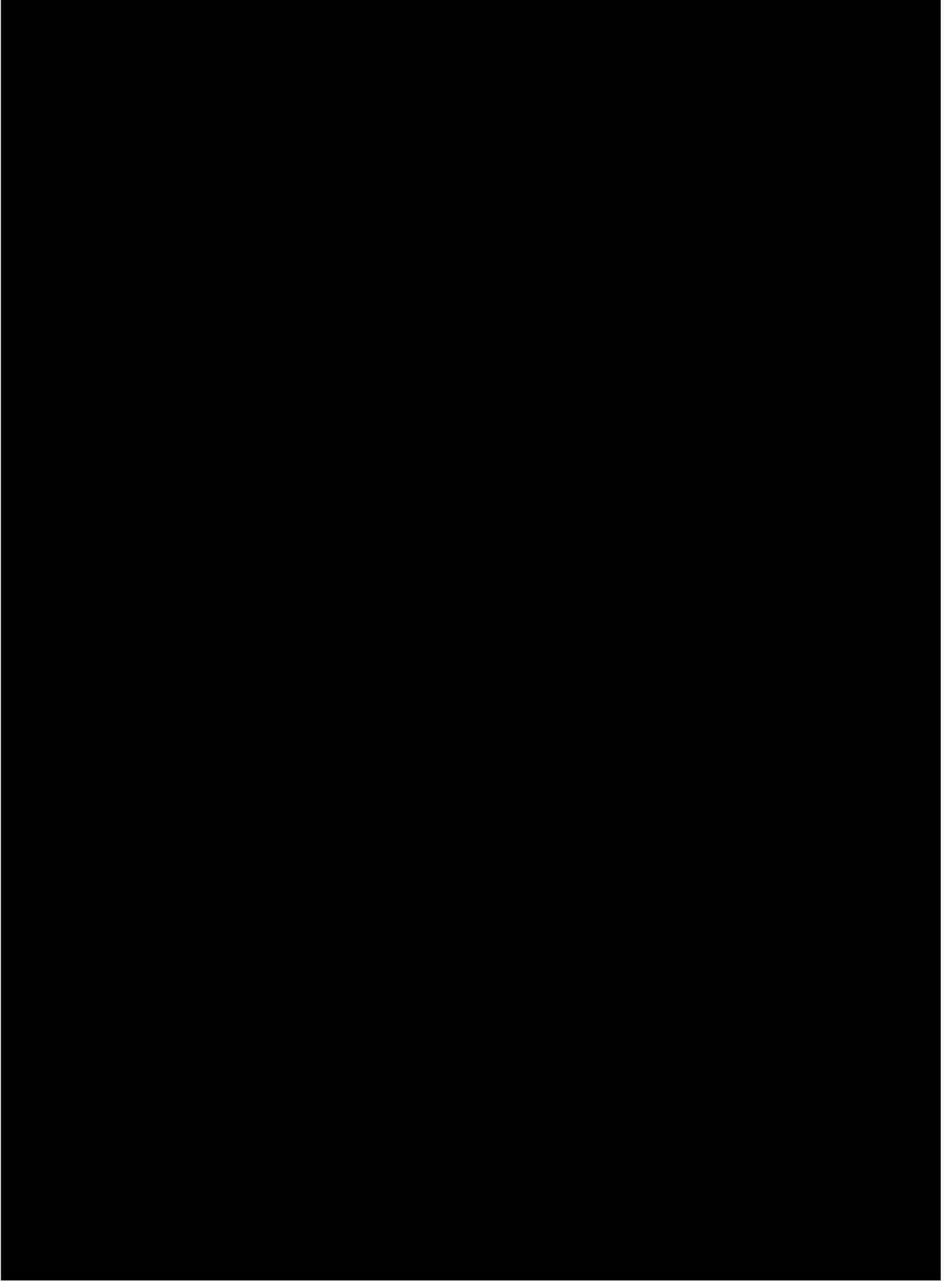


developing people, improving young lives

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In my experience, dads can be overlooked at school. That's not the case at my daughters' school. Katy, the PSA, really makes us feel welcome, which is all the more important to me now that I'm a single father. When I pick up my girls from school once a week, sometimes I'm the only dad in the playground but Katy goes out of her way to make sure I feel at home. She's the sort of person you know you can talk to if you need to, and she's always willing to help.

"Since separating from my partner, I could easily have felt cut off from my girls' school life and lost touch with how they're getting on and what help and support they need from me. But the PSA has done a lot to make sure that doesn't happen.

"Katy has arranged some terrific events to encourage male family members to come along and work with their kids. It's great that dads, step-dads, granddads and big brothers are turning up and seeing how our children work and play together. At an event last week, I said 'hello' to people I would probably never have made the effort to speak to in the playground. It's a chance to meet other dads just like me.

"Thanks to Katy, I'm much more involved in school and I join in with events and activities whenever I can. I know it means a lot to the girls when I make the effort to be there. Men should be more involved in school life and PSAs like Katy are helping to make that happen. Without them, it would be more difficult for parents to find opportunities to be involved in school life. She makes us realise that dads really do have an important contribution to make to our children's education.



Jon Skentlebury, parent
Plympton St Maurice Primary School, Plymouth

Find out more about how PSAs are working to involve fathers in their children's learning on page 20

Introduction

Since the parent support adviser (PSA) pilot ended in 2008, PSAs and staff in PSA-type roles have become a recognised and valued part of the school and community workforce.

In addition to the expected benefits they bring, such as engaging parents in their children's learning, tackling underachievement and working with the whole family to remove barriers to learning, PSAs are increasingly contributing to a variety of other Government priorities such as 21st Century Schools, early intervention and swift and easy access to targeted and specialist services.

PSAs also make a valuable contribution to other projects, including the extended services disadvantage subsidy funding, the Home Access programme and e-safety. These and other areas are explored in a series of articles in this publication.

As the PSA role grows, so too does the number of PSAs working in our schools. In August 2009, there were in excess of 3,400 PSA or equivalent roles supporting 12,985 schools across England. All 152 English local authorities see the importance of this workforce, with 16 at the planning and recruiting stage, 116 delivering PSA or PSA-equivalent services and a further 20 working towards sustaining provision.

The final evaluation report by the University of Warwick's Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) confirms the success of the PSA pilot and states: "evidence from the pilot is very encouraging and supports a Government policy of funding the PSA role across all local authorities".

According to CEDAR, more than 90 per cent of parents rated their PSAs highly in different aspects of their support style – parents felt respected, listened to and understood – and in helping them to feel more confident to tackle problems and feel better about themselves.

The impact on attendance is significant. CEDAR states: "The proportion of persistent absentees decreased by almost a quarter in secondary schools with a PSA." The PSAs' impact on improving parents' engagement with their children's learning, improved relationships between parents and the school and improved pupil attendance overall was also overwhelmingly positive.

As with any professional workforce, continuing professional development is critical to ongoing success. Updates on the training and qualifications available, examples of evidence-based training courses and PSA induction processes, along with guidance on how to sustain the role and measure the impact of PSAs' work, are all highlighted in this publication.

The Parent Support Adviser Pilot Evaluation: Final Report by CEDAR can be downloaded from www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/

About this publication

Parent support advisers: Practice and impact – summer 2009 builds on the work described in PSA Resource Kits 1 and 2 and Parent support advisers – Practice and impact – spring 2009, produced by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA). It explores how PSAs are contributing to the wider agenda and provides an overview of the support available for local authorities, schools and PSAs themselves.

Section 1: PSAs in action looks at how PSAs are operating across the country, examines the impact of their work on pupils, parents, schools and the wider community and considers how their role in championing the cause of parents and carers is having a major positive impact across a number of Government priorities.

Section 2: supporting local authorities and PSAs focuses on how the TDA and other organisations are collaborating with local authorities and schools to build on the excellent work they are doing to develop the PSA role, and sets out the professional support available for PSAs and PSA coordinators at a local and national level.

Section 3: find out more lists useful websites, documents and research.

The term 'parent support adviser' is used throughout this publication to refer to both PSAs and other professionals whose main focus is on supporting parents within a school context but who may have different job titles, for example, family support workers or family liaison officers.

A functional map laying out the key functions of the PSA role and the principles and values that underpin them is available at www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/f/functional_map_april_09.pdf

Section 1: PSAs in action

The bigger picture: supporting Government priorities

PSAs and family liaison officers (FLOs) in Kent are working to support parents while helping schools meet their wider strategic objectives. Wendy Mann, FLO/PSA Manager at Kent County Council, sees their roles as a vehicle for delivering the pledges set out in the Kent Children and Young People's Plan.

FLOs and PSAs perform the same role. The discrepancy in names is historic, arising because some schools already had FLOs in place before the PSA initiative began. PSAs' and FLOs' remit and priorities are set by Kent's Children's Trust and include tackling the underlying causes of poverty, getting fathers more involved in their children's upbringing and, more generally, improving the life chances of vulnerable children. "To achieve these goals, children in this area need capable, confident parents," says Wendy. "That's where our PSAs come in."

The guidelines Kent drew up for its PSAs and FLOs reflect the importance of their role in developing parents' self-reliance, confidence and self-esteem. "Their objectives are closely aligned with broader Government priorities for tackling underachievement in

schools," explains Wendy. "That means focusing on the 'three Es': empowering parents to become more effective parents; establishing relations through agency working and encouraging parents to take an active part in their children's learning."

A wider role

At Oakfield Primary School in Dartford, FLO Mary Weller is focusing on all three areas.

"Mary is an asset to the team," says Headteacher Garry Ratcliffe. "There's so much more to her role than simply engaging with parents. We work closely together to make sure there are direct links between the school's parenting work and its wider strategic objectives."

Extended services and support for parents are central features of the school's strategic improvement plan (SIP) and their importance is reflected in Mary's status as a member of the senior leadership team. Parenting work is fully integrated with the work of other school staff and SIP objectives for parenting support relate directly to the Every Child Matters outcomes. The school makes clear links between its parenting work and

the potential for positive impact on pupil attendance, behaviour and attainment. Oakfield's experience suggests that the FLO role can contribute directly to meeting both local and national Government priorities for tackling underachievement.

"We're already seeing parents playing a more active role in their children's learning," says Garry. "I think it's essential that we work with parents to help all our pupils achieve their goals."

Partnership working

Partnership working is at the heart of Mary's approach to supporting families. She meets regularly with the school's special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) to discuss any issues that could be affecting a child's attainment. Where those issues are family related, Mary will take the lead in approaching the family to offer support.

She also works with subject leaders to identify parents who might benefit from further discussions about specific subjects so that they are in a better position to support their children's learning. A recent session on maths and calculation proved extremely popular, and Mary has also worked with the lower school leader to run 'reading at home' sessions designed to boost parents' confidence in reading with their children and help them to support their children's literacy.

Mary also has close links with the school attendance officer and the education welfare officer. When pupils are consistently late or absent, Mary will arrange a home visit to look at practical ways of resolving attendance issues before they escalate. She recently set up Get Set Go, a second breakfast club for pupils who were arriving at school late and causing disruption in class. The club targets a very small number of pupils, giving them breakfast and the opportunity to spend some quiet time preparing for the start of the school day.

It is already having a positive effect on a number of pupils, including a boy in year 2 who was arriving late most mornings and displaying difficult behaviour in class. "A group discussion about how we could get him to settle in the mornings helped us fit the pieces of the puzzle together," says Mary. "Getting him in for breakfast and giving him just 15 minutes in a calm environment before school starts has made a huge difference. His class teacher says his behaviour is so much better. He comes in on time and he's ready to learn."

Multi-agency working

While Mary deals with a wide range of issues, including some very serious ones, referrals to specialist agencies are made by the SENCO, who is also the school's child protection officer. Mary will accompany parents to meetings with social services or other agencies if they want her to. The school is adjacent to the local children's centre and Mary maintains regular contact with the manager, signposting parents to the centre if she thinks they could benefit from the support on offer for families with younger siblings.

Building strong links with multi-agency partners supports the school's early intervention work, helping to build the confidence and self-esteem of both pupils and parents. For example, a local training provider is now coming in to run weekly sessions leading to a level 2 NVQ in supporting teaching and learning. To date, 22 parent volunteers have signed up.

"We've seen a huge change in them," says Mary. "As well as building up their knowledge and skills, it helps them to put their children's learning in context and to identify practical ways to support them at home."

Giving parents a voice in improving their children's learning

At Milton Court School in Sittingbourne, FLO Tina Buckberry is helping make sure parents play an active role in school improvement planning.

"At the end of the school year, we send a wide-ranging questionnaire to all our parents asking them what changes and improvements they want to see in the school," Tina says. "Just before the start of the next academic year, the whole school staff and governors come together to look at the results and spend two days producing a plan for how we improve the school over the coming year."

Parents' responses feed directly into the plan. For example, input from parents led directly to the school's decision to establish a breakfast club and to extend its after-school provision to 6pm. "Working parents were telling us that they needed that extra support," says Tina. "And we know that having a good start to the day sets children up to learn more effectively and to behave better in class."

As a member of the senior leadership team, Tina is perfectly placed to ensure that parents' views are heard at the highest level. She also sends out regular smaller questionnaires throughout the year to gather information about extended services activities and holds coffee mornings. "Sometimes it's just coffee and a chat," says Tina, "but we've also invited parents in to contribute to, say, our new Food in School policy."

Tina finds that a specific invitation can be an effective way of engaging parents who might otherwise be reluctant to come into the school. "We try to make sure we feed back to parents so that they know their input matters to us," she says. "For example, the action plan gets communicated back through letters and the school newsletter and we put information on to the school website. Plus there's an open invitation for parents to come in and read the plan in full and discuss it with a member of staff."

Like Mary Weller, Tina is a member of her school's senior leadership team. She believes this has helped push extended services and parental engagement up the agenda.

"I think it's quite telling that parents are getting directly involved in writing policies such as the Food in School policy and feeding into our main school improvement cycle," says Tina. "I think it's great. Everyone deserves to have a say in how the school is run, how we can improve it and to contribute to helping our children realise their potential."

Supporting personal tutors

Ensuring that every young person in secondary school has the support they need to progress is the aim of the new Personal Tutors Programme. From September 2010, all secondary school pupils will receive personalised support from a personal tutor, a member of school staff who knows them well. Parents and carers will be able to contact the tutor to discuss their child's particular learning and development needs.

PSAs' knowledge of individual children and their family circumstances will enable them to help personal tutors get to know the young people with whom they are working and ensure the maximum engagement from parents and carers in the programme. The Personal Tutor Programme pathfinder will launch in 45 local authorities this September.

During the pathfinder, the TDA will work with local authorities and their schools to gather case studies that illustrate how the staff carrying out personal tutor roles build and maintain effective working relationships with other members of the school workforce, including PSAs.

Find out more

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Everyone's a learner: the whole-school approach

When Thames View Infants School in Barking, east London achieved an 'outstanding' in its most recent Ofsted inspection, parent helper Hazel Denney was delighted. Not just because her own child, a year 1 pupil, stood to benefit from the high standards being set by the school but because she felt she had played a part in the school's success. Hazel's reaction is a testament to the effectiveness of the school's inclusive partnership approach to engaging parents in their children's learning.

Commitment to learning

Thames View is a mixed community school with 378 pupils aged three to seven. Eligibility for free school meals is twice the national average, 67 per cent of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and 33 languages are spoken in the school. Most children joining the nursery are behind their actual age in developmental terms.

Headteacher Paul Jordan believes that everyone – children, staff and parents – should see themselves as a learner. Shortly after Paul took up his post, the school underlined its commitment to parental involvement by appointing Fi Bashir its PSA. "Parents have to be partners in the process to make it work. To us, engaging parents isn't a bolt on – it's the basis of our approach," says Paul.

Removing the barriers

Fi runs a variety of services and activities inside and outside school, including help with adult education courses and keep-fit classes for parents. She also provides coaching and one-to-one advice and support for parents on anything that might help to improve their and their children's quality of life and remove the barriers that stop them engaging in their children's learning.

As part of the whole-school approach to engaging parents, Fi, who is part of the school's cross-stakeholder leadership team, also accompanies nursery and reception staff on their home visits. This means that parents are aware of Fi, what she does and how she can help them from the outset.

Fi also runs special sessions for children who are not attending the school's nursery but who will be joining its reception class. These are run during the summer term and give children at least seven opportunities to visit the school, meet their future teacher, see their

classroom and spend time with other pupils. This year, Ofsted singled out the sessions for special praise, stating that "partnership with parents, established prior to admission, acts as a foundation to learning success". Fi believes that parental engagement should start as early as possible. "If a parent is alienated at this stage, it can have a negative knock-on effect on the rest of that child's learning career," she says.

Leading and consulting

The school's senior leadership team includes teachers, governors and support staff as well as the PSA. Together, they can use their extensive knowledge of children and their families to identify and deal with potential problems early on. Parents are consulted regularly and their input fed into the school improvement process.

"By providing lots of opportunities for parents to come into the school, we can start to break down the fears and insecurities that stop them from engaging in their children's learning," says Paul Jordan. "We show them that we have nothing to hide and that together we can achieve great things."

Positive impact

Paul believes that increased engagement is already having a measurable effect on key outcomes. He says: "Over the past 18 months, attendance has risen by four per cent and persistent absenteeism has fallen from six per cent to zero. From 2006 to 2008, our level 2b reading and maths results rose by 23 per cent and by 22 per cent respectively and 16 per cent for level 3. For writing, results are up 28 per cent at level 2b and 11 per cent for level 3 and we're expecting further improvements this year."

Fi Bashir also sees at first hand the effect the approach is having on parents. "When I first started, parents were suspicious of me. Now it can take me 30 minutes to park my car and get into the building because so many parents stop and talk to me! The longer it takes, the more impact I feel I'm having." Hazel Denney is quick to support Fi's theory. "I think the school is fantastic," she says. "I feel as if I'm part of it and that I'm valued for what I do. I get a real kick out of seeing the difference I can make to the school community."

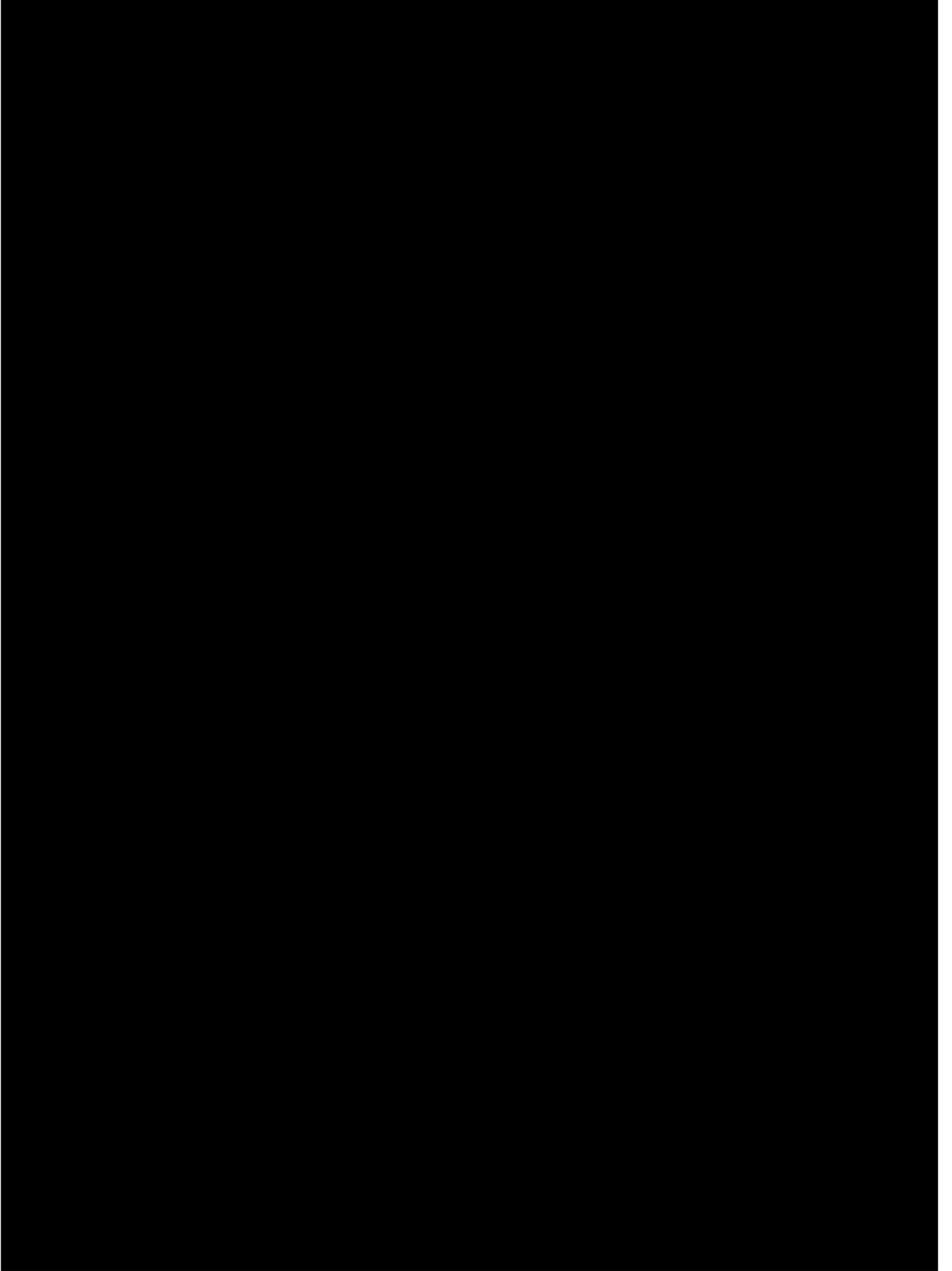
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Getting to the heart of the matter: improving behaviour and attendance

PSAs have a key role to play in encouraging school attendance and positive behaviour through their work supporting children, young people and their families. Harrogate-based PSA Ali Huddart can point to many situations where her help and support has made a real difference to a young person she is working with.

She says: "For example, I was working with a young person who was constantly being put in detention and the parents and school were worried that the child might be entering a downward spiral."

Using the common assessment framework (CAF) helped Ali to gain a holistic view of the young person's needs. The results showed that while the young person was struggling with low self-esteem, the parents also had issues. Ali's response was to enrol the young person in art and other sessions (at which she knew he would do well) to boost his confidence and to signpost his parents to where they could get help. She also made sure the teachers were aware of the key issues affecting the young person and his family. As a result, the young person's self-esteem and behaviour have improved and the number of detentions has dropped.

Extra support

In this instance, the PSA was able to help directly. However, where there are repeated instances of poor behaviour and a young person has already been excluded for short periods, the school may decide to explore other options.

One option is for the headteacher to involve the local behaviour and attendance partnership and work with it to explore the most appropriate options for a young person. Sometimes this could mean transferring the child to another school with the support of the PSA or accessing support from a pupil referral unit (PRU). In Harrogate, up to 100 children get support from a PRU at any one time. Each PRU has at least one dedicated PSA. Ali is now working in a PRU supporting key stage 3 and key stage 4 pupils, a role that involves working closely with professionals from other agencies, including the Youth Justice Service, to identify the best course of action for each young person referred from a behaviour and attendance partnership.

Although the referral from the local behaviour and attendance partnership will include some information on the home situation, a PSA assessment will give a more in-depth understanding of the family's needs. "Sometimes the information we get doesn't give us a full picture," explains Rachel Durrant, a PSA who works alongside Ali. "In one report, a mother was described as 'school phobic'. When we met her, we found that wasn't the case at all. Instead, her working hours made it hard for her to engage in school life. Despite the best of intentions, the school staff just hadn't had time to get to the bottom of the situation."

School-home partnership

The PSA will work with parents to look at possible reasons for a young person's behaviour, exploring presenting problems, the home environment and other factors that might affect the young person emotionally.

"When a young person is excluded it can create an 'us and them' culture between the school and the home. The PSA role is key to breaking down feelings of blame and enabling all parties to find a way forward," says Rachel. "We can help parents to set boundaries, young people to build self-esteem and schools to better understand and communicate with parents."

At Harrogate PRUs, pupils' behaviour and attendance is marked weekly and certificates are awarded in Friday's assembly. PSAs often see the certificates on display when they make home visits and if the young person does not pass the certificates on to their parents, the PSA ensures the family is alerted to their child's success. Sometimes the PSA will help parents to set up their own reward system.

Supporting reintegration

PSAs are also involved in regular case reviews. Around a month before the end of the referral package, they will start working with the school to support the pupil's reintegration.

When the pupil leaves the PRU, they and the school are given a summary document that includes minutes of review meetings, weekly reports, examples of the young person's work and guidance for the school on the young person's preferred learning styles and ways to manage their behaviour. The PSA plays an important role in helping headteachers, teachers and support staff implement the report's recommendations. In most cases, the PSA will continue to support the young person for a further month after they leave the PRU. Sometimes, the impact of the PSAs' work can be measured relatively easily in terms of improved attendance or reduced detentions.

However, Rachel stresses: "PSAs need to set realistic expectations of what can be achieved. Patterns of pupil behaviour are often deeply ingrained and can take a long time to change. It is important to identify and celebrate every step, however small it may seem. Each step means progress."

Find out more

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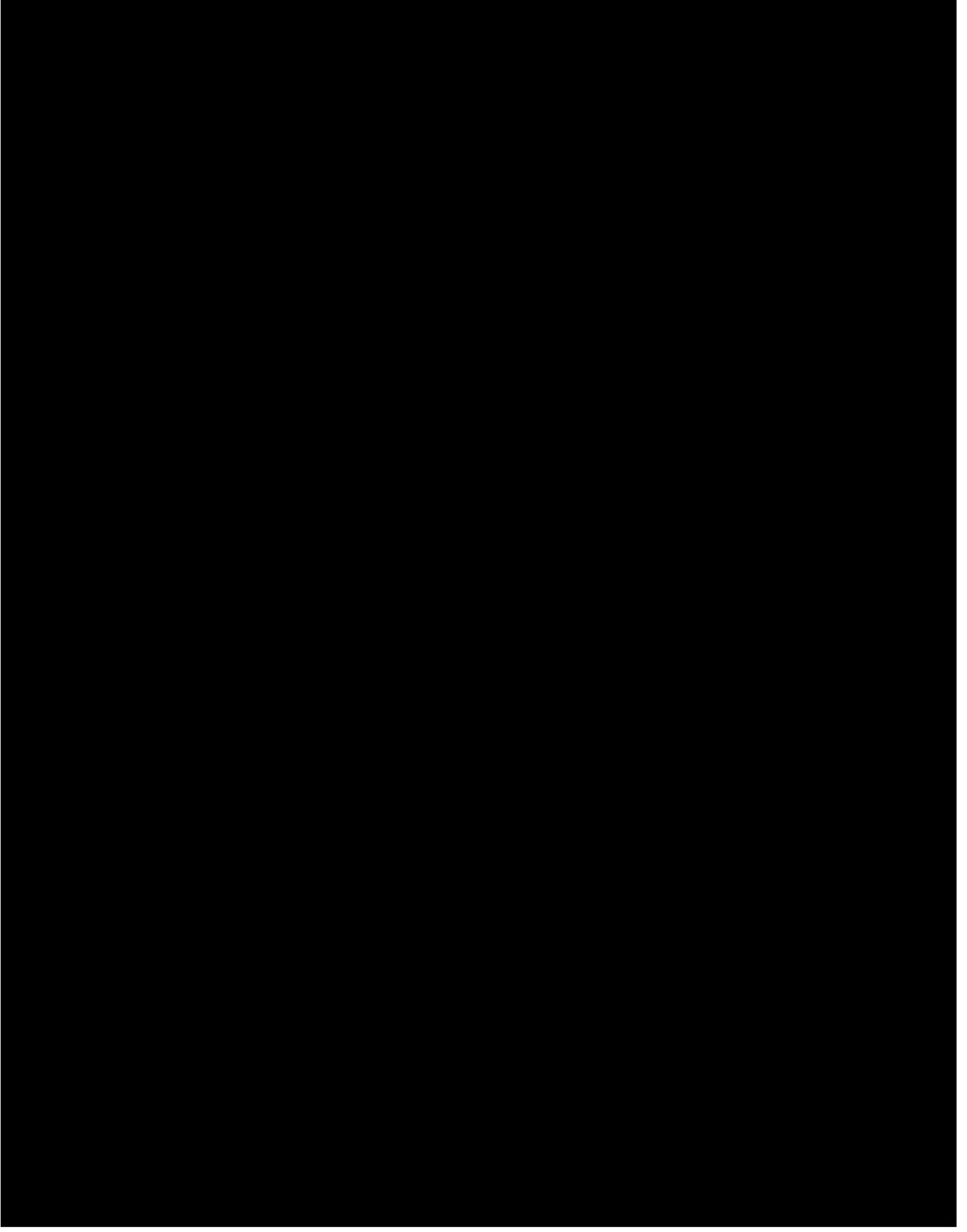
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Preventative action: supporting early intervention

Effective school-family partnerships are essential to ensure interventions for children and young people are successful in stopping problems from escalating. This is the philosophy behind Bexhill's team-based approach.

"You can't fix a child's problems in isolation. You need to involve the whole family," says PSA Team Manager Tina Frost.

Based at Bexhill High School, the PSA team serves the Bexhill consortium of schools, which comprises eight primaries, two secondaries and Bexhill College. Each PSA is attached to a school and works alongside teaching staff, health and social care partners.

The team model, combined with a commitment to collaborative working between the PSAs, schools and multi-agency partners, means there are no gaps in provision. Centrally based support ensures that all professionals involved with a family have a good understanding of the issues facing them, even when children attend different schools or move across transition phases.

Cross-cluster working

To enhance multi-agency working, the PSA team has established a monthly network meeting to share information, strengthen working protocols and share opportunities for joint professional development. The team ensures that resources are focused where they are most needed by only taking on cases following a formal referral by teaching staff. At Bexhill High, those referrals are made at weekly meetings of teaching staff, student support services, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), health professionals and youth services.

Each PSA will generally have a caseload of between 10 and 12 families. Regular home visits and school-based 'get to know you' sessions help deepen understanding and establish trust. PSAs use the CAF to assess children's additional needs and, as lead professionals, involve relevant partner agencies in offering support services. The PSA team has good relations with CAMHS and with the primary mental health worker, who meets the team on a monthly basis to discuss caseload. Recent data indicates that early intervention through the PSAs has helped to reduce CAMHS' waiting lists.

Targeted support for transition

The team provides targeted support for vulnerable pupils at transition stages. PSAs attend meetings with year 7 staff at Bexhill High to discuss the forthcoming intake, share information and arrange extra visits to the new school site for pupils needing additional help.

One student with Asperger's Syndrome was referred to the team for help in the run up to joining secondary school. He found friendships difficult and was worried about spending time in the playground. The PSA team arranged for him to visit the new school weekly so he could meet his form tutor and other teachers and familiarise himself with the canteen and the independent learning centre. After changing schools, the student continued to receive support in the form of one-to-one visits. As the PSA for Bexhill High also works with students at Bexhill College, the team is well placed to ensure he continues to receive support when he transfers to college.

Unravelling family issues

Carole Steele, PSA at three Bexhill primaries, finds that her role puts her in a strong position to get to the bottom of family problems. Carole has recently been working with Anna (not her real name), a year 4 pupil with learning difficulties and a poor attendance record. Anna was identified as a priority for PSA support because she was falling behind and it was proving difficult to engage with her mother.

"It took a lot of persistence to meet with mum," says Carole. "There was a complicated family background. A younger sibling was being assessed for Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and the family had been rehoused some distance from the school, making it difficult for them to get to school each day."

Through regular home visits, Carole was able to help Anna's mother develop techniques to resolve some of the issues affecting her family. For example, a visual timetable helped create an achievable morning routine. In addition, sessions with Anna, which focused on building her self-esteem, have helped her start to make friends. Her attendance has improved dramatically.

Carole has also engaged Anna's mother. "I eventually persuaded her to try an ICT course," she says. "It went really well and she's since completed a parenting course and is now doing an NVQ in childcare. Her plan is to try to get a job in a school." Learning is also helping the

mother in other ways. "It has given her the chance to meet other mums whose children have got learning difficulties and to start to create her own support network," Carole adds.

A long-term view

Tina Frost believes cases like Anna's are helping schools to understand and appreciate the value of the PSA approach. "Schools are starting to see that working with parents has the greatest effect on family life," she says. "As PSAs, our most powerful work happens in the home."

Tina adds: "We can't fix everything but we can break down the barriers to help parents make their own changes. Anna's mum would not have engaged with the school in this way without Carole's encouragement. The PSA's role was instrumental in stopping a situation from escalating and this has had a positive impact upon the whole family, which is exactly what early intervention sets out to achieve."

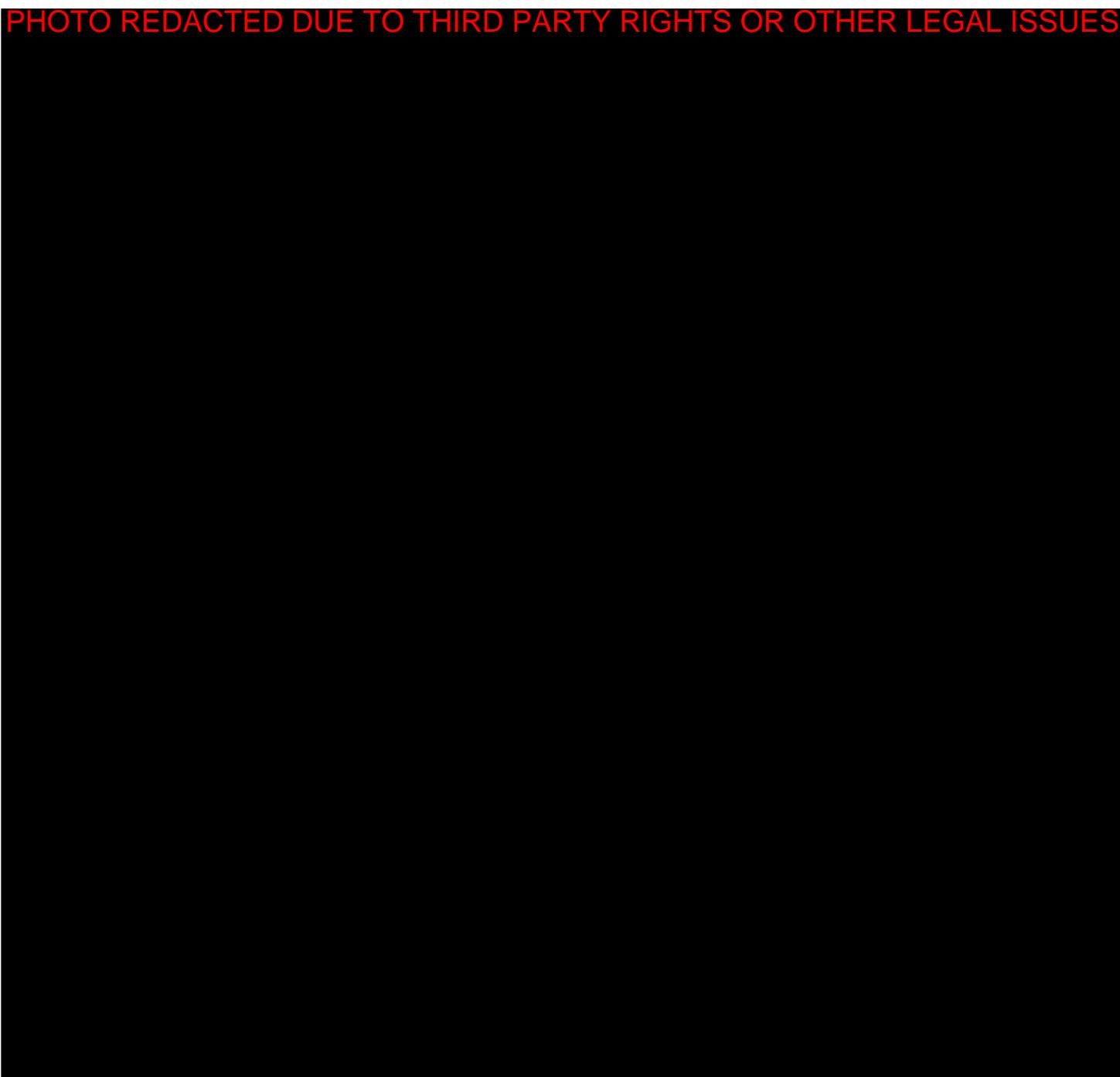
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Targeting resources: the extended services disadvantage subsidy pathfinder

The Didcot Partnership in Oxfordshire has found that involving home-school link workers (the local equivalent of PSAs) in delivering the extended schools disadvantage subsidy pathfinder has created a vital link between schools and families, facilitating swift and effective delivery of targeted funding to those who need it most.

Enabling the target group – economically disadvantaged children and those in care – to access out-of-hours activities, irrespective of their ability to pay, is the aim of the subsidy funding.

Home-school link worker Amanda Jones is based at the South Didcot Children's Centre and, together with a second home-school link worker, covers 15 schools, including two secondaries. Amanda has been involved in the pathfinder from the outset, helping to develop strategies and processes for the successful take up of funding within the target group and working to ensure that the pathfinder met the target group's needs.

"I work with parents to tell them about the money and what it's for, and to organise appropriate activities for

children and young people," says Amanda. "The disadvantage subsidy is a very positive addition to the package of support I can offer families."

Strong working relationships

Amanda's close links with families make it easier for her to identify eligible pupils and ensure the most disadvantaged benefit. "The involvement of the home-school link workers in the pathfinder is crucial," says Kate Bahu, Didcot's Extended Services Coordinator.

"The disadvantage subsidy is a powerful tool but access to professionals who already have a relationship with parents is an important factor in making the initiative a success," says Kate.

The partnership is also benefiting from home-school link workers' relationships with other professionals. They regularly meet up to 50 fellow professionals at the locality multi-agency network meetings and have forged productive links with partners in health and social care. Increasingly, Amanda is acting as the lead professional or as a member of the team around the child (TAC) in cases referred by a health visitor or social worker, giving her a more rounded picture of the child's or young person's needs.

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Practical support

"I often use subsidy funding for activities identified through CAF and TAC cases," says Amanda. "In social care cases, it can be particularly helpful to be able to access safe activities outside the home."

For example, Amanda is working with a parent with severe epilepsy. She initially visited the mother to offer help with getting her energetic five-year-old to school each day but a chance discussion about plans for the school holidays revealed that the mother was very worried about how she would look after her daughter.

Amanda suggested to the mother that she could attend a holiday club at the neighbouring school. A quick phone call confirmed that disadvantage subsidy funding could pay for 10 full-day sessions over three weeks, while another call to Kate Bahu released further funding for a taxi to transport the pupil to the club. "It took less than half an hour to arrange," says Amanda. "The mother was thrilled and very relieved that her daughter would be safe and occupied during the holidays."

Tailored provision

Home-school link workers are in a unique position to make connections between what families need and the provision available. Amanda has named contacts at a range of local providers – including the local sports and fitness centre and the new arts centre – and has arranged to register children and young people for activities. An agreement with a local taxi firm has simplified the process of organising and paying for transport.

Those contacts proved invaluable when supporting a family with two children with behavioural problems. The older boy was being increasingly excluded from school. Amanda has been able to capitalise on his love of sport by using disadvantage subsidy funding to create opportunities for him to channel his energies into positive physical activities. The results have been impressive. "He excels at most sports and being able to take part in these activities has dramatically improved his behaviour at home and at school," says Amanda.

"He's proud of his achievements, happier, more confident and much more relaxed – and his behaviour at school is now much more manageable. He'd had counselling before but that was less successful. Getting involved in sport is the thing that's made the real difference – and that's thanks to the subsidy."

Find out more

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Getting dads through the door: involving fathers in learning

Involving parents, particularly fathers and male carers, in the school community can be a challenge. Like many schools, Plympton St Maurice Primary in Plymouth was struggling to achieve this until PSA Katy O'Brien joined the team two years ago.

Since then, Katy has worked closely with Susan Soper, the Headteacher, to develop a strategy for engaging parents. This includes activities such as a regular parent and carer group, family learning events and parenting courses. Katy makes sure she is always in the playground before and after school, and that parents are fully aware of the services and support she can offer. While parental engagement has increased – with mothers regularly seeking her out for confidential advice – Katy was concerned that fathers were still not sufficiently engaged in their children's learning.

“Research shows that children do better when their dads are more involved in their education,” says Katy. “We decided that organising some events solely for fathers and male carers and their children would be a good first step towards bringing more men into school.”

Katy consulted fathers who were already involved with the school. They told her they would welcome the chance to take part in more practical activities. “We also decided to introduce an element of competition,” she says.

An imaginative approach

Initially, the aim was to get fathers used to the school environment and to raise awareness of Katy's role and of other initiatives going on in the school. The first event, held in summer 2008, comprised a barbecue, beach games and a sandcastle competition. This year's event challenged dads and other male carers to come into the school one Saturday to decorate and race land yachts. Twenty families, including more than 30 children, took part.

“We were particularly keen to target parents who don't live in the family home and who may not have many opportunities to spend time with their children alongside their classmates,” says Katy. She adopted some imaginative tactics to communicate with fathers, including talking to pupils in assembly and asking them to go home and invite along a ‘significant male’ from their family.

The feedback from the event was extremely positive. “There was lots of laughter and noise,” says Katy. “Lots of dads said they often did things as a family group but rarely took part in one-to-one activities with their children. It was good to see them interacting with each other. One grandfather said it was the most fun he'd had in ages with his grandchild.” Katy is now looking at making the competition an annual event.

Matt Wakeham brought his step-daughter, who attends the school, and his daughter to the event. Together, they won the prize for best decorated land yacht. “Although we did shockingly in the race,” he says. Because the family is new to the area, Matt hoped the day would be a good opportunity to meet other parents. “Dads are often at work during the day so they don't get many chances to meet each other or to see what goes on at school. I was a bit sceptical at first but it was definitely worth it. I think it's really important to encourage dads to get involved.”

Maintaining the momentum

The aim of events such as the land yacht challenge is to make fathers feel comfortable in the school environment.

“Once we've got dads through the door we can start trying to get them involved in other aspects of school life, such as parent assemblies and parent evenings or even parenting programmes,” says Katy.

The event has given Katy a chance to get to know the fathers and to start building relationships with them. “Now I have a reason to speak to them informally. More of the dads know who I am and I can tell them about other initiatives, such as transition events or family SEAL [social and emotional aspects of learning] sessions. I can approach men without them feeling targeted,” she says.

The approach is already reaping dividends, with fathers becoming more involved in the school community. “It's a great idea to get dads more involved with the school. Katy has given me more opportunities to take a hands-on role in my step-daughter's education,” says Matt Wakeham, who is now considering becoming a governor. “I want to get more involved. I think it's important to help build the school for the future.”

Katy sees it as a win-win situation. “Fathers and male carers need to know that the PSA is there for them,” she says. “We want them to realise that they are valued by their children, the school and the community.”

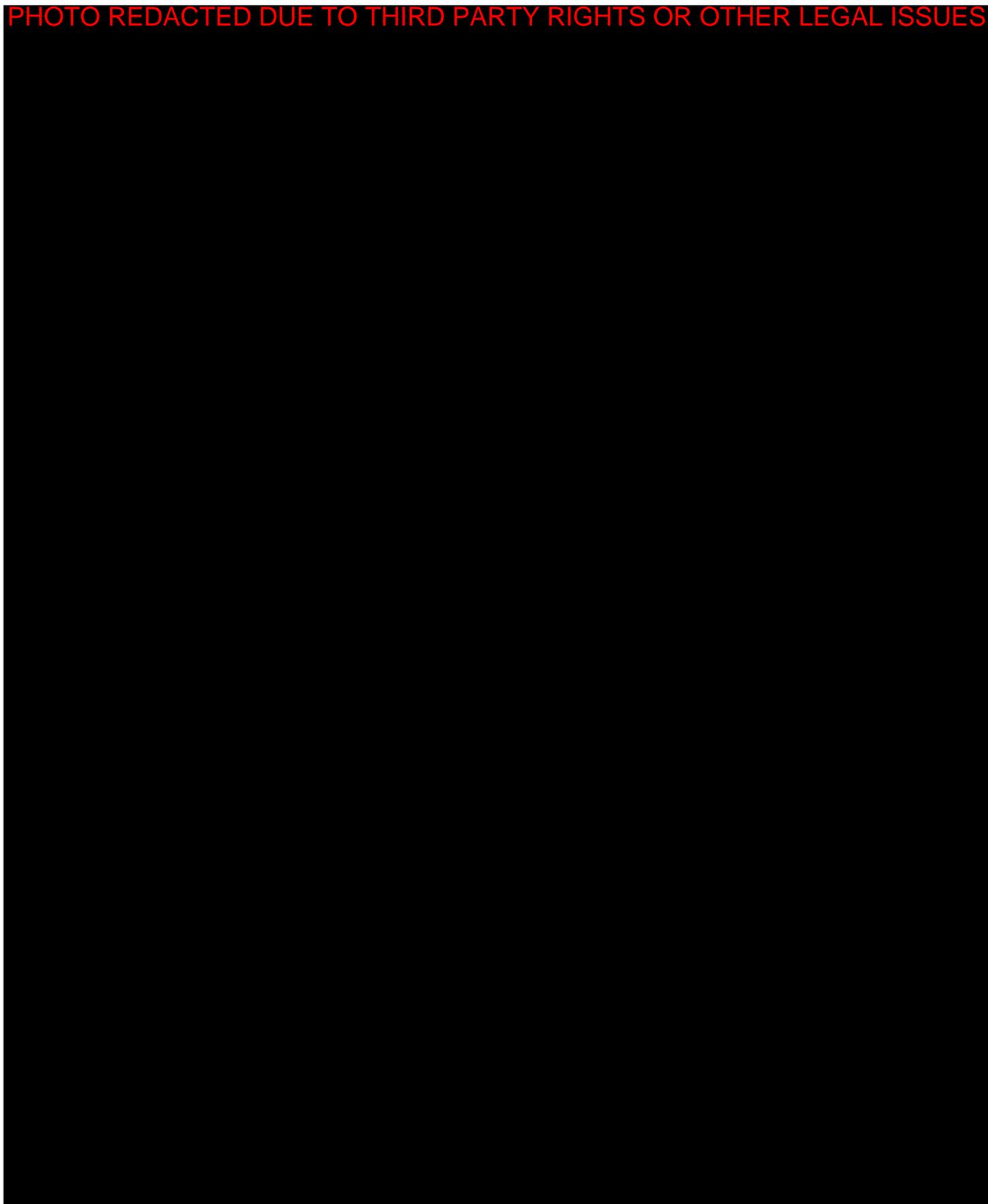
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Joined-up thinking: the common assessment framework and the lead professional

To identify appropriate support, PSAs need a holistic understanding of a child's needs. Increasingly, therefore, PSAs are being trained in and are using the CAF, a consent-based standardised approach to conducting assessments of children's additional needs and deciding how they should be met.

PSAs might instigate a CAF when, for example, they are concerned about a child's health, welfare, behaviour, performance or any other aspect of their well-being, or when the child's needs are unclear and/or beyond the scope of the PSA service. Often there will be a presenting problem relating to the child's behaviour and attendance or their inability to make friends.

PSAs are also often asked to undertake a CAF by an agency to which the child has been referred, either by the PSA directly or by school staff via the PSA. Here, the consent-based CAF provides a structure for sharing information and assures the agency that the PSA's concern is based on evidence, not just assumption.

Getting the full picture

In Durham, all PSAs have received CAF training. Simon Milligan believes that PSAs such as he are often the most appropriate people to conduct a CAF.

"To identify the right level of support, you need to get the detail," says Simon. "Asking about all of the different issues going on inside a family can be quite intrusive. Often only PSAs have the sort of relationship that makes it possible."

The case of a local mother, who felt that her child might need paediatric support and a statement of special educational needs, illustrates the point. The boy was about to move to secondary school and the mother was worried that his case might fall between the SENCOs at his primary and secondary schools. The PSA arranged a meeting between the mother and both SENCOs, who agreed that the child should be given a statement and also identified a need for other support, for example, to cope with bullying. The PSA worked through the CAF with the mother, helping everyone involved – including the mother – to see the full picture and identify the relevant support.

Enhanced service

The involvement of a PSA also adds value to the multi-agency TAC.

School nurse Sister Paula Scott says: "Having a PSA to work alongside me has enhanced the level of service experienced by our parents. The PSA visits families at home when they need practical support, contributes to multi-agency meetings, implements and supports CAFs and engages parents on parenting courses. She brings a valuable new element to the support we can give parents."

Getting parents to consent to a CAF is generally quite straightforward as long as the benefits are made clear, says PSA Julie McNeany. "In one case, a mother was facing prosecution because her child's attendance was less than 30 per cent," she explains. "The mother was concerned that completing the CAF was a step towards her child being taken into care. I reassured her that this was not the case and we were able to complete the CAF and develop an integration package to get the child back into school. She was thrilled with the outcome."

PSAs in Durham generally prefer to conduct the initial interview with parents in their own homes, with the child present. Input from other professionals such as the headteacher, school nurse, SENCO or school counselling service tends to be provided separately. After the assessment, PSAs involve parents in decisions about who attends the TAC meeting.

Managing parents' expectations is another key responsibility. In some cases, the CAF may show that a child's needs can be met through universal services. Increasingly, PSAs are taking on the lead professional role at the request of the parents and the TAC, coordinating provision and acting as a single point of contact for the family.

Having a PSA in the lead professional role provides continuity for parents and ensures there is a focus on their needs during TAC meetings, which the PSA attends.

Easing the burden

PSAs in Durham are convinced the CAF is effective. "The CAF is the best you can get in multi-agency working. It's a tool for helping families and that's what our role is all about," says Julie McNeany.

Maureen Rowe, another PSA, agrees. "It's important we are all working to find the best outcomes for children and young people," she says. "All areas of the CAF are very relevant. It is an integral part of our jobs."

And far from adding to a PSA's already busy workload, Simon Milligan believes the CAF can actually ease the burden: "Don't be put off by thinking it's going to be lots of work. The CAF is the most effective way of making sure a child's needs are met."

Line managers and the PSA coordinator all provide active support to help PSAs balance their CAF workload. This is a priority – and for good reason – as PSA Coordinator Nicola Pitt is quick to point out:

"Parents are central to the CAF process, together with children. Without a PSA to support parents through the process, the needs of the most vulnerable families may be missed."

Find out more

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Narrowing the gap: the Home Access programme

Research shows that having access to a computer and the internet at home can help narrow the achievement gap. There is a link between computer ownership and higher GCSE results, and home access also seems to have a positive impact on learners' confidence and ICT skills.

In September 2008, the Government launched its Home Access programme, designed to ensure that more children in state-maintained education in England have access to technology at home to support learning. The programme provides grants to low-income families to use to buy a computer plus at least a year's internet access from an approved supplier.

Becta, the Government agency for technology in learning, is responsible for delivering the programme, which was designed in line with recommendations made by the Government's Home Access Taskforce. Following a successful pilot in Oldham and Suffolk local authorities, where more than 12,000 grants were delivered to families, the programme will be rolled out nationally from December 2009 initially targeting learners in years 3 to 9. On its national roll-out, grants will be restricted to one per household.

Increasing engagement with learning

In Suffolk, one of the pilot areas, PSAs are taking the lead in promoting and supporting the Home Access programme. "Home access to technology offers significant benefits to parents and carers," explains Cluster Development Coordinator Elizabeth Broadhurst, who works with a number of PSAs in and around Lowestoft.

"Having access to a computer can help parents and carers develop their own ICT skills and give them access to all sorts of valuable online resources, including adult learning, careers advice and job vacancies," Elizabeth adds. "It also has the potential to increase parents' engagement with their children's education and strengthen links between the home and the school. There's a clear overlap between home access and what our PSAs are working to achieve."

Creating structure

Jacqui Healey, a PSA who covers schools in the south Lowestoft area, has been working to identify families who are eligible for the Home Access programme and to support them through the process of applying for funding, buying their computer and getting their new kit up and running. To date, more than 45 families have got connected.

"Children are using the computers for games and homework, while parents are really starting to get to grips with the internet and working out how they can use it to access information," says Jacqui. "One thing that I have noticed is that the computer is great for introducing a bit of structure to families that might not have had that before. Children will spend a set period of, say, 30 minutes or an hour on it each day. I'm also seeing parents and children using the computer to explore things together, which is great."

Jacqui has spent a lot of time helping parents get the most out of their computers. "I talk to them about setting boundaries and about appropriate use," she says. "Cyber safety is a major issue and a lot of these parents have never given it any thought before." Jacqui is also getting parents started by teaching them the basics of how to use Word, send e-mails and search for information online. "I can't cope with the demand," she says. "Now some of our schools have had to start putting on basic ICT courses for parents."

Confidence boost

Jacqui's PSA colleague, Sharon Tacon, estimates that about a third of her clients – 50 families – in north Lowestoft have benefited from the Home Access programme so far. The experience of one particular family illustrates the wide-ranging benefits the programme can bring.

"This family already had a laptop but it was old and the children had to fight over it to get their homework done," she says. "The mum is on her own and works part time, so there's no way she could have afforded new computers for both children. Through Home Access, we were able to get an up-to-date laptop for each child."

Initially, the mother was anxious that she lacked computer skills so Sharon arranged for her to attend a short ICT course at a local college. Learning the basics has boosted the mother's confidence and enabled her to start playing a more active role in her children's learning.

"They actually work together now," Sharon reports. "The mother feels confident that she can help and support them. It really brings parents and children together and closes up what can potentially turn into a big gulf." The mother is also now using the computer to improve her own prospects by writing a CV and searching for jobs online.

A valuable 'way in'

From Sharon's point of view, the programme offers a valuable 'way in' to vulnerable families and an opportunity to identify any other issues affecting them.

She explains: "Recently, I was talking to a mum about the Home Access programme, when we

got on to other topics. It turned out she was having trouble managing her child's behaviour. We've now had a number of one-to-one sessions to help her brush up some practical parenting skills, like setting clear boundaries. It's simple stuff but it can stop a relatively small problem turning into something a lot more serious further down the line."

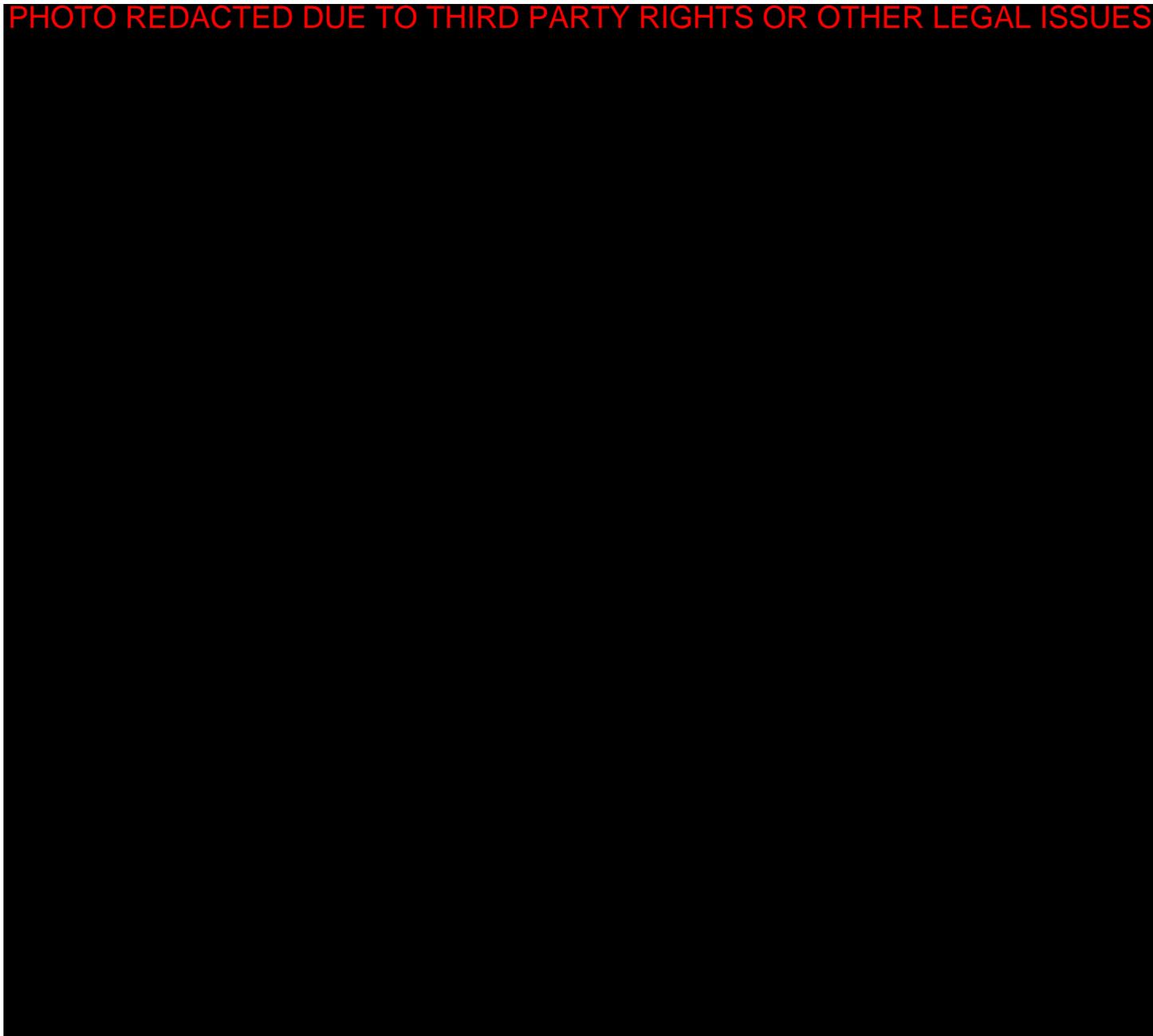
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Understanding parents' needs: the essentials of e-safety

When Stockport Council decided to help parents learn more about e-safety, PSAs were a natural choice to facilitate the training sessions and provide ongoing support.

Stockport's decision to make February 2009 'e-safety month' followed a spate of media stories about e-safety issues, such as cyber bullying and 'grooming'. It also coincided with Safer Internet Day, an annual event organised every February by INSAFE, a European network promoting e-safety awareness, to encourage safer and more responsible use of technology.

The council's Local Safeguarding Children Board developed a session for parents, working in close collaboration with the local authority's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) champion.

The CEOP champion had already established good working relationships with schools and PSAs. "I think that was part of the reason why we were asked to deliver the session," says PSA Barbara Leech, who works in one of Stockport's three cluster teams. "Plus we already have established relationships with parents, which makes it easier to tackle what's really quite a sensitive subject."

Striking a balance

The PSAs were given half a day's training to prepare them to facilitate the sessions. "The training was very detailed," Barbara explains. "It was important that we stuck pretty closely to the presentation created by CEOPs so that we struck the right balance between encouraging parents to be vigilant and not terrifying the life out of them! We found that parents needed quite a bit of hand-holding. They're very aware of the gulf between what they know and what their children know and it can be a bit daunting."

The two-hour sessions were offered to parents at a range of times, including evenings and first thing in the morning, just after they had dropped off their children. The presentation has also been added to an existing parenting support course as an additional session. Schools were responsible for making sure parents knew where and when the sessions were taking place. In most cases, ICT coordinators and/or headteachers also attended to answer any questions about e-safety, the ICT curriculum and the support on offer in schools.

The sessions were very practical and designed to grab parents' attention by using plenty of visuals and real-life examples. "It sounds obvious, but putting the computer in the sitting room or kitchen rather than in the child's bedroom is an important first step," says Barbara. "It's also important that parents are familiar with the kind of sites their children might be looking at, so we show them around popular sites like Habbo and Bebo."

Parents are also given a CD, leaflets and a fact sheet to take away. This includes a list of sites – such as CEOP's Think U Know (www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents), Childnet's Know IT All (www.childnet.com/kia) and GetNetWise (www.getnetwise.org) – that they can browse in their own time for more information and guidance on e-safety.

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Growing demand

To date, Stockport's PSAs have delivered sessions in 34 schools across the borough. "Originally, the sessions were supposed to be limited to e-safety month," says Barbara, "but demand from schools has just grown and grown. We've delivered sessions all through the spring and summer terms and have already got some booked for the next academic year."

Feedback from parents is gathered through a simple evaluation form at the end of each session and it has been overwhelmingly positive. "Lots of people say they had no idea what was out there and what kind of things their children could be accessing. It's a real eye opener," says Barbara.

Roary Pownall, Headteacher at Ludworth Primary School, sees e-safety as an increasingly important area. He says: "With children spending more and more time working with computers at home and school, it's important that we take a consistent approach to safeguarding. E-safety is part of our syllabus here, so it makes sense to get parents on board, too."

Engaging parents

Parents' responses to the initial session held at Ludworth suggest that not only did they find the content useful and relevant, they appreciated having a PSA on hand to offer support and advice.

"The PSA facilitating the session pitched it just right," says Roary. "PSAs have an in-depth understanding of parents' needs and that really came across." The school is now keen to book a second session for parents who were unable to attend the first. "It's all word of mouth," says Barbara, "which is great. It shows that the sessions are really hitting the spot."

The Stockport PSAs have also used the sessions to raise awareness of their services and to establish new relationships with parents with whom they had not had any previous contact. "It's been a really useful way in," says Barbara. "It's a way of spending time with parents without there being any kind of stigma attached. It's also helped position us as a source of expertise in an increasingly important area, which can only be a good thing."

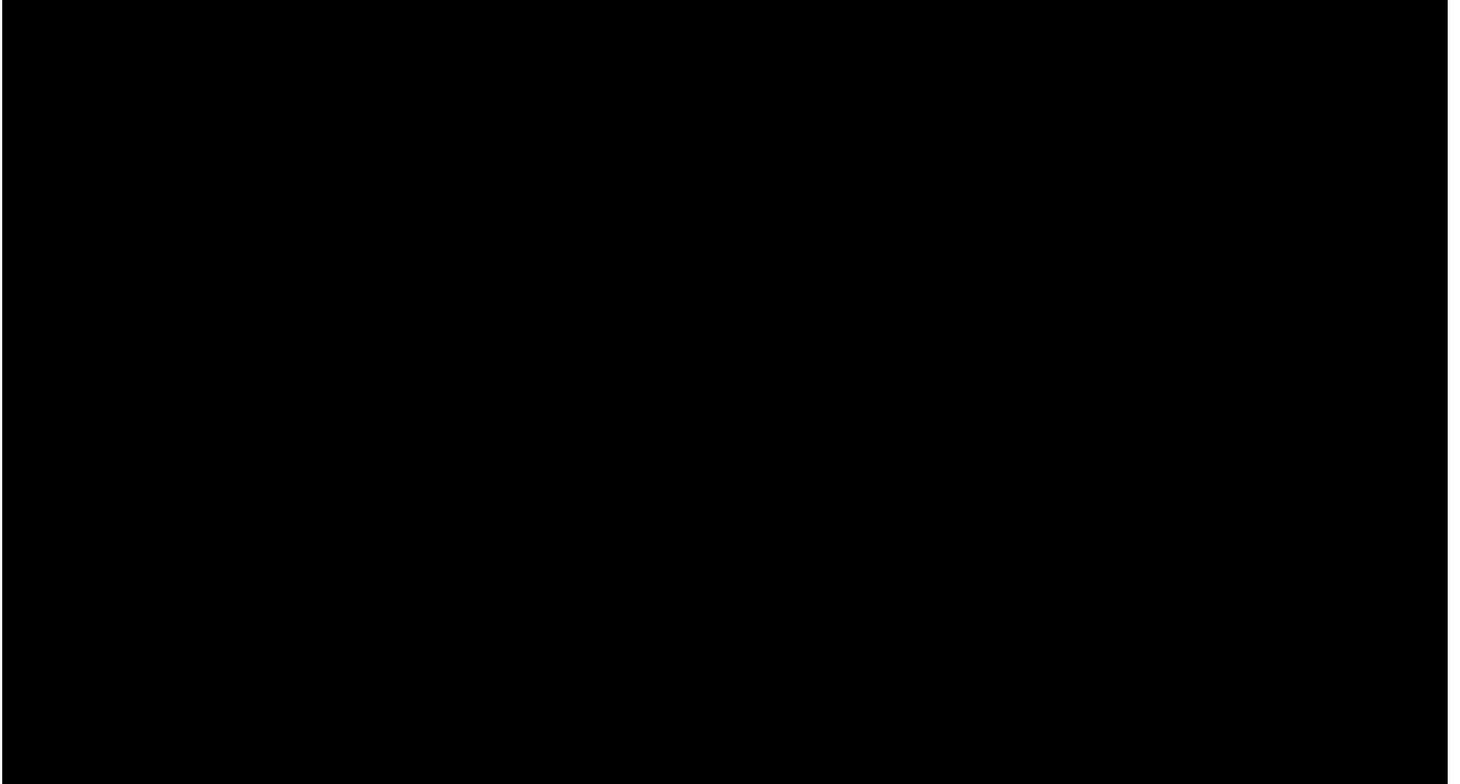
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Looking to the future: focus on sustainability

PSAs are a valuable addition to any school-based workforce. They demonstrably improve a school's success in engaging parents, particularly those who are traditionally hard to reach. This leads to improved attainment, attendance and behaviour in class and enables teachers and headteachers to get on with teaching and running schools for the benefit of children, young people and the wider community. Sustaining the work of PSAs is paramount.

The lists below provide an overview of factors the TDA has identified as important in helping to sustain the PSA role. They are not intended to be prescriptive. Schools and local authorities are encouraged to choose the ideas that best match their needs and to use the lists to stimulate discussion about how PSA provision can be sustained in their area.

Strategy

- Embed the PSA role in the local authority Parenting Support Strategy and Children and Young People's Plan with appropriate senior sponsorship
- Align PSA provision to policies for school improvement, integrated children's services and 21st Century Schools
- Get the parenting commissioner to actively support the PSA role and its links to extended services and school improvement
- Involve PSAs in multi-agency teams and adopt a 'think family' approach to supporting families
- Deploy PSAs in the context of wider inclusion and support for parents
- Identify an ongoing funding stream (either match or school-only funding)
- Involve PSAs in developing school improvement plans and working with school improvement teams at local authority level

Operational planning

- Ensure there is a designated person within a local authority responsible for coordinating PSAs
- Manage workloads so that the number of schools each PSA supports is not so large that it dilutes service provision

Measuring impact

- Agree a transparent monitoring and evaluation programme to measure the impact of PSAs' work. This could be based on the TDA impact evaluation model (see page 36)
- Provide local authority PSA leads and PSAs with guidance and support to enable them to monitor and evaluate their activities using both quantitative and qualitative approaches
- PSAs and local authorities work together to produce compelling evaluation reports stating the case for ongoing PSA support
- Set clear performance indicators based on desired outcomes where local authorities have devolved funding and management to schools

Training and development

- Ensure PSAs have a comprehensive programme of training and support, including local induction and initial training (for example, the TDA Initial Training Programme)
- Ensure that initial training meets the needs of newly recruited PSAs by, for example, getting PSA leads to carry out a training needs analysis
- Make sure that line managers and schools understand and can meet PSAs' continuing professional development needs through PSA leads issuing appropriate guidance
- Promote access to support work in schools (SWIS) (parent support) or working with parents level 3 qualifications through the TDA school support staff training and qualifications grant
- Use the PSA lead to facilitate the sharing of good practice through a range of activities
- Give PSAs regular opportunities to train alongside other staff who support parents and families, such as outreach workers in children's centres and staff in pastoral support, inclusion, Connexions, parent partnerships, education welfare, youth and community work, social services and the voluntary sector
- Train PSAs to use the CAF and make them aware of safeguarding policies
- Ensure PSAs have the opportunity to be trained to provide parenting programmes to support parents if needed and to be supported in delivering those programmes

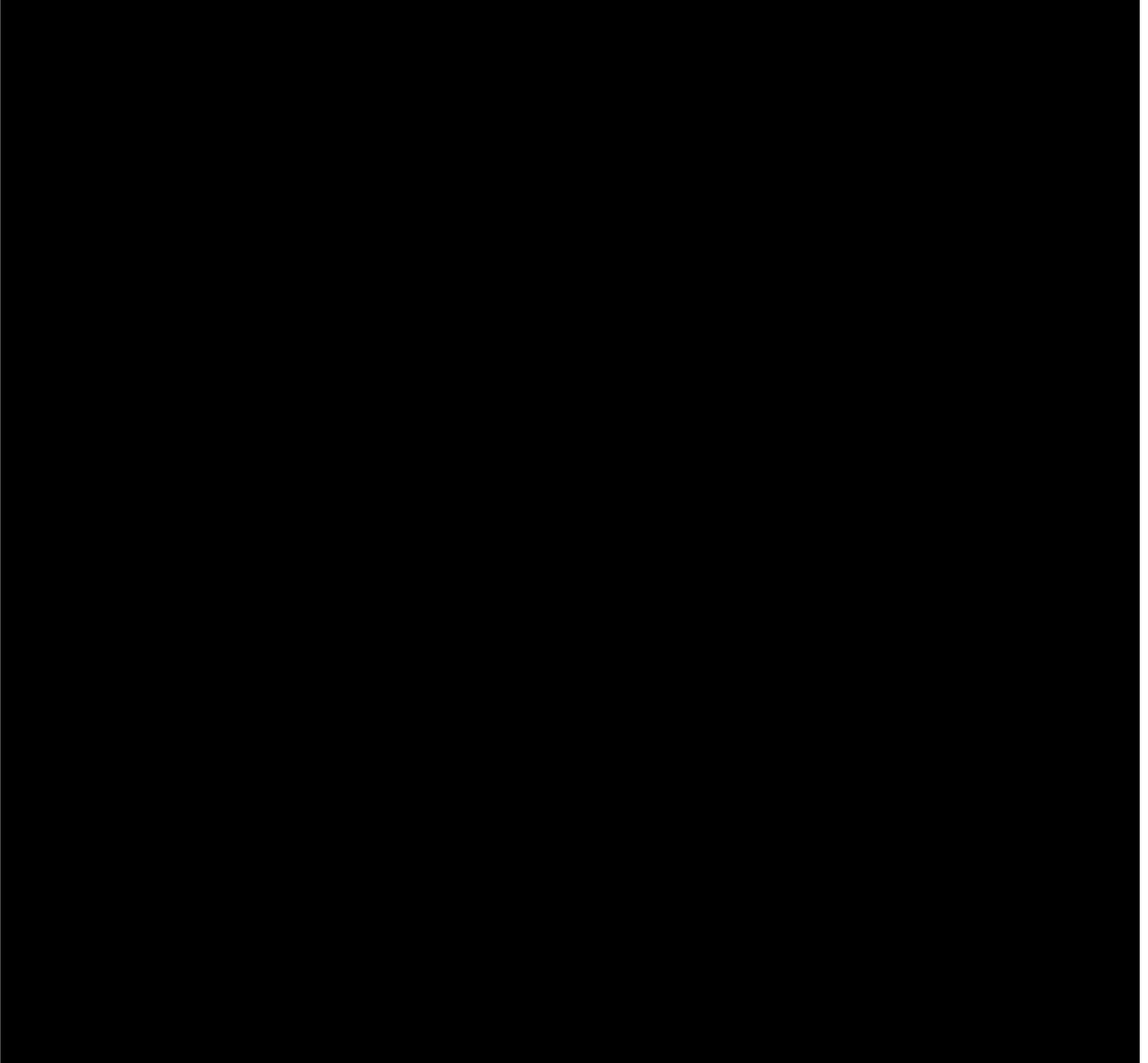
Line management and supervision

- Make sure there is a clear management structure, lines of communication and accountability
- Give PSAs the opportunity to be supervised by appropriately qualified and experienced professionals who are not their line managers
- Offer PSAs both peer support and one-to-one supervision
- Brief PSAs on caseload management protocols

Integrated working practices

- Train PSAs jointly with other agencies/teams
- Ensure PSAs are part of multi-agency structures and know the relevant policies and protocols of these teams
- Make sure others in schools and the wider multi-agency team understand the PSA role and the benefits it can bring

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Section 2: supporting local authorities and PSAs

Training and qualifications update

There are currently two sets of qualifications designed to meet the needs of parenting practitioners at level 3:

- the support work in schools (SWiS) (parent support) level 3 certificate and diploma, which has been developed to meet the needs of PSAs and similar roles in schools, and
- the working with parents (WWP) level 3 award and certificate, which is a broad qualification with core and optional units derived from the working with parents national occupational standards.

Following revisions to the WWP qualification, the two qualifications now have a number of units in common. This makes it easier and quicker for learners who have gained one qualification to study for the other if they change settings and/or identify that the WWP meets their development needs – provided they have already completed some or all of the common units.

The SWiS (parent support) qualification is accredited until the end of 2010 but will be phased out, along with broader SWiS provision, as part of the introduction of the qualification and credits framework (QCF). Current SWiS (parent support) qualifications held by practitioners will remain valid.

The TDA and the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC), along with other members of the Children's Workforce Network, are looking to develop qualifications for the QCF and to identify opportunities for shared units. The aim is to ensure a flexible approach, that facilitates progress and accreditation by allowing practitioners from a range of backgrounds to have their prior learning and qualifications taken into account when they enter the profession.

Effective supervision

CWDC has been reviewing its guidance on effective supervision in integrated settings. The revised guidance, which will look at the needs of parent support workers, is due to be published in March 2010.

Providing Effective Supervision toolkit

This toolkit, produced jointly by CWDC and Skills for Care and Development, is available online at www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/providing-effective-supervision

The TDA has run a research project with PSA practitioners and local authority managers to find out more about:

- arrangements for introducing supervision within and across local areas
- skills for supervision
- supervision models for practitioners without professional or degree-level qualifications, and
- models of supervision appropriate to the PSA role.

The outcomes will contribute to CWDC's work with the TDA and other national partners.

Share!

CWDC's Share! project looked at different approaches to supervision in integrated settings as implemented in four areas of the country:

- Newcastle – a solution-focused supervision model based on the 'signs of safety' approach, initially developed in the child protection arena
- Bath and North East Somerset – a peer model focusing on practice issues and supporting staff who are acting as lead professionals
- Warrington – a second tier of supervisors used to build capacity. The work includes setting goals for the new supervision process and a method for preparing new supervisors and assuring the quality of their work

- Devon – an MA in professional practice developed by the council in partnership with the University of Plymouth. Aimed at leaders and managers in children's trusts, the programme includes a module on 'transforming practice through supervision'

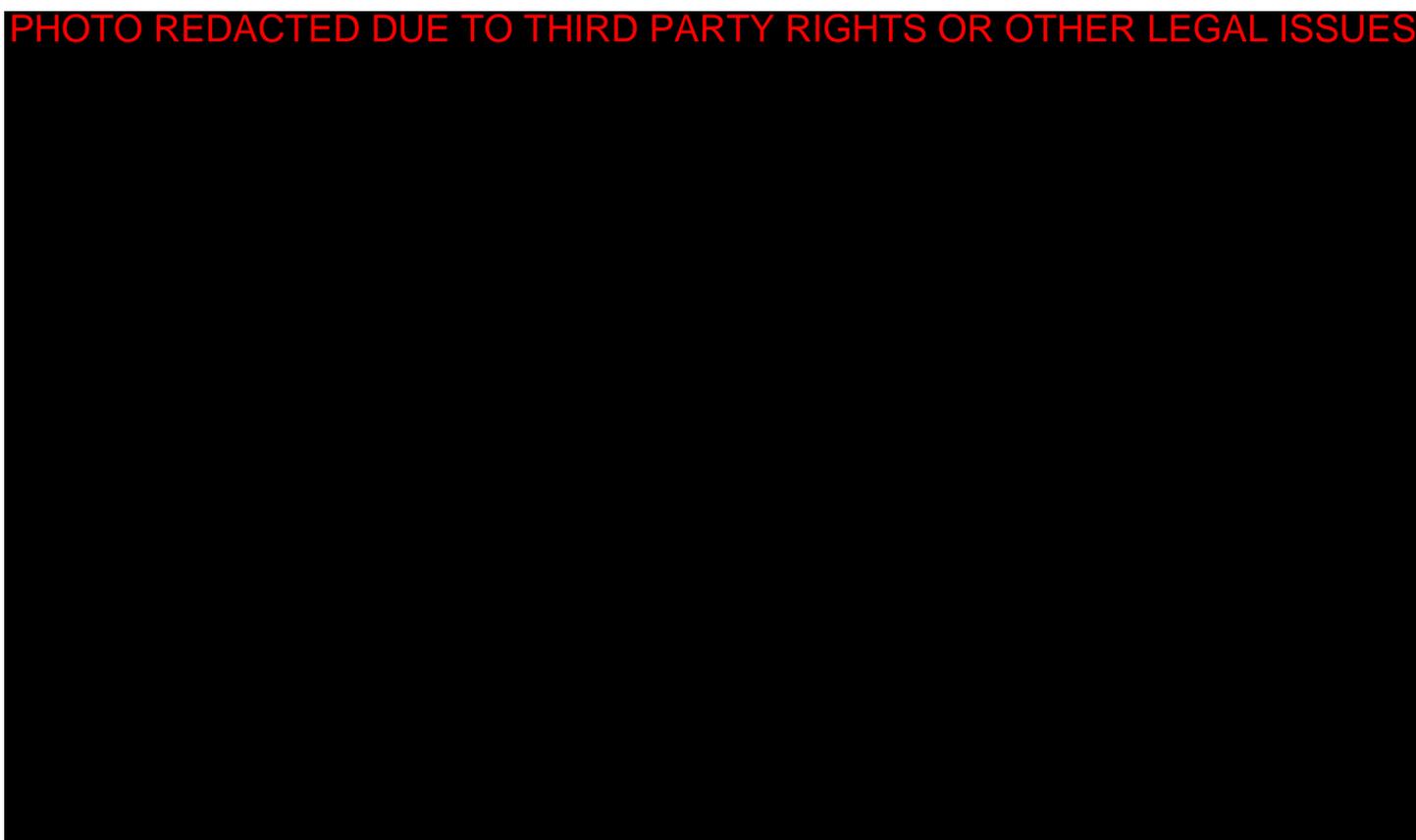
The four projects have been featured in CWDC's *Joining the Pieces* magazine and this information is available free of charge on a DVD and on a poster. The magazine, DVD and poster can be ordered from integratedworking@cwdcouncil.org.uk or downloaded at www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/cwdc-share/cwdc-share-joining-the-piece

Integrated working toolkit sign up and functional maps

CWDC's new guidance on effective supervision in integrated settings will form part of an integrated working toolkit that will be available online from March 2010. Find out more and sign up for e-mail updates at www.integratedworking.com

CWDC will also be producing two simple functional maps to show clearly the skills and competencies needed to be a lead professional and to implement a CAF. The functional maps will help to clarify the difference between key workers and lead professionals.

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Induction and initial training

Each local authority must make its own decisions about the design and delivery of initial training for PSAs, based on local need. The following examples showcase two very different approaches, one where training is delivered by the local authority and one where provision has been outsourced to an external provider.

In-house training in Doncaster

The comprehensive induction programme for all new PSAs in Doncaster, run by local PSA coordinators, equips PSAs to hit the ground running. "Many of the schools the PSAs were going to be assigned to were unclear about what was going to be involved, so the PSAs needed to be in a position to provide guidance from the outset," says PSA Coordinator Michelle Fitzpatrick.

The first PSAs recently completed the training. They spent their first week in their posts working through modules A and B of the role-specific training from the TDA's induction and initial training programme. Module A focuses on working in partnership with parents, while module B covers working together for child and family well-being.

Coordinators supplemented the TDA modules by adding sections on clinical supervision; the local records system; solution-focused therapy; note taking and report writing and impact and evaluation. They also produced their own sets of slides. The end of the course was timed to coincide with the May half-term holiday to give the PSAs time to reflect on their learning and familiarise themselves with the role.

Since receiving the training, the PSAs have asked for additional guidance on budgeting, applying for external funding and desktop publishing. The coordinators are looking at different ways of meeting these emerging needs, including training from external providers. In the mean time, PSAs are taking half a day a week out of their schedules to learn from each other's effective practice.

Information on PSA induction and training programmes developed by the TDA and covering local induction, generic children's workforce and PSA role-specific initial training modules, are available at www.tda.gov.uk/psa

Outsourced training in Sheffield

Before going into schools, all 14 of Sheffield's (full-time equivalent) PSAs took a six-week training course designed to give them the skills they needed to work with parents on a variety of levels and add real value to the school workforce.

Most of Sheffield's PSA training is outsourced to the Sheffield Alcohol Advisory Service's (SAAS) training team. Only CAF, safety-net training and the local authority induction take place in house.

All the PSAs studied CWDC's generic modules for children's workforce practitioners and undertook the TDA's PSA role-specific training. They were also trained in solution-focused therapy, accredited facilitation, PTTLS (preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector), family SEAL and evidence-based methods such as primary and group Triple P (see page 34).

All training took place in multi-agency teams with key partners such as family learning, the parent advocate service, the youth offending service, the drug and alcohol team and extended services. The SAAS has also been commissioned for a year to provide continuing professional development for the PSAs along with mentoring and supervision.

Parenting Strategy Manager Tracy Watson explains Sheffield's decision to mix outsourced and in-house training. "Outsourcing the majority of our training has enabled us to tap in to the far broader range of experience and skills offered by the advisory service's training team and it has greatly increased our capacity," she says.

"Learning from the PSA pilot authorities showed us how hard it would be to pull PSAs out of schools once they were in place, so we wanted to make sure they had all the skills needed to deliver a wide range of services and support from the outset."

Find out more

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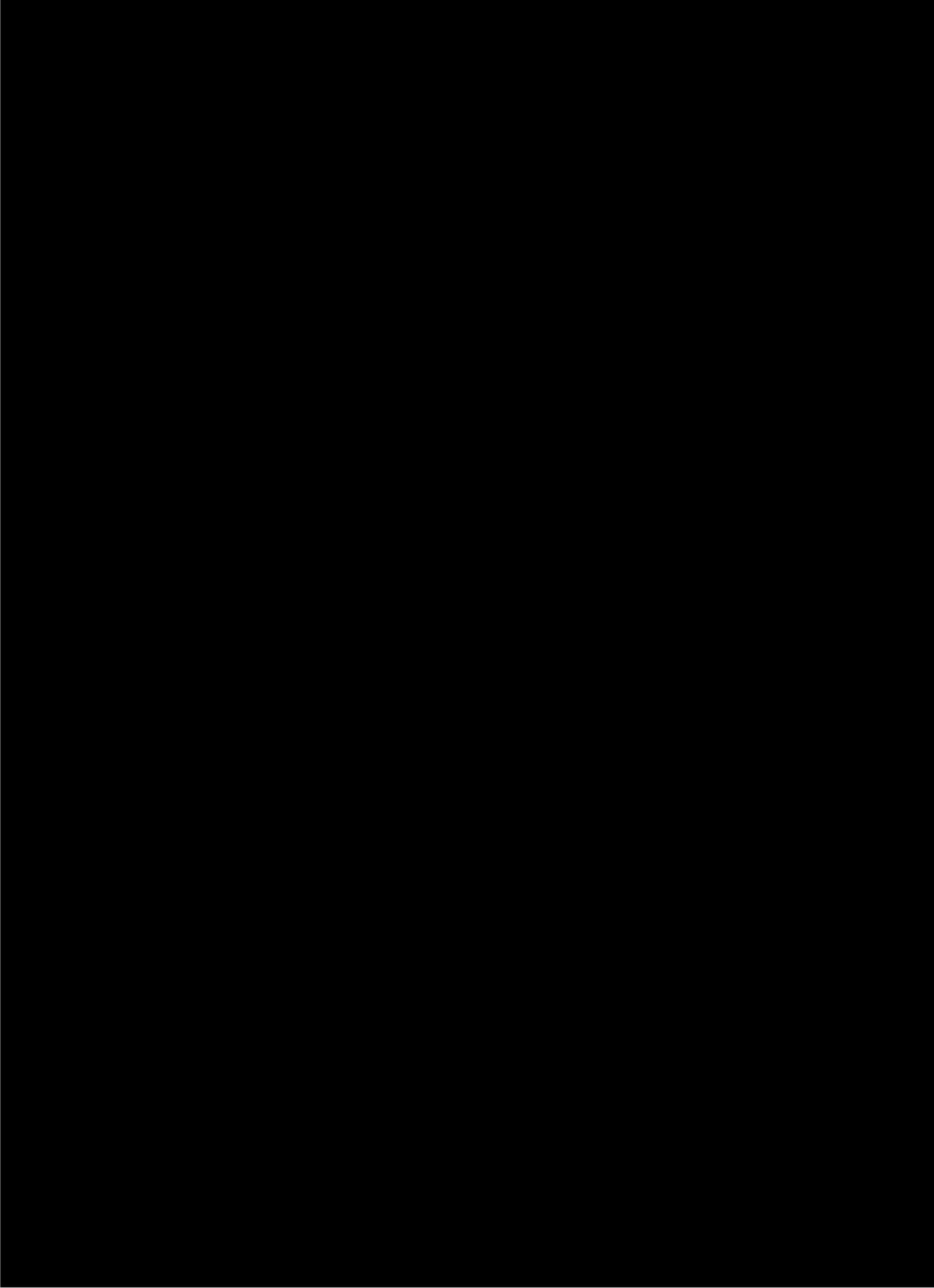
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Evidence-based parenting programmes

Equipping parenting practitioners with skills that demonstrably improve the lives of parents, children and families should be the aim of any evidence-based parenting programme. Evidence suggests that PSAs who have been trained in parenting programmes are more able to offer parents a structured approach to developing their parenting skills.

Some PSAs are trained in more than one programme so they can target support according to individual need. Programmes such as Triple P, Incredible Years and Family Links – the Nurturing Programme each have their own strengths and projected outcomes. PSAs and schools are free to choose the programme that best matches the needs of their parents.

The North Somerset approach

In North Somerset, evidence-based training is part of the local authority's strategy for delivering the extended services core parenting offer. All PSAs are trained in evidence-based programmes, which they co-facilitate with PSAs or practitioners from other agencies.

Kate Wilcox, PSA Project Manager in North Somerset, has been trained in and organises all the evidence-based parenting programmes offered by PSAs. This enables her to help PSAs identify the programmes that are most suited to their own personal style and that are best for their families.

PSAs have been trained in Group Teen Triple P for parents of teenagers; Webster-Stratton's Incredible Years, which is aimed at parents of younger children, and Family Links, a universal emotional health programme designed to strengthen all family relationships. Kate runs regular group and individual supervision sessions with North Somerset's 26 PSAs, during which they work together to identify the most appropriate interventions.

Delivering evidence-based programmes to groups of adults is a new skill for many PSAs. North Somerset Council has given all its PSAs the opportunity to take a PTTLS level 3 qualification, which provides an introduction to the techniques needed for teaching adults.

Kate is delivering a Family Links programme and is already receiving positive feedback. "One father has already told me how family rules have changed his

family life for the better, while other parents have talked about the positive benefits of praise and spending time with their children," she says. "All of them have commented on how much calmer their families are and how much more confident they feel as parents."

The Leeds approach

Gail Pollard, a PSA based at Ireland Wood Primary School in Leeds, has undertaken a wide range of evidence-based training, including Webster-Stratton's Incredible Years', Investment in Excellence, STEPS and SHARE Family Learning. STEPS is a universal programme that encourages parents to think about themselves and how they choose to live their lives, while SHARE is a practical programme designed to get parents more involved in their children's learning.

Most training is offered through the local authority and is usually done on a multi-agency basis. Training is delivered to pairs of PSAs so they can offer each other informal peer support as they start to use their newly acquired skills.

Most parents who take part in the group programmes have already worked with Gail on a one-to-one basis and her knowledge of each family helps ensure the right programme is selected.

While some parents are not comfortable with a group environment, many find that they can learn from each other, share experiences and make friends so that they can continue to support each other after completing the programme. Feedback from schools and parents is positive and often parents go on to take up other courses.

Measuring the benefits

Evaluating the impact of evidence-based courses is important. In Leeds, for example, Gail has seen improved engagement from parents and a greater understanding of the role of education in their children's lives.

"They are more likely to help with homework and are increasingly offering to volunteer in the classroom or help with school trips," says Gail. "Class teachers report that pupils enjoy seeing their parents getting involved and it leads to a more positive feeling in school."

Training parenting practitioners

The aim of the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners (NAPP) is to equip parenting practitioners with the skills to help parents raise their children to be happy, healthy, safe, ready to learn, able to make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being. NAPP has designed a programme of free training and support that will reach more than 6,000 parenting practitioners in England over the next two years. It will give them the skills to help improve the lives of parents, children and families and comprises:

- training in evidence-based programmes
- post-training support for those delivering evidence-based programmes
- good-practice workshops
- advice and support on workforce development for parenting commissioners, and
- a pilot of level 3 training courses in core parenting skills.

The free training is on offer to all practitioners in priority roles and services in England and will be delivered regionally. All applications must be coordinated and approved by the local parenting commissioner in discussion with the parenting academy's regional and specialist staff. For more information, go to the NAPP website at www.parentingacademy.org/workforce_evidencebased.aspx

Find out more

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Impact evaluation

“PSAs are having a significant impact on children’s and young people’s attainment and attendance. By engaging with the whole family, PSAs are often able to deal with the wider social issues that affect performance at school.”

This quote, from a local authority parenting commissioner, is typical of the widespread anecdotal evidence that shows that the parenting support offer within extended services is having a positive impact on children’s and young people’s well-being and learning.

But while this is valuable and encouraging, there is also a need for more systematic or quantitative evidence. For policy-makers and funders, ‘hard’ evidence of impact is essential if they are to justify providing continued support and funding for initiatives. This evidence will also give parenting practitioners valuable insight into what works best in what context, which will help to improve service delivery.

An evaluation model

The TDA has developed a straight-forward model to help practitioners evaluate the impact of specific projects, initiatives or services. It can also be used at the start of a project to help identify potential evidence sources. The model divides projects into the following elements:

- **Inputs** – what the project, initiative or service is, the resources involved, the planned activities and the intended audience
- **Outputs** – direct products of the input stage relating to the actual quality of delivery, with a particular emphasis on how users have engaged with, and immediately responded to, input activities
- **Intermediate outcomes** – how users should be influenced by the project, initiative or service in terms of changes to their knowledge/skills, attitudes or behaviour (for example, greater confidence to contribute in lessons)
- **Final outcomes** – how the project should affect the key issues it set out to address, for example, reducing the number of children or young people who are not in education, employment or training

By looking at each of these stages in turn, a local authority or practitioner should be able to describe the impact a project, initiative or service is expected to have. The model can then be used to identify potential sources of evidence and the measures and indicators that relate to those sources.

The model on the opposite page was developed with a PSA in Redbridge, east London, to help evaluate the impact of a programme focusing on the transition to secondary school.

For more information about the impact evaluation model, go to www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling/managingchange/tools/impact_evaluation.aspx

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Ensuring a smooth transition from primary to secondary school

Stage	Impact evaluation model	Evidence sources/change
Inputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified and met with prospective primary school Identified students to be targeted – year 6 and Year 7 Secondary school students to present at the primary school – five sessions to help to prepare presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary school children questionnaire – used at the start (pre-contact) and end of the project Observational re year 7's confidence and input Year 7 questionnaire re input and expectations
Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation display board produced by secondary students Includes examples of year 7 work, merits, timetable, map and aerial view of the school Secondary students produced two plays with narrator on bullying and friendships, acting out expected and actual scenarios Secondary students created a talking timetable and acted out the list of clubs available Presentations end with a question and answer session Year 6 pupils visit secondary school three times – all given information packs used to facilitate group discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of presentational materials produced by year 7 and their engagement in the project – observational plus questionnaire Year 6 feedback that this is what they want to know Year 6 engagement in materials produced – observational Increase in confidence levels of year 6 through pre- and post-questionnaire
Intermediate outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in confidence, self-esteem and social skills of year 7 pupils Increased confidence and allayed fears re transition for year 6 pupils and parents A smooth transition from primary to secondary – children arriving at secondary school more ready to learn Improved parental engagement throughout transition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How year 6 pupils react when become year 7 plus continuous monitoring of progress – academic, social and emotional Project extended to form the first part of the school's transition programme as so successful Percentage of parents who maintain engagement; uptake of new ideas eg parenting programme
Final outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher levels of parental engagement sustained for year 6 parents – home, school and pupils working together to improve results and raise levels of achievement Students underachieving less – academically, socially and emotionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key Stage results Reading and spelling tests Improved attendance Reduced incidence of inappropriate behaviour

Section 4: find out more

This section lists useful websites, documents and research. For information relating to the PSA workforce, case studies, initial training and qualifications or to order copies of Resource Kits 1 and 2 and Parent support advisers: Practice and impact – spring 2009, go to www.tda.gov.uk/psa

The following links provide more information about the rationale for parenting support and existing services and initiatives.

Every Child Matters (ECM), the Children's Plan and 21st Century Schools

ECM sets out an agenda for the future development of children and young people:
www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/

The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures (2007) outlines how the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is responding to the needs of children, young people and families: www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan

The Children's Plan One Year On (2008) looks at what was achieved in the plan's first year: www.dcsf.gov.uk/oneyearon

Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future: Building a 21st Century School (2009):
www.dcsf.gov.uk/21stcenturyschoolsystem

Extended services and targeted youth support

Extended schools: www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling/extendedschools.aspx

Teachernet: www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/extendedschools

Swift and easy access to targeted and specialist services: www.tda.gov.uk/sea

Extended services leaflet for parents:
www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/extendedschools

Extended services disadvantage subsidy:
www.tda.gov.uk/subsidy

Targeted youth support:
www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/Youth/targetedyouth/targetedyouthsupport/

Support for parents

Every Parent Matters outlines a range of initiatives aimed at parents: www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/familyandcommunity/workingwithparents/everyparentmatters/

Parent Know How is a programme of resources and information for parents: www.dcsf.gov.uk/parentknowhow

Families Information Service: www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/earlyyears/familyinformationservice/fis/

Workforce development

2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/childrenandyoungpeoplesworkforce

Behaviour and attendance

DCSF guidance on behaviour, attendance and tackling bullying: www.dcsf.gov.uk/behaviourandattendance
www.dcsf.gov.uk/bullying

National strategies behaviour and attendance toolkit: <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/97231>

Engaging parents in raising attainment

Specialist Schools and Academies Trust project and toolkit: www.schoolsnetwork.org.uk

Family learning

Information and resources to support family learning: www.familylearning.org.uk

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education's information for family learning practitioners: www.niace.org.uk

Transitions

Children's Education Advisory Service resources: www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/library/individualpupiltransition

Parentline Plus resources: www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Related research

Parent Support Adviser Pilot: First Interim Report from the Evaluation (University of Warwick's Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research 2007): www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RW020.pdf

Parent Support Adviser Pilot Evaluation: Second Interim Report (University of Warwick's Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research, 2008): www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR037.pdf

Parent Support Adviser Pilot Evaluation: Final Report (University of Warwick's Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research, 2009): www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/

Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement: Do Parents Know They Matter? (University of Warwick, 2007): www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RW004.pdf

The Impact of Parental Involvement on Pupil Achievement (DfES, 2003): www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR433.pdf

What Works in Parenting Support? A Review of the International Evidence (Policy Research Bureau, 2004): www.prb.org.uk/wwiparenting/RR574.pdf

Learning Behaviour. A report on school behaviour and discipline (Practitioners' Group, 2006): www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/learningbehaviour

Improving Children's Behaviour and Attendance Through the Use of Parenting Programmes: an Examination of Good Practice (Institute of Education, University of London, 2004): www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR585.pdf

Parental Involvement in children's education: www.dcsf.gov.uk

Segmentation study into parents' attitudes: www.dcsf.gov.uk

For more research on related issues, go to www.dcsf.gov.uk/research and use the search function.

Other organisations

Fatherhood Institute: www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

National Academy of Parenting Practitioners: www.parentingacademy.org

Children's Workforce Development Council: www.cwdcouncil.org.uk

Becta: www.becta.org.uk

Contact us

For more information, e-mail the TDA at psa@tda.gov.uk

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