

Addressing the needs of young people identified to be experiencing behavioural, emotional and social difficulties: A study of 'in-city' support and multi-agency working

Submitted by Jodie Wilkinson, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology in Educational, Child and Community Psychology, May 2012.

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Overview

Young people who are identified on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Register as experiencing behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) are acknowledged as being the most difficult to support and teach, with most requiring skilful and attentive management (Ofsted, 1999). The complications of establishing effective interventions and models of support for these young people have been repeatedly recognised (Farrell & Tsakalidou, 1999; Farrell & Polat, 2003). Currently, a wide range of services and models of provision are offered for young people with identified BESD, with varying degrees of effectiveness (Lloyd & O'Regan, 1999).

There is a continued move, within our society, towards supporting children and young people through multi-agency service delivery, and this is reflected in recent government documentation (DfE, 2011). Models of multi-agency working and factors for facilitating these are, however, diverse. The effectiveness of multi-agency services for specific groups of young people, i.e. those reported to be experiencing BESD, is still not clear, and there is no one model of multi-agency working that is consistently acknowledged to be the most valuable.

The aims of this research were to undertake a mixed methodology evaluation of a Service established to support young people with BESD, and to explore the impacts of multi-agency working.

Paper one consists of an evaluation of the service that is currently provided; looking specifically at what is offered, and what the outcomes are for service users, their families and the local authority. There is also a consideration of whether the Service

differs from, and/or is additional to, other provisions acknowledged as supporting young people with BESD, as documented in relevant literature. Participants include ten young people, six caregivers and ten members of Service staff. Data is collected through questionnaires with young people and their caregivers; interviews with staff; completion of the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ); and a review of records on the CareFirst system and young people's files.

The results from Paper one indicate multi-agency, holistic (meeting a range of psychological, social and biological needs) services help to create positive outcomes for young people recognised as experiencing BESD. These include reductions in emotional, social and mental health difficulties; as well as young person and caregiver satisfaction with services. A 'model of service delivery', reflecting the findings of this research, is proposed.

Paper two looks at the experiences of staff in relation to the multi-agency setting they work in. This includes an exploration of staff perceptions of multi-agency working; the factors that facilitate multi-agency working; and the benefits experienced for service users and staff. Ten members of staff participated and data is collected through semi-structured interviews, and a questionnaire identifying facilitating factors for multi-agency working (Watson, 2006). The semi-structured interviews are analysed using thematic analysis.

The results from Paper two indicate a number of key factors for facilitating multi-agency working, which are reflective of previous literature. Benefits of multi-agency working are identified, including holistic assessment and support; increased

opportunities for multi-professional problem solving; and personal development.. Difficulties relating to professional identity and communication are explored; and a consideration of how to minimise these difficulties is made.

Government policy is moving further towards delivering multi-agency services nationwide (DfES, 2011), and it is acknowledged throughout the research that multi-agency working appears to bring benefits for services, service providers and service users. There is a need, however, to identify how a continued development in multi-agency services will occur when there are a growing number of local authority budgetary cuts, and a growth in traded and privatised services (Rowland, 2002).

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people:

My sincere thanks are due to my supervisors Dr. Tim Maxwell and Dr. Karen Harris, for their continued support, reassurance, proof reading and guidance.

I am also grateful to the young people, caregivers and staff who participated with the research; and to the Midlands Local Authority who supported the work undertaken in the study.

My special gratitude is due to my husband, Thomas Wilkinson, and my parents, Geoff and Elaine Sallis. Without their unwavering support, encouragement during times of despair and constant belief in my abilities, it would have been impossible for me to complete this work.

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