

A voluntary sector partnership project supporting families

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Overview

- Family Welfare Association's Building Bridges model
- Islington Children's Support Service
- Working with children aged 5-13 and their families
- A parent's perspective

Building Bridges model

- Developed to support families affected by enduring parental mental health problems, also used effectively with families where adults have other complex needs.
- Tailored support for children and their parents/carers in the family home, at flexible times (including early mornings, bedtimes, weekends).
- Focuses on family relationships.
- Bridges adults and children's services; co-ordinating support for all members of the family and building parents relationships with other agencies.
- Trained Family Support Workers recruited from the local community with relevant language skills

Building Bridges Independent evaluation

- Evaluation questionnaires for parents and children at beginning and end of work and 6 months +.
- 53% of parents had clinically significant problems on referral, which fell to 31% at close of work. Children's depression (under-11's) and self esteem (over-11's) shown to improve. Reductions in numbers of children on child protection register and of adults on Care Programme Approach

Building Bridges Independent evaluation (cont'd)

- Parents perceived Building Bridges positively and as accessible and non-stigmatising.
- Parents valued the relationship with the Family Support Worker - qualitatively different from that with other services.
- Also said it helped their children to better understand their illness/other difficulties, and helped them to improve relationships with other agencies.

Islington Children's Support Service

- Child-centred service for 5-13 year olds, working with whole family using Building Bridges model. Parents/carers with complex needs – some more enduring than others.
- Tailored support based on CAF assessment which identifies clear and measurable outcomes, including input by family members and other agencies.
- Flexibility of service enhanced by range of access points including quick appointments, parent led activities, group-work, individual work with children, counselling,

Islington Children's Support Service (cont'd)

- Key to model is ethos of valuing the work of parents and carers, believing that families want the best for their children and working to understand and respect the context they are coming from.
- This is communicated by the relationships we build – little things contribute to this eg the friendliness of our administrator/receptionist, as well as bigger things – staff who speak the same language (Turkish, Somali and Sylheti-speaking Family Support Workers), ability to give clear advice about behaviour.

Our learning about working with families with 5-13 year olds :

- Parents and carers are even more tired. Physical and practical demands are still very high, but also children are pushing to be more independent. Can be more feelings of wanting to give up/literally giving up some aspects of the job.
- Need for nurturing and to be given practical opportunities to rebuild close relationships with their children, chance to have fun with them.
- Parents and carers feel under more scrutiny and more publicly not good enough. Children's more challenging attributes/behaviour may be more entrenched and more public (eg at school, with friends and family)

Our learning about working with families with 5-13 year olds (cont'd):

- Need for valuing and support to build good relationships with other agencies, and other people. Input which increases self-esteem.
- Children are challenging boundaries strongly and are affected by peer pressure. They are also physically harder to manage, including physical violence.
- Need for clear information and consistent back-up to maintain boundaries.
- Sibling rivalry is significant.
- Parents and carers need extra practical help, pairs of hands if possible (including the confidence to draw on family and friends), as well as clear advice.

- **These challenges are great and can seem insurmountable when families are dealing with many other pressures.**
- **Small amounts of support (as little as one conversation which acknowledges the difficulties and notices the strengths in the family) can make a difference.**

What parents want and need

- **Respect**
- **Friendliness**
- **Acknowledgement**
- **Acceptance of “this is where I am at”**
- **Encouragement**
- **Practical help**
- **Advice**

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