

Crescendo: Small Changes TIDieR

Name of Project or Intervention

Change Crescendo project

Why?

We have heard from social workers and leaders across many local authorities that the current system is not enabling them to do their best work with children and families:

- Social workers are prevented from spending enough time building relationships with children and families because of paperwork and processes.
- A command and control culture dominates, generating excessive bureaucracy and leading to a disempowerment of practitioners to make change.
- Layers of management accountability are prioritised over accountability to children and families

This is backed up by research; BASW found that social workers only spend ~20% of their time with children and families. ~80% is spent on paperwork and navigating bureaucracy. (BASW, 2020). Social Work England's recent research found that 77% of practitioners said they felt they could not help people as much as they wanted to, with 56% saying a focus on targets rather than resolving issues for people was a cause of job-related stress.

The system as it stands does not enable social workers to thrive. This is contributing to the sector's retention challenges; in the Department for Education's longitudinal study, the most cited main reason for leaving the profession was local authority culture; with 28% of practitioners surveyed citing the amount of paperwork being a reason and 20% saying it was because they could not make the best use of their skills and experience.

Yet we know that effective social work requires relationships built on trust, persistence, dedication and time - time with the child and family in their living rooms, in parks and communities, not behind a computer screen or navigating internal bureaucracy. The final report on Round 2 of the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme (September 2020) concludes the most effective practice has the following characteristics:

- Relationship-based: building consistent, trusting relationships and providing time for this
- Strengths-based: bolstering and leveraging strengths and resources to identify solutions and working together to progress towards positive outcomes
- Holistic: providing multi-faceted support to address multiple needs and issues in a coherent, joined-up way.

Our approach:

We want to work with social workers to design a way to deliver the service that is fundamentally enabling; that enables them to prioritise relationships and spend more time with children and families. Our approach is very much based on the principle that those closest to the work are well placed to identify solutions to improve the day to day work.

We would, over a period of 15-18 months, work with 2 teams of social workers to:

1) Make the small changes these social workers see day to day that could make a big difference to their work with children and families. Social workers hold the keys to unlock real change. They see things - both big and small - every day that could be changed that could make a significant difference to the amount of time they can spend with children and families, and that would enable them to do better work. We want to support them in first making the small changes that could unlock potential now.

2) Build on these small changes to design and implement a better, more enabling way of working that works better for children and families. This would involve co-designing, implementing and testing a blueprint for a different way of working; a system that would allow more time to be spent with children and families than currently, and that would enable social workers to do their best work.

Who with?

We want to work with 2 teams of social workers in statutory teams within one LA. These teams will be identified by the PSW and leadership team in the LA. We can work with 1-2 LAs simultaneously. So long as we are working with statutory social work teams in 1 of these Local Authorities, we are open to working with a non-statutory service with the other.

What?

We want to work with two teams of social workers in one local authority to do two things:

- 1) Firstly, unlock the potential of social workers to do their best work now, through enabling them to make the small changes they see day to day that could make a big difference to children and families. Small changes are those within the local authority's scope of influence, that could change now without any changes to national regulation or legislation, such as streamlining processes or making changes to how the duty system works.
- 2) Secondly, we will build on those small changes and learnings thus far in the process to co-design a different way of working for those two teams. This will involve designing and implementing a blueprint for structural change, that will allow more time to be spent with children and families, thus enabling social workers to do their best work directly with service users.

Attached is our five stage approach. The annex also provides more information on exactly what we mean by small changes in the first stage and the work we have done so far.

Who by?

Our team is made up of Michaela Berry, Service Manager in the Midlands, Ryan Wise, Practice Tutor at Frontline and Katie Rose, Programme Director at the Centre for Public Impact (CPI) - a UK charity.

We have also created a steering group of 12 fellows to act as critical friends for the project. We could also bring in fellows from the steering group as advisors to help with supporting the social workers through small changes and developing a different approach.

The core team have worked together now for over 18 months, meeting when working on the Blueprint for Children's Social Care, and all bring different experience to the team:

Michaela brings experience as a Practice Supervisor for 8 years (and as a SW for 11), and her experience creating Small Changes within her previous local authority.

Ryan brings experience as a social worker of 6 years and now at Frontline as a Practice Tutor, working with social workers day to day. He has also worked at Social Care Institute for Excellence helping local authorities make service changes and was one of the social workers who helped set up What Works for Children's Social Care.

Katie brings experience running teams delivering large programmes with local authorities at Centre for Public Impact, as well as experience in facilitating practitioners to design blueprints/test and learn approaches

We will also work with on the ground Frontline fellows who can support with design and implementation in the local authority. Ryan will be the key contact for the fellows.

How?

Our mode of delivery would be in-person, by phone and via virtual support throughout the five stages of the project. This would be dependent on leaders and teams' needs and preferences. We have funded up to 1 day of both Katie and Ryan's time and half a day of Michaela's time per week for 18 months.

Michaela would provide: coaching support to social worker teams in making small changes and in practice.

Ryan would provide: leadership of the local fellow, key LA and Frontline contact and support to social workers who are in the teams.

Katie would provide: facilitation support throughout all workshops and the five phases, project management support.

Where?

We have warm leads in Wandsworth and in Tower Hamlets, and potentially in Southampton. We would draft a contract with the partner Local Authority covering our access to the relevant teams, complying with data regulation and any issues around insurance and liability.

When, and how much?

We are looking to start September 2021 for around 18 months. We will likely be working with the teams for at least a few hours with one member of the team each week.

Tailoring?

We will work with the two teams of social workers, and the senior leadership team in the LA/s to ensure that the needs of service users are at the heart, and specific to the local community. This is why the co-design aspect of the model is so important - the changes we identify and implement will need to be appropriate for both the social workers and children and families.

Please also see the attachment for changes that could be made during COVID

Monitoring?

The two desired outcomes of this project are:

- 1) To enable two teams of social workers to make the small changes that can be made now and can make a big difference to the amount of time they are able to spend building relationships with children and families.
- 2) To facilitate the development, implementation and testing of a different approach for delivering the service for these two teams within a local authority context, that builds on

these small changes and creates a more enabling structure for social workers, that is designed by them.

The key metrics for the success of our project are outlined below, alongside how we would measure progress against these:

- Social workers in these two teams from the local authority are involved in the co-production process and feel collective ownership over the small changes and the developed 'test and learn' approach

How would we know? Qualitative surveys with the two teams every 2 weeks throughout the project

- Small changes are made by social workers in these two teams; changes which help reduce the barriers to spending time with children and families and building relationships.

How would we know? 10 small changes are designed and implemented by the two teams of social workers over 8 weeks in phase 2.

- The different approach to service delivery for these two teams is workable for the local context.

How would we know? The local co-designed blueprint is implemented timely by the two teams of social workers, with measurement mechanisms in place to track progress

- Senior Management are onboard with the developed approach and committed to making it work in the local context.

How would we know? Monthly review meetings with senior leaders throughout the project.

- Social workers in the two teams working in the new approach report:
 - 1) An increase in the amount of time they are able to spend building meaningful relationships with children and families. We could use qualitative surveys with both social workers and children and families before the project starts and after phase 2 and ongoing through phase 4.
 - 2) A reduction in the barriers to supporting children and families to the best of their ability. Here we could use qualitative surveys with social workers before the project starts and after phase 2 and ongoing through phase 4.

- Children and families whose social workers are working in this new way have a better experience of the social care service and feel that their needs are better met

How would we know? Qualitative surveys with children and families before the project starts and after phase 2 and ongoing through phase 4.

Our aim is to collect continual data on, and have a dialogue around, these metrics to inform practice and improvement in situ. To ensure this happens we will:

- Review progress every month against our desired outcomes and key metrics as an internal team, and with the two teams of social workers we are working with.
- Have a monthly review meeting with senior leaders to ensure their needs are being met throughout this project.
- Record the entire journey of small changes and development and implementation of the test and learn to ensure our methodology has been captured.

Specific recorded outputs of this project are:

- 1) Insights into the challenges and opportunities within the local authority, identified by social workers. This would be captured in a written document, delivered after phase 3 to the LA.
- 2) Changes to processes and structures are made by social workers from the beginning of the project and throughout the 18 months. These would be documented throughout phases 2 - 4 of this project in an ongoing record of this project.
- 3) A clearly articulated, co-created, local blueprint for a different way of working for the two teams of social workers that hopes to address a selection of these challenges and opportunities, that can be tested and continually adapted based on learning. This would be in the form of a written document, delivered after phase 3.
- 4) The implementation of this blueprint in the local authority, with continual optimisation of the approach. This would be in the form of a written document, delivered after phase 3.
- 5) A methodology of how to create small changes and a test and learn approach that another local authority could use to re-design and improve their own services and outcomes for children and families. This would be in the form of a case study that would be finalised by the end of phase 4.