

What Works Centre for Children's Social Care

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It's now been three weeks since I started as Executive Director here at the What Works Centre, and things have been a whirlwind so far - meeting with our family and practitioner panels, with our advisory council, and really getting to grips with all the work the centre has produced so far. As I mentioned in my first blog, we're announcing a range of new research programmes that are covered in the items below.

We've also had the first few new members of our team start up, including our research team, our Head of Programmes, and our Operations Director. I'm looking forward to announcing our new Head of Practice in the next few weeks.

2019 is a big year for the Centre - we have to really make ourselves as useful as we possibly can to the profession, and to start driving the generation and translation of evidence to help social workers, children and families. There's a lot to do, but we're excited about getting started!

Michael

Read Michael's latest blog and meet the team.

Practitioners to lead movement for evidence-based practice

On the 30th of January, over 100 practitioners came together in Birmingham to brainstorm establishing a movement for encouraging the use of evidence throughout children's social work. The full-day event saw practitioners debating what is evidence and why it matters. At the event, the Centre launched its new Evidence Store, more of which below. The day gave attendees the chance to look at what the evidence available in the new store says about children's social care practice today. The emphasis was very much on practitioners leading the discussion and deciding the best way to take the movement forward.

The day provided lots of networking opportunities, as well as an opportunity to hear about how Schwartz Rounds, regularly used in healthcare, might benefit social workers too.

Our Executive Director attended the event:

“It’s been great to feel the energy in the room and to speak to social workers about evidence. We’ve got to keep iterating and improving, but it’s great to be at the beginning of this movement.”



Read Stephen Rice’s blog on why the Centre wants to support the sector to become more engaged in evidence based practice and we look forward to sharing more details from the event with you in the coming weeks.

Evidence Store launches

The event in Birmingham also saw the launch of the Centre's Evidence Store. The store aims to provide professionals with accessible summaries of how effective interventions are - and how strong the evidence is supporting those effects.

The store launched with 11 summaries on a range of interventions and practice areas, including Foster and Kinship Care Support, Family Drug and Alcohol Courts, Sexual Abuse Recovery, Prevention of Child Mental Illness, Solution-focused Brief Therapy, Kinship Care, Intensive Family Preservation, and Mellow Parenting programmes. More resources are already in the pipeline and will become available in the coming months.

The 11 reviews have been conducted by the Centre's research partner, CASCADE. Each review pulls together all the studies available on each intervention, globally and in the UK, to make sure we provide the fullest and most accurate picture of the evidence.

Louise Bazalgette who led the development of the Evidence Store said: "We hope this evidence store will be really useful to help busy children's social care professionals design their services. We're very grateful to everyone from Coventry and West Sussex and our practitioner panel who gave such honest and constructive feedback on how we could ensure it was relevant, clear and easy to use. We're really looking forward to launching the evidence store and starting a wider conversation about what this evidence means for social workers."

Change Project Partner announcement

In January, we announced the six local authorities who will be working with the Centre on our Change Projects.

Following applications from more than a third of local authorities in England to our call, Lambeth Borough Council, Southampton City Council, and Stockport Borough Council will be piloting schemes to place social workers in schools. Darlington Borough Council, Hillingdon Borough Council, and Wigan Council will be working on empowering social workers to take decisions over budgets.

Councilor Jennifer Brathwaite, Deputy Leader of Lambeth Council and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People said: "We are looking forward to working with the What Works Centre and Cardiff University in maximising the effectiveness of placing social workers in our schools. We believe this opportunity will provide real insight into targeted, locality-based provision and help ensure this early intervention really delivers positive outcomes for our most vulnerable children and families."

Councilor Jenny Bullen, Cabinet Member for children and young people at Wigan Council said: "We are delighted to have been successful in our bid to be involved with the What Works Programme. Having budget-holding social workers who can quickly purchase resources and services for families is a new and exciting way of working. We hope that it will make a huge difference in the success of our plans to help more children remain safely at home with their families when they need it most. We are also looking forward to sharing our learning with others."

Two projects to look at social worker wellbeing

In the last month, the Centre has launched two projects to look at how we can best support the wellbeing of social workers.

In December, we asked for expressions of interest from prospective partners to develop research studies in collaboration with academic researchers from the Harvard Business School, University College London and beyond, to understand how to support and increase the health, happiness and productivity of social workers in England. We received a strong interest in this work. Shibeal O'Flahery, who has been coordinating the applications so far said:

"We are delighted to see the outstanding quality and quantity of applications that have come in from organisations across the UK for this exciting new research programme. Over the coming months, our research team will co-design behavioural interventions improving the health and happiness of social workers, with this design phase being directly influenced by the guidance and experience of our prospective partners."

On 28 January we also launched a new call to see if Schwartz Rounds, widely used in healthcare settings, can support the well-being of social workers and others in children's services.

Schwartz Rounds offer a way of bringing people together, to share stories about their work and about themselves, and to listen to others doing the same. Schwartz Rounds, unlike many supervision sessions or other social care meetings, are not used for making decisions, revising care plans or setting goals. They offer, instead, a third space, a place for a different kind of discussion.

The research will be a collaboration with the Point of Care foundation. Leading the project, Dr David Wilkins said: "We want to know whether similar results might be found in children's social care. We want to see if Schwartz Rounds can help social workers feel more supported in their jobs, allowing time and space to think and reflect."

Centre to help uncover what works for children in need in schools

The department for education's CIN Evidence Review, published in December, highlighted the shortage of evidence as to what works for Children in Need in education. At the same time, the centre announced a collaboration with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), the What Works Centre for Education to re-analyse previous EEF-commissioned trials to identify specific insights for children who have cleared a statutory threshold in the children's social care system - something which we hope will help to rocket propel the evidence in this important area.