

What Works Centre for Children's Social Care

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First birthday edition!

The initiative to establish a What Works Centre for Children's Social Care was first announced at the National Children and Adults Services Conference (NCASC) in October last year and commenced shortly thereafter. To mark the occasion, we are delighted to be publishing the Centre's first research reports from CASCADE, the Centre's official research partner. We are also running two events at this year's NCASC and will be demonstrating a prototype 'Evidence Store'. The Evidence Store – the first of a series of tools and services that the Centre is developing to support practitioners and practice leaders to build evidence-informed organisations – is a repository for practical guidance as to 'what works' in a wide range of areas of practice. Meanwhile, we received over sixty applications – from local authorities from across the country – to deliver 'change projects' aimed at moving services closer to children and families. We are busy assessing some high-quality applications.

Finally, and in a very timely development, we are delighted to welcome Michael Sanders as the Centre's first Executive Director. Michael will be responsible for developing the Centre's long-term strategy, building its team and acting as the Centre's principal ambassador. Michael brings a wealth of experience in public service research and design. Currently, Michael is Chief Scientist and Director of Research, Evaluation and Social Capital at the Behavioural Insights Team where his team design randomised controlled trials – the 'gold standard' in what works methods. Whilst in that post, Michael's team has conducted extensive work in children's social care, including evaluations of innovation projects, and research into the use of machine learning to help support social worker decision making. Michael will take up post in mid-January 2019.

What Works Centre publishes first research reports

We are delighted to be publishing the first research reports from CASCADE, the Centre's official research partner.

The first, a scoping review - supplemented by a national data report, survey and interviews of local practice leaders - explores what research evidence exists about what works in our priority thematic area - safely reducing the number of children and young people in care. This is the first stage of reviewing the evidence in a complex field. Over 300 studies were identified, classified for the primary outcome, level and type of intervention, and type of evidence. For each of the intervention types we will now synthesise the evidence we have identified and report on what we find - consulting with stakeholders to inform their interpretation of the evidence and determine the implications for social care practice.

The second is a mixed methods systematic review of Signs of Safety's effectiveness as a system intervention for reducing the need for children to be in care. The review considers whether, how, for whom and under what conditions Signs of Safety works to safely reduce the number of children entering and re-entering care, and/or to increase the number of children re-unified with their families. The review includes a summary for practitioners and an implementation summary for managers, and whilst it finds no evidence that Signs of Safety does not work, nor does it find compelling evidence that it does. Our first recommendation is therefore that the evidence base for Signs of Safety needs developing.

We will follow-up this work with our own review of Signs of Safety in the New Year, starting with a clear and practicable specification of what high-quality SoS looks like, in order to enable evaluations of the impact of high-quality implementation to take place.

Join us at NCASC as we present highlights from the initiative's first year

Today (Wednesday 14th) at 17.45 in Charter Room 4, the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care team, including Founding Chair Sir Alan Wood, will be sharing updates on key projects in an informal session that will feature panel presentations and a Q&A for you to put your questions to the centre. The event will include a demonstration of the Centre's new online 'evidence store' which will aim to make research about what works in children's social care more accessible.

We will also be sharing early insights from our reviews and research including emerging evidence on how to safely reduce the need for children and young people to be in care. We'll also be reflecting on how we have been engaging with the sector and our work with the 21 local partners throughout England to inform the development of the centre.

The presentations and Q&A will be followed by refreshments and the opportunity to meet the Centre's team.

Tomorrow (Thursday 15th) at 13.30 in the main Auditorium, we will be hosting a sub-plenary session focusing on how to keep children out of care. This event, followed by the keynote speech by the Minister of State for Children and Families, will feature a panel discussion with representatives from across children's social care including directors of children's services, family representatives, our children and young people's panel and our research partner on the key findings from an initial scoping review to identify existing evidence in this fundamental

area. The event will consist mostly of a Q&A discussion so

bring your questions for what an interesting and thought-provoking debate should be. Please keep an eye on www.whatworks-csc.org.uk and [@WhatWorksCSC](https://twitter.com/WhatWorksCSC) for ongoing information about both events, and do please come and say hello to the Centre's Development team in the exhibition hall at stand H28.

Demonstration of prototype ‘Evidence Store’

The ‘Evidence Store’ – the full version of which will be published in the New Year – is an accessible repository for syntheses of existing evidence and associated practice guides in a range of practice areas, including Signs of Safety, Attachment Security Interventions, Solution-focused Family Therapy, Kinship Care, Intensive Family Preservation, and Mellow Parenting Programmes. The range of resources available through this tool will grow as the Centre covers more and more ground - watch this space!

Change projects

We invited local authorities and children’s services trusts to be partners in evaluating transformative change projects in children’s social care. This work will focus on moving services closer to children and families, and funding is available for local authorities and children’s services trusts to work with the Centre to test two initial projects.

The first will explore social workers being based in schools, and the other will look at empowering social workers to reduce the need for care by devolving budgets to social workers to directly support families. This focus on supporting children and families in a different and more direct way emerged from a comprehensive process of engaging with the social care sector and reviewing existing evidence. Applicants are being sought from local authorities or children’s services trusts – either bidding on their own or in collaboration with third sector organisations – and with the deadline now closed we are busy assessing some very high-quality applications. For more information please monitor the Centre’s website or email wwccsc@nesta.org.uk.

Co-designing the future Centre

The first phase of work ‘prototyping’ tools and services to support evidence-informed practice is ending. The essence of the approach we have taken in prototyping these tools and services is to test, iterate and learn with our Pioneer local authorities. We have learned a huge amount about how evidence fits into the task of social work leadership and management, and how effective the approaches we are exploring might be in supporting the development of evidence-minded organisations. For more detail on the individual prototypes please visit our website. We are now busy making plans for the next phase, during which we will take combinations of the most promising prototypes to new local authorities for the next stage in their iterative development. Watch this space!