Developing reflective practice to meet organisational needs in service restructuring from the South East London Social Work Reform group

Case studies and resources to illustrate the implementation of continuing professional development in social work

This case study illustrates how workforce development initiatives are designed to meet the organisational needs identified in the restructuring of services. A whole system event at the end of the period ensures that the learning from the programmes is fed back into organisational development planning. The whole project is measuring the impact of these programmes in practice using a benefits realisation model. The CPD approach demonstrates partnership working across a number of employers and a university. Existing in-house courses are redeveloped with input from the university and optional academic accreditation is made available to participants in one subject area. The emphasis throughout is on the development of reflective practice.

Local context

The South East London Social Work Reform Group comprises the London boroughs of Lewisham, Bexley, Bromley, and the Royal Borough of Greenwich with Goldsmiths, Greenwich and South Bank universities. We also have close links with the boroughs of Lambeth and Greenwich.

The CPD project was initiated by staff from Lewisham and Goldsmiths, University of London, on behalf of the partnership. SE London partner agencies were already in the process of discussing a joint model for CPD activities and programmes. The project is enabling us to pilot new courses and CPD processes, methods and resources that can inform future CPD development across the region.

Organisational development

The introduction of the project coincided with a major restructuring of adults' services within Lewisham towards a 'cluster' model that aims to bring together different health and social care services around neighbourhood GP practices. There was awareness of the social work practice pilots and an interest in what a community development approach might add to these plans.

Learning from the adults' social work practice pilots has been integrated into the curriculum of the courses in the programme.

From the outset, senior managers have championed the scheme, creating the potential for the project to influence how future services are organised. Project development has included regular project briefings to the senior management team, meetings between staff from Goldsmiths and learning and development staff and senior managers, and contact with staff in Sutton.

Each course on the programme aims to:

- put staff in touch with current issues and debates by exploring different perspectives and approaches

- enable exploration of models of practice that could free up frontline workers to provide better services
- provide CPD that can be integrated directly into practice
- encourage reflection, critical analysis, research and investigation
- promote social work that safeguards people being supported and promotes social justice.

Three strands were developed to meet the organisational development needs of the major restructure. The partnership has produced a CPD programme handbook that details the approach, delivery and assessment of these areas and how these can fit within a wider programme that includes other development activities based on the PCF.

The Social work practice and interpersonal skills in community empowerment strand is pitched at the social worker level. Participants on this programme are looking at how community empowerment can enhance their practice skills.

Participants on the strand for experienced social workers – Social work practice and community empowerment – are encouraged to develop their skills in providing reflective supervision to social workers. Development is through training and by undertaking a self-identified project that develops strategies to integrate community empowerment approaches into service delivery plans.

The Adult safeguarding, alerts and investigations course is targeted at the 'social worker' level in the PCF and aims to support them to develop confidence in making judgements in adult safeguarding investigations. Participants are helped to demonstrate their capacity to work more independently in these situations of heightened complexity and risk.

Impact assessment

A benefits realisation model was used to determine the desired impacts of the project for stakeholders. Feedback from, and involvement of, people being supported and carers is integral to the project. For social workers and managers, the project aims to:

- enhance critical reflection and skills in reflective supervision
- develop models of linking CPD to the PCF
- support learning about community-based approaches to social work practice
- enhance the quality of adults' safeguarding practice.

The programme is designed to support staff involvement in change management across the organisations they work in.

Self-assessment is a key component of each course in the programme. We have developed questionnaires for each course to give a baseline measurement of participants' skills, knowledge and confidence. The intention is that candidates on the courses will repeat this after the programme has finished, to ascertain whether the programme has had an impact on their practice. Impact will also be assessed through each participant building a portfolio of evidence including feedback from people they have supported, carers and other professionals, as well as from direct observation and critical reflection.

We have developed a range of resources to facilitate participants in building evidence of their capability in the nine domains of the PCF. Each participant will receive feedback about their portfolio from staff involved in delivering the programme. This will be valuable to participants in appraisal processes and also in providing evidence of the impact of CPD activities for their continued HCPC registration. Further detail of how this has been achieved can be found in the course handbook for 'Social Work practice and interpersonal skills in community empowerment'.

A one-day event was held with key stakeholders, including people being supported and carers, community partners, social workers and managers, to disseminate and showcase learning from the project. This event enabled participants to build local connections, enhance awareness of local resources and identify practical ways in which we can sustain our learning from the project both as individuals and within our organisations.

Continuing professional development (CPD) approach

The approach to delivering these three courses demonstrates good partnership working between employers and universities. Existing in-house courses have been redeveloped with input from one of the universities, and the adult safeguarding course additionally offers academic accreditation. The partnership is working towards one centrally delivered training programme.

Teaching and learning activities involve one-to-one sessions, group learning, direct teaching on relevant topics, applied learning in practice and self- directed study. All teaching and learning activities are linked to the participants' practice experiences and offer opportunities for critical reflection.

Some participants on the 'Adult safeguarding, alerts and investigations' course will also have the opportunity to enrol on a 30-credit Masters level academic course that is being accredited by Goldsmiths. This course, which is also being piloted in North West London, involves the production of a critical evaluation of practice, with support from academic staff. The intention is to examine whether academic accreditation of learning from practice based CPD activities through the production of a critical evaluation of practice with support from academic staff is also effective in SE London.

We will have the opportunity to evaluate what, if any, additional value academic accreditation may offer by comparing outcomes between those who undertake the practice assessment only and those who also undertake the academic assessment. The awarding of academic credits may enhance the portability of the course.

Participants will join a group supervision session to look at an aspect of their safeguarding practice. This will be followed by an individual reflective supervision session with the course coordinator.

Materials developed by Skills for Care for the ASYE have been adapted for the assessment materials for the programme. All participants will be providing evidence in relation to the nine domains of the PCF.

The different levels of the PCF have helped us in the design of the curriculum and the practice tasks that participants will be undertaking.

For participants on the 'Social work practice and community empowerment' course for experienced social workers—a key point of learning is understanding that clearer models for intervention need to be developed to enable community work approaches to successfully free up social workers.

We met this objective by offering participants the opportunity to undertake a community profile and to consider how this could help in planning integrated services. More depth was needed but a talk from Jill Manthorpe (Kings College Social Work Research Unit) helped managers consider different organisational models that are emerging from the social work pilots. The course provided opportunities to debate the future of social work. A learning outcome for us as organisers is better understanding that managers need training in health and social care integration models that expressly build or include social work practice, such as those being developed by the Skills for Care Workforce Innovation Unit.

Participants in 'Social work practice and interpersonal skills in community empowerment' have attended training on how to use reflective practice and have completed a self-evaluation based on the PCF. Each participant will have the opportunity to have a one-to-one reflective supervision session with a core member of the programme staff. A session based on 'coordinated management of meaning' (CMM) helped social workers revisit and reflect on their communication skills. The group also undertook to produce a community profile related to an aspect of their work. Two participants commented that they welcomed a community work approach, but said that they needed techniques that would help them work with disempowered people who experienced change as 'cuts' and who therefore resisted self-help approaches.

We recognise that some participants may use their learning from the programme to consolidate their practice and produce evidence at the level of the PCF the programme is designed for.

However, others may also use the programme to enable them to move into the next PCF level. Our assessment approaches and methods will also enable participants for provide evidence for this. At present the only course that is being validated for academic credit is 'Adult safeguarding, alerts, and investigations.'

Each programme offers an additional specialised one-day training session and the programme concludes with the stakeholder event described above.