

Evaluation of CPD for social workers to promote reflection and measure impact on practice and those in need of care and support

Case study and resources to illustrate the impact of continuing professional development in social work.

Recent economic struggles have made value for money and measuring impact a key priority for adult social care employers. Further to the need to measure the impact of CPD on social worker practice to provide high quality, relevant CPD, the workforce development team of Southend on Sea borough council were keen to ensure that there was confidence within the organisation that public funds were being used to provide high quality, relevant and cost effective professional development to this key area of the workforce. They were also keen to measure the impact of CPD on social work practice by supporting social workers in their roles to provide the most appropriate service and improved outcomes for vulnerable children, families and adults within Southend.

Introduction

At the beginning of the process there were some clear objectives that the workforce team hoped to meet:

1. To encourage social workers to be more discerning about the development opportunities they undertake by introducing a process to align bookings, initial evaluation and evaluation after a period of reflection.
2. To establish stronger links between CPD and supervision, and to evidence reflection on CPD within some supervision sessions.
3. For team managers to be more engaged with the CPD process and make better links to CPD in performance management.
4. To capture additional data on which training and development to commission each year and to ensure providers, tutors and course content are fit for purpose.
5. To provide senior managers with rich data to make decisions on future commissioning of social work training, especially in light of financial constraints.

An ongoing cultural shift amongst social work staff has created the need to reflect on the impact of CPD on practice for the team and those in need of care and support. As a result there is increased awareness and accountability for the finite resources that are available to local government. Social workers have demonstrated through corporate engagement surveys, interviews with the workforce team and general feedback, that they value the CPD that is made available to them in Southend.

The data showed that both participants and line managers are seeing an impact on individual practice, teams and people in need of care and support as a consequence of training and development. The data on supervision from participants and line managers suggested that nearly 50% of all CPD is discussed in supervision. This is encouraging but is still an area for development.

The 2014-15 CPD programme has certainly been strengthened by feedback from social workers and their line managers, which has informed the offer that social work teams will receive in the coming year.

There are trends within the three month data which suggests areas for improvement in relation to objectives two and three. These include:

- Identifying development following training by line managers is much lower than the scores for impact, discussion in supervision and information sharing.

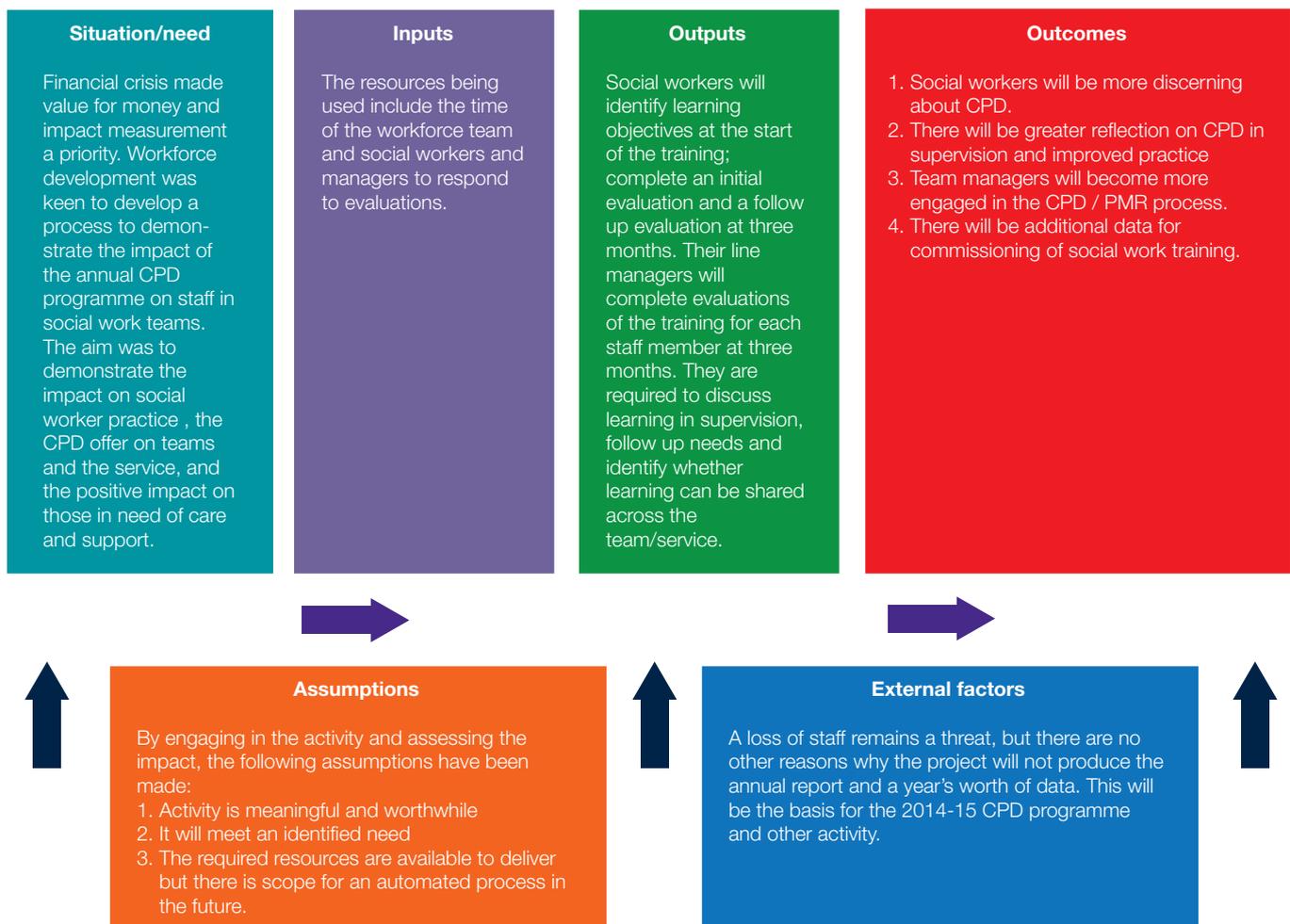
- Some comments from line managers suggest a lack of previous discussion between social workers and team managers about the CPD they choose to undertake.
- Development of social workers depends largely on the commitment of the team manager to CPD. Some team managers are engaging with the evaluation process by completing the forms but in a perfunctory way, while others are not engaging at all.

Measuring impact model

The Wisconsin (Logic) model was used in this impact evaluation as it provides a good way of measuring impact analysis of CPD in a structured way.

The project with Skills for Care made sense for Southend on Sea borough council as the evaluation work had already begun. Being part of the process allowed them to focus their work on a particular model, benefit from how others have approached impact analysis and share our good practice in Southend with others.

The model was adapted to fit with what they were already doing and it was adopted after the project had begun, rather than leading the project. It was largely used in its existing format which helped to structure the questioning and findings.



Methodology

Developments during the project

Clarifying the need to complete a profile whilst undertaking the ASYE as the academic module proved unhelpful. There was an opportunity to strengthen the importance of measuring the impact of CPD as part of this process, supporting NQSWs with the HCPC re-registration process, should they be audited.

As a consequence of this, and in conjunction with other work that was being considered for adult services, a task and finish group was established to create a professional development framework. This would pull together and measure the impact of CPD in relation to performance management, supervision, direct observation and HCPC re-registration – for all staff including social workers and those undertaking the ASYE.

This professional development framework was approved for use in May 2014.

The evaluation project had links to each of the six principles from [Developing social workers' practice: Core principles for employers providing a flexible CPD approach for social workers](#) which were strengthened by the professional development framework. This framework, in the form of a [workbook](#), acts as the employee's performance management process and evidence, making clear links to the PCF within supervision, observation and evaluation of CPD. It provides a work-based assessment process which is designed to be portable across teams, and even across employers, to underpin the principles of reflective practice and holistic assessment. This is a similar approach to the ASYE.

The workbook can be shared with others providing Southend Borough Council are acknowledged in any future use.

Baseline

The perceived benefits of integrating the PCF into social work practice mainly consist of clear expectations in regards to high standards of social worker practice. This is achieved by using a universal framework to facilitate CPD activity within the organisation.

The professional development model aims to help managers evaluate their staff during appraisals to identify key areas in professional development planning.

Summary

Findings

Initial evaluation of the CPD offered to social workers was overwhelmingly positive. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being excellent) both the tutors and materials to support training are judged to be very good or above. On average, just short of 97% of all 511 participants stated that their objectives on booking had been met. This suggests objective one is being met.

Data at three months is also extremely positive, with nearly 85% of participants and over 70% of line managers suggesting that they have seen an impact on the individual's practice, the team or service users as a consequence of the CPD undertaken.

Example responses from participants at three months:

- “This training influenced my way of thinking as I have to be more careful if there is Mental Health issues on parents as this affects their parenting ability. Procedures to contact specialised agencies were improved.”
- “It has given me a greater awareness of the impact on the child and has helped when parents seek to minimise the impact because the child was not directly involved.”
- “I have been able to apply some of the skills acquired whilst giving evidence in court. It has helped to improve my confidence and approach to cases which are in care proceedings. It has also helped me to improve my reports.”
- “I have been able to approach such families with more confidence. I have also been able to identify manipulative ways in which these families tend to function. I feel more equipped to challenge any uncertainties.”

Example responses from line managers at three months:

- “[Name’s] assessments are of a higher quality and the use of research to qualify her assessment and recommendations has given greater clarity.”
- “[Name] has been able to address many of the issues raised to ensure compliance with legal and court timescales. The impact on LAC has been to streamline the system; prevent delay and reduce duplication, to enable placement of children within their families at an earlier stage.”
- “Staff are better informed and able to access appropriate advice and support from legislation and attached relevant agencies to assist and inform our practice regarding Section 47 case work particularly. I have observed a clearer understanding and a direct positive impact upon the application of social work practice and ability to better inform families and care planning skills.”
- “[Name] has demonstrated a clearer ability through her practice to better assess potential areas of concern and to safeguard herself to others. Acknowledges a better understanding of what it means to be evasive and to be increasingly self-aware of such situations.”

Challenges

The main challenge was to get participants to respond to the requests at three months. With the support of senior managers, both for Southend’s process and in the work they are overseeing to introduce regular observations and improved reflective supervision, the responses have increased. It is anticipated that the introduction of the professional development framework will further improve the response rate as well as the quality of reflection on CPD available to the workforce strategy team.

Next steps

1. To implement the professional development framework and use of the [workbook](#) to align the impact of CPD with performance management, direct observations, supervision and HCPC re-registration.
2. To scope ways of automating the three month data collection and expand impact analysis across other CPD programmes.
3. Increased use of feedback for people in need of care and support, in the delivery and evaluation of CPD.

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