

Principles of Partnership Working
(parents and multi-agency)

Learner Support Handbook

Creating Meaningful Partnerships



Introduction



This information guide is designed to support the knowledge and understanding of the work residential care workers carry out in order to make effective contributions in supporting families of children and young people in residential childcare.

During your time working through this unit (22), you will gain an understanding of the impact on families when a child or young person is in residential childcare, including how and why impacts change over time and the impact of inter-generational issues that can exist in families where a child or young person is in residential childcare. You will also understand the principles of working with families.

This includes the principles of partnership working with families, attitudes and approaches that support positive relationships within families and the importance of having agreed roles and responsibilities for liaising with families.

You will be able to support families to maintain their relationship with their child, building relationships with families, encouraging them to maintain contact and sustain their relationship and monitor the involvement of family members in supporting their child's well-being and resilience. You will be able to work in partnership with families, informing them about changes, challenges and successes encountered in working with their child and encouraging families to share their own information about changes, challenges and successes they have encountered.

WHAT IS PARTNERSHIP WORKING?

A lot has been written about the theory of partnership working. However, translating theory into practice is **not always easy**. Partnerships can be formed between a number of individuals, agencies or organisations with a shared interest. There is usually an overarching purpose for partners to work together and a range of specific objectives.

Partnerships are often formed to address specific issues and may be short or long term. In order to achieve a co-ordinated service partners need to:

- **Communicate**
- **Co-ordinate**
- **Co-operate**

What are the benefits of partnership working? There is emerging evidence about the benefits for both service users and service providers of working in partnership with other services. A partnership approach founded on co-operation and collaboration between all relevant providers will have a number of benefits for service users.

These include:

- removal of barriers to progressing towards stabilisation / rehabilitation
- providing more consistent, co-ordinated and comprehensive care
- access to a range of training, education and employment opportunities

The benefits for service providers of partnership working include the ability to:

- develop a 'whole person' approach
- manage a broader range of services which address the individual's needs
- develop a better understanding of others' skills and develop a wider range of
- personal skills in dealing with clients
- develop a wider skill base for staff to meet more effectively the needs of
- individuals
- recognise and utilise the strengths and areas of expertise of all the partner
- agencies involved
- make the best use of available resources by managing care of more people in
- a coordinated
- and cost-effective way - including pooling resources

Key principles and ingredients of a successful partnership

There are a number of **key principles** of partnership working. These are:

- openness, trust and honesty between partners
- agreed shared goals and values
- regular communication between partners

There has been a lot of research undertaken to identify what makes a good partnership and what the barriers are to achieving effective partnership working. Some key documents are listed in the further resources section. Partnerships can work in different ways and there is no one model that can be considered to be the 'best'. There are, however, **a number of ingredients** which - if they are present - will facilitate successful partnership working:

- the aim of the partnership is agreed and understood by all the partners
- the partnership has clear, effective leadership
- the role of each partner is identified and clear to others in the partnership
- there is shared ownership of the partnership and the partners feel there is 'something in it for them'
- there are dedicated time and resources for the administration and operation of the partnership
- there is recognition of different organisational cultures within the partnership
- a supportive atmosphere exists within the partnership where suggestions, ideas and conflicts are addressed

The choice of partners is important. Partnerships are often formed from existing networks or where there is a history of collaborative work between potential partners. However, there are circumstances where it is important to invite **new partners** to the table.

Strategic partnerships should identify:

- the aims and objective of the partnership
- the range of agencies that could be engaged
- the commissioning and management arrangements
- arrangements for sharing information
- arrangements for multi-agency training to promote mutual understanding
- monitoring and evaluation arrangements for both the partnership and the service

Operational partnerships will commonly focus on more practical aspects and should identify:

- the aims and objective of the partnership
- common procedures
- protocols and systems for sharing information
- joint training opportunities
- arrangements for monitoring and evaluation

Barriers to effective partnership working

There are some potential difficulties for partners. Misunderstanding of the reasons for the partnership and a lack of commitment to the partnership can cause barriers. Other recognised barriers are:

- no clear boundary between partners' responsibilities
- reluctance to share information and data with other partners
- lack of time available to commit to the partnership, particularly in the early stages
- misconceptions or previous negative experiences of partnership working
- potential conflicts in philosophies of the partners
- lack of training among partners on substantive issues and partnership working

Why do we need to work in this partnership?

- What will the partnership deliver that we could not deliver on our own?
- Is it clear what our role is in the partnership?
- Do we know what the life expectancy is of the partnership?
- Are the aims and objectives of the partnership clear?

Partnerships with parents (looked after children)

The majority of families involved in child protection experience multiple chronic stressors, including poverty, marginality, family problems, housing instability and social isolation

Effective partnerships show how each of the partners explores how dialogue-based participation in a support group can provide an opportunity for parents with children in care to improve service development in general and attempts to answer the following research questions:

- What were the parents' motives for attending the group?
- How did they evaluate it?
- Did user participation provide the parents with power to influence service delivery, or was it just another empty ritual?

Findings described the parents' feelings of sadness, worry, lack of self-esteem, nervousness, emptiness, anger, bitterness, guilt, shame, isolation, but, for some, thankfulness and relief also (*Frame et al., 2006*).

We also know that some of these parents tend to place little focus on the pain and damage they may have inflicted on their child (*Holtan and Eriksen, 2006*). Many care settings, social workers and parents feel that empowerment strategies offer support and help to build better and stronger relationships.

Empowerment covers a vast landscape of meanings, interpretations, definitions and disciplines. Within the field of social work, these strategies emphasise the recognition of personal strength, and the importance of increasing individual and political power so that service users can make decisions effectively, act to improve their situation and maximise the quality of their lives and have a greater voice in the institutional setting. The empowerment process is often described in terms of a reduction in self-reproach and the development of self-confidence and group consciousness, as well as an increased sense of competency

Key Steps

1. Identify aims and objectives
2. Clarify roles and remits
3. Ensure partners are committed, willing and supported
4. Ensure partnership has resources
5. Establish structure and processes
6. Get working!
7. Review and evaluate