

# Gateshead Change for Children

Edition 4 Autumn 2007

'A change for children newsletter for all practitioners and managers working with children and young people'

## Maintaining the momentum

### *"turning the talk into action"*

This is the new style of the Change for Children news - as the pace of change speeds up we hope to get shorter newsletters out more often to keep everyone informed about the main developments.

In Gateshead, 2007 has seen us step up a gear in the implementation of our children's trust arrangements. As you know this means action and integration at four levels:

- **Inter-agency governance** - our Children and Young People's Partnership and Improve Wellbeing Board now head up the partnership arrangements for children and young people in Gateshead.
- **Integrated strategy** - our Children and Young People's Plan is in its second year and improvements are being successfully delivered against our 10 key priority outcomes. Our Improve Wellbeing Board will be responsible for the joint commissioning of services in response to our set priorities.

- **Integrated processes** - terms like Common Assessment, Team Around the Family and Lead Practitioner will become our common language and common culture in Gateshead for how we all work with children and young people to enable us to improve outcomes. This newsletter covers the views of some practitioners around how this really does work in improving outcomes.
- **Integrated front line delivery** - through my recent letter, the Road to Abilene, we outlined 5 themed reviews which will enable us to deliver a model for the integration of front line delivery across Gateshead - these reviews are answering the questions: "Where do we have gaps and duplications in our services, which services need to be delivered at a borough wide level and which can be delivered more locally through new area based arrangements. How do we make early intervention and prevention a reality for more children and young people and their families in Gateshead?".



Maggie Atkinson,  
Group Director  
Learning & Children,  
and Director of  
Children Services

## In this edition

- Maggie Atkinson, Director of Children's Services tells us how we will maintain the momentum around change for children.
  - Following their training, over 100 practitioners in Gateshead are acting as lead practitioners for children and young people. We ask practitioners about the benefits and challenges.
  - Solution finder service directory gets a facelift.
- ... And more updates about information sharing and integrated working training

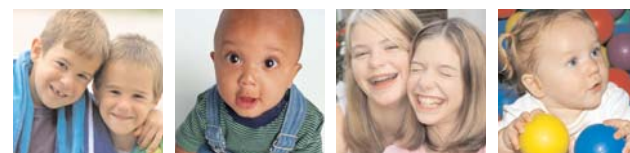
As you know during last year we were preoccupied with major inspections. This year we have begun to plan for the future and build on the excellent work of many services in Gateshead and the excellent work of many front line practitioners and others. Please read the examples that are included later in this newsletter. Next year in 2008 - 09 we need to move all this to a different level and move beyond individual pilots into how we all work more closely together in order to deliver those better outcomes for children and young people. This is called turning the talk into action.

Maggie Atkinson  
Director of Children's Services

Access resources and information and keep up to date with developments around change for children through our new website  
[www.gatesheadcyptrust.co.uk](http://www.gatesheadcyptrust.co.uk)

### Change for Children Programme

Gateshead Council, Civic Centre, Gateshead NE8 1HH.  
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e-mail: [change4children@gateshead.gov.uk](mailto:change4children@gateshead.gov.uk)



# The Common Assessment Framework and Lead Practitioner: Can it really make a difference?

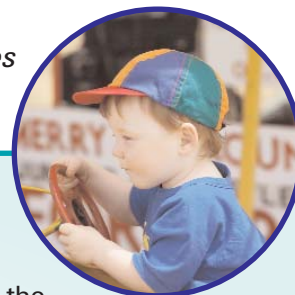
*The idea of using the common assessment framework, becoming a lead practitioner or co-ordinating a team around the family response raises different emotions in different people. Some practitioners are worried about work load, others are worried they don't have the skills and some are excited about the potential to make a difference and develop new skills.*

*We interviewed some practitioners who have been using the common processes to find out what it is really like...*

**Julie Stott** works in the Young Women's Outreach Project. She said that the first time she used a CAF assessment she was concerned about how the young woman would react. "I'm used to working in an informal way with young people and was concerned about whether using a form with them would put them off. I actually found that it helped me to go deeper with the young woman about the issues she was facing and helped me to engage with her. It also gave me a structure to talk about the positive aspects of her life which is important to balance the things that aren't going so well". Julie has now used CAF a number of times and is honest about the work involved. "It is more work, but it

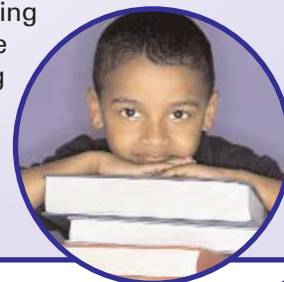
definitely gets easier the more you do it and you realise that you are doing more to support young women by looking at all their needs and putting together a plan to address them. It makes you work more closely with other

agencies which can avoid duplication and make sure you are all working to the same ends". Julie also uses the Early Intervention Fund which can be used to purchase services or goods to meet needs as part of a multi agency support plan. "I often use the Early Intervention Fund to respond to the immediate needs of young women such as basic furniture. I have found this helps me to engage young women more, to develop trust and ultimately to have a better working relationship with them". She has also found it improves the way she works with other agencies. "Developing the holistic support plan makes you work more effectively with other agencies". So does this improve outcomes for children and young people? Julie thinks yes. "It has definitely improved outcomes. The whole process is designed to make things easier and more effective for children and young people, and if done right, it really does work".



**Deb Quinn** is Parent Outreach Worker for Wardley Children's Centre and has completed 2 CAF assessments herself and used those completed by other practitioners. "I find that the CAF assessment is easy to follow and jargon free. It has really enabled me to build bonds with parents and help them to see their strengths as well as to identify their needs". Through the CAF process, Deb was able to engage with and put a package of support together for a mum who was isolated and disengaged. "She is now much more confident and is accessing services provided through the Children's Centre which she wouldn't have done before. The CAF assessment started it all off by enabling me to build a relationship with her." Deb is also acting as lead practitioner for a child with complex needs who has 14 other practitioners involved due to his disability. "Between us we've put together a Family Service Plan which looks at all the needs and we've combined a number of review processes to make it simpler for everyone. Its great for the parent because she has one point of contact.

I am enjoying being a lead practitioner and have been able to spot duplication in services being provided and prevent it from happening". Deb said she had some concerns about being a lead practitioner to start with. "I thought being a parent outreach worker, other professionals might not accept me in the role of lead practitioner but everyone is working well together and they know that my role is co-ordination, not taking over any specialist work". Deb has accessed the Early Intervention Fund for a variety of services and equipment and has found that even a little can go a long way. "I accessed £5 funding for one family to buy a small piece of safety equipment that helped reduce the parent's anxiety and keep the child safe. Being able to meet needs like this, and do something concrete, really helps to build relationships".



continued...



**Carol Smith** is a youth and community learning worker in Birtley and has been acting as a lead practitioner for 4 young people for around 6 months. "I've always been there for young people as part of my role, and worked in partnership with others, but I've found that being a lead practitioner differs in that information not normally shared between services/agencies is now more readily discussed and therefore working more closely with other agencies has given me and others a broader understanding of what's happening with the young person and their family". Carol organised a team around the family meeting with other practitioners who were involved and the young person and his mam, as a first step. "I was unsure at first how things would go, but I just asked people to share

information and suggest what they could do to help and we put it all down in a support plan so we knew what each other were doing. I remained as link for other practitioners and to keep the link going, meetings between the services and the young person and his mam are planned on a regular basis to keep everyone informed of developments and to be of support to the family". Carol said it wasn't all easy working in this way. "You do need more time to get things done, like being available and talking to other practitioners, but I've found that through this process we can give young people what they need to move on".

## Making information work for you in Gateshead

ContactPoint is coming. ContactPoint will provide a single point of access to information about a child or young person. Our latest estimate for implementation in Gateshead is from August 2008 onwards. As part of the count down to implementation we are busy identifying the issues we need to tackle to make this something that works effectively in Gateshead.

Uppermost in Gateshead is the quality and consistency of our existing records and the information they contain. A startling 69% children's services practitioners complained about the standard of the information in child records. Passport to Services ISA Trailblazer project ended in March 2007 with a comprehensive evaluation and research exercise. Practitioners across Gateshead completed questionnaires about information sharing and records and nearly three-quarters of those workers said that poor records regularly caused them frustrations and delays.

Local research shows that almost all errors in records happen when the information is first entered into a recording system. The rest of the errors happen because people don't keep the record up to date. Once a mistake is entered into a system it is very difficult to correct. Technology, unfortunately, is no match for the human brain. So errors tend to stay in the system and gradually build up.

In Gateshead, children's services are working hard to try to make real improvements to the quality and accuracy of the information we use and record. Simple things can make a big difference. Taking a little extra care to check the spelling of a name - even a common one - will take the record keeper 20 seconds but save an hour down the line.

### Good information tips

- Don't guess spellings of names or addresses, ask and check with the service user
- It's easy to mishear or make a slip when recording information so check dates of birth with the service user
- Make sure to follow the system's format for entering a dates, house numbers etc
- Make a thorough search of all records for a child before creating a new one, making a duplicate which will mean that information about one child is being recorded in two places



# Solution finder better than ever

solution finder, the online service directory for children, young people and families in Gateshead, is getting a face-lift this September.

- A new look homepage
- New dedicated pages for Children/Young People, Parents/Carers and Professionals/Practitioners with text, photos and links relevant to them
- Ticker tape style news scrolling across the homepage with latest solution finder news
- Transport information can now be added to service information
- More detailed information about charges to help user, practitioners, professionals, lead practitioners, budget holders and others make informed decision before opting for a service
- A new section where users can feedback what they think about the directory



Why not take a look at [www.solutionfinder.org.uk](http://www.solutionfinder.org.uk) and let us know what you think of the site and its new features.

There are more services than ever on solution finder but we are still looking for relevant services to add. If you know of a service that should be added to the directory please let us know at [solutionfinder@gateshead.gov.uk](mailto:solutionfinder@gateshead.gov.uk) and we'll do the rest.

## Integrated working training

Since April 2007 more than 300 practitioners and 50 managers have taken part in the Integrated Working training in Gateshead. We are grateful to a pool of trainers who are delivering practitioner training as part of their day job. If you haven't accessed the free training yet, you will need to book onto a session appropriate to your role. Check out what's on offer below.

### Common Assessment and Lead Practitioner in Practice

This one day course covers the aims, principles and use of the common assessment framework, the role of the lead practitioner, using the solution finder service directory and acting as part of a team around the family.

The course is intended for practitioners working with children, young people and families in Gateshead. Area based services are asked to attend training allocated to your particular locality where possible. Borough-wide services can access any of the dates throughout the programme.

### Integrated working for managers training

This one day course provides managers with an overview of information sharing, common assessment, team around the family and lead practitioner common processes and considers the management responsibilities in these new arrangements.

The course is intended for managers working in services or organisations supporting children, young people and/or families.

### Integrated working briefings

This one hour briefing session gives a summary overview of common processes and is intended for who require a basic awareness and understanding of the processes but are unlikely to undertake assessments, become lead practitioners or become direct users of ContactPoint. If you are not sure whether you will be using CAF but want to know more book yourself onto one of the briefing sessions. If the times or venues don't suit you, please get in touch with us.

**Book through [www.gatesheadcyprtrust.co.uk](http://www.gatesheadcyprtrust.co.uk) or contact [change4children@gateshead.gov.uk](mailto:change4children@gateshead.gov.uk) 0191 433 8353 for a booking form.**

**Next edition will be November 2007 and will include:  
*Change for Children Reviews ...Where are they leading us?***