

‘Radical Re-design’: parents as partners in effective collaboration for better Support for Learning for Children and Young People with Additional Support Needs

1 Introduction

We know that many children in Scotland, identified as having Additional Support Needs are not getting the support they need. We know that many parents, carers and kinship carers¹ feel unable to advocate for their children effectively, and that professionals struggle to include them in a meaningful way. We believe that if parents, teachers and other professionals could work more collaboratively there would be better outcomes for children and young people. Animate specialises in supporting collaboration across sectors, with people using services and their carers at the heart of those collaborations. We have teamed up with a parent and a former headteacher and consulted an educational psychologist to develop the following proposal.

It outlines a mentoring programme, that will enable parents to take up their role as partners in the collaborative design and delivery of support for learning interventions for children and young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN). The collaboration will involve parents, teachers and other professionals. It will be informed by a young people’s group and supported by an action inquiry process ensuring that we reflect and learn as we design and implement a more relational and child-centred approach.

2 The Purpose

The recent Support for Learning Review² highlights that the number of children and young people identified as having ASN has risen significantly to include some 30.9% of children in schools and that the rise in their needs in relation to social, emotional and behaviour issues coincides with an increase in poverty and inequality.

It proposes that the new starting point needs to be *‘all our children and all their support needs’*, recognising and addressing the increased complexity and barriers to learning that affect their lives and those of their families, that persist well beyond school and formal education.

The report identifies the need to radically redesign the way support for learning is implemented. In short this includes adopting a more relational and child centred approach characterised by:

- values driven leadership,
- an open and robust culture of communication, support and challenge underpinned by trust, respect and positive relationships between children, young people and their parents/carers, school staff and other professionals
- a recognition that the current ‘narrow dominance of qualification results’ are inadequate measures of success, and

¹ From now on whenever the proposal refers to ‘parents’ we are including carers and kinship carers

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- a commitment to improvement through experiential learning (learning by doing), reflection and review processes that encourage and support innovation and continually ‘test the gap between intention and reality.’

The Review has been endorsed in the Programme for Government³ *we will continue to improve support for pupils through implementation of the recommendations of Angela Morgan’s independently Chaired review of additional support for learning, working with our partners to deliver key actions to address the recommendations in the coming year and in the longer term.* (p.99)

We believe that children and young people with ASN will make the most of their abilities and potential when they have the encouragement, support and services they need from the range of people who care about them and have responsibility for their development working collaboratively - bringing the best of who they are and what they know together in a safe, appreciative and creative environment.

We know that the ‘support for learning system’ will benefit greatly if a wider range of parents and carers are supported to actively contribute their knowledge, wisdom and experience. We know too that teachers and other professionals need support to consider how to change their systems in order to be more inclusive.

Our purpose is to improve support for children with ASN in one locality, with the ultimate aim of sharing our learning more widely. We will do this by supporting an effective collaboration between young people, parents, teachers and professionals. Through listening to one another, trying out new approaches and reflecting and learning together, the collaboration will gain an in-depth understanding of what works for young people and their families. This will lead to a radical redesign of the way support for learning is implemented in one area, and lessons which can be learned to inform practice in other areas.

3 Our approach

Parents/carers are uniquely placed to support the development of children with ASN. However, they can often feel at the mercy of “experts” who may not have sufficient understanding of their social and economic situation. Navigating support for a child with additional needs is complex and exhausting, and it is often only those children whose parents have the agency necessary to move things forward who fully benefit from the resources available.

We are proposing a threefold intervention initially tested in one locality:

- Engaging and supporting parents as partners, through a mentoring programme
- Engaging and supporting young people with additional support needs in young people’ group, facilitated by the Learning Space
- Facilitating an appreciative, strengths based action inquiry that will include the parents and young people as well as a range of others central to the children’s

³ Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland September 2020.

education e.g. teachers, social work, educational psychology, health visitor, GP, CAMHs etc.

The philosophy and values inherent in the *'all our children and all their support needs'* point of departure will be central to our approach, and our practice will seek to embody the culture it promotes.

Our initial test will be in East Lothian (and could include more than one site/project) though we would be interested in including/incorporating similar initiatives in other locations as the approach clearly lends itself to being tested more widely.

4 The Process

Setting up the 'Radical Re-design' Action Inquiry Group

Children and young people with ASN have a range of people in their lives who each have different and valid experiences of trying to meet their needs, and we want to use this diversity a resource. To enable this, we need to learn more about one another's experience, to better understand one another, what works for us and what we need from one another to do our collective best.

We recognise that it is only by sharing experience with one another that we will begin to see the whole picture. Our hope is that this new shared knowledge will enable us to be creative and come up with ideas and new ways of tackling the difficult issues we are confronted with, supporting young people to reach their potential and enjoy enriched and happy lives.

Animate will facilitate a series of 4 x 3 hour workshops that will enable the key stakeholders to form the 'Radical Re-design' AI Group, adopting ***'kindness as a value and practice (evidenced in) the things that we do (with and) for one another, both practically and emotionally, in response to moments of perceived need, when there is the option to do nothing'***⁴.

This will include:

- Creating a safe, positive, creative working space - agreeing what we need from one another so we can bring the best of ourselves into the room
- Identifying what works for us, what matters to us and what we value - hearing stories of times when we have overcome adversity, barriers or obstacles in our life or work – noticing the qualities and values in our stories
- Identifying the conditions and factors that enabled these positive experiences of overcoming adversity to happen
- Developing our working agreement - exploring how we can move forward together so we can enable these kinds of positive experiences happen more often and in more places; how we will work positively with conflict; and identifying what we need

⁴ Public policy and the infrastructure of kindness in Scotland, University of Edinburgh (September 2019)

to bring with us, and what we need to let go of and leave behind to make that possible

Identifying and implementing the Support for Learning Interventions

We propose to use an action inquiry approach that takes an appreciative and strengths based perspective in identifying and implementing Support for learning interventions. The process described below is indicative of our approach, and the detailed content will be worked out with key project stakeholders.

In short, action inquiry is a process of gaining improved information about an intervention through:

- making explicit the assumptions or theory held about how and why the actions/processes 'work'
- acting to improve, and at the same time to learn more about them
- discovering what happens as a result of these interventions
- reflecting on the discoveries with a view to reformulating the theory of 'what works', and
- acting to improve again, based on the reformulated hypothesis

We will deliberately encourage the emphasis on an appreciative approach, identifying and building on current good practice. This will inform discussion on how best to use of all the assets available, implement and support action and develop partnership working on a formative basis.

We will develop a '**theory of change**' for the project, detailing how and why the activities and interventions pursued are expected to lead to desired change, and articulate the corresponding '**story of change**' - what actually happens as we put our theory into practice - reviewing, rejigging and refining our approach as we journey.

The key focus will be the iterative development and establishment of a Parent Mentoring approach to enabling parents/carers to take up their role in evolving and testing new ways of implementing support for children and young people with ASN. However, it is likely that other 'inquiry strands' will emerge as a consequence of this approach e.g. a new approach to the development and implementation to Co-ordinated Support Plans; how to develop more inclusive, collaborative practice within our education systems; the possibility of developing 'teacher champions' within a school.

The 'Radical Re-design' Group will identify any additional and agree the inclusions of related inquiry strands - specific interventions to be tested. These will emerge from the collective deliberations of the group which will meet every 6 – 8 weeks.

This approach will allow formative evaluation of the Parent Mentoring strand and related interventions as they progress, enabling the programme to learn and adapt as it travels, and to make informed changes to the approach as the need emerges.

A summative 'lessons learned' report will be produced at the end of the 2 year period to enable further development and wider learning.

Recruitment, training and ongoing support of Parent Mentors

The Radical Re-design Group will support the recruitment of an initial cohort of 4 – 6 Parent Mentors who will be trained and supported by David Ward (The Learning Space), a qualified coach and former Primary Headteacher and Liz Hardy, an experienced parent of children with ASN, and qualified counsellor.

Liz and David will work with the cohort to co-produce and deliver the training course, and provide ongoing support to the Parent Mentors.

Their role will be to enable professionals and parents to collaborate more effectively in testing new ways of implementing support for learning in a locality. Parent Mentors will enable other parents to express the circumstances of their unique situations, to consider their options, and to engage with external services.

Facilitating the involvement Children and Young People with ASN

The Support for Learning Review clearly highlights that meaningful relationships between children and young people with ASN and school staff and other adults are essential for learning. The children and young people told the review that they want to be included in their schools and communities and don't want their abilities and capability to be underestimated – that they should not be defined by their ASN. It is therefore essential that the project actively engages with them on an ongoing basis. The Learning Place, a small charity in the Scottish Borders that supports young people who face barriers and challenges, will engage the children and young people through an existing and/or purposely established Young People's group, ensuring their desires and experience are listened to and shape the support they are given.

Scope and Duration

The project will run for an initial 2 year period to enable the approach to be developed iteratively and become embedded in the local system

Key Actions:

Set up phase (0-3 months)

- establishing the Radical Redesign AI group – recruiting key stakeholders and establishing a trust based, creative working environment and working culture (4 half days)
- recruiting and training the first cohort of 4- 6 Parent Mentors (4-6 half days)
- engaging young people – through an existing and/or purposely established Young People's group

Developing the Parent Mentoring programme and associated inquiry strands (3 – 12 months)

- Agreeing what success would look like and what would indicate progress
- Articulating an associated theory of change and action plan
- Putting the theory into practice
- Identifying and developing associated inquiry strands as they emerge

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- Reflecting and reporting iteratively on progress and refining the approach accordingly. The brief reports will articulate the 'learning journey/story of change' of the specific strands to date
- Ending existing and starting new inquiry strands as the need/desire emerges

Ongoing support and development of Parent Mentors (3 – 24 months)

- Regular individual and peer support
- Potentially, recruiting and training a second cohort of 4- 6 Parent Mentors
- Further training and development, as required

Formative and Summative evaluation (quarterly and at end of year 2 respectively)

- Quarterly progress reports
- Producing an 'lessons learned report' for wider dissemination and learning

Roles

- **The 'Radical Redesign' Group** will oversee the programme
- **Ian McKenzie and Jo Kennedy (Animate)** will act as 'learning partners' to the programme – forming and facilitating the AI Group, establishing the Theory of Change and associated self-evaluation framework to iteratively capture the evolving Story of Change. Jo and Ian work together regularly, and are engaged respectively as learning partners in Columba 1400's work in partnership with BBC Children in Need and The Hunter Foundation to develop and design an early intervention approach to shape services for families whose children are at risk of becoming cared for; and the evaluation of Life Change Trust's Award to Who Cares Scotland's with a focus on capturing the learning and impact of its work around the key themes of Belonging, Voice and Choice and Opportunities. They are using similar methodologies in those programmes and are keen to bring the learning into the Radical Redesign project. Having both involved enables the resource to be used flexibly, e.g. across participating schools and emergent AI strands, such that it will be greater than the sum of the parts.
- **David Ward and Liz Hardy** will train and support the Parent Mentors
- **David Ward and his colleagues (The Learning Space)** will facilitate the involvement Children and Young People with ASN

Costs– approx. £30,000 + VAT to include

- Venue costs/appropriate venue for meetings – neutral venue - not school, CAMHS offices etc
- Ongoing support for parent coaches - hours depend on how many but 2 hours allowed per coach per week initially
- Payment for parents to attend meetings/train and then move onto coach.
- Consultancy support from Animate, Liz Hardy and the Learning Space

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Radical Redesign: Parents as Partners in Support for Learning: Jan 21 - June 22					
Key Actions:					
	Timescale	Days	David & Liz 350	Animate 550	Costs
<i>Set up phase (Spring Term 2021)</i>					
Jan 21 - Apr 21					
Inception meeting/familiarisation		2 x 0.5		550	550
		2 x 0.5	350		350
Establishing the AI group – recruiting key stakeholders and establishing a trust based, creative working environment and working culture (3 x 0.5 days)		3 x 2 x 0.5		1650	1650
Participating in AI Group establishment meetings		3 x 2 X 0.5	525		525
Recruiting and training of cohort of 4-6 Parent Mentors		4 x 2	2800		2800
<i>Developing the Parent Mentoring programme and associated inquiry strands over 4 school terms (Summer 21 - end summer term 22 inclusive)</i>					
Apr 21 - Jun 22					
Developing & supporting 4 AI strands (2 days per term)		4 x 2 days		4400	4400
Facilitating AI Group (6 to 8 weekly/2 per term)		8 x 0.5 days		2200	2200
Participatiion in AI Group meetings (6 to 8 weekly/2 per term)		8 x 0.5 days	350		350
Engaging/consulting young people – through existing Young People’s group(s) - 8hrs per term		4 x 8 hrs @ 45/hr	1440		1440
Support to Parent Mentors - individual and peer support - (12 hrs per term)		4 x 12 hrs @ 45/hr	2160		2160
<i>Formative and Summative evaluation (at end of each term and year 2 respectively)</i>					
End of Term progress reports		4 x 1		2200	2200

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Producing an 'lessons learned report' for wider dissemination and learning (July 22)		3 days		1650	1650
Project management		8 x 0.5		2200	2200
Peer Mentors budget		400 hrs @10/hr			4000
Travel & Contingencies					2500
TOTAL			7625	14850	28975
				Inc VAT	34770

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