



Project Evaluation

Background and Context

Reflection on our induction process for county council staff identified that much of the content related to methods of communication between the worker and the employer (eg timesheets, flexi arrangements, travel claims, IT systems). For social care staff, however, case audits had identified a need to strengthen and extend our methods for communicating with children and young people and capture the voice of the child in case recording. As an employer, we wanted to use the induction process to set expectations and standards of active engagement with children and ensure new staff had the skills and resources to communicate creatively with clients. This is particularly important because many of the children needing social care services struggle to engage in positive relationships with adults and we know that the quality of conversations with them is improved by building communication around creative and interactive tasks and materials - especially visual stimuli.

To this end, we developed a Talking Toolkit of resources to support and encourage quality conversations - for both assessment and task-focused work with children and young people. In order to test out the approach and the materials we decided to run a pilot project with a cohort of newly qualified social workers joining out ASYE academy. We hoped this project would have the additional benefit of supporting recruitment and retention of social workers by demonstrating the local authority's commitment to and practical support for their professional practice and development.

A steering group was established which consisted of:

- Learning and Development Coordinator from HR/OD
- ASYE Academy Team Manager
- 2 previous academy members who had moved into long term teams.

Implementation

The steering group shared ideas about the nature and content of the 'Talking Toolkits', got a logo designed for the programme and developed a 'prototype' bag which then became the model for the first issue of the toolkits.

A notional budget of £25 per bag (excluding the cost of the bag itself) was agreed by CSC management and the group identified priorities for this spending, recognising that many of the resources we would include could be produced internally at minimal cost of printing/laminating etc. Many of these resources were already available as had been created to showcase tools which could be used for issue-based work on relevant internal

training courses. The Learning and Organisational Development Team agreed to fund the cost of the bags and reprographic costs for the pilot. (Contents list attached as Appendix).

The Talking Toolkits were launched with the September 2019 intake of Academy ASYEs. A half-day training session introduced the group to the contents of the bags and give them the opportunity to explore and test these with each other. It was made clear that:

- these were 'starter kits' and our expectation was that they would add to the contents from any prior knowledge/experience that had working with children/young people or with new ideas generated from their ongoing practice
- replenishing the contents would be their responsibility (eg pens, paper, stickers etc)
- we expected them to evidence use of the materials and resources in their case recording and encouraged the use of photographic evidence.
- the project would be formally evaluated in December 2019 and their feedback sought as to the toolkit's overall value and the effectiveness of specific resources

Evaluation

This included the following elements:

- Written evaluation by completion of a questionnaire (see below)
- A meeting with the group to discuss their experience of using the Talking Toolkit
- Consultation with two groups of young service users (using an established forum) who were shown the toolkits and invited to comment on the contents, give ideas for other resources which could be added
- Feedback from Education Psychology Service on the range and potential benefits of the contents of the kits for intervention with children and young people

Feedback from the ASYE Academy cohort was as follows:

Question	Responses
How did you feel when you originally received the toolkit?	'Excited', 'very happy', 'intrigued', 'enthused', 'a great starting point for me as I hadn't done much direct work with children before', 'a bit daunted but excited to discover new tools', 'loved it - great to consider alternative ways of working', 'happy to have something to help interaction with children', 'excited and nervous. The tools looked amazing but I did struggle to think of ways I would be able to use some of them'.
Which contents of the kit have you used? What worked best?	'Worry monster, 3 islands activity, coloured paper and pens, stickers, crafty bits' 'Emotion cards, 3 islands, All About Me, paper/pens - the 3 islands was particularly effective' 'Worry monster, pens/paper, bubbles, puppets' 'Mainly the drawing equipment' 'Feelings cards, magic wand, scenarios, puppets' 'Coloured paper and pens, blank cards, finger puppets' 'The worry monster and the magic wand worked best due to ages of most children I have worked with (5-13yrs). I have used the finger puppets to initiate conversations and the Retracking worksheets have been fab!'
Did the toolkit affect	'Allowed me to be more creative and gave me ideas'

<p>your practice in any way? If so, how?</p>	<p>'It made me think more creatively, gave me ideas and confidence to use more interactive activities'</p> <p>'It allowed me to get creative with the way I put questions to children'</p> <p>'I am very enthusiastic about therapeutic work so having additional items to enable this was very helpful'</p> <p>'Yes! I have explored a range of creative ways to get kids talking by using the toolkit. I now take it with me and let the children choose something from it. I find giving choice is great at balancing the power element - even if it is choosing the colour of the paper and pens we use'</p> <p>'I often take the toolkit on visits and give it to children to have a good look through - good conversation starter'</p> <p>'Yes, it helped on many occasions with initial visits to help children talk about their worries. The Retracking booklet gave me a platform to work from during regular sessions - the young person chose the sheets she wanted to complete each week'.</p>
<p>Was there anything that didn't work as well as you hoped?</p>	<p>'Finger puppets with an 8 yr old - the child was anxious about trying this - however it provided me with more understanding about his past experience and the cause of this'</p> <p>'Not sure how to use picture cards with tigers on'</p> <p>'There are several items in the bag I still haven't used as I am not really sure about them. But everything I have used has worked'.</p> <p>'No' (from all other group members)</p>
<p>What have you added to your bag?</p>	<p>'Issue-based worksheets on specific issues, lego bricks and people, more stickers and stamps'</p> <p>'More stickers, mock-up facebook profile page for older children to do all about me. Picture of hot-air balloon - who would you let on it, what would make it fly, where would it go etc.'</p> <p>More drawing materials, crayons, stickers'</p> <p>'Magnets, Rubic's Cube, balloons, toy people'</p> <p>'Arts and crafts stuff, figures of people, jigsaws'</p> <p>'Voice of the child activity sheets from Social Work Toolbox'</p> <p>'Paint, paintbrushes, extra paper, an 'all about me' cube'.</p>
<p>How have you recorded the interactive work using the toolkit?</p>	<p>'Photos uploaded on ICS, included in documents'</p> <p>'Written up in case notes, uploaded photos, referred to in assessments, ICS-Documents-Engagement Tools'</p> <p>'Case notes, assessments, photos uploaded on ICS'</p> <p>'I record this as direct work with children, explaining the activity'</p> <p>'Scanned and added to ICS - give notes on discussion'</p> <p>'In case notes, uploaded pictures/docs onto ICS'</p>
<p>Please scale the effectiveness of the Toolkit where 1 = very little use and 10 = very useful What would be needed to take it one point higher up the scale?</p>	<p>7 - would like more resources aimed at teenagers</p> <p>9 - some instructions to go with some of the more complex resources would help to remember / refresh how to use them</p> <p>Would like books to read with young people with a message you can discuss afterwards</p> <p>8 - I think the only way to improve this would be more electronics - but realise it isn't realistic to include and i-pad!</p> <p>Information on how to best-use some of the tools with children</p> <p>10</p>

<p>What additions/changes would you recommend for future editions of the Toolkit?</p>	<p>8 - some bits of lego and lego men/women type toys 8 - figures of people and animals 8 - more tools. Instructions on how to use some resources. 9 - more of an explanation on how to use some of the tools</p>
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Conversations around the Talking Toolkit also highlighted that receiving the bags as part of their induction made the new social workers feel ‘welcome’ and ‘invested in’ - and that creative and interactive approaches to working with children was valued and encouraged by the department.

Feedback from young people highlighted that they welcomed anything which made conversations with social workers more interactive and practical rather than ‘just talking’. However they felt the workers might need training on how to use some of the resources - social workers needed to make sure they weren’t just ‘guessing’ how to use them. The youngsters also said they would like workers to make clear to them why they were using a particular resource/activity - what is its purpose/how will it help?

The groups commented that most of the resources seemed more appropriate for younger children rather than teenagers and would like to see more activities for older young people. They then wanted to keep the shiny stickers themselves as they ‘love stickers’!

Feedback from the Educational Psychology Service via link EP:

“When I shared it at the staff meeting it was very well received, the team thought it was an excellent bank of resources which could be used to gather the views of CYP at all ages, all of the items are the sort of thing we'd use as psychologists and link to theories like Personal Construct Psychology, Person Centred Approaches and Positive Psychology. The team also thought it would be really beneficial in terms of supporting new staff members by making them feel valued/welcome whilst highlighting to them the importance of gathering and representing the views of CYP. It was felt that this sort of resource is what's missing from the Northumberland induction process.”

Next Steps

Clearly the evaluation shows the value of providing a Talking Toolkit to each ASYE Academy Cohort.

The evaluation has provided useful information on how to improve the Toolkit and has reinforced the belief that this is a resource which has wider relevance and value across other CSC teams. Word of the Toolkits has spread across other teams in Children’s Social Care and interest in it has also been expressed by other agencies (eg CNTW). Some of the activity resources created internally have subsequently been shared electronically with individual social workers and early help staff where they have asked for access.

However I believe there is also a wider potential in using the Toolkit to support teams to generate their own ‘content’ for the bags - more specific to their role. One of the issues we

have had with using the Signs of Safety Three Houses tool is that some children experienced its use on multiple occasions. I am keen that the Talking Toolkit does not become so standardised that it loses its impact, with young people thinking they have 'seen it all before'. However the thirst among staff to have their own Toolkit is very evident (I have been asked on many occasions why other teams haven't been given them).

I would like to see a basic kit being provided for members of key social care teams, but alongside this, work done with them to identify the issues which they are addressing with their client group and collectively creating their own specific materials and resources to include in their team's Toolkit. This approach would be more likely to embed creative thinking about how to engage with children/young people and encourage staff to develop new interactive methods of intervention.

I would also like to develop a parallel resource kit for working with parents/carers who might equally struggle with the traditional 'conversation' with workers and would find it more beneficial to use interactive materials and activities to engage with workers. This could include such resources as the Neglect Toolkit and Outcome Stars but we could also develop additional creative and visual tools to support proactive work with parents and carers.

Anne Lambert
Learning and Development Coordinator
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Soft ball
Bubbles
Coloured paper
Felt tip pens
6" ruler
Worry Monster
Finger puppets
Large dice
Emotion cards (younger children)
Emotion cards (emoticons)
Emoticon cards recording sheet (photocopiable)
Life shield template (photocopiable)
Mountain scaling sheet (laminated)
Traffic lights/zones sheet (laminated)
3 islands (laminated)
Post it markers
Strength/skill cards
Fact / opinion cards
Tiger CAF card set

	My Star: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● User guide● Assessment cards (laminated)● Visual scale cards (laminated)● Star chart (photocopiable)
	Youth Star: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Quiz sheet (laminated)● Quiz cards (laminated)● Star chart (photocopiable)
	Teen Star <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Quiz sheet (laminated)● Star Chart (photocopiable)
	Pen
	Stress shape
	Miniature whiteboard and planner
	Retracking worksheets booklet (photocopiable)
	Blank cards & envelopes (2)
	Glue stick
	Pipe cleaners/bobbles etc for collage
	Clock templates - Day in the Life of...
	Teenagers Safety Plan 'Keeping Safe with My Mates (laminated)'