

# Principal Social Worker's Practice and Learning Bulletin November 2021



## Welcome to November's Edition of the Practice and Learning Bulletin

In this edition I am focusing on some key learning issues:

**Our Practice Focus for this month is Professional Curiosity**, also known as Respectful Uncertainty. Again, this is a recurring theme that features in Serious Case Reviews and Lessons Learnt events but also something that we have identified as a learning need within our own audits and dip sampling of work. See the L and D article for the dates.

I also want to re-visit the Hidden Men article from last months edition in light of the Star Hobson trail currently being held.

**The following articles are also included.**

- Sibling Assessments—Together or Apart
- How to use Supervision effectively.
- The experience of Black and mixed heritage boys in the Youth Justice System—thematic Review
- As usual there is lots of training available - book a date!



**As always please let me know if you want to see something in the bulletin or want to contribute.**



Best wishes

Traci Taylor

**Principal Social Worker/Service Manager**



ON PRACTICE

# Professional Curiosity

## What is Professional Curiosity ?

Professional Curiosity is best described as '***not taking a single source of information and accepting it as fact without exploring and checking out that piece of information from different sources to triangulate and confirm the information as correct***'. It is being respectfully sceptic until the information proves otherwise and is, sometimes referred to as, respectful uncertainty. Both terms mean the same thing

Being professionally curious is a combination of looking, listening, asking direct questions, checking out and reflection. Professional curiosity is not a new way of working and does not mean extra work; it is about good practice and helps to develop a relationship with individuals by showing a true interest in them, listening to them and giving them a voice.

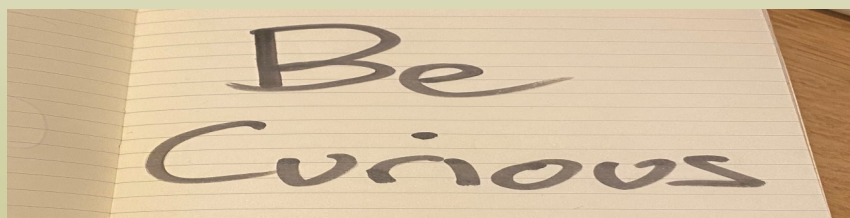
## Why is it Important?

Professional curiosity is an important part of our practice to keep children safe; Curious professionals will spend time engaging with families on visits. They will know that talk, play and touch can all be important to observe and consider. Do not presume you know what is happening in the family home – ask questions and seek clarity if you are not certain. Do not be afraid to ask questions of families, and do so in an open way so they know that you are asking to keep the child or adult safe, not to judge or criticise. Be open to the unexpected, and incorporate information that does not support your initial assumptions into your assessment of what life is like for the child or adult in the family.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and where practitioners are concerned each and every agency has a role to play in safeguarding children and adults.

The following factors highlight the need for all of us to strive to improve professional curiosity and professional courage:

- the views and feelings of children and some adults are actually very difficult to ascertain
- practitioners do not always listen to adults who tried to speak on behalf of a child or another adult and who may have important information to contribute
- parents or carers can easily prevent practitioners from seeing and listening to a child or another adult
- practitioners can be fooled with stories we want to believe are true
- effective multi-agency work needs to be coordinated
- Challenging parents or carers (and colleagues) requires expertise, confidence, time and a considerable amount of emotional energy.



## Learning for improving practice



The significance of professional curiosity, or the lack of, has repeatedly been highlighted in serious case reviews for example, Victoria Climbié, Peter Connolly (Baby P), and Daniel Pelka.

**Assumptions:** the social worker tried to visit Victoria on a number of occasions but assumed they had moved (this was not checked out). On an occasion when she was seen she was observed to be standing to attention in front of her carer, the assumption made was that this was a respect issue due to her African culture.

**Accepting things at face value** (lack of challenge): Excuses made by Daniel's mother were accepted by agencies; for example she said Daniel was losing weight because he was being treated for a rare food disorder when in reality he was being starved to death.

**Lack of professional curiosity:** The agencies involved with the family and Peter displayed a lack of professional curiosity. They were too willing to believe the accounts Peter's mum gave of herself, her care of her children, her household and nature of her friendship network.

### How to be a professionally curious practitioner

- Question your own assumptions about how individuals/families function and watch out for over optimism
- Recognise your own feelings (e.g. tiredness, feeling rushed or illness) and how this might impact on your view of a child/adult/family on a given day
- Think about why someone may not be telling you the whole truth
- Demonstrate a willingness to have challenging conversations
- Address any professional anxiety about how hostile or resistant individual/families might react to being asked direct or difficult questions
- Remain open minded and expect the unexpected
- Appreciate that respectful scepticism/nosiness and challenge are healthy. It is good practice and ok to question what you are told
- Recognise when individuals/adult repeatedly do not do what they said they would, named this and discuss with them
- Understand the cumulative impact of multiple or combined risk factors, e.g. domestic abuse, drug/alcohol misuse, mental health)
- Ensure that your practice is reflective and that you have access to good quality supervision
- Be aware of the barriers to professional curiosity.

### Workshops for Professional Curiosity:

**Additional dates have been added due to the excellent take up of the workshops.**

30.11.21 9:30am      07.01.22 9.30am

17.12.21 9:30am      10.01.22 1.30pm

20.12.21 1:30pm

21.12.21 9:00am      **Practice Guidance and links to resources will be available in Tri-x in December.**



## Brothers and Sisters Together or Apart Assessment (sibling assessment).

- Why do we need them
- What do we need to know to influence our practice?

In our work with babies and children who are have a plan of long term fostering or adoption we need to make to make sure that we have assessed the individual needs of each child this is true of all of our work. However for these children we have to make difficult decisions about whether brothers and sisters will live together or apart. This is usually known as a **sibling assessment** although we know from talking to children and young people that they do not like the term sibling, they prefer brothers and sisters hence the terminology more commonly used **Brothers and Sisters Together or Apart**.

**Where** possible brothers and sisters should be homed together, unless this would not be in the best interests of one or more of the children, or there is good reason not to. If it is necessary to separate brothers and sisters, guidance states that the reasons why should be clearly documented and reviewed with this decision based on an assessment of the relationships and consideration of individual circumstances.

**Research** tells us that where children have been removed from their parents and separated from their brothers and sisters, they frequently find the loss of their brothers and sisters harder to cope with; they usually share life experiences and can provide each other with comfort ,we need to keep that at the forefront of our decision making and consider the impact of that loss and whether that is going to cause more difficulties to the children than being placed together.

### Things to consider when completing the assessment:

- Consider the bond and the child's presenting needs rather than making assumptions based on age.
- It is vital to observe brothers and sisters and for large brother and sister groups you need to observe different pairing and/or combinations.
- What is the child's birth family experience and history?
- What are the children's individual needs
- What are the child's wishes and feelings?
- What is the quality and nature of the relationships between the children?
- Have they been able to form a bond with their current carer/parent ( it is useful to describe this in relational terms rather than use attachment styles as this requires significant training and knowledge)
- What would the impact be on each child if they were separated.
- If a decision is made to separate the children what plans would be put in place for ongoing family time to maintain their relationship?

There are lots of really good tools to use to help you to undertake a **Together or Apart Assessment** and it is important that you are really thorough in your assessment, gathering information from lots of different sources so that the decision you make is robust and evidenced based.

**Daily Diary of a Child in Care or at Home:** completed by foster carers or if possible parents/relatives. Break down the day into sections so that you get an understanding of the practical routine but also the behaviour and emotional presentation at these times—this will help you to understand any triggers or patterns.

**Trauma/Nurture Timelines:** A map or chronology of the child's life experiences to date; this can be done as a file review and helps you to think about the positive and negative experiences the child has had and at what age they were at the time of the event and therefore their likely impact on the child's development.

**Social Atoms and Pictures of People in the Child's Life:** This is like an eco ma; various circles of different sizes are used to make a picture of the relevant people in the child's life. The child is at the centre and the distance from them to the placement of each other is considered; the size of the circle chosen is also considered in terms of importance from the child's perspective.

**Direct Observation and Structured/Unstructured Play Session:** This should occur in various settings such as home, school, family time etc.; when there are large groups of brothers and sisters these sessions should be repeated with different combinations of children. Additionally, some sessions should take place without the primary carer so that observations can be made about which child takes on different roles such as parenting, domineering, authoritative, comforter etc.

**Direct Work with Children:** Each child should have individual sessions in which they can explore and reflect on life at home, the reasons why they cannot live with their parent/carer, their relationships with their brothers and sisters and family members and what they would wish for in the future. Depending on age different tools will be used; using drawing, play figures, labels etc. Do at least one session with the whole group and they could draw a family tree, talk about memories; this will be useful for life story work. For children with disabilities who have communication difficulties, they will require some additional support to express themselves and this should be planned prior to any session, such as the use of a signer, (BSL) or someone who uses Makaton, for example.

**Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) for 4—17 year olds:** this resource is helpful when assessing the emotional and behavioural needs of individual children. Children may present differently in different settings, a parent or carer may have a different experience of the child than their teacher, for example.

**Gain Information Across Settings:** at different times of the day and from different people who know the child/ren well. Any views, opinions, observations need to be backed up with concrete evidence of examples of behaviours.

**Brothers and Sisters Relationship Checklist (1991):** this tool is used to understand the way in which brothers and sisters behave towards each other. The checklist is used to assess them in pairs and , therefore, it is important to be mindful in how the information is captured to analyse larger brother and sister groups by using the tool to consider different pairings.

### **Useful Websites.**

**Family Futures** - <https://www.familyfutures.co.uk>

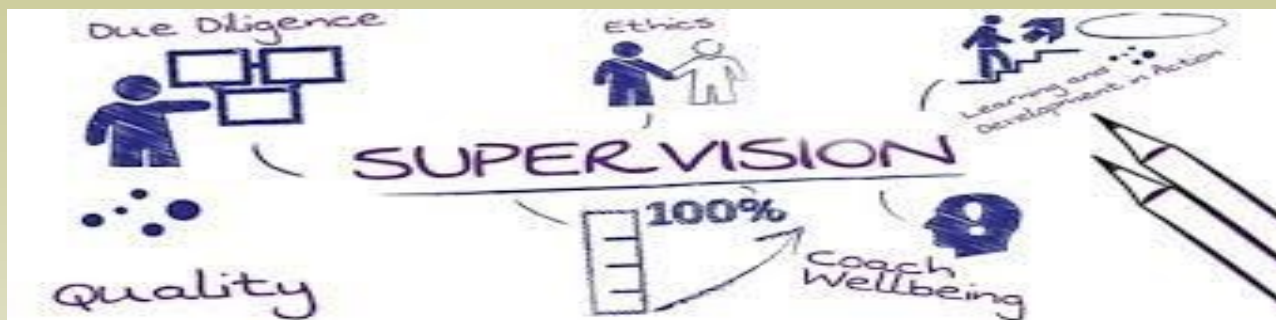
**PAC-UK** - <http://www.pac-uk.org>

**Adoption UK** - <http://www.adoptionuk.org>

**First4 Adoption** - <http://www.first4adoption.org.uk>

Please also see Tri-x for documents to use—this will be updated shortly.





Bradford Children's Services has made a commitment that you will receive supervision at least on a monthly basis; we have a supervision policy which sets out the expectations of supervision both for the supervisor and the supervisee which you can read in Tri-x; we know how important reflective supervision is and have been training our supervisors to make your experience a positive one.

### **What does good supervision look like?**

Supervision is a process that involves (usually a manager) meeting with an employee to review their work and to provide support; good supervision is built on a mutually respectful relationship which provides emotional and practical support as needed but also offers the employee to reflect on their practice (in whichever role) and learn from the reflection to develop skills and provide an excellent service to our service users.

In Bradford we have a process for personal supervision and have a template (Tri-x) which focuses primarily on staff well being and development. We have a separate process to discuss the children, young people and adults we are working with which focuses on the progress being made against a child or young person's plan.

### **How to get the best out of your supervision.**

Supervision is a two way process, like any relationship it is important that you feel comfortable and safe with the person you are talking to. You should have a supervision agreement which sets out the expectations of supervision and what will happen in the session and what happens if there are any disagreements. If you don't have a supervision agreement ask your supervisor to do one with you.

While there are expectations of the supervisor to provide regular, reflective supervision to you it is equally important that you prepare well for your supervision session; it is not just the supervisors responsibility.

### **Top Tips to prepare for supervision.**

Prioritise your supervision, don't move your session unless unavoidable; if your supervisor asks to move supervision ask for an alternative date.

Come prepared; while there is a set template to prompt the supervisor, you can add things to the discussion, Think about what you want to get out of the session and what you feel is important to talk about; make a note beforehand to remind you of things you want to ask/ discuss.

Think about your continued professional discussion (CPD); this should be discussed in all of your supervision sessions; to reflect on training you have completed and how this is or will make a difference to your work but also to look at your future development including progression opportunities.

For supervision about your children, come prepared to talk about the progress against the child's plan; where no progress is being made this is the opportunity to talk this through and reflect on your role and what needs to happen next. You should come out of supervision

Being really clear about the next steps and feeling that you have had a reflective discussion about the child's circumstances.

If you are not being offered regular supervision or feel that your supervision is not of a good quality then it is important that you alert someone to this; the first point of call should be with your supervisor; however, if this is not possible then there are other options through the line management structure, speaking to the Principal Social Worker (Traci Taylor) or using the communication available to speak to the Directors Management Team on [TalktoDMT@bradford.gov.uk](mailto:TalktoDMT@bradford.gov.uk)

# LEARNING FROM



As part of our ongoing development as a service to children it is really important that we learn from the outcomes of complaints that have been made to us about the service received.

This month we have three learning outcomes to consider:

**The first one is from a Stage 2 complaint** and the learning outcome is about the importance of verifying information to ensure that is factually correct prior to recording it as a fact in case records by validating the information through checks to corroborate the fact. For example, if you are told that there is a Non-molestation Order in place by a parent then you should verify that this correct and an order is, in fact, in place prior to recording that there **is a** non molestation order in place. You could record ... (name) told me that there was a non molestation order in place against (name), I need to verify this information.

This month we have been running workshops on Professional Curiosity which highlights the need for practitioners to triangulate the information they are given through checks from different sources and the learning outcome from this complaint highlights why this is really important. Recording factually incorrect information can lead to wrong decisions and actions being taken, it also impacts on the reputation of the authority when complaints are made and upheld.

**The second learning outcome** is in two parts; the importance of understanding our responsibilities when working with children and young people in ensuring that they receive the services that have been recommended for them; for example, if it has been agreed that children need a referral to Camhs or for any specialist support services that it is our responsibility to ensure that these referrals are made. Where we do not follow up on these referrals we are letting children down and not giving them the chance to either recover from their experiences or get the support they need for an illness/disability. The second part of the learning was to ensure that if a decision has been made to transfer a child or young person into the Children with Disabilities and Complex Health Team to understand how this is done and to ensure that this has been picked up by the team; the team managers, Sharon, Sharpe, Aamar Mahmood and Ian Walker are happy to give advice and act as consultants where a transfer of a child or young person is being considered.



# The Experiences of Black and Mixed Heritage Boy's in the Youth Justice System: A Thematic Review

This thematic review was released in October 2021, and took place during April and June 2021 when the trial for the murder of George Floyd concluded; the impact of this murder alongside the influence of the Black Lives Matter movement has resulted in overdue discussions about the impact of racial discrimination. In summary, the thematic review found:

- The boys whose cases looked at had complex needs, and opportunities to support them earlier, outside of the youth justice system, had often been missed and when they came to the attention of the criminal justice system, the quality of services they received at this critical moment in their life was insufficient.
- 60 per cent of the boys subject to court orders had been excluded from education, most of them permanently, and the impact of this on their life chances was significant.
- Black and mixed heritage boys were consistently over-represented in custodial cohorts; in one service every child in custody was a black or mixed heritage boy.
- Addressing 'disproportionality' has been a longstanding objective in most youth justice plans, but the evidence indicates that little progress has been made in terms of the quality of practice. At a strategic partnership level there is a lack of clarity and curiosity about what is causing the disparity and what needs to be done to bring about an improvement. Most services recognised that things have not been done well enough and stated their commitment to improve.
- In the last 12 months some YOSs have developed focused strategies and plans to address disproportionality and support anti-racist practice; however, any impact of this is yet to be reflected in the quality of casework.

## The boy's experiences:

- the large majority of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system had experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and had high levels of need, such as special educational needs (SEN) and mental health difficulties, which had not always been identified or properly addressed until they came into contact with the YOS. This raises questions and concerns about the support they received from mainstream services before their involvement with the youth justice system. Reports of high levels of unmet need for black and mixed heritage boys entering the youth justice system was a consistent theme of this inspection.
- There was a general consensus among YOSs that, had problems and difficulties been addressed earlier in the children's lives, there could have been a different outcome for them. In the post-court cases we inspected, 60 per cent of the boys were, or had been, excluded from school, the majority permanently. Almost a third had been victims of child criminal exploitation. In half of the cases inspected there was evidence (where it had been recorded) that the child had experienced racial discrimination.
- A third of the boys had been subject to Child in Need or Child Protection plans. The majority were not 'heavily convicted' (i.e. they had only one or no previous convictions), and in over a quarter of cases (where information had been recorded) the child had a disability. They were reported to be more likely than other groups of children to have an education, health and care (EHC) plan, and equally as likely again to have special educational needs that had not been identified or addressed.
- The boys had grown up in the poorest areas of their towns and cities and had often been exposed to the violence and family breakdown associated with poverty.



- Racial discrimination was also a feature in the lives of the boys. For the most part, they accepted it as being 'just the way it is'. This acceptance is as significant as the experience itself, when considering their development, their circumstances and their future

### **Effective practice Areas of practice that enhanced the quality of the work delivered to black and mixed heritage boys:**

- A clear anti-racist stance taken by leaders raises staff's confidence to advocate for black and mixed heritage boys in their work.
- Well-coordinated work with third-sector and community organisations enhances the quality of service delivery.
- Providing effective support to parents and carers of black and mixed heritage boys promotes their engagement.
- The effective use of data is reflected in better quality service delivery

### **Conclusions and implications:**

- Black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system are likely to have grown up in the most deprived areas. Their families are affected by the issues linked to social disadvantage and the limitations this can have on their lives.
- Inter-generational racism is part of their lived experience and the impact of this cannot be ignored by workers trying to form relationships with children and families. Any hesitancy in relation to engagement should be considered in this context in the first instance.
- From the cases inspected it was evident that almost all of the boys had experienced loss and significant trauma in their formative years, and experiences of racial discrimination had been a feature of their lives. The impact of this on their development and identity cannot be ignored or underestimated.
- Where children have committed serious offences, we cannot minimise or negate the risk of harm that they can pose to other people and the protection of victims is of paramount importance. Additionally, failing to identify and address risk of harm ;
- The experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system issues with children can add to their stress and anxiety, especially if they themselves recognise how damaging their behaviour has become. Equally, their circumstances and life experiences have to be fully considered in analysing their behaviour and their vulnerability. Effective interventions with children who have complex lives, have experienced trauma and pose a risk to others require a balance of support.
- The children also need challenge in the interventions they receive; some described their YOS interventions as 'tick box' or a 'check-in', but where workers invested in getting to know them and in carefully challenging them, the boys were more likely to engage and benefit. There was a sense that the boys did not know what it was that they needed until they received it.
- When children offend, it is a pivotal moment in their lives; they are in crisis. To help them to change their behaviour, we must understand what underlies their offending and any barriers that may hamper their progress. The role of case managers in advocating for the child is critical. For children who have often been let down by adults who have not noticed when they needed help and support, it is important that they experience a positive relationship with a professional. They may not want to discuss what has happened to them or what is continuing to happen in their lives. This can be painful and shameful for them, and their perceived reluctance to engage must be responded to appropriately.
- Practitioners require a high level of skill, support and reflection to ensure that they are attending to the underlying issues linked to the child's offending if they are to get to the root causes of the behaviour. To support engagement and progress, it is important that children are fully involved in planning their intervention, that they know what is happening and why, and that their strengths are focused on, with long-term goals identified and supported.



Here are just some of the CPD opportunities that are available to you; please ensure that you are booking in for mandatory training and that you regularly access the platforms available to you such as Evolve, research in Practice and Children's Social Work Matters.

**December Practice Focus – Motivational Interviewing (mandatory training, suitable for all services)** Available to book on Evolve – dates as follows:

Thursday 02 December – 09.00 – 11.00am

Tuesday 07 December – 09.00 – 11.00am

Monday 13 December – 3.00 – 5.00pm

Monday 20<sup>th</sup> December – 09.00 – 11.00am

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> January – 09.00 – 11.00am

Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> January – 09.00 – 11.00am

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> January - 3.00 – 5.00pm

Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> January – 09.00 – 11.00am

**DECEMBER Induction : For all new staff in Children's Social Care Service – bookable on Evolve**

Day 1 - Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> December 09.30am – 4.30pm

Day 2 – Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> December 09.30am – 3.00pm

Day 3 – Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> December 09.30am – 3.00pm

**For anyone who have missed sessions or want to refresh, they can book the following courses on Evolve:**

- The Bradford Practice Model/Signs of Safety Approach – Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> December 10.00 – 11.30am
- Voice of the Child - Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> December 1.30 – 3.00pm
- Section 47 and Strategy Discussions – Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> December 09.30 – 11.15am
- Life Story Work - Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> December 1.30 – 3.00pm

**There will also be a day of 'catch-up' training day on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> January - each session bookable on Evolve shortly and will include:**

- Case recording and Case summaries
- Chronologies
- Domestic Homicide Reviews

We are also repeating some sessions of the October Practice Focus: **'Working with Men'** and the November Practice Focus: **'Professional Curiosity'** dates on Evolve

**Early Help Modules** covering **Assessments and SMART planning** and **Team Around the Family** are available and the **Court Skills Training** continues throughout December including modules on **Care Plans, Court Statements, Permanency Planning and Assessment Planning in Court Proceedings.**

Please also consider the full day **Infant Mental Health Workshop** delivered by Little Minds Matter on **12<sup>th</sup> December** and the two-day **Adoption Law and Practice Training by One Adoption** on **15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> December** – all bookable on Evolve.

Research in Practice workshops are also bookable on Evolve: **Neglect and Poverty Aware Practice** is running 3 times at 10.00am, 13.00 and 15.00 on **Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> December** with 12 places at each session. and RiP are also offering some additional seminars – we only have 4 places on each one, so these will go quickly – colleagues need to register with RiP to book these courses:

[Social Work Organisational Resilience Diagnostic \(SWORD\) and learning from the pandemic \(researchinpractice.org.uk\)](https://researchinpractice.org.uk)

[The social gradient in children's social care: what it is and what to do about it \(researchinpractice.org.uk\)](https://researchinpractice.org.uk)

[Understanding suicide and homicide risk in family carers \(researchinpractice.org.uk\)](https://researchinpractice.org.uk)

[Life story work: making life story books and explaining difficult stories \(researchinpractice.org.uk\)](https://researchinpractice.org.uk)

[An introduction to the Power Threat Meaning framework \(researchinpractice.org.uk\)](https://researchinpractice.org.uk)

The **UNICEF Children's Rights in Practice Training** in on **1<sup>st</sup> December** – bookable on Evolve

### **Training for Managers and Practice Supervisors**

There are a few places left on the **Supervision Training for Managers and Practice Supervisors** which will be face to face in City Hall on **3<sup>rd</sup> December**.

The **Managing Our Performance** training is available on teams on **8<sup>th</sup> December** and the **Manager's Practice Focus** for December is **Courageous Conversations** - the dates for this will be added to Evolve shortly.



As a learning organisation feedback is really important to us to make sure that we are getting things right. Please have your say about the training and development being offered via your evaluation forms as we are using this feedback to adapt our workshops.

Thank you to everyone who has sent responses, feedback and suggestions for this Practice and Learning Bulletin and the bite size learning events



If you have not already done so please set up your learning accounts with the following; both are excellent sources of information, resources and webinars. There is training that you can book on also.

**Research in Practice:** [www.researchinpractice.org.uk](http://www.researchinpractice.org.uk)

**Children's Social Work Matters:** [www.childrensocialworkmatters.org](http://www.childrensocialworkmatters.org)



For Qualified Social Workers the window to update your registration on Social Work England has been open for over a month now and closes in November. To re-register you need to update your continued professional development. This should not be difficult to evidence due to the amount of learning and development opportunities available to you.

There are still 2 workshop sessions left with Iona Roberts our regional SWE engagement lead; The workshop is entitled: **Renewal & CPD Workshop with Social Work England**

Iona's presentation will cover; the renewal of Social Work registration, the requirement for CPD, the uploading of CPD.

There will be an opportunity to ask questions about the types of CPD you can upload, and any queries about the renewal process as a whole.