**Practice Note for all Practitioners,** Managers **and Staff:**

**Partners and Partnership Working**

Working with the partners and developing effective partnerships with families results in robust assessments, plans and reviews that provide high quality, joined up care and support that makes a positive difference to children’s lives. This support also needs to be based on a good understanding of the family’s experience, identity, needs, risks and resources to inform what they feel will make things better.

Partnership working describes the quality of the relationships developed and work undertaken with different individuals, families and partner agencies. Effective partnership working recognises that as practitioners and agencies we need to continuously think about how we work with families in an empowering way whilst promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children and young people. Other practice notes have developed to explore our partnership working with families using a strength based, relational and trauma informed approach as part of our ‘heart of practice’ (see the Practice Framework and Model (see Practice Notes on strength, relationship based, and trauma informed practice)

Within this practice note, partners and partnership working specifically relates to how we work with agencies such as education, health, police, voluntary and community sector organisations and provides some definitions of both. Next, the note outlines why effective partnership working is important to provide the help and support to families that makes a difference to their lives. Using Markuz’s case study, the note illustrates how using our Practice Framework and Model supports effective child centred partnership working. Lastly, it will consider how supervision and reflective spaces need to be used to think about the quality of our work in this area whilst providing practitioners with some good practice points and further reading.

**Who are our Partners and what is Partnership Working?**

The term partners can be used to describe the different professionals that work with children, young people and their families or have had previous involvement with them. Our partners professionals such as Health Visitors, School Nurses, School Teachers, Designated Safeguarding Leads Police Officers, General Practitioners, Housing Officers, Community Psychiatric Nurses, Probation Service, Offender Managers. It also includes our partners in the voluntary and community sectors.

In terms of partnership working, this term can be defined in different ways and can sometimes be used interchangeably with others such as inter agency or multi-agency collaboration. Partnership working usually indicates the co-operation between agencies and professionals at strategic, organisational and practice levels to provide help, support and services to families in accordance with legislation, guidance, policies and procedures. It describes the way in which professionals and organisations from a range of disciplines, sectors and skills jointly share information, organise, plan, undertake and reflect on their work when working with families.

Effective and meaningful partnership working recognises that each professional brings its own perspectives, values and skills which can combine effectively in a way that children, parents and their families are empowered by being provided the help and support they need. Whilst partnership working provides many benefits for families, there can be some challenges to collaborating effectively and ‘it is vital that everyone working with children and families, including those who work with parents/carers, understands the role they should play and the role of other practitioners (Working Together 2018)’.

**Why is Partnership Working important?**

* **Effective partnership working results in better outcomes for children, young people and adults**: It means that the needs of everyone within their family can be addressed holistically as no single practitioner can have a full picture of a child/ren’s needs and circumstances. It is a way of making the expertise, skills and experience of a wide range of people available to each other as they come together using a child centred approach to improve the quality of services delivered to families.
* **Empowering children, young people and their families**: Effective partnership working focuses on principles such as the empowerment of families, participation and understanding the unique nature of their identity and circumstances to support them towards greater independence. Working with families to plan the intervention required, how the support is co-ordinated and delivered is more likely to provide the right support that is needed.
* **Developing cultural competence through partnership working**: Working with a range of agencies and professionals that recognise and respond to the diverse needs of all families in Sandwell. For some families, working with statutory organisations alone can be difficult and involving professionals from voluntary or community-based services who have a similar lived experience strengthens the quality of their engagement. Broadening the partners we work with and the partnerships that we develop using Social GGRRAAACCEESSS develops our cultural competence and our ability as practitioners and managers to work with diverse families.
* **Using relationship-based practice to continue to support families:** Using a relational approach to inform our partnership working supports the development of meaningful relationships between agencies, professionals and families, wider networks and communities. Focusing on developing, maintaining and sustaining enabling relationships with professionals as early as possible means these can continue long after statutory involvement ends which can form part of their family/safety plan if required.
* **Striving to achieving good/outstanding practice whilst working our families:** Quality partnership relationships creates trust, respect, accountability and the development of agreed shared goals and values. This creates an environment in which high support and high challenge can occur. Effective and healthy partnerships can be maintained even if challenge is needed as professionals understand the common goal and processes for escalating concerns about children or for challenging decisions about them can lead to better outcomes.
* **Dynamic and creative examples of partnership working:** Partnership working can create opportunities for professionals to come together to work creatively with families and communities to support better outcomes. Through sharing listening, talking and exchanging ideas, new understanding develops and examples of best practice working with families within their communities can emerge which can be innovative and makes a positive difference to front-line practice.
* **Developing quality service provision for all our families:** Each of us as practitioners and Managers through the services provided for families as part of partnership working can provide feedback that evidences the impact or identifies possible gaps in provision. It means that we can influence services for our families through direct feedback to organisations, managers, Senior managers that also informs what can be commissioned.

**How using the Practice Framework and Model strengthens partnership working**

Using the Markuz’s case study, this section briefly illustrates how the different elements of our Practice Framework and Model can be used to strengthen our partnership working and response to issues such as professional engagement, anxiety and risk management.

**Markuz’s Case Study Part 1:**

Markuz is 15 years old of Polish and lives with his parents Tomas, Father and Sonja, Mother and his siblings Agnieska (2 years old) and Lucaz (9 years old). A single assessment has been completed and Markuz is now subject of a Child in Need Plan for 6 weeks, with no previous involvement from Sandwell Children’s Trust (SCT) and a Social Worker has been allocated his case to work with the family.

Markuz’ parents contacted the Police as he had gone missing on several occasions. The Police made a referral to SCT due to concerns that Markuz was associating with a local gang in the area and involved in anti-social behaviour. He had also been arrested for an assault on a young person and possession of a bladed article, which he used to threaten the victim. Following the incident of assault on a young person, Markuz received a referral Order and is required to work with Matt, Youth Offending. Markuz attends Willows Academy and in in Year 8.

The Youth Offending Service (YOS) are involved but Willows Academy (School) have not been engaging in a meaningful way, which is having an impact on the family and professional’s ability to work effectively together. Clive, Markuz’s Social Worker is working in with Markuz, his family.

At the beginning of Clive’s intervention as part of the assessment process, speaking to Markuz and his family to identify which partner agencies were working with them ensured that they all contributed to the assessment, decision making and the need for a CIN plan (See Practice Note on Assessments). Clive worked with Markuz and his family to develop their safety plan which has been shared with professionals.

As Markuz is now subject to a CIN plan, Clive uses **‘the 3 Basics’** to understand this part of the process supports his understanding of what needs to be completed, by who and when. These basics provide a foundation for Clive and his work with Markuz and his family and includes the relevant legislation, local and national policies, practice guidance, standards and process maps and which will assist with the quality and timeliness of the work. By using these, Clive ensured that there was a consistent approach to his work and a common understanding amongst all the professionals involved about each other’s roles and responsibilities (See Practice note on the 3 Basics).

Adopting a **relationship-based approach** as part of partnership working Clive recognises the importance of developing and strengthening the relationships with each of the partner agencies, whilst also considering any barriers. Using the **building blocks** to help focus on how he has built, sustained and maintained relationships particularly with school he immediately recognises the need to strengthen this element of partnership working. Clive acknowledged that as part of the single assessment process, his relationship with partner agencies included regular and frequent communication and information sharing. However, more recently this communication was less frequent. Clive also recognised that Markuz has positive relationships with some staff in school and the importance of their involvement to provide a holistic picture of his circumstances. Clive also considered his use of **Social GGRRAAACCEESSS** to think about the development of his professional relationship.

Reflecting on the potential barriers surrounding the engagement from School, Clive realised that although he had contacted the school, he had not had any contact for a while from anyone in Markuz’s school. Reflecting on the need to understand and if necessary challenge their engagement, Clive used a strength based, child centred, approach to understand the issues surrounding their engagement in the CIN process. By doing this, he realised that although he had previously been in contact with his teacher, that his learning mentor had been identified as being the person who would be part of the CIN process. However, due to working part time, it meant that the learning mentor been unable to attend the CIN meetings and was often unavailable for calls. The Learning mentor had left messages for Clive to make him aware.

Understanding this, Clive ensured that meetings and calls were made when the learning mentor was available strengthening the partnership working and their contribution to the CIN process. The learning mentor was able to share much more information than had previously been provided by the School as part of the single assessment which was discussed with the family and helped strengthen the intervention with Markuz and his family and the quality of partnership working.

**Markuz’s Case Study Part 2:**

Two months after the initial CIN meeting, at Markuz’s review CIN meeting has been held his Learning Mentor has shared Markuz has been hanging around with some older boys some of whom are part of a local gang and are rumoured to be involved in transporting drugs across the country. Markuz’ has been reported missing on three occasions in the last four weeks.

**Markuz’s Case Study Part 2 continued:**

A young person has recently been stabbed and it is suspected that Markuz and his friends were somehow involved in the incident. School and YOS have shared their anxieties that his behaviour is deteriorating, he is disengaging and that he is at risk. They are unsure whether parents are doing what has been asked of them. Markuz said that some of the people he is hanging with have things going on with a Birmingham crew, but he is not part of it.

Professionals felt that an ICPC is needed and he needs to be made subject to a Child Protection plan. However, agreed that safeguards seemed to be in place whilst further work was undertaken to determine the next steps.

Reflecting on his partnership working and professional anxiety in relation to the increased risks to Markuz within supervision Clive explained to his manager some of the steps that he had taken to address this. Using **a trauma informed and relationship-based approaches** to maintain and sustain effective partnership working. Clive explained at this point and previously with School, early identification of the partnership issue, considering the impact on Markuz and his family and together putting in in place a strategy was important.

Adopting a **trauma informed approach**, he acknowledged that where risks increase when working with families, this could trigger a range of feelings and heightened emotions for professionals. Clive explained that whilst he shared some of concerns, he needed to use a proactive evidence-based approach to inform what needed to happen next. Recognising this, he ensured that he had spoken to partner agencies about their views and what they could all do at this point in terms of their intervention.

This included doing an additional direct work session with Markuz and his family linked to the concerns, identifying the safe people in his life, updating his child criminal exploitation (CCE) risk assessment and safety plan and updating his single assessment which was shared with partner agencies. By taking a proactive approach to the emerging concerns, Clive reflected that he had evidenced the **right balance between process and intervention**. In doing so, it would help to understand Markuz’s circumstances, increase his participation and support his safety.

Clive was clear that adopting a **relationship-based approach** was important and that this work needed to be completed by YOS, School and the family. He revisited **his Social GGRRAAACCEESSS** and how these combined to inform his relationships with the agencies as well as the family. YOS and School explained the additional support they would put in place which had been discussed with Markuz and his family and how they would contribute to the updated single assessment. Co-ordinating the help and support in this way complimented each other’s work but also showed to Markuz and his family the importance of working with them to understand and reduce potential risks and increase his safety.

By undertaking this work, it emerged that Markuz felt a sense of loyalty to one of his friends that had become mixed up in some issues with a Birmingham group of lads but had begun to realise the risks to him and his family. The direct work with his parents identified that they were working in a way to support his safety. His parents were using the safety plan and were also getting support from other family and community members to help divert Markuz away from the difficulties he was experiencing.

Clive identified that by all partners working together with the family in this way, a better evidence-based picture of Markuz’s circumstances emerged. This enabled him to challenge professionals’ views about the need to have an ICPC. Due to this work and the quality of the relationships developed, professionals agreed that there was evidence that there were enough support and safety for Markuz’s and his family.

**Supervision and reflective spaces**

Using reflective supervision to focus on the quality of partner involvement and partnership working when working with families. It provides an opportunity to talk about partnership working and service provision that is creative, dynamic and makes a difference but also a space to reflect upon any difficulties with and between partner agencies and how they can be overcome. Reflecting on the use of the different relationships formed in partnership, how these are informed by both our personal and professional selves using Social GGRRAAACCEESSS is important. It can help to reflect on your approach to partners and partnership working such as power differentials, possible biases, approaches to voluntary or community organisations which need to be considered when working with families.

Ensuring that the right partners and effective partnership working is occurring is crucial when working with families to make a difference to the outcomes of children and young people and provide continuing support when statutory involvement is no longer required.

The reflective questions within the Practice Framework and Model booklet can be used to explore the quality of partnership working such as those focusing on relationship, strengths-based practice and trauma informed approaches. Focusing on partners and partnership working within other reflective spaces as part of Group Supervision, Practice Learning Workshops, core training such as the Research Informed Virtual Reality Relationship Based Training (RiVR) and Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership.

**How can I evidence this work on the child/young person/young adults file?**

* Assessments, plans, updating plans and reviews need to evidence the right contributions from partner agencies to provide the right understanding of the child/young person ‘s lived experiences and their journey.
* Ensure that you ask partner agencies to evidence their work and any impact as part of your involvement and include this on the child’s file, updated assessment and reviews.

**Good Practice Points:**

* Maintain relationships with partner agencies through timely communication using phone calls, emails, virtual calls or face to face meetings so that information sharing is fluid.
* Being clear about the role and responsibilities of partner agencies within children’s plans and also at CIN/CP/TAF/LAC meetings supports the family and other professionals to understand the contribution of all professionals.
* Use clear and precise language and describe risk and vulnerability in detail - Different teams and agencies may use different terminology, so ensure you use language that is understood by everyone, including the child and their family.
* Acknowledge information that's been shared with you by partner agencies and ensure that unless it places the child/young person at risk that it has also been discussed with them and their family. Ensure that any outcomes have been shared with partners agencies as appropriate. When people feel their contribution is valued, they are more likely to communicate in future.
* Where there are differences of opinions between professional this should be discussed openly and honestly. This will help you gain a greater understanding of a child's situation and make informed decisions about the appropriate action to take.
* As part of your continuing professional development, in addition to the core offer, ensure that you also attend partnership training advertised within the weekly Learning and Development, Info Burst and provided by Sandwell Children’s Safeguarding Partnership.

**Further information and reading**

* Practice notes such as those relating to the Practice Framework and Model, Relationship and Based Practice are available on the Learning and Development page.
* The Practice Framework and Model Booklet, Information relating to the Child’s Journey, Participation and KSS and practice learning workshops are located on the Learning and Development Pages.
* Working Together to Safeguarding Children Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children 2018
* <https://www.basw.co.uk/resources/effective-partnership-working-partnership-principles-–-summary>
* <https://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide23/messages/mean.asp>

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**Authorised by:** Beyond Auditing Practice and Development Team: Pauline Dunkwu and Aman Basi.