

AN INNOVATION FROM A LOCAL SURE START PROGRAMME: FAMILY ESSENTIAL LIFESTYLE PLANS

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1. Introduction

Sure Start is a government initiative aimed at improving life and early educational chances for families living within the most socially and economically deprived wards within Britain. Person centred planning is a way of assisting people to work out what they want, the support they require and helping them to get it, and is the cornerstone of the government's White Paper for people with learning disabilities – 'Valuing People' (Department of Health 2001). The values and principles that underpin person centred planning are equally relevant to children and their families served by Sure Start programmes. Person centred planning has historically been focussed on individuals, and at Sure Start Waterbridge we developed person centred plans that are written with the whole family, called Family Essential Lifestyle Plans. Skilful person centred planning with an individual will always consider the person within the context of their family. However, Family Essential Lifestyle Plans take this a step further, recognise what is important to each family member, and identify the support that the child and each individual family member needs. Therefore they are child centred and yet family focussed.

2. Contextual Framework

In September 2003, Every Child Matters, a Green Paper (Stationery Office 2003), was published for consultation; this formed a part of the Government response to the inquiry undertaken into the death of Victoria Climbié, and developed a framework for building on the success of local sure start programmes to strengthen preventative services by focussing on four key themes:

- Increase the focus on supporting families, and carers.
- Ensure necessary intervention before children reach crisis point, and protect children from falling through the net.
- Address the underlying problems identified in the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report – weak accountability and poor integration.
- Ensure that the people working with children are valued, rewarded and trained.

The Green paper also introduced a positive vision of the outcomes they wished to achieve; these five outcomes had been identified through consultation with children, young people, and their families. Those that mattered most to children and young people were; to be healthy, to stay safe, to enjoy and achieve, to make a positive contribution, and to achieve economic well-being.

This consultation created what Margaret Hodge, Minister for Children, Young People and Families, described as “the richest and most significant debate on children’s services for over a decade” (Department for Education and Skills,) and gave clear endorsement to the Government plans for radical and positive change, for the way in which statutory, voluntary and community based services respond to the identified needs of children, young people, and their families. The response to the consultation was published in ‘Every Child Matters; next steps’ March 2004 (Department for Education and Skills 2004), coinciding with the introduction of the Children’s Bill, which became the Children Act 2004, providing the legal framework for the programme of reform.

Every Child Matters: Change for Children (Department for Education and Skills, 2004), brings together all the ways partnership agencies and stakeholders are working together towards improving outcomes for children, young people, and families into a national framework.

Research informs us that better outcomes for children and their families depend on the integration of universal services with targeted and more specialised help, and on bringing services together around the needs of the child and family. At the same time, schools are increasingly offering pupils learning that is personalised to meet their needs. And children and young people will receive increasingly personalised care from health services in line with the standards of the Department of Health’s ‘National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services (2004)

Recognising that service delivery within the sure start programme needed to be informed by research, evidence based, and focussed on quality outcomes for children and their families, the management board of Sure Start Waterbridge, made up of local statutory services, community organisations, faith groups and parents, commissioned training and support in person centred approaches, person centred planning, and to develop the concept of family essential lifestyle plans. The programme board and the staff team were driven by a belief, that a process of planning used so successfully for people who are learning disabled, which reflects and incorporates all that is seen as good practice within current service design and delivery for children and young people, could be adapted for use across sure starts multi-disciplinary services.

3. Person Centred Approaches

Using a person centred approach simply means working in a way that reflects the values underpinning person centred planning. There are also a number of practical tools called ‘person centred approaches’. These approaches offer a different way of gathering information about what is important to someone, what they want for their future, or what support they need. This is very different from typical assessments. It is a shared journey of learning to discover what Beth Mount calls the ‘rich folklore of people’. (Mount, B 1990b)

Professionals can use person centred approaches, to learn more about the children and families they support, but in a different way. At Sure Start Waterbridge, all the staff team were taught a number of person centred

approaches. These included 'positive reputations', which record what people like and admire about someone, and 'good days and bad' which identify what a good day looks like for someone, and what a bad day is like, and then work out together what it would take for the person to have more good days.

Terry, a health visitor, describes how using person centred approaches enabled him to write a more meaningful report with a family who were moving out of the area.

"My initial attempt at using some person centred approaches was with a family who are soon to move out of the area. Three of their children have multiple problems and the family have demonstrated a good deal of perseverance and tenacity in their dealings with a variety of services. In helping the parents to write-up the nature of the services the children need I have been able to use a person centred approach called "Positive Reputation," which captured aspects of the children's personalities, abilities and behaviours that would have been left out of the picture if I had simply focussed on a sort of "Problem –Service" report. By teasing out the essence of what is important to the children and their family as well as what is important for them it made my report much more meaningful and richer."

Diane, a Family Support Worker, used the principles of the 'positive reputation' person centred approach to develop 'feel good folders' with a family.

Diane developed 'Feel Good Folders' with a family who were struggling to identify positives about themselves individually and as a family. Diane made 'Feel Good Folders' for each individual in the family, and gave the family small pieces of coloured card to write things they liked about each other. They were also encouraged to write something positive about themselves. The family enjoyed the activity and it gave them the opportunity to share positive messages that they may otherwise have left unsaid. Each message had the name of the person who had written it on the card, and they were encouraged to place thing that made them smile (pictures, photographs etc.) into the folder. With other professionals the family had previously found it difficult to recall 'positive interactions', however using this person centred approach they had a permanent record of what they liked and admired about each other, which Diane helped them to add to, and use, through her work with them.

These stories illustrate how a few person centred approaches are being used with families and children.

The following table lists many other person centred approaches and suggests ways that these could be helpful (Sanderson, H, 2004). Some approaches will be similar to the ways that professionals work already, others may be useful to explore and adapt.

Table 1. Person Centred Approaches

Person Centred Approach	How it can be useful
'Relationship Circles'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for finding out who could contribute to getting the person connected • for identifying relationships that could be developed or strengthened • for showing the balance of family, friends and paid workers in the person's life.
'Identifying Gifts'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for showing what the person enjoys, is good at, and can contribute to • for identifying things that the person may want to do more often • for starting to think about the kinds of people the person gets on well with.
'Skills and Interests'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for showing what the person enjoys or has a passion for • for showing what talents the person has and the things they are good at • for showing what the person can contribute • for identifying things that the person may want to do more often • for identifying the places, people and activities that make the person happy
'Learning about Hopes and Dreams'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for finding the direction that the person wants her life to go in • for inspiring action • for bringing people together around a common purpose • for getting a sense of what makes the person tick – what motivates her.
'Recording how to provide good support'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for identifying exactly what good support means for the person • for describing in detail what people who support the person must do • for seeing what support someone may need to participate in community opportunities, college or at work • for discovering what motivates the person • for examining ways in which the person might be supported to become more independent.
'Communication Chart'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for exploring peoples' different perceptions about how the person communicates • for explaining exactly how the person communicates with us.
'Sharing and recording histories'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to keep in touch with the person's history • to identify the landmark or milestone events in the person's life? • to trace themes through a person's life story • to identify experiences that must not be repeated • to celebrate achievements • to identify opportunities and positive experiences that can be built on • to identify people or activities from the past

	that have gone missing and which the person might want to reintroduce
'How I spend my week'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for identifying the activities that the person is already involved in • for understanding more about the person's preferences so that they can be expanded upon.

4. Family Essential Lifestyle Plans

Person centred approaches can be used to enhance existing work, as Terry and Diane's stories illustrated, or can begin to build a picture that can be developed into a person centred plan.

Lorraine, a community nurse, who has been working with a family of four, used person centred approaches and realised that she had information about each family member that could form the basis of a family essential lifestyle plan. She suggested this to the mother, and showed her examples of family essential lifestyle plans. The mother was enthusiastic and delighted to have the opportunity to create a plan that would *"reflect the very essence of her, and her family"*.

Rachel, the Social Worker involved with the family describes how this approach differs from how staff in statutory services traditionally work:

"Previously I had very little time to establish a relationship with a family, I often needed to make an initial assessment of a families needs in a single visit. Working with person centred approaches has clearly demonstrated to me that preventative work which produces a clear, child centred, and family focussed plan should be how all initial social work assessments are undertaken"

Planning with children and their families may be particularly useful for working with families from minority ethnic communities, and professionals working with looked after children, and those seeking adoptive placements.

Sharon, Chair of the Sure Start Programme Management Board, and a foster carer comments.

"I didn't know what to expect when I began creating my families Essential Lifestyle Plan with support from my local Sure Start programme. I had seen individual plans and commented how wonderful it would be for my foster children to have their own individual plan. However now we have our family plan I believe it is really important that foster children not only own their own plan, but that all foster carers have plans to enable better matching and, where possible for children placed to become apart of the foster families Essential Lifestyle Plan."

Social care professionals are also recognising the potential usefulness of family essential lifestyle planning, as Sarah, a social worker, reflects,

“Continuity of care, and understanding a particular child’s needs, wishes, and feelings is something we, as a profession often mess up. It is true that Care Plans and Looked After Children (LAC) documents are our tools for ensuring needs, wishes and feelings are considered, and to some level these tools are effective. What Family Essential Lifestyle Plans offer however, is a true voice for the child to express what is important to them, from their perspective within the context of their family.”

5. Key Concluding Points

- At the heart of the development of this innovative approach to family support, lies the five outcomes identified by children, young people and their families and exude within the Every Child Matters publications.
- Through the local Sure Start Programme, and partner agencies we are exploring the potential of using person centred approaches and Family Essential Lifestyle Planning within a plethora of health, social care and early education settings.
- Children tell us that they like the approach because it gives them a voice, and allows them to be heard, as equals, Julie (not her real name) aged 5, recently stated *“I will make biscuits for everybody to eat at our next meeting”*, she was so excited that people were coming to listen to her.
- Families tell us that this style of planning allows them to reflect and identify what is important.

“Planning made me stop and think about what my son wants – not just what me or his Dad wants “

”For me, person centred planning helped me to see the person behind the labels. I thought I knew my son, but now I am learning about him, and the real person behind the label.”

- And professionals are identifying the potential use with pilot projects being introduced within local sure start programmes, children centres, social services family support, and adoption and fostering teams.
- Family Essential Lifestyle Plans are not an assessment, and unlike any other tool that is used to plan with families we are aware of, the plan is owned by the family. However they do create and provide demonstrably fuller and richer information, and insights in to family behaviour and functioning than traditional assessments. We are currently developing this approach to planning through professional organisations, however within learning disability services families themselves are using these approaches to plan successfully together without service intervention, and this is a possibility that needs exploring further within other family situations.

- Person centred approaches and Family Essential Lifestyle Planning are so versatile that they may be used by parents and families themselves to 'assess' their own situations, and within complex statutory and legal services. This flexibility we believe lends itself well to the needs of the common assessment framework, proposed within the Green paper, and consulted upon by the Department for Education and Skills August to November 2004, we look forward to exploring the possibilities this presents.

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