

**Proposal for a Programme of Practice Research and Organizational
Analysis for Telford and Wrekin Children's Services
Children and Young People's Portfolio
(Abridged by LJ June 09)**

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Aims of the research

The principal aim of the research will be to establish a basic picture of the children and their families who are referred to Children's Services along with the legal, procedural, administrative and service responses to the referrals. The intention is to look at referred problems, responses to the problems, identify areas for practice development and establish a position from which change can be measured in the event of future service changes. The Telford and Wrekin research will be undertaken within the context of the recent government reports and initiatives arising successively out of the *Assessment Framework for Children in Need and their Families* (2000), the Victoria Climbié Inquiry (2003), the 2003 Green Paper *Every Child Matters*, the subsequent 2004 Children Act, and more recently, the Laming Review on Improving Safeguarding. All these reports and initiatives have emphasised a range of difficulties with contemporary practice in statutory child and family services. The proposed study aims to explore and discuss the outcomes of referrals and identify areas of practice which show scope for development. Particular attention will be paid to those matters referred by non-social work professionals and this aspect of the research will form the agenda for discussions with the children's workforce in the inter-agency context.

The basic intention is to manage referral and assessment work at the 'front door' (Laming, 2009) by ensuring that the resources of *all* the agencies participating in the inter-agency network are effectively used to provide the best service by the most appropriate agency and professional.

The benefits of the Project – "Front Door" control

A number of recommendations emerging from Lord Laming's Review will be directly addressed by this project (See Appendix). Very similar studies to that proposed for this project have been carried out in a range of different local authorities (including those in other countries) over the past 10 years. The results of and recommendations arising from the work have enabled some local authorities to enhance child protection practices by introducing a concise range of referral management methods which have the effect of simultaneously releasing resources while allowing professionals in Children's Services to spend more time with those children about whom there are very serious concerns. These methods increase professional competence and create more resources to deal with children and families under severe stress. Their effect is to produce a stabilized view of and consistent response to situations which are often conveyed as variously confused, chaotic, complicated and threatening. Very importantly, it creates a much more confident workforce which is able to

give clear and unambiguous responses to referrers. In the words of a Duty social worker at one of the sites where similar research to that proposed has been undertaken "...they [callers] know by the time the conversation ends precisely what it is going to happen and why..." Control at the "Front Door" is an essential prerequisite to creating an orderly, efficient and effective service downstream.

The information made available by the research project will show the patterns of intervention and outcome which can be used to inform future service designs, the scale and nature of the resources required to produce change and develop and plan relevant training programmes at local levels. This will be especially important for those who work with and supervise the limited number of difficult and worrying long-term cases by creating and maintaining a tight focus from the very start of the case's career which will enable the most suitable forms of engagement, relationship and scrutiny.

The Research Programme in Telford and Wrekin

The aims of the research and the methods suggest a programme with six activities as follows:

1. Identification of the sample and data collection – June/July. This will include a half-day briefing on Telford and Wrekin's information system.
2. Construction of a research data base and data entry. - July
3. Data analysis. – July/August
4. Production of the Report and recommendations – August
5. Video recording the organization of referral-taking. Analyzing and editing the video-recorded data.
 - (a) Meeting with the duty/assessment staff to let them know what is going to happen and how the work is to be done – introductions etc.
 - (b) Observing the duty room/s and recording.
 - (c) Analysis and editing followed by showing the edits to staff involved to obtain their permission to use material in the presentations.
6. Dissemination and seminar presentations – by arrangement from September onwards. (September/October)

More than one person will be involved in most of the suggested activities for example the ethnographic work using video recordings requires one researcher/consultant to conduct the enquiry (asking questions, sitting with staff discussing procedures and examining logs, manuals etc.) while a second researcher/consultant operates the camera and sound recording. At least two researcher/consultants will be involved in data collection from paper and electronic records.

Appendix

Relevant Recommendations from Lord Laming's Review

Recommendation 6- Leadership and Accountability

Directors of Children's Services, Chief Executives of Primary Care Trusts, Police Area Commanders and other senior service managers must regularly review all points of referral where concerns about a child's safety are received to ensure they are sound in terms of the quality of risk assessments, decision making, onward referrals and multi-agency working.

Recommendation 7- Leadership and Accountability

All Directors of Children's Services who do not have direct experience or background in safeguarding and child protection must appoint a senior manager within their team with the necessary skills and experience.

Recommendation 9- Leadership and Accountability

Every Children's Trust should ensure that the needs assessment that informs their Children and Young People's Plan regularly reviews the needs of all children and young people in their area, paying particular attention to the general need of children and those in need of protection. The National Safeguarding Delivery Unit should support Children's Trusts with this work. Government Offices should specifically monitor and challenge Children's Trusts on the quality of this analysis.

Recommendation 11 Support for Children

The Department for Children, Schools and Families should revise Working Together to Safeguard Children to set out clear expectations at all points where concerns about a child's safety are received, ensuring intake/duty teams have sufficient training and expertise to take referrals and that staff have immediate, on-site support available from an experienced social worker. Local authorities should take appropriate action to implement these changes

Recommendation 19 - Interagency working

The Department for Children, Schools and Families must strengthen Working Together to Safeguard Children, and Children's Trusts must

take appropriate action to ensure:

all referrals to children's services from other professionals should lead to an initial assessment, including direct involvement with the child or young person and their family, and the direct engagement with, and feedback to, the referring professional

Recommendation 30 Children Workforce

All Children's Trusts should have sufficient multi-agency training in place to create a shared language and understanding of local referral procedures, assessment, information sharing and decision making across early years, schools, youth services, health, police and other services who work to protect children. A named child protection lead in each setting should receive this training.

Recommendation 55- Organization and Finance

The Department for Children, Schools and Families must sufficiently resource children's services to ensure that early intervention and preventative services have capacity to respond to all children and families identified as vulnerable or in need".