

Five key features of good practice in working with parents with learning disabilities:

- Accessible information and communication.
- Clear and co-ordinated referral and assessment procedures and processes, eligibility criteria and care pathways.
- Support designed to meet the needs of parents and children based on assessments of their needs and strengths. (Competency building support)
- Long-term support where necessary.
- Access to independent advocacy.

(Good Practice Guidance 2007)

Need to recognise and respond to the learning difficulty (Parenting with support/supported parenting).

If the focus is on things that can be changed (such as inadequate housing) and support needs that can be met (such as equipment to help a parent measure baby feeds), there are many more possibilities for bringing about positive improvements.

Safeguarding procedures

Whilst the same values about safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children should be applied to the children of learning disabled parents as to the children of non-learning disabled parents, such families have specific needs which require particular knowledge and skills if the professionals working with them are to provide an equitable service to these children and their parents.

(Jenny Morris – author of Good Practice Guidance)

- Accessible information
- Access to independent advocacy
- Support parents to be involved
- Specialist input to core assessments
- Appoint a key worker for the parent(s)
- Address possible vulnerability of learning disabled parent
- Provide practical support to parents when children temporarily removed
- Where child is not, or no longer at risk, provide support to prevent future problems arising

(Good Practice Guidance 2007)

Outcomes for children

	VPSS %	Assessment Centre %
Parents were looked after	38	13
Children previously removed	41	12
Children living with parents	84	24
Children not at risk of significant harm	62	6
Needs fully or partially met	88	88
Needs fully met	50	29
Needs partially met	38	59

Matching needs and services conducted by independent social worker – Liz Brown

Valuing Parents Support service

Aims of the services:

- Ensure that children are kept safe.
- Provide specialist assessment and intervention for parents with learning difficulties.
- Provide targeted specialist intervention for families in the community.
- Promote improved parenting skills and thus better chances of age appropriate child development for young children.
- Reduce delay in high risk families by identifying situations where children can not be cared for by their parents.
- Support Medway's target to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups, including children with a disability, children with special educational needs, children with mental health needs and young people at risk of exclusion or disengagement.
- Empower parents with learning difficulties to engage with services and accept support and assistance as appropriate to facilitate better health outcomes for their child and themselves.

Support provided

Individualised support

- Assisting with everyday needs, such as help with budgeting, bills, shopping, household organisation routines, safety and cleanliness.
- Supporting the development of parenting skills and understanding and engaging with parenting issues.
- Advocacy/support including understanding reports, attendance at meetings/courts and engagement with Children's services.
- Support to access other more specific support services, such as the Freedom Project, West Kent and Medway Lifeways (finance), and the Housing Department.
- Support to access mainstream services, such SureStart and Children's Centres.
- On-going emotional support.
- Support with contact with children not currently in their care (ie supported contact and letter box - contact via the post with children who have been adopted).

Outcomes for children

Foster care:

- 9% of children in the VPSS sample - 52% of children in the AS sample

MNS concluded:

- VPSS service is meeting the needs of the children, and children are at far less risk of harm than those in the comparison group - a sample of children and parents in touch with the assessment service
- Parents in touch with VPSS are those who are identified as multiply disadvantaged.
- The service parents receive from VPSS seems to be enabling children to remain with their parents.

Service outcomes

Aspects of the service which appear to be contributing to the success of the VPSS include:

- Building relationships with parents based on trust and respect.
- Working in partnership with parents at their pace.
- Using appropriate materials to enhance parental understanding.
- Enabling parents to continue to access groups provided by the assessment team.

Additional themes from the qualitative evaluation:

- Supporting positive relationships between parents and other services.
- Positive interdisciplinary working.
- Supporting Child Protection workers to do their job.
- Cases discharged to VPSS as trusted to ensure welfare of child.

Coventry grapevine

- A holistic, community-powered advocacy service for parents with a learning disability in Coventry which will help them:
 - become better parents;
 - navigate social care's risk averse approach to giving them the chance ; and
 - build stronger connections with their communities

Aiming to develop:

- Sustainable and self-sufficient relationships between volunteers and parents continuing after the project ends
- A new self-governing group to continue running monthly meetings for parents and volunteers
- An informal network of parents and volunteers to allow them to share their experiences and help others

Volunteers/groups

- A network of volunteer advocates trained to
 - Speak up for parents
 - Provide long-term listening, non-judgemental support (on-going if needed through care proceedings and post-adoption support)
 - Teach them parenting skills and self-care skills
 - Help them build connections to their community and other parents.
- Fully supported by Grapevine. Provide independent advocacy if required

Month parenting group (peer support) – flexible format:

- Workshops/skills sharing/inviting professional speakers
- Engaging with professionals in a different setting
- Peer support, socialising and making new connections (for everyone)

Shared Lives

- A personalised community-based type of support with accommodation
- Delivered by approved carers who are part of a Shared Lives scheme
- The service user shares the home and family life of the Shared Lives carer
- Registered with CQC as provider of personal care. Adults service (18+) but can also take young people in transition from 16+
- Not registered with OFSTED as not providing services to children.
- 154 UK schemes. Predominantly LD service.

What does Shared Lives offer?

- A place to live for the adult and the child in a normal family home, sharing in all aspects of home and family life. Long or short term.
- Support around parenting, plus usual support to the adult.
- Can be from start of pregnancy and birth partnering although more commonly referrals come when there is a child with parent. Most common when there may be considerations ongoing about the parenting ability of the parent.
- Adult retains parental responsibility for the child. Shared Lives carers are not foster carers as they are supporting the adult to support the child, not supporting the child themselves.
- Not an assessment service, although Shared Lives carers can offer very valuable insights into how the parent is managing that a more formal assessment would miss.

Mellow Futures

- Pilots in England and Scotland – 30 mothers across 5 sites.
- Adapted Mellow Parenting Mellow Bumps and Mellow Babies with mentor support.
- 6 weeks antenatal and 14 weeks post natal.
- Baby groups, personal development, use of video, lunch and supported activities with the babies.

- Mothers loved it – develop peer group, enjoyed relationship with mentor, enjoyed the safe nurturing relationship with facilitators within the closed group.
- Mentor – volunteer mentors shocked by some of the mothers' situations but responded to the challenge – mother to mother.
- Most of mothers' referrers saw improvement in mother's interaction with and care of baby.

Mellow Futures

Changes in level of concern regarding the baby during the programme:

- Over half (16/30) of the children's 'classification' with regard to involvement with children's services had been reduced
- For 4 babies there were increased concern for the baby's welfare
- The level of concern remained the same for 10
- When the baby's 'classification' remained the same, the referrers reported improvements in the mother's relationship with and care for their baby for most of the mothers
- The mothers' situations were complex and other factors were also noted, in particular in relation to increase in concerns.

The level of concern was reduced in relation to welfare of 16 of the babies

- Two babies had been returned to their mothers care, one of these babies was subject to a child protection plan and one was classified as a child in need.
- One baby, for whom the plan had been adoption remained with their mother on a supervision order.
- Five babies were no longer subject to a child protection plan and we now considered to be a 'child in need'.
- Three babies were no longer subject to a child protection plan and there were no concerns about their welfare.
- There were no concerns regarding 4 babies who had been considered a 'child in need.'
- There were no concerns regarding 2 babies whose mothers had been assessed under a 'Maternity Assessment framework' (MAF) due to pre-birth concerns.
- Both MAF EHA are similar to a CAF (Common Assessment Framework) assessment. In one pilot area, support was provided to mothers if needed after a MAF or EHA.

Costs and benefits

Annette Bauer (2015)

The economic case for early and personalised support for parents with learning difficulties
http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/64778/1/_lse.ac.uk_storage_LIBRARY_Secondary_libfile_shared_repository_Content_PSSRU_Discussion%20Papers_DP2907.pdf

Used economic evidence from literature and costs supplied by services with regard to particular cases

Preliminary economic evidence of cost saving. Longer-term research needed.

Shared lives

Care package including:

- Shared lives placement
- Health visitor visitors
- Social worker – 4 visits a week £ 47, 738
- (Save housing benefit - £3, 744)

Foster care £ 83, 585

Placement order £ 400

Return on investment **£ 1.8**

VPSS

Total budget	£ 253, 440
Per family (30)	£ 8, 450
Community/foster care assessment	£ 7, 640
Residential assessment (10 weeks)	£ 32, 760 – 37, 723

Cost saving **if 11 out of the 30 families** have a community/foster care assessment rather than a residential assessment.

Cost saving of **£14,552** per parent (family) at 52 weeks if children remain at home and not in foster care. Short term return on investment was **£ 2.7**.

Mellow Futures

Mothers' care packages (average)	per year	20 weeks
Islington	£ 19, 859	£ 12, 591
Northumberland	£ 7, 991	£ 4, 004

Costs of pilot programme (pre and post natal – 20 weeks):

Islington	£ 2, 347
Northumberland	£ 1, 973

Prevented costs (no foster care/adoption)

Islington	£ 4, 237
Northumberland	£ 1, 287

Summary – what does this positive practice look like?

- Suited to the parents' learning needs and circumstances
 - Accessible information, advocacy, individualised learning
- Family-centred approach – Think family
- Range of services
- Covering the family life cycle and a variety of situations
- Co-ordinated approach across services
- Provide children with support in their own right
- Emotional support to parents

(Good Practice Guidance 2007, Tarleton et al 2006, SCIE 2005, McGaw and Newman 2005)

Stories of positive practice.

References

- SCIE Research briefing 14: *Helping parents with learning disabilities in their role as parents*. <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/briefings/briefing14/>
- McGaw and Newman (2005) *What works for parents with Learning difficulties*. Barnardos.
https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/What_Works_for_Parents_with_Learning_Dis.html?id=d35xAAAACAAJ
- IASSID Special Interest Research Group on Parents and Parenting with Intellectual Disabilities. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities* , 21 , 296 – 307.
- Tarleton and Porter (2012) Crossing No-Mans Land. A specialist support service for parents with learning disabilities. *Children and Family Social work* Volume 17, Issue 2. Pages 233–243
- Tarleton and Turner (2016) *Mellow Futures pilot programmes in England and Scotland – short joint report*. Bristol, Norah Fry Centre for Disability Studies, University of Bristol.
- WTPN (2009) Supporting parents with learning difficulties and learning disabilities. Stories of positive practice.

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/sps/migrated/documents/positivepractice.pdf>

More information

www.healthystart.net.au/



More information – Working Together with Parents Network

www.wtpn.co.uk

Resources include: (<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/wtpn/resources/>)

- Stories of positive practice
- Introduction to parents with learning difficulties
- Parenting assessments
- Finding the Right support? Research report discussing issues and positive practice
- Links to joint protocols etc.

