

What Works Centre for Children's Social Care

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Happy holidays and thank you!

Welcome to our final newsletter for 2018. It has been an exciting and busy year but we look forward to even greater progress in 2019. Before we round up on the latest news from the Centre, here's a seasonal word from our Chair, Sir Alan Wood: 'Well, we at the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care think we have many reasons to have a merry and joyful Christmas and New Year. We are up and running; we have appointed key staff to our leadership team; we have a home; we have launched some fantastic change projects; our research programme is already delivering the goods and there are some exciting new strands under development; our work exploring promising new approaches for putting evidence into practice is ramping up; and we have strong and productive relations with partners across the sector. So, thank you to all our colleagues who day-in and day-out do so much to ensure children and families are kept safe and are supported to make good decisions about their lives. Joy to all, have fun! See you all soon.'

Change partners to be announced in new year

In September, we invited local authorities and children's services trusts to be partners in evaluating one of two change initiatives in children's social care. The first initiative will focus on locating social workers in schools to work with children and families, and the second will look at empowering social workers to take budgetary allocation decisions with a view to preventing the need for children to enter care. With just over a third of local authorities in England responding to our call, the successful partners are due to be announced early in the new year.

Exciting collaboration to re-analyse data on education for children's social care

The Centre is to re-analyse previous trials commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to identify specific insights for children who have cleared a statutory threshold in the children's social care system.

The purpose of the re-analysis is to identify which interventions work differentially for Children In Need (CIN) and Looked After Children (LAC) as opposed to the general population of young people or for young people in receipt of free school meals. Michael Sanders, Executive Director for the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care said: 'I'm incredibly excited about this project to work out what it is in education that works specifically for children and young people in the care system, and what doesn't. Re-analysing such a wealth of data represents a huge opportunity to rocket propel the evidence base in this area and to really make a difference to children and young people's outcomes and the social workers who are so passionate to improve those outcomes.'

Michael added: 'It's my hope that by working with the EEF in this way we will see more partnership projects with the EEF and that together we can support each other's research and share learnings for our cohorts that will be translated and adopted into real practice improvements and evidence.'

For more information, see the news story on the Centre's website.

Call for partners to help design studies in social worker health and happiness

To support the children's social care profession, the Centre has just announced it will be collaborating with academic researchers from the Harvard Business School, University College London and beyond, to understand how to support and increase the health, happiness and productivity of social workers in England.

The Centre is looking for expressions of interest from prospective partners to help us design a study investigating what works best to help social workers achieve success in their work and happiness in their lives. We're looking for input at an early stage from social workers, social work managers and senior leaders to ensure that we design research informed by the people most affected by these issues. We also want to learn from strategies that local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and other social work employers already have in place to promote the wellbeing and productivity of their workers. Visit the Centre's website for more information.

Movement meeting set to launch Centre's new Evidence Store

The What Works Centre for Children's Social Care is to host a national event for social work practitioners interested in evidence-informed practice. The event, to be held at Birmingham Council House on Wednesday 30 January 2019, will provide an opportunity to discuss new evidence about how to create the best outcomes for children and for brainstorming how practitioners can lead the charge for evidence-informed social work practice.

At the meeting, we will also be launching our Evidence Store, which will provide accessible summaries of robust evidence about which social care interventions are effective and why. The Store will launch with 12 summaries on subjects ranging from signs of safety to kinship care and video feedback. Make sure you visit the website on 30 January to explore this exciting new resource.

Team WWC taking shape

As new Executive Director, Michael Sanders, takes up his post on 14 January, the Centre has also appointed new senior appointments to the team.

Emily Morgan will be joining the Centre as the new Operations Director in February while Louise Reid will be Head of Programmes, starting in January.

We also interviewed for two new posts as Data Science Manager and Researcher and will be advertising for a Team Administrator and Personal Assistant and Head of Practice early in January.

The team will also be moving to new offices in early January. Michael said: 'It will be great to have the new team together under one roof. We've made so much progress this year but, as the team takes shape, I hope 2019 will see us make huge leaps and bounds in driving truly evidence-informed practice and delivering real impact for the sector'.

Partnerships deliver progress

It has been an exciting year for the development team, working with a number of local authorities to develop a range of tools and approaches to support a culture of 'evidence-minded' practice.

We are part-way through delivering a diagnostic tool to help local authorities assess how well they are using evidence to inform practice. The tool was developed with Walsall Council and is now being trialled in Greenwich. Early indications suggest that the tool taps into aspects of practice that are not necessarily picked up in other inspection and review frameworks, confirming our hypothesis that there could well be a need for it in the sector.

We have also been working closely with Wigan Council to develop a toolkit for self-evaluation. Wigan will now be undertaking an evaluation using the approach and tools we have developed, supported via a series of workshops.

Work on developing evidence masterclasses to increase confidence in using research evidence in decision-making is also progressing well. We held our third and final co-creation workshop for evidence masterclasses with Calderdale and received very enthusiastic feedback on the content we've developed with Bristol, Buckinghamshire and Calderdale authorities.

The prototype data benchmarking tool to support local authorities to quickly and easily find actionable insights from their own data has been successfully deployed in Bracknell to identify efficiencies in its front door services – we'll continue to refine and develop the tool in the new year and report back here on progress.

Finally, we've been working with our research partner, CASCADE, to plan launching our Evidence Store in January, see above.

Reviewing the Centre's brand

We have made considerable progress building our communications capacity and capability in our first year but we're now looking to bring more clarity to the Centre's corporate identity and to create a more compelling brand. Over the coming months we'll be commissioning an external agency to conduct a wholesale review of all our branding, to ensure that the initiative's external identity reflects our ambitious mission and values. This will cover not just our visual identity but also recommendations for our brand values in support of achieving the Centre's strategic objectives.

Do please share this update with colleagues and encourage them to sign up to the newsletter.

Thanks for reading and see you in 2019!

