

Case Study #1

RECLAIMING SOCIAL WORK IN HACKNEY, UK

Reclaiming Social Work (RSW) is an initiative that set out to achieve high quality social care for vulnerable children and families. Introduced in Hackney in 2008, it is a whole system change to the way in which statutory child and family social work is practiced and managed.



APPROACH

The Reclaiming Social Work model uses a systemic approach, which focuses on relationships and interactions in the family and wider systems rather than on individual pathologies. Moving to this model involves a cultural shift across the whole local authority, with everybody embracing this way of working with families. The model as implemented in Hackney organises its multi-disciplinary workforce into units of 5 to 7 workers, each with specialist roles: social workers, clinical specialists, children's practitioners and unit coordinators. Each unit is led by a social worker who is both manager and practitioner and who holds cases collectively with the team. Every family is discussed in a weekly group meeting, which offers intensive, reflective time to discuss and decide what needs to happen next. The unit-coordinator plays an essential role in freeing people's time from administrative tasks. The units are intended to have a greater shared understanding and responsibility for cases. Following intensive training in systemic approaches, they are expected to provide more intensive support by bringing more resources to bear on each case, and through high quality direct work.

The inventors of the RSW model set up a social enterprise which has supported 30 local authorities across the UK and abroad to implement the model.

Sources

http://www.morninglane.org/Morning_Lane_Associate_1/Reclaiming.html

http://www.cityandhackneycamhs.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/themes/camhs_white/downloads/csc-the-way-we-do-things-here-2008.pdf

Reclaiming Social Work? An Evaluation of Systemic Units as an Approach to Delivering Children's Services - Forrester, Westlake et al. (June 2013)



IMPACT

Reclaiming Social Work is associated with lower rates of children becoming the subject of Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time. The number of looked after children has also shown a dramatic fall over the course of Reclaiming Social Work.

An evaluation of the model conducted in 2013 found that children and families were seeing 2 to 3 times more of their workers compared to comparator authorities, and it was reported that consultants also had high levels of client contact time. As well as improved levels of contact, the systemic unit model appeared to achieve more consistency in good practice than more conventional approaches. Even the high quality work was of a higher standard than in the comparison local authorities for complex cases or crises. Parent ratings for services were comparatively higher, and statistically significant, across a range of areas when compared to local authorities that were not using the systemic unit model, with a similar positive results when analysing worker satisfaction and current levels of stress.

In terms of value for money, the overall cost of care in Hackney has fallen by almost five per cent during the course of Reclaiming Social Work. This fall is directly affected by the fall in numbers of looked after children, but also by a 55 per cent fall in staff days lost to sickness, an improvement in placement stability and by very low numbers of children in residential care.



Department
for Education

