

Impact of the CCC Early Years team 'training role' on levels of safeguarding competence

History:

The Early Years team's role has increased and broadened in recent years, partly as a result of concerns raised at county and national level (Ofsted) regarding the level of competence of some of the early years practitioners. The Learning Improvement Service Early Years team began to provide staff for the LSCB's developing training pool. These staff members were fully trained and delivered numerous courses both at level 2 and 3. Currently, there are six members of our countywide team who provide training at level 2, both generic and early years specific courses.

Ways we train and what documentation we use and provide:

- In addition to the generic training at level 2, a specialist early years level 2 course was devised; this was based on the generic level 2 course with a number of additional slides, approved by the LSCB. The additional material covered areas that were problematic for practitioners (eg. logging concerns, policy and procedures, Early Help Assessments), and as a direct response to concerns raised by our team members and by Ofsted inspectors. Over the last year, we have trained approximately 85 practitioners through this course.
- As well as the timetabled courses, the Early Years team responds rapidly to serious concerns or issues by providing bespoke training. This particular support is directed and sanctioned by our team managers. Over the last year, we have trained approximately 60 practitioners trained in this way.
- Our team has robust quality assurance systems (audits) that include a safeguarding element; these serve as a vehicle to share and reinforce the messages of the LSCB.
- Early Years Briefings are held in each area of the county on a termly basis. These briefings are well attended, and always contain safeguarding information and updates, with regard to county and national policy and procedures.
- A service is also provided whereby all private, voluntary, independent childcare providers and childminders are sent information about safeguarding issues by blanket email. This covers several hundred early years settings and childminders.
- As a way of closely monitoring the frequency and type of advice our team members may provide practitioners, the 'Safeguarding Rolling Record' was created for our use.
- In response to observed weaknesses in record-keeping and the problems that arose as a result of these, a robust system of logging concerns was devised and offered to all childcare providers countywide. This system has been adapted, and last year was provided for all schools in the county, to use if they wish.

The impact of the above:

- Evaluations from practitioners on the training courses indicate an increased knowledge of the subject in the vast majority of delegates.
- The 'Safeguarding Rolling Record' indicates that serious safeguarding breaches and the frequency of requests for advice have decreased since the log began in April 2014. Examination of the Rolling Record seems to indicate that the childcare providers are far more confident in making appropriate decisions and applying correct systems and procedures more accurately. The nature of advice given by Early Years Advisers appears to be shifting to one of confirming the actions taken, rather than having to remind them of basic responsibilities.
- Settings that are using the 'Log of Concern' documentation now are evidenced to have robust records that are fit for purpose.
- Our audits used in annual visits and other checks indicate that there are fewer breaches to statutory safeguarding requirements. Practitioners are now far more confident in how and when to make referrals, helping to keep their children safe.
- Rapid intervention by the Early Years team has insured that several childcare providers have improved their Ofsted judgements; in some cases, these avoided inadequate judgements. In one particular example, Ofsted found numerous breaches in safeguarding procedures. Officers from the Early Years team intervened and offered support and training; this resulted in the nursery's Ofsted judgement moving from 'Requires Improvement' to 'Good', where the Ofsted inspector praised the quality of the nursery's safeguarding and procedures.
- Practitioners are becoming more aware of the Thresholds for referral, and the numbers of Early Help Assessment referrals from early years practitioners has increased from 2 in 2013 to 116 in 2015.
- Since the new Ofsted inspection framework in September 2015, safeguarding is reported separately. Cumbrian inspection reports since this date reflect the robust and highly effective safeguarding systems in place.
- The most recent Ofsted statistical data (published 26 March 2016, for the period from 1 September to 31 December 2015) indicate that the number of 'Good' and above settings in Cumbria is higher than the North West and National figures. Cumbria has more 'Good' settings and fewer 'Requires Improvement' settings than the National figures.

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