

in Cumbria **Every Child Matters**

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Information and assessment – integrated processes



The Every Child Matters agenda recognises that multi-agency working and partnerships are essential for the

delivery of effective services for children and young people. Young people in Cumbria recognised and recorded this in the early summer when they included *Connected* services as one of their ten expectations.

But what are the implications of this? Clearly we need to share information with care and we need to have a common set of values and definitions if sharing is to contribute to better services and support rather than creating confusion.

This issue of *In Cumbria Every Child Matters* focuses on some of the latest developments and tools to help us on information sharing and common assessment as part of a children's trust way of working. This isn't always straightforward: we need to have guidelines and a framework for information sharing (see the Toolkit article) so that we get it right first time and we also need an understanding of the national requirements of the Common Assessment Framework or CAF (see *What do we mean by ...?*) if we are all to be working in a similar way.

I hope that the content of this edition will help us all to grasp the opportunities of information sharing and common assessment and to handle the challenges in a way that improves outcomes for children and young people.

Dave Todd
Information Sharing and
Assessment Manager, Cumbria

Cumbria Information Sharing Toolkit

The Information Sharing Toolkit (IST) has been developed to establish a comprehensive and consistent standard within and across organisations and authorities for the treatment of personal identifiable information. It clarifies some of the issues and places the **service users** - children, young people, and their families - at the centre of how their information is used.

The Information Sharing Toolkit currently has four tiers and a set of supporting appendices:

Tier 1: Framework Document (Strategic)

It sets out the rules, values and principles for information sharing between organisations, irrespective of the purpose.

Tier 2: Information Sharing Arrangement (Operational)

This document addresses the 'who/why/where/when/what/how' questions. It sets out the specific purposes for sharing data including the appropriate legal duties and powers, what data is to be shared, how this will happen, who can access it, the consent processes involved (if appropriate) and the process for review.

Tier 3: Operational Instruction (Practitioner)

This provides a means of communicating to operational managers and practitioners that an Information Sharing Arrangement between certain partner organisations is now in place, its operational impact and the principal actions arising from these. It should contain sufficient information to give managers and practitioners comfort and confidence about sharing service-user information without overburdening them with detail.

Tier 4: Privacy, Confidentiality and Consent (Service User)

This covers a range of processes and documentation that directly impacts upon an organisation's **service users** and will include such things as 'Privacy/Confidentiality Statements', 'Fair Processing Notices', 'Consent' and 'Subject Access'.

The Appendices

The Appendices include definitions, relevant extracts from a variety of legislation, interpretive legal guidance, suggested operational guidance and various 'good practice' documents.

"For this Toolkit to have validity, and be effective, then all signatory organisations must agree to adopt it as their organisational standard and to have a strategy in place that will allow for its adoption, dissemination, implementation, monitoring and review.

In doing so they will be giving assurances to their partner organisations, managers, practitioners and service users about their handling of personal identifiable information as well as committing themselves to fulfilling all of the requirements, statutory and non-statutory, contained in the various documents."

Dave Todd

The Cumbria Information Sharing Toolkit has been largely based on work produced by the Knowsley ISA/IRT Project, which in turn was derived from the work produced by the Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership.

What do we mean by... common assessment?

Common assessment is all about using a common and consistent approach to finding out about (assessing) potential service users and their needs.

By providing a framework, common assessment can help you identify what the needs are when you're not sure. It provides a structure for recording information that you pick up in conversation with the child, young person or family and so it can also help you in getting other services to help, because they will recognize that your concern is based on evidence, not just your assumptions. And other services in your area will also be using the national Common Assessment Framework (see below) so that you will find information sharing and systems more straightforward.



The Common Assessment Framework (CAF)

The Common Assessment Framework has three parts:

- A pre-assessment checklist to see if extra help is required for a child.
- A process for undertaking a common assessment to help practitioners gather and understand information about the needs and the strengths of a child.
- A standard form to record information and assess what is required and which can be readily

shared with others who may help to address the needs of the child.

CAF combines elements from other types of assessment and in particular the Framework of Assessment of Children in Need. Information is gathered round three **domains** which ensure a systematic, holistic approach to assessing need. They are as follows:

- The development of the child which includes health issues; emotional, behavioural and social development and aspects of learning.
- Parents and carers where basic care, emotional warmth and stability are considered alongside the ability to set boundaries, guide and stimulate the child.
- Family and environment where the wider family are considered within the context of housing, financial considerations and the wider community.

Why use it?

The intention is that CAF will reduce the number and duration of different assessments to which children and young people who have additional needs have historically been subjected. It should facilitate earlier intervention and speed up service delivery. It will embed a common language between practitioners and help the provision of integrated service delivery for children, young people and families.

Who will use it?

It is expected that every agency offering services to children, young people and their families whether from the statutory, community or voluntary sectors, will train at least some of their staff to complete common assessments.

It is intended that it will be the initial assessment used by all practitioners where additional needs are identified. In agencies where practitioners are already undertaking specialist assessments, e.g. APIR (Connexions), ASSET (Youth Offending Team), it is expected that all or most of the staff will only require a relatively small amount of training. Further guidance on how CAF interfaces with more specialist assessments will be available from DfES in April 2006.

It was announced in September by the Children's Minister, Beverley Hughes, that moves were underway to tackle information sharing issues between health and other children's professionals given that some well-established codes of practice in health currently make information sharing difficult. It is a valuable achievement that, in Cumbria, there is broad support for the Information Sharing Toolkit across all agencies, including the healthcare Trusts.

When will it be used?

In Cumbria a DfES pilot has already started in Millom. By September 2006 there are plans to implement CAF in the Phase 1 Children's Centres and Extended Schools. This is likely to be followed by implementation in Phase 2 Children's Centres and Pathfinder Extended Schools. Further rollout is likely to be on a locality basis. Please note these plans for rollout in Cumbria are subject to the local developments towards children's trust arrangements and as such are subject to change. Guidance indicates that CAF will be fully embedded by March 2008 across all agencies.

What can service providers do to prepare for the implementation of CAF?

- Spend time on the DfES website: www.dfes.gov.uk and search for the FACT sheet
- Become familiar with the Pre-assessment checklist and the Quick guide to Common Assessment

And finally, three practice tips prepared by Roger Aitken of Barnardos

1. When thinking, talking or writing about a child consider clustering your observations/opinions/facts under the three domain headings.
2. When receiving or seeking a referral, aim to get it in a format and language that incorporates the CAF domains and elements.
3. Try getting into the habit of asking the parent and child to sign any assessment.

For further information contact Jane Humphries at Cumbria Children's Fund via jh@cchildfund.org.uk or 01539 742345 or Dave Todd at Connexions Cumbria via dave.todd@connexionscumbria.co.uk or 01931 711300. Dave and Jane are the Co-leaders of the Information Sharing and CAF work streams in the Cumbria Change for Children Partnership.

in Cumbria **Every Child Matters**

National recognition, national influence

The NCH Millom Children's Centre has been a trailblazer for Cumbria Children's Fund since 2003. The Children's Centre Team has been developing new ways of multi-agency working and delivering family support to the Millom area in all sorts of ways – from health visitor services, to parenting support, youth inclusion programmes and after school clubs for children who need additional support.

The Project is further developing on the infant school site in Millom, managing a capital investment of £300,000. Developments include extending the existing playground to make provision for full day care places for 0-4 year olds and expanding the space available to the Children's Centre to include a new entrance and reception area, family room, children's space and a health services room.

"Millom is a really good example of how joined up thinking and working with front line practitioners can create energy and enthusiasm for change in a community"

Kathryn Cornah, Cumbria Children's Fund

NCH Millom Children's Centre, along with Millom Extended School, is an integral part of the Millom Network Partnership, which is a self-directed group of local professionals from voluntary and statutory agencies working with children and families in the Millom area. Partners also include the Millom Federation of schools, Cumbria Sure Start, Connexions, Police, YOT, Young Carers – West, CADAS, Teenage Pregnancy Initiative, EWS, Education and Social Services.

"The overall aim of the Millom Network Partnership is to improve multi-agency working for those agencies offering services to children and young people aged 0-19 in the Millom area and their parents and carers. This will enable them to get help that is tailored to their needs at an early stage so that each child and young person has the best chance of being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and experiencing economic wellbeing"

Alison Green, NCH Millom Children's Centre

The Partnership has been working towards integrated provision of services locally since 2004. The work of the Partnership has been acknowledged by the Change for Children Partnership in Cumbria and nationally by the

DfES. Millom is now both a county pilot and one of only 13 national pilots implementing the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). The DfES selected Millom as a pilot from over 90 other Local Authority proposals. This is a real and exciting opportunity for the Millom Pilot to feedback and influence both county and national agendas for implementing the CAF and information sharing processes.

"The CAF is already being used with children and young people and their families in the Millom area experiencing difficulties and needing additional support. It is used as a tool to holistically assess needs and to enable agencies to share information and together with the child, young person and the family to develop a multi-agency support package that really makes a difference."

Gillian Troughton, Cumbria Sure Start

For further information contact Kathryn Cornah on 01539 742345 or via kc@cchildfund.org.uk.

Connected services are vital

"Going from service to service wastes a lot of time. If we visit more than one service and they are connected then important information can be shared and they can deal with it without as much fuss. The services should make sure we are at the right place to have our questions answered."

Cumbrian young person, April 2005



Anticipating CAF and exploring local priorities

Some time ago, Cumbria Children's Fund recognised the need to begin a learning process in Cumbria with a view to implementing the Government's Common Assessment Framework (CAF) as part of the Every Child Matters initiative at a later date. The Fund decided to commission a research project to develop and use a local prototype and Professor Hedy Cleaver and her colleague, Don Nicholson, were appointed to complete the study. Their work took place during 2004 and early 2005 and the final research report was published in July 2005.

The aim was to explore the practical challenges, difficulties, opportunities and benefits that a new, more integrated approach to assessment of needs and referrals could deliver, not only for the professionals in the various sectors and services, but also for children and young people themselves.

The Cumbrian projects involved in the research project were:

- Carlisle Young Carers Association
- West Cumbria Young Carers Assoc
- South Lakeland Young Carers Assoc
- Barnardos South Lakeland Family Support Services
- Nurture Group, Orgill Primary School
- Eden Young Carers Assoc
- Furness Young Carers Assoc
- Millom Family Network Centre
- Nacro Junior Youth Inclusion Programme
- East Cumbria Family Support Assoc
- Whitehaven Harbour Youth Project

"The findings from the study suggest that the introduction of an agreed common assessment record will result in more focused referrals as well as more informed plans. We found a reduced need for the same information to be re-recorded and a reduction in the number of separate assessments for individual children and families. We even had examples of new information about known cases coming to light."

Professor Hedy Cleaver

"The Cumbrian prototype record improved inter-agency collaboration and information sharing about children with additional needs. However, it is essential that time and resources are devoted to ensuring that all agencies working with children and young people are aware of the introduction of a common record and are trained in its use if they are to be committed to it and involved in its development."

Jane Humphries, Cumbria Children's Fund Programme Director

Copies of the Report, entitled **The Development and Use of a Local Prototype Common Referral, Information and Assessment Record in Cumbria**, are available from Cumbria Children's Fund on 01539 742345.



Funding merge to create grant programme

It was announced in September that a new national Grant Programme has been created to support voluntary groups working with children, young people and families.

The Children, Young People and Families Grant Programme brings together five existing funding streams in one to reduce bureaucracy and create a more strategic approach: the Children and Young People's Participation Fund, the National Voluntary Youth Organisations Grant Scheme, Safeguarding Children and Support Families grants, the Strengthening Families Grant and the Sure Start Voluntary and Community Sector Grant.

£20 million is available in the first funding round and two types of funding will be available: Strategic grants for initiatives with national significance in improving outcomes for children and Project grants for innovative approaches to service delivery that have the potential for national significance because they can be replicated or scaled up for delivery elsewhere.

Applications from charities and non-profit-making organisations should be received by DfES by 11 November 2005 and decisions will be announced in January with funding beginning in April 2006.

Full details, a Q&A briefing and the grant application forms can be downloaded via www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/voluntaryandcommunity/cypfgrant.

In Cumbria Every Child Matters is published each month by the Cumbria Change for Children Partnership, a multi-agency group covering health, education, social care and all aspects of work with children and young people in Cumbria. The newsletter is also available online via the Cumbria County Council website at www.cumbriacc.gov.uk Ideas for future issues, requests for further information and comments should be addressed to the Editor, Michael Blakey, Project Officer – Change for Children Partnership via michael.blakey@cumbriacc.gov.uk.

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