

# What Works for Children?



The role of research evidence in the Children's Fund  
Leeds 27 February 2002

*Around 50 managers and practitioners from eight Children's Fund (CF) authorities met at the Thackray Medical Museum in Leeds in February. The focus of the day was to share approaches and discuss how research evidence can be used in the development of CF programmes.*

## Evidence Based Policy and Practice

Evidence Based Policy and Practice (EBPP) aims to promote the use of research findings in the development of services. Research findings on what works, and what doesn't, can play an important part in the decision making process when new services are planned, funded and implemented. The Leeds seminar was the first in a series of meetings to foster learning between practitioners from the Children's Funds and researchers from What Works for Children initiative.

## Some of the concerns you raised

Some concerns were raised, particularly in the morning sessions, about the role research can play in the development and practice implementation of the Children's Fund:

- How will research evidence be relevant to my local area and its specific conditions?
- There is a possibility that research could stifle innovation
- What if national and local policies conflict with research evidence?
- Reservations about how research is presented and need for more accessible versions in terms of language and medium

We shall start work to address all of these.

**Your  
priorities for  
research  
evidence**

We asked you which topics were your priorities for research evidence in summary format. A range of interests came up; **offending, education, disabled children and family support**. Three were mentioned several several times:

- **Partnership work**; implementing change, working together across sectors, models of good practice and how we can benefit from partnerships
- **Participation**; how to engage children, young people's views on different types of participation, involving young people at different stages of decision making and involving different groups of children
- **Mental health**; ADHD, psychosocial transition changes (eg loss and bereavement) and attachment disorders

The groups thought that a website and email information would be the best way of distributing evidence summaries or general information related to research evidence. It was emphasised that any information needs to be written in clear and concise English and should be suitable for children and families as well as practitioners.

**Workshops  
and seminars  
for staff**

How to work in partnership was again flagged up as an important topic that people would be interested in learning more about. There was also interest in

how to improve the relationship between research and practice – how research can be interpreted and made relevant to a local area. A number of you said you would like training in how to plan and conduct an evaluation and how users can be involved in local evaluations.



## Workshops:

In the afternoon, participants split into three topic groups: offending, health inequalities and involving children.

### Reducing offending

Much research is available in this area, both on risk factors (eg income level, family situation) and service delivery (in particular service effectiveness).

The group was particularly interested in how to work with schools, families, communities who present risk factors, and try to prevent offending from the beginning.

More information is needed about children aged 4-10 and how to work with children at various ages. Emphasis was placed on evidence on what doesn't work as well as what works – you want to know that you are not causing harm. More research is needed on how to engage with boys. The group wanted evidence on offending to be accessible to parents as well as to practitioners.

### Reducing inequalities in child health

The group would like research evidence to be available on sex education, mental health, dental care and disabled children. Some concern was raised as to how mental health and well-being are measured.



As well as research evidence, the group emphasised practitioners' own experiences as valuable in service development. One way of using this knowledge would be for the practitioners to record their own experiences to share with others

Some participants wanted advice on how to build in an evaluation into the development of a service from the very start of the project. Practitioners wanted to feel they had more of an ownership of the research carried out on their work - that the research process was made more inclusive.

### Involving children and young people

The group expressed interest in research on young people's views on different types of participation, involvement of young people at different levels of decision making, different methods of involvement for different ages of young people, especially those under 11,

and methods that work with specific groups of young people, for example care leavers. Any research that could back up the importance of participation would be of use as well as information on how to co-ordinate user consultation across the strategy of the Children's Fund.

Consultation with young people runs the risk of raising expectations and there is a need to explain exactly what can be achieved from the start. In relation to this the group would like a) research into ways that difficult issues/government policies can be explained to young people and b) explaining participation research to young people in formats suitable to them.

### What Works for Children

The next event with What Works for Children will be in Leeds in June this year, and will be addressing one or more of the issues raised on the last conference. A date for the event will be circulated shortly.

Kristin Liabo - City University

Helen Roberts - City University

Trevor Sheldon - University of York

Di McNeish - Head of Research and Development, Barnardo's

Patricia Lucas - City University

If you have any questions please contact Kristin Liabo at: Institute of Health Sciences, City University, Bartholomew Close, London EC1A 7QN; Direct line: 020 7040 5970; [k.liabo@city.ac.uk](mailto:k.liabo@city.ac.uk)