

**London Borough of Redbridge
Children's Services**

Evidence Informed Practice Strategy



Developing a Learning Organisation

**Version 2
December 2012**

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1. PREFACE

Doing the right thing ... in the right way!

'Evidence is fundamental in social work practice. Social workers use direct observation and evidence from the child, family or others who know them to form an understanding of what is going on. They can use evidence from research to inform their analysis of why any problems are happening and they can use evidence on effectiveness to guide their plans on how to help solve the problems. Currently the use of evidence in the final two categories is very limited and improving this is one necessary element in driving up the level of expertise in the profession'

The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report – A child centred system (2011)

'Local Authorities and their partners should start an ongoing process to review and redesign the ways in which Children and Families social work is delivered drawing on evidence of effectiveness of helping methods where appropriate and supporting practice that can implement evidence based ways of working with children and families'

Munro (2011) Recommendation 13

2. INTRODUCTION

This Strategy is a revision of the first version which was published in March 2012 and includes developments to date.

3. AIMS OF THE STRATEGY

The aims of this Strategy are to:

- Provide an understanding of what Evidence Informed Practice (EIP) is;
- Set out the importance of Evidence Informed Practice (EIP); and
- Outline how staff from all professional backgrounds can be supported to develop their use of evidence to inform their practice within the context of a developing learning organisation.

4. SCOPE

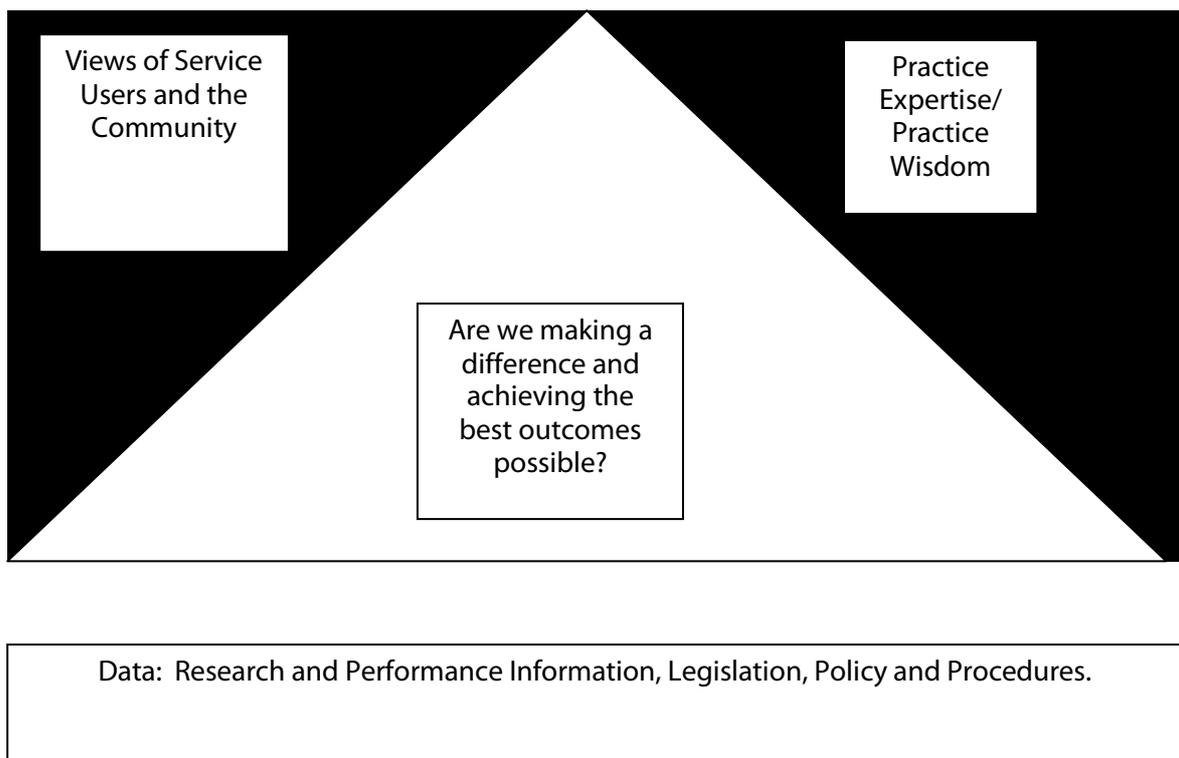
This Strategy is for all staff employed by, or within, the London Borough of Redbridge Children's Services from across the professions of social care, education, health and support services. Although EIP's relationship with social care has acquired particular prominence due to the publication of the Munro Report, which has provided some of the quotes supporting this Strategy, it is beneficial for staff from all professional backgrounds working with children, young people and families, or supporting those that do.

5. WHAT IS EVIDENCE INFORMED PRACTICE?

Evidence informed practice means that decisions about how to meet the needs of children, young people, their families and carers are informed by an understanding of:

- **Practice knowledge and experience.** This includes professional wisdom and values, law and policy, knowledge from and about the community, the opinions of colleagues and fully explored and identified 'gut feelings' or instinct.
- **The views and wishes of service users and carers** (sometimes known as experts by experience). This includes their expectations, their preferences, the impact of the challenges they face on their lives and their views on our interventions).
- **The best available research evidence about what's effective.** This includes:
 - National research findings and academic studies
 - Local research/reviews/evaluations
 - Service user feedback and complaints, including children and families not using the service
 - Local performance information
 - Local good practice groups

This is illustrated in what is known as the evidence triangle (illustrated below).



This process of decision making and the action taken as a result is called Evidence Informed Practice (EIP). Evidence Informed Practice covers planning and decision making at all levels and areas of the organisation i.e.

- Individual work with children, young people and their families;
- Supervision or 'one-to-one' sessions;
- Team, Service and Directorate Planning;
- The development of strategies and policies (including this one);
- Commissioning and decommissioning services; and
- Managing performance and delivering services.

Being evidence informed in your work means:

- Asking challenging questions about current practice;
- Knowing how and where to find relevant research;
- Understanding key messages about what works;
- Reflecting on your own experiences in order to learn;
- Measuring the impact your work is having for service users;
- Listening to what service users have to say about services;
- Being explicit about how research, experience and user views have informed your conclusions, proposals and decisions;
- Sharing knowledge and best practice with others.¹

¹ Leading Evidence-Informed Practice: a handbook" (Rhiannon Hodson and Elizabeth Cooke, Research in Practice, 2007)

6. WHY IS USING EVIDENCE TO INFORM PRACTICE IMPORTANT?

Those working with children and families have to make important decisions every day - decisions that affect the lives and outcomes of children, young people and their families, with sometimes far reaching and enduring consequences. Using evidence effectively means that we can make the best use of our professional skills and knowledge to plan and deliver more effective services and make well-informed decisions to ensure better outcomes for children, young people and their families. In short – we are doing what we are doing because we have evidence that it will work. If professionals do not base their interventions on the best available evidence of what is likely to help, at best resources may be wasted and at worst, have a negative influence on outcomes.

7. EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE OR EVIDENCE INFORMED PRACTICE?

The original definition of Evidence Based Practice is taken from the medical profession and is *“the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current evidence in making decisions about care of individualised patients”* (Sackett et al 1997). This is often altered to fit more with social care to read *‘in making decisions regarding the welfare of service users and carers’*.

The Munro Review of Child Protection says that:

“Evidence Based Practice is sometimes used in the narrow sense to refer to using methods of helping service users that have research evidence of some degree of effectiveness in some places where the methods have been tried and evaluated. Here (in her report) it is used in the broader sense of drawing on the best available evidence to inform practice at all stages of the work and of integrating that evidence with the social worker’s own understanding of the child and families circumstances and their values and preferences. It is not simply taking an intervention off the shelf and applying it to a child and family.” (p92)

This Strategy supports Professor Munro’s views but substitutes the word “informed” for “based” because it implies that practice knowledge and intervention decisions might be enriched by prior research but not limited to it.

8. LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

“Learning is work and work is learning.”

HR Magazine (2005)

“Learning organisations have strong cultures that promote openness, creativity and experimentation among members. They encourage members to acquire process and share information, nurture innovation and provide the freedom to try new things, to risk failure and to learn from mistakes.”

SCIE (Social Care Institute for Excellence) (2004)

"If research evidence is to enhance professional judgement, it will require local authorities to encourage a learning culture. If social workers simply use evidence to shore up their initial assumptions, rather than to understand the range and complexity of relevant factors, such a resource may exacerbate poor practice. In short, access to the evidence base must be supported by organisational and professional research literacy."

SCIE (Social Care Institute for Excellence) (2004)

9. HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE WORKING IN A 'LEARNING ORGANISATION' AND WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

SCIE sets out characteristics of a social care learning organisation under five broad headings which form the basis for the examples below.

Organisational Structure

- Service user and carer feedback and participation are actively sought, valued and resources are used to influence and inform practice.
- Team working and learning and making the best use of all staff skills are integral to the organisation
- There is cross-organisational and collaborative working.

Organisational Culture

- There is a system of shared beliefs, values, goals and objectives
- The development of new ideas and methods is encouraged
- An open learning environment allows learning from mistakes and the opportunity to test out innovative practice
- Messages from research and new evidence are thought about and incorporated into practice
- Information from training is widely and routinely disseminated.

Information Systems

- There are effective information systems for both internal and external communication
- Policies and procedures are meaningful and understood by everybody.

Human Resource Practices

- There is continuous development for all staff including a clear supervision and performance management policy.
- Feedback is continually sought from staff throughout the employee cycle, including via performance management, supervision/one-to-one meetings and exit interviews.

Leadership

- There is capacity for the organisation to change and develop services over and above the day to day delivery.
- Leadership at all levels embodies and models the key principles of a learning organisation.

10. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF EVIDENCE INFORMED PRACTICE (EIP) AS PART OF A LEARNING CULTURE?

"Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world: indeed it is the only thing that ever does."

Margaret Mead (1901 – 1978)

"The important thing is not to stop questioning."

Albert Einstein (1879 – 1955)

Who	Benefits	Responsibilities
Service Users i.e. children, young people and their families and carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service users are listened to and used to inform practice and policy • Service users are treated as individuals with individual needs • Increased engagement with service users • Decisions are made based on evidence of need • The reason for decisions can be more easily explained and understood • Unmet need is more likely to be explained and addressed • Positive outcomes are more likely 	Service users should be supported to ask <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What information (including written information) can staff give you about the organisation? • What range of services are offered, are there any other organisations providing these services and how quickly they will be provided? • How quickly will decisions be made and how will you be involved in this? • What can staff tell you about the quality and effectiveness of the service? • Are there policies about equal opportunities (including equitable access to services), anti-discriminatory practice, complaints and confidentiality? • What qualifications, skills and experience do the staff have that will be working with me? • What is expected of me within the process? • Is there a local advocacy group and am I entitled to an advocate?

Who	Benefits	Responsibilities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happens during an assessment? • Can I refuse a service and what happens if I do?
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased confidence in decisions and actions • Increased engagement with service users including more time to spend with them • Improved professional credibility • The reasons for decisions can be more easily explained and understood • The opportunity to reflect on practice • Support with finding and using evidence • Increased contributions to Continuous Professional Development • Finding out about new ideas and innovations is motivating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about the organisation's vision and policies and be able to communicate these clearly to service users and carers • Know how you can contribute to the organisation's vision • Be clear about who the primary service users are • Understand your own role and that of the organisation and be able to communicate this to others • Recognise that you belong to a team, to a division, to a service and to the local authority and be prepared to contribute to all of them • Ensure that core social work values, particularly respect are adhered to by everybody at all times. This is as important when answering the phone as when involved in a complex piece of practice • Have a clear understanding of accountability and communicating this to all stakeholders particularly service users and carers • Receive feedback from services users and carers positively and ensure that their views are passed on to managers. This involves advocating for service users where appropriate • Take responsibility for your own learning and utilise all possible sources of knowledge including tacit and informal knowledge often held by experienced

Who	Benefits	Responsibilities
		<p>workers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share your knowledge • Value supervision as a two way process • Ensure that premises are suitable and as welcoming as possible • Take action to maintain both service and personal motivation by encouraging a work life balance
Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability. The public and council members can see how decisions are made • Efficiency. Services and practices are planned and based on evidence of need • Better Value for Money. Practitioners are doing the right thing • Good Practice is informed by consultation with service users • Good Practice is shared within and outside the organisation • Services are evaluated to improve interventions • Standards in commissioning and evaluating services and projects are raised • Specialised support for social care staff in the development of the council as a learning organisation 	<p>Leaders must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model organisational values including continual professional learning • Listen to all stakeholders (service users and carers, staff, relevant external agencies) as key contributors and learn from the messages received <p>Leaders should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that policies, procedures, systems, processes and new developments are based in evidence • Encourage lateral and not just hierarchical relations between staff and managers • Involve all internal and external stakeholders in reviews of practice and policy • Identify the potential of staff irrespective of grade and role • Make clear that leadership can happen at all levels of the organisation • Demonstrate the knowledge underpinning policies and development • Provide ways of gathering information from service

Who	Benefits	Responsibilities
		users and carers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that information is provided for development not just for compliance • Ensure that audit staff are involved in development advice not just checking work after the event • Build positively on the cultural diversity across the organisation's internal and external stakeholders • Encourage openness and appropriate risk taking and reflection • Provide workload time for reflection and development

"When service users come back and see their files we have to be sure that what we did with them was valid and reliable."

(Member of Redbridge Children's Services staff.)

"Managers are instrumental in shaping cultures. In part they do this by talking about what they value (e.g. that time spent learning is just as much real work as duty, assessment and direct work with service users). But culture change also requires managers to take action to demonstrate these values. Changing the culture of teams happens over a period of time by encouragement, modelling and nurturing. It is not delivered quickly – people need to unlearn beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, behaviours and rules and to re-learn new ones."

"Firm Foundations", Research in Practice (RIP) (2006)

Munro states that changing the way that organisations manage frontline staff will have an impact on how they interact with children and families. There is evidence that workers tend to treat the service user in the same way as they themselves are treated by their manager.

"For some organisations the change will need a move away from a blaming, defensive culture to one that recognises the uncertainty in the work and that professional judgement, however expert, cannot guarantee positive outcomes for children and families."

The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report – A child centred system p107 (2011)

11. WHERE WE ARE NOW?

"There ain't no journey what don't change you some."

David Mitchell Cloud Atlas

This Strategy recognises that a large percentage of staff are now familiar with the concept of EIP. Evidence from the Redbridge Ofsted Inspection², undertaken in October 2012, indicates that research and other forms of evidence are informing practice and subsequently assisting in evaluating its effectiveness and informing future practice. The Ofsted Report also concluded that *"A strong learning culture is in evidence throughout the council and its partners ..."*³

Resources continue to be made available to teams to support them in developing it. These resources include:

- Membership of Research in Practice (RiP), providing access to research, learning events, elearning, learning materials etc supported by a local Strategic Lead, Link Officer, and 3 Assistant Link Officers.
- Membership of Making Research Count (MRC), providing access to a number of learning and development opportunities related to research;
- Community Care Inform licences, providing access to guidance on legislation, articles, journals, research findings to support practice;
- access to SCIE (Social Care Institute for Excellence) Athens, C4EO and the NSPCC Inform website; and
- resourced Pilots on "New Ways of Working" across the Children's Trust.

Whilst clear progress has been made, we need to continually challenge, as a 'learning organisation', whether evidence it is being used sufficiently and systematically or on an ad hoc basis with staff relying on existing customs and practices to inform their decision making.

12. HOW DO WE GET WHERE WE WANT TO BE?

"Firm Foundations – A practical guide to organisational support for the use of research evidence" (Research in Practice 2006) sets out five key 'firm foundations' for organisational support which will be used as the basis of an action plan to develop EIP.

1. Giving a strategic lead:

² Ofsted "Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children – LB Redbridge", published 15 November 2012

³ Inspection Report page 14, paragraph 48.

- a. Have a Strategic Champion.
- b. Establish strategic ownership of systems to support EIP.
- c. Support dissemination and implementation of resources.
- d. Stock take.
- e. Have a strategic plan.

2. Setting expectations:

- a. Develop consensus about what is expected of staff and managers (the **MINIMUM** standards that the organisation will support).
- b. Communicate expectations to staff.
- c. Embed expectations in the personnel process.
- d. Embed expectations in working practices.

3. Encouraging learning from research:

- a. Being a culture that values and rewards learning.
- b. Enabling staff to keep themselves up to date.
- c. Creating and using lateral structures (e.g. action learning sets).
- d. Being outward looking – learning from the integrated workforce.

4. Improving access to research

- a. Extension and expansion of the resources available via external partners i.e. CCI, MRC, RiP, C4EO etc.

5. Supporting local research:

- a. Research/evaluation by practitioners, 'in house' staff or external consultants.
- b. Building relationships with local universities using your students and their projects.
- c. Showcasing learning and development opportunities.
- d. Collaborating with other Local Authorities e.g. via the NE London Social Work Development Partnership.
- e. Offering research opportunities to students.

13. MONITORING PROGRESS

Feedback from service users, staff and Ofsted indicate that great strides have been made in the development of Children's Services as a 'learning organisation' since the publication of the first version of this Strategy. Evidence of the use of research, reflection and the impact of training can be seen in supervision/one-to-one meeting notes, on case files and most importantly on service user feedback forms. Development of the Children's Services Staff Feedback mailbox and forum show the commitment to the sharing of learning, ideas which will contribute to development.

However, learning is a journey without end. Updates will continue to be provided to the Children's Trust Management Team (CTMT) and the Children's Service's Management Team (CSMT).

14. REVIEW

This Strategy will be regularly reviewed and updated as appropriate.

15. USEFUL LINKS

Department for Education (DfE)
www.education.gov.uk

Research in Practice
www.rip.org.uk

C4EO
<http://www.c4eo.org.uk/>

Community Care
www.communitycare.co.uk

Making Research Count (MRC)
<http://www.beds.ac.uk/research/iasr/mrc>

NSPCC Inform
<http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/resarch>

Seven Standards of Public Life
http://public-standards.org.uk/About/The_7_Principles.html

Skills for Care
<http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/home/home.aspx>

Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE)
www.scie.org.uk