

Families' perceptions of their induction process

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Background

The views of families at Sunfield had been gathered for a number of years through a series of surveys which have proved extremely useful in identifying areas of good practice and find more ways to support families. As Sunfield's Family Service Department had evolved over time in a responsive way to meet the needs of families, it was felt timely to identify one area of practice for further investigation. At the point of induction many families have had an arduous journey to secure services for their child. Understanding the experiences of that process from the point of view of the family (in whatever way family is defined) was felt to be essential in enabling the organisation to meet the needs of its families. Crucial to the process were the needs as defined by families themselves, not needs which arise from assumptions of service providers.

The aim of the project

To explore the experiences of families during their induction at the point their child joins Sunfield.

Method

An evaluation of the families' induction process was conducted based on a qualitative analysis of interviews with families. A participatory approach was adopted with two strands being particularly influential. Central to the research process was the formation of a Parent Advisory Group (PAG), consisting of three Sunfield parents, who, having 'lived the experience', could formulate interview

questions from the parent perspective. Equally important, was the notion of “sharing skills” and adopting a transdisciplinary approach to research. Consequently eleven members of staff from across site were trained in research techniques in order to collect and analyse data. All families were offered the chance to participate with twenty families being set as a ceiling figure. Each researcher was paired with a more experienced researcher to undertake the interviews.

Summary of main findings

- parent emotion
- the right place to be
- settling in
- positive staff attitude, capability & understanding
- family centres
- openness & honesty
- communication
- meeting the needs of the whole family
- link families

Taking Action

All findings have been incorporated into the Sunfield Families Staff Training Programme.

Publications

- **“First Impressions”** by Barry Carpenter, Sally Conway and Teresa Whitehurst
Special Children Aug 2005
- **Parents as Research Partners : Working together to explore family experiences of their induction to a residential special school** by Sally Conway, Sue Powell and Teresa Whitehurst
PMLD Link - Summer 2005

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