

**Module L5970: Intervening Effectively in Residential Childcare**

**MSc Advanced Residential Childcare, University of Strathclyde**

**Assignment Submission**

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## **Introduction**

Within this assignment I will identify and discuss a form of intervention that is a focus of my work and explore the ways in which I would like to make some related changes. I have done so through my attempts at promoting leadership at all levels within the workplace and the introduction of an exciting project which aims to enhance the leadership capability in Scotland's Social Services. I will review the literature relating to leadership and its importance within Residential Child Care. I will explore the process of the project we as an organisation embarked upon and the challenges faced. I will relate this to notions of effectiveness and what works in residential child care.

## **Literature Review**

Informed by the 'Leading Together' research, the 'Strategy for Building Leadership Capacity in Scotland's Social Services 2013-2015' was developed. Hicks (2008) would advocate that Leadership has only been developed in Social Work very recently, whereas it has been gaining importance in residential child care over a significant period of time (Hills & Child 1999). On the back of the development of the first strategy, there have been compelling innovations which have brought challenges within Scotland Social Services which have ramifications for leadership. In addressing said challenges, services are required to work in partnership and be innovative whilst acknowledging everchanging political context in service delivery. To work effectively it's important that Scotland's social Services sway partnership organisations to dream big, challenge and be brave and manage risk whilst overcoming barriers. A clear need for enhancing leadership at all levels can be seen in 'Social Services in

Scotland: a shared vision and strategy 2015-2020'. Its focus; 'a socially just Scotland with excellent social services delivered by a skilled and valued workforce which works with others to empower, support and protect people, with a focus on prevention, early intervention and enablement.' Self-leadership and integrity across the workforce is needed to achieve this vision as well as feeling included in contributing to service delivery. Working collaboratively and with different leadership styles is what is required to ensure leaders deliver through this transformation we as a sector are experiencing with regards to leadership. Hersey (1985) defines effective leadership as involving an "adaptive style known as situational leadership which is responsive to the changing capacity and demands of an organization".

To identify, within Scotland's Social Services, what good leadership should resemble, the Scottish Social Services Council commissioned some research in 2015. They wanted to identify how we know that good leadership is making a difference within our sector. The research found that "...there was a sense that people know when they experience good leadership...its shows itself when people using services feel respected and have their voices heard even if resources are limited or decisions are made they do not agree with." Similarly, Bullock (2008, p232) suggests "Some research suggests that leadership is best understood in the context of a social role rather than a personal attribute or innate skill." Other findings from the research were that "Good leaders in social services care passionately about improving the lives and opportunities of people who face disadvantage and inequality. They hold true to values of respect, compassion and fairness even when they must make difficult decisions. Contribution analysis and logic modelling were used to explore, illustrate and understand the development of good leadership within Scotland's social services. The leadership logic model was created and encapsulates the link between good leadership and positive outcomes for young people. The model also identifies elements that support or

restrict the evolution and implementation of leadership and highlights the areas which the sector should pay special attention to. Key elements were used to inform the development of the strategy and the way in which the plan was delivered. The research emphasised the need for ongoing evidence in the subject matter “there is evidence to suggest the attention given to leadership development over recent years has made a difference; it is harder to be sure of the breadth of impact. There has already been a focus on embedding leadership across organisations within social services therefore this strategy compliments it whilst contributing to needs with regards to leadership capability and capacity in relation to the workforce. Supporting the learning and development of leaders; strategic and commissioners is a focus of the activity over the next two years. People who use services, frontline workers, managers and leaders all have a beneficial skill set and previous experience which underpins and contributes to enhancing service delivery in Scotland.

## **The Background**

To provide the reader with some context, I arrived at my service as a newly appointed senior practitioner after having been a main grade worker for several years. A mere 7 months later I was promoted internally to Assistant Service Manager and have been at the service for just over two years. The organization is small and privately run which can accommodate up to 7 young people at any given time.

The Service Manager attended a ‘Leadership Logic’ workshop run by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) in collaboration with the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS), unfortunately I was unable to attend however from the workshop came the opportunity for the Service Manager to express an interest for our organization to be involved in a project run by the partnership which would hope to enhance leadership at all levels. The specific issue which he highlighted as wanting to focus on throughout this project

was ‘embedding the leadership logic model in the supervision experience for all staff.’ As the Assistant Service Manager, I have a responsibility to be leading on initiatives within the organization along with the Service manager and have 2 senior practitioners to support in driving these initiatives. To provide the reader with some background, at our last inspection, we were downgraded in ‘Leadership and Management’ with one of the criticisms being around supervision and self-evaluation. We have since implemented a robust system of supervision, employing the Continuous Learning Framework and the SSSC Leadership Capabilities framework. Leadership at all levels is one of the things which we feel to be lacking throughout the staff team therefore we wanted to use this as a central focus and show continuous improvement in this area. We were confident that we were able to show a positive distance travelled in the areas of leadership and staff supervision since the inspection, similarly we felt strongly that the leadership learning journey should not stop here. The primary beneficiaries of this work would be the children who receive the care from a staff team who would, as a result of the project, be a more confident and competent team and a group of children whom report positively on their experiences of being looked after. We anticipated that the work would be embedded in the organization through a process of ‘workforce buy in’ and through systems of ongoing self and external evaluation of the project. Placing it within the framework of supervision which is a mandatory requirement within the service will hopefully mean that leadership logic language will become embedded as a culture norm within the organisational discourse.

## **The Workshops**

The first workshop took place on the 24<sup>th</sup> August and was an introduction to appreciative inquiry. Appreciate inquiry is ‘an approach for creating and sustaining organisational

change. It focuses on what works well and seeks to build on this. It really took us down a path that I did not anticipate but one I could now see that we really needed to travel.

From the first workshop we scheduled a development day with our staff for Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> September where we envisaged taking them through the process which we undertook ourselves to see where the similarities lay. We intentionally planned for the Service Manager not to attend, for people to feel uninhibited and to say what they really felt. I led the development day and was supported by one of the Senior Practitioners. Despite my preferred leadership being an authoritative and pace setting style. Given the developmental needs of the staff it was a priority to adapt a more coaching style. The Pacesetting Leader “sets high performance standards and exemplifies them himself”. A coaching style focuses on personal development. It works well when employees are already aware of their weaknesses and want to improve (Goleman 2000).

We felt it would be worthwhile to be as truthful and open with the staff team as possible, outlining our experience of the half-day which we had, what thoughts/issues/questions it raised with the management team, and then connect it to the value we place in including the staff views. We were very clear on where we hoped this may lead and then advised that we would follow this up by communicating with them about what has happened on the back of them sharing those views. This would hopefully get more buy-in and involvement, so things aren't being done to staff, but done with them and they can see how the direction has been shaped by their input.

Prior to the development day we considered carefully how the staff would be sharing their views, as some of the things they may share will be sensitive and probably will relate directly

to others in the room (either those they work with or are supervised by). In choosing to use a post-it exercise we felt it is was a safe and trusting enough space to answer the types of questions we would be asking them, and everyone would have an opportunity to be heard.

Our second workshop was held on Thursday 12th October which encompassed our reflections on Workshop 1, our progress since workshop 1; mainly focussing on the views that we captured from the staff, and our agreed actions to the outcomes highlighted in the leadership logic model going forward.

Our third workshop held on the 13<sup>th</sup> December was an intersect in Leadership & Management in Supervision. It provided an exciting opportunity for us to come together to get to know the other partners involved with the project, build good relationships with each other and encourage others to act on issues arising within the project. The session loosely followed the principles of action learning. This way of working promotes, collaborative working and problem solving, relationship building, the best use of resources- financial and human, more confidence to take action and make positive changes, a willingness to question and look differently at 'issues'. In preparation for the workshop we were asked to consider an important issue that we were facing within the supervision and leadership project. We were asked to give our issue a title and it was as follows: How do we encourage meaningful ownership of, and participation in, a group supervision model? We have previously floated the idea of a group supervision model however it had not been met with the level of enthusiasm that we had hope for. Some evidence from our self-evaluation indicated that group supervision would have a positive impact on staff development in our organisation. We were unsure whether there is the willingness and capacity of some team members to utilise the opportunity of group supervision to its fullest benefit. There are also issues about who

might best mediate or facilitate the group supervision process. A good outcome would be that there would be greater interest and enthusiasm for the concept of group supervision, and that staff would feel confident to contribute fully to the process. Although it is the management who are driving the project. It needs the buy in of the 'whole' team. There is perhaps more of an ambivalence rather than a resistance amongst team members. So far, we have identified team members who are possible resisters, those with lateral leadership and those with referent power as well as blue sky thinkers to form a small working group who will go out and meet with people who have experience of group supervision to hear about the pros and cons. We hope this may generate enthusiasm and from these individuals we hope to run some pilot group supervision sessions.

We as a management team are due to meet with the SSSC and IRISS on 25<sup>th</sup> January for a learning set and final workshop. The day will involve reflecting on our journey so far and planning for the rest of the project therefore this gives us time to think about key points we might wish to spend time working on as a group. On reflection, by this point, we should have begun to draft the practicalities of the group supervision process. The Service Manager has however handed in his resignation, so we have had a minor setback in terms of the project given he was going to be responsible to facilitating the group supervision model.

### **Evaluating the Effectiveness**

The Scottish Social Services Leadership Strategy Group will highlight things which work well and note differences in partnership plans which have set out to meet objectives and outcomes. Whilst referring to the logic model, evidence will be evaluated by those who embarked on the project. The impact of specific leadership activities will be identified by asking the question "How do we know any of our leadership activity is making a difference to people who use our services?" We developed a leadership evaluation plan alongside the



action plan to shape the evaluation activity and the leadership logic model was used to measure progress. We used careful consideration to work together to come up with ideas and used this data as a collective to reach a consensus surrounding the impact that the leadership activity has had on the staff team and more importantly the young people who use our services. Progress in relation to meeting targets and outcomes will be showcased on an annual basis. In terms of long term goals, the effectiveness of the strategy would be showcased in improvements to management and leadership sector wide and a sustained quality across the board in Scotland. Inspecting and improving care and social work in Scotland: Findings from the Care Inspectorate (2011-2014) already evidences the notable improvements in Scotland's social services and high achievements in areas such as leadership, management and the quality of care. Furthermore, examples of good leadership practice indicate that when the organisations culture supports enhancing leadership across the staff group, the outcomes for young people who reside within the organization are revolutionized. Examples of good leadership are evidenced on the SSSC website under the 'Step into Leadership' heading and are added to each year.

### **Effectiveness of the Implementation**

Although the project began in August, I have quickly realised that change doesn't happen overnight and the process of embedding the leadership logic model in the supervision experience for staff is in its infancy. The SSSC and IRISS had stated on one of our last meetings that there was funding for a further project. Given there is still a distance for us to travel, the partnership may use this funding to further develop our aspirations for the workplace. We can only hope.

## **Conclusion**

At the beginning of the project we stumbled upon a consensus that despite our efforts and the resources we had been putting into supervision, it had not heralded the developmental results we had hoped for. Hawkins and Shohet (2012) identified a poor link between the importance of supervision being recognized and the amount of research conducted in this subject matter. To provide an example, Carpenter and colleagues (2013, p1843) examined 690 articles surrounding supervision in child welfare and found that, “the evidence base for the effectiveness of supervision in child welfare is surprisingly weak.” They acknowledged that there are numerous examples of supervision but very few have undergone studious research. Fleming and Steen (2004) further defined this by suggesting that there are many links and differing elements that contribute to the job of creating an evidence base to be demanding. “The most obvious gap is in evidence that the implementation of clearly defined models of supervision in an organization leads to improved outcomes for workers and, in particular, people who access support.” On the back of our appreciative inquiry, I found this information to be reassuring. It would be beneficial for the sector to have access to a larger evidence base to indicate longer term outcomes of the supervision of staff in relation to outcomes for young people in residential childcare.

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