



INNOVATION TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

Innovation Programme learning event

16th March 2017 in Manchester

The Spring Consortium and the Department for Education hosted an Innovation Programme learning event on the 16th March 2017 in Manchester Town Hall. The theme for the event was **Innovation towards Excellence**, looking at the role innovation plays across the improvement journey of Children's Social Care services.

Tamsyn Roberts from the Department for Education and Eleanor O'Reilly from the Spring Consortium started the day with a warm welcome to projects funded through the programme, and to others including those who are new to the programme and Partners in Practice. They briefly shared the Innovation Programme journey and its achievements since it first started back in 2014, and on the future plans for the programme where a stronger emphasis will be on disseminating the programme's learning to the sector.

Innovation Insights boards developed by the Spring Consortium were shared. These capture insights from the project's perspectives about how innovation in Children's Social Care is being done, which methods people are finding helpful and the conditions required for innovation to thrive. They offer an introduction rather than a 'how to' guide, using illustrative examples of projects from within and beyond the Innovation Programme. The boards also provide reference links to further information.

There are five Innovation Insights boards covering the topics below, as well as a summary [introductory sheet](#):

1. [The value of innovation in Children's Social Care](#)
2. [Innovation methods in Children's Social Care](#)
3. [Adopting and adapting innovation](#)
4. [Scaling and spreading innovation](#)
5. [Creating the local system conditions for innovation](#)

Matthew Horne and Heather Rollinson from the Spring Consortium then followed with a session that framed the need for innovation in Children Social Care and the distinction between innovation and improvement. They talked about the key drivers that make innovation so essential: high demand, greater public scrutiny, less money and the challenge of delivering quality at lower cost. Innovation aims to achieve a step change not only in practice, but also in outcomes, whereas improvement only focuses on gradual changes in service and outcomes. Matthew and Heather also described the ten different types of innovation and the factors needed to embed innovation. The slides used for this session can be found [here](#).

The rest of the day was then framed around the five Innovation Insights boards' topics.

Four projects both within and outside of the Innovation Programme shared their experiences of running specific innovation projects. Sue Rumbold, Chief Officer, Partnership Development and Business Support, from [Leeds City Council](#) and Andrea King, Head of [Prevention and Developing Community Resilience](#), from [West Berkshire Council](#) shared insights from their projects which aimed to implement Restorative Practice across the Children's Social Care services. Both local authorities had embarked on their innovation journey after a poor Ofsted rating and wanted to bring radical changes to their children's services.



Tony Clifford, Head of Virtual School for Children in Care from the City of Stoke-on-Trent Council shared their approach of co-designing an alternative housing offer for young care leavers: [The Stoke House Project](#) is a collaborative housing association based on co-operative principles in which adults and care leavers work together to refurbish and manage houses that become their homes for as long as they need them. The idea of the [House Project](#) is grounded in a deep exploration of the care leavers' experiences and their aspirations and wishes. They are not passive recipients of services done to them, but very much involved in decision-making processes of their co-operative. Young people, for instance, were involved in staff recruitment decisions.

Carolyn Fair, Head of Children in Care, and Dorothy Duffy, Programme Lead of [Brighter Futures](#), from Ealing Council shared their experience of transforming their children's social care system for children and young people who were in residential care. Their project aimed at reducing the number of children who live in placements far away from their birth families. The '[Brighter Futures](#)' includes three key components aimed at better supporting families to prevent children entering care, improving social work practice with a focus on empowering families and children, and improving the support for foster families.

The afternoon sessions included break-outs to learn more from other Innovation Programme projects based on the following three themes:

1. Adopting and Adapting Innovation in Children's Social Care

Bradford Council shared their experience of adopting and adapting [North Yorkshire County Council's successful "No Wrong Door"](#) model which provides alternative residential offers to care leavers.

2. Spreading and Scaling Innovation in Children's Social Care

[Wigan and Rochdale Councils](#), Stockport Council, [The Family Drugs & Alcohol Courts](#) (FDAC) and [Catch 22](#) on the other hand shared their approaches to scaling and spreading their innovative models of practice.

3. System Conditions for Innovation in Children's Social Care

Professor Judy Sebba, from the Rees Centre at Oxford University shared insights about the system conditions for innovation in the Children's Social Care sector. The barriers highlighted included:

- Lack of clarity about objectives and target population
- Setting up and lead time to develop new models took much longer than expected
- Lack of capacity to innovate

Enablers to positive change included:

- Strong leadership, consistent communication and regular communication
- Effective data collection and use of a data/evidence base to contribute to timely and child-centred decision making
- Effective multi-agency working

Participants reflected on their own experiences and what they can do to create a more conducive environment for innovation in their local system Children's Social Care system.



You can find out more about the individual projects evaluation reports [here](#).

Four key takeaways about learning and improvement in the sector

Many lessons were shared by the Local Authorities and organisations participating in the day about how they have improved their services in their own local areas. We have picked out four key factors that were raised during the day about what is important to support learning and improvement across the sector.

1. Talking about what hasn't worked as well as what has is important

Innovation requires a level of risk by its nature, and some things will go wrong. Talking about these often painful lessons is very important and this was greatly appreciated by participants during the day. This was particularly relevant in the sessions focused on scale and spread where issues about *how to scale* were discussed by a range of projects taking different approaches – from developing different financial models to different geographical approaches.

2. Mutual learning relationships between organisations at different stages along their improvement journeys help everyone to improve

Participants reflected on how valuable it was to connect to each other to share common challenges and different ways to overcome them. This face to face time is key to supporting organisations to move forwards regardless of where you are in your improvement journey – learning was reciprocal between local authorities across different Ofsted ratings.

3. Knowing what is important and acting on it are two very different things

It was interesting how familiar some of the learnings shared felt to projects. This was particularly true about the early lessons emerging from the evaluations reports about implementation. In many instances, the challenge is putting these insights into action.

4. Starting with needs and insights from young people and their families makes for stronger innovations

Many of the projects which spoke during the day had found ways to work with young people and families to develop their ideas. By starting with these insights they increase their ability to develop innovative solutions that respond directly to those needs, and importantly they are able to tell powerful stories of change that take key stakeholders with them.

What's next?

We are now planning for our next learning events. If you have any suggestions/recommendations, please drop us an email to the Spring mailbox at innovation@springconsortium.com