

Action for Children's Chance for Change evaluation: **executive summary**

1. Background

Action for Children's Chance for Change (CfC) service is targeted at 7–11 year olds who are experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is delivered through a strategic partnership between the Western Health and Social Care Trust and Action for Children (formerly known as NCH), one of the UK's leading children's charities. The project was initially funded by the Children's Fund until March 2008, with further support from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) committed until March 2009.

Developed within the broad context of family support services and child and adolescent mental health services (Tiers 1–2) as an early intervention prevention initiative, the service aims to improve outcomes for children, particularly their emotional health and wellbeing. CfC programmes involve 8–10 children and 12–16 carers/parents, although all programmes are tailored to meet the specific support needs of participating children and their families.



2. Evaluation aims and methods

In late 2007, Action for Children commissioned CENI to undertake an independent evaluation to assess the relevance of the project to the strategic policy context, evaluate its operational effectiveness, the project's approach to partnership working, empowerment and prevention, the outcomes for children (including their health and wellbeing) and the overall strengths and weaknesses of the model.

2.1 Methodology

The evaluation employed a range of methods:

- ▶ desk research
- ▶ consultation with staff and management in semi-structured interviews
- ▶ consultation with children through four small-group discussions
- ▶ consultation with parents through a questionnaire and a focus group
- ▶ a postal survey of education staff
- ▶ a telephone survey of referral agencies

3. Main findings

3.1 Relevance to strategic policy context

The evaluation found that Action for Children's Chance for Change service has relevance for a number of key strategies within the wider health and wellbeing, education and child development policy contexts. Locally, the service is of particular importance within the WHSSB's Children's Services Plan.

3.2 Operational effectiveness

The evaluation found that the organisations involved in its delivery have brought a considerable breadth of knowledge and experience in the development and delivery of children's services, including child and adolescent mental health services. Both the partners have well-developed systems for planning and review that have ensured best practice. Evidence-based approaches and effective systems for monitoring and evaluation have ensured assessment frameworks and activities are child-centred and delivered in a holistic and safe manner.

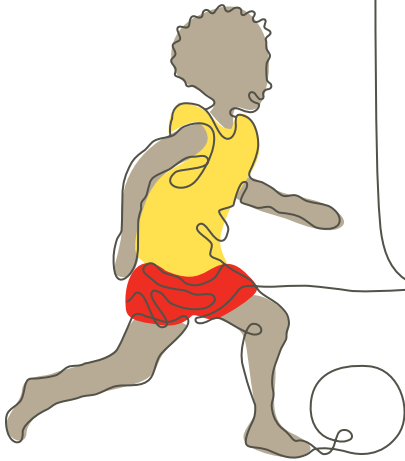
3.3 The approach

Chance for Change has established an effective partnership approach, enabling both partners and local community and voluntary organisations to meet more effectively the needs of a particularly marginalised, vulnerable section of the population.

The project has:

- ▶ promoted more effective links between home and school for addressing the cause and maintenance of difficult behaviours
- ▶ enabled teachers to broaden their understanding of the circumstances of particular children and how best to work with them, as well as providing support for teachers and an opportunity to discuss their concerns with others
- ▶ made a substantial contribution towards integrating the diverse systems in health, education, social care and the voluntary sector that aim to address these difficulties
- ▶ helped to improve existing service delivery as well as addressing a recognised gap in provision





‘Before, if I did the slightest thing wrong, I felt guilty. I can make a mistake now and not feel guilty. I was afraid to make a mistake.’

Young person at Action for Children Chance for Change

3.4 Achieving aims

Chance for Change has made a significant impact in relation to all of its core aims.

► **Prevention:** The project provides an early intervention initiative at primary school stage. Eighty children from 26 primary schools participated between January 2006 and June 2007, and teachers, parents and children indicated that the child-focused intervention programme encourages children to accept responsibility for their own behaviour. CfC is contributing to improving educational outcomes and access to creative opportunities for young people.

► **Empowerment:** The project supports parents to develop more positive coping strategies, enhancing their self-esteem and confidence, and improving parents’ relationships with their children through reduced stress levels.

► **Partnership:** The project promotes more effective links between home and school. Education staff reported good communication between the project and schools, and that the project was increasing their confidence in supporting children with behavioural/emotional difficulties. Of education staff, 94% reported either a substantial (25%) or moderate impact (69%).

4. Health and wellbeing outcomes for children

CfC achieved a number of health and wellbeing outcomes of participating children:

- ▶ behavioural improvements, including reduced levels of hyperactivity/attention difficulties at school and disruptive behaviour in general
- ▶ reduced levels of emotional distress and anxiety
- ▶ reduction in feelings of anger
- ▶ increased confidence and self-esteem
- ▶ improved communication with parents, teachers and other children
- ▶ more constructive relationships with others
- ▶ more constructive attitudes to school



5. Recommendations

A number of recommendations were made that would contribute to the further enhancement of Chance for Change:

- ▶ Renewed priority should be given to strategic planning and development within the context of RPA, and government policy priority given to integrated working between health and education.
- ▶ The project should consider the potential for further integration of personnel and systems.
- ▶ The project should continue to conduct rigorous research to demonstrate the impact of its work.
- ▶ The project should consider follow-up research with participants to examine whether improvements are maintained over time and whether there is sufficient follow-up support for those who need it.
- ▶ Chance for Change should consider the potential for expansion of the project through broadening the age group, geographical accessibility, having services available through the summer or more specialised groups for families with more severe difficulties.
- ▶ The project should consider a follow-up programme for participants requiring further support in the period following completion of the courses/programmes.
- ▶ The project should consider developing a promotional plan.

'I don't shout at my family any more and I don't hit them any more. I don't want to fight any more.'

Young person at Action for Children Chance for Change

6. Conclusion

The evaluation found that CfC provides a unique model for effective partnership working, through a successful approach involving children, parents and teaching staff. Its operational effectiveness has enabled the project to achieve its aims in addressing a number of issues and good outcomes concerning primary school children experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties. The evaluation highlighted that these benefits could not have been achieved without the integrated, holistic approach adopted by the CfC project. These benefits also would not have been achieved so effectively through the individual partner agencies working in isolation or without the integrated, holistic approach adopted by the Chance for Change service.

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as long as it takes

