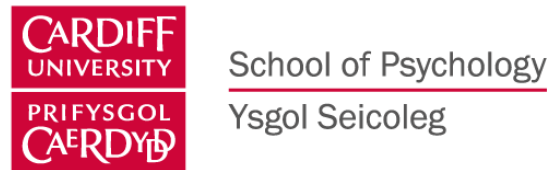Interim Report

Fostering Wellbeing Evaluation

Alyson Rees and Bridget Handley

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CASCADE Infrastructure Partnership

Our expertise brings together an exceptional partnership. CASCADE is the leading centre for evaluative research in children's social care in the UK and sits within the School of Social Sciences (SOCSI), a leading centre of excellence in social sciences and education research with particular expertise in quantitative methods. The Centre for Trials Research (CTR) is an acknowledged national leader for trials and related methods, the School of Psychology was ranked 2nd for research quality in the most recent Research Excellence Framework and SAIL provides world-class data linkage. Together we believe we can create a step-change in the quality and use of children's social care research that is unparalleled in the UK. Specifically, we can deliver high quality trials and evaluations; link data to understand long-term outcomes and involve service users (our public) in all elements of our research. Our intention is that these three strands will interact to generate an unrivalled quality of research.

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Acknowledgements

Terminology

Children looked-after – The definition of children looked-after (children in care) is as in the Children Act 1989. A child is looked after by a local authority if a court has granted a care order to place a child in care, or a local authority's children's services department has cared for the child for more than 24 hours. The Local Authority can have either full or shared parental responsibility.

Children in public care are placed with foster carers, in residential homes or with parents or other relatives (under certain circumstances).

Wellbeing – We use the Fostering Network's definition which refers to the meeting of five basic needs: social, physical, emotional, cultural and learning.

Co-professional – We use the term co-professional for those professionals who were involved in the study, who were not foster carers.

Executive Summary

Whilst this is an interim report, we have already collected a wide range of data and are thus summarising our findings to date by providing a brief executive summary at this interim stage.

To date:

- We have interviewed 26 delegates one month after attending the masterclasses.
- We have observed each of the five masterclasses.
- We have surveyed 105 participants who attended a masterclass.
- We have interviewed five facilitators.
- We have had access to attendance and attrition data.
- We have had access to the evaluations collected by The Fostering Network.
- We have interviewed three local authority managers of service.

In the remaining period of evaluation, we will:

- Interview one further manager
- Analyse the interview data from managers.
- Re-interview 10 delegates to see how far they have been able to embed and implement the learning in practice.
- Run a focus group with pioneers.
- Create a case study of the team around the child.
- Update the literature review.

Findings to date

1 The masterclasses commenced face to face but were stopped due to Covid lockdown restrictions. During the initial lockdown phase, the masterclasses were honed, recalibrated and regionalised so that they could be delivered on-line.

2 The content has been overwhelmingly well received and is supported by a range of handouts and supplementary materials. The facilitation is experienced as engaging and interactive.

3 The on-line delivery has made attendance much more feasible for busy foster carers and co-professionals. The skill and passion of the facilitators has been positively commented on.

4 The masterclasses have drawn upon speakers who are experts from a wide range of disciplines working with children looked after, including speech and language; these have been particularly well received. There have been fewer speakers who are care experienced and this aspect could be strengthened.

5 The interdisciplinary nature of the training is highly valued.

6   The main messages of the importance of bringing the foster carer in to the team around the child and related decision making has been received and taken on board by delegates.

7   There are many examples of the skills and learning being taken into practice and forming the basis of discussion between foster carers and practitioners in the field.

8   Foster carers have felt empowered to become stronger advocates for the children in their care and have been able to provide us with examples of this.

9   Co-professionals have not attended the masterclasses as extensively as was hoped, especially those from education and social work. Where they have attended, attrition has been problematic with the majority of co-professionals failing to attend later sessions.

10   Management support is deemed vital for encouraging enrolment, reinforcing the value of the training and galvanising attendance. More liaison with management and further advertising of the programme would be beneficial to extend attendance. Managers may want to lead by example.

11   Service support and action plans are yet to be fully developed and implemented. This could be developed ahead of the masterclasses and might encourage increased attendance.

12   Many have commented on the need for more time in discussion-type break out rooms.

      The on-line training provides more limited opportunities for networking or for developing frameworks of support to be drawn on in the future.

13   The pioneer model is in the early stages and may scaffold and help to provide a network of support for foster carers.

14   Further follow up sessions to the masterclasses may help to consolidate and implement learning, and further extend and embed new skills and practices.

Aims of the evaluation

Fostering Wellbeing is a multi-agency programme which aims to improve the wellbeing and educational outcomes for children in care in Wales. The programme is designed for professionals working with children looked after. Specifically, the programme aims to:

1   Identify and share the core values and principles which will help children and young people who are looked after to thrive;

2   Develop skills and competencies in common which will help equip children and young people who are looked after to fulfil their potential;

3   Become confident in a shared and consistent approach to meeting the needs of children and young people who are looked after which, in turn, will fire ambition and help them to find success;

4   Be active advocates for the children and young people for whom they have a responsibility, be it individual or corporate.

Content of programme

Fostering Wellbeing is an initiative devised by The Fostering Network that has been trialled in Cwm Taf, Wales drawing on elements of the Head, Heart and Hands programme (McDermid et al., 2016) and London Fostering Achievement model (Sebba et al., 2016) set in a Welsh context. Fostering Wellbeing encompasses three strands of work:

i.   A set of five themed masterclasses delivered to multi-disciplinary members working in the team around the child (social work, health, education, youth justice). A copy of the masterclass 1 facilitator framework, as an exemplar, can be found in Appendix 1.

ii.   The development of the Pioneer foster carer role to provide training, operate a telephone helpline and run support groups for foster carers, based within the local authority fostering team offices.

iii.   Service support and action plan.

Fostering Wellbeing brings together foster carers with other professionals to share best practice across service boundaries.

Figure one summarises the programme's ten principles.

Fostering Wellbeing Programme: Ten Principles

1 All the child's needs have to be met i.e. understand and respond to the whole child/young person to improve his/her wellbeing;

2 Each person's view of life and the wider world will differ, arising from their background, experiences and own mindset;

3 Good relationships are at the centre of a person's wellbeing;

4 What has happened cannot be undone but can be understood and provide lessons for the future;

5 Encouraging aspiration and ambition is essential in developing positive attitudes;

6 All those involved with a child/young person being looked after, including the foster carers and the children/young person, have equality of status in the relationship;

7 The values and attitudes of all those involved with a child/young person being looked after need to be made explicit;

8 Positive values and attitudes are best nurtured through practical activities shared between child/young person and foster carer;

9 Learning to help oneself is as important as learning to build relationships;

10 Those working with a child/young person being looked after need to know the difference between the behaviours of the professional self, personal self and private self and in what situations the appropriate behaviour applies.

Source: internal report from the Fostering Wellbeing design and implementation team

Figure 1 Ten Principles

Background

This evaluation continues on from the two-year pilot evaluation of Fostering Wellbeing undertaken between 2017- 2019 (Rees et al., 2019 https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/128577/). The initial pilot evaluation was undertaken in Cwm Taf. The Cwm Taf evaluation was positive, but identified a range of suggestions for improvement and many of these have been acted on, with the content slimmed down, the sessions shortened and a clearer focus on social pedagogy. After the success of the initial pilot, the plan was for the Fostering Well-being training programme to be rolled out pan Wales. This evaluation is of the pan Wales roll out of the programme during 2020-2022.

The masterclasses started face to face with the first set being delivered in February 2020 to Cardiff and the Vale but the onset of COVID in late March 2020 and subsequent lockdown led to a pause in the training programme, and a postponement of delivery in West Glamorgan and North Wales which had been scheduled to start in June 2020.

During the initial lockdown the facilitators took the opportunity to further recalibrate and revise the materials such that they could be delivered on-line. This reconfiguration also allowed the facilitators to further tailor the materials to the different regions. This activity is captured in the Fostering Network reporting documentation August- October 2020. The on-line delivery started in January 2021 after trialling some shorter virtual workshops in October and November 2020.

Data collection undertaken to date

The evaluation has consisted of the following workstreams:

1. Surveys

Surveys were collected from foster carers and co-professionals who attended masterclass 1 (T1). The survey collected some demographic data about delegates and was mapped to the programme objectives. We have collected and collated 105 surveys to date.

2. Attendance and Attrition

We have received the attendance and attrition data from The Fostering Network.

3. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with a sample of participants from Gwent, North Wales, Mid and West Wales, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea, Cardiff and the Vale who have attended the masterclasses. Interviews were undertaken one month after completion of masterclass 5 (T2) and will be undertaken again after 12 (T3). Participants were sampled with reference to their level of engagement with the programme (to explore factors which helped or hindered engagement with the programme). Interview data at T2 was used to ascertain perceptions of the training and beliefs about what participants' wish to change. Follow up interviews at T3 will be used to explore the impact of the training over the 12-month period and map baseline data to reported change over time. To date we have interviewed 26 participants (N= 26), 18 foster carers and 8 co-professionals.

We have undertaken interviews with five trainers to look at perceptions of how the training changed across cohorts and the receptiveness of the different audiences (N= 5).

We have interviewed three senior managers of services to explore their experiences of the masterclasses to try and correlate the relationship between management support and attendance. These interviews have been transcribed, but not yet analysed.

4. Observation of masterclasses

We have also observed each of the five masterclasses.

5. Evaluation of masterclasses

We have collated the evaluations disseminated by The Fostering Network.

Remaining data collection

6. Case Study

We will also create a case study from at least one cohort, starting with the foster carer and will then approach the other members in the team around the child to create case studies where possible. This will help us identify how the team around the child is working together and any changes that occurred as a result of the masterclasses.

7. Interviews at 12 months

T3 interviews with ten masterclass delegates, twelve months after completing the masterclasses.

8. Focus Groups with Pioneers

The pioneer role is being developed from November 2021 and we will run a focus group with pioneers in April 2022. The focus group will include two pioneers from each cohort

(Focus group of 8). We anticipate that all outstanding interviews and focus groups will be held virtually and recorded.

9. Update the Review of Literature

This update of the literature will take place in early 2022.

Interim findings

1. Attendance and attrition rates

In round one, across all regions, 94 delegates started the first masterclass, in round two 111 started, and in round three 97 delegates started the first masterclass. Attrition rates are difficult to report for round one which was impacted by the start of lockdown; round three data is still being gathered.

Table 1 shows the number of delegates attending each of the masterclasses during round two which demonstrates a pattern of attrition. In round two, the highest attrition levels were in Neath Port Talbot (NPT) and Swansea with an overall attrition rate of 42.11% between masterclass one and masterclass five. The next highest levels are in Cardiff and the Vale, with an overall attrition rate of 36% between masterclass one and five. The Cardiff and the Vale masterclasses were halted at the start of Covid lockdown and attendance re-started on-line sometime later; it is perhaps not surprising that attendance fell away for the Cardiff and Vale cohort. The lowest attrition rates were Conwy at 25.9 %. Attrition is an area of concern which will need to be addressed going forward. Attrition was similarly identified in the previous pilot (Rees et al., 2019).

Region	Masterclass 1	Masterclass 2	Masterclass 3	Masterclass 4	Masterclass 5	Attrition (between masterclass 1 and 5)
Cardiff and Vale	25	21	15	13	16	36%
NPT Swansea	19	14	14	14	11	42.1%
Mid & West Wales	22	17	17	17	14	36.4%
North Wales (Conwy Authority)	27	21	21	21	20	25.9%
Gwent	18	19	16	13	10	44.4%

Table 1: Attendance levels

The following table (Table 2) shows the range of professionals who attended the masterclasses in each of the regions. We can see that for all of the regions the majority of delegates were foster carers. Conwy had the widest range of co-professionals attending, potentially suggesting a more strategic approach being taken by management in encouraging attendance. A drilling down of the data reveals that it is co-professionals who are most likely to fail to attend the full set of five masterclasses (see Mid & West Wales). This may be because co-professionals do not value the masterclasses as highly, do not see full attendance as important, or have less time available to attend.

Region	Professionals
Cardiff and Vale Round 2	14 foster carers 2 social workers 8 educators
NPT Swansea Round 2	11 foster carers 3 social workers 1 regional develop manager 1 education professional/educator
Mid and West Wales Round 3	12 foster carers 2 educators 2 health professionals 1 reviewing officer 1 project worker 1 personal advisor 2 inclusion hub leads
North Wales Round 3 (Conwy Authority)	22 foster carers 7 social workers 3 educators 5 health professionals

	4 support staff
	1 police
	1 solicitor
	2 panel representatives
	1 residential worker
	1 human resources
Gwent Round 3	23 foster carers
	2 social workers
	3 educators/education professionals
	3 support workers
	1 social care trainer

Table 2 Multi- disciplinary attendance

2. Survey data

We started our data collection process with a much longer, in-depth survey, but found that very few delegates completed it. This may have been because the survey was too lengthy. However, we quickly revised the survey, to make it far shorter and far easier to complete, although as a result we were not able to collect such fine grain data. The survey was given out during the first masterclass.

Numbers completing the survey

Area	%	Numbers
Cardiff and the Vale	16.2%	17
Gwent (and Cwm Taf)	14.3%	15
Mid and West Wales	20%	21

North Wales	47.6%	50
NPT Swansea	1.9%	2
Total	100%	105

Table 3: Survey responses

Professional Role

Role	%	Numbers
Foster carer	60.6%	63
Kinship carer	3.9%	4
Educator	6.7%	7
Social worker	14.4%	15
Health worker	5.8%	6
Other	8.7%	10

Table 4: Professional role

From our survey data which had 105 responses out of a possible total of 302 returns, most attendees were foster carers (60.6%), with only four kinship carers attending the masterclasses. Seventeen percent of foster carers in Wales are kinship carers (https://corambaaf.org.uk/resources/statistics/statistics-wales) in 2020, suggesting that the percentage of kinship carers in attendance was low.

Fifteen social workers attended (14% of delegates) and only seven professionals from education across all of the regions.

Members of the team around the child attending

Thirty-five percent of delegates identified that they were the only member of the team in attendance.

Numbers of children in foster care being cared for

Of the 63 foster carers who attended the masterclasses, 15 had no children placed with them at the time of completing the survey, 23 had one child, 25 had 2 children and 9 foster carers were caring for 3 or more children.

Experience of accessing the masterclasses on-line

Of the 105 delegates completing the survey, when asked how easy it was to access the training on-line, out of a potential 100% (totally accessible), the average rating given was 95%, suggesting the vast majority of people found it extremely easy to access the training for the first masterclass, and we can assume that this only became easier.

Team working

When asked about their experiences of working in the team around the child, there were varied responses. In terms of whether the communication in the team around the child was effective, 39 people (37%) were either neutral or disagreed.

When asked about all members of the team being listened to equally, 39 (37%) answered as neutral or disagreed. This suggests that there is some further work to improve communication within the team around the child, and to ensure that all members of the team are listened to.

Gender and ethnicity

Of the delegates who completed the survey, 88% were female and 12% male. Of the male participants, there were nine foster carers, one social worker and one kinship carer. All the remaining delegates who completed the survey were female. All delegates identified as white.

Age

Thirty-five of the delegates were 55 years or over (33%). Twenty-seven foster carers were 55 or over (40% of the foster carers who completed the survey) which suggests the need for succession planning for foster carers. Seven co-professionals (19% of co-professional respondents) were 55 or over.

Reasons for attending the masterclasses

Delegates gave a range of reasons for attending the masterclasses and these included the following:

- To provide improved support to children and young people
- An invitation received from a mentor or manager
- Feedback from others who had attended this course
- To inform role
- To gain new information and continue learning

Several people had the training recommended to them by a line manager, or by their supervising social worker. Others stated their motivation was,

"Being involved in bringing this into the LA with the Fostering Network. Keen to progress professional development for Foster Carers and collaborative conversations to support the needs of the child".

"Invited to attend along with other professionals - good opportunity to cascade training to other colleagues".

When anticipating which aspects would be most valuable

Delegates noted a range of potentially valuable aspects of attending the training, including the following,

- Sharing and discussing expertise with other participants
- The guest speakers (especially PACE)
- Hearing from young people
- Developing ideas to improve support, relationships, and wellbeing

(NB: These comments were provided after attending day one of the course.)

3. Interviews with delegates one month after attending masterclasses

Twenty-six delegates were interviewed one month after attending the final masterclass; 18 of these were foster carers and the remaining eight were co-professionals. Following the six-stage framework suggested by Braun and Clark (2015) all interviews have been transcribed, analysed, and coded by two researchers, and the following eight themes identified.

On-line working

Most delegates enjoyed the on-line nature of the masterclass delivery, comparing it favourably to other on-line training. Delegates particularly valued the interactive nature of the classes, with helpful breakout rooms. It was felt that the relatively dynamic nature and fast-moving pace kept participants engaged and interested,

> *this was a more interactive... which obviously makes you learn better. (FC)*

> *Although, actually I would say this that you've delivered was more interactive, more balance of, you know, different presentations like the guest speakers, the breakout rooms, you know, that whole variety was there with {the masterclasses}. (CoP)*

The busy lives of foster carers and practitioners made on-line attendance much more achievable,

> *I mean, you know, it's a long day, particularly when you've got children that you've gotta get them up early, the older one, at seven o'clock to get the taxi, and then he's not back till half past five and you've got that thinking of giving them meals. Whereas now it's mid, late morning, they're in school, college, my husband's out sorting out, cos we've got a smallholding, sorting the animals. You know it's fantastic for me. (FC)*

Foster carers who were working in addition to being foster caring found it easier to juggle their responsibilities,

> *"...I work full-time. My partner works part-time. We run a farm as well, so it's ... there's quite a lot going on, and it's quite ... quite nice just to go out and feed the sheep and come back in, do the course and go back out." (FC)*

In Wales, many people are living in more rural areas and this means travelling further and taking more time out of their busy day to attend any training programme,

> *And you've got the stress of maybe getting caught behind a tractor or something and then not getting there and you've got to park and find your way in. (FC)*

Some foster carers felt that being on-line meant that they made less connections with others in the team around the child and this potentially limited the networks that could be forged during the masterclasses,

> *There were a couple of foster carers there who I'm like, I would have really liked to have had their contact details, because of... cos that's where I wanna go with fostering and they, they, I really feel they could get me prepared. But if you were face-to-face you'd do that, in a break you'd go and find them and you'd ask them and you'd get their number. (FC)*

When it was suggested that a blended approach might be helpful for future delivery, some carers agreed that either an initial or final face to face meeting might be helpful so that they could make deeper connections and develop a framework of support,

> *I think it would be nice if you were going to bring people together right at the very end face-to-face as well… (FC)*

Overall, however, all participants were very positive about the on-line training provision.

Organisation and Delivery

All delegates were positive about the delivery and organisation of the course,

> *It's one of the slickest online training events I've been on. I've been on a few, with fostering and with my normal day job. It's, it was so, it was run, it was so slick. The housekeeping of it was amazing. (FC)*

> *It's very well thought out. Well planned. (FC)*

> *I just thought that it was one of the best ones I've ever been on. I just remember thinking, "Wow, if only all training could be like this". (FC)*

Delegates were particularly positive about the facilitators, noting how they were passionate and also engaging,

> *{The facilitators} are obviously very passionate about what they do, and it showed. (FC)*

> *Great sense of humours, so which made it really good fun. (FC)*

> *They were very calm and very informative, and they held everything together, and they had a really good working relationship… (FC)*

Delegates particularly liked it when one of the facilitators was a foster carer, as this provided a confident and professional role model for both foster carers and co-professionals.

Participants noted the benefit of the regionalisation of the materials and course delivery,

> *but I think the fact that we were all localised to an extent, you know, especially as north Wales is starting to do some kind of, you know, regional stuff. I know that we're looking at regional recruitment and things like that and, and kind of creating a brand across north Wales. So I think that's really good, kind of having that, that kind of cohort across that area is good. (Co-P)*

Meeting co-professionals in their own teams and regions was seen as particularly important,

> *…and actually having an expert come and talk about real cases or real experiences, really helps. And, and now that they've started to embed the programme even more, they were all local as well… we've already heard or met the psychologist so it's great to hear from her. (Co-P)*

Participants also commented on pacing, level, and pitch of the training,

> *And it was just spaced out nicely (FC)*

> *I think it was definitely at the right sort of pace in terms of you weren't being spoken at the whole time but {between} the five… it did give time for pause and reflection.(Co-P)*

> *I thought it was pitched at the right level for foster carers, and I think, you know, it treated them as professionals and you know, I think… I think that was… that was good, they felt valued very much from it, and… and that the actual… the content was good.(CoP)*

Many delegates found that the course acted as a refresher and provided an opportunity to reflect on their own practice and in doing so highlighted aspects that they could strengthen or do differently.

Many identified that the masterclasses would be particularly good for new foster carers as it was comprehensive and set the context for fostering,

> *I think all new foster carers should definitely go on it. (FC)*

The handouts underpinned the masterclasses and were seen as valuable supplementary materials which many of the delegates mentioned,

all the sheets were sent, and I've saved them all and I'm like, that's what... so when I now want to, want to look at the four F's again, I know exactly where to go and find the four F's. When, when I need the three P's I know exactly where to go. (FC)

All delegates valued the breakout rooms which gave them time to discuss and reflect. It was felt that the groups were better when a facilitator was able to pop in and keep people to task. Some participants felt they would have benefitted from more time in breakout groups,

So that was quite, you know, we didn't get around to everybody. So no, I would say no, there wasn't enough time. (FC)

But we were just getting into our stride, and then it would be... the clock would be ticking to go back. And in a way, that was a shame, because there were some really valuable sort of comments and things that, you know, maybe others wouldn't have even thought of. (Co-P)

It might be that for those who would like it, the possibility of meeting up outside the training to reflect further and develop networks may be helpful.

In the previous evaluation of the pilot programme many delegates commented on the emotional impact of speakers who were experts by experience, but this was not commented on in the current evaluation.

Practical tools and skills

Delegates felt that they took away a range of practical tools and skills that they were starting to use in practice,

So, I feel like I've got one of those tool belts round me now and I feel like I've got different tools in, in there ready for the job. So, I should be able to pull something out when I need it each time, I need something, I'm, I'm hoping. (FC)

Some of the skills helped participants to become more attuned to young people, to attentively listen, spend more time with children in their care, and reflect on the child's needs,

Now I'm thinking about why it's happening and what's behind it, and why ... why you don't want to go and visit, and how to deal with you when you've said you don't want to visit, but actually you really do. (FC)

We're gonna talk tonight, it's not about you coming this weekend and doing what I say, it's gonna be a weekend of let's do some things together and if it's something new, it's

something, if it's something you want to try, we'll do it. (even if it's a deep-fried Mars Bar) (FC)

This led delegates to have more empathy for the children,

the main message I took away was sort of looking at behaviour, realising you can't change what's happened, but ... sort of trying to understand it and be alongside the child if they go through it. (FC)

And others noted they wanted to spend more time listening to children,

And listening is the biggest gift that we can give. (Co-P)

Particular aspects of the training were seen to strongly resonate with participants, for example, the common third,

I mean for instance, he's made a sort of a place outside in the garden and he's filled it with moss and mud and old vehicles and it's supposed to be a war zone. Well, completely out of my realm. You know I had three girls to bring up [laughter] so we're learning together and he's teaching me. So that really resonated, that common third. (FC)

The speech and language presentation was particularly well received, with people reflecting on the taken for granted aspects of caring,

lots of speech and language, little tips. Not finishing off the sentence for the child, being really patient, not asking what's wrong with you, what has happened to you, and various other things that were, you know, really... considering she only spoke for about 45 minutes, maybe even less than that, it was incredibly concentrated, and she obviously was pitching it at what, what, what would be useful for us. (FC)

The importance of relationships was emphasised throughout the masterclasses and getting to 'know' the child, and this was reiterated further through understanding the impact of trauma,

You know, those key relationships, knowing your child... the child that you are caring for, and sort of... you know, and sort of... and actually understanding trauma. I think that's what really came through from foster carers. (Co-P)

Many of the skills were already known but forgotten or not in the fore of their thinking,

The breathing, getting a child just to breathe really slowly when they need, you're trying to calm them down. I didn't realise I'd forgotten about that really, using that as a tool and we had quite a long chat about that. (FC)

Inter-disciplinary working

One of the major innovations of the training is the inter-disciplinary delivery. Many participants commented on this and its importance for strengthening the team around the child.

I loved the fact that everybody... there's different professions there, so hearing their input, not just from those that presented it, those who were just there in the breakout rooms as well. So, hearing from a school nurse, hearing from a social worker, (FC)

Delegates found that training together created a shared language and understanding of principles and approaches,

I find it's really valuable if everyone around the child shares the same language as well... Because ... often, they get really confused when they hear different terms and different narratives from different people. (FC)

This helped all members of the team around the child to come together and work in the best interest of the child, creating a collegiate and shared approach. Understanding the perspective of other professionals was particularly helpful,

Well, it's all about the holistic approach, I think, because you have got everybody round the child, haven't you? And we have all got the best interests of the child, but I think you get a better perspective of different people's roles, and how their piece of the jigsaw fits together around the child in the middle. Do you know what I mean? We are like pieces of a jigsaw around a child, aren't we? And I think the fact that you've got different... the different professionals, you know, you have got the foster carer, you have got health, you have got maybe Social Justice, Youth Justice, you've got education, you've got schools, you've got the whole gamut, I think... I think that's good because it's that collegiate, isn't it? We are all in this together around this child. (Co-P)

One co-professional noted the increased confidence in the foster carer and the improved rapport as a result of them both attending the training,

..actually, the most recent LAP review that I've been in was on Friday before we finished for the weekend, and it was interesting, because he had a different... a different rapport with me in that meeting, I think... and he used my first name, and he was very... and I

thought 'yeah, that's because you've seen me in the training, and you've... you've heard me,' because obviously on the first one, I did a short presentation about my role. (Co-P)

Similarly, a foster carer noted how supportive it is to have other members of the team attend the same training,

So also on the training was my supervising social worker, and our teenager's social worker was also on it as well. So that was really handy, and there was a lot of other foster carers on there that I do know. But yeah, having those two especially on it, we had little chats, so we had our meetings as well about the different things that came up …(FC)

However, despite being positive about a shared professional approach, delegates noticed the limited numbers of co-professionals attending the master classes, and this left people less convinced that inter-disciplinary was working and a more equal approach was possible,

I was in the first round; we didn't have anyone from health or education attend. So, I think, well like one of our carers has been here 26 years and she was like, yeah, it all sounds great, but are education actually going to listen? And if they were there, she may have bought into it a bit more...... (Co-P)

I felt there was a... there was a lack of teachers involved, if that makes any sense. (FC)

The co-professional went on to note how in her experience, social workers sometimes did not want to include foster carers in their discussions,

a perception from social workers that, oh well we don't want foster carers to come cos we might wanna talk about them. And actually I think that should be eradicated entirely. And it, yeah, there's just so much benefit to having them all together and I think, yeah, that was a really lovely aspect to, to the course. (Co-P)

One delegate, a social worker, noted that sometimes a range of co-professionals wanted to exclude foster carers, and since the training she had worked hard to ensure that this was not the case,

I had a group of professionals, as in, you know, colleagues, saying, we don't need the foster carer at this meeting. And it was, it was an issue about school that the, that the foster carer had raised herself and me and the foster carer had requested the meeting. So I was like, I really don't understand what you're, what you're saying. You know the foster carer has requested the meeting, there's an issue in school, how in any way or form do we not need the foster carer at this meeting? ...And school just kept putting the blocks up saying, we can only do this one time in the whole week, so if the foster carer can't do it, and she

couldn't cos she was working, they were like, well we need to go ahead. And I sat for about four hours with the child care social worker, fighting to arrange this meeting at another time. Emails and calls going back and to, going, I don't understand it. And someone emailed me and said, well we'll just say that it's a professionals meeting then, and then that's our reason for not inviting the foster carer. (Co-P)

The social worker notes how, as a result of the training, they fought for the foster carer to be included,

And I was like, the foster carer is the professional, like how can you have this conversation saying that there's us and them. And I actually went, I've just been on the foster carer masterclasses and we talk about these wellbeing things and one of the main things is that everyone's got equal status in the relationships, and that includes foster carers and professionals. I said, so I've just done five weeks of this where we're saying everyone's equal in these conversations and then to sit in an email chain and phone conversations where you're saying that we're above the foster carer, really, really grates on me. (Co-P)

Certainly, this co-professional had taken on board the messages from the masterclasses and was keen to ensure that foster carers were not excluded from decision making in the team around the child.

Empowering foster carers to become advocates

Many of the delegates gave examples of how, as foster carers, they felt empowered and more able to advocate on behalf of children looked after. They also realised that their own wellbeing as being of vital importance,

before I always thought of myself as the poor relative … of the whole foster care system … but I'm learning … hearing from the experienced foster carers as well, they're like, no, you need to advocate for the children, you need to advocate for yourself … and our wellbeing is just as important. (FC)

One foster carer noted how she felt empowered to go back and ensure that a child had access to dental treatment as a result of discussions she had with a health professional during the masterclasses,

You know, one of my… the boys that I look after, I cannot find him a dentist. And the looked after children's nurse is like, "No, this is not acceptable. You know, it is a right for your child to see a dentist." You know, I appreciate obviously with COVID things are difficult, but she was like, "No, push." And I pushed quite hard afterwards. I think it gave me the confidence to go back and in his review, have a bit of a moan about it. And they have managed to find him an appointment with a community dentist, so… (FC)

Co-professionals identified that the masterclasses had emphasised that foster carers are professionals, should be treated as such, and as a result should be recognised for the challenging work they do,

> We need to be seeing foster carers as the professionals they are, the work they do, the challenges that they have in managing sometimes very, very difficult situations out of hours, even. So that was for me, was like music to my ears. (Co-P)

Foster carers felt more valued by being included in the training and more part of a team,

> And one guest speaker they got which I was quite shocked by was... I think she's a Head of Service who I've never met before, and most of the people hadn't met before, because she's, you know, a top manager, and we never come across her. I think it felt a bit more valued, because she was willing to be there and talk to us and listen to us. (FC)

Foster carers also felt more as an equal member of the team, rather than the bottom rung of the ladder,

> I came out feeling more part of a team, really, rather than sort of the bottom of the rung where the decisions are made above you. (FC)

In the past some foster carers had not felt involved in decision making, but attending the masterclasses helped them review this,

> Well, sort of from my point of view, I sort of feel a lot of decisions are made that you don't really have any part of, and then you've got to slot into somebody else's sort of plan without sort of being able to feed back into it. So I think having been to this course has sort of... it... it's helped you to see yourself as a more of a team. (FC)

It will be interesting to review the transcripts of the interviews undertaken some twelve months later (T3) to see if foster carers have felt emboldened to continue as a more equal partner in the team, and as active advocates for the children in their care.

Attrition

Numerous delegates commented on attrition levels, noting that social workers in particular did not consistently attend,

> ... with the latest masterclasses, there's one set of masterclasses where a lot of social workers turned up for the first one, then they said it was great, but a lot didn't come back because they said it was more aimed at foster carers, which is such a shame because that's really undermining the programme. (Co-P)

The sense that if the masterclasses were appropriate for foster carers, they could not be relevant for social workers is concerning and an issue to be addressed possibly via management when arranging the training.

Interviews with facilitators of the masterclasses.

Response to Covid

The facilitators were very aware of the impact of Covid on foster carers, who were already working in isolated situations. Ideas for how to adapt the masterclasses were generated as a result of discussions with Welsh Government, with some of the materials deliberately linked to the pandemic experience. Facilitators wanted to develop materials that foster carers could utilise from home,

> *within the education one, we looked at things like the Learning Zone and the Common Third, and how you can build activities at home... (T5)*

They also wanted to draw on the increased empathy that they perceived had occurred as a result of lockdown,

> *I also think that quite a few of the principles of the master class kind of resonate a bit more now, having gone through COVID because it's evoked quite a lot of emotions in people. (T2)*

> *So {after Covid} I think we can all have some kind of empathy for children who experience those detachments from those people that they care about and the impact that has on them. (T2)*

In this sense, facilitators felt that the audience was more receptive to some of the main messages of the masterclasses because of the Covid lockdown.

Perceptions of the masterclasses

General perceptions

Facilitators were very clear that one of the main purposes of the masterclasses was to bring foster carers into the team around the child and increase the respect for the foster carer,

the programme's aim, is to bring foster carers into that team around the child and be really valued, but actually, to see the other side and for them to understand…. I think that's specifically true for foster carers, is that they are just as important, if not… you know, the key person in that situation and that they should feel that, and that the other professionals should consider that too. (T5)

Facilitators felt this purpose had been achieved, seeing foster carers develop and flourish during the masterclasses,

And see them grow in confidence to actually share their experiences, rather than just say, "Oh well, I'm… you know, I'm just a kinship carer, so I wouldn't know. (T5)

The joint training also provided a shared language which foster carers became more confident with,

you know, use words like "holistic support" or "working together", you know, to actually be able to talk about that a bit more confidently…(T5)

One facilitator noted the lack of care experienced people speaking on the programme,

I think we need more actual people who've experienced care, like real-life people talking. Which is very difficult to have, because obviously, like, if they're still in care, there's a lot of, like, issues around protection and stuff. And people don't always want to talk about their experiences…. I feel like the child's voice still needs to be a little bit more involved. (T4)

Facilitators were positive about the co-host arrangements where trainers worked in pairs, which provided good support and a back stop when delivering the materials,

you can have one person managing the content, and one person sort of checking that everyone's okay and dealing with… dealing with the little… the sort of little things that come up with online delivery and, you know, setting up the breakout rooms and things like that. (T5)

There were varied ideas about the optimum number of participants when working on-line, with facilitators suggesting anywhere between 12 -30 made for a successful group.

There was some discussion around the principles and whilst valuable, there was consideration of whether too much time was spent running through these, and several felt this could be reduced,

I probably wouldn't spend as much time on the principles each session, going through them. I'd probably use that time for more interaction with participants, more... more... maybe more activities. (T1)

it could be done in a maybe sort of a slightly different way where people are reflecting on the principles that we've... we've discussed in a... in a previous session... (T3)

On-line delivery

All facilitators saw the benefits of on-line delivery because of ease of access for delegates,

I would say foster carers have been really great at attending. I do think virtual makes it easier. They're less likely to have something happen over the school run and be delayed and things. (T5)

Most facilitators did not see any reason to go back to face to face delivery,

{To} go back to face-to-face would actually need a lot more people facilitating because of the... the travel and the logistics. (T5)

... I don't see why we would go back to a face-to-face delivery on the training, because it just... you know, the money saving that has happened because it's delivered virtually is huge. (T1)

Whilst others thought that face to face delivery provided more potential for building relationships and networks,

I think they should be face to face. That would be my preference. Just in terms of building relationships, I think it's easy... the whole thing is about building relationships and building that team around the child, so I think face-to-face is easier for that. (T4)

Some facilitators suggested a blended approach,

I can definitely see a value in potentially meeting every now and then .....because there's that personal element that's missed sometimes through this way of working so I think it could be intermingled with some opportunities to meet in person. (T2)

On-line delivery allowed for the recruitment of the high quality of external speakers that could be drawn upon, even for just short presentations,

> *And... and also for getting the guest speakers in, because if they can just, like, tune in from their office...(T3)*

> *We were able to get a whole range of people from the educational psychologists or the vulnerable support teams, and they were fitting it round their appointments, so they would say, "I can join this 15 minutes," which is all we need from them. (T5)*

One facilitator worried that having in-depth conversations about trauma whilst in the home with children around might place children in some difficulty, which will be worth further consideration,

> *And there's some pretty heavy discussions going on, not part... particularly about individual children, but actually how... how safe are these children being protected at home while, you know, these heavy conversations are going on? (T3)*

Attrition

Facilitators also noted the difficulties with attrition,

> *I think they could be improved by getting a few extra bums on seats with regards to South Wales, so I would like to see that going forward (T2)*

One facilitator identified that whilst it is easier to attend a virtual session, it is also easier to drop out of a virtual session, and those who did so were mostly co-professionals,

> *the ones who drop out often do seem to be the professionals more than anyone else (T4)*

It seemed that where social work professionals attended the first session, they were unlikely to attend all five masterclasses,

> *where we've had good engagement from social work teams maybe from the first session, that's not necessarily carried through all five. (T4)*

Regional differences were noted, with some regions having bought into the Fostering Well-being programme in advance of the masterclasses,

> *some regions have been much more engaged with that process before the master classes start. (T5)*

Having buy-in from senior managers was thought to have had a significant impact on attendance,

I had one response from Sofia, who's… who's head of service for Llan, and since then, Llan's numbers have definitely increased {if} it's not endorsed or led by the strategic managers, so they're… they're just seeing it as training opportunities for foster carers…(T1)

Where management buy-in was not evident or the region did not fully understand the principles and purpose of the programme, it was only seen as a training opportunity for foster carers,

to have it per local authority, because that local authority then took ownership of what needed to be done, and ensured that, you know, everybody in that team around the child attended. (T1)

Future

When discussing ideas for the future, facilitators noted the need for a curation of the resources and supplementary materials in some sort of Padlet,

Padlet that people could access and in there would be lots of different links to wellbeing resources and services. (T1)

Facilitators were conscious that at the point of interview, the Pioneer role had not been developed and this might be better initiated face to face,

I think potentially, the face-to-face stuff would be better with the pioneers, so I think, you know, if you're trying to develop a pioneer role within each local authority, actually being able to kind of meet somewhere and, you know, have that kind of community feel, rather than it being a virtual… because you're… you're kind of… you're more based within that community. (T1)

One facilitator suggested the need for more speakers who were care experienced for future delivery of the masterclasses. Others noted the need for a follow up session for consolidation of learning and future networking opportunities,

follow-up opportunity to maybe meet and discuss how they've implemented the programme, maybe something like that. (T2)

4. Masterclass observations

One of the researchers sat in each of the five masterclasses pan Wales and made some overall observations.

Overview

Positives:

- The masterclasses provide a wide range of rich, engaging material delivered by excellent presenters.

- The 10 principles provide a constructive, sequential structure for the classes. There is a clear progression of content.

- The use of local expertise gives the delegates a range of useful signposting.

- Time is used efficiently to balance an ambitious range of activities.

- Participants from different professional, geographical and life experiences provide a diverse range of opinions.

- As the classes developed, an inclusive friendly culture was established.

- Facilitators were charismatic and consistent anchors.

- During each session the participants were asked to use SmartSurvey to complete a sentence. These replies were shared in the 5th session to provide a stimulating source of discussion and reflection.

- The supporting handouts and resources provide a rich source of reference material.

- It can be hard to ascertain virtually how much people were engaging but the discussion in breakout groups and visible body language suggested a good level of engagement.

Possible Improvements:

- The course expectations could have been more clearly explained to create a more aspirational culture. Ideally, each delegate should feel privileged to attend such a well-resourced and unique course. An explicit discussion of expectations might have reduced attrition.

- Each course could start with some feedback from the previous one. This could highlight a listening culture and remind participants of the course value.

- To promote recall, the ten principles could have been presented with less text and an icon for each one.

- On occasions the time in the discussion groups could have been extended, although it is tricky to balance the limited time with people's need to reflect. Delegates also

stray from the allocated topics, but this discussion helps to create bonds and the sharing of expertise.

- An increased representation of education would enhance the course. Ideally, more educationalists need to attend, to gain and share knowledge, and also a CLA Education Co-Ordinator could provide a valuable insight.

- More opportunities could have been created to promote the pioneer initiative.

- Greater time for discussion could help to embed learning.

- Fostering Wellbeing would benefit from more delegates. This excellent resource should be provided to as many people as possible, but, due to attrition, the courses are frequently below capacity.

- This course works best when a wide range of disciplines are represented. Levels of attrition and attendance would benefit from further consideration.

- More contributions from young people and experts from experience could enhance the course.

Evaluation Summaries

We were provided with evaluations which had been collated by The Fostering Network via Smart Survey, with the link shared in the chat function in Zoom or Teams, and in an email following the masterclass sessions. There were 345 responses collated from the four cohorts of masterclasses (one response per person per masterclass). These were mainly from North, Mid and West Wales, as evaluations were not available from other regions where authorities were limited to the use of Microsoft Teams, which does not currently enable participants to access the chat function to provide feedback.

The evaluations very much echo the data from the interviews, highlighting the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach, and that this was often missing, especially from management,

> *{We need} A more diverse attendance of delegates.*

> *The training needs to be completed by managers and those higher up.*

Delegates valued the input of specialists, especially around speech and language,

> *The SALT presentation has opened my mind to be more vigilant of communication difficulties and how I can support children and young people to communicate.*

Delegates noted how the training created a team culture, believing the training should continue, so that everyone would be working in the best interests of the child,

> *To continue to train all of those involved with the Looked After Child (Foster carers, school staff, Social and support workers), to look at the child as a whole, to reflect often, to put themselves in the shoes of the child, and most importantly to listen to the child.*

Many of the takeaway messages about what needs to change were around recognising the importance of the foster carer, and drawing them into discussions when making decisions,

> *Better recognition of Foster Carers professional abilities.*

> *To take on board Foster carers are more than just a carer, I'd like to see us taken more seriously in terms of decision making and become part of the decision-making arena.*

Foster carers noted they were determined to become more assertive and advocate more on behalf of children,

> *I think I personally need to be a tad more assertive to ensure I am heard. The future of the children I care for relies on my voice, as the session verified, us carers know these children better than ANYONE.*

There are numerous suggestions for more time for discussion in breakout groups and the opportunity for more interaction between participants.

Longer breakout groups and an opportunity to hear more from other foster carers, especially kinship carers.

Appendix 1

The Fostering Wellbeing Programme

Masterclass 1 - Facilitator framework

Masterclass 1	Knowing and meeting needs	Principles
		1. All the child's needs have to be met - it is essential to understand and respond to the **whole child**/young person to improve their wellbeing. 2. Each person's **view of life** and the wider world will differ, arising from their background, experiences and own mindset.
Aims	*The aims of the Fostering Wellbeing Programme are for all participants and sponsors to:* 1 identify and share the core values and principles which will help children and young people who are looked after to thrive; 2 develop skills and competencies in common which will help equip children and young people who are looked after to fulfil their potential; 3 become confident in a shared and consistent approach to meeting the needs of children and young people who are looked after which, in turn, will fire ambition and help them to find success; 4 be active advocates for the children and young people for whom they have individual or corporate responsibility.	

Fostering Wellbeing masterclass 1

Version: 1.0

Objectives	*The specific objectives of this masterclass are for participants to:*
	1. arrive at an understanding of wellbeing and the five areas of need, using a common language;
	2. become familiar with the principles underpinning the Fostering Wellbeing Programme;
	3. listen to and learn from the stories of children and young people who are or have been looked after;
	4. explore and evaluate the various methodologies for finding out what children and young people think and feel;
	5. gain insight into the perspectives of foster carers and co-professionals working with and caring for children and young people who are looked after;
	6. explore the values and attitudes which research has shown have the greatest effect in supporting children and young people with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); this will include the principle that caring for a looked after child is a shared endeavour which requires commitment and working in partnership.
	The wider objectives of the masterclasses are for participants to:
	7. gain a shared understanding of the needs of children and young people who are looked after;
	8. develop their understanding of the principles underpinning the Fostering Wellbeing Programme and how they need to be applied in practice;
	9. embrace and mediate the theories, practical activities and resource materials that will enhance the experience and wellbeing of children and young people who are looked after;
	10. build the knowledge, understanding, skills, confidence and positive attitudes of individuals and agencies to improve the wellbeing of children and young people who are looked after;
	11. develop a greater understanding by all of the roles of foster carers and co-workers and open channels of communication which will benefit the children and young people in their care.

| Rationale | Everyone has the same basic needs. To exist, we require our physical need for food, warmth, shelter, and freedom from disease to be met. It is part of being human to require our social, emotional, and cultural needs to be met. Wellbeing, for the purposes of this programme, is the state reached when a person's five basic needs are met.

The principles of social pedagogy underpin many of the most effective means of meeting our basic needs. These principles put people before processes, relationships before rules. While the language and theories behind social pedagogy will not be explicit in the programme, the key principles relevant to the wellbeing of children and young people who are looked after will shape the content of the masterclasses.

A person's basic needs can only be met in a holistic way. We have to recognise that while we all have the same basic needs, our experiences of the world will all be different. Therefore, our values, attitudes and abilities will differ in range, strength and complexity. |
|---|---|
| Outcomes | Participants will:

• listen to and learn from others
• reflect upon their own values, attitudes and practices so that change for the better in service provision and relationships might result
• understand the five areas of need
• understand and embrace the 10 principles underpinning the Fostering Wellbeing Programme
• acquire a better understanding of the perspectives that co-professionals bring to improving the wellbeing of children and young people
• understand how person-centred planning can meet the needs of the whole child or young person |

Masterclass outline	• Introduction to the Fostering Wellbeing Programme and the 10 principles
	• Wellbeing and meeting the needs of children and young people
	• Real-life stories – sharing of good practice from foster carers, social workers, health professionals
	• Engaging with children and young people - the PACE model
	• Person-centred planning and good practice from education
	• Reflecting, learning and applying lessons

Masterclass schedule	Introduction	Slides 2 – 7	20mins
	What is Wellbeing?	Slides 8 -10	15mins
	Voice of young people	Slide 11	10mins
	Fostering Wellbeing principles	Slides 12 – 18	15mins
	Break		
	Knowing a child's needs – Foster Carer / Social Worker	Slide 19	15mins
	Engaging Children – the PACE model (DDP or EP presentation)	Slide 20	20mins
	Meeting health needs (Health professional)	Slide 21	10mins
	Knowing the whole child	Slides 22 – 25	10mins
	Person Centred Practice in education (DT or LACE)	Slide 26	10mins
	Reflection and End	Slides 27 – end	10mins

Resources	Handouts
	1 The 10 principles of the Fostering Wellbeing Programme
	2 Wellbeing concept
	3 The five areas of basic need chart
	4 Ten things looked after children and foster carers want you to know.
	5 One page profile template
	6 Personal reflections journal
	7 Head, Heart, Hands – social pedagogy stories

Appendix 2

Fostering Wellbeing Programme: Mapping learning from Masterclasses to Welsh Learning Frameworks

Fostering Wellbeing Masterclasses	All Wales Induction Framework for Health and Social Care Workers	Post Approval Learning and Development Framework for Foster Carers in Wales
1. Knowing and Meeting Needs	**2. Principles and values of health and social care** • Child centred approaches • Communication • Change and transitions in children's social care **4. Health and wellbeing** • Wellbeing • Factors that impact upon health and wellbeing • Positive environments for the health, well-being and development of children and young people • Play • Speech, language and communication **5. Professional practice as a health and social care worker** • Continuing professional development	Core topics • Developing a secure base and promoting attachment • Understanding challenging behaviour and promoting positive strategies • Child development • Transitions for children and young people • Supporting education and development • Promoting good health and wellbeing Additional topics • Equality and diversity • Promoting independence • Understanding children and young people's mental health

2. Living and Growing	**2. Principles and values of health and social care** • Child centred approaches • Communication • Change and transitions in children's social care **4. Health and wellbeing** • Wellbeing • Factors that impact upon health and wellbeing • Positive environments for the health, well-being and development of children and young people • Play • Speech, language and communication **5. Professional practice as a health and social care worker** • Continuing professional development	**Core topics** • Developing a secure base and promoting attachment • Understanding challenging behaviour and promoting positive strategies • Child development • Transitions for children and young people • Supporting education and development • Promoting good health and wellbeing **Additional topics** • Equality and diversity • Promoting independence • Understanding children and young people's mental health • Advanced attachment and trauma
3. Me, you, us and them	**2. Principles and values of health and social** care • Child centred approaches • Communication • Change and transitions in children's social care **4. Health and wellbeing** • Wellbeing • Factors that impact upon health and wellbeing • Positive environments for the health, well-being and development of children and young people • Play • Speech, language and communication	**Core topics** • Developing a secure base and promoting attachment • Understanding challenging behaviour and promoting positive strategies • Transitions for children and young people • Recording, presenting and information sharing • Supporting education and development • Promoting good health and wellbeing **Additional topics** • Equality and diversity • Promoting independence

		• Understanding children and young people's mental health
	5. Professional practice as a health and social care worker • Continuing professional development	
4. Hands on	2. Principles and values of health and social care • Child centred approaches • Communication • Change and transitions in children's social care 4. Health and wellbeing • Wellbeing • Factors that impact upon health and wellbeing • Positive environments for the health, well-being and development of children and young people • Play • Speech, language and communication 5. Professional practice as a health and social care worker • Continuing professional development	Core topics • Developing a secure base and promoting attachment • Understanding challenging behaviour and promoting positive strategies • Child development • Transitions for children and young people • Supporting education and development • Promoting good health and wellbeing Additional topics • Equality and diversity • Promoting independence • Understanding children and young people's mental health • Therapeutic re-parenting • Advanced attachment and trauma
5. Working as one	2. Principles and values of health and social care • Child centred approaches • Equality, diversity and inclusion Communication • Change and transitions in children's social care	Core topics • Recording, presenting and information sharing • Working with birth families and contact • Transitions for children and young people

| | 5. Professional practice as a health and social care worker

• Roles and responsibilities of the health and social care worker
• Partnership working
• Team working
• Handling information
• Personal conduct of health and social care workers
• Continuing professional development | • Supporting education and development
• Promoting good health and wellbeing

Additional topics

• Equality and diversity
• Promoting independence |

CASCADE

Authors and Contributors

Alyson Rees, Bridget Handley

Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE),
Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences (SOCSI), Cardiff University

For further information please contact:

CASCADE: Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre

Cardiff University
3 Museum Place
Cardiff
CF10 3RL

CASCADE@cardiff.ac.uk