

Learning Example – Formulation Meetings and a Hub-centred Approach - Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Introduction

This learning example shows how Rotherham have worked to expand their short breaks provision in their first year of funding from the Department for Education's Short Breaks Innovation Fund. Rotherham became involved during the second year of the Innovation Fund, and have recently been awarded funding for another year which will commence in April 2024.

Rotherham's project was focused on supplementing their existing short breaks provision, and they worked with key stakeholders to develop their proposal. Following this, they received letters of support for their proposal from the [Rotherham Parent Carers Forum](#) and [NHS South Yorkshire ICB](#). This highlighted the strong multi-agency relationships in place in Rotherham and how they underpinned the design and delivery of their new short breaks project.

This example highlights two themes of innovative practice which Rotherham has used to create a transformative short breaks offer and improve the outcomes of children and young people whose needs were not being met by the existing short breaks provision. Rotherham developed a unique 12-week intensive intervention, which is mobilised through action-focused 'formulation meetings' and 'My Family Support Plans'. This intervention is delivered through their new Short Breaks Hub, which has links with education, community-based care and CAMHS to provide a comprehensive holistic offer of support.

Aims and Objectives

As part of their successful funding application, the project team focused on how they could harness the strong multi-agency relationships and robust ordinarily available short breaks offer in Rotherham to inform their new short breaks offer. They carried out an internal scrutiny process to identify that the vast majority of disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs were having their needs met by the robust short breaks provision. There was however a small cohort that was recognised to be struggling to access the existing short breaks offer or it was not providing the desired and necessary outcomes.

Rotherham wanted to develop a project that provided tailored and holistic support to young people to help them remain at home and in the community, avoiding family breakdown and the chance of the young person being placed in an out-of-borough residential placement.

They decided to develop a short breaks hub that incorporates community-based care and support for children and young people aged 10 years upwards with complex special education needs and/or disabilities.

They wanted to design a holistic, intensive intervention that has a transformative impact of children and their families and ensure that there are tangible positive outcomes for all using the new Short Breaks offer.

This learning example will look at how Rotherham's Short Breaks Offer aims to:

- Utilise a hub-centred approach to provide a holistic, multi-agency offer of support.
- Develop a specialist 12-week intervention that harnesses the strengths of action-focused 'formulation meetings'.
- Ensure positive outcomes for children and young people and their families.

Approach

Rotherham was passionate about harnessing this innovation funding opportunity to design and test a new intensive intervention approach to short breaks, which is structured around a new type of multi-disciplinary meeting and a new type of positive behavioural support plan. Utilising their well-established relationships with their multi-agency partners, such as psychologists and specialist practitioners, enabled Rotherham to provide a more comprehensive and joined up offer of support that better addressed the needs of the child or young person.

Linked to this innovative approach, the project team also wanted to emphasise the importance of outcomes-focused short breaks and worked with their strong network of short breaks providers to place greater focus on positive outcomes through this 12-week intervention period. Rotherham recognised how vital short breaks are within wider special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) support and knew that short breaks needed to be at the heart of these intensive interventions.

Formulation meetings

Rotherham has designed a specialised 12-week intervention process to provide an intensive behavioural support offer that is linked in with school, community, and home-based support. The intervention process begins with the project team, alongside their multi-agency partners, identifying young people that are reaching or may reach crisis point and would benefit from an individualised programme of support centred around enhanced short breaks provision.

A central part of this intervention approach are formulation meetings. These meetings are individualised to each young person that is being supported, and they consist of 30-minute meetings every 4 weeks where they will bring together a group of multi-disciplinary professionals to discuss and design a positive behavioural support plan. The professionals present typically range from psychologists and short breaks providers to social workers.

These meetings provide an opportunity for targeted bespoke work to take place to support the young person and creates space for goals and timelines to be set. There are similarities between these formulation meetings and multi-disciplinary team panels, for example, but one key difference is the focus of these meetings on setting time-limited actions and targets. All of the practitioners attending will have a clear set of actions to address in between the meetings, leading to these meetings being very effective and efficient. The meetings are coordinated by the project manager, and they are responsible for keeping track of the action plans to ensure that the young person reaches the desired outcomes. The aim is for the young person to transition into a sustainable short break offer utilising improved existing provision at the end of the 12-week period.

The design of these meetings and the wider intervention is trying to create a shift within Rotherham towards ensuring that all short breaks are outcomes-focused. The providers linked in with the programme have been receptive to this shift, and the project team have already seen how the providers are benefitting from being directly involved in positive behaviour support planning and being linked in with other practitioners such as psychologists through these formulation meetings.

A hub-centred approach

The Rotherham Children's Disability Service was already located in a well-established hub, with a number of different services co-located in the same building, called [Kimberworth Place](#). These services included educational psychologists, CAMHS, portage and physiotherapy. This set-up had already paved the way for strong multi-disciplinary team relationships because the practitioners working in these teams were already joined up and working together. These effective multi-agency partnerships helped with the roll out of this new short breaks project and enabled the offer of support to be even more comprehensive and joined up across education, health and social care.

Rotherham built on this for their innovative Short Breaks Hub, incorporating community-based care and support and linking into the existing short break residential staff team. This hub-based approach has created more opportunities for overnight respite when families involved in the project need it, and more generally developing a mixed economy approach to short breaks that utilises the different strengths in the community.

As part of this hub, there is a rolling programme of development and training of personal assistants (PAs) to increase the skill set and capacity of these practitioners. Building their team

of in-house PAs helps to ensure the project can continue to provide a programme of community-based support, with the aim of avoiding high-cost educational and residential provision.

Rotherham has demonstrated how a hub-centred approach has led to SEND services and provision becoming a clear priority amongst all of their multi-disciplinary partners and it has further reinforced effective multi-agency working and information sharing.

Challenges and Successes

Key challenges

- Rotherham sought to carry out an early intervention approach where possible with families involved in the programme, rather than a reactive response once the young person had reached crisis point. However, they had to manage this narrative carefully, as some parents were worried that the project team were implying family breakdown was likely to happen.
- Rotherham's project is focused on an intensive 12-week programme of support, and they have been able to demonstrate initial positive outcomes at the end of the 12 weeks. However, they are still working on how to demonstrate the longer-term impact that this intervention has on the young person and their family, and how this project is leading to a reduction in the number of young people entering residential placements.

Key successes

There have been many successes in the first year of the project:

- **Outcomes-focused short breaks:** Rotherham's project has led to a shift amongst providers and wider practitioners to ensure that short breaks are always outcomes-focused and providing the right support for the young person.
- **Multi-agency interventions:** Rotherham have worked with their multi-agency partners throughout the project to ensure that all interventions are co-designed and delivered, leading to a more comprehensive and effective offer of support.
- **Sustainable transition:** The project has been carefully designed and delivered to ensure that the young people involved are supported to transition into a sustainable short break offer at the end of the 12-week intervention, with increased stability at home and/or school.

Key learning

- **Have a lessons learned log:** Throughout the delivery of the project so far, Rotherham have kept a lessons learned log to ensure that they keep track of all of the areas that

have worked well and the areas that still require improvement. This enables the project to be continually improving, and they have fed all of these lessons into their plan for the second year of the project.

- **Involve providers:** Rotherham has worked to involve providers in the new intervention they have designed through this project and how it has created transformative outcomes for young people. The providers have been receptive and interested in the project, and there have been clear benefits to involving them and linking them to multi-agency partners.
- **Gain support from the parent carer forum:** Rotherham commented on how important gaining support and a letter of confidence from the local parent carer forum had been to their project.