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## **Enabling families to lead change through a systemic, relationship-based approach**

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# Somerset Children's Social Care

Strengths based practice –  
a systems wide approach

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Principal Child and Family Social Worker

Richard Sprott, Operations Manager - Assessment and Safeguarding



# Welcome

Our aims today:

- To describe our approach to strengths based practice in Somerset.
- To describe how our practice framework and principles support our work with children and families.
- To share what has worked well for us.



# Re-inventing the wheel?

“If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

- Isaac Newton



# What is Family Solutions Somerset?



- An umbrella under which our support to families sits.
- A coherent framework which describes our offer, from early help through to statutory interventions.
- Includes our values, our culture and our ways of working.
- Supports and informs our work with partners.
- Least intrusive? Building on family strengths? Right service at right time? Proportionality? Pathway of flexible support for families?



# Family Solutions Somerset – key elements



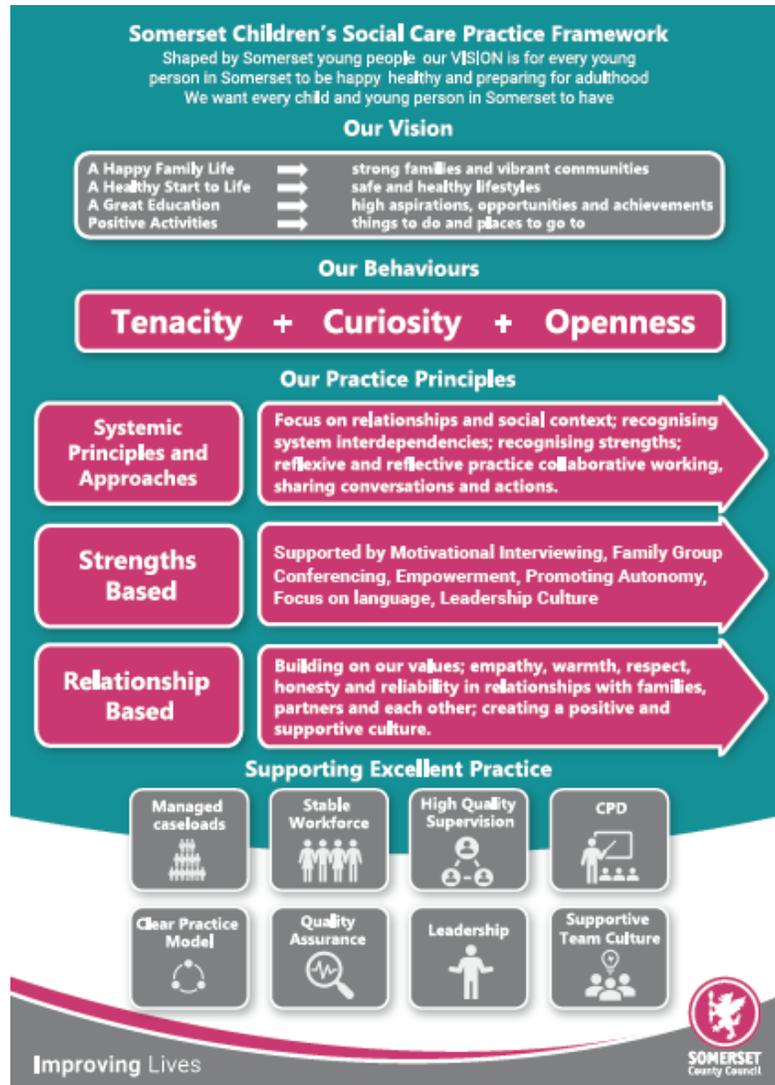
- Our practice framework
- Our guiding principles and behaviours
- How we support families
- How we support staff
- How we assure the quality of practice
- Services that we provide





that will improve their childrens' lives

# Developing confident social work practice



## Intervening proportionately:

Right intervention at the right time to support children to live within their families and communities wherever possible

Working confidently with risk, focusing conversations on **needs not thresholds**

Equipping social workers to focus on **relational and strength-based practice** in planning and recording.

Using **Motivational Interviewing (MI) techniques**, to support improved engagement and increased likelihood of positive and lasting change

Multi-agency partner workshops completed to support **better partner understanding** of the implementation of the effective support document:

- Safe uncertainty
- Role of the lead professional
- Needs not thresholds

# Practice Framework: our behaviours

## Tenacity    Curiosity    Openness

Key behaviours which we want to see in all our staff, taken from research findings as being linked to successful interventions.

**Tenacity** - never giving up, making sure that children are safe and their needs met.

**Curiosity** - not always accepting things on face value, but digging deeper to seek out the truth.

**Openness** - accepting that we are not always the experts and that we need to seek and hear the views of others - not making snap judgments - being humble.



Safe Families



Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC)



Pause



Family safeguarding model



Social Worker



Senior Recovery Worker



Domestic Abuse Worker



Adult Mental Health Worker



FAMILY  
SOLUTIONS  
**SOMERSET**

"where families lead change"

# Safe Families



## Safe Families *for* Children

A commissioned programme providing trained and supported volunteer befrienders from within the community, who are matched with families.

Includes three main aspects:

1. Befriending and family support to help vulnerable and often isolated families re-engage in their local **community** life to build sustainability.
2. Resource finders – providing practical support with household items.
3. Short term hosting with supported volunteer families – caring for children where, for example, a parent is unavailable such as when giving birth, ill health or hospital treatment.

Utilising the community to provide support  
Avoiding the need for intrusive statutory interventions



# Family Intervention Service



- Somerset's specialist Early help offer, providing high quality, **flexible, responsive** support to children and families.
- Supporting families to stay together – intensive intervention to **families at risk of breakdown, including** overnight interventions if required .
- 0-18 wrap-around service to families with complex needs, focusing on **empowering positive parenting, building on family strengths.**
- Supporting homeless 15-25-year-old olds, including mediating to keep children within their family networks or support them to return home .
- Identifying and supporting young carers including delivering ongoing intervention where appropriate.
- Integrating Youth Offending Service (YOS) into the Prevention Service management group to support closer working and improved practice.
- Includes specialist support to children who go missing, completing Missing Return Interviews and offering early intervention to prevent escalation.
- Alignment of the training offer and referral pathway for Children with Disabilities

Early Help, linking seamlessly with social work support.  
Motivational Interviewing guides our work with families

# Family Safeguarding



Strengthening Families,  
Protecting Children Programme

Hertfordshire Family Safeguarding



Bringing adult workers into integrated teams within children's social care to strengthen the whole family in order that children can remain with birth families and not come into care.

- Nationally recognised model to help families to stay together and reduce the number of children in care.
- Delivers support to families when they need it, reducing system escalation, dependence and long-term trauma using **motivational interviewing** techniques.
- Presents an opportunity for a culture shift – innovation, **empowerment** and staff feeling more valued.
- Wider system impact. Reduced demand on emergency services (NHS and the Police), prevention savings to adult services (mental health and drug services).
- Addressing Ofsted's criticisms of 'less than good' multi-agency working between services for vulnerable families - improving lives faster.

Providing real practical expert support to parents to help them to address their difficulties  
Focusing on supporting parents to keep their children at home and care for them safely

# Family Drug And Alcohol Court



*“What is it that family courts are there to do? Just take away children? Or are we there to provide part of the whole construct of support around families to try to enable children to remain within their families? If we are looking to remove the 8th, 9th or 10th child, the family courts can't be doing very well by this family”.*

***DJ Nicholas Crichton.***

- The judge holds fortnightly court reviews with parents, in addition to the usual court hearings with lawyers.
- A specialist multi-disciplinary FDAC team works closely with the judge and other professionals to provide intensive treatment and support for parents wishing to turn their lives around.
- The principles underpinning FDAC are shared with other problem-solving courts and there is a firm focus on working positively with parents.
- Independent evaluations of FDAC have found that FDAC was more successful than ordinary proceedings in helping parents achieve abstinence from drugs and alcohol, enabling more children to be reunified with their parents.

Keeping the focus on supporting parents throughout the court process  
Ensuring that they have every chance to prove they can care for their children safely

# PAUSE



- A national programme that works with women who have experienced, or are at risk of, repeated pregnancies that result in children needing to be removed from their care.
- Through an intense programme of support, it aims to **break this cycle** and give women the opportunity to reflect, tackle destructive patterns of behaviour, and to develop new skills and responses that can help them create a more positive future.
- Each Pause Practice works intensively with 20-24 women over a period of 18 months.
- The key element of the programme is the relationship between the woman and a skilled, experienced Practitioner
- The wider impact of improving the lives of this small group is greater than the benefits for individuals.

Ensuring mothers are not 'written off' because of previous difficulties  
Maintaining hope of positive change

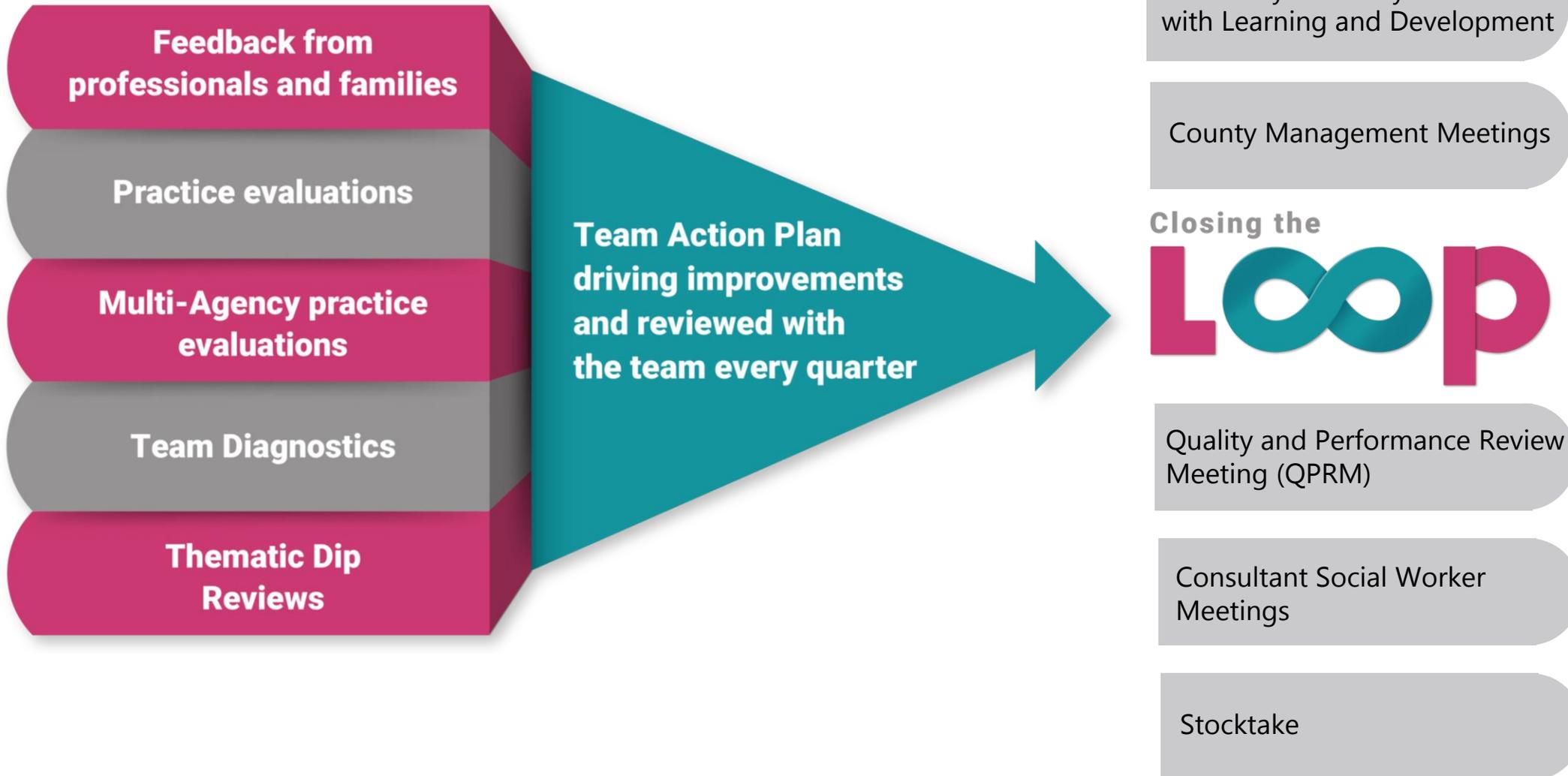
# Wider safeguarding...



- Not all families fit the family safeguarding model, or need the specialist support which it provides.
- Focusing on some remaining key areas of practice
- Neglect
- Child exploitation
- Parents with learning disabilities
- What's in a name? Wider safeguarding

Different teams but a common approach to practice  
Motivational Interviewing guides our work with families

# Quality Assurance (QA) Framework



# Strengths based QA tools



## Shining a light on excellence

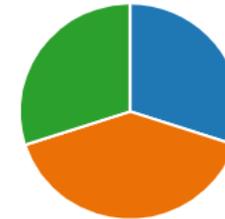
Helping children and young people understand the different roles of everyone can often be a challenge. When a Youth Offending Worker in the East was recently faced with this challenge she collaborated with the social worker. They helped the young person by taking pictures of the professionals involved and writing a simple couple of lines about who they were and what their roles were. This was really appreciated by the young person who felt much more confident to attend meetings and understand who to turn to for help at different times.

54. These are my thoughts around how supervision or other management processes could be strengthened further:

69. The plan is clear, concise, understandable and accessible to professionals and family members,

[More Details](#)

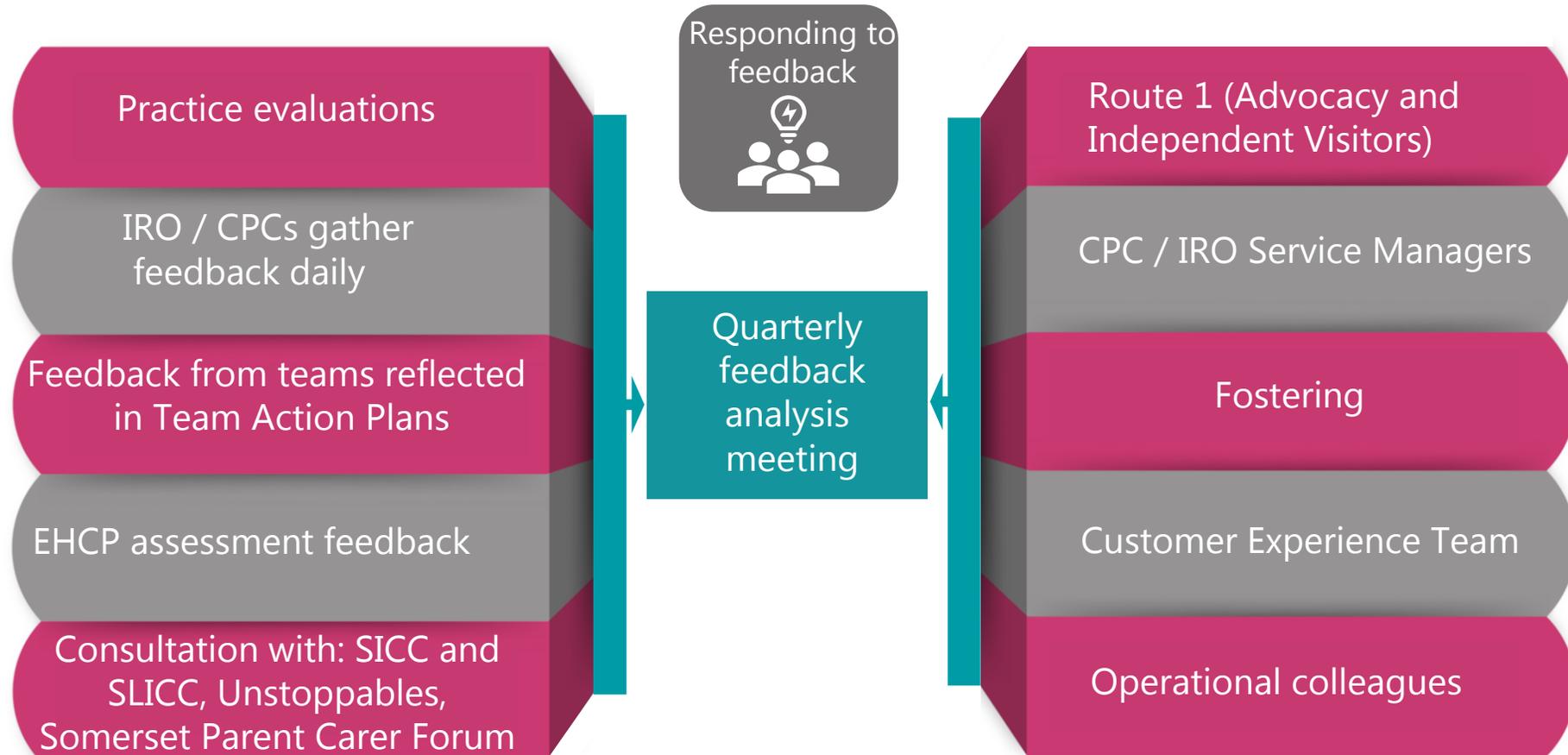
Strongly agree	3
Agree	4
Disagree	3
Strongly disagree	0



Things that have gone well since the last supervision session

(Positive feedback, good examples of practice, workplace relationships that are supportive etc)

# Hearing the voice of families



Relational practice – cannot work without hearing the views of those we are trying to support.

# Peer Challenge, Dorset July 2021



“The involvement of partners in QA activity is a **clear strength**. There are processes that actively enable partner involvement (MAPE) and we heard how well these are regarded by partner agencies. We feel this has enabled your aspiration to ‘hold the collective nerve’ and feel safe in uncertainty. As a result, **we believe children, young people and families are likely to experience the right support at the right time and feel part of the solutions and positive change.**”

“Throughout our time with you we found strength-based language modelled and proactively pursued. We feel this is further supported by the commitment to Motivational Interviewing. Team members consistently referred to MI and how beneficial it has been in terms of embedding a coaching style of working with children and families. ”

# Practice strengths identified and shared



 Families are receiving support that is relevant to their needs. Signposting to other specialist support is happening where needed. This is helping them make changes to improve the care of their children.

 We are considering the roles of both parents and more actively thinking about how we can engage non-resident parents.

 There is some evidence of plans being written in a more positive and strengths-based way, with a greater awareness of the impact of language in our recording.

 There is good evidence of positive relationships between practitioners and families. Many families report that they trust their practitioner, feel supported by them, and generally receive good communication.

There is evidence of the voice of care leavers and their identity being clear throughout planning and case records. 

There are good examples of responsive supervision that helps guide the focus of plans and ensure that our intervention addresses risks and needs. 

There are many positive examples of good communication and collaboration between Professionals so we can understand how families' Needs and circumstances are changing. 

Dip Reviews identify that in 92% of cases the plan to manage risks during the pandemic were appropriate. Practitioners are using creative ways to mitigate risks where face to face visits are not possible. 

# What is Motivational Interviewing? The glue that binds us...



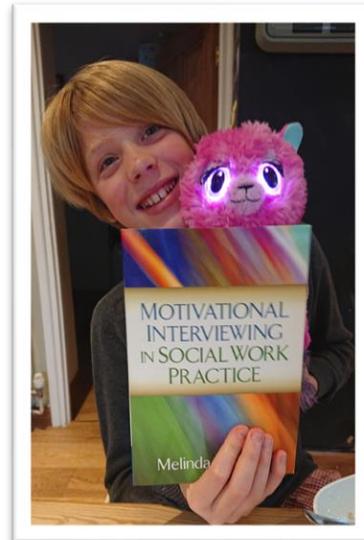
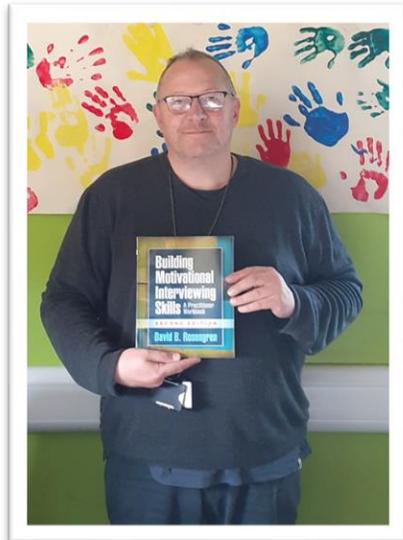
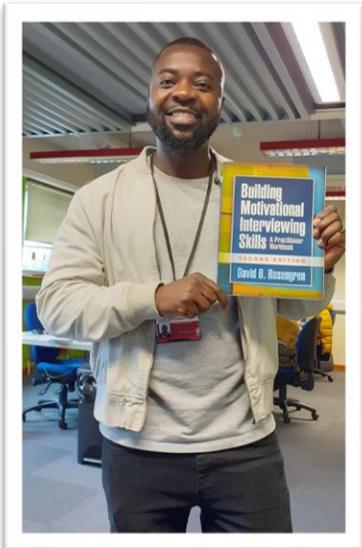
*“MI is a **collaborative**, goal-oriented style of communication with particular attention to the **language of change**. It is designed to **strengthen personal motivation** for and commitment to a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the **person’s own reasons for change** within an atmosphere of **acceptance and compassion**.” (Miller & Rollnick, 2013, p. 29)*

- **Open questions** draw out and explore the **person’s experiences, perspectives, and ideas**. Evocative questions guide the client to reflect on how change may be meaningful or possible
- **Affirmation of strengths**, efforts, and past successes help to build the person’s hope and confidence in their ability to change.
- **Reflections** are based on careful listening and trying to understand what the person is saying, by repeating, rephrasing or offering a deeper guess about what the person is trying to communicate. This is a foundational skill of MI and how we express empathy.
- **Summarising** ensures shared understanding and reinforces key points made by the client.

# Supporting Motivational Interviewing



- Training offered to **all** Children's Social Care Staff
- Taster sessions for partners, elected members, commissioners
- Books purchased for all practitioners and managers to support embedding the techniques
- Agenda item at all team meetings to support the development and use of learned skills
- Practice Leader group facilitated by training provider certified by MINT (Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers)



# Feedback from families

"I like that I am not restricted to a strict programme and the **adult workers listen to what I need** and they see me face to face (not just over the phone). **I feel with the other services if I don't fit into their programme, they can't help me or I have to wait so long to get anything, its pointless.**"

"My mum trusts you, so I want to tell you what I think."

"I thought I'd blown it but I was told that relapse is part of recovery and while I know what I did is not ok, **I'm grateful to be given another chance and show them (CSC) that I can be a good dad to my baby. That's all I want.**"

"Why didn't you lot do this before? It really helps..."



# Feedback from social workers



**We had a parent alleging domestic abuse and we were able to immediately call in the domestic abuse worker first for advice, and then to contact the parent directly and arrange a safe place for the parent to go to.** This immediate assistance is so different from our previous experience as external services are often not easily accessible or responsive.

Having access to a substance misuse worker and a mental health worker has enabled me to support a parent to access the support she needs in a timely fashion, ensuring that there is a solid plan in place to help her overcome the difficulties she is facing.

Having support from adult workers has **reduced the risks to the child and prevented the need to escalate to care proceedings.**

Having the adult workers has enabled me to get the support services for parents much more quickly. **The feedback from parents has been really positive – they feel that they are getting the support in a much quicker, more timely way.** The ability to form the relationships on a one to one basis is so much more helpful.

When we worked with external services, it could often take a long time and we would lose the momentum and the parents would often lose faith and disengage. The adult workers are flexible and if something doesn't work, they try something different. **We think together as a team and we work out together with the parents what would be the most helpful intervention.**

**Both parents** being supported by adult workers (and now through FDAC) have shared that, despite there being a long way to go, they **are finding the support and intervention in place really supportive and encouraging.** Although the level of involvement can feel a lot to manage at time, they **truly feel involved** in the planning, that has **helped them find their voices** and that they now **feel optimistic** that things can and will change.

# Working with partners

**Open**

Mental Health

- Recognising the importance of partnership working in all we do.
- Locating Family Solutions Somerset within the wider multi-agency system
- Modelling strengths-based approaches through the Safeguarding Partnership
- Supporting partners to understand the CSC journey and context
- Motivational interviewing taster workshops for partners
- Funded opportunities for joint training with partners
- Multi-agency Partner Workshops:
  - Safe uncertainty
  - Role of the lead professional
  - Needs not thresholds

**Rethink  
Mental  
Illness.**



# Questions

This presentation, the video and handouts are available to view and download from:

[www.somerset.gov.uk/socialcarejobs](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/socialcarejobs)

**Come chat with us on stand 35!**

We have exciting ambitions for the future – and we'd love you to join us to make them happen



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