

Signs of Safety

A new approach to working with Children & Families

November 2013

What is it and where does it come from? Signs of Safety is an innovative, strengths-based, safety organised approach, created in Western Australia. The model was created by practitioners, based on what they know works with difficult cases, has attracted international attention and is being used in areas of North America, Europe and Australasia.

It is an assessment and planning framework supporting practitioners in determining:

- Whether there is sufficient safety for the child to remain within the family and what support is needed for the family for that to happen;
- Whether the situation is so dangerous that the child must be removed;
- If the child is looked after, whether there is enough safety for the child to return home.

Signs of Safety was developed from a spirit of appreciative inquiry, and the heart of the process revolves around a risk assessment and case planning format that is meaningful for all the professionals, and the parents and children.

Why have Lincolnshire chosen to implement it? Lincolnshire have chosen to implement Signs of Safety to go some way to meeting the recommendations detailed in Professor Eileen Munro's report into Child Protection, which in turn should ensure the Directorate's readiness for meeting future Ofsted requirements.

A key recommendation of Professor Eileen Munro's report identified the need for, '*Local authorities and their partners to start an on-going process to review and redesign the ways in which child and family social work is delivered, drawing on evidence of effectiveness of helping methods where appropriate and supporting practice that can implement evidence based ways of working with children and families*'.

The use of the approach was approved by Children's Services Directorate Management Team and is being led by Janice Spencer, Assistant Director, as the Project Sponsor.

What are the Core Principles of the framework and approach? Signs of Safety offers a robust way to identify risk and harm, and the changes needed for children to be made safer and more secure. Three principles underpin the approach:

- **Working relationships:** constructive working relationships between professionals and family members, and between professionals themselves, are key to effective practice.
- **Thinking critically, fostering a stance of inquiry:** all processes that support and inform practice, foster a questioning approach or a spirit of inquiry as the core professional stance of the practitioner.
- **Landing grand aspirations in everyday practice:** Signs of Safety has been developed with practitioners, and continues to develop as another area begins implementation. Practitioner and service user descriptions of what on the ground good practice, with complex and challenging cases looks like, continue to be documented.

What will the impact of Lincolnshire's implementation be? Lincolnshire Children's Services aim is to create a supportive working environment where staff are confident and committed to the professional judgements they make. The benefits of this are:

- Increased confidence and capability of staff.
- A supportive working environment for staff working through difficult and protracted cases.
- Professional judgements based on a balance of information and evidence.
- Improved engagement with families to meet the best needs, and outcomes, of the child.
- Improved partnership working with partner agencies to meet the best needs, and outcomes, of the child.
- Improved quality of assessment, analysis and intervention delivered to families.
- Improved risk management of vulnerable children as a result of rigorous assessment and safety planning.

As Signs of Safety becomes embedded, you will find meetings, supervision, panels and assessments will be framed using this approach, and a routine use of the Signs of Safety communication tools for capturing children's views.

How are we implementing it in Lincolnshire? There have been a series of two-day introductory training sessions planned from July 2013 – January 2014. These should enable all those who have attended, to begin to apply the thinking and tools in practice, and particularly through group supervision and practice workshops.

The Steering Group, led by Janice Spencer, will meet on a monthly basis from January and will include our consultant trainer, Tracey Hill, on a bi-monthly basis. This group will agree the implementation plan and provide the drive and direction for the project.

10 Children's Services practitioners attended the 5 day residential on Signs of Safety in September; this group, including Learning and Development, are working with the Project Manager to develop how Signs of Safety can be used in key Children's Services processes, for roll out in the New Year.

From February 2014, a program of Signs of Safety learning for Practice Leaders will begin. In this first year: all FAST and LAC Practice Supervisors and Child Protection Chairs will meet with Tracey Hill, our trainer, on a monthly basis. All CWD, Targeted and FWT Practice Supervisors and attendees from the Residential Course, that do not fall into the monthly group, will meet with Tracey on a bi-monthly basis.

Resources: Please note the Comprehensive Briefing Paper and Work Book circulated for training is for use within Lincolnshire County Council only, if a colleague from outside of the organisation is keen to learn more, please direct them to the Signs of Safety website: <http://www.signsofsafety.net/>

If you have any queries, question or comments, please contact Clare Rowley, Project Lead, on 01522 552208, or email, clare.rowley@lincolnshire.gov.uk