

SIGNS OF SAFETY: AN EVALUATION ACROSS TEN AREAS IN ENGLAND

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▶ English Innovation Programme

▶ Timescale

▶ Judging outcomes

BACKGROUND

- ▶ Direct work with young people had the most positive impact on outcomes
- ▶ Young people benefited from more intensive, in-depth support than from occasional support over a period of time

▶ Walker and Donaldson (2011)

OUTCOMES AND INITIATIVES

- ▶ **Three key principles:** relationships are fundamental; stance of critical inquiry and locating grand aspirations in practice
- ▶ **A Signs of Safety assessment or Mapping:** past harm; future danger and complicating factors

SIGNS OF SAFETY

- ▶ Realistic evaluation
- ▶ Longitudinal design
- ▶ Multiple types of data collection
 - ▶ Interviews
 - ▶ Focus groups
 - ▶ Case file analysis
 - ▶ Secondary data analysis
 - ▶ Value for money

WHAT WE DID

10 pilots
differed in
terms of
experience
with Signs of
Safety

New

Wakefield

Norfolk

Wokingham

Bristol

2 years

Suffolk

Lincolnshire

Brent

2 years plus

West Sussex

Tower Hamlets

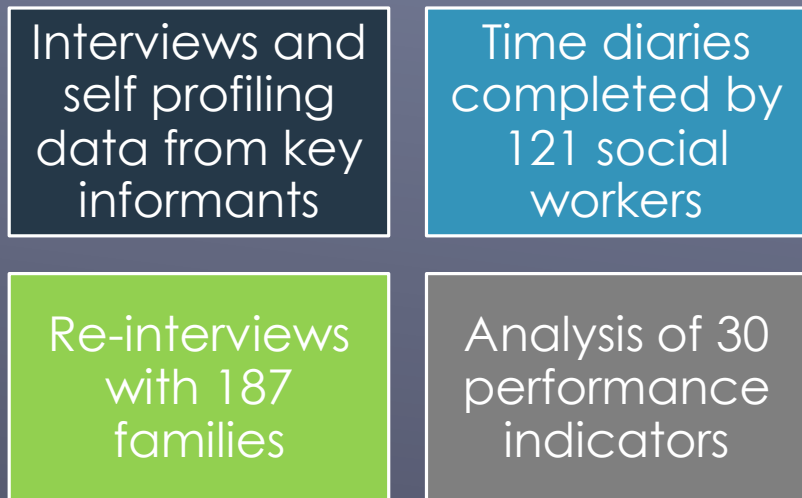
Leicestershire

Time 1



Analysis of 262 case records

Time 2



Reanalysis of case records

DATA COLLECTED AT TIMES 1 & 2 ABOUT TWO COHORTS OF FAMILIES

- ▶ Generally very positive about Signs of Safety in terms of improving their practice
- ▶ But some inconsistencies with key informant views
 - ▶ Extent of use of scaling, mapping, tools and appreciative inquiry
 - ▶ Challenges in using Signs of Safety with all families – some reported had not/would not use it with some families. This was also reflected to some extent in the case records

SOCIAL WORKERS' VIEWS

- ▶ Context of complex and longstanding situations
 - ▶ At least 75% families had been referred to children's social care in the past
 - ▶ Domestic abuse, neglect, mental health problems and substance misuse were common

DELIVERING OUTCOMES FOR FAMILIES

- ▶ Importance to Signs of Safety of shared understanding between parents and social workers
 - ▶ Majority of parents thought they and their social worker shared the same views about their situation
 - ▶ Most felt the social worker had focused on their strengths
 - ▶ But a quarter said they did not know what their social worker's goals were
 - ▶ Better levels of agreement in the pilot areas that were more experienced in Signs of Safety and as other areas became more experienced at Time 2 and Cohort 2
 - ▶ But changes of social worker and high rates of agency social workers in some areas have implications for further progress

PARENT/CARER VIEWS ABOUT SOCIAL WORKERS

- ▶ Quality of Signs of Safety recording improved over time
- ▶ But some concerns about quality of assessments and whether time spent in direct contact enables Signs of Safety to be implemented well
- ▶ The relationship between Signs of Safety and outcomes would require longer investigation:
 - ▶ Just over half were not re-referred at Time 2
 - ▶ 28 children removed from their parent(s) between Times 1 and 2
 - ▶ SDQ scores

QUALITY OF PRACTICE

- ▶ Time spent on direct client contact does not appear to increase or decrease as a result of Signs of Safety
- ▶ There were indications of positive change within published performance indicators:
 - ▶ Pilots had lower average rate of assessments per 10,000 children (362) than their Statistical Nearest Neighbours (SNNs) (497) in 2015/16.
 - ▶ Assessments were significantly shorter (in 2015/16 the average duration was 19 days in pilots sites compared to 28 days in SNNs).
 - ▶ Pilots had a significantly lower rate of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) per 10,000 children (44) than their SNNs (61) in 2015/16.
 - ▶ Pilots had a significantly shorter duration from the start of Section 47 enquiries to ICPC (13 days) in 2015/16 than their SNNs (14 days).
 - ▶ Pilots had a significantly lower rate of children becoming the subject of a child protection per 10,000 children (29) than their SNNs (41) in 2015/16.
- ▶ There was no evidence that Signs of Safety had resulted in changes to expenditure patterns.

RESOURCES, OUTPUTS AND EXPENDITURE

- ✓ Embedding organisational commitment to Signs of Safety
- ✓ Using plain language
- ✓ Using tools to engage children and young people e.g. three houses; fairies and wizards
- ✓ Mapping cases by individual social workers and mapping in teams
- ✓ Using safety plans
- ✓ Providing advanced 5-day training for all managers
- ✓ Embedding Signs of Safety approaches and principles across all training
- ✓ Aligning Initial Child Protection Conferences with Signs of Safety
- ✓ Establishing practice leadership and supervision processes to support Signs of Safety

FROM PROFILES: VIEWS ABOUT WHERE THERE WAS GREATEST PROGRESS IN DELIVERY

- ✘ Building constructive working relationships between professionals and family members
- ✘ Spending the necessary direct contact time with children and adults in families
- ✘ Being confident that the service is intervening at the right time
- ✘ Creating a culture where it is permissible to admit mistakes
- ✘ Supporting social workers with administrative tasks
- ✘ Recruiting high quality staff
- ✘ CHALLENGES OF A SYSTEM UNDER STRAIN

FROM PROFILES: VIEWS ABOUT WHERE FURTHER PROGRESS WAS NEEDED

- ▶ Direct work with young people had the most positive impact on outcomes
- ▶ Young people benefited from more intensive, in-depth support than from occasional support over a period of time

Walker and Donaldson (2011)

OUTCOMES AND INITIATIVES – AGAIN!

▶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/signs-of-safety-practice-in-childrens-services-an-evaluation>

LINK TO REPORT

- ▶ This research was funded by the Department for Education. The views expressed in this presentation are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education

DISCLAIMER AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS