

Child Welfare Inequalities Project (CWIP)

The work with Barnsley frontline social workers and managers was a result of senior management engagement with the Child Welfare Inequalities Project (CWIP). More details about this project can be found at <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/inequalities-in-child-welfare-intervention-rates>.

The project established the link between rates of poverty and deprivation and the chances of children entering the care and protection system. Barnsley is an area of high deprivation with 21.8% of areas within Barnsley being amongst the 10% most deprived in England.

This link was of particular interest, and service leaders were keen to support staff to think carefully about children's social and economic circumstances and how this might be affecting professional decisions.



BARNSELY
Metropolitan Borough Council

Poverty Proofing Assessments :

Service Director Debbie Mercer asked Professors Brid Featherstone (Huddersfield University) and Kate Morris (University of Sheffield) to lead a series of practice focused workshops with children's services staff.

An initial workshop was held with managers, and this focused on building their familiarity with data about the social and economic circumstances of Barnsley families, and the CWIP findings. Workshops were then held with frontline staff.

These aimed to:

- Ensure staff had up to date knowledge about the relationship between child abuse, neglect and poverty
- Link the relationship-between-poverty-child-abuse-and neglect
- share the CWIP research and the implications
- To support reflective analysis of existing practices
- Make recommendations for future development in practice & policy



Reflections from the workshops

- The CWIP research resonated strongly with the experiences of frontline staff
- There was recognition of the endemic nature of poverty and a high level of understanding of the Barnsley history, some practitioners struggled to make links between these wider issues and the harms faced by, and within, families.
- Child protection practice is focused at the level of the individual family and the risks within that family; it is not always sighted on the poverty in which the family is living.
- When families are in crisis, some practitioners struggled to integrate practices that recognised the constraints posed by poverty with practices that supported the taking of appropriate levels of responsibility to protect children.
- Entry into care often led to profoundly unequal experiences, with birth families struggling to offer the social and economic resources foster families and kinship carers could offer and reflections within the workshops revealed a level of ethical unease about this.
- There was a recognition of the need to strengthen opportunities for collaborative working across the Council, and with the community sector, in order to meet the needs of families.



Poverty Proof Planning:

Following the initial workshops a Barnsley Report and Plan has been developed and is in the early stages but progress so far is:

- A Poverty Task & Finish Group
- Implementation of the managers poverty checklist
- Agreement with the DWP to offer training to front line social workers on benefits advice and sign posting
- Allocation of poverty champions across social care, housing and health
- Agreement with BMBC Housing Colleagues to provide training, guidance and advice on housing, specifically around arrears and how to avoid eviction
- Development/review of assessment and child protection templates to take account of poverty context of the family
- Review of the Neglect Strategy to take account of the links between neglect and poverty



BARNSELY
Metropolitan Borough Council

Future Possibilities

- Broadening the conversations with families and with the third sector
- Linking with colleagues across services
- Linking CSC services and income maximisation services to pilot advice surgeries for families
- Further role out of poverty workshops across the joint partnership

