The Eastern Region Sector Led Improvement Programme and Research in Practice Voice of the Child Change Project: summary report

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Introduction and background to the project

The Children's Services Sector Led Improvement Programme for the Eastern Region contracted Research in Practice to run a regional collaborative project on 'the experience of the child within child protection'. The project was run by a RiP facilitator alongside colleagues from East Sussex who had been working on this issue over a number of years to and acknowledged by Ofsted as evidencing:

> *"The development of meaningful relationships with children and families, good quality assessments and the effective use of chronologies result in social workers knowing their children and families well. Social workers are confident and skilled in protecting children. Children and young people told*

inspectors that they both feel safe and are safe, and that they enjoy good
relationships with their social workers"   Ofsted 2014

Full details of the Change Project are provided in the full project report (attached). This summary report highlights key messages for the region but does not include the rich practice examples contained in the full report.

Engagement and feedback on the project
All of the participants at the final group meeting evaluated the project as 'excellent' or 'good', both as a professional development opportunity and in terms of building new and rewarding networks:

> "*Increased [my] confidence in developing this area; huge learning and resources from sharing with others"*

> "*Definitely increased my enthusiasm, which was already strong, about contributing to development in this work in [my authority]"*

> "*Reinforced in me a desire to continue to change the practice culture of my organisation"*

(See charts at the end of this report for further feedback data).

Information sharing and exchange of ideas and tools were highly valued by the group. The tools and resources shared are available here:

https://www.dropbox.com/home/VOC%20Appendices.

The project divided into two working groups:

1. Developing principles and guidelines for creating more child-centred Child Protection Plans.
2. Exploring and developing a working model for 'participation champions'

Challenges and barriers identified
The following key themes emerged:

- A lack of qualitative information about the experience and views of children and young people (CYP) receiving child protection services.

- Quantitative data does not provide information on CYP's *experience* of a conference or why they did not attend.

- Local authorities do not appear to *do* much with the information that is collected about child protection services.

- Many local authorities commission advocacy services to support children to attend or contribute to conferences. Participants identified these services as an underused source of qualitative information.

- It was apparent that there is much good practice happening but that recording, evidencing and building consistency and quality require work.
- The extent to which children and young people are involved at a strategic level with service planning, commissioning and in shadow safeguarding boards is variable and needs building upon.

The staged process: key messages

The full report is structured around a suggested 'staged process' for eliciting and responding to the voices of CYP in child protection and includes many examples and 'reflection tips'. This summary report contains only headlines from each stage of the process. The key stages identified were as follows:

Clarify a starting point

The information collected by local authorities is rarely collated and analysed systematically. Clarity about what the organisation need to know requires targeted and focused analysis of existing and missing information involving key staff from various services.

Involve practitioners and managers from the start

Early engagement of practitioners and their supervisors is essential to bring about whole scale change. Principal Social Workers have a key role.

Senior leadership ownership and drive

The Assistant Directors instrumental in commissioning this project identified the importance of building collaborative engagement across corporate and practice leads. This was echoed by participants who strongly endorsed the need for clear sign-up and an accountability structure for the work with key senior managers providing momentum. Senior leadership and 'push' was also identified as key to the success of East Sussex's work.

Build a strategic approach

Building momentum around the voice of CYP in child protection requires specific drivers in service plans and/or a specific strategy in place to drive this work. A wide range of coordinated activities and mechanisms will need to be in place to ensure the work is coherent and efficient. A steering group or similar will need to map the activity and prevent duplication.

Children and young people as collaborators

The strategic approach should be underpinned and directly influenced by CYP collaboration.

SMART action plan

A 'SMART' action plan will map out multiple activities being undertaken – from workforce development to creating case file audit tools or setting up focus groups. The action plan should be dynamic with mechanisms to review and hone it over time in light of progress and emerging evidence.

If major changes or multiple activities are not realistic, it may be better to start in manageable ways, for example piloting new approaches with a single area of service and planning for how they can be implemented more widely.

Building the approach into the 'every-day'

A resounding message to come out of the project meetings was the importance of building this work into the everyday experiences of children in receipt of CP services and into the everyday work of those providing them. Taking opportunities to affect everyday practice will give out the strongest message to children and young people that their voice is valued and build their trust in sharing their thoughts and feelings.

Develop accessible services

Initial impressions will influence expectations for children, young people and families. Building accessible, equitable, relationship and strengths-based service provision, dealing with stigma, negative media coverage and other barriers will influence people's attitude to working collaboratively and accepting support.

Design services to build engagement

Whether or not local authorities go as far as fully redesigning services, all need to ensure handovers do not require CYP to repeat themselves to new teams of staff.

Direct work with children - consistent but not 'standardised'

A trusting relationship between CYP and the key person/people working with them is critical to the extent to which their voice will be heard. Many participants were using a range of direct work tools or were developing a toolkit and others were keen to do so.

Recording CYP voices in auditable forms

A key factor in the positive evaluation of East Sussex by Ofsted was the strong sense of the child in case records. These include an in-depth profile of the child including their likes, dislikes, hobbies and personality type; clear information on who they are/are not close to; notes on what they are worried about and what they want to change. The record also needs to make clear what has been done in response to the child's expressed view. There was also evidence in some cases of co-production - where the social worker sat down with a CYP to draw their own Child's Plan, either in the form of a 'mind map' or with clear bullet points and images.

Maximising CP conferences

Many participants were trying to increase CYP attendance at conferences, often through use of advocacy services. Examples of positive practice are in the full report.

Conference planning and preparation

The Conference Chairs' role is key in ensuring the voice of CYP is sufficiently present at conference and in subsequent plans. Developing meaningful CP plans requires engaging a CYP's networks to assist them to feed into the plan. Several of the participants are taking work forward to develop child friendly or 'co-produced' child protection plans.

Building staff skills

Key competencies for driving this culture change include knowledge about children's rights; child development; good communication skills; equality and diversity.

Developing clear and meaningful outcomes

In focusing on individual CYP, desired outcomes might focus on their experience and how things would look for them if their circumstances were changed for the better. The same principle applies to setting outcomes at the service level.

Building evidence of impact

There will be a range opportunities for checking in with CYP on outcomes, most of which will occur in every-day practice. Some periodic activities such as interviews, feedback forms, questionnaires, face-to-face interviews and focus groups can provide additional information about the impact of the work.

Children and Young People's Focus groups

In East Sussex focus groups with CYP provided rich and visually interesting data which fed directly into recommendations and actions.

Audits

Building scrutiny around CYPs' experience of the CP process into audits can provide useful evidence (of 'voice' and 'impact').

Drawing from complaints and compliments

Compliments and complaints, if analysed for themes and fed into performance data provide another rich source of information.

Focussing on what works

There is much to be gained from exploring what works well. Appreciative Inquiry is a method to support this kind of analysis and using AI in the group threw up a great deal of information. The method invites participants to 'dig deeper' which fleshed out previously discussed activities considerably. Participants were keen to utilise this approach in their local authorities.

Next Steps

Group work in progress:

Group 1 working on child friendly CP plans has started to develop principles to underpin child friendly CP planning. They agreed they would like to strive for a regional 'vision' or 'core principles' to which each local authority might sign up. **For further information contact Emma Sparrow who is leading on next steps.**

Group 2 worked on the theme of 'practice champions' and have taken this forward in their own local authorities, with varied progress. Some established the model through the course of the Change Project. The group do not have plans to develop a regional approach on this in 2015.

Individual LA plans and support

Although there are a few exceptions (with some local authorities already having drawn up a plan and set up governance arrangements), most participants have a vision and a set of ideas for taking this work forward locally. They now require Assistant Directors and other local stakeholders to formally engage with this

work, including the development of detailed, signed off plans, underpinned by a good understanding of the current local picture.

A regional plan

Participants are keen to continue to network and support each other with this work regionally. They have suggested the following:

- An information sharing 'portal' so they can continue to exchange ideas, tools and resources, building on those already made available through this project.

- Quarterly 'coaching' for their own local authority to help them review progress and plans and maintain momentum.

- All agreed they would find it helpful to reconvene in six months time to review and share progress.

- All agreed they would like the region to facilitate a conference in one year's time for project participants, the strategic leads and key stakeholders taking this work forward in each local authority including participation champions and children and young people representatives.

- Setting up peer shadowing opportunities (for example to be taken up by practice champions) might enable local authorities to see each other's approaches to this work in practice and build on the exchange of ideas.

Sharing the project work regionally

One participant has been keeping the 'Regional Participation Workers Network' informed of this project and will continue to do so. We are hoping that Alison Bennett from Peterborough, who participated in the project, will present this summary report at the regional QA leads meeting in September.
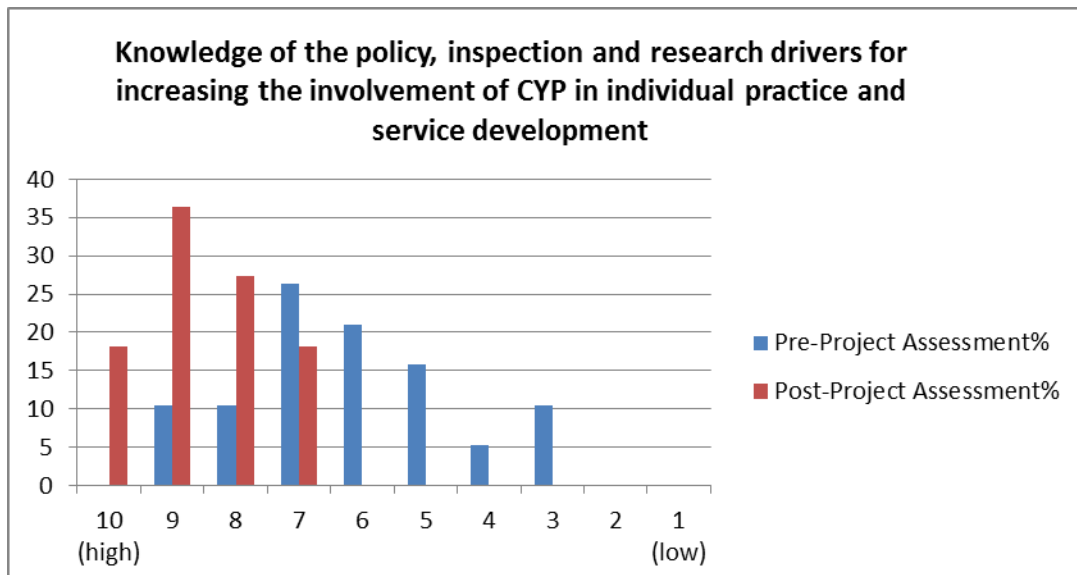
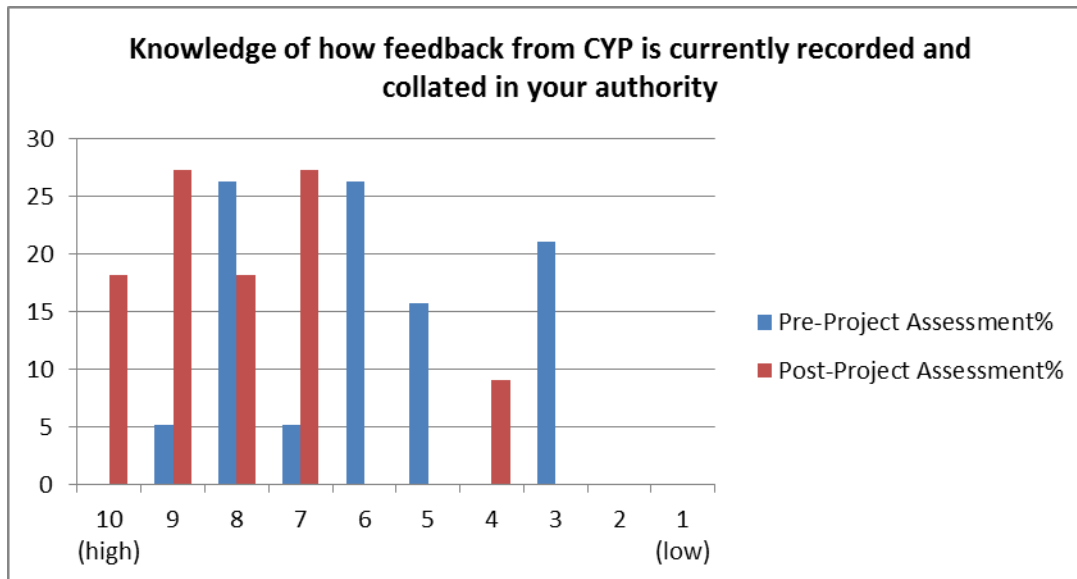**Sharing the project work nationally**

Research in Practice are keen to share the learning from the project with the wider RiP network, and seek the permission of the regional ADs to:
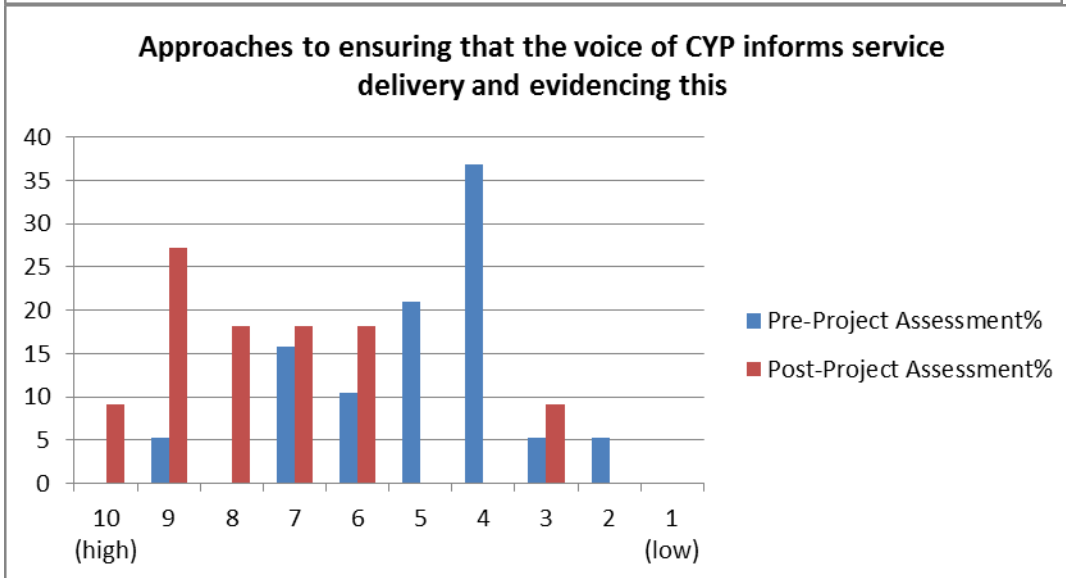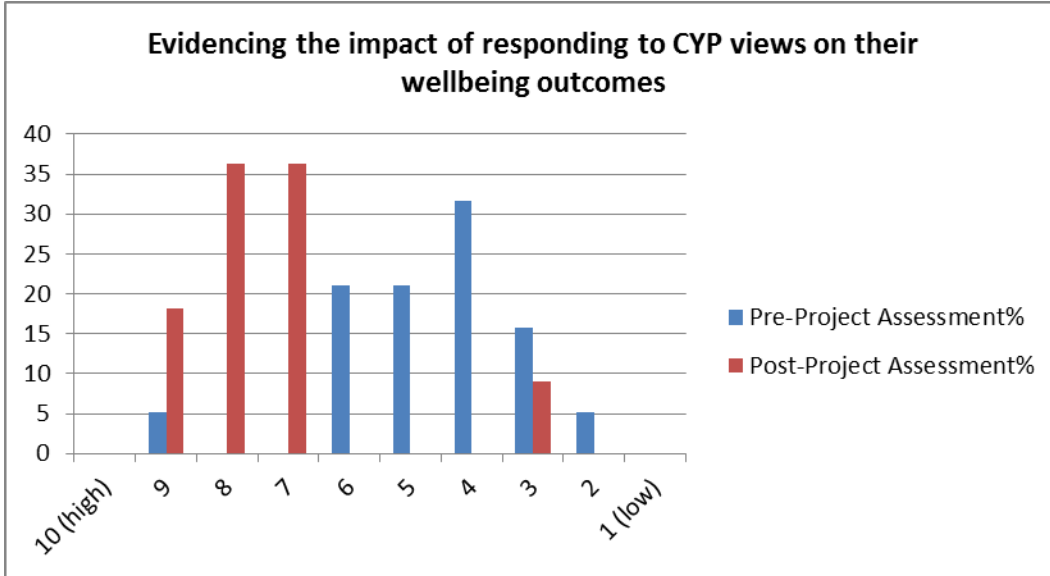
- Post the full report on the RiP website
- Use examples from the project in a forthcoming evidence review on this topic.

Eastern Region Sector Led Improvement Programme and Research in Practice Voice of the

Child Change Project: participant feedback.

Feedback data from project participants

Participants were asked to rate their knowledge and skills in relation to aspects of this topic at meeting one in and re-rate at meeting four. Their responses are set out below.

Knowledge of how feedback from CYP is currently recorded and collated in your authority

Knowledge of the policy, inspection and research drivers for increasing the involvement of CYP in individual practice and service development

Evidencing the impact of responding to CYP views on their wellbeing outcomes

Approaches to ensuring that the voice of CYP informs service delivery and evidencing this

research in practice

Essex
Luton
Suffolk
Thurrock
Cambridgeshire
Bedford Borough
Central Bedfordshire
Peterborough
Hertfordshire
Southend
Norfolk

Participants rated the project's contribution to their professional development and their engagement in professional networks:

Rate your participation in this Change Project of its contribution to your professional development

Through participating in this Change Project I have become engaged in new and rewarding professional networks