

Practitioner Research

Does the Working Agreement empower families?

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***Clare Young
Project Worker
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1 Preface

My name is Clare Young and I am a project worker at the CHILDREN 1ST Dundee Family Support team. I was given the opportunity to be involved in the first pilot of practitioners' research commissioned by CHILDREN 1ST. I feel that this has been both a challenging and thought provoking task, and I hope that my research findings will be valuable in the future work we do with children and their families.

2 Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Jan McClory for giving me the inspiration for the research topic. A big thank you to the families who agreed to take part in the interview process, and to the CHILDREN 1ST workers who introduced me to them. Also, thanks to the CHILDREN 1ST workers who took the time to complete the questionnaire. A big thank you to Alison for typing up the information, Sandy for her support and listening to me, and finally thank you to my tutor Lucy Hanson.

3 Introduction

CHILDREN 1ST provides ten local family support services across Scotland as well as running ParentLine Scotland (0808 800 2222), a national confidential helpline giving support and information to parents and carers across Scotland. CHILDREN 1ST family support services aim to provide support to vulnerable children and their families to help them cope with the effects of abuse, trauma or family breakdown. The teams do this by offering flexible packages of support to suit the individual family and by working in partnership with them to build on their strengths.

CHILDREN 1ST, as a national charity, campaigns for the rights of children and their families and works towards giving every child in Scotland a safe and secure childhood.

CHILDREN 1ST policies, procedures and practices derive their values from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the UN Convention on the Rights of The Child (1991), The Children (Scotland) Act 1995, *It's everyone's job to make sure I'm alright* (2002) report and many more. As documented in the CHILDREN 1ST safe care and child protection standards, policy and procedures, (2005), the work with families is underpinned by a set of practice principles. These principles set out the importance of working in partnership with children and their families and set a precedent in the expectations of CHILDREN 1ST family support staff employees:

- 1 The welfare and wellbeing of all children and young people is paramount.
- 2 Children and young people have a right to the provision of high quality services, delivered within the context of caring, safe and supportive relationships responsive to the needs of the individual.

- 3 CHILDREN 1ST believes that the wishes and feelings of children, young people, parents or carers should be heard and taken into consideration in the design and delivery of services.
4. All work must be carried out in partnership with children, young people, parents, carers and families, and the child's needs are the paramount concern.
- 5 All of our services need to respect the uniqueness of the individual and encourage their growth development and individual identity.
- 6 All services will encourage and support children and young people to develop their potential.
- 7 Children and parents must be enabled to have access to a complaints procedure.

(The complete list can be found in Appendix 1)

The family support services are unique to their area and are based upon the needs of the local community and partnership working with the local authority. Most referrals are received from health, education or social work; however some self-referrals are also received, as well as referrals from other voluntary agencies.

Within its services, CHILDREN 1ST has procedures regarding the referral process, with specific forms to be completed when working with families, although individual services have different ways of implementing the process.

Following receipt of the referral form, agreement that the referral is appropriate and meeting the family, the first stage is to complete an initial assessment. The assessment is an opportunity to gather information, highlight the significant issues, find out what the families views are and to

be clear about the potential risk and protective factors and strengths that are present for the child and their family. The collating of this information then enables the worker to present a summary and recommendation of work.

Following this process, the working agreement is then introduced to the family as a tool that will enable the planning and agreement of work to be covered during sessions. The working agreement is then used in reviews with the family to keep the work plan focused. A copy of the individual services' working agreements can be found in Appendix 2.

One of the key factors in the delivery of services highlighted in the *Changing Lives report of the 21st Century Social Work Review (2006)* is the need to work in real partnership with service users. This is echoed throughout reports published by the Scottish Executive. At a strategic level, CHILDREN 1ST has over the years implemented the concept of including children and their families in decision making, campaigning and evaluating services. More recently, this has included the recruitment of a participation officer to further develop participation throughout the organisation.

CHILDREN 1ST has now taken this a stage further and is currently in the process of developing a participation strategy, which will set out the principles, goals and standards of participation within the charity. The strategies underpinning this comes from Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991), which states that "each child who can form a view on matters affecting him or her has the right to express those views if he or she so wishes." It also supports the CHILDREN 1ST mission statement, which states that the charity "works to give every child in Scotland a safe and secure childhood."

CHILDREN 1ST views the principals of participation as a process which aims to support children and families to have a say "in meaningful and relevant decisions and developments that affect their lives, the

organisation and their communities” (draft participation strategy, March 2007). The role of the participation worker has evolved to take on the new challenges of embedding participation in every level of CHILDREN 1ST's work with children and their families. The participation worker will continue to develop the strategy as well as provide training to service staff. To ensure the effective implementation of the participation strategy, a participation development managers group has been created. It is their vision that this will eventually include service users.

Moving participation from a strategic level to become embedded in CHILDREN 1ST children and families services will ensure that partnership working is at the forefront of all support given to families. This in turn will help to create a transparent, open and honest service that will empower rather than de-skill service users. For this to work, it will be the responsibility of every worker to include this in their values and practice, and to challenge others when this is not evident.

In *Working Together to Safeguard Children (a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children)*, the Department of Health sets out 15 key principles to partnership working. The document shares many common principals with CHILDREN 1ST, including the need to treat service users with respect, to be honest and open about the concerns, ensure it is clear that the child's welfare is paramount, always include parent(s) and where appropriate children in the decision making process, as parents often have detailed and complex information which may not have become clear to the professional.

Building upon this knowledge and families' strengths is beneficial to the decision making and planning process. However, this partnership will only be effective through the continuous development of key skills, such as being able to listen effectively and to communicate in non-jargon terms.

It is important to explore the potential barriers to being able to work in partnership. Barriers could be cited in all areas; personal, cultural and organisational. The individual needs to be aware of their own values, attitudes and prejudices towards situations and circumstances, and ensure that personal feelings do not influence professional roles and responsibilities in a negative and harmful way.

In any working relationship it is essential to be aware of power balances within these relationships. Whether this is between worker and service user or manager and employee, the abuse or over-exertion of power prevents empowerment and working in partnership. Individual service users' experiences of professionals may present barriers, particularly if these experiences have been negative. It may be essential to overcome stereotypes of professionals that are held by the individual in the community. The culture in some organisations may be that of a 'doing to' service rather than 'doing with', therefore preventing partnership working from the beginning.

4 Research Aims

Due to the importance of working in partnership with service users, this piece of research chose to ask the question: does family support empower families?

The project focused on the use and implementation of the working agreement when working with families. It sought to ascertain whether the working agreement enabled families to be involved in identifying issues that are at the forefront of their lives, and to decide and agree with their worker how their needs would be best met through the plan of work. Or paradoxically, does the working agreement act as a tool to fulfil the workers role and have no benefit for the family as they are not involved in the process and decision making process. In essence, the power

dynamic here would mean that it is a document written about service users instead of with service users; the result being a 'doing to' service.

A definition of empowerment, as written by N. Thompson in *Ethics and Values in Social Work* (1993), is that empowerment "involves seeking to maximise the power of clients and to give them as much control as possible over their circumstances. It is the opposite of creating dependency and subjecting clients to agency power."

5 Study Design

The study was separated into two sections in order to obtain adult service users' views of their experience of the working agreement and that of CHILDREN 1ST workers who use the working agreement.

Six service users were identified by their worker and agreed to be interviewed. The location of the family support teams has not been given in this report in order to protect the anonymity of service users. The interview questions were structured but open ended, and the interviews were recorded using written notes. A copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix 3. During the first interview, the issue of a waiting list arose; therefore the question regarding how service users would feel about a service not always being available immediately and their names being placed on a waiting list was added to subsequent interviews.

Service users were introduced to the researcher by their worker in order to try to alleviate anxieties about meeting the interviewer and the interview process. The interviews took place at an agreed location between service user and worker – either at the family's home or at CHILDREN 1ST premises. Transport was provided by the worker where necessary. All the interviews took place between July and October 2006.

Interviewing service users was chosen as a method due to the wish to gain as much indepth information on service users' views and experiences as possible; it was felt that face to face contact would help to alleviate anxieties and provoke further discussion.

In June 2006, 39 questionnaires were sent to seven family support teams to be completed by workers who used the working agreement with families – 15 questionnaires were returned. The questionnaire included both open ended questions and closed questions with scales. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 4.

Service users and CHILDREN 1ST workers both signed a written consent agreeing to take part in the research, which stated that the information they provided would be used in the completed report, and that no names would be included to protect their anonymity. Service users were informed prior to interview that if any issues of a child protection nature arose where the researcher felt there was a significant concern or risk to a child or young person, then the researcher would have to pass this information on to the appropriate professionals. Due to the questionnaires being handwritten the answers have been collated and typed to protect the anonymity of the workers.

A questionnaire was chosen as the method of gaining as many views from CHILDREN 1ST workers as possible from the different localities across Scotland. The anonymity of the questionnaire hopefully gave people the reassurance that they could be open and honest with their opinions.

6 Presentation of Findings

6.1 Service Users' Interview

Referral Process

All the service users had been involved with CHILDREN 1ST between eight months and two years. Two service users had been referred to CHILDREN 1ST by the local authority/social work department, two had been referred by either their health worker or visitor, and two by the school. One of these service users had asked the school to refer them. All the service users had received support for themselves and their children or grandchild and had agreed with the reason for referral to CHILDREN 1ST.

Two out of the six service users could remember receiving a leaflet giving information about CHILDREN 1ST and its services. Five out of the six service users did not get a leaflet detailing how they could make a complaint. However, the majority of the service users felt that they would not have to make a complaint, and if they did they could speak to their worker or their worker's manager.

The majority of service users felt that they would prefer to have their names on a waiting list rather than be told that no service was available because they felt that they would be getting help.

All of the service users felt that they were listened to when they first met their worker, and when asked about their needs and concerns one service user said she felt that she could trust the worker.

Awareness of CHILDREN 1ST

The majority of service users did not know about CHILDREN 1ST prior to discussing a referral with them. One service user, when finding out that CHILDREN 1ST was the working name for the Royal Scottish Society for

Prevention of Cruelty to Children, was scared because of knowing about the former 'cruelty men'. When they saw the campaign advert on the television they were worried about what family members would think about their care of the child due to the advert's focus on abuse.

Feedback on the Working Agreement

All the service users could remember their worker drawing up a working agreement with them. Most saw the working agreement as a means of agreeing what work was to be done. One service user said she did not know what the working agreement was for, another was not sure, but had an idea. The service users felt that the worker explained the working agreement in terms of agreeing work and following the list of what was agreed.

All the service users felt that they had been involved in writing the working agreement and felt that they had definitely had a say in what went into it. All believed that they were involved in planning the work. Two service users said that their worker stated what work they would be doing and how they were going to do it. All the service users felt that the plan of work was written into the working agreement. One service user went on to say that the working agreement was used in their review of work.

All service users felt that their views had been taken into account, that the plan of work represented what they felt they needed, and that they could speak to their worker to add new issues when required.

All the service users felt that their worker could not have done anything more to involve them. The majority felt they could contact their worker at any time, and most said they had not thought about the working agreement since, as they felt they knew what the issues and plan of work was. Others said they had used the working agreement at their review to look at what had been covered and what they still needed to do.

Most of the service users felt that the working agreement had been useful, in that it was good to look back and see the progress they had made since starting work with CHILDREN 1ST. Being clear about the concerns and work to be completed also helped to build an honest and open relationship with their worker.

One service user felt that the agreement had not had a big impact on them because the worker had done more than agreed. They felt that it would have been useful if the worker had not done what had been agreed. All the service users felt involved in the work they are now doing with CHILDREN 1ST. Another service user felt that it was the relationship and what the worker had done for her that mattered, not the working agreement.

All the service users felt that their worker was approachable. They felt listened to and that they were able to build up good relationships. All felt that they had definitely benefited from having a service from CHILDREN 1ST.

6.2 CHILDREN 1ST Workers' Questionnaire

Workers' Use of the Working Agreement

Fourteen out of 15 workers said that they used the working agreement a lot, and one worker said they used it a fair bit.

The working agreement is introduced to service users at different stages by different workers. The majority of workers introduce the working agreement after the initial assessment phase or after the issues have been identified and the work agreed.

Workers have different ways of explaining the working agreement to

service users; however, the majority said that they explain the working agreement as being a means for the service user and worker to identify and agree areas of work, expectations and focus. Workers also use the agreement as a working document, to focus the work, use at reviews and to look back on issues and work completed.

The worker is involved in writing the working agreement in most cases and the service manager in some instances. In all cases, everyone who is involved with the working agreement signs it. Eight out of the 15 workers stated that the people involved in writing the working agreement received a copy of the completed agreement, and seven workers said that a copy was kept in the file.

Workers felt that the role of the working agreement was to clarify and focus on work which is made into a contract. Eight workers said that they occasionally refer to the working agreement following its completion. Four said that they sometimes refer back to it and one said that they refer back to the working agreement all the time. Two stated that they refer back to the working agreement at reviews.

Tools for Planning Work

When planning work, workers use a variety of tools. Several workers said that they used the initial assessment, as well as discussing issues with the families and brainstorming with other colleagues. When undertaking work with service users, reward charts, wish lists taking pictures, resources and books, arts and toys are some of the tools that are used by workers.

Use of the Working Agreement with Children/Young People

Eleven workers have used the working agreement with young people, three had not, but have used other methods or would if the need arose.

The same working agreement template is used by most workers with children; however they adapted it to suit the age/needs of the young person.

Four workers felt that families didn't use the working agreement very much. Three workers answered that families do not use the working agreement at all. Five felt that families use it sometimes, and three workers said they didn't know.

Use of the Working Agreement by Families to Make Decisions

Four workers answered that they feel that the working agreement does not help families make decisions. Three answered that they think that it does. Six workers did not answer the question and one worker said that it *maybe* helps families to make decisions.

Use of the Working Agreement to Empower Families

Fourteen workers felt that the working agreement had the potential to empower families. One worker was not sure.

Ways in which workers felt that the working agreement could empower families included:

- A friendlier form that could be completed by both worker and service user together; using the working agreement to focus service users' perceptions and needs on what they see as beneficial in terms of work, approach and focus.
- Service users to receive a copy of the signed working agreement with the aims and objectives stated clearly; ensuring that service users have full knowledge of what support is available.
- Using the working agreement in a particular way which would hopefully assist service users in feeling that the working

relationship is a partnership from the outset which may empower them and help them to feel in control of the issues. In our interaction with families, listening is probably the most important element as it shows that we are taking an interest in issues that matter to them.

Use of the Working Agreement to Facilitate Empowerment

Ways in which workers felt that the working agreement facilitated empowerment included:

- Creating agreement in the interventions; enabling service users to participate in the planning process where objectives are agreed.
- Allowing honesty as to the consent of concern and the work commitment from the family and CHILDREN 1ST worker.

Restrictions of the Working Agreement to Empower Families

Workers felt that the current working agreement restricts empowerment; as although it is discussed with service users it is not generally owned by them. Although working in partnership to empower families, the use of jargon in the forms restricts this. Furthermore, families are not always given a copy of the working agreement once it is completed. The form looks too formal and the process of getting all parties to complete their section and then sign it is cumbersome and difficult to achieve. Some families are not open to other people's opinions or suggestions, and blame the child or young person for the problems or difficulties within the household.

Ways to Change the Working Agreement

Four workers gave examples of how they would change parts of the working agreement. The back page of the working agreement was felt to be too formal, and the question was posed as to whether the working

agreement should be an agreement between the service user and worker only, or the service user, worker and all other professionals and people involved with the family.

A more child-friendly version would be beneficial, with more space left for the 'focus of work' section, and a less formal version introduced. Three workers left the question blank, and four said that they would not change the working agreement, as they felt they could adapt the current form for their needs. One worker said that their team was currently in the process of developing a new form for the working agreement.

Six workers said that that they would like to use the working agreement differently, and three of those workers gave examples of possible changes.

Firstly, to introduce the working agreement earlier – although this needs to be done sensitively – and also to change the form so that it can be completed jointly, and owned by both the service user and worker. Secondly, that the working agreement could be referred to more often to make sure the intervention is on track, and to make it less formal as a means of detailing the planning of work, with the emphasis placed on the client's hopes and expectations. Thirdly, adapting the working agreement to make it more age-appropriate, so it can be used with younger children.

Five workers gave no answer to the question as to whether they would like to use the working agreement differently. Four workers said that they would not like to do anything differently. Six workers answered that they found the working agreement to be fairly useful and seven felt that the working agreement could be very useful. One worker felt that it was both fairly useful and not very useful for families, and one worker felt that it could be very useful but that this depended on the family.

Referrals and Information Sharing

The referrals to projects came from health, education, social work, children's panel reporter, police, other voluntary agencies or self referrals.

Twelve workers said that their project did receive self referrals from service users. One worker did not know if they had self referrals. One said they occasionally received them and one worker answered that they rarely received self referrals.

Eleven workers answered that service users are given information about their service prior to being referred to CHILDREN 1ST. The information given to service users tends to be either based on the referrer's own knowledge or they will request information to be sent to them. One worker answered that sometimes service users are given information about CHILDREN 1ST prior to a referral being made. One worker said that information is not always given and one said that information is not given.

Twelve workers answered that their service had information leaflets about the service they offer, and three workers said that their service does not have information leaflets about their service.

Four workers answered that they give service users a complaints procedure leaflet when they start working with them. One worker answered that they don't give service users a leaflet, however they tell them about the procedure verbally. Ten workers answered that they don't give service users leaflets about the complaints procedure.

Difficult to Engage Service Users and Strategies to Attempt to Engage Them

All 15 workers answered that they have worked with service users who have been difficult to engage with. The majority found service users difficult to engage in the initial stages, but sometimes managed to get them to engage in the end. However this depended on the individual service user's circumstances.

Workers reported a variety of strategies to try to engage with service users who are particularly resistant to support. A key theme to successful engagement involves giving service users as much information about the service as possible, coupled with the fact that the service users have the choice of accepting the service due to it being voluntary. Workers feel that it is important to be honest, non-judgemental and to listen to service users' views, experiences and wishes, and accept that it is important to recognise that sometimes it is not the right time for the service user to accept support.

Other Information

At the end of the questionnaire workers were asked if there was anything else they would like to add about using the working agreement. Four workers chose not to answer this question, other workers put forward the suggestion that workers needed to believe in the value of the working agreement and encourage and enable service users to do the same, otherwise its use would be a paper exercise. Some projects have adopted their own working agreement to make it more comprehensive and to ensure that all workers cover the same issues contained in the agreement.

One worker reported that their project has returned to using a handwritten copy of the working agreement instead of a typed one. They complete this with service users in order to enable them service user to

agree and then sign it at the time of writing. This prevents any possibility of not returning with the typed copy to share with the family and getting it signed. Another worker says that the working agreement is a small part of the initial assessment, and follows the formulation of a problem or hypothesis with the family and referrer, which then leads to a shared collaborated understanding of issues, leading to the agreement of work which the working agreement represents.

7 Discussion and Conclusion

All the service users interviewed were very positive about their involvement with CHILDREN 1ST. They made comments like “it has been brilliant,” and “life changing”, and some are not sure how they will feel when their involvement with CHILDREN 1ST comes to an end. A key theme that is very clear from the interviews is that all of the service users value the relationship they have built up with their individual worker. They felt that they had been listened to and consulted about what they believed were the main problems and issues in their and their family’s life, and the support they need. They felt involved in every aspect by their worker and that they could not have been any more involved.

If looking at the 15 principles of partnership working contained in The Department of Health’s *Working together to safeguard children* (1999) referred to in the introduction of this report, CHILDREN 1ST workers are clearly using these principles in their work with service users. This is evident from service users’ answers during the interviews, in which they described how they felt and how they were included and consulted throughout their contact with CHILDREN 1ST.

The majority of service users spoke positively about services having a waiting list, as they knew that they would eventually receive support rather than thinking no support is available. One service user felt it would be beneficial if they could be kept up to date about where they were on the waiting list rather than having no communication. This is perhaps an area that further consideration could be given to in the future.

The majority of service users remembered the working agreement being completed with them and felt involved in the process. The working agreement as a completed document appears to have less significance to service users than the process of being listened to and consulted about issues in their life. The agreement was not reviewed by service

users as a shared ownership tool, but as something their worker brought to them and they completed together, and then referred back to during the time of their involvement at different stages like reviews. However service users did say that they felt that this was a useful thing to do.

The same theme appears to be evident from the questionnaires completed by workers. The working agreement is useful up to the final review of work as a reminder of the original aims and objectives. It is also a useful tool in supervision. The agreement is viewed by workers as having the potential to be really useful; however it needs to become something that service users see the point of other than being a contract, as “beginnings and endings in family support are very important, as well as having open communication.”

Another key theme highlighted from the questionnaire is that at present the working agreement “feels like a tool that could be better for both service user and worker”, and that it should be used as a tool, “not as a bureaucratic exercise” to encourage parents and children to express their needs and reach agreement, and as a check that everyone knows why they are working together. Changes to the working agreement could be carried out in consultation between service users and workers to identify how to create a form they both feel they can jointly own.

The working agreement is used differently by all CHILDREN 1ST family support projects, although the basis of the form is identical. In most services, the working agreement is introduced following the completion of an initial assessment.

The projects follow a different process for completion of the initial assessment, with some completing it within the first two visits and others within a three week period. The working agreement being completed three weeks into the contact with the family means that either the worker has already discussed with the service user what they feel are the main issues and where they will benefit from support, and the working

agreement is used as a tool to revisit and then agree on the issues, or that the service user is not being consulted about issues until this stage, which is not working in partnership and is not empowering to the family.

Other issues that arose from the questionnaire included the question about who the working agreement should be an agreement between. Should it be between the family, worker and all professionals or between just the family and the worker? This should be given consideration if the working agreement is to be a document that is owned by the family and the worker.

In conclusion, looking at the research question together with Thompson's definition of empowerment, as "seeking to maximise the power of clients and to give them as much control as possible over their circumstances," the answers given by service users who took part in the interviews show that use of the working agreement *can* empower families.

However it is very clear that it is the process of consulting and planning intended work with families, together with building a strong, honest working relationship, that is very important to families. When striving to work in true partnership with families to enable them to make important decisions about their own and their family's life, the working agreement can be an important tool for both the family and the worker. This is further evident from the answers given by CHILDREN 1ST employees in the questionnaire. However, the form being adapted to make it more service user and worker friendly will assist the process of empowerment further.

8 References

Changing Lives, Report on the 21st Century Social Work Review (Scottish Executive, Edinburgh, 2006).

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Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (HMSO).

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"It's everyone's job to make sure I'm alright." Report of the child protection audit and review (Scottish Executive, Edinburgh, 2002).

Thompson, N. (1993) found in Banks, S. (1995) *Ethics and Values in Social Work*, BASW.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991).

Appendix 1

CHILDREN 1ST Safe care and child protection standards, policy and procedures.

Introduction:

CHILDREN 1ST derives its values from the universal declaration of human rights and related human rights instruments, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. These instruments, together with the 1995 Children (Scotland) Act underpin our work and inform our practice.

Mission Statement:

CHILDREN 1ST works to give every child in Scotland a safe and secure childhood.

This work is underpinned by the following practice principles:

- The welfare and wellbeing of all children and young people is paramount.
- Children and young people have a right to the provision of high quality services, delivered within the context of caring, safe and supportive relationships responsive to the needs of the individual.
- CHILDREN 1ST believes that the wishes and feelings of children, young people, parents or carers should be heard and taken into consideration in the design and delivery of services.
- All work must be carried out in partnership with children, young people, parents, carers and families. The child's needs are the paramount concern.
- All of our services need to respect the uniqueness of the individual and encourage their growth, development and individual identity.
- All services should encourage and support children and young people to develop their potential.
- Individual identity, including racial and cultural identity, need to be encouraged and enabled to develop.
- The environment of the service should convey a positive sense of identity and respect for staff and users alike.

- The principles of confidentiality and transparency should be adhered to in all services within the context of open communication and open record keeping.
- Children and young people have a right to be protected from any form of abuse, neglect or exploitation. CHILDREN 1ST services will ensure that children are aware of this right, in a way that takes into account the child or young person's developmental level, and that they are enabled to seek effective protection from such abuse.
- Services will encourage the independence of children and young people and the right to take risks appropriate to their development and ability.
- Children and parents must be enabled to have access to a complaints procedure.
- All children, young people and their families must have an equal right to services sensitive to their needs. CHILDREN 1ST is committed to becoming an equal opportunities organisation, and to the elimination of discrimination on the grounds of disability, HIV status, race, colour, gender, age, nationality, religion, marital status, sexuality or responsibility for dependents.
- All services will challenge discriminatory or racist practice and ensure equality of opportunity.
- The interests of children must always be considered separately from the interests of parents and carers.
- Where there is a child protection concern, the protection of the child will be the overriding priority, even where the adult is the primary client.
- Where CHILDREN 1ST suspects a child has suffered harm or is likely to be at risk of significant harm, priority over all other work will be given to taking the necessary action to protect the child.
- If there are concerns that children are at risk of abuse, or are being abused, staff, through line management, must refer to the local authority in accordance with local child protection procedures.

Confidentiality

- CHILDREN 1ST has a confidentiality policy where details of our work with you can remain confidential. If however we are concerned about the welfare/wellbeing of a child, we are obliged to pass information to the local authority. Where possible this would be with your prior knowledge and consent.

Consent to Share information

- CHILDREN 1ST believes that families are best served when professionals are working well together with effective communication. We would ask therefore that you agree to us sharing relevant information about your child and their circumstances with other professionals involved.

If you agree with the focus of work and conditions described above, including the agreement for information about your child to be shared with professionals, e.g., doctors, therapists, educational psychologists, social workers and agreed others, then please sign in the box below. You can of course change your mind about this, just let us know.

1. The Individual/Family:	
agree with the focus of work and conditions described above.	
Signature:	Date:

2. CHILDREN 1ST	
agree with the focus of work and conditions described above.	
Signature:	Date:

3. Referrer	
agree with the focus of work and conditions described above.	
Signature:	Date:

4. Other relevant persons:	
Signature:	Date:

Date of next review:	
Service Manager's Signature:	Date:

THIS AGREEMENT WILL BE FORMALLY REVIEWED AFTER A PERIOD OF 3 MONTHS.



Working Agreement Record

CFS004

Dundee Family Support Service
47 Blinshall Street
DUNDEE DD1 5DF

Tel: 01382 349910
Fax: 01382 349911
e-mail: Dundee@children1st.org.uk

Discussed on:	Date of Referral:
First name:	Referral or Case Reference:
Surname:	Referrer:

Agreed Objectives: Plan of Work

Why are we doing this?

What are we going to do?

How are we going to do it?

1. The Individual/Family:

--

Signature:	Date:
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2. CHILDREN 1ST

--

Signature:	Date:
------------	-------

3. Referrer

--

Signature:	Date:
------------	-------

5. Other relevant persons:

--

Signature:	Date:
------------	-------

Date of next review:	Date:
Project Worker:	Date:
Project Leader's Signature:	Date:

THIS AGREEMENT WILL BE FORMALLY REVIEWED AFTER A PERIOD OF SIX MONTHS.

Date:.....

Confidentiality:

CHILDREN 1ST has a confidentiality policy which means that details of our work with you remain confidential. If, however, we are concerned about the welfare of wellbeing of a child, we will have to pass this information to the local authority. Whenever possible we will do this with your prior knowledge and consent.

Access to Records:

CHILDREN 1ST keep records of our meetings with children and families and operate an open access to records policy. Staff will be happy to discuss the process for seeing your file should you wish to do so.

The Way We Work Together:

CHILDREN 1ST staff agree to be consistent, honest and treat you with respect and we ask that you treat us in the same way.

We will protect the time agreed to work together and will keep within the agreed time. We will contact you by phone if we have to cancel for any reason and would ask that you do the same.

1. The Individual/Family:	
Signature:	Date:

2. CHILDREN 1ST	
Signature:	Date:

3. Referrer	
Signature:	Date:

8. Other relevant persons:	
Signature:	Date:

Date of next review:	
Project Leader's Signature:	Date:

THIS AGREEMENT WILL BE FORMALLY REVIEWED AFTER A PERIOD OF SIX MONTHS.

Date:.....



Working Agreement Record

CFS004

CHILDREN 1ST Family Support Team
 Baird House
 10-12 Newtoft Street
 Edinburgh
 EH17 8RD

Tel: 0131 468 2580
 Fax: 0131 468 2581
 e-mail: fst@children1st.org.uk

Discussed on:	Date of Referral:
First Name:	Referral or Case Reference:
Surname:	Referrer:

Agreed Objectives

Agreed Focus of Work:

Agreed conditions of work between parent and CHILDREN 1ST staff:

CHILDREN 1ST staff agree to be consistent, reliable and punctual for our meetings with you, please allow us +/- 10 minutes for traffic within this.

CHILDREN 1ST staff will treat you with consideration and respect and we ask that you treat us in the same way.

We would ask you to agree that:

- We both protect the time agreed for the work to take place, will keep within the agreed time, and will contact by phone if we have to cancel for any reason.
- We both prepare for each meeting, bringing anything previously agreed, remove distractions e.g. turn off TV/radio/mobile phones etc.
- We both make a prior arrangement e.g. by phone if anyone else is to be present for the meeting.
- We both contact each other by phone, prior to meeting if we have come into contact with a virus or contagious condition e.g. chicken pox, flu, german measles etc. to allow for a decision to be made with regards to cancelling.
- For health and safety reasons to be considerate about smoking e.g. take a break during a meeting if necessary and smoke in another room. Keep pets in another room during our meetings with you.
- You are not under the influence of non-prescribed drugs/alcohol/other substances or their after-effects during our meetings with you.
- You agree to implement any parenting strategies as advised in response to identified difficulties.

CHILDREN 1ST keeps records of our meetings with families and operates an open access to records policy. Staff will be happy to discuss the process for seeing your file should you wish to do so.

1. The Individual/Family:

Signature:

Date:

9. CHILDREN 1ST

Signature: _____ Date: _____

8. Referrer

Signature: _____ Date: _____

10. Other relevant persons:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Date of next review: _____

Project Worker: _____ **Date:** _____

Project Leader's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

THIS AGREEMENT WILL BE FORMALLY REVIEWED AFTER A PERIOD OF SIX MONTHS.

Date:.....

Appendix 3

CHILDREN 1ST RESEARCH PROJECT

Does family support empower families?

Service users' interview questions

1. How long have you been or were you involved with CHILDREN 1ST?
2. Who referred you to CHILDREN 1ST?
3. What did you know about CHILDREN 1ST before you were referred?
4. Did you get leaflets about the service CHILDREN 1ST offers?
5. Did you agree with the reason for the referral to CHILDREN 1ST?
6. Were you asked what you thought were the main problems/ issues?
7. Have you been given a complaints leaflet?
8. Do you know how to make a complaint? If yes how?
9. Has your CHILDREN 1ST worker made a working agreement with you?
10. Do you know what the working agreement is for? Please explain in your own words.
11. How was the working agreement explained to you?

12. Were you involved with writing the agreement?
13. Do you feel that you had a say about what went into the agreement?
14. Did you and your worker plan the work that you are going to undertake together? YES/NO
15. If yes, is this written in the working agreement?
16. Do you feel that your views were taken into account?
17. Did the plan represent the support you felt you needed?
18. Do you feel that the worker could have involved you more?
19. Have you thought about or used the working agreement since it was first made? If no, why not, or if yes please explain how.
20. Have you found the working agreement useful?
21. Do you feel involved in working with CHILDREN 1ST now?
22. Is there anything positive that you wish to share about how your worker involved you?
23. Is there anything else you wish to add about your involvement with CHILDREN 1ST?

Appendix 4

CHILDREN 1ST RESEARCH PROJECT

Does family support empower families?

Workers' Questionnaire.

1. Does your service use a working agreement with the families you work with? *Used a lot / Used a fair bit / Used rarely / Never used / Don't know*

2. When do you introduce the working agreement?

3. What do you explain about the working agreement to families?

4. How do you use the working agreement?

5. Who writes the working agreement?
You / Service manager / Service user/ Other (please state)

6. Who signs the working agreement?

7. Who gets a copy of the working agreement?

8. In your opinion what is the working agreement for?

9. In your experience, once the agreement is completed, have you continued to refer to it?
Never / Occasionally / Sometimes / All of the time

10. What tools do you use to plan your work with service users?

11. Do you use a working agreement with young people you are working with? *Yes / Sometimes / No*

12. If yes, do you use the same working agreement for everyone?
Yes / No (please explain)

13. If yes, do you use it in the same way you do with adults?
Yes / No (please explain)

14. Do you think the working agreement is used by families?
Yes most of the time / Yes sometimes / Not very much / Not at all / Don't know

15. If yes, do you think the working agreement helps families make decisions? *Yes / No*

16. Does the working agreement have the potential to empower service users? *Yes / No*

17. In which way could users be empowered?

18. In your opinion, what facilitates or restricts families being empowered through the working agreement?

19. Is there anything that you would change on the working agreement?
Yes / No (please explain)

20. Is there anything you would do or like to do differently with the working agreement?
Yes / No (please explain)

21. Do you find the working agreement useful or do you feel that it is a paper exercise?
Very useful / Fairly useful / Not very useful / Not useful at all

22. Who refers to your project?

23. Do people self refer to your project? (If so how many people have in the last year)
Yes / No _____

24. Are clients given information about CHILDREN 1ST and its services prior to referring?
Yes / No

25. Do you have leaflets that you give families about the service on your first visit?
Yes / No

26. Do you give clients a complaints leaflet when you first become involved?
Yes / No

27. Have you worked with clients that you have found particularly difficult to engage with?
Yes / No

28. Did you manage to get the client to engage in the end?
Yes / No

30. If yes, what techniques or strategies did you use to get the client to engage? If no, what happened?

31. Is there anything else you would like to add about using the working agreement with families?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return it with a blank copy of your service's working agreement and your signed consent form to:

Clare Elliott, 47 Blinshall Street, Dundee, DD1 5DF.