

Abstract of Research into Effective Multi-Agency Working

Background: John was receiving limited education, living in a local residential home and an active case for the child and adolescent mental health services. Recommendations were being made for a residential therapeutic placement. However, a multi-agency approach was implemented which resulted in John going home and accessing full time education in the community. How was this positive outcome achieved?

Aims: To explore the views of people who participated in the multi-agency approach of what factors (actions, events, processes) contributed towards a positive outcome?
Sample: Seven participants from health, education and social services with strategic or operational responsibilities.

Method: Semi-structured interviews were analysed using grounded theory methodology.

Results: A grounded theory was developed around the central concept of conflicts of interest. Factors were identified which triggered conflict (child and adult stress; dilemmas, hard to solve problems and tasks) and constituted barriers to negotiation (values and beliefs re child placement and inclusion, competitive blame culture and lack of understanding). The main process involved in achieving a positive outcome was one of negotiation (joint decision making, support and cooperation). Intervening conditions (positive changes in child and adults, shared responsibility and shared understanding) also contributed to a positive outcome (consistency of adults, full time education and leaving care).

Conclusion: Identification of these factors should lead to a greater understanding of effective multi-agency working and enable recommendations to be made about future research and practice. Recommendations for practice could include guidance on managing conflicts of interest including identifying the triggers to conflict, the barriers to negotiation and effective negotiation skills and processes.