

Big Ideas

CSV VOLUNTEERS IN CHILD PROTECTION (ViCP): "Volunteers Supporting the Community Through Early Intervention Schemes"

Summary of policy

ViCP is a ground breaking project that matches volunteers to families with one or more children suffering from neglect and who are at risk of significant harm. CSV's volunteers provide support and encouragement to help these families address the many problems they face and ultimately assist them in turning a chaotic, dysfunctional home into a happy, stable and safe environment in which they can thrive.

Description

The programme was developed as a response to the recommendations of Lord Laming, following the death of Victoria Climbié and the public inquiry that followed. The findings concluded that;

- Early intervention helps families to deal with potential crises and can avert more

serious interventions in the future

- The community has a role in safeguarding the lives of children

How does ViCP support families in crisis?

CSV ViCP is run in partnership with Children's Social Services. The ViCP Project Manager is responsible for recruiting training and supporting the volunteers, who are then carefully matched to families, identified by social workers, with children known to be at risk. Volunteers help to combat the isolation and stigma felt by many families with a child subject to a child protection plan (CPP) and support families to meet the expectations and outcomes of the plan.

The volunteers initially have to build trust they visit their matched family on a regular basis, ideally 3 times per week or more. The volunteer's role is to provide practical support and encouragement, but at no time do they assume responsibility for the family or the running of the household. This is paramount if the families are to achieve lasting change for the future.

The difference a volunteer can make

Parents are often reluctant to work with social workers and other authorities. This is not surprising, when you consider the stigma that having a social worker can bring. However, CSV has found that families readily identify ways in which a volunteer can help them in their day to day lives.

The support and encouragement our volunteers provide is often more welcome simply because it is not seen to be judgemental or threatening. Crucially, the fact that volunteers are unpaid and choose to support the family because they want to helps to foster mutual trust and respect.



What are the benefits to local government and the community?

Local Governments save money, improve their services and involve members of the local community in supporting families most in need. Rather than undermining the work of social workers, the volunteer involvement enhances it through helping to improve the relationship they have with the family and providing long-term support to parents and children, often long after the social workers have stopped visiting.

The CSV volunteers reduce the number of children in need moving into the child protection system and support families to come out of the child protection system. CSV ViCP adds value to both the safeguarding and children in need service.

There is significant cost to children's services in having a child with a child protection plan:-

- Staff time preparing for the panel
- The cost of convening a panel
- The cost of professionals representing many disciplines attending the panel
- The cost of the agreed intervention
- The cost of monitoring change.

On average it costs £40K per child/family.

CSV ViCP can support a family for 12 months for less than £3K.

On average 11% of families completing a CPP are re referred within a year, the families who have been supported by a CSV ViCP volunteer have all successfully completed their plan and none have been re referred.

Some volunteers decide to train as social workers as a direct result of their experience. All are more informed of the services families can receive.

Many parents have gained the confidence to get work once their home life has improved and the family is functioning better.

Other benefits include:-

- Children attending school more regularly
- Children and families attending medical appointments
- Parents developing coping strategies and parenting skill.
- Community volunteers feeling they are making a real contribution to the lives of others.

Can it be implemented elsewhere?

There is no reason why this work cannot be implemented in any council provided the council

is able to work in partnership with CSV; has sufficient numbers of families needing support to justify the infrastructure required to deliver the work. The project works best when the CSV staff are co located with the safeguarding or children in need teams because all family referrals need to come through qualified social workers.

The social workers identify the families that are appropriate for support and every family has to agree to having a volunteer. The social worker takes responsibility for risk-assessing the family circumstances and develops a volunteer involvement plan with clear outcomes.

The CSV Project Manager is responsible for recruiting, vetting, training, supporting and matching the volunteers with the referred families. The project manager is also responsible for reporting regularly to the local authority the projects progress and alerting the social workers to any concerns or indeed family achievements.

The local authority commits to providing the volunteers with appropriate child protection training as a an important module during their induction training. This ensures that every volunteer is clear about their responsibility to report any Child Protection concerns and the processes for doing so.

Could the project undermine child-protection professionals' efforts?

No, there is no danger that this work will undermine the child protection professionals as they are an integral part of the process and work in partnership with the project. The volunteers support and complement the professionals efforts and frequently help the families to understand the role of the professionals and the work that they do while also helping the families to communicate their needs more clearly, thus avoiding misunderstandings.

Is it easy to find volunteers?

It is extremely easy to find volunteers as there are many people in the community willing and able to offer this important help. In Southend we recently needed to recruit 50 volunteers for a large project. A potentially daunting task. However, following the first recruitment drive we had over 65 volunteers.

What are the financial implications of the approach?

Each individual ViCP project needs a minimum staffing infrastructure to recruit, train match and manage a cohort of volunteers. A minimum investment of £65K /75K per annum for three years would be required to support 25 families.

What is the evidence of success of this approach?

The evidence is that families are able to complete their child protection plans and stay off the register but more important parents develop their parenting skills, coping skills and confidence to be better parents.

Families with children in need are supported not to become families with a child protection plan.

Children have happier, safer homes in which to grow and develop, attend school more regularly and achieve better outcomes.

Social workers know that families are being well supported and that they will be alerted to any problems and concerns.

Local authorities save money and provide a better service to families in greatest need.

The community is encouraged to support the local authority by offering their time and expertise increasing the social capital of an area.

The project recently won two Charity Aid Foundation awards for their Children and Families section and overall winner of the year.

For more information

To get in touch with Jill Williams, CSV's UK Development Director for ViCP, to discuss their ideas please contact: jwilliams@csv.org.uk, 0207 6431396, CSV HQ 237 Pentonville Road, London N1 9NJ

Localis is an independent think-tank dedicated to issues related to local government and localism. We carry out innovative research, hold a calendar of events and facilitate an ever growing network of members to stimulate and challenge the current orthodoxy of the governance of the UK.

To find out more about the work of Localis or to discuss possible membership opportunities, please visit our website at www.localis.org.uk or phone 0207 3402660



LOCALIS RESEARCH LIMITED
10 Storey's Gate, Westminster, SW1P 3AY
T: 0207 340 2660
F: 0207 222 5859
E: info@localis.org.uk