Working together in Family Support Hubs – is anyone better off?

The Northern Ireland experience

Aim: to demonstrate the effectiveness of Family Support Hubs in the co-ordination of early intervention services in local communities across N.Ireland

The Northern Ireland Children and Young People’s Plan 2011-2014 identified the need for a network of Family Support Hubs based in local communities across the region as an important part of delivering on the strategic theme of early intervention. This initiative was led by The Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) who believe Family Support services are best delivered in a collaborative and coordinated way in order to share expertise and knowledge, and make best use of existing resources whilst also recognising that families may need the help of more than one agency.

These collaborative multi-agency networks of statutory, community and voluntary organisations that provide early intervention services were therefore established to improve the coordination of early intervention family support services and also to improve awareness of such services and signpost families with specific needs to appropriate services. There are currently 24 Family Support Hubs in operation across Northern Ireland with others in development – complete geographic coverage is anticipated within the next 6 months.

In order to determine the effectiveness of Family Support Hubs a comprehensive review has been undertaken regarding this initiative which includes a Literature Review of similar developments across the UK, Ireland and globally, a systemic review of the various elements of the delivery of Family Support Hubs in N.I., statistical returns from individual hubs using an outcomes based accountability model of evaluation, a service provider questionnaire and a small service user study.

This workshop will outline the findings from these sources and also demonstrate the use of International Best Practice Standards in Family Support (Canavan, Dolan and Pinkerton 2006) as a quality assurance tool in the development of Family Support Hubs.