



# executive summary

## how to sustain and replicate effective practice

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### Background and context

Innovations in practice in local authority children's services face a number of key questions in the current organisational and economic environment. First, is it possible to show how a project, programme or process has made a positive difference in outcomes for the children, young people and the families concerned: that is, can effective practice be validated? Second, can the longer-term benefits in terms of impact be proven to outweigh the costs of implementation of a programme or initiative? The challenge, while being mindful of cost-effectiveness, is to evidence how practice can be:

- *sustained*: that is, continue to work effectively beyond the initial effort to establish the practice and/or
- *replicated*: that is, transferred to different settings with different staff.



The Local Government Group (LG Group) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to examine how effective practice examples that have been through the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO) validation process<sup>1</sup> have been, or could be, replicated and sustained, with a view to informing guidelines for future practice.

## Key findings

### How do you sustain and replicate effective, validated practice?

- **Appropriate 'buy-in'** from key individuals at a strategic and operational level was considered particularly important in order to promote and drive the programme forward.
- Although not always believed to be necessary, evidence showed that **collaborative working** (especially where the role of partners was clear and the size of the partnership was manageable) was often perceived to be vital.
- When replicating a programme, it was believed to be important that the **core principles remain the same**, as this helps to ensure that the aims of the programme remain clear.
- Ensuring resources and adequate funding are secured and that the **long-term impact outweighs the costs** associated with the programme or initiative, were felt to be important. Moreover, resourceful 'joined-up' funding should also be explored.
- Other essential factors included defining the key stages of the operational process, devising a clear plan at the outset, **having a documented system** and embedding that system.
- There was a general consensus that evidence of impact is critical and can be achieved through, for example, **systematic evaluation and dissemination of findings**.

### What are the challenges and how do you overcome them?

- 'Change' in itself was identified as a challenge. Staff involved in sustaining or replicating practice often need to change their working practice and develop new ways of thinking. Therefore, it is important to manage and support staff through transition by ensuring that effective communication allows them to have a clear understanding of why change is necessary.
- There was widespread concern about the potential impact of budget cuts in terms of, for example, changes in staffing and discontinuation of funding streams. However, having 'champions' at all levels can help promote the positive aspects of the programme and help keep it on the agenda.
- Meeting the needs of a particular community can prove challenging. Therefore, it is important to have high calibre staff who possess, for example, a good knowledge of the local area to lead the programme or initiative.

## Methodology

This executive summary builds on Phase 1 of this research (which considered whether validated examples have been, or could be, replicated and sustained) and presents key findings from Phase 2 and Phase 3. Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with stakeholders involved in validated practice programmes and initiatives. Interviews were carried out between October and December 2010. In order to explore further and refine the key factors that were identified as facilitating sustainability and replication, two focus groups were conducted with those practitioners involved in current validated practice programmes and C4EO sector specialists with experience of validation panels, between January and February 2011.

## Note

- 1 Effective practice that demonstrates evidence of impact on outcomes for children, young people and their families is eligible for validation.

## Further information

For more information about this report visit [www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LRSV01](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LRSV01) or email Tami McCrone at [t.mccrone@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:t.mccrone@nfer.ac.uk).



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