

Design a portfolio which presents a multi-agency strategy that uses person-centred planning approaches. (5000 words)

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1. Introduction

Within society, there are a number of children and families who require multi-agency workers and strategies they use to aid them.

Within this portfolio, I will be discussing Multi-agency working (MAW) and Person-centred planning (PCP) and how multi-agencies workers use person-centred planning to aid children, young people and their families.

Working as a multi-agency aids children, young people and families while working with a range of different agencies in order for them to receive the best quality of life. Multi-agency working (MAW) can be described as different workers from different agencies joining together with the shared aim which is in the service user's best interest. For example, these agencies could be educational services, child protection officers, social workers and health visitors. These agencies would join together to ensure they alleviate or provide help for the individuals using the services. It is argued that MAW has a large number of benefits in how it supports individuals, and government frameworks and strategies such as the Children Act (1991) and the Every Child Matters policy 2003 "have drawn attention to the importance of working together in this way" (Atkinson et al, 2002), suggesting that multi-agency working is a fundamental strategy to support children and their families.

In addition to this, Person-centred planning (PCP) or child-centred planning is focused on ensuring children and young people are at the centre of decision making which affects them, meaning they are in control of decision and planning to benefit them as a whole holistically. This gives children a voice and a sense of control, and shows children that they are "listened to, respected, and valued and care for - that they belong" (Council for Disabled Children, N.D). Thus conveying the notion that children have the opportunity to have a voice and have equal opportunities while working with others to promote their quality of life.

An example of a multi-agency strategy which focuses and implements person-centred planning is the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub [MASH]. MASH are a team of multi-agency workers which make assessments and decisions in order to protect a child, young person, and their families in the best possible way. This multi-agency team works together to gather as much information on the individual and their families and work together to create a positive intervention and to identify their needs. This is beneficial as it has a clear focus on working as a multi-agency team, using different skills and abilities to work towards a clear focus (Swindon Borough Council, 2021).

2. Multi-Agency Working

The term 'multi-agency working' can be described as a number of different teams and workers, from different professions working together towards the same shared aim. Supporting this, according to Edwards (2004), in order to protect vulnerable children, this "therefore calls for a multi-layered approach". This suggests that in order to protect children and enable them to receive a good quality of life, multi-agency working is needed as this allows them to benefit from the professionalism, values and approaches of all agencies working together to their strengths to respond to the child, young person, and/or their families needs, such as education services, social services and health care.

In addition, Edwards (2004) also states that the term 'multi-agency working' has now been adapted and should not be seen as a medical model notion, such as working to fix the child, it should be seen through the social model, where the child is considered an individual, and there is a focus on what the child or young person also thinks what is best for them, while allowing them to build "their capacity to take control over their own lives", allowing the children working with these services to have a sense of authority and accomplishment and to see their future in a positive light. Secondly, Edwards (2004) also suggests that the term multi-agency working should be professional, however practitioners within their sectors should also have "an understanding of what other practitioners are able to offer the responsive package of protection that is built around the child or young person". This indicates that although one practitioner from a particular sector, such as social services, would benefit the child greatly, it does not mean that other agencies will not benefit the child also, which also states that individual professions should be aware that working with other practitioners from different sectors with a shared aim for the child would be in the child's best interest, in turn creating a multi-agency team building improved circumstances for the child and their family.

As stated by the UK Government Home Office, their Multi-Agency Working and Information Sharing Project final report (2014), multi-agency working can be described simply by agencies following "three common principles: information sharing, joint decision making and coordinated intervention". This can be portrayed as the key features to a successful multi-agency team in order to benefit the child, young person and their families. Although the term 'multi-agency working' and the notion of different agencies working together can seem quite intricate and a difficult process, the shared interest and aim of multi agency working can be put simply as one shared aim, to work towards the best quality of life for the child, young person and their family.

There are also models in place, such as the a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), which aims “to improve the safeguarding response for children and vulnerable adults through better information sharing and high quality and timely safeguarding responses” (Home Office, 2014), stating that these models are set up in order to work as effectively as a multi-agency in a skillful, expert and professional manner.

The government document ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018’ is statutory guidance which aims to safeguard children and ensure their needs are met while working as a multi-agency team to promote the welfare of the service users. This document outlines the statements in The Children Act (2004) under section 10 - cooperation to improve wellbeing - which states that

“Each local authority “must make arrangements to promote co-operation between

A) The authority,

B) Each of the authority’s relevant partners

C) such other persons or bodies as the authority consider appropriate, being persons or bodies of any nature who exercise functions or are engaged in activities in relation to children in the authority’s area.”

(Children Act, 2004).

This suggests that under the law of the Children’s Act (2004) the term ‘multi-agency working’ is described as appropriate relevant partners working together towards outcomes that are deemed as in the child’s best interest.

Although the term ‘multi-agency working’ is the most common and used term to describe agencies working together to work towards a shared aim for a child, the term ‘multi-disciplinary’ is also used, which is simply another term used to describe a team of agencies working together for these individuals, which also work to monitor children’s development, refer to other agencies when need be, make decisions for the needs of that child and family and to ultimately advocate for that child or their family through a child-centred approach.

3. Benefits and Challenges of Multi-Agency Working

As mentioned, the notion of multi-agency working is a group or a number of different agencies coming together to work towards a shared aim. This process of working together can be greatly beneficial and have many advantages, but it may also have some drawbacks too.

The importance of engaging with The Every Child Matters (2003) framework when working as a multi-agency team is necessary as it provides intrinsic links to working as multi-agencies, and according to the Every Child Matters (2003) initiative states that “professionals will be encouraged to work in multi-disciplinary teams based in and around schools and Children’s Centres”, this suggests that according to the UK Government, they believe that working as a multi-agency team is beneficial in supporting children, and supporting the notion of the Every Child Matters framework as it provides a range of care from a large number of teams. According to Cheminais (2008) Working as a multi-agency allows “greater sharing of exemplification of good practice in how to implement ECM [Every Child Matters] and multi-agency partnership working in educational settings”. This clearly states that as a multi-agency, it intrinsically links to the Every Child Matters framework, and believed to be a force that brings multi-agency working together, which gives initiatives on how to best support the child and their families. In addition, this also states that by working as a multi-agency team, it allows agencies to witness good practice to work towards a shared aim from other agencies and apply this practice to their own work to support the child in a way which works best for them. Furthermore, a benefit to working as a multi-agency is that it leads to improved outcomes of the child and their family as there would have been a range of services provided and made available for these individuals access which aimed to support them in the best possible way. To support this, Harris and Allen (2011) stated that when researching outcomes of children who had been provided multi-agency care and how they benefited from it, “young people were able to provide examples of the tangible benefits to them from multi-agency working”. This also suggests that working as a multi-agency allows children and their families to pin-point exactly how they have benefited from this and how it had a positive impact on their future. Furthermore, multi-agency working allows teams to share their skills and knowledge, while communicating together to benefit the child and their family. For example, an educational service will be able to provide information to relevant services on the child’s attendance, school grades, and behaviour, and communicate with other agencies so they have more background information of the child and can work together to improve the child’s welfare - this also works

vice versa with other services, such as social services sharing information they may have which may be necessary for all teams to know to benefit the child and their family.

Moreover, when working as a multi-agency, it is important to have a valued relationship between the agencies and the child and their families. This relationship is beneficial as it is often described as a 'Birth Family Defender' model. According to Brotherton (2010) "the birth family defender perspective identifies a positive role of intervention of a more proactive kind through supportive intervention to either provide welfare services or promote the rights and well-being of families. It is often associated with relatively high levels of welfare provision and notions of 'early intervention'". This model relates indefinitely to the work of multi-agencies, and is beneficial as they work towards early intervention through a child-centred approach to promote the well-being of families and the rights of the child and the child being central to everything they work towards. This is also beneficial as it targets the notion of early intervention.

Although there is a large amount of benefits to multi-agency working, there can also be drawbacks. For example, working as a multi-agency team, there is often a large amount of people working together towards the same aim, although communication is key in these situations, it can also be difficult to communicate and share necessary information to every team. This may lead to vital information being missed to protect a child's welfare, which ultimately does not benefit the child or their family. In addition, due to there being a possibility of working with numerous teams at once, for example, child protection officers, police services, housing officers, social workers and youth offending teams, it can be very difficult to convene meetings and arrange times to communicate with each other due to being a range of different teams, this can also lead to teams disagreeing with what they believe is in the best interest for the child when these meetings convene. According to Cheminais (2008) a challenge of multi-agency working is that "understanding each other's professional language and protocols" may be difficult; Often, different teams have had specialised training for their particular agencies, and will have their own values and beliefs on what they believe is in the child and the families best interest, however some agencies may have completely different beliefs compared to other agencies, in turn, making the situation for the child more difficult as there may be an unclear aim to what is best for the child. This may lead to territorial issues between the multi-agency teams; for example, "overcoming the reluctance to share equipment and facilities, professional jealousy and inter-agency mistrust" (Cheminaise, 2008) may be an issue for these teams due to their values and beliefs, especially if they do not usually work as or trained to work as a multi-agency team, such as MASH services.

4. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

One particular service that provides excellent multi-agency care is the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

According to Dunne and Finalay (2016) “The first Multi agency safeguarding hubs (MASHs) were developed in 2011 in response to failures of agencies to work together to safeguard children and young people”. The MASH is a team of a range of different agencies, such as adult and children safeguarding officers, mental health services, police protection unit, protection, education, housing officers, health services and many more in different hubs. All services and individuals working in the MASH are service user focused for the wellbeing of the individual and their families. According to the Home Office report ‘Multi Agency Working and Information Sharing Project Final report’ (2014)

“The MASH approach saves time by enabling information to be researched and pooled at a very early stage, therefore helping improve the timeliness and effectiveness of the safeguarding response to children, young people and families. The aim is to understand all the relevant information that may be around quickly and share it and agree the best way forward.”.

This portrays that the MASH is focused on early intervention to help the child and their family by having a fast and effective working team which are able to use a multi-skilled workforce to aid the service user and create a beneficial outcome for them. In addition to this, the set up of the MASH also allows agencies to work together in an organized manner which promotes professionals to work as a team in a coherent manner, compared to working as a stand alone service seeking information from other agencies, which is timely and has drawbacks, as mentioned in section 3.

Within Wales in 2000 , the Welsh Government produced a framework named ‘Children and Young People: A Framework for Partnership’ which aimed to work towards the goals of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and how the Welsh Assembly Government can promote the articles within the UNCRC children’s rights and ensure children and their families have the best possible outcomes in their life. As a result of this, the Children and Young People: Rights to Action (2009) framework produced the Seven Core Aims which are seven aims in which every child and young person in Wales - and essentially around the world - should be entitled to.

These Seven Core Aims suggest that they are fundamental in everything multi-agency services such as the MASH do and should work towards. All seven aims can be targeted within the MASH as there is such a range of services available to help the child and their families maintain their personal rights, while the MASH works towards creating a better future. Furthermore, within the MASH in all areas across the UK, having a person-centred approach and looking at the child as a whole person, and not promoting a laissez-faire model of approach, meaning that intervention from state services is a last resort to help the child, is essential as this allows the children to be in control of their situations using a person-centred approach, in turn creating a stable relationship with the MASH in order to promote the rights of the child, safeguard them from any harm or danger and provide a better quality of life.

The MASH work as a referral service where local authority services or police services would make a referral regarding an individual, whether it be a child, young person or their family, if they believe they are in need of safeguarding or a concern for the welfare of the individual. Following a referral, the MASH team would undertake safety checks to assess the level of risk the individual is exposed to. Following safety checks, the MASH team will then work together with the relevant services from this team with a shared aim to benefit the individual's outcome through a person-centred approach to ensure their rights are being met, they are free from harm and are safeguarded appropriately by sharing information, referrals to additional support such as family housing officers, meetings to ensure the correct and supportive approach is being undertaken and finally decision making for what is the best possible circumstance for the individual within this service (Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership, N.D).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs may be a key theoretical approach which underpins the MASH approach and the strategies they use to ensure the children are safeguarded, such as person-centred planning (PCP) or child-centred planning. "Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid" (McLeod, 2020); this pyramid consists of basic needs at the bottom, working up towards safety needs and finally to self-fulfillment needs at the pinnacle of the hierarchy. Maslow's theory suggests that in order to reach the top of the pyramid and to meet all of the needs of a child, the needs at the bottom of the hierarchy must be met before meeting the needs which are higher up. This suggests that with the MASH team, in order for a child, young person or their families to achieve the best quality of life and to reach their full potential, the MASH team needs to work towards meeting other needs of the child lower down

in the hierarchy. For example, if a child's basic needs such as warmth and rest aren't met, they will be unable to meet their physiological needs such as having friends, or intimate relationships. Relating to the UNCRC's rights of the child, according to Unicef (1992), article 19 of the 54 children's rights articles, every child has a right to be protected "from violence, abuse and neglect", which intrinsically links to Maslow's basic needs of safety in the hierarchy of needs. This suggests that as a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), by using strategies such as person-centred planning, the team has a duty to ensure the rights of the child are met such as ensuring they are free from neglect and abuse, while fulfilling the basic needs of the child in order for them to get the best quality of life, and should ensure that in order for them to progress through their life and their needs, they will work towards meeting every need of the child in order to reach 'self-actualisation' in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which in turn being in the best interest for the child, young person and their families (Kaur, 2013).

Although Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs could now be considered rather dated, it is still as important and fundamental now as it first was, as within the UK, Maslow's theory is an element in which is widely used when considering the needs of the child in order for them to be aided by the MASH to receive the best possible quality of life with their rights respect and their needs met.

5. Multi-Agency Partner Overview

Within Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub's (MASH) within the UK, there is always a range of key workers within this hub with the specific role of working as a team towards the best interest of the service user. Within the MASH process of a referral to the team, the team of "agencies gather, share and analyse information relating to any referred individuals" (Shorrocks et al, 2019) in order to reach the decision making stage for the person or child. The stage where agencies gather and share information underpins the whole notion of the MASH - as having a MASH allows information and a team of agencies to gather very quickly and make quick decisions in order to provide early intervention to the service user. According to the Minister of State for Crime Prevention (2014), a legislative perspective on the MASH is that having this particular team in place is "is key to early and effective identification of risk", ultimately safeguarding the child and respecting their rights through the strategies put in place with these teams.

Within a MASH in Wales, the team consists of a range of agencies who work together to create better outcomes for the service users. The team consists of agencies such as:

- “Children’s and adult services,
- early help,
- education,
- housing,
- mental health services,
- drugs and alcohol team
- independent domestic violence advocates
- South Wales Police Public Protection Unit
- Registered social landlords
- Probation and community rehabilitation
- Health

(Bridgend County Borough Council, N.D).

This shows that there is a range of different individuals who represent each agency within the MASH, in turn allowing early intervention and information sharing due to all teams being in the same building. Within the information sharing stage of the referral to the MASH - the relevant information to safeguard the child or young person would be shared with the relevant people in order to make decisions. Not always will all boards take part in these decisions, however it is essential that there is a range of staff like this as all cases and service users are different, and some children in certain situations will need a range of people from the MASH in order to be safeguarded appropriately. The range of services the MASH provides enables it to be apparent that there is a clear and concise direction in which the MASH use to determine the safety of the child and to use strategies, such as person-centred planning, to better the child’s quality of life.

Within Wales in 2014, the Social Services and Wellbeing Act was introduced in order to aid the “well-being of people who need care and support, and carers who need support, and for transforming social services in Wales” (Social Care Legislation in Wales, 2017). This Act ensures the child, young person, and/or their families and carers needs are being met when they are in need of support and care. This act is supported by the MASH team and their strategies such as person-centred planning as they ensure that their duty is to put the service user first, from a person-centred approach and respecting their rights. This act can also be considered as the pinpoint of care in Wales, as it promotes independence, allowing people in

need to have a voice about what decisions are made and what they believe is best for them while being delivered high quality care from services such as the MASH. Furthermore, due to there being a range of individuals working for the MASH, this act allows all staff to share the same values and work towards the same outcomes, goals and key principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act; for example, the MASH's core objective is early intervention and safeguarding the individual through a person-centred approach while always putting the individual first and focusing on their wellbeing - which ultimately relates directly to the Act, as according to the Social Care and Legislation in Wales (2017), the fundamentals of this Act are "voice and control, prevention and early intervention, well-being and co-production".

6. Roles and Responsibilities

As a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, there are a number of roles and responsibilities that they must deliver in order to provide effective approaches to improve the quality of life of the service user. As mentioned, each MASH has a considerably large amount of different agencies working together with a shared aim under one roof, and all of these different agencies will have their own particular roles and responsibilities to carry out on a day to day basis. For example, one agency such as an education service's main role and responsibility could possibly be to ensure the child or young adult is receiving the best quality of education while being safeguarded - this may be done by providing extra educational help they may need possibly due to attendance issues because of certain situations such as their parents not having positive attitudes towards education, therefore the child not being made to attend school. Ultimately, this example suggests that there are certain circumstances or situations in which the agencies working under the MASH will have their own profession-targeted roles and responsibilities, however there are also roles and responsibilities in which they share as a team. For example, keeping the child or young adult safe, "better quality information sharing, analysis and decision-making, to safeguard vulnerable children and young people more effectively" (Coventry City Council, 2021). This states that although these are the fundamentals of the MASH in any county or council throughout the UK, these are also the main roles and responsibilities they must carry out in order to provide effective care. When working as a multi-agency team, including agencies such as a MASH, it is vital to adopt the values and to think holistically about the child, as this allows a person-centred planning approach which thinks about the wellbeing of the individual, their development as a whole, including their social and emotional skills, not just about what the

child's learning goals are but what their life goals and better outcomes may be. Their values may also include respecting the child and their views, empowering the voice of the child, viewing the child as competent to make decisions and allowing them to control their life, allowing effective person-centred planning to take place when a team such as the MASH base their decisions around these values.

In addition to this, being an advocate to the child and their families is also an essential role and responsibility for the MASH to carry out. Advocacy can be defined, according to Henderson (2005), as creating relationships “with a person who is at risk of social exclusion and chooses one or several of many ways to understand, respond to and represent that person’s interests as if they were the advocate’s own”. This definition suggests that working as a multi-agency, particularly for the MASH, their role and responsibility is to be an advocate for the child or young person, as they create relationships with them while providing excellent quality of care by representing their interests and using several strategies such as person-centred planning to represent the view in which believe is the best outcome for themselves and providing that service.

7. Person Centred Planning

According to Dowling *et al* (2007) “ Person-centred planning refers to a number of explicit methods that provide a framework for people who use social care services to design their own services to meet their current needs and desires, and move towards future goals”. As agencies within the MASH, they provide a personal and integrated level of care in which some stand alone agencies may not be able to provide. As there is such a large amount of different agencies working together this allows a wide level of care in which they can share explicit methods to support the child while putting them first at a personal level and focuses on what is best for them. This adopts person-centred planning or child-centred planning strategies as it allows the MASH to focus on what is best for the child by putting them first and the child or young person being central in all decision making and the main focus, in turn, essentially planning around the person to meet their needs and desires, in order to provide better opportunities for their future. Although some children using MASH may not always agree with the decisions made by the team, it is important to recognise that the MASH base their decisions on what is best for the child to ensure they are safeguarded and protected, which may seem as though they it is not a person-centred decision, it is made in the best interest of the individual to

provide the best quality of life. Furthermore, as the MASH has a number of professionals working together with a shared aim and focus on what is in the best interest for the child, this adopts a person-centred planning approach as the child or service user is the main focus from all the professions, where they all aim to “meet their needs and improve their outcomes” (Barnet London Borough, 2021), undoubtedly resulting in their principle of the MASH is to put the individual first, and empowering the person by making all decisions around them, and helping them make their own decisions for their future.

As a MASH team, it is important for professionals to ensure they can meet the needs of the service user and ensure they are safeguarded, whether it be a child, young person and/ or their families. Approaches such as person-centred planning can be critical in order to benefit these individuals too. For example, using an empowerment method of approach when using person-centred planning methods to help the person can be greatly beneficial. The strategy of empowering the individual by allowing the child or young person to have a say in their future and being respectful of their rights may allow the individual to be more confident and see their future in a positive light. This may also create positive relationships with the MASH team, in turn creating significant adjustments as a team, with the MASH and the individual to create better outcomes for their life. To support this, children and young people having rights and having a say in decisions made about their life can be considered a relatively new concept, however it is important to recognise that it is fundamental for all agencies such as the MASH to follow by being respectful of their rights, not just a choice. According to Munroe (2001) “Article 12 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child” (UNCRC) states that “state parties [such as the MASH] shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express these views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child”, this reinforcing the fact that in order to respect the rights of the child and empower them as individuals, it is essential when making decisions to allow the child to express what they believe is in their best interest also, in turn allowing the person-centred approach to be successful and effective by allowing the individual to be central to all decisions. Although there are benefits to the MASH team empowering children and young people when planning their future and the best outcome for them, there can also be some drawbacks. Often when a child or young person or their families are referred to the MASH team, the team determines a level of risk of the service user, their mental state, their living situations and many more. In some cases, the child or the young person may not be in a capable state of mind to make positive decisions for their future or their

view may not be exactly in the best interest for their situation. However despite this, the MASH team will still need to be respectful of their rights and according to article 12 of the UNCRC children's rights stated by Lansdown (2011), by giving the child the "opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child"; this allows the TEAM to be rights respected, allow opportunities to apply person-centred planning and view the opinions for the child in order to base their decisions on what would be the best possible outcome. Additionally, other values such as showing respect to the service user through person-centred planning is pertinent when working with children, young people and/ or their families. For example, allowing the service user to have "a valued place or role in one's community and being seen by others in positive ways" (Mercer, 2003). This implies that the service user should feel respected and feel as though they are valued in their situations when having decisions made about their life. For example, a MASH team would adopt person-centred planning by showing respect to the child and ensuring they feel as though they are not out of place, nor will be in the future when better outcomes are made in light of their situation. In addition, good practice of person-centred planning by allowing a child to be respectful according to the UK Government's (2018) framework 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' is to ensure a child is "to be treated with the expectation that they are competent rather than not"; this draws back to empowering a child, and viewing the child through the social model of disability in that a child is able to make their own decisions about their life, in turn showing a respect and planning a child's future around them. Although it is fundamental to respect all children when working as a MASH team to make decisions about their future, it can be considered that this may come with some difficulty. In some cases when working as a MASH team, there can be times when the team has to work with challenging behaviour; this may make it difficult for the agencies to portray their values and their views if the service user believes they are not working in their best interest, even when they are, in turn seeming as though person-centred planning is not in place and the child or service user is not respected. When dealing with these situations in order to maintain respect and put the child first, professionals within MASH teams will have appropriate training and values in order to deal with challenging behaviour, such as, according to Home Office's (2003) policy document 'Respect and Responsibility', "Behaviour and Education Support Teams to provide multi-agency support for children with the most serious problems" by working with them, subsequently allowing the child to view the MASH team as a positive service, in turn allowing a person-centred approach to take place and work with the shared aim of providing a future that is in that individual's best interest.

8. Conclusion

To conclude, multi-agency strategies such as the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) working as a team has shown to be an effective hub in which makes information sharing and intervention far more convenient in today's society, however using values from person-centred planning approaches such as empowerment, respect, giving individuals a voice and allowing them to have control of their life, has proven to be far more effective when working with children, young people and their families in order to provide the best quality of care, which allowing them to express their rights, be rights respective and work with currently policies and legislations with the shared interest of what is best for the service users, in turn, suggesting that person-centred planning approaches and values are vital to adopt when working as a multi-agency.

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