

Child Poverty

You have to wear the uniform. But some of the jumpers are £11 so even if you can't afford it you have to get it. ...I know at our school, if you don't come in uniform you have to get like a uniform pass, and you explain to the teachers that you can't wear uniform and you give a reason. If you don't, you get like a detention and a letter home and the teachers are like blaming you.

Eleven year-old child (Ridges, 2009)

Introduction

This final summary brings together the best knowledge from our literature reviews, examples of validated local practice, and contributions from service managers, children, young people, parents and carers, which will support you in the development and implementation of whole-area child poverty strategies.

C4EO's aim is to support senior managers in local authorities and their partner agencies to improve the lives of children and young people and their families, by providing the best possible evidence of what really works.

This work has been very timely, as it will support local authorities and other key local partners to implement the new duties placed on them by the Child Poverty Act 2010 and the National Child Poverty Strategy to be published in the coming months. The evidence highlighted in the C4EO knowledge review, together with validated practice examples, provides local authorities with the knowledge and confidence to develop and implement their child poverty strategies. In addition, the datasets available through the data tool on the C4EO website, provide easy access to the data needed to undertake child poverty needs assessments.

The measure of child poverty used for the knowledge review is the number of children living in households below 60 per cent of contemporary median equivalised household income. This is known as the **relative low-income measure**, which looks at whether the poorest families are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the economy as a whole.



The C4EO knowledge review concluded that there are five key components to a whole-area child poverty strategy, and two priority outcome areas where activity should focus, in order to address poverty:

Key components of a child poverty strategy: **Priority outcomes:**

- effective multi-agency partnerships which draw on the experience, resources and expertise across the whole area
 - sufficient and sustained resources
 - active participation of children, young people, families and communities
 - differentiated approaches to address the needs of different groups or areas in the community
 - monitoring and evaluation focused on outcomes rather than outputs.
- maximising of family income – a mixed economy of provision is required, which can help the jobless into work, help those in work to progress, and financially support those unable to work
 - narrowing outcome gaps for children and young people living in poverty, particularly in education and health.

Using the evidence to develop your whole-area child poverty strategy

Key components

Multi-agency working:

- Ensure that your strategy promotes a non-judgmental approach.
- Agree a clear definition of poverty and develop a shared vision on your overall aims and objectives.
- Ensure high-level 'buy in' from all agencies, including third sector organisations
- Ensure that your strategy makes it plain that tackling child poverty is everyone's business, not just the concern of children's services
- Agree and use clear terminology and language.
- Manage expectations between partners to ensure that decision-making is shared appropriately.
- Identify which partner is responsible for implementing different parts of the strategy. Effective collaboration between all partners and/or agreeing that partnerships have control over their own funds (via aligned or pooled budgets) is key.

Sufficient and sustained resources:

- An audit of existing provision will help you formulate the strategy, plan its implementation, target resources effectively and ensure sustainability.
- Allow sufficient time and human resources for development – a full strategy may take up to two years to develop.
- Assign long-term budgets to meet long-term challenges. If local investment can be matched centrally, it will help to achieve some of your objectives.

Active participation:

- Enable local people to participate, including children and young people. This can be complex and involves:
 - promoting informal participation
 - facilitating brokerage between community representatives and service providers
 - ensuring that roles and responsibilities are well distributed between service providers and community members

- acting on 'grass roots' ideas

- taking local issues into account.

Differentiated approaches:

- A people-focused approach may at times help more than a place-based approach, as for example poverty can be rural as well as urban, and certain groups, (young parents, disabled people, those on low incomes) require targeted services wherever they live.

Monitor and evaluate outcomes:

- Partners should use monitoring to assess improvements in outcomes in the lives of families living in poverty.
- Make monitoring and evaluation a priority; use agreed national and local indicators to set child poverty targets and collect good quality local data.
- Ensure that your strategy is part of a development cycle and includes cost analyses, evaluation and review.

‘ Providing parents with locally based early prevention services, such as parenting support and to take an active interest in their children’s learning. ’



Achieving the two priority outcomes

Maximising family income

The key components are tackling worklessness, maximising the incomes of those in work and maximising benefits take-up. Ways to do this include:

- providing high-quality employment and career advice and information, developing whole-area intelligence on the local employment market, and encouraging local investment in deprived areas

- targeting the needs of groups at risk, for example, young people leaving care, disabled parents, people on low incomes, those not in work
- working with local businesses to develop jobs in more deprived areas, and services for working parents such as childcare, including before and after school care
- encouraging employers to provide flexible working patterns
- local authorities acting as ‘model’ employers by providing back-to-work ‘tasters’ and other stepping stones
- improving local transport and facilitate access to it so that parents can travel to and from work and training
- providing training based on local needs and including ‘softer skills’ and confidence building
- local campaigns and support to maximise benefit take-up.

Narrowing outcomes gaps

Enable poorer children and young people to achieve better economic wellbeing in later life by:

- focusing on raising educational achievement and reducing health inequalities. These can be achieved by developing a multi-agency approach to

- tackling deprivation, and ensuring services, especially health services, are accessible where poorer families live
- providing parents with locally based early prevention services, such as parenting support and taking an active interest in their children’s learning
- ensuring that local professionals, e.g. teachers and those working in housing, health, adults’ and children’s services, understand the links between disadvantage and poorer outcomes, and their role in tackling these issues
- child poverty partnerships developing strong multi-agency agreements
- schools acting as connecting hubs with and between services.



“The service has been able to increase patient access in the most deprived sections of their population and outcome evidence (user satisfaction surveys, health measures) demonstrates that children are not falling through the net.”

Local practice that has made a difference

Practice examples have been submitted to C4EO and validated against a range of criteria to determine the extent to which they are evidence-based. Here we summarise three of these projects:

Community Paediatric service, NHS Derby, aims to narrow the gap in child health outcomes by re-modelling into a ‘community-facing’ service which means targeting expensive medical resources where they are most needed. Multi-agency planning, clinical leadership and information-sharing work underpins the service which is also characterised by an overall vision and shared priorities across the agencies involved.

As a result of these changes, the service has been able to increase patient access in the most deprived sections of their population and outcome evidence (user satisfaction surveys, health measures) demonstrates that children are not falling through the net.

Devon County Council, Devon Welfare Rights Unit has been maximising family income by increasing the take-up of benefits and tax credits in families who have children with special needs. The aim was to increase families’ economic wellbeing, and by increasing their purchasing power, also boosting local economies. Partner agencies worked together to share information and to encourage and support benefit take-up. In terms of outcomes, the verified additional total benefit income for 2005–2009 was over £3.8 million.

As part of its evaluation of **Children’s Centres, the London Borough of Ealing** wanted to reduce child poverty by integrating work-focused services in Children’s Centres, in order to maximise family income. As part of the evaluation, parents and children were invited to give their views using a process called Story Catching. The outcome has been to give parents and children more say in how services are organised, and to make their participation more meaningful. Story Catching is now being implemented as part of a wider monitoring and evaluation framework for Children’s Centres in Ealing.

Further detail on these examples and other validated local practice examples can be found on the C4EO website

What do providers and people who use services tell us about what works?

The material in this section is drawn from a group discussion with C4EO's Parents and Carers Panel, from debate with local service providers who work with people in poverty and from direct work as well as studies (Ridges, 2009) and reports that have incorporated the views and experiences of children and young people living in poverty. These may be worth considering when formulating your area-wide child poverty strategy.

Here are some views from service providers:

- There needs to be an agreed understanding of what constitutes 'child poverty'.
- It is important to be clear who is responsible for driving the child poverty agenda.
- Services need to ensure that working practices are cohesive and operate across organisations.
- Providers need to address limited take-up of services, financial and welfare support amongst the poorest families in the locality.
- Childcare provision needs to be of good quality, affordable, accessible and flexible to enable parents to take up employment.
- Assistance and support needs to be targeted to particular unemployed sectors of the population such as young people.

Below are some of the challenges that parents, carers and children and young people living in poverty, have described:

- For parents, the difficulty of meeting both their own needs and their children's needs. Parents, especially mothers, often go without everyday necessities like food and clothing, to try and ensure their children's needs are met, for example money to pay for supervised play and leisure activities.
- Trying to make money stretch and avoid debt. Free advice and support for parents in managing money, finding jobs and coping with debt are seen as key to educating parents in helping their children out of poverty.
- In relation to economic and material deprivation, children are often anxious that there is not enough money for them and for their family's needs; they have concerns about being short of essential everyday items like food, bedding and clothing so a mechanism where families can be provided with these essentials and children can talk about these fears and anxieties, is needed.
- Poverty restricts children's chances to make and sustain friendships, and reduces their opportunities for shared social activities due to, for example, the costs of attending social events, inadequate and expensive transport provision and the expense of hosting social occasions within their own homes.

Reference

Ridges, T. (2009) *Living with poverty, A review of the literature on children's and families' experiences of poverty*, Department of Work and Pensions, Report no.594, 2009.

Stay involved with C4EO

- The C4EO website includes a range of support and data about your local area for you to access and compare with other areas.
- Encourage practitioners to put themselves forward to be C4EO sector specialists.
- Access support from C4EO as part of the Tailored Support scheme provided by accredited and trained experts on the theme priorities.
- Make sure your organisation submits examples of local validated practice. Examples can be entered onto the C4EO website.

Final summary and recommendations

This summary is a concise overview of C4EO's work in this theme for directors of children's services. Please visit www.c4eo.org.uk to download the full, in-depth knowledge review.