

Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children

Developing good practice in assessment and planning

Introduction

This practice paper is aimed at social workers and other practitioners involved in the statutory assessment, planning and review process. It will also be of interest to managers who are looking for an assessment and planning tool which they can use in supervision and case work management to help staff focus on breaking down the task of assessment and planning.

Breaking down the task of assessment and planning

Making assessments and plans for separated children or *unaccompanied minors* as they are often referred to, present many challenges.

One has to take account of legislation and policy on childcare and immigration and how they impact and inform each other.

The children themselves come with diverse needs, from a wide range of countries and regions, and with different and unique experiences. Understanding where the child has come from, how they see the world, how their environment has shaped their life experiences and development so far, makes the job of assessment and planning both exciting and hard work.

Although getting enough information to make an informed assessment and working to timescales might be difficult, it is important to note that assessment and plans are not one-off activities. It is not an event but a process. As new information comes to light, as circumstances change, the assessment that is informing the child's care plan or pathway plan and so on needs to be updated.

In order to have effective plans that meet the needs of a child, it is paramount that all the needs of these children are properly identified and to the best of the worker's knowledge at any particular time.

Even if a basic need is identified which may not be met by the local authority in the long term, because of immigration legislation and policy, that need should be identified. It may be necessary to explore and plan for alternative options in advance. If there really is no alternative, issues should be flagged up for local authority senior management.

Unless a child is able to stay in the UK indefinitely, it is advisable to apply a parallel planning to identifying the needs of the child. Thus identifying what the child's needs would be if they were to remain in the UK; and those if they were to, instead, return to their country of origin.

Using this approach from the outset when identifying needs makes the job of drawing up a plan covering all eventualities much easier.

The needs–outcome–services model

In order to make the job of assessing and meeting needs manageable, the following model has been devised to help you focus on breaking down the task.

The aim is to provide you with a tool to help you feel more confident in identifying needs and to plan more effectively.

The model places the child's needs at the centre. It will help you to focus on the actual need as opposed to what the child might *require* and from jumping ahead and thinking about what services you have available. The difference is shown in Case study 1.

Case study 1

Albion has been having regular nightmares, getting up in the middle of the night and falling asleep in class. Both the social worker and the school are concerned.

The social worker feels that Albion needs counselling.

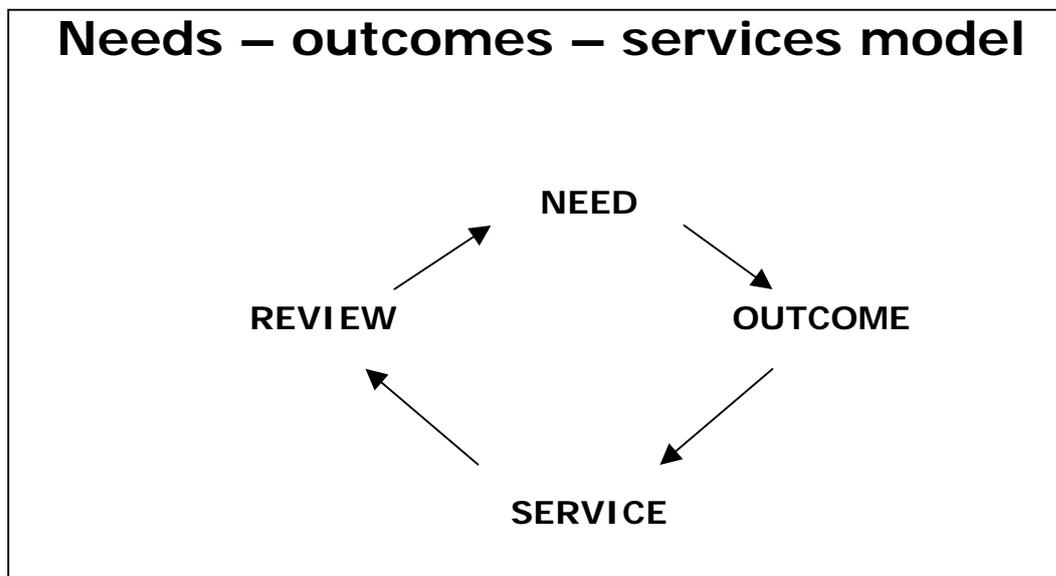
What is being described here is a service and not a need. By saying Albion 'needs counselling' it could be interpreted that a specialist service is required and that only someone with counselling expertise could offer the appropriate help. It may be that there is a long waiting list for counselling services or no services available in the area. If the social worker said that Albion's need is counselling, then straightaway we might think that this need can't be met.

Albion may not wish to see a counsellor or may not understand what a counsellor does. In some countries this service might not exist or may have negative associations with mental illness; and in other cultures receiving counselling might be perceived as a sign of weakness. Some children and young people may not want to talk to someone they see as a stranger, preferring to talk to someone they have already begun to build up trust with, whether this be for example a social worker or carer.

So how do you establish Albion's needs?

This model (Figure 1) can be applied to the assessment process for any child, not just separated children.

Figure 1: The needs–outcomes–services model



Adapted from Care planning for looked after children project (NCB 2006).

Need – Ask what children and young people require to thrive, for their health and development in order to maximise their opportunities to reach their full potential as they move towards adulthood and beyond.

Outcome – Think about what you want to achieve. In order to know whether you meet a need, you have to establish exactly what outcome you are looking for. An outcome stating that the young person should *be happy* would be too vague. How would you know if you achieved this? Is this actually a realistic outcome as no human being is happy all the time? Outcomes need to be SMART:

- S** Specific
- M** Measurable
- A** Achievable
- R** Realistic
- T** Time-limited

You should also be able to provide evidence that the outcome has been met.

Service – Think about the task that needs to be done to meet the need and who will do it. A service can be a person like a foster carer doing a particular task, such as listening to a child about their concerns; or an organisation doing a particular task to meet a particular need, such as a counselling service providing trauma counselling.

Review – Look at whether the service you put in place, or the task undertaken to address the need, has achieved the outcome you were looking for. If the need has not been met, then you may have to look at another service to meet that need.

Unmet need – Record needs that have been identified and have not been met or cannot be met and the reasons for this. This information is important both to the local authorities, to assist them with strategic planning, and to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and ADSS, to highlight issues affecting the ability to meet identified needs.

Applying this to Albion

When you apply this needs–outcomes–services model to Albion’s situation, it looks different.

Case study 2

Albion (introduced in Case study 1) has been having regular nightmares, getting up in the middle of the night and falling asleep in class. Both the social worker and the school are concerned.

Need – Albion needs to sleep and not have trouble sleeping. He needs ways to express the fears causing his nightmares so that they do not intrude on his sleep.

Outcome – For Albion to sleep free of nightmares, and not be falling asleep in class.

Service – The social worker to provide the opportunity for Albion to talk about his nightmares and express the fears that may be causing the nightmares. The social worker and Albion to explore strategies for dealing with the nightmares.

Review – If the service put in place doesn’t achieve the outcome described above, then a different service should be put in place.

It may be that, after trying different approaches to addressing Albion’s nightmares, a specialist counselling service is required but this would be done with Albion’s full agreement. In order for any service to be effective, the child or young person should be consulted and agree with the rationale behind the service being offered. This is only a case study but should highlight the importance of talking to a child about the needs that have been identified, as they may be able to offer solutions and ideas as to how they wish it to be addressed.

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