



Department
of Health

Health Visitor Advice Line

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Health Visitor Advice Line

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Purpose of Document

This case study focuses on an improvement in service quality, innovation or a new way of working, specifically along one or more of the strands of the health visiting service vision and family offer:

Community

Universal

Universal Plus and

Universal Partnership Plus.

Case Study Overview

What started out as a considered management response to a change in the way health visiting services were delivered in the Shropshire locality of Shrewsbury and Atcham, soon turned into a service development that has seen both staff and clients benefiting from a range of important service improvements.

Health visiting services in Shropshire went from having individual health visitors attached to specific GP practices in the county to being centralised, with all local health visitors working across one of the three Shropshire County areas. Health visitors based in GP practices in the Shrewsbury and Atcham area were brought into a single centralised team in the north of Shrewsbury, and this relocation led to the introduction of a Health Visitor Advice Line.

One of the technical problems with the centralisation of local health visitors was that where each health visitor had previously had access to a single personal telephone, with answerphone facility, the provision of 24-plus individual direct-dial phone lines into one office seemed both costly and impractical.

A decision was then made that the health visiting team for Shrewsbury and Atcham would change to a single Advice Line, which would be staffed by a qualified health visitor at all times . Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Concurrently, clinic sessions were changed from walk-in sessions to appointment only and these needed to be booked through the Advice Line.

This service covered the Universal offer of rapid access to health advice via telephone or text, and allowed for booking appointments for clinic attendances or reviews. It also covered the Universal Plus offer of rapid access to support for specific programmes or interventions.

Achievements

- “ Since introducing the Advice Line, the team has received an increase in the volume of enquiries. They have also seen an increase in the range of topics being enquired about; it seems that clients often feel more comfortable asking someone on the phone about something than face to face. However, those families that need and want a face-to-face appointment are still able to get one . without the long waiting time.
- “ Other NHS services and GPs are starting to refer to the Advice Line more and more. It is quick and easy for them and their patients to get the help they need.
- “ Other partner agencies that visit hard-to-reach groups are also making use of the Advice Line while they are with clients. This helps to show that it is easy to use and is encouraging good behaviour change in these groups, who would normally not engage with the health visiting service.

Benefits

The introduction of the Advice Line was not just about giving families in Shrewsbury and Atcham a single, easy number to remember in order to get in touch with the health visiting team, it also allows the team to provide a much faster, triaged, relevant and localised service to new mums and dads, meaning that a whole host of benefits are obvious to local families with young children and babies. These include the following:

- “ Instant advice and support to families is provided because the Advice Line is staffed by a qualified health visitor. This means that, often, people get the advice they need straight away, rather than having to wait till the end of the day . or even the next day . for a health visitor to return their call, which was typical of the old way of working.
- “ Families getting access to quicker health-visiting advice means that they do not have to make use of another NHS service, such as GP consultations or treatment and care from emergency departments, as frequently. This helps to reduce demand on other services.
- “ Through triaging of family concerns, those that need access to a face-to-face consultation with a health visitor can be booked into a clinic straight away or, if appropriate, can be booked in for a home visit or provided with access to other NHS services as relevant.
- “ Appointment-only clinics mean that families do not have long waiting times, unlike the old system of drop-in clinics.

Challenges

The new way of working was difficult for the team to get used to in the beginning, as it was radically different from the more traditional method of working, but the benefits soon started to outweigh any initial trepidation, as Claire Langford, Clinical Lead for Health Visiting comments:

“The new way of working did make some of the health visitors feel more exposed in the beginning. They weren't working with their own, usual, known caseloads . they literally could have anyone calling up and asking them questions. But the benefits soon started to become more than obvious. The team became comfortable with the way the Advice Line was offered and they started to work much more effectively together . the health visitor on the Advice Line started to act as the information point for the whole team during the day, providing

proactive advice and support to the team who were out and about around the locality.+

Importantly, during the introduction and establishment of the Advice Line, the Trust has been able to make the most of the triage process of handling calls. This means that those people who need the most obvious and sometimes most expensive interventions get them when they need them, while other clients get advice and support or, if appropriate, signposting to other sources quicker than with the older model of health visiting.

Learning, Sharing and Sustainability

The Shrewsbury and Atcham team has already begun to share its learning and success with the other locality teams across the county, who in turn have developed a single Advice Line approach.