



Gail Bennett (centre)

Improving the lives of young people through National Occupational Standards

Background

Since 2007, Gail Bennett, Parenting Strategy Officer for the Children and Young People's Partnership, has been responsible, along with the Parenting Strategy Group, for implementing, monitoring and evaluating the Flintshire Parenting Action Plan. The Partnership is multi-agency across the local authority area and sets out to promote a positive difference to the lives of children and young people in Flintshire. It works through universal services such as schools as well as children and family services. The key to making that difference to young people's lives, Gail believes, is to work closely with parents.

Using National Occupational Standards (NOS)

Following her remit, Gail promotes and raises awareness of National Occupational Standards (NOS) to personnel who include staff from education, social care, social justice, health and the voluntary sector who support parents directly or partially. As NOS inform the few qualifications for people working directly with parents, they are considered particularly relevant. NOS, Gail believes, also enables staff to value their work more and, in some instances, use them as a self-evaluation tool:

“What was recognised by those involved in the Children and Young People’s Partnership was that there was a lot of parenting work being done, but no-one had a full overview of what was happening and what standards were being followed. It is often assumed that anyone can work with parents and make effective change. This is not the case because you need to skill people up to work with parents and families.”

Piloting NOS in the statutory and voluntary sectors

Gail, along with colleagues in Wales, particularly in two adjoining authorities, has been working on a pilot scheme with staff at Glyndwr University offering City & Guilds 3599, Working with Parents, a work-based qualification based on NOS.

Twenty-five personnel took part in the scheme in Flintshire: some were targeted specifically to ensure that it worked in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. Those selected included the Youth Justice Service Parenting Co-ordinator, a Family Worker and a Mental Health Advocate. On describing the qualification at Glyndwr University, Gail said:

“It’s a work-based qualification so people who have put their heart into it really got the benefit. They are developing good practice and their knowledge has developed as a result. Overall, the pilot scheme went very well, and the official figures – which we are awaiting – should reflect this.”

Positive feedback and a chance to get on the career path

Feedback at a local level indicates that the exercise was worthwhile for those taking the qualification. Benefits of using NOS in this way have included staff following a different way of learning and professionals being challenged in their thinking and in their role.

It is anticipated that the scheme will be developed further and offered to a wider sector of the employees working directly with parents. The scheme will be continued at City & Guilds Level 2 and 3, with Level 4 also being offered in conjunction with some of the Children and Young People’s Partnership’s strategic aims.

Making a difference to individuals

The qualification has also provided a boost to some of the workforce providing opportunities to develop their careers. Gail cites the example of one woman for whom NOS has made a big difference:

“One administrative assistant in the voluntary sector was recognised as having a passion and talent for working with parents because of her communication skills. She wanted to gain more experience and her manager offered her a training place to take City & Guilds Level 2. She completed three modules and submitted an excellent portfolio. This gave her direction for her career pathway, and the confidence to pursue it. Following her own personal, and professional success, she secured a new job working as a mental health advocate with parents. The chance to take this NOS-based qualification provided opportunity.

“I do believe that National Occupational Standards are the way forward,” she continues, “NOS provide a qualification that is competency-based – and for individuals it shows that they are competent in their own specific role, and that is very important, particularly if it leads to children and young people having a better life.”

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