Measuring the Impact of Child Protection Training on Practice
A SSCB Audit 2012

1.0 Background
Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board’s (SSCB) Workforce Development and Training Strategy 2011-14 and action plan outlined the need for improvement in our evaluation and quality assurance processes. It is important that SSCB can demonstrate that child protection training it provides is improving the outcomes of safeguarding of children. One successful outcome is being able to practice more confidently and competently in practice.
The 2010 Carpenter et al research document ‘The Outcomes of Interagency Training to Safeguard Children: Final Report to the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health’ highlights the need for further ‘rigorous evaluation’ work to be undertaken locally.

SSCB training is aimed at promoting the knowledge, skills and confidence of adults and children’s practitioners; so that they can improve the way they recognise and respond to safeguarding children concerns.

2.0 Methodology

The impact of training will be measured by delegates rating their knowledge of the subject of training and their self confidence to practice effectively within that area of protecting children (i.e. to use knowledge in practice).

Self reporting of self efficacy and confidence has been evidenced as a good predictor of future behaviour. Salas and Cannon-Bowers, 2001 in Carpenter 2010 states;- 

“Self-efficacy is more than a self-perception of competency. It is an individual’s assessment of his or her confidence in their ability to execute specific skills in a particular set of circumstances and thereby achieve a successful outcome (however defined). Furthermore, there is substantial empirical evidence accumulated in many fields over the last four decades that it is a powerful predictor of behaviour).”

The successful outcome (for the purposes of this audit) would be being able to practice more confidently and competently in practice. The assumption is, if a practitioner self reports highly in child protection knowledge and highly in self confidence in their ability to practice competently; they will be able to practice effectively within the multi agency child protection arena.

Knowledge and confidence to practice was measured by delegates scoring themselves using a Likert scale with a range from 1 (very low) through to 5 (very high). Delegates were asked to score themselves three times:
• T1: At the start of training. The scales were presented to all delegates and could be completed on an anonymous basis. This captured a benchmark that is not biased by the identification of delegates.

• T2: On completion of training. Delegates were asked to rate their knowledge and confidence levels at the end of the training event and to add their name and contact details to the evaluation form and to indicate if they objected to being contacted again three months after the training.

• T3: Three months after training. At three months, delegates were contacted again by email and were asked to rate their knowledge and confidence levels and to recall what they had learnt in the training, to give an example of how their practice had improved as a result of the training and how they had utilised the knowledge and skills into their daily safeguarding practice. They were also asked to describe how their practice had improved as a result of the training. This gives an indication if learning had been retained and how it is being applied in practice.

This audit design is based on two hypotheses:-

A. Because of the training received there will be an increase in the mean scores between the start of the course (T1) and the end of the course (T2) and there is an expectation that the increase would be maintained at the 3 month follow up (T3). A slight drop of mean scores at T3 is acceptable but it would not be expected to regress to the level of pre training. This would indicate the training has a positive impact on delegates, increasing both knowledge and self confidence to practice and this had been maintained 3 months after training.

B. Because of the training received, delegates would be able to state what they had learnt, as well as give examples of how the knowledge and skills has been transferred and used in practice, and how the training has improved their practice, three months after the course. Successful recollection of practice examples would indicate that not only had knowledge from the course been retained, it had been transferred into practice and as such had impacted on safeguarding children.

3.0 Audit Results

The audit was undertaken on 11 training sessions of the SSCB Working Together to Safeguard Children training course. The courses ran from January to March 2012. These were attended by 198 delegates from 53 different organisations that provide services to children, young people and adults who are parents or carers, as well as some adult services.

The Course
The course in the audit was a level 2 course and of one day duration. The three month follow up commenced in April 2012. The training is mandatory for professionals, third sector and independent staff who work with children, young people and/or their families and/or have a lead safeguarding role.

Of the 198 delegates who attended the courses, 43 (21%) participated in all three stages of the audit. The response rate ranged across the three stages was from 97% to 24% (see table 1 below). The response rate at T3 was better than other long term evaluation projects (Carpenter 2010) who had a response rate at T3 of 20%. This is a good response rate considering it was all carried out by email.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Returns</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Rating Knowledge and Confidence to Practice Competently

Table 2 below shows the mean score at T1, T2 and T3 across the course.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Confidence to practice (average score)</th>
<th>Knowledge (average score)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a rise in both the mean score of knowledge and self-confidence in ability to practice competently immediately after training (T2). There was a slight drop in averages at T3, but not to the level at T1. This suggests that the course had a positive impact on delegate’s knowledge and self-confidence in their ability to practice effectively to safeguard children.

The results also show that at the start of the day 23% recorded their confidence level as high or very high. This increased to 71% after 3 months.

The results also show that at the start of the day 15% of the returns reported a high knowledge level, this increased to 52% after 3 months.

Delegate comments at T3 (three months after training)

To measure how knowledge had been transferred to and influenced practice delegates were asked 3 months after the training how they had utilised the knowledge and skills into their daily safeguarding children practice. They were also asked to describe how their practice had improved as a result of the training.

What did you learn?

The majority of delegates (96%, n=48) who attended the training and who were contacted at T3 were able to successfully recall some of the learning content of the training. In addition to recalling course content many of the delegates commented on the positive use of case studies, discussions around thresholds, information sharing and procedures. Some examples of this include:

“Case studies when things had gone wrong, mistakes had been made. Discussions around the CAF and framework for needs for children.”
(School teacher).
The level of process, best way working in multi agency team, Signs to look out for, not to miss out opportunity to safeguard a young person”.

(Youth Worker)

“That if you have a responsibility to do something about it - discuss it with your supervisor, report it etc. That child protection/safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. That it is important always to put the child's needs first (no matter how sympathetic to/engaged with the carers parents you are) “

(Health professional)

This is evidence that not only had delegates retained knowledge from the course but it had also had an impact on their child protection work.

How has your practice improved?

Of the 48 returns 23% commented that they had a heightened awareness of child protection procedures and 8% commented on their increased confidence level.

Some of the specific examples given as to how the training had directly impacted on practice are shown below:

“Through building positive working relationships I have worked collaboratively with other agencies. By being aware of other agencies and using the CAF process I have been effective in working towards safeguarding the children I'm working with. I feel confident when discussing concerns with my line manager and when using the escalation process.”

(Parent Support Worker)

“More confidence in participating in child protection conferences and core groups. Better understanding of the child protection system and ability to assist and support those going through the system. Increased confidence in knowing when to escalate to safeguarding.”

(Family Support Worker)

“I question more of what is going on - I am more suspicious - Whether this is good or bad - I'm not sure! I am more confident when calling first response - in fact that I will argue the point if I feel it is the best interest for the child.”

(Head Teacher)

“Policies and procedures have been tightened up e.g. ensuring injury on arrival forms are completed by parents/carers and they are contacted by phone if an injury is noticed after their child has been dropped off.”

(Manager-Day Nursery)

“Always ask questions about if there are children in the family set-up with all clients now.”
“Mainly through accessing support for families at LSTs to ensure mental health needs (supported & CAMHS) and family are supported jointly.”

“Termly safeguarding report is now prepared and shared with director, regarding concerns/escalation and procedures followed.”

“I feel I have great awareness of safeguarding issues and the knowledge that can be applied correctly when visiting families in the home. I confidently work through the safeguarding scenario at monthly staff meetings. I am also the link to the LST, the training has increased my confidence when working with any linked families.”

4.0 Discussion

The audit had a higher rate of delegate responses three months after the training than the ‘Carpenter’ research stated in the report. However, the response was still disappointing.

This audit demonstrates that the training course had a positive impact on delegates self rating of knowledge of the course content and their self confidence to practice competently immediately after the course and that this was retained three months after the training. Of those that responded 90% were able to give examples of how their practice had improved as a result of the course. The majority of delegates were able to recall the course content, as the responses were written; some responses were in great detail others less so. Many highlighted the multi-agency aspect of the course and how useful this was. Many highlighted information around CAF’s thresholds and reporting processes. Others reported information around the role of the Local authority Designated Officer (LADO), around the necessity to challenge others and the learning from serious case reviews.

The audit demonstrates that Working Together to Safeguard Children training has had a positive impact on practice; it would no doubt be enhanced by opportunities for further reflection after training (possibly through supervision) as to how the training can be used. Training is a major investment for SSCB and it is essential that the training is as effective as possible. This requires a commitment from delegates in developing, delivering and evaluating training programmes as well as ensuring that learning is applied in the workplace. Munro¹ argues for the need for the child protection system to move from a compliance culture to a learning one, where all organisations become adaptive learning

organisations constantly reflecting and adjusting the work environment to support professionals to use their knowledge, skills and judgement. Releasing staff for child protection training with the expectation that the staff members then commits to apply the learning in practice is central to this.

5.0 Conclusion

This audit has developed and tested a tool that can demonstrate the impact and outcomes of multi agency training on practice. However, there is a considerable resource implication when implementing the tool, as follow up phone calls would no doubt have improved the response rate and provided more detailed responses. However, using any audit tool without the commitment of delegates and managers to participate in the evaluation process will limit its effectiveness.

This audit has clearly demonstrated that delegates attending this course had significant gains in both knowledge of the topic and self-confidence regarding their competence to practice effectively. These gained were gained after three months. The audit provides examples of how the training has directly impacted on multi agency child protection practices and how some workers see that they will continue to use the skills and knowledge in future practice.

6.0 Recommendations

SSCB implements the newly developed Quality Assurance Strategy. The audit tool outlined is included in the strategy, however as the return rates are poor, consideration should be given to the use of the electronic evaluation process - Survey Monkey. It should be noted that whatever processes are used there is considerable resources implications.

It is essential that all delegates attending training are given the opportunity to reflect on training and how the training will impact on practice and supervision appears to be a key mechanism for this, the views of supervisors should try to be included in any future audits.

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