

Monitoring and evaluation

As childcare services are being more widely developed by government, local authorities and employers, there is increasing emphasis on assessing the impact of services. Are services delivering the outcomes they are intended to? Do they provide quality and value for money? What are the measurable benefits, compared with the costs?

4Children can help employers, local authorities and government to assess the impact of their childcare services, using a range of measurements against target outcomes.

These include, as relevant:

- surveys of service users (parents and children)
- cost benefit analysis
- analysis of staff vacancy and turnover rates
- staff recruitment, retention and rates of return from maternity leave
- quality audit
- review of outcomes for children

The South West London Strategic Health Authority commissioned 4Children to look at the impact of the NHS childcare strategy on staff recruitment, retention, and improving working lives in south west London in 2004, and to update this Impact Analysis in 2005.

We found that:

- Savings across SW London resulting from NHS investment in childcare could amount to over £7 million in 2005
- The financial impact on the NHS nationally is likely to be significant, saving an estimated £377 million p.a.

In addition, NHS Trusts had made savings by introducing salary sacrifice schemes for nurseries and childcare vouchers. In excess of £92,500 had been saved on National Insurance and pension contributions by the Trusts implementing childcare vouchers in south west London in 2005.

- 100% of staff using new childcare places said that NHS childcare support helped them to continue to work for the NHS, compared with 94% of users of new NHS childcare in 2004
- 100% said that NHS childcare support had helped to reduce stress, compared with 89% in 2004
- 96% said that the childcare support had enhanced the image of the NHS as a good employer, compared with 86% in 2004

Quality strategies and quality assurance

With the rapid expansion of integrated provision in children's centres and extended schools, developing a consistent quality offer across all services is crucial.

4Children's Aiming Higher quality assurance scheme has been developed to enhance the quality of childcare and education in all services for children aged 0–16 years, in direct response to the needs of childcare practitioners and early years teams, and provides a strong development framework around the needs of the child.

Aiming Higher is a government approved scheme with Investors in Children status. It offers comprehensive and simple to use guidance materials, hands-on support through network of experienced mentors, and fast assessments once childcare settings are ready. Aiming Higher provides a simplified, smooth and effective route through to quality accreditation.

4Children can provide a range of support activities for local authorities and childcare settings looking to achieve quality accreditation. In addition to the Aiming Higher pack, we offer mentoring support, training, pre-assessment visits and assessments.

These can be commissioned by individual settings – or by a local authority that wishes to support individual settings in its area.

Cheshire County Council, for example, has commissioned 4Children to support all of its out-of-school settings in working towards quality assurance

Review policies and procedures

As services for children become more integrated around children's centres and extended schools, and across a wide range of disciplines, integrated policies and procedures for all staff are becoming increasingly important.

Consultancy 4Children can help you to ensure appropriate policies and practices are in place and that they underpin the Every Child Matters outcomes.

Our reviews include:

- Range and implementation of existing policies
- Gap analysis
- Recommendations for good practice and integration
- Suggest revisions and updating required to comply with legislative framework
- Identification of resource requirements to implement recommendations

Reviews are based on consultation with providers and users in respect of the impact of implementation of existing policies and practices currently being delivered, and include:

- Policies and practices effective in implementing the change agenda
- Changes required to achieve integrated service delivery and Every Child Matters outcomes
- Recommendations for policy development

Consultancy 4Children reviewed all early years and out of school/play policies for the London Borough of Hackney, and has developed a pack of good practice policies for out of school schemes: *Getting it Right*, available as a CD-ROM and resource pack.