**Case Study**

**Award:** Finalist for Excellence Wales Status  
**Theme:** Our Services- delivering high quality, citizen centred services  
**Good Practice:** Common Assessment Framework & team around the child project  
**Local Authority:** Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council  
**Contact:**  
Alison Prowle Alison.prowle@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk 01495 355584  
Kelly Butler Kelly.butler@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk 07971 681450

### Introduction

The Blaenau Gwent Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and Team around the Child (TAC) project was introduced in March 2009. The impetus for the project was provided by the Children and Young People’s Plan 2008 - 11. The needs assessment underpinning the plan involved extensive consultation with partner agencies and service users and had identified the following issues:

- Partnership working to support children, young people and families was deemed “patchy”.
- There were some areas of duplication in service provision to support families, and also significant gaps in service provision, particularly in offering flexible bespoke packages of support.
- Agencies highlighted difficulties in sharing personal information about families
- Partners were not always sure what services were available to support families or how to access them.
- There was insufficient targeted preventative work to support families before their needs escalated.

Parent/ carers had also identified the following issues as part of the needs assessment:

- There were too many assessments – families were asked the same questions over and over again!
- Agencies don’t always seem to be talking to each other
- Families were not always sure why each agency is involved, and what their role is
- Parents said they often get conflicting advice and information from different professionals
The Partnership therefore identified the need to introduce a new tier two preventative service for children, young people and families that would address the issues above and would offer:

- Earlier, holistic identification of needs
- Earlier, more effective intervention
- Improved information sharing across agencies
- Better service experience for children and families

The new service would form part of a robust continuum of care, with clear mechanisms for escalation and de-escalation of families according to need, and a strong emphasis on safeguarding issues.

In order to achieve this, the partnership decided to:

- Pilot the use of a Common Assessment Framework across all agencies that work with children and young people (0-16)
- Use the CAF in conjunction with a Team Around the Child model to support children and young people in a more responsive and joined up way.

The CAF and TAC models are outlined below:

**Common Assessment Framework**

The Common Assessment Framework is a new way of working to enable children and young people to achieve their full potential.

It requires those working with children and young people to think differently, record differently and work in a joined up way to support children and young people.

The aim is to identify, at the earliest opportunity, a child’s or young person’s additional needs which are not being met by the universal services they are receiving, and provide timely and co-ordinated support to meet those needs. It has three elements:

- **a simple pre-assessment checklist** to help staff identify children or young people who would benefit from a common assessment. This process also helps identify any safeguarding issues;

- **a process for undertaking a common assessment**, to help staff gather and understand information about the needs and strengths of the child – based on discussions with the child, their family and other practitioners as appropriate;

- **a standard form** to help staff record, and, where appropriate, share with others, the findings from the assessment in terms that are helpful in working with the family to find a response to unmet needs.
The ‘Team Around the Child’

The ‘Team Around the Child’ is a process for co-ordinating support services for children and young people with additional needs following a CAF assessment.

T.E.A.M @ Child/YP (holistic)

Key Challenges

The Partnership agreed that it needed a high quality tier 2 preventative service that:

- offered borough wide coverage
- supported children and young people from birth to 16
- provided co-ordinated, responsive, flexible support to meet identified needs
- solutions focused and built on inherent strengths of families
- could offer a step-down from higher tier interventions.

However, there was no additional resourcing attached to the new plan and change could only be affected by doing things differently, within existing resources.

The partnership therefore made a number of brave decisions, which included:

- decommission a number of projects (including a large Council-led education project) to free up resources to reinvest in priorities
- reconfigure existing Action for Children provision to provide a new service that met the identified needs

The partnership used freed up funding to develop and implement the Common Assessment Framework and Team around the Child project, through a working partnership with Action for
Children, which enabled a brand new borough-wide preventative service - **Project 416** to be established. Through collaborative working with Action for Children the partnership was able to provide a flexible, responsive service offering bespoke time-limited packages of support to vulnerable families.

Managing the change effectively was deemed imperative and this involved extensive partnership with:

- Local development trusts
- Communities First Partnerships
- Voluntary organisations
- Core services - including schools, health services, police and housing

The Partnership used the following approaches to ensure appropriate **engagement** in developing the new services:

- Area based task and finish groups
- Awareness raising sessions
- Multi-agency staff training for CAF

It was also important to fully engage operational staff in the design and implementation of the new services and this was done through a range of mechanisms.

The contribution of service users were an important element in delivering the changes required, and a number of approaches were adopted which included:

- Ensure suitable exit strategies from existing services
- Involving children, young people and families in design of new services
- Innovative ways of engaging with families, including street parties

In order to manage the change, an operational implementation group was established, with strong multi-agency involvement. This group was tasked with developing policies and protocols for the new service.

**Learning & Sharing with others**

- Presentation to National ADSS Conference – Summer 2009
  - Neath Port Talbot
  - Caerphilly
- Presentation to National Children in Wales Conference – November 2009
  - RCT
  - Powys
- Support to other authorities developing integrated working models
  - Wrexham
  - Swansea
• Sharing protocols, Toolkits, Training packages, etc.

• Piloting new services/models that can be replicated elsewhere

• Longitudinal study of project efficacy to add to National evidence base

Making a difference

The CAF/TAC pilot was launched in February 2009 at a high profile Integrated Working Conference. The multi-agency panel was established and met for the first time in March 09. Action for Children Project 416 went live in April 2009. 170 plus CAFs have been received to date. Some early successes from the first 6 months are identified below:

• The project was already being used in an early preventative context and also offering a step-down from higher tier interventions

• Referral agencies included schools, health visitors, housing, police, voluntary organisations

• Keyworkers had been appointed from all relevant agencies

• Flexible and responsive packages of care were being developed

• Excellent linkages to universal and specialist services according to need were facilitating a responsive service for the families

• Close working links to Intake and Assessment (SSD) were providing strong coordinated support and addressing safeguarding concerns

• An Estynn inspection at a local comprehensive identified the CAF model as “outstanding practice”

Parents and children have reported that the keyworker role has improved the coordination of the support. Practitioners report improved information sharing and joined up approach to services.

Future Plans

The next steps for the CAF/TAC project will include ongoing staff development in order to up-skill the workforce in all agencies, completion of a robust evaluation of outcomes for families and children, continuous development and improvement of services and effective multi-agency integrated service delivery.

National context regarding CAF could present as a risk to the CAF/TAC project, along with the distribution of public finances and the pressure on individual agencies. The CYPP will continually liaise with the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure the CAF/TAC project remains on their agenda and to urge the Assembly to make the CAF statutory in Wales as in England.

The operational next steps for the project will include:

• Further development of a keyworker forum

• Further development of a robust keyworker/lead professional support package

• Provision of support to senior managers of operational keyworkers

• On-going development of the Personal Information Sharing Protocols

• Continued rolling programme of training, both in house and external

• Development of the “Team around the cluster” model

• New initiative “families First” voluntary scheme to support the TAC model and strategic management of preventative services

Lessons Learnt

• extensive engagement with all stakeholders such as partners, users and staff to reach common solutions

• multi agency partnership and management structure to manage, implement and monitor the outcomes in line with national and local agendas

• capitalise on the enthusiasm, commitment and diversity of all stakeholders to deliver a more responsive and appropriate service that meets the needs of all

• To maintain the ethos within the project that every child and young person deserves the opportunity to have a flying start in life; in line with WAGs seven core aims. Building upon outcomes focused interventions which engage the hardest to reach families promoting sustainable outcomes and families’ independence