Developing skilled and vibrant professionals
A brief introduction to Strengthening Practice

Since 2007, Strengthening Practice (formerly named Child-Centred Practice) has worked with practitioners across a wide range of service areas and local authorities, supporting continuing professional development within the workplace through coaching, action learning sets, seminars and workshops on core skills, developing policy and procedures, and capturing information about what matters most for children and families.

Training and practice improvement in the social care sector is the principal focus of Strengthening Practice. We design and provide customised training programmes guiding staff through legislative and conceptual frameworks in order to understand how this knowledge applies to: the practical daily activities within the context of their organisation; their local policies and procedures; and the children, young people and families they support. We do this by providing practitioners with an opportunity to reflect on and strengthen their core skillset based on the overarching PCF framework, social work knowledge and skills statements, legislation and evidence-based practice – each topic building on the last.

Whilst seminars and workshops are important traditional training methods, our aim is to help build excellence within the workforce. We supplement the classroom learning with an additional tool kit comprising: case clinics; coaching sessions; action learning sets; learning diaries and action logs; and networking tutorials. All participants receive high quality, comprehensive handbooks and practice tools.

Strengthening Practice is a member of the UK Register of Learning Providers. All trainers are registered social workers with the HCPC and have recent practice experience in the field. Three of our trainers - Jo Fox, Gerry Nosowska and Fareena Shaheed - are associates of Research in Practice (RiP).

We offer two successful and well-received workforce development programmes:

- Strengthening Practice Programme
- Strengthening Managers Programme

These programmes are available in both Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care. Following is an overview of the two programmes.
The Strengthening Practice Programme

The Strengthening Practice Programme (SPP) is based on best practice around learning transfer, and involves participants working with the Strengthening Practice team over an extended period (typically 12 – 18 months) using a variety of methods and tools.

The opportunity to think about practice is presented in a number of different ways with core information being repeated, and new information being added and practised. The commissioning authority identifies the key messages that are then built upon over the programme. Participants get a chance to learn, rehearse, do, review and do again in the workplace to give the best possible opportunity for knowledge transfer into practice.

PROGRAMME AIM

The principal aim of the Strengthening Practice Programme is to support practitioners to improve the lives and experiences of children, young people and families through the application of evidence-based practice in their work.

The programme promotes critical thinking and analysis, good decision making, partnership working and empowerment of children and their families. The emphasis is on helpful interventions based on ‘what works’ from evidence and research.
The aim of the programme is to move from learning through action to impact. This requires a mixture of learning activities, practical exercises, coaching, support, and evaluation. The programme therefore includes:

- A learning needs analysis to support the development of the programme's content;
- A range of tools, information, discussion, reflection and action planning, and a range of materials within workshops; and
- Action planning within workshops to transfer learning into practice.

The messages and content of the programme are developed in close dialogue with the organisation's senior management. As the programme is delivered, learning and action plans are shared with senior management and input is sought on issues that arise.

We utilise a range of tools to enable effective delivery of the Strengthening Practice programme, with each topic area ("module") comprising three session types: Seminar, Workshop and Action Learning Set.

SEMINARS
These are large group events that introduce a theme to a varied audience and include the key messages from the organisation about the purpose of the learning. Typical audience is between 50 to 75 people.

These are an opportunity for the senior team within the organisation to present the key local messages and aspirations alongside the programme leads who will present the national messages and the latest research.

WORKSHOPS
One or two days of face-to-face learning involving group work, that presents the theme in a number of different ways to respond to adult learning styles, including: presentations; videos; role play; problem-solving activities; and demonstrations. Our ideal maximum participants for workshops is 20. The minimum number required for a workshop is 8, and the maximum we allow is 25.

ACTION LEARNING SETS
Small groups that meet to discuss a case study or practice challenge, utilising a range of tools and techniques that the facilitator coaches the group through to produce a better outcome for the client and their family; or targeted group sessions where a practitioner brings a specific issue which the coach works through with the group using questioning, modelling, best practice knowledge and analysis to support the practitioner to think through the issue. Our ideal number of participants in a session is 6. Team-based Action Learning Sets are also very effective.

We use the following methods during the three sessions to embed learning:

- **Rehearsal and Application**: Tasks that require the participant to use the knowledge and tools they have gained. Opportunities are identified with the commissioners, the managers and the practitioners prior to participating in the course. The skill level of the participant is evaluated prior to the course and is monitored in a series of tasks that are performed in the workplace.

- **Learning Log and Diary**: A reflective tool that helps participants to log their daily experiences while assisting them to examine their immediate experiences through their values, belief, knowledge and practice.

- **Comprehensive Training Handbook**: Each course has a comprehensive training handbook providing quality reference content to enhance the learning process. In the Strengthening Practice Programme, these are normally all bound and presented together in a ring binder.

- **Research and Further Reading**: Information made available during the course of the programme that is not mandatory reading but is up to date best practice. This reading is available and can be discussed in any of the above forums. This research should always include the organisation's policy and procedures around the learning theme to ensure they are well linked into the content.
Content and structure of the Programme

The Strengthening Practice Programme comprises a number of discrete but interconnected topic areas, or “modules.” The commissioning authority can construct a programme that best suits their needs (e.g. in response to an Ofsted inspection finding about a particular area of practice) from any or all of the following modules.

1. STRENGTHENING ASSESSMENT
   A two-day module to build capacity and knowledge in frontline staff to use critical thinking, hypothesising and defensible decision making in their assessment work. It supports staff to identify and manage risk and demonstrate their ‘workings out’ so they can be tested and supported through supervision. The workshops introduce tools such as the Risk and Resilience matrix, the Graded Care profile, the Hypothesis Tree and the Impact on the Child Chart to support practitioners to use evidence-based tools in their assessment work.

2. STRENGTHENING PLANNING
   A two-day module that will build capacity and knowledge already gained from the assessment module and support staff to plan meaningful interventions for children in the short, medium and long term. The interventions are based on SMART planning and look at the repair and restoration of children and young people and their families. Included is work on building the Secure Base from the work of Schofield as well as use of the NSPCC Restoration Planning. The workshops consider all children and young people including those in need, in care and leaving care.

3. STRENGTHENING PARENTING CAPACITY
   This two-day module is intended to support practitioners to work well with parents to increase parenting responsibility and responsiveness to their children. It includes understanding capability to parent and making changes within the child’s timeframe.

4. STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION
   This two-day module is designed to help adults who work with children, young people and their families to communicate successfully with them. This module aims to help workers practise mindfully, to measure their words and encourage them to build a relationship through communication. What are we offering in return for a child’s words, feelings and fears? What difference will it make? Children need to understand where their words will end up – where their world will end up as a result of the difficult conversations we ask them to have.

5. STRENGTHENING RECORDING
   This one- or two-day module is intended to look at the best practice in recording including any guidance from research and peak bodies such as Ofsted. Participants will look at the ethics and the importance of recording as well as the legislative requirements for record keeping and data protection. Different versions of the module are available for specific audiences (such as foster carers, for example).

6. STRENGTHENING ATTACHMENT
   A two-day module to support practitioners to understand the theory of attachment, recognise behaviours in children, young people and adults that indicate issues around attachment and explore strategies for improving attachment behaviour and building strong relationships. We also explore the Attachment Regulation and Competency model in parenting.
7. STRENGTHENING SUPERVISION FOR MANAGERS
A two-day module for managers, intended to support them to think about the purpose of supervision, identify their strengths and difficulties and reflect on their role in the organisation, their role within the team and their individual responses. They will look at how to manage poor or under-performance of staff and how to get the most out of their own supervision.

This course is currently being developed as a further result of the work being carried out by Jo Fox on the Research in Practice (RiP) Supervision Change Project.

7(1) STRENGTHENING SUPERVISION FOR SUPERVISEES
This course is also run as a one-day module for all staff to support them to get the most out of their supervision and to increase responsiveness to, and responsibility for, supervision.

OTHER TOPIC AREAS
Strengthening Practice also provide a range of one-day workshops on specific areas of social care practice, such as Neglect, Graded Care Profile, Risk Assessment and Multi-agency safeguarding.

PROGRAMME EVALUATION
Strengthening Practice understands the critical importance of evaluating and understanding the effectiveness (or otherwise) of the learning. Throughout the delivery of the programme we ask: What did people learn and how effective was the training? What difference did the programme make? What would support impact?

We use a number of tools to help us assess the impact of the learning, including: Self-assessment of change in knowledge, skills and confidence through pre- and post-course questionnaires; feedback from participants via session evaluation forms; feedback from facilitators and examples from coaching; 6-month internal Council review of impact. We give feedback to the organisation after each module on the areas above. We encourage the organisation to follow up on learning, impact and support needed through supervision, managers’ meetings and appraisals.

We also offer the option for an independent evaluation of the programme, supported by a week of targeted focus group workshops. The output will be a detailed report summarising the findings and analysing the results. It will include the positives and negatives, how well the programme appears to be meeting the objectives and goals, and lessons/areas for future improvement.
Strengthening Managers Programme

PROGRAMME AIMS

- To support first-line managers to improve the experience and outcomes of children, adults and families in the region,
- To deliver the organisation’s vision and goals and
- To deliver directorate and service vision and goals.

CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAMME

WORKSHOP 1

Strengthening Self (2-day workshop)

- Diagnostic learning needs analysis preparation exercise
- Workshop (with break out for adults' and children's managers)
- Feedback and action learning sessions
- Strengthening self action plan (telephone follow up)
- Peer survey to reflect on the changes in practice of colleagues

WORKSHOP 2

Strengthening Staff (2-day workshop)

- Diagnostic learning needs analysis
- Workshop
- Feedback and action learning sessions
- Strengthening staff action plan (telephone follow up)
- Staff survey to understand impact of actions in teams

WORKSHOP 3

Strengthening the Organisation (2-day workshop)

- Diagnostic learning needs analysis
- Joint session: Strengthening organisation (with break out for adults' and children's managers)
- Feedback and action learning sessions
- Strengthening organisation action plan (telephone follow up)
- Senior managers’ survey to understand the impact of the programme on the organisation

360 DEGREE FEEDBACK

This is a personal development tool which incorporates feedback from peers, staff and senior managers. Feedback is facilitated by an independent expert.
COURSE OBJECTIVES

These objectives aim to develop managers’ own practice, develop their practice with their staff, and develop their practice within the organisation and with other agencies.

STRENGTHEN MANAGERS’ OWN PRACTICE:

- Understand and contribute to the vision and goals of the organisation
- Understand and commit to individual and organisational accountability
- Develop professional judgement through increased self-awareness and reflective work
- Deliver management tasks with confidence under pressure
- Identify and meet their own learning needs
- Ask for support appropriately and use support constructively
- Take ownership of their role within the organisation.

SUPPORT MANAGERS TO STRENGTHEN THE PRACTICE OF THEIR STAFF:

- Act as change agents to embed the vision and goals of the organisation
- Act as role models for critically reflective practice
- Challenge appropriately to improve performance

INTENDED OUTCOME/IMPACT OF THE COURSE MANAGERS’ LEAD, MODEL AND THEMSELVES DELIVER:

- A focus on children, adults and families in the region, with clear expectations and accountability
- Work that is based on outcomes, not on outputs
- Professional judgement through critically reflective practice
- Defensible decision making
- Flexibility, prioritising and proactive self-management in a changing environment
- Constructive challenge and support for improvement
- Continuous learning and development
- Emotionally intelligent practice
- Positive relationships both internally and externally with other agencies.

ENABLE MANAGERS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL CARE IN THEIR REGION, INCLUDING WORKING WITH OTHER AGENCIES:

- Contribute to building and delivering the vision and goals of the organisation
- Contribute to a professional culture
- Support service improvement
- Contribute to a learning culture
- Contribute to a positive working culture
- Act as ambassadors for the organisation.
In order to achieve Council and Directorate goals, managers lead, model and themselves deliver the organisation’s:

- values;
- system change; and
- culture change.

**MEASURABLE INDICATORS**

- Increase in knowledge, skills and confidence following delivery of the programme (based on changes in diagnostic learning needs analysis carried out at start and end of programme, observed learning in sessions, and self-reported learning after sessions).
- Identified actions to transfer learning into practice (identified through sessions)
- Reported transfer of learning into practice by managers and their staff (based on feedback in follow up sessions, on surveys to staff, reporting to senior managers).
- Promote individual and team learning to improve practice
- Provide appropriate support to manage uncertainty, risk and emotional impact
- Examples of actions undertaken as a result of learning (identified through evidence of actions undertaken).

**AUDIENCE**

Managers who supervise frontline staff who deliver social care (social work or occupational therapy background):

- Children's service managers
- Adults' service managers
- Children's and adults' service senior practitioners (to be decided)
- Neighbouring councils' first-line managers (this is under discussion).

**COHORTS**

This programme runs successfully with a cohort of between 15 and 25 managers.

**EVALUATION**

The programme fee does not include an independent evaluation of the programme. We do offer an evaluation option at additional cost. Specific aims of the evaluation will be discussed with you prior to the work commencing to ensure alignment with corporate reporting needs.

**PRICING**

For pricing details of our programmes, please contact us for a discussion and we will prepare a quotation based upon your specific requirements.
Previous practice development and support projects

Strengthening Practice has a wealth of experience delivering services across children’s and adult social care in the UK. Below is a summary list of relevant clients and projects.

2017-Present

2017-Present
Wakefield City Council: Development and delivery of a comprehensive programme of practice training for the entire case-holding workforce of Wakefield Children’s Services (the Strengthening Practice Programme).

2017-Present
Telford and Wrekin Council: Development and delivery of a targeted programme of practice training for the case-holding workforce of Telford and Wrekin’s Children’s Social Care (the Strengthening Practice Programme).

2017-Present
Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council: Development and delivery of two comprehensive programmes of practice training for the entire case-holding workforce of Redcar and Cleveland’s Children’s Social Care (the Strengthening Practice and Strengthening Managers Programmes).

2017-Present
Rochdale Borough Council: Development and delivery of two comprehensive programmes of practice training for the entire case-holding workforce of Rochdale Children’s Social Care (the Strengthening Practice and Strengthening Managers Programmes).

2016-Present

2015-Present
London Borough of Waltham Forest: Development and delivery of a comprehensive programme of practice training for the entire case-holding workforce of Waltham Children’s Services (the Strengthening Practice Programme).

2014-Present
Research in Practice (RiP): Project Lead and lead author on RiP Supervision Change Project.

2014-Present
Middlesbrough Council: Delivery of targeted training modules to Children’s Services and Multi-agency staff (including LSCB), including: Child’s Journey; Listening to Children and Young People; Putting Analysis into Assessment - Defensible Decision-making; New Assessment Framework; Case Recording.

2014-Present
South Tyneside Children’s and Adults’ Social Care: Development and delivery of a comprehensive Strengthening Managers Programme.

2014-2015
Cumbria County Council Adults and Children’s Services: ASYE coaching and mentoring programme for newly-qualified social workers.

2014
Sunderland Council: Delivery of Supervising Effectively for Social Care Managers training.

2013-2014
Cumbria Adult Social Care: Development and delivery of Effective Writing and Analytical Recording in Social Care / Effective Supervision training.

2013-Present
Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council: Delivery of targeted training modules to Children’s Services and Multi-agency staff (including LSCB), including: Graded Care Profile, Neglect, Risk Assessment, Voice of the Child, Parenting Capacity.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013-Present</td>
<td>Northamptonshire CC</td>
<td>Development and delivery of best-practice workshops for Northamptonshire's Children's Services (the Strengthening Practice Programme)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013-Present</td>
<td>South Tyneside Council</td>
<td>Development and delivery of a comprehensive programme of blended learning practice training for the entire case-holding workforce of South Tyneside Children's Services and, latterly, Adult Services (the Strengthening Practice Programme)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013-Present</td>
<td>Southampton City Council</td>
<td>Online practice and procedures manual</td>
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<td>2013-2015</td>
<td>London Borough of Sutton</td>
<td>Delivery of practice improvement training and comprehensive review and rewrite of all Children's Social Care policies and procedures</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea</td>
<td>Delivery of supervision training for supervisors and supervisees</td>
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<td>2012-Present</td>
<td>Cumbria County Council</td>
<td>Development and delivery of a comprehensive programme of blended learning practice training for the entire case-holding workforce of Cumbria Children's Services (the Strengthening Practice Programme)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Oxfordshire County Council</td>
<td>Review of ICT business and spatial data systems leading to the development of an improvement and efficiency implementation roadmap.</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Hartlepool Borough Council</td>
<td>Interim Manager, Over 11s Team, Children's Services</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Peterborough City Council</td>
<td>Development and delivery of best-practice workshops for Peterborough Children's Services; review and gap analysis of existing CP procedures</td>
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<td>2011-Present</td>
<td>London Borough of Barnet</td>
<td>Online practice and procedures manual</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010-Present</td>
<td>Research in Practice (RiP)</td>
<td>Development and delivery of best-practice seminars and workshops for national and local audiences</td>
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<td>2010-2014</td>
<td>Hertfordshire County Council</td>
<td>Development and delivery of a comprehensive, blended learning training package for all levels of Children's Services staff</td>
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<td>2010-2014</td>
<td>Surrey County Council</td>
<td>Online practice and procedures manual</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>Buckinghamshire County Council</td>
<td>Continuous professional development training</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>London Borough of Barnet</td>
<td>Development and delivery of comprehensive training package for Children's Services managers</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>Milton Keynes Council</td>
<td>Introducing Common Assessment training</td>
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<td>2009-Present</td>
<td>Hartlepool Borough Council</td>
<td>Development and delivery of a comprehensive, blended learning training package for all levels of Children's Services staff</td>
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<td>2009-2014</td>
<td>Isle of Man Government</td>
<td>Development and delivery of a comprehensive blended learning training package for all levels of Children's Services staff; Advisor, Integrated Children's System (ICS) implementation</td>
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<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>UK Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)</td>
<td>Writing practice and policy guidance (Integration Children's System Improvement Programme); Advisory Group for the text Children's Needs – Parenting Capacity, 2nd Ed, pub. DCSF 2011</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>London Borough of Barnet</td>
<td>Evaluation of ICS implementation and next steps planning</td>
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<td>2008-09</td>
<td>Essex County Council</td>
<td>Development and delivery of a comprehensive, blended learning training package for all levels of Children's Services staff; Development of an online practice and procedures manual</td>
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<td>2008-09</td>
<td>Hertfordshire County Council</td>
<td>Practice training, assessment and care planning; evaluation of effectiveness in multi-agency working in Child Protection conferences and core groups</td>
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<td>2008-09</td>
<td>Buckinghamshire County Council</td>
<td>Practice training; Planning for the ICS journey</td>
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<td>2008-09</td>
<td>Telford and Wrekin Council</td>
<td>Facilitation of management planning days for further ICS implementation</td>
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<td>2008-09</td>
<td>Blackburn with Darwen Council</td>
<td>ICS practice training</td>
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<td>2008-09</td>
<td>Hartlepool Borough Council</td>
<td>Development of an online Practice Manual; ICS practice training</td>
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<td>2008-09</td>
<td>Action for Children</td>
<td>IT implementation project scoping and facilitation</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>London Borough of Islington</td>
<td>Evaluation of the Borough's ICS implementation</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>Cumbria County Council</td>
<td>Mobile working pilot</td>
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<td>2006-07</td>
<td>Welsh Government</td>
<td>Common Assessment Framework (CAF) implementation training across Wales</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>Somerset County Council</td>
<td>Management away days; facilitation of CAF ICS practice training</td>
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