

Licence to develop Inspiring and collective learning in the field of child protection

ABSTRACT

The Kehrä network project for the development of child protection in the Metropolitan Area operated in the Socca Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area from 2009 to 2011. It was part of the “Lapsen ääni” (Child’s Voice) development programme funded by the Kaste programme. Kehrä comprised three large areas: development of the operations of the 19 participating child protection work groups, the Praksis network which developed practice teaching in child protection, and the five pilots included in the practical study on supporting parent recovery during a placement in substitute care. Over 400 child protection workers and over 140 students took part in the Kehrä project in the Metropolitan Area.

The development of the Kehrä workgroups has been examined from the perspectives of collective and dialogue-oriented approaches. Collective development is possible in day-to-day child protection when dialogue-oriented and reflective practices and structures that are also flexible in terms of the needs of work communities are created to support it. In addition, success requires enthusiasm and commitment from the participating people. A process-like and systematic approach is important in collective development. The development is based on practical needs, which should be mirrored throughout the process. It must be possible to change the direction if necessary. Development is not something removed from basic day-to-day work – it is fundamentally a part of everyday efforts.

Direct leadership is extremely significant in terms of the development of work communities. The leading social worker is the person who makes an active and interactive approach to development possible. The special development social workers operating in the work community bring a long-term perspective to teaching and research, and ensure the progression of the development process together with the leading social workers.

In the Kehrä project, the development efforts renewed work practices with regard to the beginning of new client relationships, planned work and the support of parents during placement in substitute care. Client involvement is the key principle for all development work. The work groups indicated that it is hard to imagine any development efforts in the future without involving clients in the process. First and foremost, the development conducted together had a dramatic impact on the development culture, mindset and occupational wellbeing of the work communities.

The Praksis network for child protection in the Metropolitan Area created a model for combining practice teaching, development and research. The method was developed through the collaboration of municipalities, University of Helsinki and universities of applied sciences in the Metropolitan Area. The experiences of students, practical teachers and Praksis work communities are a tale of shared learning, in which the dialogue of practical information and research data increased the understanding of child protection work among everyone involved.

The end result of the Praksis project was an information creation model based on practice research. The reflective and dialogue-oriented structures of work communities provide room for a “Praksis mindset”, in which the consolidation of various types of information and the synergies of different practices improve each other and, most importantly, social work with clients.