

Engaging with children and parents with complex needs – a systems approach

Jane's story

Jane is a social worker working for a local not-for-profit organisation. With three years' experience working with disadvantaged parents and their children she is developing confidence in her practice but wonders why some of her clients don't return to her service. Jane sometimes worries that she is not doing enough to help the families who she works with, and wishes she had better information to help her understand their needs. Jane's service occasionally facilitates client participation forums and receives client feedback forms – which are generally positive – but she wonders what more she could do. Jane also receives collated demographic information about her clients at the end of each quarter, but this does not seem to provide her with the answers she is looking for.

Jane has started asking every client about their experience in her service, and what would help to keep them engaged in service provision. This has generated rich conversation, and she is finding out a lot of information that she never knew about the children and parents who she supports. For example, many of the mothers who work with her have said that they sometimes struggle to make their appointments because of financial hardship.

Jane discussed her findings with her manager who often talks about data-informed service provision, but numbers have never really been Jane's thing.

Thinking about Jane's example, we invite you to consider the following in relation to your own practice:

- What information do you currently collect about your clients? Is this the information you need, or is there something more you'd like to know?
- What do you want to know from your clients? What strategies do you use to collect this information? How might you record and analyse it?
- How do you use data to make decisions about individual client sessions or service design?
- Are there ways that you could use data in your service that involve minimal time or intrusion?
- Have you or your organisation ever partnered with academic institutions or researchers? How would you go about this?