

Evaluation Case Study: Coaching for Leaders programme

Lincolnshire County Council

Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) governs the non-metropolitan county of Lincolnshire in England. It covers an area of 2,286 square miles, within which lives a population of 714,800. The Council headquarters are based in the City of Lincoln and the Council currently has 77 councillors.



Families Working Together

Families Working Together (FWT) is based within LCC and is "Lincolnshire's response to the Government's Troubled Families programme". (www.lincolnshire.co.uk/children) It was set up in April 2011 as a Community Budget project which works on helping families with complex needs. The aim of FWT is to address these family issues in a coherent way. This is done by way of a Key Worker, who works closely with families, helping to draw up a Family Action Plan that addresses all of the family's issues. The Key Worker then brings in services and partner agencies to help achieve this plan. A Key Worker assists families in solving their problems for themselves by providing them with the tools to develop the skills they need to do so.

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Understanding the challenge

Alison Poxon, Team Manager at FWT was keen to help her frontline social work managers broaden their approach to how they supported the families they were working with. Alison was eager to ensure that her team were equipped to adopt a curious, questioning and non-directive approach to the way they identified solutions in collaboration with their clients.

Agreeing the Solution

Alison had previous knowledge and experience of coaching and could quite easily draw various parallels between the skills required to be an effective coach and those required to be an effective social worker. Alison approached Chris Leggett, Head of Programmes at The Beech Centre for People, Performance and Organisational Development and together they worked collaboratively to decide upon an intervention that would have the greatest impact for the delegates and that would achieve the best outcomes against Alison's objectives for the team's development. They decided upon The Beech Centre's Coaching for Leaders development programme, as this would incorporate learning around all of the skills and behaviours Alison wanted her team to develop. Chris also had knowledge and experience of using this intervention within another organisation which had a similar requirement to great effect; this gave them confidence that this programme was indeed the correct intervention.

Successful Implementation

Although this particular intervention had been used previously by The Beech Centre within another organisation, this was not to say that it was approached and utilised in the same way with FWT. As with all The Beech Centre's work with clients, Chris worked collaboratively with Alison and her team to mould the programme to specifically fit their needs, in order for the optimum return on investment to be achieved. This was done by allowing time for a lot of discussion within the programme, where delegates were encouraged to identify parallels between the themes, models and frameworks introduced and their own personal experience of working with families. This allowed the participants to be able to truly link the learning to their work, making the application of what they had learnt straightforward. The experiential nature of the programme, as with all Beech Centre programmes, meant that a large proportion of the candidates' time was spent practically utilising their learning. Inviting candidates to do this in a safe environment allows them to build the skills and confidence to do so when visiting the families they worked with.

The Impact

The delegates on the programme were invited by Alison to complete two questionnaires- one prior to the programme commencing and the other after completion of the programme. This presented the opportunity for the impact of the course to be thoroughly measured, and comparable data to be produced, including numerical statistics for some questions.

One area that both questionnaires enquired about was the level of knowledge and awareness the participants had of coaching. Prior to the programme, a large number of delegates described having a non-existent or low level of knowledge, with many describing being unsure as to the difference between coaching and mentoring. Some participants described having knowledge or experience, with some having completed coaching qualifications previously, however none of the participants scored their knowledge level at the maximum 10 out of 10 rating. The post questionnaire saw an increase in the scores given for all of the participants in relation to their knowledge level of coaching, some by up to 70%, with the mean average of the scores increasing from an average of 4.2 pre programme to 8.6 post programme. All participants described being more confident when describing what coaching means and how they would use it, both within their role working with families and within day to day life. All delegates also described an increased self-awareness with regards to the way they now interact with families; whether their behaviour reflected the curious, non-directive style of a coaching approach.

Another aspect measured was how important the participants considered it is to be self-aware when working with families. All delegates both before and after the programme considered self-awareness to be extremely important and so the numerical data was recorded at a mean average of 9.7 out of 10 at both pre and post questionnaire. The shift was seen in the explanation of the answer, with the themes of the pre questionnaire being mostly around awareness of strengths and weaknesses in order for self-improvement to take place, as well as ensuring professional practice and boundaries are adhered to. In the post questionnaire comments, much more emphasis was placed upon how a Key Worker's high level of self-awareness has a directly positive impact on how families engage and interact with them. Many participants noted that when a Key Worker is aware of their body language, actions, the things they say and the way they turn up, they can ensure that they do so in a manner that impacts positively on families, in turn leading to a higher level of engagement and quicker progression towards goals set together. Some participants also referenced models and frameworks they had learnt which would help them to make sure they remain self-aware; one also described a scenario where she had introduced a model she had learnt within her work with a family.

In the post programme questionnaire, the candidates were asked to identify any models or frameworks used during the intervention which had the greatest impact on them. Many were mentioned, including the GROW model, which nearly all delegates commented was simple and they could easily envisage transferring into their day to day work with families. The use of coaching triads was also described as being helpful, as candidates could practice using a coaching approach in a safe environment, receive honest and constructive feedback and learn from one another.

Participants were then asked what actions they were going to take, both professionally and personally as a result of the programme. Most participants described how they are now going to refrain from attempting to fix everybody else's problems for them, and instead use the tools and techniques they have learnt to empower others to make their own decisions and come up with their own solutions. Many now described seeing their role as more of an enabler- the person who provides individuals and families with the opportunity to solve their own problems and provide them with the tools they require to do that as and when appropriate. Many also described using this non-judgemental, non-directive approach in non-work situations such as with friends and family too, showing the impact that the introduction of coaching skills has had on the participants in all areas of their lives.

Quotes from some of the participants:

“ It was very useful to take time out from your professional role and have more in-depth discussions with colleagues about your professional roles but even more on a personal level; to realise you may have some similar interests to one another and how you perceive them may differ. ”

“ I really feel this programme has helped me to grow professionally. It leaves you with a lot to think about and can only have a positive effect on the way you work with clients and colleagues. ”

“ I would recommend this programme-it gives you time to think and self-reflect, you learn so much about yourself. ”

“ ...This course has highlighted that I coach on a daily basis without realising. I gained more knowledge of the effect that coaching can have by empowering people. ”

“ The programme was well done. It engaged the audience and we were able to put it into practice almost immediately. ”

“ This programme has been extremely beneficial in terms of my personal life and professional life and I will have much more confidence to positively challenge people without feeling like I have caused any upset. ”

“ This course has enhanced my skills to let the family think about how they can solve their own problems...this has increased my capabilities within my professional role. ”

“ It has made me more conscious of my practice which, as a result has led me to make small changes that give me greater confidence in the work I do. ”

Next Steps?

For more information on Coaching for Leaders or any of The Beech Centre's development programmes, please contact us at info@thebeechcentre.co.uk