

Evaluating the Gwella Approach

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'Gwella'

- Project managed and run by Barnardo's Cymru from 2017-20;
- An intervention designed to support children aged between 5 and 11 yrs, who were involved with social services and had experienced trauma and abuse:
 - providing a trauma-informed system of supportive professionals around them, and;
 - improving their relationships with their primary carers.

Evaluating 'Gwella'

- Took place throughout the timeframes of the project:
 1. what is the Gwella intervention, and how can it be delivered effectively?;
 2. what are the outcomes from the Gwella intervention for children and families, and what is the 'added value' of the project?
- We wanted to hear from all those involved with Gwella:
 - 18 of the families (25 parents and carers and 19 children) took part in the evaluation. We used play-based creative activities to help involve children.
 - Gwella practitioners; Gwella team; specialist consultants; external professionals from education and social services

Process evaluation

- What was 'Gwella'?
- How was it realised in practice?
- Where there any obstacles to its implementation?
- What methods and strategies 'worked best' in project delivery?
- How well 'Gwella' was integrated with other services?

Outcomes evaluation

- What differences were made, for whom, why and how?
- Is Gwella different and how?
- Can Gwella be improved?



Key findings: The Gwella project in practice

- trauma-informed, relational and play-based approach to working with children and families;
- central focus on understanding and being led by the needs of parents, children and carers;
- responsive to the varied, and family specific nature of concerns, and worked with parents, carers and children to identify areas of support that were important to them.

A focus on relationships

1. The relational bond between parent/carer and child;
2. Supporting the relationship between parent/carer and child;
3. Building a relationship and connection with children;
4. Relationships in the system around the child.

Case study: the 'Grant family'

- Lucy, aged 7, referred to Gwella because of trauma relating to parental substance misuse and witnessing domestic violence.
- They had trouble with dealing with Lucy's emotions and night terrors; parents not communicating well.
- Meeting fortnightly with dad and Lucy on alternate weeks or together. Focussing on dad understanding Lucy's needs and helping Lucy to understand her emotions through play.
- After 12 months, Lucy was no longer experiencing night terrors; parents reported her emotional stability and confidence had improved; School reported that Lucy's behaviour had improved and she was no longer discussing traumatic events from her past as though they were still happening.



Key findings: Outcomes evaluation

Parents views

- Universally positive:
- Trust building, creating a bond, relationship improvements, confidence in parenting;
- Significant improvements in their children's wellbeing;
- Changes in their understanding of trauma and how to meet their children's needs;
- Significant improvements in family life;
- Changes in involvement with social services included reduced concerns, better relationships, their case being closed.

Parents views

"I just think it's really good for like you know trust building and stuff and you know like and just getting that quality time together really. And just learning different ways of coping with [child's] emotions and [child] being able to cope with his emotions because before you know, like before he started any of this work you know [child] wouldn't cry you know he'd just be like whatever was happening, even if he wanted it to or not or anything he'd just you know, just sit back and distance himself and just be like well if it's going to happen it's going to happen or you know whatever like isn't it. But you know like doing the work with [practitioner] you know really helped [child] open up and be like you know no, I don't want to do that, no this shouldn't be happening, this should be. And you know he's cried now which none of us saw him cry at all you know." Mother

Children's views



Researcher: So your unicorn book, was it a colouring book?

Child: Yep it was like colouring book, it has like stars and castles and unicorns and things like that.

Researcher: And how come [practitioner] gave you that, just as a present or?

Child: Like the like she gave it to me because like I was sad and I had worries and things like that she gave it to me to stop having my worries. If I am sad I get to colour in my, and I bought a book just in case, if I'm happy I draw a happy one, if I'm sad if I draw a sad one. [...]

Researcher: So you were going to say something else about [practitioner].

Child: Me and [practitioner] up Daddy's we made like a bottle and then we put some things in and then when I am mad or like when I'm sad I shake it like that, shake shake shake.

Foster carers' views

- Unsure whether to attribute the changes to Gwella;
- Mixed impression:
 - Changes in calming strategies and behaviours, or;
 - Significant changes, or;
 - No change but because the intervention wasn't suitable for that particular child.

External agencies: social workers

- Reported similar changes to those from parents;
- Reduced/no concerns, successful rehabilitation plans;
- helped the relationship and building trust with agencies;

"And mum as I said, she was really difficult to sort of express any emotions, showing emotion was always to her a sign of weakness whereas now you know she will go and hug the children, they do enjoy doing activities together. She has really learnt how to appreciate family time and just sort of basic things like cooking together and being able to talk to each other. And you can see the children have really appreciated that and you know they're thriving on it now and we're actually looking to close the case to social services."

Social worker

- Where there was no change it was due to organizational issues.

External agencies: education

"I think the outcome is that we have a happier family. We have a family that hasn't got as many arguments, as much disruption, we haven't got the police being called you know the children aren't seeing violence. And just the biggest outcome is happier children, happier homes, happier parents. And parents who are ready to parent and not just argue with each other, they're seeing what actually is important and the importance is the child. So I'd say that's the biggest outcome is that how we've turned, well the Gwella project and everybody else involved, we've seen this family completely turn around. So I'd say that's the biggest outcome is happier children, happier home"

Educational professional



Key findings: Process evaluation

Impact on delivery and outcomes?

- A trusting relationship is key for delivery & outcomes;
- Consistency in the relationship was also key to the perceived success or failure of the project.
- Flexibility with the intervention;
- Duration of the intervention.

Impact on delivery and outcomes?

- Logistical arrangements and practicalities;
- Flexible arrangements and smaller caseloads;
- Multi-agency working and case formulation meetings;
- Wider context of time-bounded funding?



Key findings:
Added value?



How Gwella is different

- Case formulation meeting;
- Support and ongoing involvement/advice for practitioners and professionals;
- Independence and unique position of practitioners.

Thank you

The research team wishes to thank Barnardo's and the Gwella team for their collaboration on this project, the families, children and professionals who gave their time and shared their perspectives, and the Welsh Government for funding this project.

To read more, the summary and full reports can be accessed here:

<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/research/explore/find-a-project/view/2427641-an-evaluation-of-the-gwella-approach>