

Crescendo Impact Report 2022

Executive Summary

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Centre for
Public Impact
A BCG FOUNDATION

Frontline
Making social work
better for children

About Crescendo

Crescendo is a collaboration between social workers and UK charity the Centre for Public Impact, dedicated to reimagining children's social care to enable better relationships between practitioners and the children and families they support.

Crescendo's work started from a position of hope and optimism for the future of children's social care. Built on the first-hand experience of seeing practitioners do their best to support and protect children and families every day, the Crescendo team are working to help create the conditions needed for relationship-based social work to thrive.

The challenge

The wider context of austerity and poverty has led to local government struggling to meet the needs of communities. In addition, the cost of living crisis and COVID-19 has only exacerbated long-standing problems. All of this is making social care practitioners' jobs harder, making them feel less equipped to support families.

Local authorities need to make the best use of their resources in uncertain times. But too often, the systems, processes and culture are focused away from what is needed.

The current children's social care system does not always prioritise relationships between practitioners and children and families, nor does it enable practitioners to do their best work. We recognised this needed to change. However, we wanted to pursue a different approach to creating change. We wanted to develop an approach that prioritised relationships between social care practitioners, children and families, and time spent together. To do this, we wanted to co-create change with practitioners, to ensure the change was "done with" and "not done to".



80%

Social workers spend approximately 80% of their time on paperwork and navigating bureaucracy (BASW, 2020)



77%

of practitioners said they felt they could not help people as much as they wanted (Social Work England, 2020)

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Children's social care is complicated, bureaucratic and too often risk averse, and this has the combined effect of taking social workers' time away from practice and reducing their ability to support children and families.”

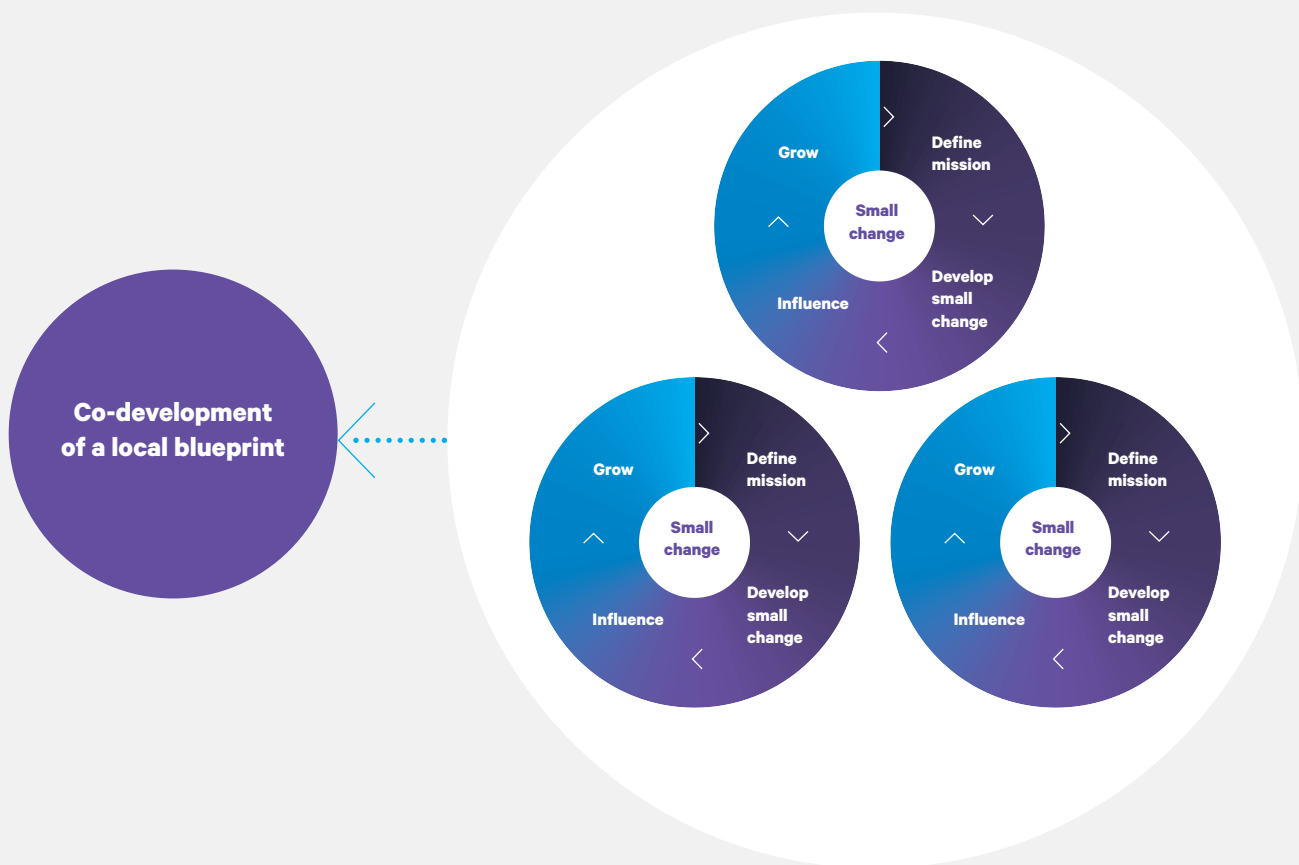
Independent Review of Children's Social Care, 2022

Our approach

Our approach prioritises the voice of practitioners and unlocks their potential. We enable them to make the small changes which can make a big difference to the amount of time they spend with children and families.

Small changes are those within the local authority's scope of influence that can change now without any changes to national regulation or legislation, such as streamlining processes or changing how a duty system works.

We then build on small changes and what has been learned to co-design a different way of working alongside social workers and leaders. This involves designing and implementing a local blueprint for wider change; to create a system that allows more time to be spent with children, and enables practitioners to do their best work.



Supporting local authority partners

We have piloted this approach with three local authorities across the last 12-18 months: Warrington Borough Council, London Borough of Tower Hamlets and the London Borough of Wandsworth. We are currently implementing and embedding the local blueprints we have co-created with our partners.

Our work London Borough of Wandsworth

Crescendo has been working with the Evolve team in Wandsworth since November 2021. Evolve is an Early-Help service within the local authority. It offers intensive support to young people and young adults (up to age 25) who are at risk of, or affected by: going missing, exploitation and serious youth violence.

To provide a framework for making small changes, Evolve set a vision for the values and principles they wanted to be at the heart of their practice. They also identified the barriers that prevent that from becoming a reality.

Values and principles



Barriers



Our work

London Borough of Wandsworth

These barriers formed the focus for Evolve to identify small changes they could make, before deciding on four to prioritise.

Small changes



By implementing these changes, the Evolve team have begun to adapt their ways of working to enable them to spend more time with children and families.

Making small changes helped the Evolve team and leaders further understand the system they work in. It also exposed the more challenging systemic barriers in the way of practitioners building relationships with children and families and living the vision they outlined. The next stage for Evolve was to consider what a local blueprint could look like from these small changes.

Evolve created a [blueprint](#) focusing on two areas of service that could be reformed to better support practitioners to work effectively: changing their approach to meetings, and developing innovative approaches to recording. The blueprint outlines a series of experiments that could be undertaken in each focus area, to overcome systemic barriers and establish the conditions for continuous learning. Crescendo and Wandsworth are considering how to implement the local blueprint in the Evolve service. Alongside this work, we are exploring how to spread the learning across the broader system in Wandsworth.

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Since these changes have been implemented, practitioners have reported that the protected slots in their calendars have allowed them to allocate their time better; they've also gained the confidence to push back on meeting invites where their attendance wouldn't have a clear purpose.”

Beth & Elisha, London Borough of Wandsworth

Our work Warrington Borough Council

Crescendo worked with the whole children's social care system across Warrington. Because of this project's scope, we decided to employ a more wide-ranging, less intensive approach to delivery; we would work directly with those in managerial or leadership positions, who would then engage the practitioners and other stakeholders within their service.

We engaged the wider workforce to create a shared vision of the values and principles they wanted to be at the heart of their practice, and identified the barriers that prevent the vision from becoming a reality.

Values and principles



Barriers



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When the Crescendo team joined us here in Warrington, there was a widely-held, but little-spoken, belief that there was too much bureaucracy within children's social care. People were spending lots of time behind computers, and the administrative work had become all-consuming. Individual people across the service had been trying to improve things incrementally within their roles, but we didn't have the impetus or permission to come together for joined-up working. It took embarking on this project for us to realise that we needed a service-wide 'call to action' around making changes to put good social care practice at the heart of everything we do, for the good of the child at the centre.”

Lisa, Warrington Borough Council

Our work

Warrington Borough Council

The teams then developed and implemented a series of small changes across different themes. The small changes were led by a variety of teams across children's social care, including the full Child in Need service and Independent Reviewing Officers, Fostering, Mosaic and Business support teams.

Each team was given permission to act autonomously, and were encouraged to collaborate extensively with one another. A key component to developing this way of working involved getting staff to build relationships across teams. This was facilitated through experiments in co-locating staff and by setting aside regular reflection time across teams.

Mission strand	Small change	What was the intended impact?
Improving staff retention	New induction process for staff	A new and improved induction process will support staff to feel more familiar and aligned with the values and ways of working of children's services, and thus more connected with their colleagues, which will mitigate against future burnout and churn.
Having effective recording practices	Changing the invite process for Children Looked After reviews	Completing the original invite sheet was frustrating for practitioners, the IRO and admin support; it required extensive emailing and auditing before necessary invitees were communicated with. An updated form, integrated with Mosaic, allowed for a more efficient process, which cut down on administrative back-and-forth, and better ensured that Children Looked After would have a speedily-arranged review meeting, with the appropriate people in attendance.
Speeding up decision-making and authorisation	Speeding up decision-making and authorisation, allowing social workers access to and ownership of food vouchers	Giving social workers the autonomy to access and distribute food vouchers ensures they can disseminate essential support to the families that need it.

Currently, we are working with Warrington to create a local blueprint which is focused on embedding a culture of experimentation and learning through small changes. This involves helping Warrington to develop an evaluation strategy and an effective method to track the numerous small changes being made across the system.

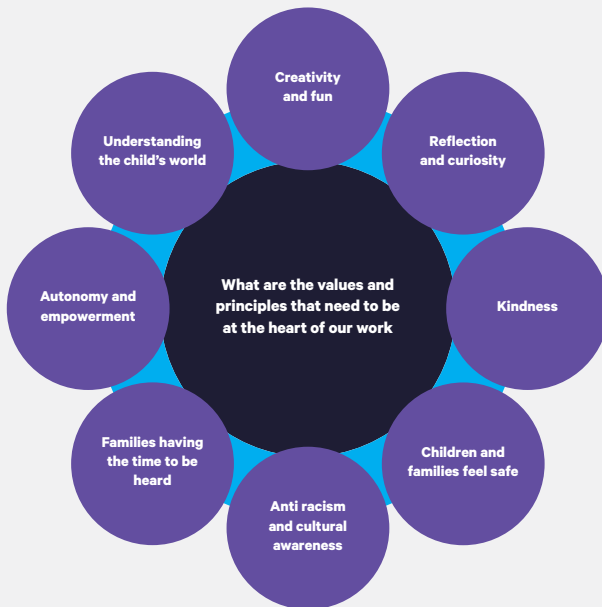
Our work

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Crescendo worked with two teams across the Family Support and Protection service (FSP) in Tower Hamlets. The FSP service consists of two teams which work with children subject to Child in Need or Child Protection Plans, and/or where public law proceedings have been initiated.

The two teams created a shared vision of the values and principles they wanted to be at the heart of their practice, and identified the barriers that prevent the vision from becoming a reality.

Values and principles



Barriers



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I think the key enabler for successfully delivering small changes has been the motivation and passion from within my team and from management; everyone's got lots of ideas they want to see implemented and they're aware of the positive effects that small changes are having. That sense of having regular and enthusiastic buy-in from stakeholders across our service has been so important in successful uptake; we need to hear that change is good and that people want change to happen.”

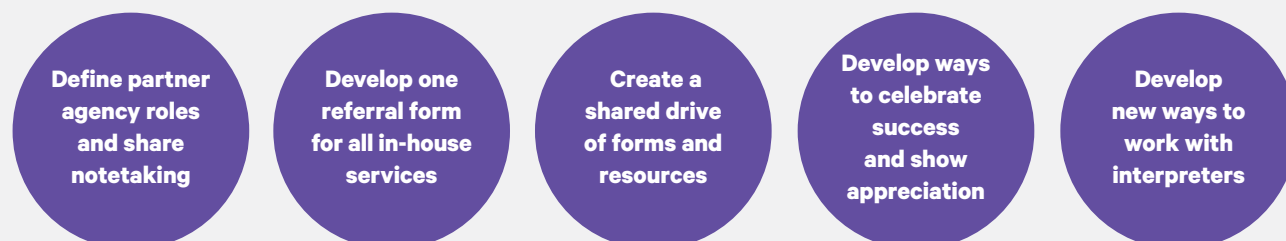
Syeda, London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Our work

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

After developing mission strands from the barriers, the two teams identified five small changes to start with:

Small changes



Following a period of defining, delivering and reflecting on small changes, teams across Tower Hamlets had learned enough about their service to co-design their local blueprint alongside the Crescendo team. At the heart of the local blueprint were the following commitments:

- Everything is about improving the support for the child and family through enabling relationships.
- Practitioners need to be enabled to spend more time with children and families and give them the right support, at the right time.

For their local blueprint, the teams chose three priority areas to focus on to help drive wider system change and are currently working with the Crescendo team to consider implementation:

- Build better partnerships with external agencies, to ensure effective contribution of all agencies to promote the welfare of the child.
- Creating better ways of working with Business Support colleagues.
- Further develop a culture of learning and innovation led by the Principal Social Worker (PSW).

Insights

We have engaged in continuous learning and reflection throughout our approach, and some of our findings include:

Culture

We did not fully anticipate the positive impact the approach would have on practitioner wellbeing and morale. We found that practitioners felt more connected to one another, to their local authority and to their practice as a result of being part of the project.

Sustainability

The key to embedding sustainability around the Crescendo approach lies in cultivating local 'champions' and generating enthusiasm for our work.

Building relationships

Relationships are key to the Crescendo approach. The informal, relationship-building aspects of the workshops (providing snacks, playing music, making the content conversational and interactive) are important. All levels of a service need to be bought into the Crescendo approach, particularly when it comes to delivering small changes, and bringing people together to talk about change is a helpful exercise in and of itself.

Return on investment

If staff are feeling burnt out and disconnected from the values of their sector, they are more likely to leave their role, or their profession. Crescendo's approach helps to reconnect staff with their values and supports them to undertake better, more frequent direct work with children, young people and their families.

Impact

We have identified four specific areas where we have had an impact. This has been supported by data gathered from our work with the Evolve team in Wandsworth.



We have encouraged greater feelings of connectedness amongst teams and colleagues.

The inclusion of multiple perspectives in developing solutions has enhanced the ability of the organisation to solve common problems. Improvements to practitioners' well-being enhanced their energy levels and mindset when it came to working directly and constructively with families.



Social care professionals have found avenues through which they can feasibly affect meaningful change.

The Crescendo approach helps staff to affect change at a meaningful pace – through a method that replenishes their energy levels, rather than draining them.

75% of respondents from Evolve believed that small changes had positively impacted their job satisfaction to a moderate or large extent. All eight respondents (100%) believed that small changes had positively impacted how effective they are as a team to a moderate or large extent.

87.5% of respondents believed that small changes had helped them to positively effect change within their local authority to a moderate or large extent.



Staff feel empowered, motivated and connected with the purpose of their roles.

By identifying and implementing change within their services, participants in the Crescendo approach brought their roles further in line with their values. This alleviated feelings of stress amongst the workforce, mitigated against future burnout, and translated into more positive direct work with children and families. Reflecting on this, we realised that the Crescendo approach isn't so much a revolution in the way in which social care service delivery is effected - it's more about bringing social care back to the principles that lay at the founding of the profession, and the hearts of its practitioners.

87.5% of respondents believed that small changes had positively impacted how valued they felt in their role to a moderate or large extent.



A sense of optimism around children's social care.

By encouraging teams to develop and deliver small changes, we saw that teams started to see the potential for positive change through their own actions, which positively impacts the amount of time they spend with children and families.

All of the respondents believed that small changes had increased the amount of time that they or their team spent in direct work with children, young people or families to a moderate or large extent. Three respondents reported to a large extent, while five responded to a moderate extent.

Future plans

After a successful pilot phase, we want to continue building the evidence base for our intervention, and connect with the wider sector. We would be delighted to hear from:

- Social care organisations, such as local authorities and trusts, that would be interested in following the Crescendo approach to change;
- Any individuals looking to embed cultures of experimentation and learning within their public service, outside of children's social care;
- Any organisations which are looking to share learning around our mission and activities; true to our principles, we're learning all the time and adapting our approach;
- Organisations which are looking to support us in our mission.

If you'd like to connect and discuss any of the points raised above, or anything else you think would be of interest, get in touch with either Katie Rose, Director at the Centre for Public Impact, at katie@centreforpublicimpact.org, Ryan Wise, Practice Tutor at Frontline, at ryan.wise@thefrontline.org.uk or Michaela Berry, Service Manager at michaelaberry8775@gmail.com

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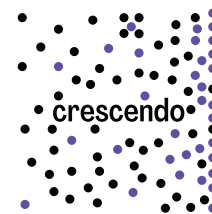
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