

## Improving the Experiences and Outcomes for Families and Professionals Seeking Support Through the Starfish and Starfish Plus Consultation Line

### Introduction

The consultation line was set up by the Starfish - Learning Disabilities (LD) & Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and Starfish Plus – Intensive Therapeutic Service - LD & CAMHS teams as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure both teams are still accessible to families, carers and professionals who are seeking guidance and support from the teams who may not have an open referral. This QI project sought to review the impact of the consultation line on its callers and evidence the continuation of the line as part of the service plan. Children and young people with Learning Disabilities and/or Autism and their families and carers should be able to expect high quality care across all services provided by the NHS (NHS Improvement, 2018). This should encompass the implementation of reasonable adjustments and continuous improvement across services. The continuation of the line will enable the teams to continue to be pro-active in ensuring appropriate referrals are made to the correct team through offering professional advice or signposting. Additionally, this will also improve the experiences and outcomes for children, young people, their families and carers whom a professional may be calling about or the family themselves and in turn enabling early intervention if needed.

### The Approach

#### Aim

To understand the impact of the consultation line on the experiences and outcomes for families and professionals seeking support through the Starfish and Starfish Plus consultation line and subsequently referrals made to the services.

#### Measures utilised

The project initially took a baseline, based on the referrals made to both services in the 8 weeks prior to the set-up of the consultation line to enable a benchmark to compare referrals pre consultation line and post.

#### Methodology – PDSA cycle for improvement (Langley et al 2009)

**Cycle 1:** Review the referrals made to both services in the 8 weeks prior to the consultation line and to confirm the hypothesis. This information was utilised to create a baseline.

**Cycle 2:** Utilise the service spreadsheet that holds records of all who contacted the consultation line to contact and gain feedback from callers – making note of 'key' words used by callers to summarise their experience of the consultation line and whether a referral was made to either of the teams following the consultation.

**Cycle 3:** Electronic survey rolled out to gain staff perspectives of the consultation line.

**Cycle 4:** Review the referrals made to both services after the first 8 weeks of the consultation line being 'live'.

**Cycle 5:** Following data collected from cycle 4, this identified a reduction in referrals to both teams. This highlighted the effectiveness of the consultation line as a resource for both families, carers and professionals whom may need advice and not necessarily a referral to either team.

The presence of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns are impacting upon everyone's well-being and significantly more so on those who have a Learning Disability and/or Autism and their families (NHS, 2020.) I predicted that the feedback I would receive would support the need for the consultation line to continue.



### Leadership Learning

Undertaking this QI project has provided me with further insight into the processes involved in service development. This enabled me to discuss my project with the Quality Improvement Manager and the Head of Nursing for the trust. As a result, I have developed links with professionals that I had not encountered before. Having the understanding and the support of the Quality Improvement Manager and the Head of Nursing with this project enabled me to think more creatively and feel more confident to ask for feedback on the project.

Creating links with other professionals within the trust has enabled me to advocate for children and young people with Learning Disabilities and their families/carers at a higher level within the organisation. I hope to continue to take this further to influence future policy and developments within the trust.

### The Impact

The feedback received from families, carers and professionals about the consultation line stated they found the calls they had with the professionals manning the consultation line 'helpful, reassuring and empowering' to name a few (further findings presented in the 'word telephone'.

Capturing the voice of the child and their family as well as positive patient experience is crucial and underpins the Starfish - LD & CAMHS & Starfish Plus - Intensive Therapeutic Service - LD & CAMHS ethos. The findings from this project highlighted this and most importantly had a positive impact upon the experiences and outcomes of children, young people, their families and carers which was evidenced through the feedback obtained and a reduction in referrals to both teams.

### Next Steps

- To continue to monitor the use of the consultation line by families, carers and professionals against referrals made to the Starfish - LD & CAMHS & Starfish Plus – Intensive Therapeutic Service - LD & CAMHS teams.
- To organise a stakeholder meeting with service leads and the head of children's services within the trust to propose the continuation of the consultation line as part of the service improvement plan.
- For the consultation line to be continuously reviewed by professionals, families and experts by experience to ensure continuous development and adaptation to change where needed.

Alexandra Wilson – Specialist Learning Disabilities Nurse  
Starfish Plus – Intensive Therapeutic Service – LD & CAMHS  
[a.wilson281293@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:a.wilson281293@hotmail.co.uk) / [Alexandra.Wilson@nchc.nhs.uk](mailto:Alexandra.Wilson@nchc.nhs.uk)  
21<sup>st</sup> January 2021

#### References:

NHS Improvement, 2018. The Learning Disability Improvement Standards for NHS Trusts. (eBook) Available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/learning-disabilities/about/resources/the-learning-disability-improvement-standards-for-nhs-trusts/> (Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021)  
Langley GJ, et al. *The Improvement Guide: A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organizational Performance* (2nd Edition). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers; 2009. ISBN: 978-0-470-19241-2  
Mental Health, Learning Disabilities and Autism: Guidance, 2020 (eBook) NHS. Available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/letter-responding-to-covid-19-mental-health-learning-disabilities-and-autism/> (Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021)