

Julia Moller, Assistant Director of Children's Services for Barnardo's, North East, tells us more about how FAME has helped to support the work of Barnardo's by addressing the challenges of developing multi-agency working and information sharing within child care services.

How would you explain FAME and what it delivers in a few simple words, to those to who have never used the framework before?

FAME provides a way of thinking about peer to peer relationships amongst organisations who are working together to improve outcomes for children, or adults. It enables participants to think clearly about collaboration and federation based on choice and trusted relationships, rather than on the basis of a technology solution.

What specific challenges regarding multi-agency working and expectations did you take to FAME, and were they met?

We wanted to identify exactly what we needed to do in order to think appropriately about multi-agency working in the Information Economy. We wanted to understand the language and the landscape better across our region, partly in order to influence change throughout Barnardo's UK.

We also wanted to have a better grasp of our position as an independent agency working in a series of partnerships within the North East Region. This is something that FAME's Readiness Assessment Tool (available on the FAME website) has really aided us with. It has given our group a series of reference points to use and a shared language to begin thinking through some of our wider partnership issues, especially those related to the national child index.

Can you explain a little bit more about the child's services context in which you are working & why multi-agency working is such a priority?

Under the legislation of 2004 and ensuing regulations, multi-agency working is seen as key to the achievement of better outcomes for children and families. Good practice in the child care field has always involved close collaboration among diverse professionals, but now there are clear government policies merging around these practices.

For the voluntary/independent sector, there specific are issues which arise as a result, concerning our independence, and our ability to retain the close trusting relationship with our clients, (many of whom have found difficulties with the statutory services,) and our capability to maintain an adequate funding base to deliver the services to our clients in the communities where we work.

Sometimes demands are placed on our services, in respect of the way client information is collected and held which challenges our independence and our relationships with clients. We have a strong culture of client recording and robust information systems, so whilst we are well able to share appropriate information in the appropriate circumstances, in a partnership framework crossed purposes can occur.

Would you encourage others to use FAME?

I wouldn't hesitate in pointing people in the direction of FAME. The additional insight we have gained through using this framework of understanding has been very valuable. There is real urgency in the field at the moment, as people's level of understanding of these issues is really low. In fact, I would really like to thank the team for their work with us and for the sense of partnership we have had through working with them.

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How has FAME supported your understanding and development of multi-agency working at Barnardo's?

The FAME team has supported us in the development of our thinking through our discussions with DfES and other organisations we work alongside, regarding the national child index and the local index trailblazer project in Gateshead/Newcastle. It has been of immense value to us to be able to explore our ideas and processes, and has assisted us in making the case within our wider national organisation. The broad experience of the FAME team and their acknowledgement that these issues of multi-agency working are challenging has been very encouraging to us.

FAME encourages trust among agencies and helps them, regardless of size or influence, to understand that peer to peer working and partnership requires more than just an all-encompassing integrated IT system which gobbles every organisation's data. The independent view point of the FAME group, plus their careful study and knowledge of this marketplace, places them in a very unique position to broker trusted relationships.

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