

Andy Roberts, Children's Trust Manager, Newcastle City Council tells us more about how FAME has supported his department by improving their understanding of information sharing and multi-agency working, and in growing good practises.

Why did you get involved with the FAME project?

Children and young people with disabilities and their parents and carers in Newcastle said that our services didn't join up properly and they had to co-ordinate them. Children's services is a particularly complex area in terms of multiple agencies being involved with individual children. We wanted to improve this situation through information sharing across agencies.

How did you begin working with FAME?

We applied for and received an ODPM grant to research information sharing and joint working in a multi-agency environment under the FAME Project. This work came under the new Pathfinder Children's Trust focussing specifically on children with disabilities. Our work was one strand of a wider project which produced the FAME framework and it was a natural step for us to apply the learning from FAME to our problems.

In what way has FAME supported you in Children's Services?

Like many other areas, we struggled with issues of information governance, protocols, finance etc. in the Children's Trust. As a partnership of children, young people, parents, carers, the local authority and Health Trusts, we began to work on a way forward.

In the Pathfinder Children's Trust, FAME helped us to consider how to identify the various issues involved in multi-agency working and showed us how different parts of the jigsaw fitted together. This included highlighting areas we needed to address that we may not have otherwise covered in developing a strategy for joining up services.

Not only did it help us build towards our specific tangible outcome 'Link IT', our new system for sharing information across children's services, it also highlighted areas we hadn't foreseen. Although we initially used the assessment tool just focusing on services for children with disabilities, we are now looking to use it in order to develop other areas of children's services.

Put simply, what does FAME offer to a local authority?

FAME offers a framework to make sure you have considered all the issues when planning the integration of services, or when looking to improve and enhance already integrated services where information is an issue. FAME creates a clear framework which enables an authority or another organisation to effectively 'do the work'. It helps you be intentional and to 'think' through what is a very complex process, before rushing in to implement.

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Which FAME tools have been particularly useful to you at Newcastle?

The FAME Readiness Assessment Tool helps you understand the issues you face and what you might need to learn to address them. We used this halfway through our project, and although it ideally should be used at the outset during the planning stage, it did enable us to go back and check our understanding of every area of information sharing, some of which we hadn't fully considered.

We invested the time in using the FAME framework because we believe that it ultimately saves time by reducing the number of long-term problems created when all the issues are not considered or addressed.

Would you encourage other authorities to use FAME, and if so, where do they begin?

If you are planning a multi-agency service change, which includes information sharing, the FAME website is a great starting point. The framework and the Readiness Assessment Tool provide a theoretical basis for change and the individual development strands provide concrete examples of how sharing information and working together can improve services.

“...sharing information and working together can improve services.”