

IRT:Information Sharing to Improve Services for Children

Briefing Report December 2003

What is the IRT concept?

IRT (previously known as Identification, Referral and Tracking of Children at Risk) has been developed by the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) in response to Lord Laming's enquiry into the Victoria Climbié case and as part of June 2002 Street Crime Initiative.

As mentioned in The Green Paper - Every Child Matters focuses on IRT in Chapter 4 Early Intervention and Effective Protection, the Government's aim is to build on existing best practice to integrate information across services and ensure professionals share concerns about a child or young person at an early stage of involvement.

The long term aim is to develop a local information hub in every local authority consisting of a list of all 0-19 years living in the area and hold basic details including;

- Name, address and date of birth
- Unique identifier number (? NHS number)
- School
- GP
- Lead professional
- Flag stating if a child is known to agencies and professional contact details dealing with the case.

The IT system would be a 'communication tool' for professionals to identify all agencies involved with a child or young person at a given time and have clear communication routes to other professionals with knowledge of what information can be shared.

There are 10 Trailblazers nationally who have been given £900k by the government to pilot ICT systems and to explore legal issues and change management in order to enable IRT implementation. Other non-trailblazer authorities have been given £100k to assist in assessing and improving current information sharing practice within their local area – in effect building a platform for future development.

IRT is about modernisation of services, the change management and a cultural shift in ways of sharing information rather than just an IT solution.

Which agencies are involved?

The IRT project is a joint development involving Health, Education, Social Services within the Norfolk Local Authority area plus those agencies providing services for children and young people across the whole of Norfolk e.g. services such as schools, GP practices, Youth Offending, Drug Action Team, Connexions, Police, Voluntary and Community agencies.

What will it mean for local agencies and their staff?

Development of an IRT system will lead to a clearer understanding and a more joined up approach to consent and information sharing processes to improve services for children, young people and their families.

So, where are we in Norfolk?

The IRT project is part of a programme of work being delivered by the Local Preventive Strategy, which consists of Chief Executives and Directors from Norfolk County Council, Education, Social Services, Primary Care, Connexions YOT, Police Early Years Partnership and the voluntary sector.

Sam Brown, currently on secondment from Norfolk Health is programme managing the IRT project for Norfolk County Council. The project is a non trailblazer project and has current funding from the DfES until September 2004. The IRT management group is an enthusiastic multi agency (statutory and voluntary group overseeing the development of IRT.

The objective for IRT in Norfolk is not to implement an ICT system at this stage but to

- Raise awareness of the Local Preventive Strategy /IRT and the Green Paper to all agencies
- Gain a clear picture of current practice and processes in information sharing, assessments and referral processes across all relevant agencies within the local authority area
- Build on existing practice to improve information sharing
- Deliver the DfES minimum IRT requirements
- Work collaboratively with other local authorities.

Norfolk has carried out an audit of existing local service provision and practice, which is currently with research analysts. The analysis report should highlight gaps, duplications and best practice within Norfolk.

Norfolk will shortly develop on an existing managed service directory to list all children's services within the local authority and beyond. This information will be available to professionals and the general public.

What next?

Legal issues

There are a number of legal issues surrounding current information sharing practice. The Green Paper has suggested that the Government intends to legislate at the first opportunity to enable information sharing to happen at an earlier stage to prevent problems escalating.

Technical issues

The Government plans to announce by the end of 2003 how it will define a single unique identifying number for each individual child, which will support electronic information transfer. It will set out common data standards on the recording of information so that data can be transferred easily between agencies.

Change Management

There is a need to remove professional and cultural barriers to improve information sharing and develop a common understanding of terms across agencies. IRT will develop and agree information sharing processes which will be communicated across agencies to all staff which will assist in the future implementation of an ICT system.

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