

Most Significant Change: Using lived experience to support learning and improvement

Inspectors found Neath Port Talbot placed lived experience at the heart of improvement activity

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Introduction

During CIW's assurance check of children's services in Neath Port Talbot, inspectors found a strong commitment to strengths-based practice and ensuring children, families and carers had a voice in decisions affecting their lives. Practitioners routinely used "what matters" conversations to understand people's experiences and ensure their views informed assessment, planning and review.

Inspectors also found leaders had embedded quality assurance and learning arrangements that drew on a range of evidence to support improvement. This included the use of Most Significant Change (MSC) stories, which provided a way for children, families, carers and practitioners to share experiences of what had made the biggest difference to them and why.

What they did

Neath Port Talbot incorporated MSC stories into its wider approach to learning and improvement. Inspectors heard how stories were gathered from people with lived experience of services and considered through Story Panels involving practitioners, senior leaders, elected members and partners.

The purpose was not simply to collect feedback. The local authority used stories to understand how services were experienced, what people valued, and what could be learned from their experiences. Themes emerging from stories were discussed alongside other quality assurance information to support reflection, learning and service development.

Inspectors also heard how MSC stories were used at a strategic level, with senior leaders maintaining oversight of learning emerging from the process and considering how this could inform future developments.

Why it worked

What makes this practice worth sharing is not the use of MSC itself, but how it has been embedded within the wider culture of the organisation.

Inspectors found a strengths-based culture where children, families and carers were listened to and their views informed plans and decisions. Leaders were visible and approachable, practitioners felt trusted and supported, and there was a clear focus on learning and improvement.

Within this context, MSC provided a practical way of bringing lived experience into discussions about service development. Rather than treating stories as standalone feedback, the local authority used them alongside audits, thematic reviews and other sources of information to better understand the impact of services.

The approach reflected the authority's wider commitment to voice and control, co-production and learning from lived experience.

The difference it made

Inspectors found Neath Port Talbot placed lived experience at the heart of improvement activity. MSC stories helped leaders and practitioners understand services from the perspective of the people receiving them and provided insights that would not always be visible through performance data alone.

Stories reviewed during the inspection highlighted the importance people placed on trusted relationships with practitioners, feeling listened to, receiving practical support and being supported through difficult periods in their lives. They also highlighted ongoing challenges experienced by families, providing opportunities for learning and improvement.

The stories gave leaders and practitioners a richer understanding of what mattered most to people. They helped move discussions beyond whether a service had been delivered to understanding what difference that support had made.

Inspectors heard how learning from stories informed discussions about practice, service development and future priorities. The approach provided a structured way of ensuring that the experiences of children, families and carers contributed to learning and improvement across the service.

Why this is practice worth sharing

Many local authorities seek feedback from children, families and carers. What stood out in Neath Port Talbot was how lived experience had been incorporated into existing learning and improvement arrangements.

The practice worth sharing is not simply the use of MSC methodology. It is how the local authority connected people's experiences with quality assurance, reflection and service development. By doing so, it created an additional route for understanding what mattered to people and ensuring their experiences informed learning at both practice and strategic levels.

Find out more

For further information about Neath Port Talbot's Most Significant Change approach, please contact:

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Melanie leads the authority's performance, quality assurance and practice improvement functions and has supported the development and embedding of the Most Significant Change approach within Neath Port Talbot's quality assurance and learning framework.

Watch the video (<https://youtu.be/Ey0pk1clewl>)



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