

IASA's 10-Year Celebration

Florence, June 12 - 14, 2018

Using the IASA court protocol. Challenges and successes working with children on the edge of care.

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Topic: Court Work.

As an independent social worker undertaking expert work within the UK family justice system, I have lots of experience of using the IASA court protocol in the UK. I also deliver a lot of attachment training throughout the UK which has led to a growing interest in DMM theory in many of the areas where I work. One such area has identified a group of 'attachment leads' and funded their attendance on Attachment and Psychopathology and training in the CARE-Index and Adult Attachment Interview (AAI). Through my supervision of this group, an exemplar case was identified to trial the value that using formal DMM assessment methods could add to working with families whose children were identified as being on the edge of care. The family (2 parents and 6 children in total) had been known to Children's Services for over twenty years. It was accepted that despite almost continuous intervention, very little change had been effected and safety concerns about the domestic abuse and neglect of the children continued to be high with the children being deemed to be at risk of sexual exploitation (10 year old girl) and criminalization (14 and 16 year old boys). Both parents were given an AAI, and 3 out of the 4 children were given a SAA (1 refused to participate). A Parents Interview was also given. Utilization of the formal DMM assessment procedures both allowed for a more sophisticated understanding of the family's difficulties and provided clarity of how better to help. For example, the father's AAI revealed unresolved trauma relating to abandonment by his mother in a dismissed form. This seemed to link clearly to outbursts of aggression directed at the mother when she threatened to leave him. Both parents engaged in individual therapeutic work and have gained a greater understanding of how their functioning was effecting the wider family system. The parents have been supported by a small group of trusted professionals to take a hierarchal position with the children with significant benefits and change being reported by all of the professionals involved. For example, the ten year old girl's school have recently invited her to take part in a trampolining master class to reward improved behaviour.

How it used the DMM

The organization has been impressed by how application of DMM theory and assessment procedures has improved outcomes, reduced suffering, and saved money that would have been spent on court proceedings and costly alternative care arrangements for the children. A formalised 'pilot' rolling out this way of working with two other families they are 'stuck with' now looks very likely.

What it can contribute to the DMM

If the pilot goes ahead, it will add to a growing body of evidence promoting the cost and human benefits of utility of DMM theory and DMM informed treatment within services working with distressed children and families.