



Critical Social Work Practice

Implementing change through leadership

Nick Balneaves

David Cummley and Willy Rowe both emphasised the importance of leadership in this process, and one of those leaders Liz Bravinder, she's Deputy Director of one of the largest children's charities in Scotland. So how does she view change?

Liz Bravinder

I like change and I ... I also like routine, I've realised that as I've got older, but I do like change, I find change is an exciting thing provided certain things are in place. I need to understand what the change is about.

I can't cope with change for change's sake, I need to feel that there's an end purpose and that there's a positive to the change, but I like change and I like leading in change, because I think the people that we work with are continuously challenged by the need to change the situations that they're involved in and I think a big part of social work intervention is about helping service users make those changes positively. Very often I think we work with ... with children and families who are right on the edge of society who may well feel a despondency around what the future might be. I think a big part of our job is to ... to create a confidence about what the future can be.

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As part of the Changing Lives implementation process Liz has taken part in a course called Leading To Deliver, organised through the Scottish Executive. So what does good leadership mean in terms of how she relates to her staff?

Liz Bravinder

Make sure you've got an open door policy so that staff know that you're available for them; making sure that you've taken time to continue to reflect and read, because I think that's one of the key messages is.

In order to continue to develop as a leader, you need to be up to date with some of the most recent research and messages. But I think overall a culture change in relation particularly to helping staff take the decisions that they need to take without them being frightened about what those decisions are, I think they also need to be able to come into a room, shut a door and say I don't agree with this. Let's talk about it, let's bounce ideas off each other. So I think they need a very open approach. But in times of change, I think people also need to have a leader that leads from the front. And who knows when to lead from the front, when to be visible, when to be available, and when to lead from the back and let people get on with it?

Nick Balneaves

What do you need from your staff to implement change effectively then?

Liz Bravinder

I need an honesty and I need an ability to listen to what the changes are about and I need a willingness to sign up and take part in genuine consultation about change. I think consultation has to be genuine. I think too often we could be guilty of not being clear at the start of a change process, that there are some things that are not up for grabs.

There are some things not up for discussion. For example, if we've only got two pounds to spend on the change process, but we need four pounds, there's no point in raising false expectations, we're not going to be able to deliver that. So I think it's important to be very honest.