

# THE ROLE OF THE CHILD PRIMARY MENTAL HEALTH WORKER

(Prepared on behalf of the National (UK) Committee for Primary Mental Health Workers in CAMHS and National CAMHS Support Service, Department of Health)

## Definition of the role

The role of the CAMH specialist PMHW is to act as an interface between universal first contact services for children and families (tier1) & Specialist CAMHS with the aims of :

- (a) Supporting and strengthening Tier 1 CAMHS provision through building capacity and capability within Community and Primary care staff (Health, Social Care, Education, Youth Justice and Non-statutory sectors), in relation to early identification and intervention with children's mental health need.
- (b) Promoting the emotional health of children, young people and families in the community.
- (c) Enhancing accessibility and equity for children and families, especially those who would not ordinarily have opportunity to seek help from statutory and non-statutory agencies i.e. asylum seekers or refugees; homeless families
- (d) Identifying mental health problems in children and young people early in their development
- (e) Working across boundaries to develop a co-ordinated response children's mental health between agencies.
- (f) Facilitating appropriate access to Specialist CAMHS and other relevant provision according to level and nature of need.
- (g) Providing a direct service to children and young people and their families, in an accessible and less stigmatising environment

## Components of the role

The role needs to incorporate the following principles:

- a) The consolidation and elaboration/development of the existing skills of tier 1 professionals
- b) The improvement of links between tier 1 and specialist services
- c) Formalisation of supportive partnerships and networks with tier 1 professionals
- d) Integration within specialist CAMHS, ensuring responsive provision according to levels of mental health need
- e) Assessment and treatment of child mental health problems where the level of need would not require specialist input, in partnership with tier 1 professionals

The above principles can be achieved through the provision of :

(**N.B.** the following components are not in order of importance. All are seen to be intrinsic to the role)

### a) *Liaison*

The facilitation of collaboration between all agencies working with children, to enable the definition of the best approach to meet the mental health needs of the child. The liaison role includes networking; being a catalyst for effective multi-agency partnership working and an increase in accessibility to services who work with children's mental health needs.

### b) *Consultation*

The aim of the consultative role is to identify the child's mental health needs and to consider appropriate ways of meeting them in partnership with professionals already working with them. Consultation is offered through a range of initiatives, including telephone and face-to-face advice and ongoing support for tier 1 professionals at a more advanced level. Advanced level consultation would include joint assessments and supporting interventions with tier 1 professionals.

**c) Training**

Regular multi-agency training programmes should be offered to the range of professionals working with children, in order to increase and build on the understanding of mental health issues and to consolidate existing knowledge through experiential learning, enabling them to recognise and manage child mental health problems at an early stage.

**d) Supervision**

Primarily educative, supervision should aim to improve the ability of tier 1 professionals to manage child mental health needs more effectively by improving their CAMHS skill and knowledge base, thus enabling more effective practice. Supervision can take the form of individual or group support and can also act as a means of consolidating multi-agency training offered by PMHWs. NB. This component of the role should neither replace nor conflict with the professionals' own clinical supervision.

**e) Intervention**

Intervention can be provided on two levels:-

- 1) Through joint work with tier 1 professionals with the aim of undertaking joint assessment of the level of mental health needs or to support the practitioner in work that they are already undertaking and to provide education and support about specific management techniques. Joint work may also enable the PMHW to provide advice regarding appropriate referral to CAMHS or other agencies
- 2) Direct intervention with children and families, where mental health needs have not been responsive to methods and interventions undertaken by tier 1 professionals and the level of need is not appropriate for intervention within specialist CAMHS. Direct interventions should be brief and tailored to the child and families identified needs. Direct work should be evidence based and drawn from a range of interventions, for example, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or Solution Focused Brief Therapy. It may also include the provision of target group work programmes.

**f) Strategic planning**

The PMHW role is pro-active in informing and influencing child mental health strategy and includes the development and agreement of joint agency protocols for pathways of intervention, treatment or care. It also offers a contribution to the development of interagency structures to ensure joint planning and collaborative working relationship, placing an emphasis on shared ownership and responsibility for children's mental health.

**g) Research and Development**

The PMHW will have a role in identifying service needs and gaps across agencies with regard to children's mental health. Also, they will be key in obtaining users views and involving users in the design and delivery of accessible CAMH provision in the community.

## **Core Skills and knowledge base**

To fulfil these roles the following core skills and knowledge base are required:-

### **Clinical**

- Professional qualification, with evidence of continuing professional development in a field relevant to child and adolescent mental health
- Significant level of experience of working with children and families including work with child mental health needs
- Significant level of experience working within a CAMHS or a CAMHS related field (3 years plus)
- Understanding of the PMHW role and function and its relationship to specialist CAMHS and other agencies
- Broad range of skills and experience in a wide range of clinical and behavioural presentations

- Experience of mental health assessment and implementation of a range of evidence based therapeutic interventions
- Working knowledge of health, social services, education and the voluntary sector, together with the relevant legislation regarding both children and mental health
- Experience of working in partnership with other agencies and interdisciplinary working
- Ability to work in partnership with children, families and other professionals
- Qualities essential to clinical practice, including, for example, respect, genuineness, empathy, personal integrity.
- Communication skills to enable the helping relationship and process
- Ability to negotiate and to speak from a position of authority on primary mental health work and CAMH issues
- Knowledge and skills related to family and multi-agency dynamics
- Ability to develop and deliver training packages in child and adolescent mental health
- Ability to provide Consultation
- Ability to provide Supervision including clinical supervision where appropriate
- Ability to manage a caseload
- Ability to work flexibly and creatively as an autonomous practitioner, in order to meet the needs of children, families and professionals
- Experience of working alongside professionals and to contain anxieties/concerns in relation to working with children and families, where there is mental health need.
- Clinical leadership

### **Managerial**

- Experience of team management including clinical teams where appropriate
- Leadership skills
- Experience of strategic development, and in particular development of interagency projects
- Ability to identify gaps and opportunities for service development, improvement and expansion
- Budgetary and resource management skills
- Performance management skills
- Time management skills
- Working knowledge of relevant national policies and guidance in relation to children's services
- Understanding of the role of users and carers in service development

### **Research and Development**

- Experience of service evaluation and audit
- Ability to plan, commission and implement research projects

## **Career pathways in Primary Mental Health Work**

Primary Mental Health Workers may come from a range of relevant professional backgrounds and it is important to acknowledge that it is unlikely that any one person will have all the skills and experiences for the task described without career development. Therefore, it is vital to create a career pathway structure for primary mental health workers in order to develop competent and effective practitioners. The following provides a framework for this development and will ensure that individual practitioners only deliver those aspects of the role within their level of experience and competence.

### **Development Primary Mental Health Worker post**

The Practitioner will have some of the core skills and knowledge base to deliver the clinical aspect of the role as defined above, but will require a development programme to achieve identifiable competencies, which enables practice at the next level. It is likely that they will require enhanced supervision and support to deliver a significant part of the role from Senior PMHW colleagues and specialist CAMHS professionals.

### **Primary Mental Health Worker**

The practitioner will have the full range of core skills and knowledge base to deliver the Clinical aspect of the role as defined above and will be competent to carry out this work as an autonomous practitioner. To enable them to effectively deliver the role at this level, they will require regular supervision and support from the Senior PMHW and specialist CAMHS professionals.

### **Senior Primary Mental Health Worker**

The practitioner will operate at an advanced level and will be competent in offering support and supervision (including clinical supervision) to other levels of primary mental health worker. They will also have responsibilities for delivering the managerial and research and development aspects of the role. To enable them to effectively deliver the role at this level they will have to develop a network of support from senior professionals, with a range of complementary relevant skills.

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