



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



A practitioner's point of view with Matthew Lambe

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT OF THE INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW LAMBE 14.07.2022.

By Dr Paul McCafferty & Dr Esther Mercardo Garcia

Listen to the Podcast: [Practitioner's point of view with Matthew Lambe](#)

Paul: Thank you very much for joining us this morning. And this morning's podcast is all about participation. We're going to talk about everything, participation, an exciting topic for us to talk about as part of our European Panda project. Something that we're passionate about, but we're very keen to engage with people who've got a lot of expertise and a lot of practice such as yourself. So, thank you very much for coming along to talk to us today about your work. But could I just start off by asking you, just introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about yourself and your work? That would be great.

Matthew: Yeah, no problem. So, yes, I'm Matthew Lambe. I work with the South Eastern Trust and I'm one of their CAF teams. So that's a Child and Family team within the South Eastern Trust. And there was, there was a change in terms of the team set-up, it used to be that it would be Family Intervention, Looked After Children, they would have been separated out in terms of their teams. I suppose that has been brought together now under one umbrella, letting that be in the child and family team. So, in terms of the cases that I would work, they would be child protection cases and looked after children and then also family support. So, all three of those run alongside each other. So, we have mixed caseloads, which provides its own complexity in itself, in terms of separating the workload and the different domains and the skills of that are sort of needed for that. I have been within that and within that sort of remit of work for the past 3 to 4 years, and I have to say, really enjoy it. It's madly intense and it's very understaffed at the moment, which is something that we're experiencing and well, I'm sure we'll get on that impacts on how we can participate for children, and we think that's a big contributing factor. But, you know, I suppose that that would be my setup and my remit of work at the moment. But yeah, just, just, just, just suffering staff-wise. But sure.

Paul: So you're going to be looking for staff, Matthew, is this a call out for new staff?

Matthew: This is an advertisement, absolutely. If we can get anyone coming across... especially to the CAF teams.

Paul: So, you sound busy. I mean, a lot of your work, I would imagine, is around assessment. And part of that assessment I would have imagined is getting the voice of the child, you know, understanding what life is like, the voice from the child's perspective. Could you tell us a wee about how you go about doing that, getting the voice of the child into your assessments?

Matthew: Yeah, no problem. So, in terms of the looked after children and as you know, we're required to do a statutory visit every 28 days, for example. And during that time, during that stat (statutory) visit, we'll have time alone with the child in which we're trying to ascertain their wishes and feelings about how things are going generally in terms of their health, their emotional well-being, and how contacts are going between themselves and their extended family member, mums and dads. And then also just alongside trying to understand how they're getting along with their placement as well. That's usually done in a 1 to 1 conversation. There is a big push within the Trust at the moment around the implementation and system and the implementation of Signs of Safety. And I suppose that would be a term that I would use and something I can say that children respond to quite well on my caseload anyway, and from the looked-after world, you know, the three houses is a nice way of working through that and it's something that the child would understand in terms of what's working well and any worries that they might have. And then thinking about what we can do next about those and that that's a sort of format that lines up nicely to the way our and our LAC (looked after child) reviews are run. So, our LAC reviews then we enter into that domain, and we think about what's working well for the child and we think about worries and we do think about a plan for the next six months. So that would be one of the terms that I would use and working through that with them. There is something that was sort of piloted within our team, and it's called MOMO, it's called Me to My Own. I would use it really very often I would use it across cases concerning children, but both in child protection as well and working 1 to 1 with the child and again, you can go straight to those sorts of domains to try and understand their wishes and feelings around a certain topic area or a certain decision that's going to be made. And it can be the simplest decision, around perhaps an increase to contact or and I suppose it can be very simple in that way and it can be adapted. But that's a system that uses the likes of emojis that they can use to express how they're feeling, and they can use a rating system from zero to ten and around certain questions which can be adapted, they can type into it. There are responses that are already there that they can just click on and go, Yeah, that's how I sort of feel on that. That's pretty accurate, but after that, it sort of generates an overview, of that, that sort of decision that needs to be made or how they're participating or not. That can be, that's typically that goes straight to my email.

So, it does we retain a copy of that. We can bring that into our LAC reviews. We can bring that into supervision on a monthly basis and make those really day-to-day decisions for a child, make them real which is really important. But I think in that way we're trying to get that through for their decisions or sorry for their participation to be acted on quite rapidly. And I think that we would use supervision for that quite a bit in making those decisions, not waiting six months down the line to look after the child and start making decisions. I think that if there is some change that we're

aware of, we can do that within the supervision format. So, I suppose that the three houses MAMO would be another one that I would use. And then I think there's a simple conversation that you can work through with the child. And I think that that works okay. And it doesn't necessarily need to be drawing some phone or on an iPad or something along those lines. But even there's children that I would take out and we would go for a walk together or something really informal and then start to talk around a certain area. And again, if you're taking contact, for example, just seeing how that's going for them and I suppose then trying to make decisions from there and see what they would like from their contact. You think you're back in action? Sorry. Sorry. Right. Yes. No, Paul, I was just finishing off. I suppose they're just talking about making those. Sort of day-to-day sessions for children They had looked after, and I finished off there just by saying. about using more informal methods for doing that. And some of it can just be to put all of that aside and maybe just go for a walk or spend some 1 to 1 time with them outside of their placement, start to get into that, to really understand their wishes and feeling. Yeah, So I think that works very well.

Paul: So, Matthew, if I'm hearing you right, then it could be sort of organized tools or it could be, you know, informal, going for a walk, going for a chat, go for coffee, go for a walk in the park, something like that. That doesn't necessarily have to be a formalized tool.

Matthew: Yeah, I absolutely think that it's a difficult dynamic when I'm thinking about it in terms of formalizing our tools and thinking about formal and informal because I think that's a really interesting distinction to make because the formal term typically comes forward into the likes of your case conference or you looked after child review. And I think then you're trying to present that on behalf of the child if they're not able to attend that review. And you know in that way it's lovely to be able to give the Chair, you know, an overview of what the child is thinking at that point on paper. And that works well for that setting but that's okay I suppose that that's a trust a way forward in terms of trying to present those Does that necessarily work well for the child? I don't know. But, you know, those more informal methods can be captured. They I suppose it's on the social worker to try and capture that and write that down record it, make sure that that sort of write that down and that's acted on, you know, and the child knows that in terms of their wishes and feelings around a certain area, that they're getting feedback on that that they're seeing that there's actually something potentially changing, or if it's not, why and people have acted to. But I think that we save our formal methods for our meetings and whatever that might look like, but for our day-to-day and try and understand the wishes and feelings of the child and then informal ones quite well may not.

Paul: That's quite fascinating because some of the formal stuff might make the agency needs the organizational needs but the question is, is it really meeting the needs of the child when perhaps there is a sense all the informal stuff works really, really well, but it might not necessarily fit under the organizational requirements. Esther, what's your view on that?

Esther: Yeah, I think that this is very, very interesting to know these kinds of the tools, the informal tools that you, Matthew, has explained before because sometimes we are working with the children, so from a personal point of view, the professional has more complicated to create a relationship and maybe it is kind of the informal meeting for an informal tool to promote a more relationship between the professionals of the children and improve the opportunity to hear their

wishes, desires that they have and concerns that they have about the future of what happened to them and their family. But I think this is really, really nice to hear. Matthew, that you can incorporate because I'm wondering what happened is something that may be in your organization's respect or support you with this kind of informal tools because sometimes the organization is very, very close to trying to support a professional with this kind of the initiatives. What do you think about these?

Matthew: Yeah, and I think it like if I can give an example. Okay. In terms of I think if I can give an example in terms of my thoughts around Signs of Safety are definitely mixed and this is very by the by you know there's been no extensive research into it or there's a space to tell me what I'm picking up from some students and some new staff coming in. But I think that they believe that they need to use things and so there's a need, there's a dashboard to that. So, they would work through the Signs of Safety model from genograms, words and pictures and Three Houses and I think that from talking with some of them, they thought that they could only use the Three Houses to ascertain a child's wishes and victims. What a worrying thought. I thought, you know, I was sort of saying this and that, that, you know, that that's interest and it's fulfilling an agency need in terms of also showing the use of Signs of Safety. Yes, that works. That's great. And but on the other side, it's perhaps not fulfilling the need of the child It's maybe more for the social worker and critically about what works well for them or works out for ascertaining that child's wishes and everyone's and it may well be the Three Houses that may well be an approach that works. But I think it's thinking outside the box and not being, you know, cornered in one area, you know, in training and we certainly think of ways in which we can promote participation in the that we can use and change the settings. One of them. But there's a multitude of others that we can start to utilize. So, I think that that... it's... it's worrying that I think that some students or some new staff members coming in place, that that's the only method that they can use and what needs to be brought forward. Or do you need to be thinking critically for the child and things that work better for them, MOMO (Mind of my Own) might work better for them, like a walk on the beach and conversational capture of their wishes, might work better for them? So, I think in that way, I think that the participation element needs to be thought about as critically harmful for the child.

Paul: Matthew what's your experience of working with under 12, you know, getting the participation of kids who are under 12?

Matthew: Yeah, it's a very difficult one for me. And I think that in the first couple of years of practice and it was almost via the carer was a lot of what we were capturing their voices and the carer that knew them the best they were trying to capture that in terms of how they're feeling, how they're present, and then bringing that forward, I think it does take maybe more time to build up skills in communicating with a child who is a lot younger. You know, they may not be as clear in their questions and feelings about a certain area. And I think it's a sort of one element of communication with that and on then, you know, I suppose in terms of the parents, I find drawing works very well with them, you know, drawing pictures, thinking of ways in which they can express their wishes and opinions as opposed to doing it in written format or in a more formal, formal format that older children might be able to do. So, I think my experience of working with that group is that it takes me to adapt to that engagement and think about what ways they can participate. I'm not saying that a five-year-old can attend their LAC review or participate in that formal setting and some of them might be able to you might be able to bring them along, Okay? But my experience is that that that age group that they can do very well at and that 1 to 1 time in which we can draw pictures

together, think about different areas, but also gather some information from the adults around them that they know best as well, I'm bringing all of that together as part of their participation and I find that area particularly difficult in that younger age group. I don't think it's as easy to access, and I think it really takes a different skill. And, you know, if different skills were coming out of the PANDA project as well, that might suggest ways that we can develop that, I would be open to that.

Paul: That's certainly one of the things that's one of the reasons why we are interested in the under 12s, particularly because practitioners do seem to find that that it is an additional challenge, Esther what's your view on this?

Esther: Yeah, I think that working with children under twelve is tougher and more complicated to create that relationship and the communication. And of course, I must say that maybe these kinds of tools are related more to the arts, or the narrative approach is easier to understand their feelings. Okay, so I think that is a big challenge for the professional to develop this kind of material that they use, that improves relations and the participation in decision making with children under twelve years.

Paul: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But Matthew, from your experience, what sort of things do we need to be better at when we are communicating involving increasing participation under twelves? I mean you've already said that there seems to be maybe need heightened skills, but what more things should we be thinking about?

Matthew: Yeah. Yes. Skill and skill-based assessment is definitely one. And I know that's definitely one, one. For me, it's no longer in development around data or in that area. And for me to think that we are making some positive progress and our meetings and how we set up our meetings. So, we had a child protection case conference or be at a, you know, looked after chatting with you. I think that simplifying the format in terms of what's working well and what are we worried about and what needs to happen next is something that a child can perhaps be ready and be able to contribute to. You know, we can understand that concept. And I think that we still have some way of breaking down how formal that setting is. You know, if I would definitely love I think that there's an age group that is more than capable of attending those meetings. I'm not saying the likes of a 3 to 4-year-old, but I'm saying that as we go up that age bracket and judging by the child themselves if they're able to, you know, but allowing them into that setting in a more comfortable way. I think it's still a very formal setting for them to contribute to and it is their care plan. That is their plan for the next six months. Now, that is their life around, you know, talking about their health and talking about their emotional wellbeing, talking about their contact with mummy and daddy and that I like their placement. They should have a place at that table. So, I think it's about breaking down that environment and make more accessible for a child born to enter into. I suppose they can be based on that. In thinking about the report, they'll be right around to for a child as well, allowing them to access some of that. There's some sensitive information that you might not want to share with them immediately if it hasn't been shared in a child-friendly way before through words in pictures. But there's definitely a part of the document that they should have access to in the care plan that they should be able to understand as well. We have done it before. I've done it with children who have suffered from dyslexia, for example, but I've used it. There's a system called read, right, gold I don't know if you're aware of it, but you can almost highlight all of the text and turn it into an audiobook, right? We have done that before about it being able to allow the child to listen along to the report, read along to what's written about them,

onto the care plan that's been developed for them as well. So, I think that allowing, there's access, I think access is an issue for me, access and the information that's been written and talked about them and especially about a good script will tend to break that down for them and help them understand it.

Paul: Yeah, So, so Matthew, I'm conscious that we said we'd only keep you for 20 minutes. Yeah. If I could. So, if I could sum up just what we have said and it's been, you know, really fascinating to hear what you have said. I mean, and it has made me think about it differently, I have to say. So, if I could sum up what you're saying is that there are tools. Yes, those tools can work very, very well. But there's also the informal, the relationship, the communicating informally with kids, which can just be as equally good. And those are two things that we need to think about, about do we use the tools? When do we use them? Do we use relationships and how do we use them and when do we use them? Which is better? Perhaps both have got an equal place, but the under twelves there seems to be, you know, a challenge. It's a critically important thing that we do. But there are additional challenges. And you've outlined some of those challenges and you've given us some very helpful solutions as well, which, you know, I appreciate. Do you, Esther, before we finish, are there any other things that you would like to ask Matthew or anything that you think is important that you haven't had a chance to listen to or want to say?

Esther: Well, no, because thank you so much, Matthew, for this kind of conversation took a little dip on that project. And I think it's important to hear your experiences and also to open new ideas and tools method that the professional can use in the field of social work. And for me, the thing is only just to incorporate in our project that we are not talking about the right of the children to today to have to access to this kind of the report that you told before, okay, that maybe is no method that the tool that the professional use working with to read that is important for the participation in decision making and the idea that you put here today that I to the opportunity today to incorporate in the process and to know that the professional sometimes write down in the report. Okay. So, for me thank you so much, Matthew, for this conversation and for your time, for collaborating with our group on that project and other aspects of our thinking.

