

# Multi-agency working

A number of different agencies come in to regular contact with parents and families, such as staff at children's centres, Jobcentre Plus, schools, Citizens Advice Bureau, and health workers. Additionally there are a number of community based organisations and informal networks which can act as community gatekeepers. Developing partnerships with these agencies and services is an important tool in effective information provision, and can facilitate multiple routes to families. This section focuses on the key factors for the success of multi-agency activity.

Some key factors in the success of multi-agency working are:

- ▶ **Commitment or willingness to be involved** – commitment is needed from both strategic and operational levels. Strategic level commitment means putting structures and conditions in place to allow staff to be involved in multi-agency work. Operational level commitment involves seeing the work as a priority and believing in its worth.
- ▶ **Understanding roles and responsibilities** – those involved should have a clear understanding of what is expected of them, as well as the constraints under which other agencies operate. Without clear roles and responsibilities it is easy for agencies to work on different agendas, to assume that a piece of work was somebody else's responsibility, for misunderstandings to develop, or for clients to receive conflicting information.
- ▶ **Strong communication and information sharing** – it is important for the lines of communication to be open and for there to be opportunities for dialogue between different agencies. Dialogue facilitates a better understanding of how other agencies function and thereby resolves many of the day-to-day issues. Some strategies for improving communication are:
  - Enhancing the procedures of communication, for example by establishing clear protocols and principles underpinning communication between individuals or agencies, so that some individuals or parties are aware of their responsibilities to others.
  - Improving systems of communication, for example, by setting up an intranet or email groups, so that communication is not hindered by over reliance on agency – specific systems.
  - More frequent contact with other professionals at the human level, for example, by physically sharing workspaces and enhancing opportunities for face-to-face contact with partners in frequent interagency meetings at both strategic and operational levels.
- ▶ **Involving relevant personnel** – involving people at the right level of responsibility can smooth multi-agency projects. People can make the required decisions or activate the right services or mechanisms within their own agency.
- ▶ **Sharing funding or resources** – this is a common strategy identified for overcoming challenges. Agencies can pool budgets, provide joint funding, or identify alternative or additional sources of income.