



THE ATTENTION THE PROFESSION DESERVES

Jacky, Director of Children's Services in Bexley, volunteered her Local Authority to take part in Phase 2 of NAAS and will be taking the assessment herself with her social workers in Spring 2019. In her blog, she

talks about how accreditation makes sense for professions, like social work, where frontline practitioners have to make significant and life changing decisions with families and children.

Any profession that is offered an opportunity to think about how it develops and what sort of people it needs, should take it. When I was working on the Munro Review, we often talked about the training provision that GPs and medics received, and how normal and expected it has become for those professions. Accreditation has to be a chance to grow and develop.

Social workers make seriously important decisions about children and their family lives. It is highly skilled work and needs the same level of attention as other professions because the outcomes are just as important. I've been in social work for a long time, and I've lived through seeing it largely ignored or neglected as a profession. Accreditation has the potential to make us stronger as a workforce and families everywhere will benefit from having rounded, confident professionals working with them.

I wanted Bexley to be involved in the phased roll out of NAAS because I wanted to be able to influence it. We – as a profession, government and country – have sometimes lost sight of what social work is and what authority social workers have. I wanted to make sure that we created an accreditation system that was linked to the real work social workers do on a daily basis.

Having been involved in the early stages of NAAS has meant that I've seen it develop first-hand. I'm reassured by the fact it accredits the parts of the job that are the most important to good social work practice. For me, it is about enhancing that very special social work skill which is balancing the use of authority with empathy and respect for families and children whilst making a transparent and clear set of judgments.

There are a number of reasons why I personally volunteered to take the assessment. Primarily, I did not want to ask anyone to do something that I would not be willing to do myself. That was a big motivator for me because I

knew social workers and managers were anxious about it and I wanted to understand how they might be feeling so that any help Bexley offers has a chance of making a difference.

Volunteering for NAAS has helped me shape our offer in Bexley. Though I haven't started my assessment preparation, I've already reflected on the need for learning groups and time for social workers to prepare. As I've cleared time in my own diary, I would want to provide the same opportunities to others. I'm happy to allow that additional resource because I'm involved in the process and have heard directly from social workers.

As leaders, we sometimes make it difficult for our profession to grow. We need to remain in touch with practice and what needs to change, and NAAS makes you look in the tin. Having to write a portfolio as part of my practice endorsement has made me reflect on my work and seek feedback from others. It's important to create learning opportunities for everyone and it can be too easy to self-narrate about the work that we do.

Even as a senior manager in an organisation, we need to check we still have the right balance of knowledge and skills. I don't want to be immune to the need to grow as a professional and I want to encourage learning opportunities that bring me closer to practice. It is important to debunk the myth that more senior staff don't need to develop themselves too.

To others who hold senior leadership positions in social work, I would encourage you to find out more about NAAS. It is only by being curious and seeing it for yourselves that you'll be able to make a valued judgement about it. But there is no escaping the fact that we, as sector leaders, need to find ways for our profession to develop and to practice against consistent standards, whether we have accreditation or not.

We all need to be fluent in the same practice language. I want the reassurance that all social workers are making the best decisions they can alongside families and in the best interests of children wherever they are. So, in short, I'd encourage you to find out about NAAS for yourselves and to look deeply at the key knowledge and skills statements that underpin the framework – they are fantastic touchstones for great practice in a well led environment.