

service directories

Fact sheet

Online local-area service directories enable practitioners to access up-to-date details of the services available to meet the needs of children and young people.

Background

Part of the Information Sharing and Assessment funding given to local authorities in 2003 was for the setting up and maintenance of service directories.

Every Child Matters: Change for Children (December 2004) reinforced the importance of the service directory in helping children and families access services to meet their needs and enabling practitioners to make informed referrals.

What is a service directory?

A service directory is a comprehensive online information-bank of all types of children's and young people's services available in a local area. It should be easily searchable, and should include a broad range of preventative services from providers in voluntary and statutory agencies.

Basic content should include:

- contact details of local providers;
- eligibility criteria;
- geographical location;
- referral procedures.

By providing this information, the service directory should contribute to the reduction in the number of inappropriate and misdirected referrals.

Who will use the service directory?

The online service directory should be widely available and easily accessible to practitioners from statutory and voluntary sectors.

Children, young people and families should also be able to access the directory in an easy to read format.

Accessibility

Access should be web-based but could also include a telephone helpline or print version, although the costs and difficulties of maintaining an up-to-date print based directory may be prohibitive.

Many local areas have placed their service directories on their existing local authority website whilst others have created a new site and given it a title appropriate to local community circumstances (eg Help 4 You).

Some of the established services directories span local authority boundaries providing information about services across a wide geographic area.

The Childcare Act 2006 gives a duty to local authorities to provide information to parents, or prospective parents, on childcare and other services in their area that will enable them to identify sources of support and help for children and young people.

Keeping the service directory up-to-date

Responsibility needs to be allocated to an individual or team to ensure that the service directory is kept up-to-date. As a minimum, the directory should be updated annually. The procedure followed in local authorities varies but includes:

For practitioners:

- individual practitioners being responsible for updating their own contact details;
- departmental responsibility;
- agency responsibility;

For local authorities:

- dedicated individual team;
- website team.

Some areas have also joined with providers of other directories, such as their local Connexions and/or Children's Information Services, to develop and maintain their service directories and avoid duplication of effort.

Research in to the development of service directories and the links made with Children's Information Services was carried out by the National Family and Parenting Institute between September 2005 and March 2006. The report sets out twelve key principles to govern good practice in the development and sustainability of directories and includes case studies from 16 local authorities to illustrate these principles.

The full report 'Linking up Directories of Children's Services' (RR731) and the accompanying brief (RB731) are available to download from www.dcsf.gov.uk/research.

For more resources and information:
visit the Children's Workforce Development
Council website: www.cwdcouncil.org.uk,
or the Every Child Matters website:
www.ecm.gov.uk.

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