Why Practice Leadership Matters

One of the strongest predictors of good support

Practice Leadership is increasingly recognised as essential to delivering high-quality support, care and education — yet it is often misunderstood.

Good support does not happen by chance

Across adult social care, organisations invest significant time and resources in recruitment, training and quality assurance. Yet many still struggle to achieve consistent, high-quality support and to sustain improvement over time.

Research over more than two decades consistently shows that one factor plays a critical role in the quality of support people experience:

Practice Leadership

Practice Leadership helps organisations turn their values, policies and training into everyday experiences for the people they support.

What is Practice Leadership?

Practice Leadership is the day-to-day leadership that supports staff to deliver high-quality, person-centred practice. It is most commonly provided by frontline leaders and managers who work alongside staff to ensure that organisational values are translated into everyday practice.

Although much of the research has been undertaken in social care, the same principles are equally applicable in specialist education and multidisciplinary settings, where leaders work alongside staff to develop consistent, person-centred practice. Practice Leadership can also be demonstrated by others who influence and shape support, including family carers and people with lived experience.

Practice Leaders

- Focus staff attention on quality of life and good support.
- Organise and allocate support effectively.
- Coach, observe and provide feedback to staff.
- Use supervision and team meetings to promote learning and improvement.
- Help teams reflect, solve problems and work consistently.

Practice Leadership is more than...

- Paperwork and administration.
- Quality assurance and
- compliance.
- Managing rotas and resources.
- Quarterly supervision meetings.
- Performance monitoring alone.
- Leading from the office.

Practice Leadership involves...

- Being visible and present.
- Coaching and supporting staff.
- Modelling good practice.
- Reflection and continuous learning.
- Focusing on quality of life.
- Working alongside teams in everyday practice.

Why does Practice Leadership matter?

Research consistently shows that Practice Leadership is one of the strongest influences on the quality of support people experience.

Effective Practice Leadership creates cultures where:

- staff understand what good support looks like;
- learning is continuous;
- values are translated into action;
- support is more consistent;
- people experience greater participation, choice and quality of life; and
- improvement is sustained over time.



Practice Leadership helps turn values into everyday experiences

Values → Staff practice → People's experiences → Quality of life

What does the evidence tell us?

Research from the UK, Australia and Ireland shows that strong Practice Leadership contributes to:

Better outcomes for people

- Increased participation and engagement.
- Improved quality of life.
- More meaningful activities and relationships.
- Greater choice and control.
- Reduced distress and fewer restrictive practices.

Better outcomes for staff

- Greater confidence and competence.
- Higher job satisfaction.
- Stronger teamwork and collaboration.
- Increased motivation and engagement.
- Improved staff retention.

Better outcomes for organisations

- More positive organisational cultures.
- Greater consistency across teams.
- Better implementation of PBS and Active Support.
- More sustainable change.
- Improved quality and workforce stability.

Practice Leadership and the workforce agenda

The importance of Practice Leadership is increasingly recognised across adult social care. The Department of Health and Social Care's Care Workforce Pathway for Adult Social Care identifies Practice Leader as one of the recognised career roles within the sector, recognising the importance of leaders who support and sustain good practice.

Recent Skills for Care guidance highlights that:

"Training alone rarely improves practice. The best way to improve practice is through Practice Leadership."

This growing national focus reflects the increasing recognition that workforce development is not only about training staff, but also about supporting leaders who can coach, develop and sustain good practice.

Practice Leadership enables good support across different approaches

Practice Leadership is not a separate initiative. It provides the leadership and coaching needed to successfully implement and sustain many of the approaches currently shaping adult social care.

This includes:

- Capable and Supportive Environments.
- Human rights-based approaches.
- Person-Centred Active Support.
- Positive Behaviour Support (PBS).
- Trauma informed practice.
- Reducing restrictive practices.
- Mental Health Act reform.

Good support does not happen by chance

Practice Leadership helps organisations create the conditions in which people, staff and services can thrive.

Bild and Practice Leadership

For more than two decades, Bild has worked alongside providers, researchers and people with lived experience to promote Practice Leadership as a key component of high-quality support. Bild's work includes:

- promoting evidence-informed approaches;
- developing leadership resources and guidance;
- supporting workforce development;
- delivering learning and development opportunities, and
- helping organisations embed Practice Leadership in everyday support.

This briefing provides a summary of the key messages from the research. For references and a more detailed review of the evidence, see:

Practice Leadership: The Evidence Base - A companion evidence review summarising current research and key publications.

Find out more about Bild's Practice Leadership work: **www.bild.org.uk/what-we-do/about-practice-leadership**