

***Joint Investigative Interviewing in Scotland* – a reflective blog by Lorrette Nicol, Social Work Manager at the National Joint Investigative Interviewing Project, September 2021**

Starting Out

I've had a particular interest in child protection and joint investigative interviewing since I first qualified as a social worker, back in 1995.

I remember "participating" in joint investigative interviews when I first qualified, as the second interviewer - before I had even been trained - and wondering what was actually joint about that process! When I eventually undertook my training, it was three days long and the thing that I remember about it to this day is a slide presentation of young children with horrendous injuries. However, my first joint investigative interview following the training was much more positive. It really felt like a joint interview, as I undertook it with a police colleague who had been trained with me.

Over the years, I undertook interviews in different situations with varying amounts of preparation, and different experiences of working jointly. I was lucky enough to attend two Advanced Forensic Interviewing Clinics at the University of Dundee and went on to become a tutor on the five-day JII Training in my local authority, as well as establishing the programme of practice evaluations.

Project Start Up

When the National Joint Investigative Interviewing Project was established in 2017, this felt like a natural progression for me. I was keen to apply my knowledge and experience but also to develop it further.

We started at the project on 27 November 2017 and at first, I felt a little guilty, having gone from being a team leader in a busy children and families practice team to sitting reading research articles in the busy weeks running up to Christmas. However, the guilt didn't last too long as it dawned on me that we had been given a once in a lifetime opportunity to develop a new model of practice from scratch. We could also design what the training should look like and how long it needed to be, to meet interviewers' needs. This was an opportunity to make a significant difference for Scotland's children!

Working with a team of two other social workers and three police officers, it felt very strange working in the police environment of the Scottish Police College at Tulliallan - being called "ma'am" by all the police probationers was only part of it. Throughout those early months we had some heated discussions about what the model should look like and what should be included in the training - I recently looked back on some early lessons, and they bear little resemblance to the programme today.

It's been such an amazing opportunity to reach out to colleagues nationally and internationally to inform development of the model - initially I was a little starstruck when speaking to people whose names I had previously only seen in academic articles. However, without exception, people have

been so supportive and recognised the importance of the work of the project. Our aim throughout this whole process has been to improve children's experiences, minimising the risk of further traumatisation whilst securing best evidence and information from the Joint Investigative Interview.

Stepping Out

Finally, the Scottish Child Interview Model for Joint Investigative Interviews was fully developed, and we could begin the training. The first cohort began their training on 30 September 2019, showing up for that first week it was clear they had little idea what to expect but were keen to learn. We were equally enthusiastic, but at the same time a little unsure about how the training programme would run in practice. Everyone involved still talks about Module 3 in January 2020 which was very demanding for the learners and tutors alike. We have since adapted the timetable for that part of the timetable to make it more manageable!

Over the last few years, we've dealt with the global pandemic, which impacted upon our ability to deliver training for a period (but didn't stop the first cohort going live with interviews!); there have been changes of staff; we have continued to develop the model and the programme, and we are now giving a lot of thought to how to implement the model effectively in remote and island areas of Scotland.

We now have four cohorts who have completed the programme, and several more lined up. Over the next three years interviewers will be trained in the Scottish Child Interview Model for Joint Investigative interviewing across the whole of Scotland. The programme has been credit rated at SCQF level 9 and is to be recognised as Specialist Training by SSSC. We are hearing how interviewing practice has changed due to the new model, and we have several formal research projects in the pipeline.

What Next?

I write this as I move on to a new challenge and reflect upon my experience of my time with the National JII Project. I know now that I didn't know as much about forensic interviewing practice as I thought I did. Although I have learnt a lot, there is still much to learn.

I can consider what trauma informed practice really means and how relatively small changes can have a huge impact on children, young people, and their families.

I have learnt a lot about engaging collaboratively with partner agencies and working together to find solutions. Having always worked as within a local authority, albeit not the same one, during my time at the project I have learnt to really think about the national picture and even see things from an international perspective.

I understand the importance of the Scottish Child Interview Model for Joint Investigative Interviewing and the significance of the interview as plans progress for the Barnahus in Scotland.

I will miss my colleagues and being involved in this important work. However, I am able to look forward with a sense of excitement as we see the changes that are ahead for children and families in Scotland. I look forward to the day when we see joint investigative interviews being routinely used as evidence in chief and people asking, “Do you remember the days when children were cross examined in Court?”

You can find out more about the National Joint Investigative Interviewing Project here: <https://bit.ly/34w4HsM>