

The Reflection and Action Learning Forum (RALF)

Final Report: Summary

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Introduction

This report will tell you about the work of the RALF Project – a Promise Partnership funded project aimed at developing reflective work cultures and individual workers' reflective capacity. RALF is a model, co-produced by the Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group (SPRAG), for supporting the development of reflection at depth. The aim of RALF is to provide a practical and evidence-based approach that supports members of the residential child care workforce to develop the necessary habits and skills associated with genuinely reflective practice, even when some behaviour exhibited by children, young people or colleagues can feel challenging.

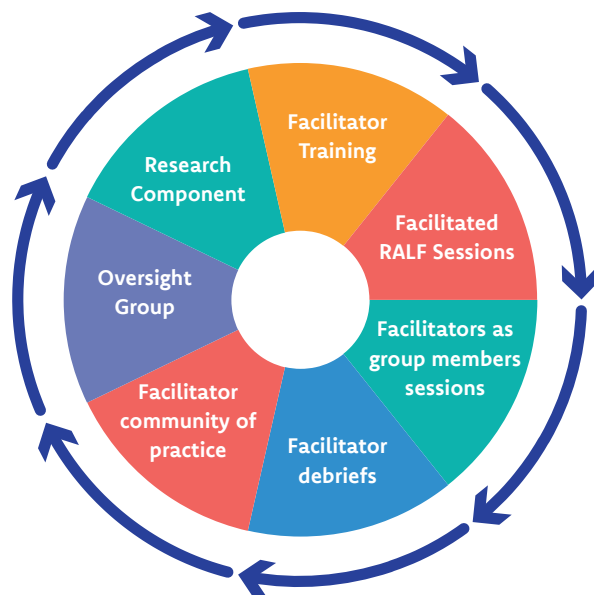
More information about the co-production of the roll out of the Project and its early stages can be found in the [RALF Project Update](#). This report is a summary of the full project report and only provides an outline of the project and what we learned. The full report can be accessed [HERE](#) and contains far more detailed insights, including direct quotes, from our participants. We encourage you to take a look.

What the RALF Project Did

The main aim of the RALF Project was to start a process of rolling out the forum more widely in Scotland. Broadly, the roll-out took the form of recruiting project members, assembling and meeting with the oversight group, training forum facilitators, supporting these facilitators to start and maintain RALF groups, maintaining lines of communication with RALF members in order to adjust the process where needed, and using research methods to identify key learning from the process and impacts of the project.



**Diagram 1:
Component Parts
of RALF Project**



The quantifiable outputs of the project are presented in the following table:

| RALF Facilitators |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32 Started Training • 30 Completed Training • 22 formed one or more RALF groups • 2 were active in the project supporting the implementation of RALF in service(s) w/o forming their own group or running sessions |
| RALF Groups |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size ranged from 3 to 8 members with the average size being 6 members • Of the 24 groups formed, 22 were in-service groups facilitated by a facilitator internal to the organisation, 1 had an external facilitator and 1 was a cross-organisation group. |
| RALF Sessions |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of sessions per RALF group at the end of the funding period ranged from 1 to 11 sessions. |
| Participants in RALF |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the organisations represented, 22 were direct providers of residential child care. There were 9 members, including non-affiliated individuals, in roles supporting residential child care practice. • Well over 100 residential child care workers and/or managers took part in at least 1 RALF session. |

Table 1: Quantifiable RALF outputs

² The Promise Partnership is a Scottish Government grant that provides funding to support the implementation of the recommendations of The Promise, which is the outcome of Scotland's Independent Care Review.

The Impacts of RALF

We used online questionnaires, research diaries and individual and focus group interviews to collect the views and experiences of RALF participants about the impacts of RALF and any other learning from the project. The research component of the RALF Project was approved by the University of Strathclyde's Social Work and Social Policy's Departmental Ethics Committee. A Reflective Capacity Sub-scale (RCS) of the Reflective Practice Questionnaire was used, along with open questions, in the questionnaires.

Facilitators' average scores using the RCS showed overall improved reflective capacity over the course of the project. How this data was scored and its limitations are discussed in the full report.

From respondent accounts in the research diaries, open questions in questionnaires and interviews, more details about the impacts of RALF were evident. These included

impacts on individuals and on participating services.

Significant impacts on the way individuals thought, felt, worked and *were* as people were all discussed. Impacts on thinking included becoming more reflective, clearer in their thinking, and less quick to try to fix or rescue. Impacts on feelings included feeling supported, less isolated, more motivated and empowered, more willing to be vulnerable, and relief from the release that came from sharing and processing feelings. Impacts on how respondents worked primarily related to how they managed, supervised and mentored, but also included having more honest conversations, challenging more and using language differently. Impacts on the way they *were* as people included becoming more confident, more self-aware, more open, and more empathetic. All four areas of impact were often interconnected and overlapping.

Control Chart with Upper and Lower Control Levels

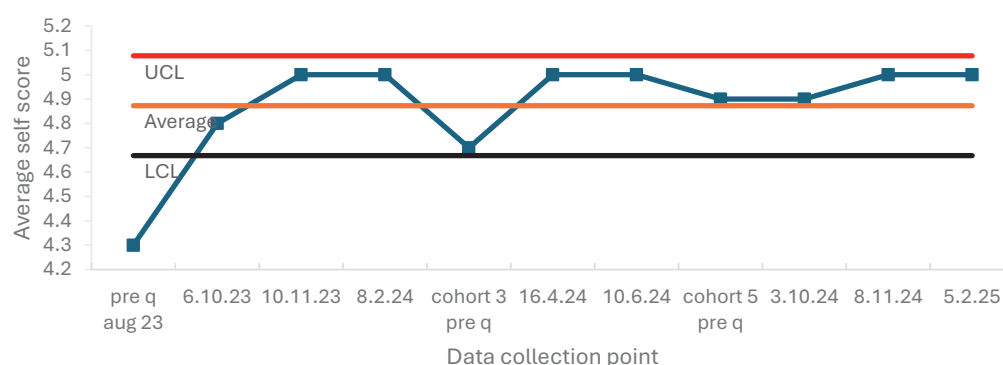


Diagram 2: Facilitator Average RCS Scores Across the RALF Project



Challenges

Impacts on services included improvements in debriefing processes, changes to training, improved relationships, and shifts in organisational culture. Many of these individual and service-level impacts were linked with physical restraint, including changes to the way workers thought and spoke about restraint and restrictive practices. Several respondents spoke of a relationship between reflection and the reduction of restraint and restrictive practices, with some citing significant reductions in behaviour that can lead to restraint. It is important to note that RALF was cited as a significant contributing factor (rather than a sole influence) in services' other efforts to reduce, and where possible eliminate, physical restraint.

Facilitators spoke of the challenges in learning how to facilitate RALF sessions and in forming their groups. The challenges of implementing RALF included time pressures, initial unfamiliarity with what RALF was, reticence and/or discomfort with reflection, organisational issues – for example, sickness, turnover, annual leave, and service size – with smaller services finding it especially difficult to absorb impacts on staffing to enable RALF group participation. One service that involved significantly more workers in the project spoke of the operational and financial costs required for effective implementation and maintenance of the RALF forum, and the importance of acknowledging and planning in order to meet those costs.



Making RALF Work

RALF appears to provide a containing space that helps make unmanageable or uncontainable parts of the work more manageable or containable. In this regard, RALF appears to have enabled workers and managers to think more clearly and cope more effectively with challenging aspects of their work. Key ingredients in making containment possible were regularly cited by respondents, including protected time and space, not being judged, trust, safety, and RALF's structure. RALF training, the community of practice sessions, the

designated support for post-session check ins, refresher training and the general support provided by the organising team were all cited as project elements that supported successful rolling out of RALF groups. At service level, a recognition of the operational and financial investment and related costs were identified as instrumental in implementing RALF, as well as collective reflection and ownership of related challenges.

Key Takeaways

Workers and managers require planned, structured and effective support for the feelings work that is an unavoidable part of reflective practice

Reflective practice in residential child care will sometimes be necessarily emotionally demanding. Workers and managers require

planned, structured and effective support for the feelings work that is an unavoidable part of reflective practice, and there is strong evidence that RALF can provide this support. Within RALF sessions, powerful experiences of what appeared to be attunement were evident. It may be that intentional provision of attunement, especially in relation to restraint and restrictive practice, has not

been prioritised or even named. Yet it also may be that in those situations of pressure and escalating risk, the level of attunement a worker is able to maintain with the child may be a deciding factor in whether safety can be maintained or restored while meeting that child's needs, and all while averting a physical restraint.

Changing unhelpful habits of mind is an important key in unlocking the alternative ways of doing and being with children that make physical restraint less or even unnecessary.

RALF sessions also provide a conducive space for participants to practice new habits, whether in relation to vulnerability, more enabling practices, or any of the other changes to thinking, feeling, doing and being that respondents described above (and in more detail in the [FULL REPORT](#)).

Messaging will affect the implementation of RALF groups as well as services' organisational culture.

The way services prioritise RALF communicates something important not just about the RALF project, but about reflective practice, empowerment, safety, vulnerability and the feelings work required of residential workers and managers. This messaging will affect the implementation of RALF groups as well as services' organisational culture. Contradictory messaging – for example, that RALF or reflection is important, but time for it is not protected or prioritised – is an obstacle to the development of reflective cultures.

Being reminded of their part in the wider effort in Scotland to develop reflective practice and make related changes to the ways children are supported through their most distressing moments can provide inspiration for overcoming the challenges in implementing RALF.





Conclusion

The RALF Project has made a strong start in rolling out the forum more widely in Scotland. Significant numbers of residential child care workers and managers have participated in RALF sessions, and participant views on the impacts of RALF are overwhelmingly positive.

There is compelling evidence that the support for reflection that RALF provides is making a powerful difference to residential child care practice and management generally, and specifically in relation to reducing and where possible eliminating physical restraint while still meeting the needs of children and the adults who care for them. Challenges around implementation remain, and investment is required at service and sector level for RALF to continue.



Who is involved in RALF?

Members of the following services and organisations, as well as the following unaffiliated individuals, have been directly involved in the RALF project:

Aberdeenshire Council

Aberlour Children's Charity

Action for Children

Angus Council

Barnardos

Brodie Patterson, Independent Consultant

Care Visions Residential

CELCIS: The Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection

CYCJ: Children and Young People's Centre for Justice

Church of Scotland

CrossReach Children's Residential Care

David Grimm, Independent Consultant and Artist

East Ayrshire Council

East Park School

Harmeny Care and Education

Inspire Scotland

Judy Furnival, Independent Consultant

Kibble Education and Care Centre

Lee Hollins, PhD Student, University of Strathclyde

Moorehouse Group

Nether Johnson House

Our Promise, Scotland

Pebbles Care

Rossie Young People's Trust

Seamab Care and Education

St. Mary's Kenmure

St Philips Residential Care and Education

The Department of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Strathclyde.

The Good Shepherd Centre

The Scottish Prison Service

Up2Us