**Notes from the Professional Panel Discussion**

The question the Panel was asked to address came up in varying forms throughout the Stage 2 discussions:

**‘Why it is so difficult to affect systemic change for looked after children and their families and carers even though there is a recognition that what we currently do isn’t working?’**

The ‘size’ of the question was recognised and so there was no expectation that it could be dealt with comprehensively in the time allotted. Panel members were asked to respond however they wished e.g. putting forward an idea or challenging the premise of the question etc.

* Sometimes there is an air of fatalism around the depth and breadth of change that is required.
* Not all of children’s issues are down to abuse and neglect – there is a need to understand ‘needs’ in the round. This should also include the needs of parents and carers (including adoptive parents).
* A lot of focus of what we do today is connected to power, ‘managerialism’, audits / targets and efficiencies. It wasn’t always like this so how did this change happen? Whose interests does this way of doing things serve? It often comes back to ‘power’. There is a tendency to focus on the individual. Are we beginning to move back to a more ‘collective’ understanding?
* The concept of the power of the subconscious – ‘the collective defence against anxiety’. It interferes with systemic changes and helps us to distance ourselves from things we are fearful of i.e. politically, organisationally and things that are deeply personal.
* Think there is also something about a fear of loss / of feeling out of control. There is something about recognising that we’ve all played a part in this and for change to occur, we have to give up / share some of our power. Change is difficult. It is difficult for us to face what we are responsible for. (Feelings of shame and fear are not useful). The need for change triggers something deeply in us. We are not having an Independent Care Review because we as professionals asked for change. It was sparked by some courageous young people. Sometimes we hide behind our professionalism. We have built an industry that has produced good and bad. When overwhelmed, we go to places of safety. This leads to us creating processes, where we feel comfortable. The question I often ask is are we in the way of change?
* As an optimist and working in schools, I see positive things. The concept of ‘nurture’ is beginning to gain some traction.
* Rather than seeking to ‘solve’ or ‘fix’ things, perhaps our role is more one of ‘containment’ i.e. helping people live with the difficulties.
* Need to identify ways of working that are evidentially informed and build on people’s strengths. Video Interactive Guidance (VIG) is one: Attachment, Regulation & Competency (ARC) and Non-violent Resistance are also examples.
* Sometimes get stuck as professionals. Tend to see when things go wrong.
* Idea of ‘differential susceptibility’ is the opposite of pathologising. It focuses on how we build and understand a child’s narrative. Of interest is case recordings. Who are they for? Is there something about us discharging our duties or do they really serve to build a child’s story? A developmental approach is about giving a child the power to understand themselves.
* First thing we should do is look at what natural relations a child has i.e. kinship. If this isn’t working or not possible, only then should be look wider. When foster care is chosen, we equally don’t give foster carers enough power nor do we give them the support they need. It’s important that we do not separate out the children who are adopted. Many complexities can arise as children grow. Adolescence can be a particularly stressful and painful time for children and adoptive parents. Why can’t be hold this child’s story as adults? Idea of ‘circle of security’, where adults have to be bigger / stronger / wiser.
* Tension running through the bigger picture of the system and an individual’s experience.
* Most times, the system is set up to serve its own interests and becomes the master we’re then due to serve. There is something about keeping focus on ‘what is our primary task?’ (Menzies) We come together, from all our perspectives, to support the development and growth of children so perhaps we need to be clearer about what is our primary task?

Comment from the audience:

* Need to be mindful that our primary task is delivered through people.
* Liked the idea of the ‘system becoming the master’. We spoke in our group earlier about the ‘commodification’ of children, and a worry about how procurement systems are breeding competition between services.
* There are issues about how we commission services and how we recruit. We don’t recruit on the basis of people’s abilities to build relationships nor do we measure outcomes on the basis of relationships. Think we need to be dead brave to re-look and perhaps un-learn.
* We do know of frameworks / methodologies that are relationship-focused e.g. VIG and Mary Dozier’s work ‘This is my baby’ which helps babies feel known & safe.

Comment from audience:

* Really enjoyed the richness of the conversation. I think one of the key messages is about not trying to ‘fix’ children but help them make sense of their lives.