

# South Yorkshire Empower and Protect Child Sexual Exploitation Innovation Project Evaluation summary

## Background and aims

South Yorkshire Empower and Protect (SYEP) was a partnership between Sheffield, Barnsley and Rotherham local authorities and Doncaster Children's Services Trust, working with VCS partner Catch 22 to enable young people experiencing or at high risk of sexual exploitation to remain safely at home, or in stable foster care in South Yorkshire, rather than being placed in out-of-area or secure accommodation. For young people already in care, this involved the recruitment and training of specialist foster carers, intensive support and therapeutic input to help sustain placements. For young people living at home, a parallel provision included working with family members to increase their understanding of child sexual exploitation (CSE), ability to manage risks and provide appropriate care.

The project intended to undertake some direct work with families, carers, children and young people while at the same time skilling up other professionals to do this work, through modelling, supervision and training. This workforce development element of the project was intended to help increase reflective social-work practice based upon relationships rather than process.

## Evaluation

The aim of the evaluation was to assess whether the intended milestones and early outcomes identified in the theory of change were achieved. Of the 36 referrals accepted by SYEP between October 2015 and October 2016 systematic follow up data were available for 14 young people. Outcomes were assessed using standardised measures administered at baseline and at 3-monthly intervals and in-depth analysis of case studies.

A total of 128 interviews were conducted with managers, staff, foster carers, parents, young people and multi-agency stakeholders at 4 time points. 27 service feedback forms were completed by young people. The evaluation team observed co-production events, training courses and project governance and operational meetings.

## Findings

- The programme has successfully demonstrated that CSE affected young people can be safely cared for in their own communities - if sufficient, appropriate support is provided for both them and their carers.
- A coherent model of working has been developed drawing on Adolescent Mentalization-Based Integrative Treatment (AMBIT) which focusses on strengthening key relationships in a young person's life and providing carers and key workers with the tools to better support them. It also takes clinicians out of the clinic and into the homes of young people and their carers. This has successfully broken down barriers to accepting therapeutic support and increased engagement with services more generally. However, delivery

of the intervention has been largely by the SYEP team rather than through skilling and supporting other workers. Therefore, this aspect of the theory of change has not been effectively tested by the Innovation project.

- Providing foster carers with specialist training and direct access to clinical expertise from the beginning of a challenging placement, rather than only when a breakdown is on the cards, has greatly enhanced carers' ability to cope with self-harm, missing episodes etc. Foster carers consistently reported positive experiences of training and support. In cases where young people have remained in their family home, parents have been successfully engaged and some family relationships have improved as a result.
- Young people have engaged with the support provided and there is evidence that key risk factors (e.g. missing episodes) have been reduced and protective factors (e.g. school attendance) increased. Nine out of 14 cases showed a reduction in risk and in 3 of these cases this was a significant reduction. Young people were extremely positively about the support they had received.
- The impact of the project has been limited by the following factors: the short time allocated to co-designing a new model; a late start caused by delays in appointing key staff; the huge challenge of recruiting foster carers for very complex adolescents; a failure to fully engage social workers and team managers in order to achieve workforce development goals.
- The Innovation has benefited from committed leadership at children's services director level and while the project has been discontinued as a sub-regional initiative there is a commitment to mainstream some elements of the innovation in each of the 4 areas.

## Cost benefits

In a cost savings exercise undertaken by Sheffield City Council's finance department, based on 22 young people being supported by SYEP in a year, the estimated cost savings were £1,166,854. However, the methodology for estimating savings was not entirely convincing to the directors in the four locations, who decided not to continue the project collaboratively beyond March 2017.

## Implications

Placements with trained and experienced foster carers with direct access to clinical expertise, combined with key worker support for young people, should be considered as viable alternatives to secure or specialist residential placements for exploited or high risk young people. Similar levels of support to parents and high-risk young people living at home should be provided in order to improve their relationships and reduce the likelihood of them coming into care.

This evaluation was carried out between May 2015 and October 2016 by Sara Scott working with the University of Bedfordshire International Centre: Researching Child Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Trafficking & NatCen Social Research.

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