

What we've learned

Pause

Reducing the number of children being removed into care, by intervening with women who have experienced, or are at risk of, repeat removals of children from their care

“‘Doing it differently’ is at the heart of what Pause offers.”

Seeing women differently

Agencies that Pause work with have begun to see women as people, not problems, and women now see professionals as people, too, not just as part of a system that works against them. Encouraging partner agencies to think differently about women, and in turn modeling good relationships to women, has had a positive impact.

Pause has challenged partner agencies to meet the needs of women, and in doing so, shown them that behaviours can change and improve if a different approach is taken.

Managing transitions

After such an intense intervention, we are very wary of suddenly leaving women with dramatically reduced support. To address this, we have worked with women and practitioners to design a transition and aftercare programme that enables the woman to move from intense support to a more universal level.

Being clear on what Pause doesn't do

It's important to be clear with women and practitioners on what Pause doesn't do. Pause does not conduct parenting assessments; it does not work with women to get their children back (though this can be the case); it doesn't offer parenting support or parenting classes; and, crucially, it doesn't 'rescue' women or run their lives for them.

Continuously developing the core delivery model

An in-depth understanding of the values and objectives of National Pause is crucial to the success of local Pause Practices, and in ensuring fidelity of the model.

As Pause scales and spreads, a level of guidance is required to ensure consistency of core delivery model, whilst allowing flexibility so that the model can respond to and be owned locally. The Pause Framework is essential so that all Pause Practices understand what must be in place to effectively deliver Pause, coupled with the ongoing support from National Pause.

In the future, we believe that Pause has the potential to be used as a wholly preventative solution rather than a reactive one (e.g. prior to the birth of any children for women who fit the profile).

Responding to direct requests for support

Pause has had to consider how best to respond to requests for support, particularly from vulnerable women contacting National Pause. This is difficult in areas where there is no existing Pause Practice or similar service. A protocol has been developed to respond appropriately to such requests.

Demonstrating value for money

The primary purpose of Pause is to prevent the damaging consequences of children being taken into care. The trauma is a high enough cost, but the cost to the taxpayer is in the hundreds of millions. It is estimated that over a 5 year period, 7 Pause Practices could potentially save the taxpayer over £12 million.

Pause is progressing its business model to ensure sustainability beyond the initial investment from the Innovation Programme. National Pause has been inundated with requests from local areas, expressing an interest in a Pause programme in their area. Many of them have already identified significant funding.

To date, no further children have been born to women currently working with Pause. Emerging evaluation findings indicate an increase in the uptake of training, education, voluntary and paid work, engagement in physical and mental health services, and an improvement in the quality of contact with their existing children.

Understanding the scale of the challenge

In 2013 the London Borough of Hackney identified 49 women who had given birth to 205 children between them, who were taken into care.

This is a familiar picture across the other Pause Practices, and is further illustrated through a national study (Broadhurst et al) which estimates the scale and pattern of recurrent care proceedings. This shows that of 46,094 birth mothers appearing before the courts over a seven year period, 15.5% (7,143) were linked to recurrent care applications.

As each woman may be linked to more than one child, the total number of care applications associated with this cohort is as high as 29% of all care applications (22,790).

This is an under-representation of the scale of the problem as it does not account for children removed through other avenues, for example, under voluntary arrangements, e.g. Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

Personal stories

Lindsey, Pause Practitioner

"The main difference about working for Pause is the philosophy behind the interactions with women. As a Health Visitor the work was rightfully very child-focused, and geared towards public health targets. But with Pause, it's all about the individual woman. The programme is designed to fit around her needs. This individual, woman-focused approach looks at the unique needs that will help her achieve her desired outcomes.

There are fewer boundaries for me as a practitioner, to work with her and I'm free to work differently with each woman. Practitioner's come from many different worlds, but when we all come together, we use our expertise and disciplines to support one another and work collaboratively."

Bella, 27, Pause client

Bella has had six children consecutively removed from her care. Two children have a Special Guardianship Order within the family and four have been adopted.

Bella has lived with domestic abuse, dysfunctional relationships, insecure housing, and has found it difficult to understand why her children were removed from her care.

Bella wanted to work with Pause to address these issues and begin counselling. Bella has since reported improved insight into why her children were removed and improved quality of contact with her children. She has secured a Housing Association flat, built up her confidence, and is better equipped to make positive life choices.

Bella has said:

"Mum invited me to have Christmas dinner with her and my children, which I haven't done for years. I love my new flat and want to make myself a new home. I want a job to keep busy and earn money to look after myself."