

Aycliffe Secure Centre Child Sexual Exploitation Innovation Project Evaluation Summary

Background

The rise in concern about sexual exploitation and the difficulties of keeping exploited young people safe in the community has resulted in more referrals of sexually exploited young women to secure accommodation. However, depriving young people of their liberty on welfare grounds is a contentious issue, particularly given a lack of evidence of its effectiveness in improving outcomes. Within this context, the central question being tested by this pilot was: Can secure accommodation provide a therapeutic environment, engage sexually exploited young people with appropriate therapeutic support and support their transitions into a safer life in the community?

The project was developed in partnership with Barnardo's and the Odysseus mentoring project and involved opening a specialist unit at Aycliffe Secure Centre to accommodate, and provide therapeutic support to, young people referred on welfare grounds as a result of their sexual exploitation. The relationships between young people and staff were seen as the primary facilitators of change; and staff and managers across the unit were provided with reflective supervision and training on attachment and trauma. Well supported transitions were seen as vital, and workers who had developed relationships with young people provided ongoing support through their transitions into the community.

Aims and objectives

The ultimate aim of the Aycliffe innovation was to improve the mental health and well-being of sexually exploited young people and enable them to build lives free of sexual exploitation.

The intended outcomes for young people were: reduced risk of sexual exploitation; improved emotional well-being; stable living situations; supportive relationships; awareness of rights and risks and being able to make positive choices for themselves. For Aycliffe Secure Centre itself, the outcomes included: fewer re-referrals to secure accommodation; a stable, skilled workforce with a consistent trauma informed approach, and evidence of an effective, replicable model for secure provision.

Evaluation

The evaluation began with a Theory of Change workshop involving project partners to inform an evaluation framework which reflected the intended project journey over the course of the pilot year. Evaluation methods included: a pre-post survey of Aycliffe staff to assess work satisfaction, resources, support and the impact of the

innovations project; repeat risk reduction assessments and psycho-social measures with young people (on attachment, trauma symptoms and attitudes to sex and relationships); interviews with staff, parents/carers, social workers and young people; observations of project meetings and training.

Findings

- The pilot project was efficiently established and by June 2015 a team including Barnardo's and Odysseus staff and residential workers for a specialist CSE house were in place.
- The biggest difference between what was planned and what occurred related to the source of referrals. Rather than coming mainly from the North East referrals came from much further afield. This had a major impact on the sustainability of throughcare support that can be provided.
- Training and reflective supervision were very positively received by staff who report increased knowledge and confidence in relation to working with CSE affected young people. This element of the project has continued beyond the pilot.
- Over the course of the pilot period, eleven young women have been resident on the specialist house, mainly referred on three month orders (with some extended to 6 months). Ages have ranged from 13 to 17 years.
- Most of these young women had extremely troubled backgrounds, often including major experiences of violence and abuse. In most cases, the precipitating factor for seeking a secure order was frequency of missing episodes, placement breakdowns and serious concerns for the young women's safety.
- The development of positive relationships with staff was a key objective of the pilot and staff succeeded in developing some very positive relationships.
- There was some evidence of improvements in the mental and emotional well being of some young people during their time at Aycliffe. However, the project has been unable to address the complex underlying difficulties affecting many of the young women referred in the short time available to do so.
- In most cases, positive transitions into suitable placements were not achieved. Local Authority planning was poor and placements difficult to find.

Recommendations

From the evidence so far, there are good indications that it is possible to create a more therapeutic culture in a secure environment. However, for a secure placement to do more than care for a young person for the length of the order, it needs to be part of an integrated long-term plan by the placing authority. Such a plan would need to incorporate: a really thorough appraisal of young people's needs; an ongoing relationship with a worker - preferably prior to, during and after secure; transition planning in place from the start of the order and appropriate residential, foster care and independent living options being available. A secure placement, however good, cannot positively affect outcomes in the absence of long-term solutions.

This evaluation study was carried out between May 2015 and March 2016 by researchers from University of Bedfordshire International Centre and NatCen Social Research led by Dr Sara Scott, DMSS Research.

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A full copy of this report can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications