

Wigan and Rochdale Child Sexual Exploitation Innovation Project Evaluation Summary

Background

The Wigan and Rochdale Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Innovations Project is a partnership between Wigan and Rochdale local authorities, Greater Manchester Phoenix CSE Project, the Children's Society and Research in Practice, on behalf of the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities.

Aims

The aim of the project was to improve outcomes for young people and their families and provide effective alternatives to high cost and secure accommodation for those vulnerable to CSE. The project also aimed to test the value of adopting an action research and co-production approach to service design.

Evaluation

The aim of the evaluation was to assess whether the intended milestones and early outcomes identified in the theory of change were achieved. A member of the evaluation team was embedded in the project team and attended all steering group meetings as well as being a participant-observer at research, engagement and co-design events.

Outcomes for young people were assessed using standardised measures administered at baseline and at 3-monthly intervals along with in-depth analysis of case studies.

A total of 94 interviews were conducted with managers, staff, parents, young people and multi-agency stakeholders at 4 time points. A staff survey was administered to a target population of 79 Wigan and Rochdale staff at 2 time points. Service feedback forms were completed by 13 young people and 10 parents.

Findings

- Messages from a review of national evidence, original local research and co-production activities provided evidence which informed the design of the ACT (Achieving Change Together) pilot service (operational since February 2016). ACT works with young people at medium or high risk of, or who have already experienced CSE, who are also at high risk of family or placement breakdown. ACT social workers operate as key workers, co-working with children's social workers and working non-standard hours to better meet the support needs of young people.
- In their first 8 months of operation ACT have provided intensive early support to 25 young people. These have been mainly young women under 16 with a range of complex difficulties. All of the young people

referred to ACT were assessed as either being 'on the edge of care', or in care placements that were at risk of breakdown. Escalation has been avoided and no secure placements have been used.

- Parents, carers and young people are engaging and reporting high levels of satisfaction with the service. There is evidence that some key risk factors have been reduced, and some protective factors increased for many of the young people worked with. Young people report improvements in things that matter to them like relationships, how they feel, and the attainment of personal goals. However, outcomes data is limited, as assessments at 6 months and beyond provide the most reliable data on change and only 9 young people reached this assessment point within the timeframe of the evaluation.
- The Innovations ways of working are influencing wider practice. Both local authorities signed up to the 6 good practice principles that emerged from the action research and are embedding them through various workforce development activities. Both Wigan and Rochdale have reduced the caseloads of their children's social workers to improve the quality of relationships with families and enable more strengths based, young person-centred ways of working. There is evidence that the model of working has support amongst target staff in both authorities and their knowledge and confidence in working with CSE has increased.

Cost benefits

A cost-benefit analysis by New Economy estimated that for every £1 spent running on the Achieving Change Together service, the fiscal equivalent of £5.48 in benefits was saved through reduced and avoided accommodation costs. The analysis was based on an annual running cost of £305k and benefits of over £1.6m.

Implications

- An action research and co-production approach to service development can be effective in achieving wider ownership of new ways of working.
- It is possible to support exploited and at risk young people without escalation into high cost placements. Support needs to be young person and family focused and high intensity. However, there is no quick fix and services need to be sustained beyond a pilot year for longer term outcomes to be identified and any cost-benefits to be realised.
- Relationship-based work can be effectively carried out by social workers. However, the caseloads of ACT social workers have been approximately a third of those of other children's social workers in Wigan and Rochdale and there is still much to be learned about the conditions needed to sustain this level of social work intervention outside an innovation context.

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

The DFE's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme funded this project and its independent evaluation. Co-ordination of the evaluation was undertaken by the Rees Centre from the University of Oxford (www.reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk).

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