

Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme

Project Learning Report

Details of Bespoke Support Project (BSP):	
Partnership Name:	Redcar & Cleveland
Core partner agencies involved:	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council including children's service, early help and community safety. Youth offending service Cleveland Police
Number of Local Authority areas covered:	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Regional Area:	North East
BSP Project Size:	Complex
BSP Methodology/ methodologies	Data
Digital / Face to face / Mixed Delivery	Digital
Date BSP commenced:	June 2020
Reasons why the local area requested the TCE Support programme:	
<p>As part of ongoing work in the local area within the Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing, Trafficked (VEMT) group, the local partnership are in the process of developing their use of multi-agency data and considering how to utilise this as they adopt a more contextual approach to safeguarding children and young people as part of their work in relation to child exploitation and extra-familial harm. As part of this, a 3 P's model had been adopted focusing on places, peers and perpetrators. Redcar & Cleveland approached the TCE Programme to support activity in this area, to consider how to embed this approach across a range of multi-agency partners and to explore how the approach to data might be used to enable partners to understand and respond to young people's experiences across the local area.</p>	
Overall goal of BSP:	
<p>As part of the early scoping phase, the change goal for the project was identified as-</p> <p>To explore the use of data in relation to child exploitation and extra-familial harm across Redcar & Cleveland and use this as a basis for the development of an intelligence led prevention strategy.</p> <p>In support of this, local colleagues and the TCE programme agreed to explore the following areas-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping and reviewing the quality of existing data • Producing intelligence about exploitation across the partnership which takes account of peers, perpetrators and places to support the focus on early intervention and prevention • Developing a shared and common language in relation to data and different data sets across the partnership which lead to a shared narrative around vulnerability as it relates to child exploitation • Using data to describe the narrative / experience of young people in relation to exploitation 	

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- Grounding the data approach in practice so that it becomes a dynamic tool for the partnership to support service planning and resourcing
- Developing an action plan which leads towards the development of an intelligence led prevention strategy across the area.

Approaches / methods taken to achieve project goal and deliver the BSP:

The approach adopted throughout the project was one of collaboration, holding space and providing the enabling conditions for reflective discussion and exploration. Although originally due to begin in April 2020, the impact of Covid-19 had a significant impact on this project both in terms of the TCE Programme's shift to digital delivery, alongside the Local Authority's experience of a cyber-attack early in the spring, which had a knock-on effect in terms of capacity and capability to progress a data focused project. Throughout the summer, however, progress was made in terms of scoping and the partnership and TCE delivery team were in a position to progress with a project which was delivered digitally.

The scoping phase of the project was primarily driven by local authority colleagues, but it came to light during early conversations with Cleveland Police that they were in the process of developing a child exploitation problem profile across the force area. This provided an opportunity to ground the work of the project in real time local activity across the partnership and to use Redcar & Cleveland as a basis to trial developments related to work around data so that learning could be shared across the Cleveland Police area.

Initial conversations were held with individual agencies across the partnership to provide space to consider current strengths, challenges and opportunities relating to data within the system. These conversations considered data collection, systems, recording, analysis, sharing and decision making, leading to reflections which formed the basis of both single agency and partnership actions plans.

Following this, a number of sessions were held with colleagues from across the partnership-

- **Data Mapping-** two sessions for data leads to explore the data held across the partnership currently and to reflect on how it is utilised to inform an understanding of child exploitation and extra-familial harm
- **Telling our story-** a session for strategic, practice and data leads to come together to explore key messages from data across the partnership and to consider what this might tell us about the experience of children and young people across Redcar & Cleveland

Throughout these sessions, actions were identified to build on those emerging from initial data maturity conversations, providing a basis for local colleagues to further develop and embed this work beyond the life of the project.

Key issues that arose during the delivery of the BSP:

- for a local area and those delivering the BSP

What do we mean by data?

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Strategic leads from across the area were clear that in wanting to reflect on the use of data, they wished to take a broad view, considering both quantitative and qualitative data sources, and landing on the definition that data is any information that has been collected, observed, generated or created. Taking a broad approach such as this can result in a rich and varied data set, but can also present challenges both in the recording and analysis of data across partnerships. Capturing and analysing qualitative or unstructured data can be resource intensive and has implications for capacity which should be considered and responded to by strategic leads.

Data sharing

One of the recurring conversations and challenges surrounding data within partnerships is that of data sharing. Redcar & Cleveland have previously faced challenges in relation to this, which manifested as some early hesitation as we worked through the project. Partners were concerned that new information sharing agreements may be needed to underpin the work within the project or that issues may arise around GDPR as the work progressed. The TCE approach was to try and shift the focus away from individuals and personalised data and to begin considering patterns and trends within aggregate data as a means to enable collaboration and joint working. The role of data sharing, however, should not be minimised, and local colleagues reflected the need to hold discussions at the earliest point with data protection leads as this work develops in order to ensure safe and effective data sharing is reinforced as a principle on which partnership working is predicated.

Strategic leadership

Strategic leadership is central to an effective approach to considering the use of data across a partnership from a number of perspectives. From a practical point of view, leadership is required to give space for the developmental and reflective work to take place across the partnership such as that we undertook in this project. It supports more operational colleagues in recognising and responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm as a priority and provides the enabling conditions for a curious approach to data to be adopted. Throughout the project, the engagement of strategic leaders fluctuated, with strategic police leads being absent from discussions and delegating involvement in the project to senior data analysts. Although there is strength in delegated authority, a robust and visible strategic lead may have further benefitted the work to ensure impact could be maximised and amplified across the partnership as work progressed.

Digital working

For the TCE delivery team, this project represented the first opportunity to deliver some of the tools utilised in previous data focused projects in a digital format. Although not without challenge, an approach of testing, reflecting and adapting as the project progressed meant that tools were successfully adapted for digital delivery. Further reflections with other TCE Bespoke Support Projects is taking place to ensure learning is captured and further iterative developments are progressed as we discover more about how this work translates into a digital space.

A reflection of the TCE delivery team throughout the project is that digital delivery can feel more 'flat' than in person. The sparks generated from bringing people together in a room can sometimes be more difficult to replicate online. Although digital delivery offers greater flexibility in terms of securing availability of partners, it can also have the effect of creating a space which feels less

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protected with people dropping in and out of sessions in a way in which might not happen so readily in an in person workshop settings.

Joining the dots:

Describes the [thematic approach](#) taken by the TCE Support Programme to respond to system challenges. These three themes are intended to prompt new and innovative thinking and constructively challenge the status quo by encouraging the sector to make new links and approach strategic decisions from new angles and perspectives.

Key reflections on the Joining the Dots themes within the BSP:

1. Leading with care
2. Blurring boundaries
3. Holding complexity, uncertainty and curiosity

Leading with Care

As part of the project, the concept of leading with care emerged in a number of ways. Firstly in considering the young people subject of the data collected, it is important for us all to consider the fact that **notions of risk and vulnerability are located externally to young people themselves**. In shifting the lens through which we understand vulnerability, we are able to consider the impact of context and protective or safety factors which exist within local communities.

Strategic leaders have a responsibility to consider the safety and wellbeing of *all* children and young people within their local area. By asking different questions of our data, we are able to piece together a narrative which tells us the story of young people's experience. **Within this project we explored what we know and, perhaps more importantly, [what we don't know](#) about children and young people known to be exploited, those thought to be being exploited and all young people in the local area.** This approach led to questions around our understanding of child exploitation and extra familial harm by prompting us to consider that which is not visible or perhaps hidden within systems and processes which require reflection and challenge to uncover.

Those working with, collecting or analysing data are often several steps removed from seeing the impact of their work. **Feedback loops are vital within the system, acting as a motivating factor for staff as well as providing crucial connections between data, practice or service delivery and strategic decision making.** Holding and creating space for feedback loops to be established was highlighted as something which would be beneficial for colleagues across Redcar & Cleveland with recognition that strategic leads have a role in facilitating and nurturing these connections.

Bridging boundaries

The notion of bridging boundaries was evident within this project in relation to both questions of **geography and understanding the experience of children and young people within the context of exploitation and extra-familial harm**. In terms of geography, the police problem profile was undertaken to cover the whole of the Cleveland Police force area. Firstly, this highlighted the fact that data recording, systems and analysis is not consistent across local authority boundaries. There is no common data set for child exploitation and extra-familial harm and this presents challenges in terms of interpreting data presented. These challenges are compounded further when we consider that child exploitation itself does not conform to artificial administrative boundaries. Children, young people and perpetrators alike 'show up' in different data sets depending on local

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processes and resources. In Redcar & Cleveland specifically, this issue arose within the project when discussing missing incidents, particularly those involving children in out of area care placements. The need to share data and intelligence across administrative boundaries is a pressing concern for all agencies and one in which further work is required. It is hoped, however, that in framing the TCE project within the context of the wider police problem profile, a catalyst is in place for these conversations to begin to be explored at a strategic level across the region.

An understanding of children and young people's experience within the context of child exploitation and extra familial harm prompts us to ask questions about our data. If we are seeing young people present as perpetrators within the criminal justice system, what questions do we need to ask to see beyond the initial presentation and consider whether child exploitation or extra familial harm may be a factor in what professionals are observing? Who might hold the missing pieces of the jigsaw to help us interpret what we are seeing? Who might provide a different lens through which we might begin to acknowledge the gaps present in the information presented to us? How can we look beyond binary interpretations and understandings of that which we are observing? Within this project, the bringing together of a range of partners including the youth offending service, police, children's services and community safety allowed an exploration through different professional lens' to begin. The bringing together of data, practice and strategic leads also created the conditions needed to ask questions of each other's perspective and acknowledge the need for looking beyond the obvious.

Holding complexity, uncertainty and curiosity

Curiosity sits at the heart of the work within Redcar & Cleveland with the project presenting an opportunity to reflect on and ask questions of the **uncertainty and complexity present within child exploitation and extra-familial harm**. The premise for our work in the local area was that **data is our starting point for asking further questions**. Data itself does not provide definitive answers, but serves as the jumping off point for further exploration. Throughout the project, colleagues noted that the data available only reflects part of the picture. There are gaps in what we know and we need to ensure strategic leaders are reflecting critically on this, acknowledging issues of bias and seeking out the voices of children, young people and those supporting them to provide a more holistic view.

The work as part of the TCE project is just the beginning for Redcar & Cleveland. For the learning to have a lasting impact, the curious approach to data should be adopted as a core principle running throughout the work of the partnership. Ongoing conversation should seek to identify new data sources, bring in wider partners who may provide new and emerging insights and build capacity for data leads across the partnership to work collaboratively in developing a deepening understanding of the 'story' of exploitation and extra-familial harm across the local area.

Significant learning and transferability from the BSP for other areas:

The power of relationships

Throughout this project, we saw the power of relationships and connections as they began to develop across the partnership and the need to create space to nurture these as part of an ongoing and sustainable approach. Bringing in partners who sit outside of the statutory safeguarding framework, such as those in community safety, opened up new opportunities to explore different data sets, all of which serve to strengthen the 3 P's model adopted by VEMT

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leading to a richer narrative about the experience of children and young people across the local area. This is a platform on which to develop, with the possibility of other partners, particularly those from the voluntary and community sector who were noticeably absent from this project, being brought into the iterative conversation around data as it continues to develop.

In bringing together leads from across the partnership, we have seen professional relationships form whereby people now know who they can have a conversation with, should they wish to explore a particular issue. Previously, requests for data across agencies seemed to get lost in the system. These seemingly small connections and relationships are powerful and provide a basis for longer term, multi-agency exploration and collaboration which will have a direct impact on the emerging approach to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.

Feedback loops as a motivator, confidence builder and a foundation for deeper reflection

Within Redcar & Cleveland, as is the case in many local areas, those working with data are, in the main, part of centralised teams who are several steps removed from front line practice and are rarely standing members of strategic meetings or forums. This disconnect means that analysis or reports are often produced with little to no feedback on the context in which they are to be used, the impact they have had or the actions which took place as a result of the analysis provided. In developing connection and ongoing dialogue between strategic leads, practitioners and data leads, local partnerships able to create a culture of curiosity around data. This connection provides a strong foundation for the development of effective and meaningful feedback loops which support collaboration, serve as a motivator for all professionals within the system, build confidence in the value of critical challenge and serve as the foundation for deeper reflection on what data is telling us and perhaps more importantly what it is not.

Patterns, trends and aggregate data as a means to unlocking collaboration

Although the legal frameworks are in place to allow the sharing of personalised data in appropriate circumstances, all too often concerns around GDPR can cause multi-agency collaboration around data to fail at the early stages. The emphasis in this project was to consider what we might learn from the patterns and trends within aggregate data and use this as the basis for collaboration. The focus on place and consideration of contextual factors for Redcar & Cleveland in their understanding of child exploitation and extra-familial harm allowed relationships to develop and trust to build between colleagues across the partnership. This space to build trust and explore the possible provides a platform on which to build further collaboration in the future.

Emerging evidence of how the project has positively disrupted the system response to child exploitation and extra-familial harm :

Throughout the project, the TCE delivery team have observed the **strengthening of relationships between key partners as mutual trust develops and an understanding of the different perspectives and insights people can offer**. An example of this can be seen in the stronger connections which are emerging between children's services and the community safety partnership. The foundations of this relationship were evident and strong from the outset of the project, but by bringing together and holding space for strategic and data leads as part of the project, possibilities for bringing together new data sets are emerging. At a strategic level, there is a commitment to ongoing closer joint working and discussions taking place about what this could mean in terms of service response.

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Challenges within the project, such as strategic engagement with police colleagues, have prompted problem solving discussions amongst strategic leads and a recognition of the need to actively seek out and engage with partners who were not part of the conversations within this project or part of the core VEMT group. In terms of police engagement, there is a recognition that in thinking about who may hold insights which support a partnership understanding of children and young people's experience, the partnership may need to look beyond just those who have child exploitation explicitly set out within their defined remit. Neighbourhood policing were highlighted as an example of this, being an area of policing with a broad and varied remit, but with a significant contribution to make in terms of the partnership response to child exploitation. There is a commitment from local partners to further develop these wider relationships as work progresses. Central to this learning is a **shift in thinking from considering only individual children and young people to beginning to explore patterns and trends**. As part of that, understanding children and young people's experience within the context of local communities opens up the possibility for exploration with partners who do not as yet sit within the core VEMT group.

The learning from Redcar and Cleveland presents an opportunity for local strategic leads to share emerging learning across the Tees region with a view to building a platform for wider engagement in developing an effective strategic response to child exploitation. There is a recognition within the partnership that governance for this work currently sits at a senior operational level with VEMT. Reflections towards the end of the project highlighted that more work is needed on this to ensure governance is highlighted and owned at a strategic level with conversations across the Tees area opening up opportunities to highlight, develop and embed this over the coming months.

Immediate reflections from the local area:

Our bid to the TCE program was submitted at a time when we had been gathering data based on our 3P model for approximately 12 months. This was starting to identify children who were on the periphery of concern, children who were interconnected and perpetrators that featured in more than one case and we were identifying emerging hot spot areas. We recognised that for those children who were actively engaging in work regarding exploitation it was usually at a point when the risks were already high. We needed to be able to analyse our information earlier and identify how we could work with partners through education, our community safety partnership or our early help and youth service to implement proactive, instead of reactive, interventions. We requested support to understand how we could better utilise our data, overcoming GDPR barriers.

Following scoping discussions and the appointment of our project team, the facilitation of meetings with partners to discuss the project request and to establish our goals were incredibly helpful. We quickly moved into a culture with TCE of high support, high challenge through skilled facilitation. The questioning approach enabling consideration of what we really meant by data, our sources, what would be most helpful to us moving forward. Particularly, the enabling discussions around moving away from personalised data to the consideration of patterns and trends within data which would then enable improved knowledge through analysis and better targeting of education, intervention and disruption activities.

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Whilst there were some gaps both by way of police engagement and some delay in establishing governance, these areas are now addressed within the local authority and in determining our next steps, should not present as a barrier to future progress.

In respect of joining the dots; the facilitation and creation of a space to work with partners, to be led through a process by way of high support and appropriate challenge, enabled some interesting, reflective and very useful discussions to take place. This created an opportunity to learn about our partners and the data they hold and to consider how we might better work together in tackling child exploitation. The need to work with partners and create an opportunity to share, interpret and act upon data and to be curious about what we don't know has helped to create shared goals and ambitions for our children and young people.

Whilst it was felt that we had made good progress by way of our 3P model we were still stuck in the concept of considering individual children rather than really starting to think about our places and spaces, our communities and how we can intervene differently, through schools, community groups and centres, parenting and youth groups to raise awareness and prevent extra familial harm.

Due to Covid, this project was delivered digitally, there is no doubt that we have all adapted to working by way of virtual means and although this has its advantages, it also brings about a slightly different dynamic; the way the energy of a meeting can be impacted upon. Nevertheless, we made significant progress and once the project had commenced, we maintained an appropriate pace around our learning objectives.

Our next steps in Redcar and Cleveland are to continue our signs of safety journey, in conjunction with our broadening knowledge of contextual safeguarding and extra familial harm. To develop our No Wrong Door model, strengthening our response to children who are at risk of and are being exploited, who are on the edge of care or looked after. We will achieve this through our work with partners strengthened by the skills and knowledge we have gained through our work with TCE.

Please tick this box if there is an agreement for the Project Learning Report to be shared via the TCE Support programme's Microsite for other local areas:

Date: 1.02.21

Signed by local area: N. Henry

Date: 1.02.21

Signed by TCE project Lead: A.Hurst