Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) Support Programme – Annual Learning Report 2020-21 Executive Summary
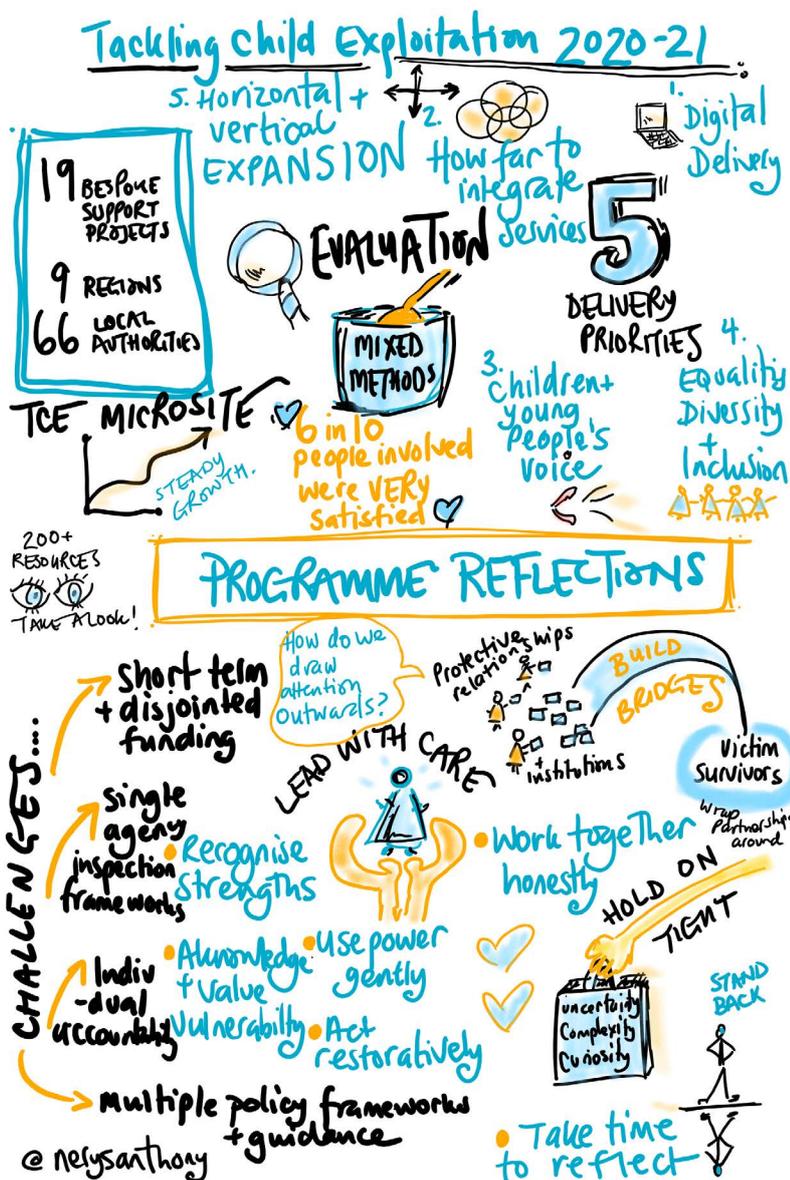
Introduction

The Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) Support Programme is a consortium led by Research in Practice with The Children's Society and the University of Bedfordshire. Funded by the Department for Education (DfE) for three years (2019-2022).

The overarching aim of the programme is to support child safeguarding partnerships and wider partners working in and across local areas to improve strategic responses to child exploitation and extra-familial harm. This summary report is intended to support cross-sector reflections by offering insights based on learning from the programme's second year of delivery. This summary covers:

1) Core TCE activities in Year 2 (2020-21)

2) Programme reflections on the current child exploitation and extra-familial harm strategic context and the programme's response to it.

3) A look ahead to plans for work in Year 3 (2021-22).

Section 1: core TCE activity - Year 2

The programme takes an evidence-informed approach, drawing on research, practice wisdom and lived experience to offer high support and high challenge in relation to the systemic complexity faced by strategic leaders in their efforts to tackle these concerns. Its core activities are:

> Working with strategic leads in child safeguarding partnerships on Bespoke Support Projects (BSPs) and Development Priorities with a team of expert Delivery Partners drawn from the sector.

> Amplifying TCE learning and commissioned programme research and resources through the TCE microsite.

> Embedding evidence both within delivery and through an embedded evaluation of the Programme itself.

Bespoke Support Projects are time-limited projects for local areas and partnerships, which aim to accelerate and / or add value to existing strategic activity and its associated responses in order to tackle child exploitation and extra-familial harm.

Year 2 saw the programme initiate 19 new BSPs (6 of which were from the application window in autumn 2020) and complete one outstanding Year 1 BSP. In 2020-21 TCE delivered BSPs in all 9 regions in England and a total of 66 local authorities in England were reached (see appendix 1). A fourth application window, open from February to the end of March 2021, saw 12 applications from local partnerships, with 7 new BSPs accepted to be taken forward in Year 3.

In addition to BSP delivery the programme also focused on development priorities, which responded to learning from Year 1. Activity against the five Year 2 priorities was taken forward through a mixed model of direct delivery activity (BSPs, learning sets, moderated online conversations etc) and through the commissioning of research and resources, which are published on the programme priorities page of the TCE microsite. Specific activity against the five priorities included:

Digital delivery action research was carried out into the impact of Covid-19-related restrictions on child exploitation and extra-familial harm, and the safeguarding implications for strategic leaders. The findings are available on the microsite and an article was published in the peer-reviewed Journal of Children's Services. In the early stage of lockdown (April – May 2020), the research highlighted the significant impact of the pandemic on children and young people, especially with regard to disadvantages and inequalities. However, it was too soon to be able to know the implications in relation to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.

Children and young people's voice focused on work to support local strategic partnerships to improve and / or provide opportunities for children and young people to have a voice that is heard when strategic responses to tackling child exploitation and extra-familial harm are developed, implemented and reviewed. This included exploring children and young people's experiences of the systems that determine the response and support they receive in relation to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.

Equalities, diversity and inclusion work began with a think piece for strategic leaders: 'The hyper-visible and invisible children' by Listen Up, and a series of moderated Twitter conversations and a blog to underline the need to attend to minoritised communities within the national and local response to child exploitation and extra-familial harm. Further commissioned work includes an evidence review on disproportionality and data plus a series of interviews exploring the intersectionalities of gender, faith and disability in relation to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.

The final two priorities, **horizontal and vertical expansion of services** and **how far to integrate services** were developed in tandem as the two defining 'asks' from the sector during the first year of the programme's delivery. Work across Year 2 involved action research with a group of six BSPs. Through joint working and reflection as a group (as well as individually) The programme explored the approaches and implications that service configuration has in relation to providing an effective response to child exploitation and extra-familial harm:

> By 'horizontal expansion', we mean the expanding remits of child exploitation teams to move from the (often sole) focus on child sexual exploitation to incorporate child criminal exploitation, Contextual Safeguarding and wider forms of extra-familial harm including modern slavery and human trafficking, and radicalisation.

> By 'vertical expansion', we mean local areas seeking to extend support for young people beyond 18 years. There is growing research evidence to support a more transitional approach to safeguarding (Holmes & Smale, 2018) and a need to support an understanding that, in practice, this does not simply entail a one-off transfer to adult services.

> By 'how far to integrate services', we mean the extent to which child exploitation and extra-familial harm services restructure to meet these demands, either by centralising expertise or maintaining a more diffuse model.

The TCE programme microsite was launched in June 2020 as an open access resource for strategic leaders and others involved in child exploitation and extra-familial harm to source relevant resources and up-to-date learning from the sector. It is also the vehicle for programme communications (i.e. blogs, the Twitter feed, BSP project learning reports and information about opportunities to work with the programme) and provides a mechanism for TCE learning to be shared with the sector.

Traffic to the microsite is growing steadily, with an average of 850 unique sessions in the last quarter of 2020 and just over 1,000 in the first quarter of 2021.

Over 200 quality-assured resources, ranging from primary research, toolkits, webinars and guidelines, have been uploaded to the microsite this year. Over 1,600 resources were downloaded between August 2020 and the end of March 2021.

The evaluation of the programme is carried out internally by its Evidence team. Led by the University of Bedfordshire and overseen by an independent steering group, the Evidence team uses a mixed methods approach:

> All BSP participants are asked to complete quantitative surveys at three time points (the start of the BSP, the end of delivery and 3-6 months later), with qualitative focus groups at the end of BSP delivery and around 6 months after that exploring the impact.

> Insights from Delivery Partners are collected through surveys and discussion groups and quarterly learning panels.

> A sector-wide survey is conducted each year.

Analysis of data from Year 2 of the programme shows a resoundingly positive response from BSP participants asked about their satisfaction with the support provided. More than 6 in 10 participants were very satisfied, none were unsatisfied and the remainder were satisfied to some extent.

Section 2: programme reflections

The TCE Evidence team also engages in an ongoing cycle of action research, whereby themes and issues identified in the evaluation are shared and fed back into the programme delivery and vice versa. This enables emerging issues and gaps in evidence to be identified, highlighted, and where appropriate, directly addressed. The identification and delivery of the Year 2 development priorities are a good example of this process in action, as is the Evidence team's ability to inform BSP scoping and Project Learning Reports. The themes and learning identified through the evaluation identified below come from the evaluation dataset and ongoing delivery learning, contextualised within the wider research and evidence base.

The current child exploitation and extra-familial harm strategic context

The challenges facing local areas and partnerships are predominantly shaped by the combination of:

a) the complex nature of child exploitation and extra-familial harm

b) the complicated multi-agency system that depends on partnership working to effectively respond to these concerns.

Responses both from the Year 2 TCE sector survey, and from local areas worked with through BSPs, continue to highlight as issues: the multiple and sometimes overlapping policy frameworks and guidance, a short-term and disjointed funding landscape, and individual accountability and single agency inspection frameworks that can drive the focus of attention inwards rather than outwards to partnership working. Local areas also continue to describe the challenges of delivering an effective response to child exploitation and extra-familial harm without additional resources.

TCE's response and approach

The TCE programme takes a strengths-based, relational approach, working to restorative principles, providing high support and high challenge. Three conjoined principles underpin the work of the programme: building bridges through broad-based partnerships; leading with care through relational working and working with complexity, curiosity and holding uncertainty to allow us to slow down and challenge 'quick fixes'. Collectively, these are articulated as 'Joining the Dots', emphasising the inter-relationship between the three elements. Analysis has highlighted the symbiotic (but inverted) relationship that these principles have with exploitation itself.

Where child exploitation and extra-familial harm often splits and separates victim-survivors from protective institutions and relationships, 'building bridges' looks to wrap deeper and broader partnerships around young people and their families with a focus on meaningful partnership working – the role that statutory and non statutory partners, community and families can all play.

Where child exploitation and extra-familial harm often involves coercive control and manipulation of young people, 'leading with care' asks those with power to use it gently and restoratively (i.e., 'do with' not 'do to'). The programme encourages local areas and partnerships to acknowledge their own strengths and vulnerabilities to best enable them to work together honestly as experts in their own contexts.

Where child exploitation and extra-familial harm constantly moves, shifts and reinvents itself, 'holding uncertainty, complexity and curiosity' offers the space needed to stand back and reflect and act with purpose. Within a complex, fast-paced landscape where significant harm is happening, rapid responses at an operational level are essential. The challenge for strategic leaders is to manage these swift responses whilst also pausing and reflecting on what is needed at a systemic level to hold and work with the complexity emerging across their local landscapes.

Section 3: forward look to Year 3

During the course of the third year of delivery, the programme will shift emphasis away from single site BSP delivery and towards thematic analysis and learning dissemination. The programme will continue to offer BSPs, but with a thematic approach:

> TCE delivery will lead a final round of single-site BSPs from the March application window, followed by a range of thematic projects that explore in more detail themes identified by programme learning. The programme will continue to support sustainable peer networks and will have an enhanced focus on consolidating and applying learning to date with the Evidence team.

> TCE will offer a new programme of learning and events to amplify programme learning. This will be a varied menu of online knowledge dissemination and knowledge exchange opportunities, microsite content and commissioned resources, and opportunities for peer-peer reflective learning and deeper learning events focused on systems improvement.

Both BSP delivery and the learning programme will continue to prioritise throughout Year 3 a focus on hearing the voices of children and young people and minoritised communities, including approaches to equalities, diversity and inclusion, with a view to integrating and mainstreaming 'expertise through lived experience' at a strategic level. Reflections on partnership working, in particular what this looks like beyond statutory safeguarding partners, will also be a key focus.

In terms of evaluation, a core focus will be moving towards a whole-systems approach, including articulating a Theory of Change and the programme's Joining the Dots framework as contributions to systems improvement. The programme will accelerate its analysis of learning to date to support the new learning offer. Finally, the programme will deepen its understanding of how and whether TCE approaches could make a positive impact to the way local areas and partnerships respond to child exploitation and extra-familial harm by encouraging colleagues to take time to think, reflect and act purposefully, not simply at pace.

Type	Region	Local Area	No. of LAs participating	Focus
Standard Project change goal closely aligned to: > Partnership > Theory of Change > Strategy > Data > Action research > Bespoke Single area partnership Transferable learning	South East	Portsmouth	1	Data
	South West	North Somerset	1	Partnership / data
	South West	Somerset	1	Partnership / strategy
	South East	East Sussex	1	Partnership − disruption
	West Midlands	Walsall	1	Partnership − community response to CE
	North West	Blackpool	1	Partnership − early intervention
	West Midlands	Birmingham	1	Partnership − quality assurance
	South West	Swindon	1	Bespoke − culture
	South East	Brighton and Hove	1	Partnership − culture
	South West	Torbay	1	Partnership − culture
	West Midlands	Herefordshire	1	Data
	West Midlands	Dudley	1	Bespoke − quality assurance
Complex Addressing a complex risk or issue. Potential to generate key learning and / or tools that could directly support other local areas' development.	West Midlands	Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent	2	Data
	North East	Redcar & Cleveland	1	Data
	North East	Northumbria − Gateshead, Newcastle Upon Tyne, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland	5	Data
	East Midlands	Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire	2	Strategy
	North East	Stockton and Hartlepool	2	Partnership − culture
	Eastern	Pan Bedfordshire	3	Partnership − transitional safeguarding
Regional Complex partnership arrangements over multiple LA, health or police force boundaries Broad-based regional impact	Greater London	Greater London	33	Mixed
	Yorkshire and Humber	West Yorkshire − Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield	5	Partnership − disruption

We want to hear more about your experiences of using TCE resources and tools.

Connect via Twitter using #TCEProgramme to share your ideas.

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