Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme

West Yorkshire Project Learning Report

Details of Bespoke Support Project (BSP):	
Partnership name:	West Yorkshire Regional Partnership
Core partner agencies involved:	Police, Health, Social Care, Education
Number of local authority areas covered:	5
Regional area:	West Yorkshire
BSP size:	Regional
BSP methodology/ methodologies	Bespoke
Digital / face-to-face / mixed delivery	Digital delivery
Date BSP commenced:	November 2020

Reasons why the local area requested the TCE Support Programme:
This was a regional Bespoke Support Project (BSP) across West Yorkshire, with representatives from the local areas of Wakefield, Bradford, Kirklees, Calderdale and Leeds. Three areas were highlighted in the application that the region wanted support with: a) use of risk assessment tools b) disruption toolkits c) the use of data in relation to child exploitation.

Overall goal of BSP:
It was beyond the scope of the project to look at all three issues identified, so it was decided to focus on one key area: to develop a broader understanding of 'disruption' (beyond its traditional association with enforcement activity) across the region. This was an issue that resonated with all participating local areas and was of strategic significance to the partnership. The BSP aimed to identify examples of positive practice and take a more proactive approach to disruption, already being developed across the partnership. There was

acknowledgement that strategic responses to child exploitation needed to be mindful of the intersecting but distinct local contexts across the region.

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

Due to the regional nature of this project, scoping started with the Central Safeguarding Governance Unit. Single agency conversations then took place with local area stakeholders to understand views and preferences on the areas of exploration and support offered by the BSP. This also helped to surface the 'cross-border' challenges around disruption and the acknowledgement that strategic responses to child exploitation needed to be mindful of the intersecting but distinct local contexts across the region.

Findings from this scoping were then fed back to the Regional Vulnerability Unit, with three different work strands identified. A TCE Delivery Partner then worked on the different goals with the identified local areas and created an output for each strand with a plan for an overall feedback meeting with representatives from across the region in October 2021.

Delivery
Local area participants, with support from Delivery Partners, explored the themes identified in scoping through a range of workshops, evidence scoping and stakeholder interviews. In addition to this Project Learning Report, three different outputs were developed. The intention of this approach to delivery was to build a regional outlook on disruption, which the Safeguarding Partnership could take forward and embed into organisational culture.

The three different outputs developed were:

- TCE was requested by child exploitation partnerships across Bradford and Leeds to facilitate a partnership workshop and gather attendees to think about relevant activity to enable collective and collaborative learning focussed on disrupting child exploitation. As a result, Emma Philipps, TCE Delivery Partner, has developed a framework with supporting audio commentary, which could act as a means of both areas working together to focus on disruption.

- TCE was requested by Calderdale's child exploitation partnership to undertake a series of interviews exploring approaches to disrupting child exploitation within Calderdale. Five interviews in total were conducted by TCE Delivery Partner, Joe Caluori (Head of Research and Policy at Crest), with five interviewees from the Safeguarding Partnership, CCG, local authority, police and third sector. Each interview explored how each partner defined:
  o disruption
  o opportunities to enable partners to be disruptive
  o considering the use of data to support disruption approaches

- disruption focussed on locations
- examples of where disruption is already taking place locally and deemed as positive.

Once the interviews were complete, an analysis of the responses were shared with the local area highlighting key themes and areas to progress next steps.

- As part of the wider TCE West Yorkshire project, an additional 'light touch' review was initiated to consider how the partnership used data to facilitate the disruption of child exploitation impacting on Wakefield and Kirklees. Invitations were sent to key members of the partnership inviting them to take part in semi-structured interviews to understand the relationship between strategic (governance) and operational (delivery) groups, i.e. if / how is data (quantitative and qualitative) currently shared? What strategic products are produced and who leads on / contributes to them? Is the delivery group proactive in combatting exploitation through data? What activity would the interviewees like to try / do more of? Based on insights from the interviewees, the Programme also provided suggestions on how other partnerships it has worked with from other projects use data to disrupt. Its focus was to understand the activity already undertaken by the partnership and to provide practical suggestions around what else it may want to consider when combatting child exploitation.

It is important to acknowledge the context that partners were working in. Child exploitation is always a complex challenge, further compounded by the pressures on services of operating through the pandemic. BSP delivery therefore tried to support the partnership by 'starting small, starting somewhere,' to identify and share emergent practice as well as amplify learning across the partnership.

Key issues that arose during the delivery of the BSP:
- for a local area and those delivering the BSP

Consistency
During scoping there was an emphasis on how the regional partnership could become more consistent in its child exploitation work. The importance of a consistent application of processes, such as risk assessment,[1] using disruption toolkits or standardising the use of data across the region, were highlighted. This, the regional partners felt, would help to give them confidence that evidence of young people being exploited was coming to the attention of services, so that those young people might receive the appropriate support.

---

[1] There is research about the problematic use of risk assessment tools on the TCE microsite.

Before considering the 'disruptive intervention,' senior leaders asked three key questions about how to **enable and align a local system response** around this ambition:

- Does our current governance structure lend itself to flexibility of disruption across the different levels?

- What principles underpin our disruptions? Do all partners have a good understanding of these and a clear sense of everyone working towards a common goal?

- Is there space in our partnership structure to enable effective reflection and evaluation of disruption? How is that learning fed back into future planning / intervention?

Partners were asked to identify the principles behind their disruption approaches, to help establish a shared understanding of disruption and how it could impact on child exploitation.

Community Engagement and Community Partners
The importance of working with communities was emphasised, particularly where they have not been engaged with or have felt marginalised in the past. However, it was acknowledged that referrals will not increase until training and awareness raising make it salient in the community context. Potential blind spots were mentioned by the local area, such as LGBTQ+ young people and young people with learning disabilities.

There was consideration of how strategic leaders can positively enable this engagement. If partnerships are dependent on 'reporting up' or 'driving up,' more needs to be done to engender trust and support within communities to do so. This was not raised as a criticism. Many local areas had good examples of community engagement. It was more about making the link between intelligence and understanding, resulting in an increase of referrals from communities.

Significant learning and transferability from the BSP for other areas:

The key learning from the BSP around the multiple intersecting challenges related to disruption are set out in this section.

1. **What are the guiding principles of disruption?**
   What principles, frameworks or structures would help to guide a partnership in being more disruptive collectively? Local areas talked about elements such as trust and communication, and there was discussion about how this applies to both internal and external audiences to support strategic responses. For example, how we communicate principles across a partnership to enable disruptive practice, as well as how a community might need support with understanding what we mean by 'disruptive.'

2. **How might we enable partners to be disruptive?**
   This project reflected that 'we' (sector-wide) are asking professionals to work in new ways, with our increased understanding of the complexity associated with exploitation (the nuance in individual cases and challenges in responding to exploitation, which has a footprint across multiple organisations and agencies). Part of disrupting also applies to how we might enable the environment for partners to feel they *can* be more disruptive in practice. Training, awareness raising and opportunities for more collaborative opportunities for different teams and stakeholders across the local area system were seen as means to catalyse more 'licence' to identify and act in more disruptive ways to break the cycles of harm associated with child exploitation.

3. **What does disruption through data look like?**
   The project focused on understanding, cataloguing and sharing what local areas had or could locate to enable more 'disruptive' interventions across the partnership, i.e. widening the focus on data to incorporate considering how more positive interventions or proactive and preventative initiatives could be identified. The local area discussed how such approaches, like data around hotspots, might only shift concerns around instances such as threats of violence from being known to unknown. For example, reacting to a 'threat of violence' by sending engagement workers into a hotspot area might only postpone this event and not address the underlying causes of or motivations for this 'threat. The participants considered how the use of data would need to be a means of examining how it can influence a disruption activity that is more sustainable, leading to discussions around how data might influence funding or commissioning decisions.

4. **Where do we need to be more disruptive?**
   Similar to enabling the use of data, partners engaged in the BSP shared examples of when they felt they 'needed to be more disruptive,' i.e. by considering the disruption of cycles of harm earlier in a young person's life to minimise the potential for trauma / establishing cycles of harm and vulnerability. Or taking advantage of being more 'place and space' focused by identifying opportunities for more outreach and interventions in communities.

5. **What is meant by 'positive' disruption?**
   A final reflection and area of learning centred on changing our traditional assumptions about what disruption is and who does it, it being mainly a police-led and enforcement-focussed activity. Through considering who else

might carry it out, in which ways, and how we could reframe disruption in a broader sense to include a variety of holistic and strength-focused interventions. Partners and Delivery Partners identified opportunities to signpost to a broader suite of possible interventions which could be categorised as 'disrupting' extra-familial harm such as child exploitation.

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

There are three ways in which the work with TCE has aimed to influence and constructively disrupt the regional response.

Establishing sustainable links across the region
Links between West Yorkshire and a TCE Delivery Partner who works in North Yorkshire have been made to take forward and develop resources to shape disruptive practice across the region.

Development of TCE resources
During delivery, a set of resources and reflective learning were developed and shared with the Risk and Vulnerability Group of West Yorkshire. The local area, already in the process of reflecting on and making changes to regional pathways and processes, saw this as a 'timely and relevant' resource for shaping emergent responses around child exploitation. There is now an appetite to share this learning across the regional partnership to shape and influence disruptive practice in the long term.

Narrative for local area conversations around adapting multi-agency practice (LA Single Point Of Contacts)
The third theme is about developing a more nuanced way of working across the region that allows different areas to work flexibly, not just using the same tools and processes. Consistency has been addressed by way of common principles, values and outcomes that regional partners are seeking when working with young people at risk of exploitation, whilst allowing flexibility across the relevant pathways and processes to achieve those goals.

Immediate reflections from the local area:

The report is very fair and represents the issues we had in getting the project off the ground. It was difficult to agree on a shared mandate for research areas from all five authorities, partners and the police. This wasn't due to a lack of willingness on anyone's part, more reflective of the challenges of working in a large geographical area that has five distinct arrangements. We are all committed to ensuring there is consistency across the board, but there is an appreciation that each area also has some distinct challenges and priorities. There is some useful learning for us as a Risk and Vulnerability Group in how we might look to

commission across the West Yorkshire area in future and how we might work together to agree terms of reference. This can be taken forward.

There is an agreement for the Project Learning Report to be shared via the TCE Support Programme's Microsite for other local areas:

Date: 10.11.21

Signed by Head of Delivery: E. FAIRGRIEVE