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**Tackling Child Exploitation
Support Programme**

Parents Against Child Exploitation (Pace): a case study

Introduction

Parents Against Child Exploitation

(Pace) is a national charity that believes parents and carers should be valued as key partners in safeguarding children from exploitation. Established in 1998, Pace works to keep children and young people safe from exploitation by supporting parents and carers and by working in partnership with parents, carers, police and family services, to disrupt perpetrators. Pace also trains professionals to better support children, young people, parents and carers affected by exploitation with a trauma-informed, family-centric approach.¹ Lindsay Dalton, the interim CEO at Pace, spoke to the Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) Support Programme about her organisation's work.

This paper sets out three key areas that were discussed in the interview:

- > **The Parent Liaison Officer (PLO) service** that Pace offers to local authority multi-agency teams developing a response to child exploitation.
- > Working in partnership with parents and carers - **key considerations for local areas**
- > How to **embed these changes more widely**.

The final section sets out the key enablers for the work Pace carries out with multi-agency exploitation teams.

1. The Relational Safeguarding Model: Best practice in working with families affected by child sexual exploitation. Pace (2014) www.paceuk.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Relational-Safeguarding-Model-FINAL-PRINTED-May-2014.pdf

1. Parent Liaison Officer service

When first established, Pace focused on campaigning work to amplify the voices of parents to police, social care, health, and the voluntary sector. A telephone helpline for parents and carers was later set up, offering advice and support. Helpline callers frequently described the challenges they experienced when trying to work with their local authority to better protect their child. From this, the PLO role was born (to effectively represent the voices and needs of parents and carers, parent advocates working as partners within local area safeguarding multi agency teams were required).

When a local authority commissions the service, a Pace PLO joins the multi-agency team, usually for an initial 3-year period, to provide dedicated support to parents and carers. Whilst the PLO service is tailored to fit the requirements of each local area multi-agency team, the following four key elements underpin it:

Relational Safeguarding Model



Maximising the ability and capacity of statutory organisations and families to safeguard children from exploitation together

Independent and trusted contact



Providing parents and carers with a sole point of contact with whom they can develop a trusting relationship

Sharing information safely and transparently



Gaining informed consent to share information and providing feedback on how that information is used

Robust Safeguarding Plan



Tailored, co-produced, responds to evolving circumstances and holds accountability for all

a) Relational Safeguarding Model

The PLO service employs a relational safeguarding model, meaning that PLOs aim to **‘facilitate and support [parents], in order to maximise the ability and capacity of statutory agencies and families to safeguard a child at risk of being exploited.’**² The model focuses on enabling family involvement in the safeguarding process (including decision-making), ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the family (recognising the impact of exploitation), and balancing the child’s identity as both an individual and part of a family unit.³ Lindsay argues that this model works more effectively than the traditional intra-familial child protection model when responding to child exploitation and extra familial harm.

Lindsay recognises that the **child protection system** was not set up to deal with extra-familial harm and is instead focused on child abuse happening within the home. As a result, **assessments and processes tend to focus on intra-familial harm** and can involve parenting ability being assessed. For parents and carers who are struggling to protect their child from exploitation or counter the impact of grooming,⁴ this can **reinforce the disempowerment already being experienced**. Instead of being treated as partners, this approach leads to **parents and carers feeling under scrutiny**, needing to ‘prove’ that they are responsible parents. Not only can this be traumatic but it also takes up valuable time and energy that could be better spent working alongside services.

Pace’s approach is different. **The relational safeguarding model sees parents as a protective presence, playing a key role in helping to keep a child safe.** Lindsay argues that parents and carers are the most invested in keeping their child safe and have access to information that nobody else will have. By focusing on strengthening positive family relationships in a young person’s life, PLOs can also help counteract the negative relationships that are exploiting them. The Pace approach focuses on responding to unmet needs and building the resilience of the whole family as a fundamental element of any safeguarding plan.

‘We find that a lot of parents’ time gets taken up fighting the system, trying to prove that they’re a good parent or responding to requests from services, which really depletes the valuable resources [parents could] use to respond to the needs of their child. [Their] energy is focused in the wrong place, because the system is requiring that of them. The relational model really strives to change that balance.’ Lindsay Dalton – Pace Interim CEO

2. The Relational Safeguarding Model: Best practice in working with families affected by child sexual exploitation. Pace (2014) www.paceuk.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Relational-Swafeguarding-Model-FINAL-PRINTED-May-2014.pdf 3. *ibid* 4. *ibid*

b) Independent and trusted contact

For parents and carers, PLOs are often the main point of contact within the multi-agency safeguarding team and act as a conduit between them and other professionals. It is made clear to parents and carers that the PLO role is independent of statutory organisations. Lindsay explained that these factors are of critical importance, firstly because it can be overwhelming for parents and carers to have to engage with a range of different professionals and, secondly, parents and carers often feel let down by, and distrustful of, statutory services, not least because they have often felt blamed and stigmatised by the child protection process. Their independence from statutory agencies means that Pace PLOs are well placed to develop trusting relationships with parents and carers and can advocate for them in statutory processes, amplifying their views and needs and enabling these to be addressed.

c) Creating safe and transparent pathways for sharing information

A priority for PLOs is to create safe and transparent pathways for the sharing of information between families and statutory services. Parents and carers often hold valid concerns about sharing exploitation-related information about their child due to threats made against them or against their child. Parents are not always clear on how information will be used and what measures will be put in place to ensure the family is kept safe. Parents and carers tell Pace they can also feel frustrated about the lack of feedback they receive after sharing information. The PLO role addresses these concerns by **ensuring that parents and carers consent to sharing information only after they understand** what will be shared and with whom. They **gain assurances of the safety measures that will be put in place following information sharing**, and provide parents and carers with **feedback on what happens as a result of sharing any information**. Pace PLOs co-produce information-sharing plans with parents that are shared and stored on local area systems.

d) Developing a robust safeguarding plan

Lindsay emphasised the key role played by a PLO in ensuring the active involvement of parents and carers in developing a robust safeguarding plan. The following considerations are central to this process:

- > **Adapting the approach to fit the family.** Safeguarding plans often include general interventions that have not been tailored to meet the specific needs of the whole family. Bespoke plans can respond to a family's particular context and unmet needs.
- > Safeguarding plans are **co-produced with families**. Parents and carers should be asked what support they need to better equip them to protect their children. Understanding their views of what progress towards improvement and safety would look like should also directly feed into safeguarding plans.
- > Safeguarding plans should be **live documents that are regularly reviewed**. The needs and circumstances of families and the risks faced by children and young people will continually evolve, and a safeguarding plan must respond.
- > Safeguarding plans must **hold all relevant stakeholders equally accountable**. There is often a focus in intra-familial safeguarding plans for parents and carers to demonstrate their actions and what progress they have made. Lindsay emphasises the need for extra-familial safeguarding plans to shift accountability so that it is shared equally by all safeguarding partners. Parents and carers should be able to challenge decisions and question professionals about progress that has been made in safeguarding meetings.

'When we're looking at extra-familial harm, we need equal accountability for everybody around that [table] parents and professionals - about what has been achieved since the last meeting. Has everybody carried out the actions that were needed, or done the actions they committed to do?'

Lindsay Dalton – Pace Interim CEO

2. Working in partnership with parents and carers – key considerations for local areas

Whilst describing the four pillars of the PLO service, Lindsay highlighted some of the central considerations for any local area wanting to better collaborate with parents and carers.

> **Empower and equip parents to be safeguarding partners**

Lindsay sees parents and carers as a valuable and untapped resource. Local areas could do more to develop partnership working so that the knowledge and information parents and carers have about the contexts of their children's lives could be shared and used constructively to keep them safer by identifying risk and developing safeguarding actions plans.

> **Shift the existing power imbalance and strive for an equal partnership with parents**

The feelings of powerlessness that parents and carers can feel when their child is being exploited can be exacerbated by the power imbalance they can face when working with statutory organisations. Parents and carers often describe feeling intimidated in safeguarding meetings with statutory organisations. Pace PLOs aim to give parents a voice and equal representation around every table, ensuring they have an equal say alongside other partners when developing and implementing a safeguarding plan. Some ideas that may help in relation to safeguarding meetings include:

- > Choosing a neutral venue for meetings that will help parents and carers feel more comfortable.
- > Involving parents and carers in decisions about the agenda and structure of the meeting.
- > Sending parents and carers relevant documentation ahead of any meeting so that they can fully prepare.

‘Often, professionals are attending those meetings having seen all the documentation prior. They will have had briefings. And often, parents have just moments before they go into a meeting where they’re quickly run through details of what’s going to be covered... That’s not equitable because they’ve not had the same time to prepare, and they’ve not had the same materials.’

Lindsay Dalton – Pace Interim CEO

> **Consider how a family-oriented approach enhances child-centred work**

Pace officers encourage local multi-agency teams to take a family-oriented approach, which involves working in partnership with parents and actively seeking the thoughts and views of children and young people. This enables statutory agencies to more fully understand the family context and all the family-derived protective factors, thereby identifying opportunities to provide safety in a way that best meets their needs.

‘A lot of the misunderstanding around a child-centric [approach] is that it’s exclusionary of parents, and we don’t include parents in those discussions. We don’t look at the voice of the parent within that, and actually, to be child-centric and hear the voice of the child, we should be looking at where they sit within the family, to really look at that dynamic and the entire life of the child as well.’

Lindsay Dalton – Pace Interim CEO

> **To develop meaningful partnership working with parents and carers, local area multi-agency exploitation teams should consider working alongside independent, non-statutory organisations**

Pace advocates reflective practice in this area and encourages statutory services to consider their own historic practice, particularly any loss of trust that may have occurred with parents and carers. A more partnership-oriented approach to safeguarding for extra-familial harm will take time to develop and in the interim, it can be useful to partner with third sector and community organisations that are well-placed to develop trusting relationships with parents and carers.

3. Embedding change more widely

Pace recommends that local areas **commission their training offer alongside the PLO service**



The training focuses on **changing the mind-sets and culture of the entire workforce on how to value, engage with and better understand the experiences of parents and carers**



Training is for professionals at all levels - senior leaders, operational managers and frontline staff



The training is **co-delivered by parents and carers** whose children have been exploited



Trauma-informed practice is an integral element of the training. Professionals often mislabel the behaviour and responses of parents and carers because they do not understand how they are linked to trauma



As well as working with individual parents and carers, the PLO service also has the aim of supporting cultural change across local safeguarding partnerships in relation to working with parents and carers as safeguarding partners. Lindsay notes that **Pace sees better results from its work in local areas when there is buy-in across the partnership, at all levels, to the value added by having parents and carers as equal safeguarding partners.** The genuine transformation of the culture within statutory organisations is what will enable professionals across different agencies to engage more effectively with parents and carers in the long term. Working alongside other professionals within each local area multi-agency team, PLOs share their knowledge and expertise on the practice of effective collaboration with parents and carers.

Pace also **delivers training about the value, methods and ideas for working with parents and carers as safeguarding partners.** Local areas that commission a PLO receive this training as part of the service. The training offer is not just for frontline staff. Lindsay argues that, in order to significantly impact the culture of the entire multi-agency team and beyond, **senior leaders, operational managers and frontline staff must all take part in the training.** It is also important that the **training is co-delivered by parents** directly affected by child exploitation. Not only does this empower the parents, it also gives professionals the opportunity to listen to experts in exploitation who have lived or are living with the consequences.

The training focuses on the relational safeguarding model, the importance of taking on a family-centric approach, trauma-informed practice, and the avoidance of victim blaming language. The idea is that, over time, the approach and principles that underpin the PLO service will be embedded across the multi-agency team and become part of the everyday way professionals work. The objective is for professionals to understand the importance of, and feel equipped to start, developing trusting relationships with parents and carers.

Lindsay highlights **trauma-informed practice as a particularly important element of the training.** It is important that professionals understand that the exploitation of a child or young person can also lead to siblings, parents and carers experiencing trauma. When engaging with parents and carers, professionals need to understand how trauma can be experienced, manifest and impact on their responses and behaviours. All too often, professionals can mislabel the behaviours and responses of parents and carers as aggressive and uncooperative, rather than understanding them to be a result of the trauma they have experienced. Consequently, professionals can end up responding in a way that can worsen or trigger that trauma. Professionals need to understand that parents can feel isolated and scared. They must try to walk alongside them rather than pass judgement or criticism.

'The mind-set change is really important. For professionals that are attending the homes of children who are exploited, and supporting or interacting with families, it is really important that they do that in a really trauma-informed way and that they understand the trauma that the families will be experiencing themselves, so that they're not mislabelling some of the behaviours that they may see, which are a response of the fact that their child is being exploited. It's about not making snap decisions about that one window... you may have seen that family through at that one point.'

Lindsay Dalton – Pace Interim CEO

Key enablers

To conclude, Lindsay reflected on the current and potential enablers for the work Pace carries out with multi-agency exploitation teams. She explains why these factors are key to ensuring Pace creates meaningful change.

- > Pace has a **Parent Advisory Group** and parents also sit on its Board of Trustees which ensures that parents and carers feed directly into all areas of work Pace delivers, providing feedback and advice on an ongoing basis. Being able to demonstrate that the lived experiences of parents continually shapes its work gives Pace a credible voice when it advises statutory agencies and advocates for change.

‘When we’re giving feedback and information to services about what needs to change, and what the impact of exploitation is on families, it’s credible because we’re giving it [advice] from a lived experience, and we’ve constantly got that live account of what that exploitation looks like for families.’ Lindsay Dalton – Pace Interim CEO

- > A condition when commissioning the PLO service is that **Pace has to sit on the multi-agency exploitation team’s strategic and operational boards**. This enables Pace to advocate on behalf of parents and carers and embed its relational safeguarding model more widely (at strategic, operational and frontline levels). By having a seat at these tables, Pace is more able to create the necessary systemic and culture changes.
- > When the PLO service first started, Pace would approach local areas that had received high levels of complaints and requests for support from parents through their national helpline. The rationale was to offer the service where it was most needed. Over time, local areas began to take the initiative and approach Pace to enquire about commissioning the service. Pace tends to have more impact in these local areas where there is more buy-in about the importance of supporting and working with parents and greater willingness to respond to feedback and suggestions. Now **Pace only delivers the service in the areas that either approach the charity or are already working alongside it in some capacity**.

- > When a local area adopts a contextual safeguarding approach,⁵ the changes that occur around how professionals work with parents following the commissioning of the PLO service are more significant and sustainable. Lindsay argues this is because contextual safeguarding, which she sees as being strongly aligned with a relational safeguarding model, encourages a safeguarding assessment that looks beyond the family and instead focuses on the places and spaces where exploitation happens. Lindsay notes that local areas tend to implement a contextual safeguarding approach at the strategic level. It is therefore more likely to influence and modify the safeguarding structures and processes that focus on harm within the home. **A contextual safeguarding approach can therefore instigate the systemic change that supports multi-agency teams to embed the relational safeguarding model** that Pace encourages in a more sustainable way.
- > Lindsay acknowledges **the value of using evidence from evaluations to promote a relational safeguarding approach**. An independent evaluation of the PLO service in Lancashire was recently completed. Findings demonstrate that a family-centric approach to safeguarding leads to positive increases in family participation and engagement and better supports children to more quickly exit exploitative situations. Demonstrating the effectiveness of its approach increases Pace's credibility and helps it have more influence with local areas.

5. **Contextual Safeguarding** is an approach to safeguarding children and young people from harm outside of the home developed by Professor Carlene Firmin, OBE, of the University of Durham. This [briefing](#) explains what Contextual Safeguarding is (and is not).

Looking forward:

- > **A National Strategy for tackling child exploitation** that explicitly acknowledges parents and carers to be key safeguarding partners would act as an important enabler for the work Pace does. The strategy would need to include clear guidance on how to support local safeguarding partnerships as well as parents and carers to be effective safeguarding partners.
- > Working in tandem with parents, Pace is in the final stages of developing a Parent Charter that clearly outlines what parents and carers should expect from local area partnerships, i.e.:
 - a. being believed, valued and respected
 - b. being treated with empathy
 - c. having the assurance that professionals are trained on child exploitation and the impact of trauma
 - d. being protected.
- > Pace has also developed a Family Working Agreement to sit alongside the Charter that sets out a local authority agreement to take on a family-centric approach and work more collaboratively with parents when tackling child exploitation. When a local area commissions the PLO service or the training offer, they will be asked to sign both documents. In so doing, an area demonstrates its commitment to working more effectively with parents and carers, in order to create **'a network of family-friendly and family-centred local areas'**.



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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