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The
Children's
Society



**Tackling Child Exploitation
Support Programme**

Annual Learning Report (2019-20) 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 TCE Support Programme represents a significant investment at approximately £2m. The programme aims are to provide strategic support to local area partnerships in England to:

- > Enable them to identify and respond to risks and harms in relation to child exploitation and extra familial harm in their area
- > Help build capacity and capability of multi-agency partners within local areas to support an effective strategic response to child exploitation and extra-familial harm
- > Support local areas to build their strategic capacity to respond to child exploitation and extra familial harm

1.1 Report Background and Purpose

Each year the TCE Support Programme is to produce an annual learning report for the DfE. This report is to summarise the programme's progress; highlighting core learning; flag key risks, issues and challenges (both for the programme, and the sector more widely in relation to child exploitation and extra familial harm) and sets the programme's forward-looking priorities. Though the full annual report is for internal communication only, we have agreed with the DfE that we will publish an executive summary of the report for wider-sharing.

1.2 Definitions of Child Exploitation and Extra-Familial Harm

The terms child exploitation and extra-familial harm are used throughout this report. These are emerging and often converging terms that may feel ill-defined as categories of abuse and exploitation. Whilst this is an issue the programme is actively exploring, when using these terms here, it is acknowledged that both can encompass a range of abuse and exploitation types, which can vary dependent on geographic location and different organisational and professional contexts, roles and responsibilities.

2. TCE Support Programme Achievements: Year One (2019–20)

2.1 The Scoping Phase

The TCE Support Programme commenced in June 2019, with a period of scoping activities, including a sector survey, literature and evidence reviews and insights gathered through discussions with sector leaders. The findings from the scoping phase highlighted five principle cross-cutting themes, which have in turn framed the challenges the TCE Support Programme has responded to.

a) The need for a co-ordinated approach to national policy, legislation, strategy and support.

Child exploitation and extra-familial harm policy cut across multiple government departments bringing complexity in joining up approaches and funding at national level. This filters down to local areas, where similar challenges can be seen mirrored across policy and funding structures.

b) Rethinking the boundaries of local service delivery models

Traditional social care and safeguarding delivery models were predominantly developed for supporting/working within the intra-familial context (Bilston, 2006). This impedes efforts to address the contextual and non-familial features of child exploitation and extra-familial harm (Firmin, 2015; 2017). The TCE Support Programme aims to expand sector expertise to reflect the changing nature of safeguarding young people from exploitation and extra-familial harm and to help the sector rethink traditional boundaries.

c) Developing a personalised approach

Exploited children and young people often present with complex and multiple needs. The dual identities children and young people may occupy as both victim and ‘perpetrator’ need to be considered whilst their rights to participation and decision making are also promoted and upheld. The TCE Support Programme seeks to support local partnerships to operate strategically in a flexible and responsive way, focusing on the presenting and underlying needs of young people.

d) Supporting young people into adulthood through a transitional approach to safeguarding

Harm, and its effects, do not stop when a young person reaches 18. Failing to help young people recover from harm and trauma can mean that problems continue into adulthood, at great cost both to the individuals and the public purse (Chowdry and Fitzsimons, 2016; Kezelman et al, 2015). Responses to child exploitation and extra-familial harm need to ensure that young people do not fall between the gaps as they move from children’s to adult services.

e) A Whole System Approach

‘A whole system approach’ (also known as a ‘public health approach’) promotes a common framework and outcomes across systems and organisations, encouraging a coherent response from prevention through to recovery. In order to achieve this when responding to child exploitation and extra familial harm, the wider sector needs to: promote new and emerging partnerships; identify and commission research to fill gaps in knowledge and use local data to better understand need and impact of intervention.

2.2 Delivery Outputs

There are two front-facing deliverables for the TCE Support Programme: a microsite and Bespoke Support Projects (BSP).

The Microsite

The microsite contains a range of different types of resource from research, policy and practice. These resources are designed to inform strategic responses, and contribute to the evidence base relating to child exploitation and extra familial harm, including amplifying the learning from the programme itself. Although already significant, the microsite's resources will continue to be added to throughout the duration of the programme.

Resources for the microsite were identified initially through a call for practice from the sector followed by literature searches. Gap analyses have resulted in targeted search activity and some commissioned resources. All resources are quality assured using a framework designed for the TCE Support Programme. Methodological robustness is assessed along with alignment with the TCE Support Programme's core aims using related but tailored criteria depending on whether the resource is a policy, practice or research item.

Bespoke Support Projects

Bespoke Support Projects (BSPs) offer time-limited strategic support to a local area, focused around a locally defined goal to tackle child exploitation and extra-familial harm. Across year one, the TCE Support Programme has delivered seven BSPs; three pilots and four from our first round of applications.

BSPs are delivered by the TCE Support Programme team, along with a range of peer experts, known as Delivery Partners. Support is categorised into five main types:

- > Strategy documentation review
- > Partnership review and facilitation
- > Data
- > Theory of Change
- > Action research.

Key to BSP delivery is modelling an approach to support that empowers partnerships to define and own their own development. This methodology was tested with three pilot areas (Greater Manchester, Hertfordshire and Devon) before opening applications out to the sector. Twenty-eight local partnerships applied for bespoke support. Four projects (Coventry, Sefton, Warwickshire, and a Pan-Bedfordshire project) were then taken forward in Year One, with a further thirteen projects accepted and scheduled for the first cohort of Year Two delivery¹.

2.3 Key BSP Delivery Successes

The following four themes were identified as having worked well in relation to BSP delivery in the first year:

- a) The level of skills, experience and expertise across the delivery teams combined with an explicit relational, restorative approach to working has enabled local partners to reflect honestly and drive forward activity.
- b) commitment at both a strategic and operational level, in terms of engagement by local areas, has enabled progress towards systems change.
- c) Creating time and space to pause and reflect has allowed for deep thinking on the potential across partnerships to respond more effectively to child exploitation and extra familial harm.
- d) ‘Unlocking capacity’ has been a common thread. In the absence of more resources, local areas therefore have to find creative ways of understanding and using what they already have to address the problem.

1. Learning reports from the BSP projects completed so far can be found [here](#) on the microsite

3. Conclusion and Development Priorities for Year Two (2020-21)

3.1 Joining the Dots

Learning from Year One delivery has highlighted three key elements to an effective response to child exploitation and extra familial harm: ‘leading with care’, ‘bridging boundaries’ and ‘holding uncertainty, complexity and curiosity’. The TCE Support Programme has brought these elements together to form the [*Joining the Dots*](#) framework: an approach to system change that is designed to hold space and unlock capacity. It reflects the TCE Support Programme delivery model, that has a) been carefully calibrated to recognise local partners as experts on their own context and to respect them as the owners of (the levers and resources needed for) strategic change, whilst b) walking alongside them to support and challenge them to identify, explore and embed an approach to child exploitation and extra familial harm that reflects the experiences of their young people, families, communities and practitioners.

3.2 Year Two Priorities

Looking ahead, Year One delivery has highlighted five priority areas where we believe strategic change is most needed and will be explored in the second year of the TCE Support Programme. The first two priority areas were identified by the programme team from our analysis of the evidence and level of need in relation to child exploitation and extra familial harm. The last three are a reflection of issues raised by local partnerships through our scoping work, BSP applications and delivery. Specific work strands relating to all five priorities will commence in the second year.

1. Voice of the child/young person, parent/carer and community

Ensuring that the voice of the child/young person is appropriately and meaningfully sought, captured and reflected within local and national strategic development.

2. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion

Moving beyond simply 'recognising the importance' of equalities, diversity and inclusion to challenging local and national partnerships to clearly articulate and evidence the relationship(s) between protected characteristics and child exploitation and extra-familial harm, and the responses required, at a strategic level.

3. Horizontal and vertical expansion

Facilitating a reflective understanding of the overlaps and differences between different forms of child exploitation and extra-familial harm, and the way in which these intersect with other forms of harm. This is a key issue as some local areas (conceptually and structurally) expand existing Child Sexual Exploitation services 'horizontally' to encompass wider definitions of child exploitation and extra familial harm and 'vertically' to support young people beyond 18 years/ develop a more transitional approach to safeguarding.

4. How far to integrate?

Understanding the effectiveness of local areas to establish or expand (as noted above in priority 3) their specialist exploitation teams in response to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.

5. Digital delivery and Covid-19

In taking forward work relating to the above priorities, there is an overarching necessity that for Year 2 the TCE Support Programme respond to the implications of Covid-19 related restrictions and the 'new normal' by:

- > Adapting our own programme delivery approach.
- > Capturing and amplifying early learning in relation to the potential implications of Covid-19 on the field of child exploitation and extra-familial harm
- > Supporting local areas to respond to these implications.

3.3 Conclusion

The first year of the TCE Support Programme has reinforced our understanding of the complexity and evolving nature of child exploitation and extra familial harm and the need for coherent policy and systems-leadership. This is not simply a question of more process or pace (of which there is plenty already). The TCE Support Programme's role is to support local areas to reflect and interrogate, to promote curiosity and critical thinking and to identify and mobilise the considerable talent that exists across local areas in order to help keep children, young people and families safe.



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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