

Project Learning Report

Details of Bespoke Support Project (BSP):	
Partnership name:	Reading
Core partner agencies involved:	Brighter Futures for Children Thames Valley Police Reading Borough Council Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust
Number of Local Authority areas covered:	1
Regional area:	South East
BSP size:	Standard
BSP methodology/ methodologies	Partnership and data
Digital / face to face / mixed delivery	Digital
Date BSP commenced:	June 2021
Reasons why the local area requested the TCE Support Programme:	
In response to recent inspections and in recognition of the multiple and complex impacts of Covid-19 on child exploitation responses, Reading had already begun its own reflective journey on examining the pathways, policies and procedures that make up its strategy and partnership approach to child exploitation and extra-familial harm. Reading requested support from the TCE Programme to provide external support and critical challenge to this work as it began its journey in shifting towards a more agile extra-familial harm strategy	
Overall goal of BSP:	
Following initial discussions with key local partners, the overarching goal of the project was agreed as developing a clear set of principles which underpin strategic activity across the partnership landscape in Reading in relation to child exploitation as part of the development of a new extra-familial harm strategy. Part of the work with TCE was to identify actions for priority work streams to support implementation.	
In order to work towards this, it was agreed that the TCE delivery team would support the partnership in:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing an understanding of the evidence base to support the expansion of the partnership approach from child exploitation to extra-familial harm.	

- Developing understanding of emerging best practice as part of partnership expansion approaches.
- Developing a clear understanding of strategic roles and responsibilities across the partnership to underpin the emerging strategy and consider a set of principles which can be developed to support activity going forward.
- Exploring feedback from recent partnership workshops and working collectively to translate these into strategic actions for the partnership going forward.

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

The approach adopted throughout delivery of the project was one of creating and holding space for the partnership to develop a collective approach through a combination of individual agency conversations, the sharing of evidence-based resources, and action focused workshops.

Specifically, the project comprised:

Commissioning an extra-familial harm evidence review and briefing

The TCE Evidence Team produced a [briefing](#) for Reading that pulled together a range of literature and posed reflective questions to support local colleagues in grounding their shift to a broader extra-familial harm strategy in the current and emerging evidence base.

Individual agency conversations

Single-agency conversations were held with a range of partners from across Reading with a view to drawing out enablers and challenges from their perspectives to support the TCE delivery team in shaping the rest of the project.

Light touch strategy review

At the point of project commencement, Reading colleagues had already made significant progress in drafting their extra-familial harm strategy. In order to support its development at this stage, the TCE delivery team undertook a light touch review of an early draft, signposting local colleagues to emerging practice from other areas and utilising reflections from the process itself to support the design of the remainder of the project.

Partnership workshops using data as the lens to unpick the partnership approach

During the scoping phase of the project and in locally held workshops which took place around the same time, data was identified as a topic which local colleagues were keen to explore further. The TCE delivery team shaped two workshops around the partnership approach to data and extra-familial harm, which served as a basis for exploring principles to underpin wider strategic activity. These sessions drew on a series of [resources developed for the TCE Programme by Rebecca Godar](#).

Action planning session-

The final phase of the project comprised an action focused session for strategic leads across partnerships in Reading to reflect on learning from across the project and to consider tangible next steps which could be taken forward to ensure momentum was maintained and learning embedded beyond the TCE delivery team's involvement.

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

Managing capacity across the partnership landscape

Early on in the project it was agreed that a session for senior strategic leads would be arranged to ensure an appropriate mandate sat behind the work and to allow strategic direction to be built in throughout. At the time however, across the strategic partnership landscape in Reading (the Children's Safeguarding Partnership, Community Safety Partnership and the One Reading Board), capacity was noted as a significant issue with a number of core meetings being cancelled as a result. These capacity issues filtered down to the work of the TCE project. Initially, it was felt that this would cause significant impact for the progression of the project, but in taking time to reflect with the TCE delivery team, the core group of local partners determined that the strategic mandate and leadership could be sought in a number of different ways locally and that, although pressures in terms of capacity were significant, they shouldn't allow developmental work to stall at a point which was deemed critical for the local partnership in taking the new strategy forward.

Local need vs wider, regional focus

In taking forward discussions across the partnership, the tension of regional approaches, in this case Thames Valley, with locally identified need was noted. Local leaders within the project took a deliberate and bold decision to focus solely on Reading for this work which is in contrast to some other local activity, such as that of the Violence Reduction Unit, which historically has taken a wider, regional approach. Local leads felt that explicit conversations focusing on the needs of young people in Reading were needed in order to ensure that the emerging strategy was aligned with local priorities and to ensure ongoing conversations around resourcing were able to be locally focused.

Working across partnership boundaries

Early on in scoping with local colleagues, the need to work across partnership boundaries came to the fore of discussions. As in many local areas, child exploitation and extra-familial harm is not just a priority for the Children's Safeguarding Partnership, but one which is also high on the agenda for the Community Safety Partnership and others. As such, broadening out the key group of partners involved in the work of the project became a central, enabling feature of progress towards the locally established objectives.

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

Joining the Dots



Bridging boundaries

Thinking broadly about where responsibility for responding to extra-familial harm sits within the partnership landscape was central for Reading in moving forward with their approach. By looking to utilise some of the resources, capacity and structures which sit within the Community Safety Partnership, and the requirement of that partnership to produce a serious violence strategic assessment, local colleagues were able to think differently about how and where to locate this work in their wider partnership approach, recognising that collective strategic approaches to child exploitation and extra-familial harm involve a broad range of different partners.

Leading with care

As a partnership, Reading looked at the strengths it had in place and utilised these as its starting point in taking activity forward. When looking at its use of data, an initial barrier was the lack of analytical provision to resource the activity local colleagues wished to progress. Rather than allowing this to halt activity however, partners reflected on what was already in place, discussed how to reframe existing activity and adopted the idea of starting small but starting somewhere as a means of demonstrating the value that could be found if further investment in analytical capacity was achieved. Specifically, the work taking place locally as part of the Better Together project, which is part of the [Local Data Accelerator Fund](#), offered a platform on which to take this work forward and the opportunity for local partners to think creatively about how resources across the partnership landscape could be best utilised as part of the local approach.

Working with complexity, curiosity and uncertainty

By leaning into the complexity of different partnership structures across Reading, local colleagues have been able to think creatively about how to secure the strategic mandate for the implementation of the emerging extra-familial harm strategy. This will provide support in terms of governance and resourcing, with discussions taking place across safeguarding, community safety and the One Reading partnerships about how best to implement a joint approach going forward.

In relation to data, which was the lens through which local conversations were taken forward as part of this project, remaining curious and considering what it is that partners

want to know about child exploitation and extra-familial harm provided local colleagues with a means to approaching discussions from a fresh perspective and lifted the focus away from the challenges presented by a lack of dedicated analytical resource, focusing instead on key questions and how these might be answered collectively across the partnership.

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

The TCE delivery team worked with local partners to shape the project to provide a jumping off point for the partnership to take forward the implementation of its emerging local strategy. In creating space for honest and open discussions to take place around capacity, resources and leadership of the child exploitation and extra-familial harm agenda, a small and committed group of local leaders were able to define and shape clear and tangible next steps for local activity. Examples of this include:

- Developing a series of strategic questions partners wish to explore around extra-familial harm to help understand the local picture and experience of young people, and feeding these questions into the work taking place around multi-agency data approaches as part of the Better Together project.
- Formalising links between CMOG processes and the Community Safety Partnership delivery group to support place-based working and contextual safeguarding approaches.
- Reviewing the partnership approach to soft intelligence.
- Undertaking a review of the workforce development plan in relation to extra-familial harm and considering how this can be rolled out across the partnership landscape in Reading.
- A shift away from individuals holding and leading this area of work to a collective sense of ownership across organisational and partnership boundaries.

Significant learning and transferability from the BSP for other areas

The role of influence as part of the strategic leadership

For Reading, throughout the life of this project, strategic leadership was observed as sitting with a range of different individuals across a range of different agencies. This leadership was not necessarily linked to seniority or hierarchy, but rather came from the power of influence across a complex multi-agency and multi-partnership landscape. This chimes with observations from across other TCE BSPs and echoes the themes drawn out by TCE Delivery Partner Ben Byrne in his [blog post](#) for the Programme.

As we observed in Reading, strategic mandate often, and necessarily, comes at an Executive level of partnership, but leadership, development, and implementation of a local strategy can be taken forward by a coalition of individuals who sit at a senior operational or

service manager level, who are able to draw on their strategic influence to affect system-level challenges and work collaboratively towards long term, sustainable change.

Balancing capacity and complexity with the need to deliver at pace

Throughout the project, we heard from local colleagues about the capacity issues at play across Reading. When resources are stretched and multiple priorities are at play, it can be tempting to pause developmental activity or that which requires time for reflection. In Reading, local colleagues recognised the momentum which was building around the emerging extra-familial harm strategy and looked to identify ways to incorporate this within existing activity, such as the Better Together data work and the newly formed Community Safety delivery group, to ensure momentum wasn't lost and extra-familial harm remained high on the partnership agenda. This pragmatic and creative approach came from the commitment and drive of the core group members who utilised their strategic influence across the wider partnership landscape.

Immediate reflections from the local area:

Date: 01/03/22

Signed by local area: Amy Hurst