The Relational Safeguarding Model

Best practice in working with families affected by child exploitation

Pace

Parents against child exploitation

> It's a dramatic difference when Pace isn't involved – you're not seeing any improvements, they're still going missing, they're still not being reported, they're still getting into unknown cars with no registrations, still coming home under the influence."

Multi-agency Team Worker

> No child has gone into care as a result of CSE in the 11 months Pace has been working with us."

Commissioning Officer

> I honestly don't know what I'd have done if you [Pace] hadn't been there at that point in our lives."

Affected parent

> Pace's work with parents and its Relational Safeguarding Model enables us to gather much better intelligence and work alongside parents to successfully prosecute offenders."

Detective Sergeant

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Foreword

Gill Gibbons, CEO

Today, as I write this foreword, there are countless families and young people across the United Kingdom struggling to escape the grip of child exploitation. All of us want to prevent this horrific criminal activity and identify the best way to help affected children exit their appalling situation. This is for all forms of child exploitation, including child sexual exploitation, criminalisation (county lines), modern slavery and radicalisation.

Sadly, many parents, carers and children are still battling powerful myths and societal prejudices linked to child exploitation that are blocking them from support and engaging with statutory agencies. The myths around sexually exploited children are receding. Exploited children are now less likely to be seen as 'willingly taking part in sexual activities' or as 'non co-operating victims'. This is welcome and long overdue. But their parents and families continue to be judged and blamed for the abuse of their child.

In November 2013, the YouGov report *Are parents in the picture? Professional and parental perspectives of child exploitation* (Autumn 2013), which surveyed police officers, social workers and teachers, highlighted that far from being hidden away, these prejudices are publicly acceptable, with 44% of interviewees agreeing that in most cases parents are in part responsible for the sexual exploitation of their child.[1] This final residue of victim-blaming needs to be removed. The only people responsible for crimes are the manipulative perpetrators who sexually assault children and young people.

As Chief Executive of Pace, I know that families are often traumatised twice over – firstly by the horror of witnessing their child suffer and the impact of that on themselves and their family, and secondly, by the way they can be treated by agencies who seek to safeguard the affected child. All too often, parents are sidelined and either ignored as 'forgotten safeguarders' or deemed 'failed carers'. We need to confront this issue and remove the oppositional thinking or absence of thinking about parents.

It is easy to forget that the vast majority of affected children are not living in care, but at home when the exploitation starts and most will have parents, siblings and a family who will want to help. The majority of recent reports and strategies on child exploitation continue to suggest that only 'professionals' can provide the 'solution' to child exploitation and the only acknowledged or relevant relationship is between the affected child and professional. The child is seen in isolation, placed in a vacuum, and abstracted from their family lives.

We need to build on the findings of the YouGov report in which 87% of police officers, social workers and teachers think there are potential benefits to statutory agencies working in partnership with parents to safeguard a child during a police investigation.

Seven out of ten of these professionals also reported that the main barrier they face in identifying and preventing cases of child exploitation is a lack of parental knowledge and engagement. Working with families, keeping families together and helping to rebuild families needs to become an integral part of the statutory response to child exploitation across the United Kingdom.

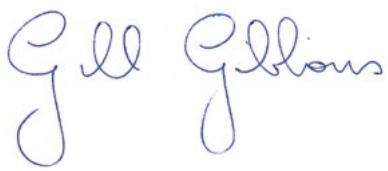
This report has been written to commend and communicate best practice and positive outcomes in responding to child exploitation. There are already pockets of best practice around the country, where child exploitation teams and individuals are working alongside families to keep their children safe and build new futures. Pace wholeheartedly supports their work and hopes this report is a catalyst for a more consistent family-centred approach to child exploitation.

We believe this document reinforces the 'Supporting Parents and Carers' recommendations in the 2013 Barnardo's report, *Running from hate to what you think is love: the relationship between running away and child exploitation* written by Emilie Smeaton. Pace recognises how perpetrators can seek to create a wedge between a child and a loving home. Pace strongly advocates the required actions highlighted by the report with regards to supporting parents and carers:

- Recognition of the importance of working with parents and carers should be included in local arrangements and planning to meet the needs of young people who experience both running away and child exploitation.
- Commissioners should ensure commissioning processes for services to meet the needs of young people who experience running away and child exploitation, including provision of a specialist parents' support worker.
- Both statutory and voluntary support services should incorporate meeting the needs of parents and carers to achieve positive outcomes with young people who experience both running away and child exploitation.[2]

I have witnessed firsthand the benefits of the relational safeguarding model and I very much hope that within this report you find information and practical guidance that will assist you in your work.

Finally, I would like to thank Emma Palmer and Peter Jenkins for allowing us to use extracts in this document of their report, *Parents as partners in safeguarding children: an evaluation of Pace's work in four Lancashire child exploitation teams* (October 2012). We would also like to acknowledge Lucie Shuker and Elizabeth Ackerley for their 2017 report *Empowering Parents: Evaluation of Parents as partners in safeguarding children and young people in Lancashire project 2014 – 2017*, and Lucie Shuker for her subsequent 2017 report *Virtuous Circles – Theorising the impact of Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation*.



Gill Gibbons, CEO, Parents Against Child Exploitation (Pace)

> Professionals sometimes basically interrogate the family in terms of 'what are you doing that is causing this?' or 'what are you not doing?' This focus can detract from the actions of the perpetrator and is disempowering for the parents.

Background

The majority of children affected by child exploitation are living at home when the abuse starts. It is highly likely the parents[3] will be among the first to realise something is wrong – although they may not be able to identify what – as their child will be presenting profound behavioural changes.

Sexually exploited children suffer physical, psychological, behavioural and attitudinal changes, which all present severe challenges to their parents and threaten the stability of the family environment. An affected child may direct emotional, verbal and even physical aggression towards parents, siblings or pets, resulting in what could be described as a 'chaotic household'.

A calculated strategy of grooming, intimidation and coercion by the perpetrators strips parents of their ability to fulfil their parental responsibility. The perpetrators of child exploitation deliberately seek to drive a wedge between the child and their family. This estrangement causes obvious strain at home, as trust between parents and child breaks down. Sadly this disempowerment is often unwittingly reinforced by statutory agencies and professionals, who erroneously assume that the parents are unwilling, or incapable, of protecting their child from exploitation.[4]

As the Barnardo's report *Running from hate to what you think is love: the relationship between running away and child exploitation* notes, professionals can sometimes deal with parents and carers in a manner that is problematic:

"Professionals sometimes basically interrogate the family in terms of 'what are you doing that is causing this?' or 'what are you not doing?' This focus can detract from the actions of the perpetrator and is disempowering for the parents."[5]

The child protection system is focused on abuse and neglect within the home. The end result is that our child protection system places responsibility and the need to change within the family instead of on those abusing them. This is not appropriate for child exploitation which is carried out by perpetrators from outside of the family home. A Relational Safeguarding Model is required instead for these forms of exploitation, to sit alongside our child protection system.

Published in February 2014, the College of Policing's new national policing guidance *Authorised professional practice – child exploitation*, states:

"Sexual exploitation can have a significant impact on families and can affect their health, work life, family relationships, economic stability and social life. Parents and carers often feel distraught, traumatised and guilty for not having protected their children from being sexually exploited. The stress of the situation can limit their capacity to respond to the needs of their children and to deal with crises that occur following the exploitation".[6]

Identifying the cause of their child's behaviour as sexual exploitation is hugely distressing for parents. Many experience disbelief that their child could be exposed to such a thing without them realising. The trauma and disruption to family life cannot be underestimated. The emotional, mental and physical resilience needed to maintain a job, keep a home routine, control finances and support siblings is significant. Trying to retain a sense of normality, while simultaneously safeguarding a child who is hostile to boundary-setting and will not disclose their whereabouts when missing from home, is extremely challenging. The stress will be compounded should the child face exclusion from school, or is called upon as a witness in a court case.

The strain on parents' own interpersonal relationships can be immense, with many withdrawing from their partner, and relationship breakdown being the end result. Arguments can become a daily feature. Unfortunately, in some families, this rift becomes permanent, with parents separating and one or more of the siblings becoming a looked-after child. Many family break ups occur because parents simply cannot cope with the sense of guilt and shame.

The health implications on families is also immense. 'Evaluating the Health Implications of Child Sexual Exploitation on Parents' by Dr Peter Unwin & Dr Danielle Stephens-Lewis from the University of Worcester highlights the significant detrimental impact CSE can have on parents' health. Findings include that of the parents surveyed:

- 30% of parents had either self-harmed or had considered self-harm as a result of CSE.
- 39% of parents had considered taking their own life.[7]

> "Husband now has depression, second daughter had depression and self-harmed and son has high anxiety and has stopped school.
>
> Affected parent

During our 23 years of working with parents, Pace has recorded numerous additional impacts on affected parents' physical and mental health including:

- Two victims' mothers' suicides
- Acute psychiatric breakdown of one mother, which led to her being sectioned and forcing her other children into care.
- Dozens of parents have reported the onset of previously undiagnosed conditions (breast cancer, leukaemia, heart conditions, raised blood pressure) which have only presented symptoms after acute cases of CSE.
- Multiple diagnoses of parents suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.
- One (previously healthy) mother was so traumatised after witnessing the sustained multiple rape of her daughter that she suffered a heart attack, leading to a diagnosis of Takotsubo cardiomyopathy (sometimes known as 'broken heart' syndrome).

Siblings are also affected by child exploitation. Some report feeling left out and seek to gain attention in other ways, including the potential for them to become involved in crime or sexual exploitation themselves. Siblings can struggle with the attention that the affected child is receiving which ultimately leads to a rift in their relationship. Many siblings also take on a protective role. This can place them in danger from offenders, or cause health implications especially emotionally and mentally, with the constant pressure and feelings of responsibility. In some cases the unaffected child may even ask to be taken into care.

The reality that families can also become crime victims is often overlooked or unknown. They are often subjected to threats, assaults and intimidation by perpetrators. In response, families can be compelled to take extraordinary measures in their attempt to safeguard their child: some uproot the family, moving to another city or even country to get them away from perpetrators. But the stigma associated with sexual exploitation is harder to escape, and its consequences on the child such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders and self-harm, can cause enduring misery and isolation for parents and other family members.

While there is evidence that an unstable home life does increase the vulnerability of a child to exploitation, it is crucial that there is acknowledgement that the grooming process itself can bring chaos to a formerly 'stable' household. Vulnerability only becomes a risk when an offender enters the child's life. Vulnerability and CSE are not causal effects. The focus for the cause of the sexual exploitation should be on the perpetrator rather than the parents' socio-economic difficulties or domestic issues. Furthermore, to assume that sexual exploitation happens to children of 'dysfunctional' households, increases the likelihood that sexually exploited children from more 'stable' households will slip through the net and miss early intervention.

> "The trauma and disruption to family life cannot be underestimated. The emotional, mental and physical resilience needed to maintain a job, keep a home routine, control finances and support siblings is significant.

The Relational Safeguarding Model rationale

2.1. Definition

The Relational Safeguarding Model is integral to all Pace's activities designed to safeguard children, and disrupt and convict the perpetrators responsible.

The approach assumes that parents want to and have the capacity to protect their child, unless there is evidence to the contrary. This aligns with government guidance advocating for parents to be treated as key partners in all safeguarding arrangements (Munro, 2011).

A key principle of the relational safeguarding model is that parents must be viewed as lead partners in all safeguarding arrangements - they are the leading experts of their children. By working alongside parents and listening to them, multi-agency teams' capacity to safeguard the child is increased.

The Relational Safeguarding Model was developed by Pace as a result of more than 23 years' experience of direct work with families. It is a strengths-based model which involves equipping and empowering parents to safeguard their child. It does this through supporting them to develop and implement safety plans. It also involves working alongside parents to ensure their support needs are met.

Three key messages of this Relational Safeguarding Model can be described as:

- This holistic model recognises the impact of CSE on the whole family. It works to understand these needs and ensure they are met. Families are listened to, valued and respected. They are never judged or blamed. By meeting these needs, parents' resilience and confidence to safeguard their child is increased.
- The model understands and values parents' vital role in safeguarding the child, and disrupting and convicting perpetrators. This includes but is not limited to parents taking a leading role in the development of statutory safeguarding plans, collating information and evidence for key agencies to disrupt and convict those responsible, and supporting victimless prosecutions. This can also help keep other children safe who the perpetrators may otherwise go on to target.
- The model is a holistic approach which works alongside the family, recognising parents as a vital safeguarding partner and the leading experts on their children. This ongoing engagement and respect enables practitioners to better understand and respond to the families' needs on a continual basis, and disrupt and convict those responsible. This continuous cycle of long-term support will also lead to a reduction in re-referrals, and any witness intimidation being understood and acted upon when cases go to court.

The Relational Safeguarding Model works to best affect when Parent Liaison Officers (PLOs) or advanced CSE trained practitioners are co-located within multi-agency teams providing direct support to parents affected by CSE and working alongside them.

PLOs work alongside affected parents, building resilience, strength and empowering them to play a key safeguarding role. This includes through developing safeguarding plans, gathering evidence and attending court.

The relational safeguarding model focuses on:

- Maximising the capacity of parents and carers to safeguard their children and contribute to the prevention of abuse and the disruption and conviction of perpetrators.
- Early intervention and prevention.
- Enabling family involvement in safeguarding processes around the child, including decision making.
- Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the family in recognition of the impact of child exploitation.
- Balancing the child's identity as both an individual and as part of a family unit.

> "All the professionals interviewed noted that by supporting the parents, they could then better protect the child.[8]

2.2 A comparison of models

Central to both the relational safeguarding model and the child protection model is the safeguarding of the child.

The child protection model is the standard approach in familial child protection, where the role of the social worker is to assess parental and home circumstances (DOH, 2000). The model assumes that parents may be partly responsible for the abuse that a child is experiencing. Although this will work effectively within an environment of sexual abuse and child neglect (including emotional, mental and physical abuse) within the home, the model framework does not adapt well to external risk to a child from a perpetrator.

The central concern when applying the child protection model to child exploitation is that it assumes the child's family background is a root cause of their abuse. This initial assumption puts the focus of intervention in the wrong place: inside the house and on parenting ability. Such an approach significantly risks disempowering family members who are often struggling to protect their child from exploitation[9] and counter the impact of grooming.

There may be factors at home or in the child's history that exacerbate a young person's vulnerability, unless repeated evidence or their behaviour proves otherwise, the relational safeguarding model assumes that parents want to and have the capacity to protect their child. As such, it represents a variation on the safeguarding model outlined by Jago et al., 2011.[10]
A family-centred approach also complies with the shift to a more 'relational model' of child protection, strongly recommended by the Munro Review (2011) of safeguarding policy and practice, i.e. emphasising "the centrality of forming relationships with children and families". (Munro, 2011, p 8)

The Relational Safeguarding Model sees parents as the solution, not the problem.

2.3. Safeguarding and support

The complex and at times contradictory reality of child exploitation presents a dichotomy for agencies. Parents require a dual approach: they should be treated as safeguarding partners yet at the same time they need agency support for their own wellbeing and to help them in turn support their child. This dichotomy does not not easily 'fit' with the child protection model. In particular:

- Some of the warning signs of child exploitation are children or young people who become estranged from their family; show sudden hostility towards family members and physical aggression towards family and friends.[11]
- The immediate risk, as a rule, to the child is not in the family home but outside it.
- The perpetrator is, as a rule, external to the family and not a parent.
- The impact of the perpetrator's grooming of the child will infiltrate into the household dynamics and corrupt the relationship between the child, parents and siblings.
- The parents will be aware something is wrong but may be unable to identify what is wrong or safeguard the child without assistance.

2.4. Police investigations

> "Pace's work with parents and its Relational Safeguarding Model enables us to gather much better intelligence and work alongside parents to successfully prosecute offenders."
>
> Detective Sergeant

Police forces increasingly acknowledge that, due to the complexity of child exploitation investigations, they need to engage and have a working relationship with the parents and family[12] of an affected child. Parental knowledge about the child and their collateral information or intelligence regarding perpetrators is increasingly critical to police investigations. The College of Policing new guidance on child exploitation notes:

"Parents and carers may be the first to notice any changes in a young person's behaviour which may give cause for concern. The information a parent or carer can provide may be valuable evidence to help build a case against the offender. This can include:

- Intelligence on suspects.
- Third party accounts supporting the allegations.
- Evidence showing the suspect in contact with the victim (e.g. via texts or social media platforms).
- DNA evidence, clothing and mobile phones.

If the victim's family contacts the police, they should be actively supported and referred to relevant support agencies."[13]

2.5. Dynamics of grooming

Parents will find child exploitation extremely difficult to come to terms with and the family unit will need high-level and, at times, intense support in maintaining emotional resilience. child exploitation will also have a damaging effect on siblings as well as the targeted child. A relational safeguarding model ensures both child/ren and family are at the core of interventions and areas of conflict are dealt with in a collaborative manner. The model engages with the emotional and relational dynamics of grooming, in terms of broken relationships within the family which can be missed by the child protection model that focuses more strictly on noting behavioural indicators of increased risk or vulnerability for the affected child.

2.6. Victim family blaming and disempowerment

The child protection model approach can compound the common perception that parents are in part responsible for the sexual exploitation of their child. Parental disempowerment by statutory agencies is also likely. There is evidence that the combination of blame and disempowerment can risk exacerbating any poor previous experience parents may have had with agencies and increases the likelihood that they become reluctant to engage. Parental disengagement will then potentially reinforce statutory agency prejudices and a situation can quickly spiral into hostility, a breakdown in communication and the loss of the shared focus of all parties to safeguard the child.

> I thought they'd help us and I was completely vulnerable at the time because I was scared and desperate about the dangers to my daughter. I was completely open with them and I really wanted their help. I feel as if they used everything I said against me and against my family. It started to feel as if I was fighting on two fronts. I was fighting to keep my child from her abusers, I was fighting for my child's life, and then I was fighting social care."

2.7. Summary

The Relational Safeguarding Model maximises the capacity of agencies to keep children safe, convict perpetrators, reduce missing episodes, and prevent family breakdown – whilst recognising the immense emotional impact CSE has on families. It recognises parents' vital role in safeguarding children, and builds parents' resilience and confidence to lead on the development of safeguarding arrangements.

The relational safeguarding model responds to the dynamics of grooming and its impact on family life. It seeks to engage parents and family members in safeguarding a child, rather than treating them with professional suspicion. This approach is rooted in best practice, as recommended by statutory guidance (DCSF, 2009) and can be demonstrated as an effective and efficient model.

> Pace enables families to understand CSE and how groomers operate – resulting in better relationships within the home. This enables us to work alongside the family and convict the perpetrators. As a result of Pace's work in a recent case and working with the family, five offenders appeared in court and were sentenced to ten years."
>
> Detective Sergeant

The Relational Safeguarding Model in practice

3.1. Organisational culture

The relational safeguarding model can be adapted into different environments but works most effectively within a specialist child exploitation multi-agency hub with an organisational culture that:

- Recognises the benefit of supporting and working with affected parents and families.
- Does not blame parent/s or families for the sexual exploitation of a child.
- Respects the independence and different roles of NGOs and charity sector workers within the hub.

3.2. The Relational Safeguarding Model and Parent Liaison Officers

Research and experience from child exploitation multi-agency hubs has identified that in order to minimise the risk of conflict between parents and agencies in regards to safeguarding measures, it is better that the emotional support for parents and families comes from a co-located Parent Liaison Officer (PLO), employed by an outside agency rather than social services or the police.

> “So much more [is] gained from a Parent Liaison Officer (PLO) than you would ever get from a detective or social services.[14]

The appointment of PLOs into multi-agency teams is an integral part of working within the framework of the relational safeguarding model. It is possible to generate a family-centred approach and culture without a PLO but research[15], case studies and third party endorsement over the last nine years has shown the benefits of PLOs as part of a multi-agency child exploitation team in terms of:

- Safeguarding children.
- Improved parents and family engagement with statutory agencies.
- Successful prosecutions of perpetrators.
- Empowerment of parents to provide the long term support for the victim.

Co-located PLOs currently work in Kirklees, Calderdale, North Yorkshire and Rochdale. It is unclear why PLOs are often missing from child exploitation multi-agency and co-located teams. This may be because:

- Affected children are looked at in isolation.
- A negative organisational culture exists towards affected families.
- The multi agency benefits and cost effectiveness of PLOs is unknown.
- Parent and family support is a part of someone’s job in the team.

3.3. A PLO job description

PLOs build bridges, open doors and maintain mutually respectful relationships between statutory agencies and families in order to maximise the ability of all parties to safeguard a child at risk of/or being sexually exploited.

> In recognition of the positive outcomes that are achieved when parents and carers are part of an intervention to address the needs of a young person who has experienced both running away and child exploitation, the research suggests that a good practice of model support should incorporate a specialist parents' support worker.[16]

A PLO will:

- Develop appropriate emotional and practical support services for the parents[17] of sexually exploited young people.
- Form and maintain supportive, empowering relationships with the parents affected by child exploitation to build their self-esteem, confidence, knowledge and resilience to enable them to maintain the family unit, and effectively safeguard their child.
- Support parents in gathering intelligence to help identify perpetrators.
- Be the conduit between the parent and professionals.
- Support parents in developing safeguarding plans and missing from home plans.
- Support parents with a compassion over control response to their children.
- Explain exploitation, its affects on victims behavior, and help partner agencies to understand trauma responses.
- Increase awareness of professionals that families are often in states of secondary and vicarious trauma.
- Increasing victim-less prosecutions due to the parents' collection of robust intelligence and evidence.
- Identify the individual needs of parents/carers and work with them towards fulfilling those needs.
- Take on an advocacy role for individual parents.
- Facilitate and enable the development of parent self-help and advocacy networks.

- Identify and deliver strategies to enable diversion and protection of children from exploitation through prevention work with parents/carers and training with other professionals.
- Develop partnership working to support the development of good practise.
- Provide training workshops on issues around support to parents of sexually exploited children in a variety of settings.
- Challenge prejudice and raise awareness of the issues for the parent and families of sexually exploited children and young people by giving talks and training to other individuals, groups and professionals.
- Advise other professionals of good practice issues related to working with parents of sexually exploited young people.
- Participate in Common Assessment Framework (CAF), Team Around The Child (TAC), child protection, participate in safeguarding meetings, and other formal support processes for parents when required.
- Link parents and where necessary, other family members, into services and support appropriate to their needs (i.e. health services, training, positive activities, counselling, befriending/peer support programmes etc).
- Identify the barriers for parents to accessing other agencies.

3.4. Parent Liaison Officers and Child Support Workers

PLOs have been identified as the most effective and efficient partners to work with Child Support Workers (CSWs) in order to provide 'wrap around support' for the family. Two workers recognise the child's identity as both an individual and as part of a family unit.

These two individuals work together. At times they may have different priorities but their approach is always to work holistically through risk assessment, safeguarding planning, possible disclosure, investigation, trial, trial outcome and therapy.

> "If she (PLO) wasn't here we could not get the same outcome because of the dynamics in a family. Especially around court time, support is needed at this time, which is why you need two workers as it releases all of that pressure.[18]

Measuring the long-term outcomes of the work of PLOs is challenging, given the number of variables involved. Professionals acknowledge that, in most cases, risks to young people diminish when the parents are supported. However this decrease in risk goes hand in hand with the support work done by the CSWs too. It is the combination of dual support that is the vital component of success.

A 14 year old girl started to spend time with a group of men. There was conflict between the daughter and her mother, a single parent. The young person did not want any intervention. The PLO worked with a CSW for seven months to gain the confidence of both mother and child. Gradually the young person began to trust the workers and ultimately this led to a disclosure.[19]

3.5. Factors affecting PLOs

The work of a PLO will vary according to parental need, child exploitation team requirements and organisational priorities. The support work offered to parents by PLOs varies as a consequence of three interrelated factors:

- Capacity.
- Flexibility.
- Multi-agency perceptions.

Capacity

Capacity is in part managed by a threshold assessment (low, medium and high risk). This threshold assessment is a core aspect of the child exploitation team process.

Flexibility

PLOs have to show considerable flexibility in their role and make themselves available to parents out of office hours. Flexibility also has to be exercised on what form support may take; with the one to one support changing over time as parental needs change.

Multi-agency perceptions

The perceived role and subsequent allocation of work to the PLO in supporting parents varies between different child exploitation teams. Current PLOs have experienced teams who prefer that all parents work with the PLO (even if the parents do not want to engage). All referrals to a Pace PLO go through the operational manager who assesses what support is required. At the other end of the spectrum a team may deploy a PLO to support a single family. In both situations a PLO would have to challenge the multi-agency perceptions and approach in relation to working with parents.

3.6. Potential cost savings

Assessing the potential cost savings of a child exploitation intervention is a challenge. Given the complexity of social relations, there is rarely one intervention that on its own can be said to have made the difference.

However, evidence suggests that the potential cost savings of this model outweigh the relatively low investment. It costs just **£50** a week to pay for a Pace Parent Liaison Officer to support a CSE affected family. As a result, safeguarding opportunities are maximised, and missing episodes and children going into care can be significantly reduced.

In contrast, it costs local authority areas approximately:

- **£4,500** a week to keep a child in residential care
- **£1,300** each time the police to search for a missing from home child per night (many go missing multiple times)
- **£37,669** annually per looked after child (further expenditure on after care services if the young person remained looked after) [20]

Attempts have been made to calculate the cost of early intervention services in child exploitation, suggesting that every £1 spent on Barnardos support services saves the taxpayer either £6 or £12 in the future (2011). Similarly, the intervention provided by a PLO does, in some cases, prevent the need for more extensive services for a young person and their family. Child exploitation professionals have stated through research that PLOs have lowered the child exploitation risk to children, as the parent became better equipped to deal with the situation. This results in the risk decreasing and no further need for statutory services, such as the police or social services. Related to this is the reduction of missing from home incidents.

> “Affected parents are unanimous that, without the (PLO) support offered, they would not have got through their ordeal.[21]

The work of PLOs in helping to hold families together when they were at breaking point is significant and can be evidenced. Without the support of a PLO, parents have stated their families would have separated and in some cases the children been taken into local authority care. According to the House of Commons, the average cost per looked after child was £37,669 in 2009/10 and there would be further expenditure on after care services if the young person remained looked after (Harker, 2012).

3.7. Outcomes

Local Authorities tackling child sexual exploitation have invested in this evidenced-based model because it has been demonstrated to:

- Increase the capacity of agencies and empower parents to work together to safeguard children, and disrupt and convict perpetrators.
- Maximise conviction rates by increasing attendance at court and the collation of robust evidence against the perpetrators (eg at one local authority, prosecutions increased by 90 per cent after a PLO was placed in the team).
- Reduce missing episodes and children going into care as a result of CSE.
- Increase parents' understanding of CSE and reduce the likelihood of family breakdown by placing the responsibility of the abuse onto the perpetrator.
- Empower parents to find ways to support and safeguard their child, with 86 per cent of parents reporting they are more confident to safeguard their child after receiving support from the PLO team.
- Increase information sharing between parents and practitioners – ultimately increasing opportunities for agencies to work with parents to safeguard children.

The work of a PLO in a multi-agency hub

4.1. One-to-one support

The one-to-one PLO's support is often intensive and time consuming and can continue over a significant period of time – sometimes years. PLOs visit a home twice a week and phone daily to build a good rapport with affected parents and family. The PLO will support the parents at home, at meetings, including child protection case conferences, as well as prepare them for court. The fact that a PLO can dedicate so much time to a family is often seen as a key contribution by other agencies in a multi-agency team to their overall work in safeguarding a chid.[22]

Two sisters aged 15 and 16 (one diagnosed with a learning disability) were groomed and sexually exploited by a male. Three workers were allocated to the family, one for each child and a PLO for the parents. After much discussion, including an internal meeting with the parents, a collective decision was made not to prosecute as it was not in the best interests of the chid. The children are no longer at risk.

4.2. Knowledge of the whole family

The PLO capacity to understand the whole family, not just the parents and their ability to see all the family's needs, and to not just focus on the child exploitation are key factors in their work to support and contribute to a multi-agency hub. A PLO can provide background and give family context which assists in safeguarding decisions. This area of work for the PLO reflects the Munro's recommendations on child protection reforms (DfE, 2011), in particular the emphasis on building up good working relationships with families and maintaining continuity in support and building up trust.

4.3. Reducing the risk to children and young people

Early intervention by a PLO can hold a family together as it experiences the child exploitation crisis and help prevent family break up. This support from a PLO – especially important in the early stages of a child exploitation intervention – enables the parent to be there for the child and reduce the immediate risk of further crisis. The PLO also enables other members of the child exploitation team to focus on the young person's needs and protection.

Risk is also reduced because of the network approach that the PLO and CSW teams take. If one young person is affected by child exploitation, then it is likely that other young people may be being groomed. Using a network analysis approach (Cockbain 2011), links can be made between potential victims – for instance the PLO and CSW working in a school with friends of an affected girl or parents of children in the school – to inform them on healthy relationships and identifying abusive environments to avoid.

4.4. Awareness raising

PLOs can supplement their high risk support work with group work and contacting parents who may be affected by child exploitation.

Improving parental understanding of child exploitation and the grooming process can break the stranglehold that the perpetrators have on a young person as the parents begin to understand that their child is being manipulated and deliberately being estranged from them. Moreover, some parents need to understand that their child is not responsible for what has happened. This can have a significant effect on family relations and lead to positive change.

Improved parental understanding is achieved through a variety of means by a PLO. Individual or group support can be ways of sharing and exploring the process of grooming. Often the parents are learning the same things that their child is covering with the CSW; this joint 'mirroring work' is essential.

4.5. Low level support

A key role of PLOs is taking low-risk referrals to assess early risk indicators. PLOs can undertake preventative work and can work with families where the police have identified risk but a criminal investigation is not planned.

4.6. Information and intelligence sharing

Another key role of the PLO is to encourage parents to take an active role in information gathering, to see the value in sharing information about what they notice and overhear and feeding this back to the right person.

The PLO can encourage parents to gather the 'right' kind of information, such as car registrations, time of phone calls, names mentioned in discussions, Facebook comments etc. This role is considered vital by the multi-agency partners where PLOs are currently located.

> You get better information from families where Pace are involved. I think when Pace become involved parents get a better education about what the risks are and what the signs are to look out for and the importance of sharing that information and the opportunity to share the information to somebody specifically that's there to listen to them."
>
> Detective Sergeant

> The information that the PLO provided each week was often substantial enough to generate new referrals for the team about other vulnerable young people.[23]

Some PLOs have developed a system of logging concerns, which have proved to be especially useful for foster carers and residential care workers. 'Provenance logs' capture relevant information for the police. PLOs can train residential and foster carer staff on how to record in these logs and include evidence in a section called 'How do you know it is true?'.

There is a distinction between information and intelligence and some frustrations can arise from parents when they share information that they think is intelligence and will be acted on. Some parents will have had negative experiences of phoning the police or social services to try and share information in the past. One of the important roles of the PLO is to help parents understand the difference and act as a vessel to pass information on. The information may not be enough to act on, however feeding it back to the child exploitation teams via a PLO gives the police and partners the chance to formalise this information and turn some of it into intelligence that informs a bigger picture. In some cases, this process has culminated in a sophisticated network mapping that has led to a police operation targeting multiple offenders.

A recent evaluation highlighted that without information from parents some cases would not have proceeded to trial, including one case where a disclosure to a PLO led to an arrest on the same day.[24]

4.7. Court preparation/witness support

The court preparation involves visits to court, making any necessary special arrangements, explaining the process and associated language to the parents and accompanying them to court hearings.

Parents may be interviewed as witnesses and the family may be subject to threats and intimidation whilst they wait for the court date.[25] PLO support to a family covers emotional, practical and legal aspects. The PLO will do whatever is required to support the family through the process, be it being in court with the parents, explaining the language associated with court process, or ensuring adequate witness support protection, if required.

> “Parents have felt enabled to support their child, throughout the investigation and to the point of prosecution. All four parents interviewed were adamant that, without the constancy of support, they would not have been able to go through the ordeal.[26]

The PLO support is not just about what happens at court but the consequences of the police investigation and trial, such as housing needs, managing harassment, intimidation and the schooling needs of siblings. Life can also become difficult in a local area as a result of media coverage; this happened to one family after a newspaper picked up on and printed a barrister's comments in court that 'it takes two to tango'. There is evidence that families have to move because of the threats they receive as a case goes through the criminal justice system – one family in the north of England had to be moved three times.[27] (This ended up with a further court case and two men being sentenced for intimidation offences.)

A female aged 12 was groomed and sexually exploited by a group of men over a period of three years. The mother supported her daughter, via the PLO, to go to court on three separate occasions, leading to convictions against a number of men. The child is no longer at risk.

Part of the work that a PLO undertakes is to bring the family back together. For some parents, this will mean taking the perpetrator to court and for others being involved in the decision not to prosecute will be just as critical. The involvement of the parents and the young person empowers the family to make choices that are right for them.

The PLO de-briefs the family following a court case – giving explanations about the conviction or otherwise to help the family to accept the judicial decision – e.g. if the sentencing is not as severe as they had expected. The PLO helps the family to understand the judicial decision which is often difficult due to the complex judicial specific language used or the family were in a state of trauma during the result.

4.8 Post trial support and longer-term needs

Whilst a successful conviction is the end of an investigative case, the parents and young person still have ongoing support needs. PLOs can offer support post-trial to ensure that affected families are not 'abandoned'.

A parent still phoned the PLO nine months after the end of the trial. She needed to work through further emotional trauma (a need to visit the perpetrator in prison) and practical matters (application to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board) .

Conclusion

Working with and supporting parents is crucial for both preventing child exploitation and as part of an intervention strategy for a child who is being sexually exploited.

Intervening early and adopting a relational safeguarding model reduces the child exploitation risks factors for a child and maximises the ability of statutory agencies and parents to safeguard them. The sooner intervention commences, the more likely it is that the outcomes will be positive for the child or young person and their family. This can be evidenced both from national research, successful prosecutions and working practice.

Seven out of ten of professionals surveyed by YouGov reported that the main barrier they face in identifying and preventing cases of child exploitation is a lack of parental knowledge and engagement. In the same survey, educating children in secondary schools about child exploitation and providing parental support and information were considered the top ways of preventing cases of child exploitation. In the same YouGov report parents fed back that they had no knowledge of CSE and therefore the awareness hadn't been given/received.[28]

Independent Parent Liaison Officers (PLOs) working in partnership with Child Support Workers (CSWs) is at the heart of the relational safeguarding model. Dual support is vital as it recognises the child's identity as both an individual and as part of a family unit. Specifically, a PLO in a child exploitation team can:

- Increase the capacity of agencies and empower parents to work together to safeguard children, and disrupt and convict perpetrators.
- Maximise conviction rates by increasing attendance at court and the collation of robust evidence against the perpetrators (eg at one local authority, prosecutions increased by 90 per cent after a PLO was placed in the team).
- Reduce missing episodes and children going into care as a result of CSE.
- Increase parents understanding of CSE and reduce the likelihood of family breakdown by placing the responsibility of the abuse onto the perpetrator.
- Empower parents to find ways to support and safeguard their child, with 86 per cent of parents reporting they are more confident to safeguard their child after receiving support from the PLO team.
- Increase information sharing between parents and practitioners – ultimately increasing opportunities for agencies to work with parents to safeguard children.
- Provide cost-effective support for parents in order to maintain the emotional, physical and mental resilience of the family whilst supporting a sexually exploited child.
- Result in parents describing themselves as being more emotionally resilient and able to cope with the impact of CSE as a result of the Parent Liaison Officer's support. The safety and wellbeing of the family can also increase.
- Give knowledge to increase parental understanding of CSE and a reduction in the CSE risk to children and young people.

- Act as a conduit for parents to share information with the police which can support intelligence-led mapping, targeting of perpetrators and prosecutions.
- Offer potential statutory cost savings including reducing the risk of children going into a secure unit, missing episodes and court cases collapsing due to the failure of a child witness to attend, and family breakdown.

Annex

Parents Against Child Exploitation (Pace)

Established in i996, Parents Against Child Exploitation (Pace) is the lead national charity that works alongside parents and carers of children who are, or who are at risk of being exploited by individuals from outside of the family. We also provide guidance and training to professionals on how child sexual exploitation, modern slavery, human trafficking and the criminalisation of exploited children affects the whole family. Our Parent Liaison Officers are based at multi-agency hubs tackling child exploitation in various local authority areas across the UK.

Specialist support staff work with parents one-to-one, by telephone or face-to-face to provide:

- One-to-one advice and information.
- Advocacy and emotional support.
- Support through investigations and court.
- Opportunities to meet and connect with other affected parents.
- Advising how to establish rights as parents and work in partnership with statutory agencies (eg social care and police).

Pace also works alongside affected parents who wish to campaign for positive change for affected families and their children. This is called the Parent Action Group.

Our national training programme is taught by highly experienced Pace staff and leading experts from the fields of social work, police and academia. It is informed by over 23 years' experience of working directly alongside affected families who share their experiences and stories to support your learning. This programme includes the UK's first Level 4 Accredited Award in Child Sexual Exploitation (ACSEP).

> "Everybody working with families and children who are victims of, or at risk of, CSE should do this course"
>
> ACSEP Graduate

We also offer our Advanced Child Exploitation Course (ACE) which brings together the most pressing areas of child exploitation including trafficking, modern slavery, radicalisation and criminalisation (county lines), and bespoke training opportunities.

Full details can be found at **www.paceuk.info**

Endnotes

1. YouGov report *Are parents in the picture? Professional and parental perspectives of child exploitation* (Autumn 2013) page 42.
2. Barnardo's report *Running from hate to what you think is love: the relationship between running away and child exploitation*. Emilie Smeaton. (2013) Point 6.4.5 page 119.
3. The plural description of 'parents' in this paper describes single parents, couples, biological parents, step-parents, foster parents and kin carers and carers. A child will be living in a 'family environment'.
4. 69% professionals surveyed agreed parents feel disempowered by agency involvement in the family. YouGov report Are parents in the picture? Professional and parental perspectives of child exploitation (Autumn 2013) Page 53, 54.
5. Barnardo's report *Running from hate to what you think is love: the relationship between running away and child exploitation*. Emilie Smeaton. (2013).
6. College of Policing *Authorised Professional Practice – child exploitation* (February 2014) Section 10 – victims' families.
7. Dr Peter Unwin & Dr Danielle Stephens-Lewis *Evaluating the Health Implications of Child Sexual Exploitation on Parents*, University of Worcester, 2016.
8. Emma Palmer and Peter Jenkins *Parents as partners in safeguarding children: an evaluation of Pace's work in four Lancashire CSE teams* October 2010–October 2012.
9. 69% professionals surveyed agreed parents feel disempowered by agency involvement in the family. YouGov report *Are parents in the picture? Professional and parental perspectives of child exploitation* (Autumn 2013) Page 53, 54
10. Emma Palmer and Peter Jenkins *Parents as partners in safeguarding children: an evaluation of Pace's work in four Lancashire CSE teams* October 2010–October 2012.
11. College of Policing *Authorised Professional Practice – child exploitation* (February 2014) Warning signs – family and social relationships.
12. 87% of professionals think that there are potential benefits to statutory agencies working in partnership with parents to safeguard the child during a police investigation. YouGov report *Are parents in the picture? Professional and parental perspectives of child exploitation* (Autumn 2013) Page 74.
13. College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice – child exploitation (February 2014) Section 10 Victims' families.
14. Emma Palmer and Peter Jenkins *Parents as partners in safeguarding children: an evaluation of Pace's work in four Lancashire CSE teams October* 2010–October 2012.
15. ibid.
16. Barnardo's report *Running from hate to what you think is love: the relationship between running away and child exploitation*. Emilie Smeaton. (2013).
17. The plural description of 'parents' in this paper describes single parents, couples, biological parents, step-parents, foster parents and kin carers and carers. A child will be living in a 'family environment'.
18. Emma Palmer and Peter Jenkins *Parents as partners in safeguarding children: an evaluation of Pace's work in four Lancashire CSE teams* October 2010–October 2012.
19. ibid.
20. ibid.
21. ibid.
22. ibid
23. ibid.
24. ibid.
25. *Supporting families through the court process*. A guide for police officers, intermediaries and witness supporters. Pace (Jan 2012)
26. Emma Palmer and Peter Jenkins *Parents as partners in safeguarding children: an evaluation of Pace's work in four Lancashire CSE teams* October 2010–October 2012.
27. ibid.
28. YouGov report *Are parents in the picture? Professional and parental perspectives of child exploitation* (Autumn 2013) Pages 69 and 70.

ISBN: 978-0-954648-6-4

Price: £4

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