

## LEARNING SUMMARY #1

# WHOLE FAMILY APPROACHES TO TACKLING DOMESTIC ABUSE

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This summary is intended for use by anyone in children's social care looking to lead a whole-family approach to tackling domestic violence and abuse. The summary aims to provide thought-provoking ideas and insights from the DfE's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, including what we know is working, with reference to the places and people that are trying new approaches. The summary draws on the evaluations of Innovation Programme projects published in 2017; on Programme learning events on complex safeguarding and domestic abuse; and on the on-the-ground experiences of projects.

References to evaluations, key material and reports can be found on the final page, with a full list of links and contact details on the Spring Consortium website [www.springconsortium.com](http://www.springconsortium.com)



## The challenge

Around 20% of young people in the UK have been exposed to domestic violence or abuse, with DVA a factor in 50% of social worker assessments of children in need, over half of serious case reviews and two thirds of child contact applications.

Despite the development of positive work to tackle domestic abuse, the experience of practitioners and families shows that it can be difficult to sustain change and safe long-term outcomes. In part, this is due to difficulties in creating a cohesive and co-ordinated approach across the separate cultures, laws and practitioners of the 'three worlds' of victims and perpetrators; child protection and safeguarding; and child contact.

## New approaches

A greater understanding of the different forms domestic abuse can take has developed over recent years, including coercive control, abuse within adolescent relationships and the abuse of parents by adolescents. This has shifted approaches towards working with the whole family, **viewing every family member as one part of a complex picture** and including perpetrators in this picture as far as possible.

These approaches maintain a **focus on sustainable change**, recognising that it is not always in a child's best interest to lose contact with a parent; that separating out the worlds of perpetrator and victim does not always address long-term risks within the family; and, crucially, that it is possible for parenting relationships to improve, even when parents do not stay together. This requires taking a **different perspective on balancing short and long-term risk** and rethinking the support that both parents and children need in order to recognise, understand and break out of damaging family dynamics.

# Whole-family approaches to tackling domestic abuse in action

## DONCASTER CHILDREN'S SERVICES TRUST

### Growing Futures: whole-family interventions for domestic abuse

Research with families in Doncaster in 2015 showed a widespread culture of acceptance of DVA in some communities, in addition to considerable antipathy toward local services. The Growing Futures programme combines **targeted, whole-family support** from Domestic Abuse Navigators with **outreach work to challenge community attitudes**.

In the first 12 months of Growing Futures, 12 Domestic Abuse Navigators (DANs) have worked with 440 family members, including 90 perpetrators. DANs deliver therapeutic interventions, create **trusting relationships between professionals and families**, and act as system enablers to effect **whole-family joint working across relevant agencies**. This is supported by partnerships between the Children's Services Trust and Doncaster Council, police and probation, housing, third sector providers, NHS Trusts and CCGs.

The programme demonstrated decreases in repeat MARAC referrals in its first year and a reduction in cases of looked-after children that feature DVA. It has also resulted in young people launching their own campaign to address community understanding of DVA. Doncaster is supporting the **London Borough of Newham** to implement its NewDay programme, which encompasses systemic practice training for social workers delivering individual, couple and whole-family therapeutic interventions and the expansion of the Virtual School to children in need and on child protection plans.

-15.6%

Decrease in repeat MARAC referrals

-26.3%

Reduction in LAC cases featuring DVA by end of project

## CHESHIRE EAST AND CATCH22

### Project Crewe: a 'pod' support model for children and families in need

Cheshire East and Catch22 have developed a 'pod' model of support for children in need in Crewe, focusing on families experiencing domestic abuse, mental ill-health and substance abuse. Led by a social work consultant who holds statutory responsibility, qualified practitioners provide day-to-day support **alongside peer mentors and volunteers**. All are trained in solutions-focused, strengths-based interventions, with the family's own approach to addressing risk at the centre of each support plan.

A strong structure of collaboration and support is reinforced by a practitioner buddy system and a **responsive training programme** that allows frontline staff to access the information they need to support families. Around 47% of families worked with in the pilot period had experienced domestic violence, with in-depth training provided to teams to collectively hold the risk inherent in working with these families. The use of volunteers has increased direct contact time, with Project Crew practitioners visiting families almost three times more often than their counterparts in the rest of the county.

An RCT found that the approach has promising indications of efficacy in closing cases, particularly for families with a history of social care support, partly due to the ability of volunteers to rebuild trusted relationships with families. Cheshire East is now rolling out the model to a second team based in **Macclesfield** and is working with **Coventry City Council** to adapt the model to their local context.



Personalised flexible support



## HAMPSHIRE AND THE ISLE OF WIGHT

### Active Agents for Change: rethinking the system response

In 2015 almost three-quarters of families with a child in need or child protection plan across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight had experienced domestic abuse, with the prevalence of parental substance misuse and mental ill-health at 52% and 46% respectively. In response, the two local authorities have worked together to develop a suite of approaches to whole-family working across early intervention, child protection and looked-after children. **Multi-disciplinary Family Intervention Teams** engage with and support parents dealing with these issues to sustain motivation and change through a range of group work and 1:1 interventions.

In addition, the programme recruited, trained and supported 220 **volunteers to engage young people and families** in four key areas – mentoring young people on the edge of care through building trusted relationships has been particularly successful in conjunction with delivering evidenced based interventions, advocacy, family support and undertaking Return from Missing interviews. On the Isle of Wight volunteers were recruited from an existing volunteer provider, whilst Hampshire undertook a successful community recruitment process that has resulted in over 1400 enquiries.

Highly skilled administrators are used to support social work teams, leading in the first year to **social workers' time spent on direct work with families** increasing from 34% to 58%. A social work surgery pilot offered advice to schools where there was an element of risk or uncertainty about risk to children thus further promoting cross-agency working. Overall the suite of projects has seen engagement levels of families with complex needs increasing from 29% to 70% in Hampshire and 87% on the Isle of Wight.



## What do we know about what's working?

Learning from across Innovation Programme projects working to tackle domestic abuse supports the wider evidence base in suggesting that multi-disciplinary working with the whole family improves outcomes for both adults and children, including victims, perpetrators and wider family members.

### Creating and supporting multi-disciplinary teams

Successful whole family approaches require multi-disciplinary teams that can tackle issues on multiple fronts and share responsibility and risk across professionals. This includes children's and adults' specialists; a mix of social workers and other professionals; and a focus on underlying issues including mental health and substance abuse. In particular, this requires:

- Direct, flexible and therapeutic work according to each family's and individual's context, with a solid understanding and knowledge of the types and causes of abuse and the ability to challenge system silos.
- Data sharing within and between teams, including qualitative recording of families' experiences of working with professionals.
- Co-located specialists focusing on young people and families in a way that 'goes to them' and offers multiple opportunities to build relationships.
- Multiple channels of engagement to challenge family members to identify, understand and change behaviour. This includes shared responsibility for engaging and challenging perpetrators so that this does not sit solely within the criminal justice system.

**Stockport Family's** multi-disciplinary teams saw marked improvement in communication and co-operation within the organisation, allowing professionals and families to draw upon the right intervention, specialist knowledge and skills when needed. Adult specialists play a substantial role in **Hertfordshire's Family Safeguarding** approach to stabilise family environments so that children can be brought home from care more swiftly.

### Building in ways to learn and spread good, common practice

Successful approaches feature peer-to-peer learning between family practitioners as well as across sectors, including social workers, domestic violence workers, the police, probation and youth justice, mental health and substance misuse specialists, family practitioners, health workers and teachers. Voluntary and community sector knowledge is increased through training and formal learning programmes run by DVA experts, and cross-sector relationships are built when practitioners learn alongside each other.

In **Leeds**, which is trialling Family Group Conferencing in cases of domestic violence, a large-scale training programme has seen 6,000 practitioners trained in restorative practice between 2015 and 2016, from social work, police, health, housing and youth offending, including 800 school staff and 500 staff from the third sector.

### Involving family members in interventions to put them in control of change

Giving families who have experienced DVA control of the practices that affect them is a powerful tool in itself. Using models such as Family Group Conferencing, restorative practice and motivational interviewing, families can be supported to better understand the options available to them, the impact of their decisions and the possibilities for change. Empowering families to seek help and effect change for themselves can increase the likelihood of children remaining in the care of birth family networks, by addressing families' problems early and embodying a commitment to 'work with' rather than 'do to' families as far as possible.

In a survey sample of 54 of the 660 families taking part in a Family Group Conference in **Leeds** in 2016, 100% said they felt involved in the process of creating their family plan and that their values had been respected, with 99% feeling the conference had helped them to address their problems.

### Measuring what matters

The effects of DVA on young people are far reaching, so the indicators that are measured must be as well. Indicators of factors that will break intergenerational cycles of abuse include school attendance, improved mental health and feelings of confidence. The more complex the case, the more longitudinal support the family will need to sustain a positive change.

Multi-agency working requires measuring outcomes across sectors and at different points of the statutory system. Success in tackling DVA results in decreased reoffending, decreased emergency admittances to hospital, decreased referrals and fewer cases of children in need, child protection and children looked after after featuring DVA.

In addition, there is now an increased drive to use families', particularly young people's, own assessments on how far things have improved as a measure of success. **Newham** describe this as 'using the child's voice as a barometer for change'. Ongoing reflection, digital logbooks and multiple conversations with trusted, consistent key practitioners are successful ways of approaching this.



“We feel involved in the process of creating our family plan”

## Other projects and places looking at whole-family approaches to domestic abuse

**Hertfordshire Family Safeguarding:** 22 co-located, multi-disciplinary teams to tackle domestic abuse, substance misuse and parental mental ill-health, with resultant savings of £2.6m in the first 12 months.

**Leeds City Council's Family Valued:** embedding Family Group Conferences as an alternative to ICPCs, including in cases of domestic violence.

**Royal Borough of Greenwich:** a system-wide approach combining interventions that tackle the causes of domestic violence, based on the Science of Compassion.

**Durham's Families First:** ten integrated, co-located and mixed-skill teams working with the most complex families

**Slough Children's Services Trust:** implementing the Inspiring Families Programme and Coercion and Control Enquiry Form, two tools for practitioners to assess the dynamics and types of domestic abuse across the whole family.

**Stockport Family,** led by the council and NHS Trust: an integrated service for complex families including a 'team around the school' approach, leading to a 14% reduction in spend on care placements.



## Resources projects have found useful

### Innovation Programme materials:

- 'Child sexual exploitation and mental health', Innovation Programme thematic evaluation report by the Rees Centre, July 2017
- Spring Consortium webinar on domestic violence and abuse, June 2017
- Complex Safeguarding Conference, hosted by Wigan and Rochdale, January 2017
- Growing Futures Dissemination Conference, Doncaster December 2016
- Innovation Programme Interim Learning Report, January 2016

### Wider research:

- Hester, 'The Three Planet Model: Towards an Understanding of Contradictions in Approaches to Women and Children's Safety in Contexts of Domestic Violence', *British Journal of Social Work*, 41, 2011
- Stark, 'Coercive Control: How men entrap women in personal life', *Oxford University Press*, 2009
- Johnson, 'A Typology of Domestic Violence: Intimate Terrorism, Violent Resistance, and Situational Couple Violence', *Northeastern University Press*, 2008
- Leeds 'One Minute Guides' to Coercive Control, 'Think Family, Work Family' and Daily Domestic Violence Meetings

Evaluation reports for all projects in the Innovation Programme, contact details for projects mentioned and further learning and research materials can be found at [www.springconsortium.com/evidence-learning](http://www.springconsortium.com/evidence-learning)

## Five things to consider when taking a whole family approach to tackling domestic abuse

1

Early intervention is essential in developing trusting relationships with families before crisis occurs. Non-social work practitioners can be best placed to do this, avoiding the culture of fear around engagement with services that can cause families to develop deflection strategies.

2

Practitioners work most effectively when they are able to combine practical, theoretical, therapeutic and systemic knowledge.

3

Co-location of specialists, in places families already know and feel comfortable, enables real multi-disciplinary working.

4

Separate workers for victims and perpetrators and for adults and children, operating within the same team, are crucial for building families' trust and ensuring safety.

5

Underlying issues for perpetrators, such as drug abuse, must be tackled as part of the whole family picture in order to break cycles of disengagement and re-offending.