



Evaluation of the Alexi Project 'Hub and Spoke' programme of CSE service development

Key Messages
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THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
RESEARCHING CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION,
VIOLENCE AND TRAFFICKING

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Background and Aims of the Alexi Project

The Alexi Hub and Spoke programme was an £8m service development programme, funded by the Child Sexual Exploitation Funders' Alliance (CSEFA). It was designed to rapidly increase the capacity and coverage of specialist, voluntary sector child sexual exploitation (CSE) services within England.

Sixteen CSE services were funded for three years each,¹ over a five year period,² with the aims of:

1. Making specialist support available to children and young people in a series of new locations.
2. Improving the co-ordination, delivery and practice of local services responding to CSE – including the police, children's services and other partner agencies.

The model known as 'Hub and Spoke' was used to achieve this, whereby a voluntary sector organisation (the 'hub') placed experienced CSE workers ('spokes') either within its own or into new neighbouring local authority areas, in order to extend its coverage and reach. These spoke workers undertook a variety of activities, including individual casework with children and young people, consultancy, and training and awareness-raising with children and young people and practitioners. In total, 53 spoke workers were placed out in 35 new local authority areas and supported by the 16 hub services.

The Hub and Spoke funding programme was one element of the wider strategy, developed by CSEFA, designed to create a 'step-change' in how local areas respond to CSE. [The Alexi Project](#) website has information on the full range of these activities and outputs, including a significant strand of work promoting the meaningful participation of children and young people in their own care and service provision.

The Evaluation

The evaluation of the Hub and Spoke programme took place between September 2013 and January 2017. It aimed to both inform the development of funded services, and summarise the learning to date. Multiple data were collected:

- 276 interviews: 72 with spoke workers and 62 with hub staff. Participants also included 56 representatives from children's services (including social workers, managers, CSE co-ordinators), 24 from the police and Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC), 17 in other roles in the local authority, 12 from Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs), 12 young people, 9 from other voluntary organisations working in the sector, 8 parents/carers and 4 from CSEFA.
- Case studies from spoke workers, exploring features of the model that enabled them to effectively engage with children and young people.
- Quantitative data relating to numbers and backgrounds of children and young people reached by Hub and Spoke services, as well as children and young people and professionals attending training and awareness-raising events.

This document highlights key messages from the evaluation for policy-makers, commissioners and practitioners. A detailed evaluation report is available from the [Alexi Project website](#).

¹ With the exception of the original Hub and Spoke service, which was established prior to the funding programme and so received continuation funding for a period of one year from CSEFA (2013-2014).

² The funding was available 2013-18 and the programme used a phased approach. At the time of publication the services from phase three and some from phase two were still delivering the work.

Summary of Key Messages and Recommendations

- 1. The Hub and Spoke programme has already reached over 7,000 children and young people with CSE awareness-raising sessions, and provided over 700 children and young people with specialist casework intervention.**

By the end of data collection in December 2016, the Hub and Spoke programme had reached 7,722 children and young people through groupwork, talks and sessions run by the spoke workers. In addition, 783 children and young people had received individual support through casework undertaken by the spoke workers. These children and young people are unlikely to have otherwise accessed a specialist service. By the time the programme ends in 2018, the final numbers of children and young people worked with will increase significantly³. For the 255 children and young people whose cases were closed during the evaluation period, 72% were recorded as being at lower risk compared to the initial assessment⁴. For the remaining 28% where no reduction in risk was recorded, this was due to a variety of reasons including the child or young person not engaging with the service, not being contactable, or moving away.

“It’s not like she’s telling me, she’s kind of helping me understand actually what she’s saying, and putting it into a situation”
(Young woman supported by a specialist spoke worker)

- 2. Over 6,000 professionals have been trained to improve identification of, and responses to, CSE.**

In total, 6,568 professionals attended training events or awareness-raising sessions about CSE, including social workers, police, teachers, health professionals and other voluntary sector practitioners. Some Hub and Spoke services have extended their awareness-raising programme to other relevant groups in their areas, such as taxi drivers and those in the service industry such as hoteliers, pubs and clubs.

The evaluation found that specialist voluntary sector workers within the Hub and Spoke programme have the capacity and expertise to address CSE, through both direct intervention with children and young people and through the training and support of other agencies and professionals. The direct work was effective in reducing risk for children and young people. There is clearly a need for specialist support services across England, particularly in places where services have not been provided before.

Recommendation

Commissioners should utilise voluntary sector knowledge and expertise to identify and respond to CSE, and to support the development of good safeguarding practice.

- 3. The voluntary sector has a distinct contribution to make to engaging young people through relationship-based and empowering practice.**

It was widely agreed by statutory staff and commissioners that the

³ Most spoke workers have a caseload of between 10 and 12 children and young people at any one time, and work with around 20 per year. Therefore it is anticipated that when the services are fully established and working at capacity the 53 spoke workers will undertake casework with approximately 1,060 children and young people per year of the project.

⁴ These data are based on services’ own assessments, following guidelines provided by the evaluation team, based on selected indicators from Barnardo’s CSE Outcomes Monitoring Framework.

voluntary sector brings a valuable contribution to safeguarding children and young people affected by CSE, which is distinct from that of statutory workers and agencies. Voluntary sector CSE services within this programme achieved this through their ability to engage vulnerable children and young people who other services struggled to reach. They did this by offering children and young people choice about when and how to engage with services, helping them to take more control in their lives. Many Hub and Spoke services offered support for as long as it was needed, which in some cases was up to two years or beyond.

Relationship-based practice created a context for developing self-efficacy and this, in turn, helped children and young people to disclose abuse, be supported to leave unsafe 'relationships' and begin to recover from CSE. Voluntary sector involvement also improved children and young people's engagement in wider services and this can result in better operational outcomes, including prosecutions and convictions.

The role of the voluntary sector has historically been to work with those children and young people who do not reach statutory service thresholds, or whom other services find hard to engage. For this reason, it is important that spoke staff maintain a voluntary sector identity, both for children and young people accessing support, and to maintain distance and independence from statutory services. This, in turn, enables services to advocate for children and young people and provide challenge to other agencies when necessary.

"I believe that this young person enjoyed the flexible approach of our work with her. At the point of referral she was very weary of services and was reluctant to engage. However, once she realised that [my] approach was different and that she had control over what she chose to discuss and how quickly or slowly we did the work she started to relax and feel more comfortable. I believe this was a turning point for her."
(Specialist spoke worker)

Recommendations

When commissioning voluntary sector services to support children and young people, it should be for as long as that support is needed. Good supervision of voluntary sector staff should be in place, to ensure progress is being made in individual cases. Service reporting should include evidence of persistent outreach to children and young people, engagement and trust-building (for example, through case studies) so that the value of this work is clearly communicated.

Statutory services should partner with voluntary workers to engage children and young people in statutory services and processes.

Future research should evaluate the contribution of the voluntary sector to partner agency outcomes, including the prevention of children and young people coming into care and increased prosecutions of the perpetrators of CSE.

4. Effective partnerships between voluntary and statutory agencies require certain conditions in responding to CSE.

The conditions for effective partnerships between voluntary and statutory sector agencies were:

- a shared understanding and respect for each organisation's role, needs and priorities
- agreeing arrangements and protocols for effective communication and the sharing of information from the outset
- the negotiation of clear roles and boundaries
- the recognition that trust takes time to develop between agencies who may have different aims and priorities.

Recommendation

Managers and commissioners engaging in partnership arrangements should build in time for mutual listening, trust-building and creating shared agreements and protocols for co-delivering service responses to CSE. These should be regularly revisited, and revised if needed.

5. Involving voluntary sector services in co-location arrangements can be an effective method of partnership working and diffusing good practice in CSE.

The representation of voluntary sector CSE services in co-located multi-agency CSE teams in this evaluation:

- improved sensitivity to the experiences and support needs of children and young people
- was a strong vehicle for increasing communication, information sharing and collaboration between agencies
- was a resource efficient way to provide a holistic response to the support needs that CSE raises.

A disadvantage of such co-location in this study was that children and young people did not have access to drop-in facilities or voluntary sector service buildings. These facilities are important because they help children and young people to identify with the service, recognise its independence from statutory agencies and connect with other service users.

6. The Hub and Spoke model of development is effective for expanding services quickly and strengthening regional responses.

The programme achieved a rapid and significant expansion of voluntary sector services, with 53 new spoke workers supporting children and young people and practitioners across 35 local authority areas.

The Hub and Spoke model strengthened regional responses to CSE by providing an overview of CSE patterns and services across local authority areas. It facilitated awareness of children and young people's movements across local authority boundaries, and multi-agency strategy development in combatting CSE.

This approach lends itself to regional or national commissioning models, and will be of particular value to police forces and PCCs developing regional strategies.

“That’s the benefit of the hub and spoke I suppose, is that you’ve got all the benefits and the resources at a central level, and that coordination centrally, but then the, the local connectedness of a spoke within [the county],

so that they're tapped into the right partners locally, strategically and operationally..”
(PCC representative)

Recommendation

Commissioners should consider the use of Hub and Spoke models if seeking to strengthen regional approaches to combatting CSE or to scale up voluntary sector services rapidly across a region.

7. Before developing a Hub and Spoke service, key features of the local area need to be scoped.

In order to embed successfully, Hub and Spoke services and their commissioners need to undertake a thorough scoping exercise in the proposed new area in order to understand:

- the current service landscape (the local organisation of services, multi-agency safeguarding responses and gaps in services)
- challenges to time, cost and resources arising from local geography
- local demography and needs arising for local populations or groups with differential needs
- the local profile of CSE including evidence, models and prevalence.

Recommendation

Those wanting to commission future Hub and Spoke developments should ensure that the strategic aims are thoroughly underpinned by a local scoping exercise. Undertaken in conjunction with the Hub and Spoke provider, this should inform key decisions including the spoke worker location, and resource allocation/structures for supporting lone workers.

8. There are a series of necessary conditions for the successful use of the Hub and Spoke model to expand services.

Effective use of the Hub and Spoke model to expand services requires strategic investment, and there are some conditions that are necessary for effective implementation of this approach to service expansion, including:

- a dedicated management role at the Hub, to focus on local partnership arrangements and strategic positioning
- time and persistence in developing local relationships
- clearly defined roles that support the strategic aims of the Hub and Spoke service
- the early recruitment of key statutory sector contacts who can advocate for and champion the work of the Hub and Spoke service.

Recommendation

For Hub and Spoke approaches to be effective, commissioners and the voluntary sector need to co-design services in a sustainable way that supports the strategic positioning of the service and its embeddedness in the

local service landscape.

9. Addressing key challenges is critical to the success of Hub and Spoke services.

The most successful Hub and Spoke services recognised and continually strived to overcome the challenges in providing sufficient management and support to lone workers, and in managing the implications of covering large catchment areas.

The evaluation found that Hub and Spoke services using outreach models experienced additional challenges in providing adequate long-arm management for lone specialist workers, whereas co-located services provided more supportive arrangements.

Recommendation

Hub services and host organisations need to provide adequate support and management to spoke workers, and acknowledge that the demands of casework with children and young people may limit the physical presence of the spoke worker in a host service or team.

10. The work of Hub and Spoke improves standards in local safeguarding: it extends the reach of training and resources, and shows how good casework can be undertaken.

In this study, the voluntary sector services focussed on relationship-building, trust and empowerment, and keeping children and young people at the centre of all their activities. The diffusion of these approaches and methods amongst partner agencies helped to develop a sense of shared norms or values between partner agencies which in turn, supported improved standards in local safeguarding practice.

The Hub and Spoke services had a key role to play in improving local practice through:

- providing expert and up-to-date knowledge on CSE definitions, types and prevalence
- modelling their ethos, approach and methods in engaging children and young people
- providing tools and resources
- providing training, awareness-raising and case consultancy to support other organisations working with children and young people affected by CSE.

It is important that this diffusion/influencing is rooted in casework experience, so that specialist voluntary sector CSE workers are seen as credible experts.

“No disrespect to social workers, they spend less time with the children and young people. Obviously [spoke worker] in her role can very much focus on CSE, whereas social workers can’t. So her expertise in terms of doing this day in, day out, is so important for people to learn from. I know I’ve heard there have been occasions where someone’s stuck on a case so they’ve made contact with [spoke worker] to say, “What can I do differently?” ...She [the spoke worker] has built up skills that other people won’t have.”

LSCB manager

Recommendations

Multi-agency CSE teams should include experienced voluntary sector CSE workers, who can offer training and resources and model their distinct approach to other agencies.

Specialist services need to ensure they deploy experienced case workers as spokes.

11. The location of spoke workers can have significant impact on the success of the Hub and Spoke model

The physical location of the spoke worker was key as it determined:

- visibility of the spoke to the relevant agencies locally
- referral pathways that reflected the ways in which populations of children and young people targeted for intervention were identified
- children and young people's access to and engagement with the service.

If the aims of a Hub and Spoke service are to support children and young people meeting the thresholds for statutory intervention, being located in a statutory setting is effective (see point 5). Conversely, location in a community resource or voluntary sector centre can support preventative or early intervention strategies. This happens by extending reach to those children and young people not meeting the high threshold criteria of statutory authorities, and by skilling up those locally (across voluntary and other settings) who work with children and young people.

Recommendations

Commissioners and voluntary sector agencies should determine the location of the spoke based on need locally, and the aims for the spoke worker role.

Specialist workers in statutory or multi-agency teams need to develop 'soft' access points to the service for children and young people (such as community buildings and resources) to emphasise their independence.

12. Top level outcome measures are not always effective for assessing progress for CSE cases.

The Hub and Spoke services found it challenging to evidence their impact through top level outcomes measurement because a young person's level of vulnerability to, and experience of, CSE is difficult to assess. Baselines are also challenging to establish, and progress may be too subjective or relative to measure. Even where possible to collate the data, top level, aggregated data on the outcomes of specialist intervention for children and young people using CSE services is unlikely to adequately capture the change that these services make to children and young people's lives.

Recommendation

Policy-makers, service commissioners, practitioners, children and young

people engaging in services, and academics need to work together to develop innovative approaches that will more effectively capture the difference that services make to children and young people's lives.

13. There are not clear or sustainable funding streams for delivery of these CSE services.

The Hub and Spoke programme has not automatically led to sustainable funding arrangements. Longer term funding outcomes for the new services are not yet known, but given the on-going context of reduced local authority budgets, this is likely to remain a key challenge to their survival in the longer term. Proper funding for voluntary sector services enables them to remain independent and advocate for children and young people.

Short-term contracts and funding arrangements can undermine the methods used by these services to support young people effectively, such as long intervention times based on relational practice. A different approach to co-commissioning and co-funding is required that reflects the value of multi-agency partnerships at local level and the role of voluntary sector specialist CSE services within them.

Recommendation

Longer term co-commissioned funding streams should be developed, drawing on both government and voluntary funding, in recognition of the important role of the voluntary sector in safeguarding and child protection practice.

Concluding comment

The recommendations above are made in order to inform the development of good safeguarding practice and partnership working between the statutory and voluntary sectors in providing effective responses to CSE. They support sustainable, specialist, CSE services provided for children and young people by the voluntary sector, which contribute to children and young people being protected from, and recovering from CSE.

Further details of the Hub and Spoke evaluation findings can be found on the [Alexi Project website](#).



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