
An evaluation of Pace support to parents whose child has been exploited

Dr Sarah Lloyd

June 2022

Pace

Parents against
child exploitation





Without the help and support from Pace, I would not be here, it's that simple. The fear was immense, there was no way I could see beyond the worst possible outcome. My Pace worker sorted everything. I could see light at the end of the tunnel. I was suicidal, without her help I would not be here.”

Parent

Funding of the evaluation

Thank you to the Big Lottery for funding the National Parent Support Team and Parent Participation evaluation and the John Laing Trust who have funded the Parent Liaison Officer evaluation.

Acknowledgements

A sincere thank you to our funders and commissioning partners, whose backing enables us continue our vital support for families affected by child exploitation.

**Albert Gubay Foundation
Blackburn with Darwen Safeguarding Partnership
Bromley Trust
Bradford Council
Calderdale Council
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
Garfield Weston Foundation
John Laing Charitable Trust
Kirklees Council
Lancashire Police & Crime Commissioner's Office**

**Merseyside Police & Crime Commissioner's Office
Ministry of Justice Victim's Fund, West Yorkshire Mayoral Office
National Lottery Community Fund
North Yorkshire Police & Crime Commissioner's Office
Pilgrim Trust
Reta Lila Foundation
Rothschild Foundation
Samworth Foundation
Tudor Trust
Wakefield Council**

Publication date: June 2022

© Parents Against Child Exploitation (Pace), 2019. No part of this publication may be reproduced or stored on an authorised retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, without prior permission of Pace.

Contents

Introduction	2
Executive summary	3
1. The National Parent Support Team	6
The issues parents face	7
What parents think of National Parent Support Team support	8
Information	10
Emotional support	11
Advocacy	12
The main benefits of National Parent support	13
Case studies	15
2. The Parent Liaison Officer programme	16
What parents think of Parent Liaison Officer support	22
3. The Parent Participation Programme	27
Case studies	32
4. Conclusion	33
Appendices	35

Introduction

Parents Against Child Exploitation (Pace) is a national charity supporting families whose children have been groomed, abused and exploited by offenders outside of the family. Established in 1996, Pace has provided direct support to over 4,000 families and training for 12,000 professionals.

Pace is committed to learning from its work - using input from parents, staff and partners to combat child exploitation and improve the support it provides to affected families. This report summarises the findings from a series of evaluations commissioned by Pace. It was conducted by Dr Sarah Lloyd (Research Co-ordinator and Senior Trainer at Pace) with additional support and analysis provided by Dr Sara Scott and Dr Anna Ludvigsen (DMSS Research).

The aim of the evaluation was to assess how successful each programme is in achieving its intended outcomes, and to gain greater understanding of the 'real life' impact on families of the support Pace provides. To this end, we undertook three surveys of parents who were current/recent service users alongside interviews with staff providing support and professionals in partner agencies (see Appendix A Evaluation Methodology).

The findings provide considerable insight into 'what works' for families when a child is exploited and how real partnership working with parents, and across agencies, can deliver better safeguarding practice and ultimately improve outcomes for children and young people.

The report covers the three programmes of work through which Pace provides most of its support to families:

- **National Parent Support Team**
- **Parent Liaison Officers Programme**
- **Parent Participation Programme**

Our report will be of value to a range of trusts, professionals, policy makers and to those considering commissioning or funding Pace services in the future.

Executive Summary

Pace supports parents who have a child that is being sexually and/or criminally exploited. This report provides the findings from the evaluation of three of Pace's programmes:

- The National Parent Support Team who offer telephone support sessions to parents across England and Wales.
- The Parent Liaison Officers Programme which locates Parent Liaison Officers within multi-agency child exploitation teams, supporting parents in person.
- The Parent Participation Programme which offers opportunities for parents, to be involved in consultancy, raising awareness and improving practice with Pace.

Purpose and methods

Pace regularly evaluates its work in accordance with funding requirements and for organisational learning and development. This evaluation was undertaken to explore whether the three programmes were successfully achieving their intended outcomes and to assess where there might be need for improvement.

Surveys were used to gather data from parents supported by Pace's National Support Team and parents involved in the Parent Participation Programme.

Semi structured interviews were conducted with Pace staff and with partners working with Parent Liaison Officers based in seven local authority areas across the following counties: North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Lancashire and Merseyside.

Findings

The evaluation findings were overwhelmingly positive. Intended outcomes are being achieved by all three programmes:

- ▶ Parents supported by the National Parent Support Team have increased understanding of grooming and child sexual exploitation. Parents' isolation is reduced and their confidence and resilience is increased.

96% of parents felt less isolated

93% of parents had a better understanding of the effects of exploitation and abuse on their child

73% of parents felt their communication with their child had improved

An evaluation of Pace support to parents whose child has been exploited

- ▶ Parents supported by a Parent Liaison Officer gain knowledge of the nature and effects of grooming, child exploitation, the associated trauma and its impact on their child's behaviour and on themselves as parents. Parents often reported that as a result their relationships with their child, and those with other family members, improved.

90% of parents felt their understanding about child exploitation improved

79% of parents felt more confident to respond to their child's trauma effectively

- ▶ Many had co-created safety plans with their Pace support worker and felt that their confidence and ability to protect their child had increased. Parents also felt better informed about the roles of safeguarding agencies and had learnt how best to record and pass on information to assist police with their investigations and thereby contribute to the disruption and conviction of offenders.

63% of parents said that information they had provided to their Liaison Officer had been used by the police to disrupt the offenders

- ▶ Parent Liaison Officer partners in the police and children's social care services clearly value the role Parent Liaison Officers play both as colleagues and as liaison officers. **Professionals working with Pace in the multi-agency teams felt that their own knowledge about the sexual and criminal exploitation of children, and its impact on families, had increased.** As a result, they were better able to safeguard children exploited by abusers outside the family home.
- ▶ Those involved in the Parent Participation Programme report high levels of satisfaction regarding their involvement with the work of Pace and the support they receive. They appreciated the opportunity to build relationships with other parents affected by child exploitation and valued having opportunities to share their expertise with policy-makers, operational managers and the media. All of this increased their own confidence and resilience as parents.

Recommendations

The following recommendations arise from the findings of this evaluation:

- ▶ Working in partnership with parents should be the cornerstone of all multi-agency efforts to address the sexual or criminal exploitation of young people. All agencies involved with such young people need to recognise the importance of working with parents and include them in safety planning wherever possible.
- ▶ The disruption of offenders should be a significant focus of all safeguarding, and the information parents are able to provide about offenders and locations needs to be better utilised.

Executive Summary

- ▶ Pace should develop a promotional strategy to advertise The National Parent Support Service more widely across the UK. This strategy should include building relationships with Children's Services in local authorities that do not already have a Pace Parent Liaison Officer.
- ▶ In line with the above, additional funding should be sought in order to expand the work of the National Parent Support Team so that more parents can access support and there is greater capacity for undertaking advocacy and partnership working.
- ▶ All local authorities should consider commissioning a Parent Liaison Officer in recognition of the essential role they play in any multi-agency team which is addressing sexual or criminal exploitation effectively.
- ▶ The Parent Liaison Officer programme should be expanded so that liaison officers can undertake more early intervention work and provide support when indicators of exploitation first emerge, rather than when a crisis point is reached.



In a lot of cases, without the Parent Liaison Officer, some of the children would have ended up in local authority care and did not because of Parent Liaison Officer support. The resilience she builds in parents is key in keeping children in families.”

Social Work Team Manager



The National Parent Support Team

The National Parent Support Team

The National Parent Support Team works to achieve the following outcomes for parents:

- **Increase their understanding about grooming and child sexual exploitation**
- **Reduce their isolation**
- **Increase their confidence and resilience**

It is based at Pace's head office in Leeds and undertakes telephone-based casework with parents and carers affected by child exploitation in England and Wales. Parents self-refer and receive emotional support, information and advocacy. There are currently two staff members (1 full-time programme manager and 1 part-time caseworker) working on the programme. Parents self-refer to the National Parent Support Team; there is no waiting list, so parents are responded to swiftly. Parents are offered appointments for regular telephone support sessions, this is usually bi-weekly but can be more if needed, and may be supplemented with email contact.



We journey with parents...it is an individualised approach”

National Parent Support Team Worker

The issues parents face

Parents contacting the National Parent Support Team for the first time are most often in the midst of traumatic and complex situations and have already tried, and failed, to get the support they need from their own local authority. As a result, the abuse their child is experiencing may have gone on for some time, and be very serious.

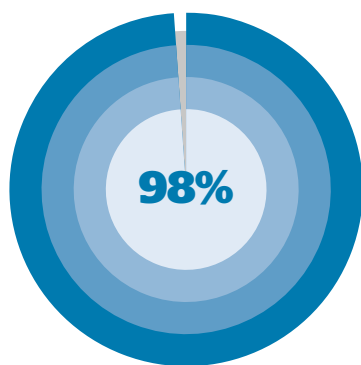
The levels of sexual violence involved in child exploitation can be horrific and the impact this has on young people's mental health is significant, leading to self-harm and suicide attempts. Parents are often traumatised both by what has occurred and by their child's distress; many blame themselves for not having protected their child from harm or not being able to obtain the help they need. Parent Support Workers reported that there is little help available to respond to the mental health needs of either parents or children; with long waiting lists and professionals often unable to engage young people.

In recent years, the National Parent Support Team have seen an increase in referrals of parents with younger children who are being abused online. In addition, there is increasing demand for support from parents who have a child that is being criminally exploited. The pressure on the service is considerable and the issues parents are facing are complex.

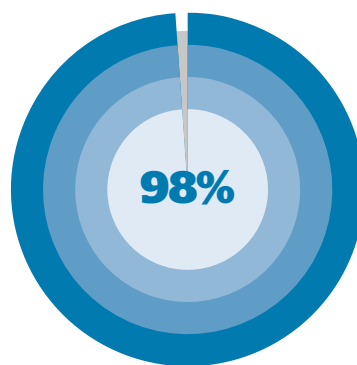
What parents think of National Parent Support Team support

An online survey was sent to 105 parents and carers who had received support. Fifty-four parents completed the feedback survey between September and October 2021 (representing a very good 51% response rate). All but one parent completing the survey was female. (Appendix B contains a complete analysis of responses to all three surveys which formed part of this evaluation).

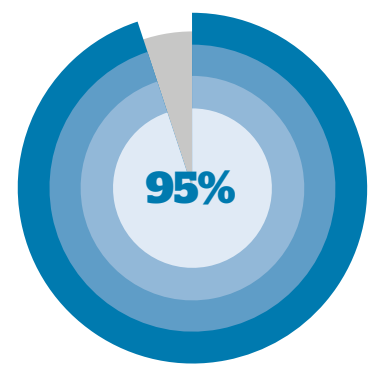
Parents who had received support through Pace's National Parent Support Team were asked about the quality of services provided to them. Overall, feedback was extremely positive.



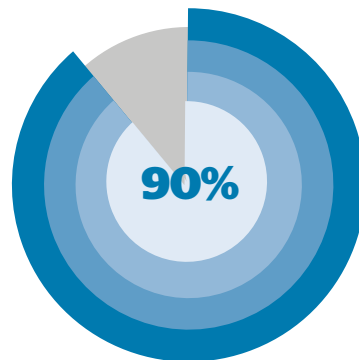
of parents felt that their Pace worker was reliable



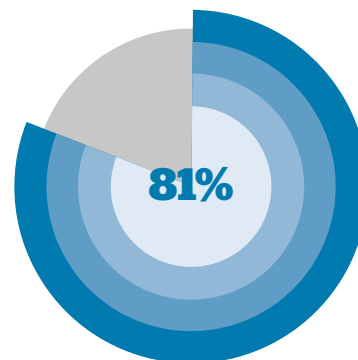
of parents received a timely, warm welcome by Pace



of parents felt their choices as a parent were always respected



parents felt consulted and informed by Pace

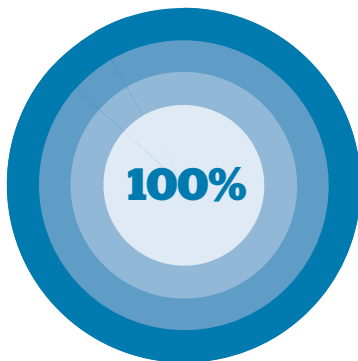


of parents felt Pace worked alongside them to create strategies

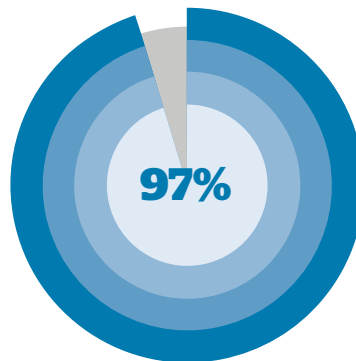
(See Appendix for full data).

The National Parent Support Team

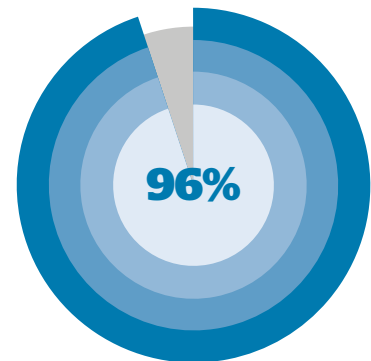
As part of the feedback on Pace services, parents were also asked to comment on the skills, experiences and knowledge of Pace workers. Again, parents expressed very positive views about their Pace worker.



of parents agreed workers demonstrated relevant knowledge of child exploitation



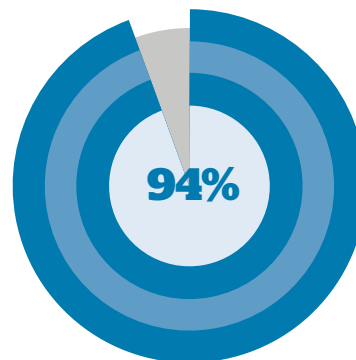
of parents agreed workers had relevant skills in supporting parents



of parents agreed workers were sensitive and demonstrated empathy and understanding when providing support

This is a very positive endorsement of Pace workers' skills, experiences and knowledge.

Parents were asked how satisfied they were with the overall support they had received:



of parents were satisfied that their needs for support, advice and advocacy had been met

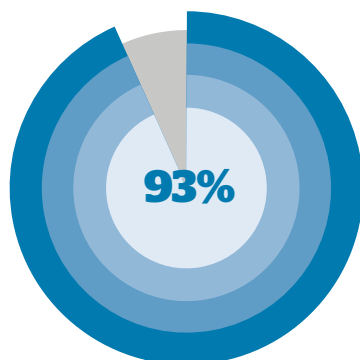
Information

One of the main things the National Parent Support Team do is to provide information to parents about their rights, the role of other agencies and strategies for responding helpfully to their child's, often highly challenging, behaviour and the trauma they have experienced. The aim is to build up the resilience of the parent so that they can maintain as positive a relationship with their child as possible. Moreover, workers give parents 'permission' to recognise their own trauma and understand the importance of looking after themselves.

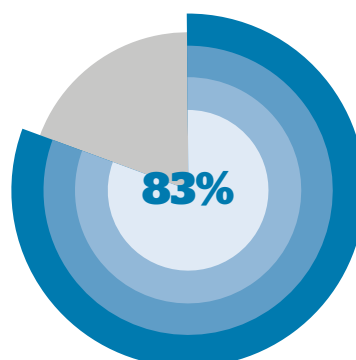
Overall, the National Parent Support Team aims to give parents a 'toolbox' of resources so that they can better safeguard their child and feel more empowered to do so. In turn, this information can also enable parents to self-advocate.

“ We help parents regain a bit of control in a situation of complete helplessness”.

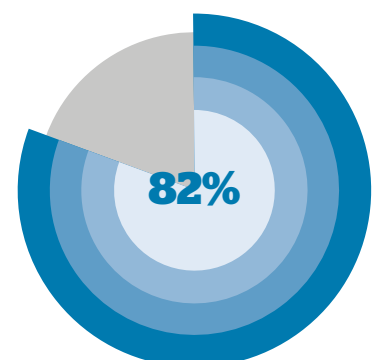
National Parent Support Worker



of parents had a better understanding of the effects of exploitation and abuse on their child



of parents had an increased understanding of the effects of trauma



of parents had an increased understanding about the indicators of child exploitation

However, one-third (31%) of parents neither agreed nor disagreed that they had a better understanding of how the child protection system works. This may be because their understanding was already satisfactory, because such information was not relevant to them or it may point to a need for more focus on providing this information to parents in an accessible way.

Emotional support

“They were a lifeline at an extremely traumatic time I would not have coped emotionally or psychologically without their support.”

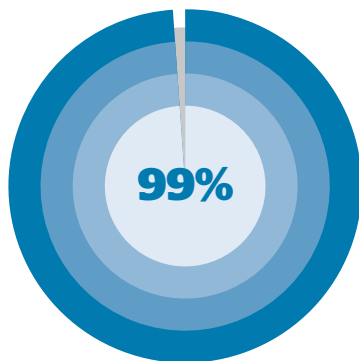
Parent

Every case is different but in almost all cases, parents calling Pace are desperately anxious and distressed. Parents often feel they have ‘failed’ as parents and need a great deal of reassurance and support. National Parent Support Workers listen and respond with empathy rather than judgement. Trust is thereby established and the isolation parents commonly feel is reduced. Staff are able to reassure parents that their fear and panic is an understandable reaction to what is happening. They help parents understand what triggers their own emotional reactions and give advice on grounding techniques that might be useful.

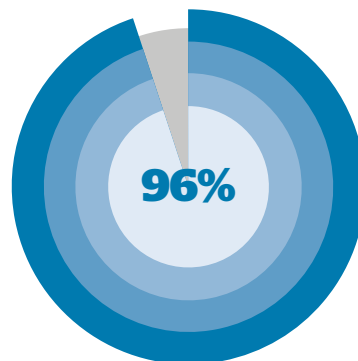
“One mum told me, “I laugh now more than I cry.. I don’t wake up crying anymore”.

National Parent Support Worker

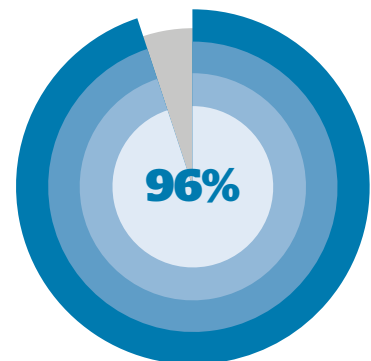
When asked to comment on the emotional support received, parents were overwhelmingly positive:



of parents felt listened to



of parents did not feel judged by Pace



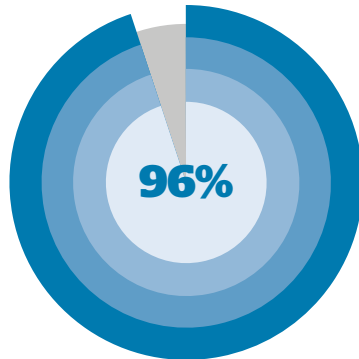
96% of parents felt understood

“The worker was amazing, she listened, understood and did not judge me. She recognised my employment and helped me to forgive myself for not safeguarding my own child. I will always be grateful for that.”

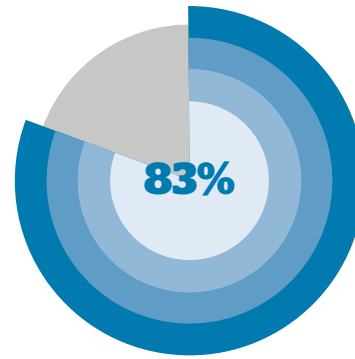
Parent

An evaluation of Pace support to parents whose child has been exploited

As a result of the emotional support from Pace:



of parents felt less isolated

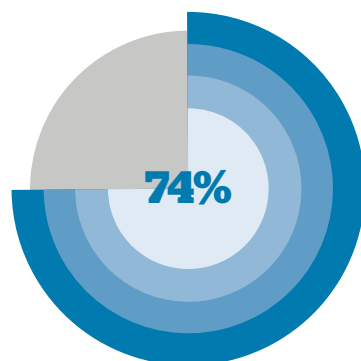


of parents felt that their resilience was strengthened

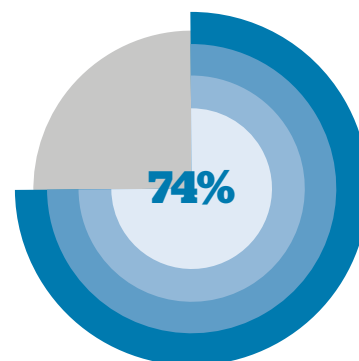
Advocacy

National Parent Support staff see advocacy as a key element of their work but it is often challenging. Workers are often advocating for parents where Pace may not be known. In some cases, when advocacy over the phone or by email/letter has been attempted, workers have been met with defensiveness. Indeed, in some situations, an attempt at advocacy has made things worse for the parent, as the professional concerned had not appreciated an 'outside' organisation getting involved.

'In-person' advocacy - such as accompanying a parent to a meeting - is usually not possible for a national helpline service. The focus is therefore on equipping parents with information and support to enable them to self-advocate. Staff carefully prepare parents for safeguarding meetings and for court hearings. They provide them with accurate information about possible interventions and boost their confidence thereby enabling them to communicate more effectively with professionals and so affect change for their child.



of parents had increased confidence to represent themselves to professionals



of parents felt better able to challenge professionals

Pace workers had supported approximately one-in-five of survey respondents by contacting other professionals on their behalf. Parents were asked if Pace's intervention with other professionals had made a difference to their child's situation. Six parents believed the support had had a positive effect and none said it had a negative effect. Another nine parents said it 'had no effect on the situation, but it was good to have the support'. Two parents indicated that they had not been offered this advocacy support, although they would have liked it.

The main benefits of National Parent support

When parents were asked what the main benefit of Pace support had been, responses largely focused on the importance of having 'someone there' for them. Having a person who they could offload and talk to, who would listen without judgement and understand what they were going through, was mentioned time and time again:

“ Having someone to talk to about everything, who is not involved and whom I don't know. I didn't feel like I was being judged when I was having a bad day. My Pace worker was brilliant. She gave me advice when it was needed, listened to me get everything off my chest, laughed with me when it was needed. Some days I'd feel like I was going mad, but she listened and made me realise that I wasn't.”

“ To be heard and understood when you feel there is nowhere to turn, Pace has been a big help, I can vent and have suggestions made to me.”

Pace support made many parents feel less alone with their feelings of anger and guilt and helped them understand what their child had gone through and how best to support their child:

“ It made me feel less guilty as a parent and made me understand grooming. My daughter and I now have an amazing relationship. If it wasn't for Pace ... I honestly could not have got through this.”

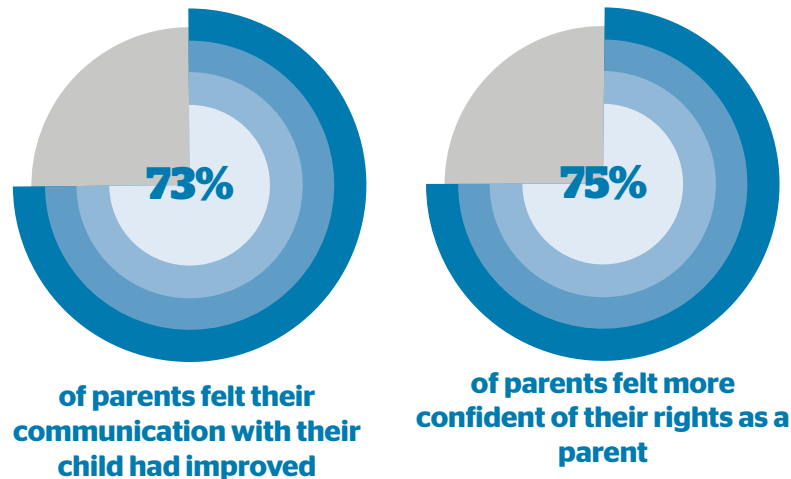
Having someone on their side also made some parents feel better able to challenge professionals and to trust their own instincts as parents.

“ Giving me the power to complain to the detective about his behaviour to his face.”

An evaluation of Pace support to parents whose child has been exploited

“ I feel more empowered, know my rights & confident to tackle these issues.”

When asked about specific outcomes parents' responses were more varied.



One-in-five were not sure whether these outcomes had been achieved or not.

Just over half of parents responding (58%) agreed that the 'safeguarding of their child had improved' and almost one-third (29%) of parents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the response they had 'received from other professionals, such as police and social care, had improved'. However, parents also mentioned other equally important outcomes:

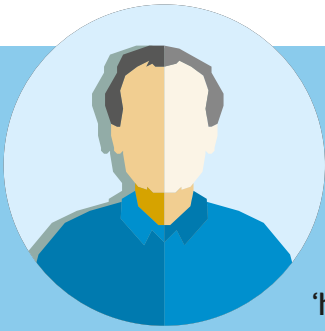
“ The most significant outcome that Pace helped me achieve was to not let the experiences define my daughter; that it was something that happened to her and not who she is.”

Parent

The findings of this survey leave little doubt that the Pace National Parent Support Team is achieving its intended outcomes for parents by:

- **Increasing their understanding about grooming and child sexual exploitation**
- **Reducing their isolation**
- **Increasing their confidence and resilience**

In many instances this helps parents influence better outcomes for their child. Sadly, this is not always the case. Many other factors including the power of exploiters, the impact of abuse, young people's own agency, peer relationships and the part played by other agencies and professionals are significant determinants on whether abuse and exploitation continues or ends.



Isaac

Isaac believes the sexual exploitation of his daughter started when she was 11. He says 'she was groomed, manipulated and brainwashed'. His daughter was frequently going missing and made a disclosure that 'hundreds of people have abused me'. Police identified a possible 50 perpetrators and Isaac decided to relocate hundreds of miles away. Now 14, his daughter's mental health is severely affected and she is often suicidal and frequently self-harms. Isaac says he feels like 'a failure'. Isaac says he doesn't want his daughter to see him struggling and wants her to know she's done nothing wrong. Isaac believes it's vital for him to remain emotionally strong and that the support he receives from Pace is instrumental to this.

Marcia

Marcia's 14-year-old daughter has been missing for 3 nights. Marcia is exhausted as she hasn't slept in that time and has younger children to care for and a full-time job. Her daughter has regularly gone missing like this over the past 10 months and Marcia knows when she is missing her daughter is being sexually exploited by numerous adult males. One time a police officer looked at her daughter's phone - he told Marcia what he saw were the worst images he'd ever seen. Marcia does not know who facilitates the missing episodes or harbours her daughter. She often wonders if she's headed for a nervous breakdown as she shakes uncontrollably and describes herself as 'hysterical'. Marcia longs for the moment her daughter walks through the door and she can hold her. Pace's regular phone calls with Marcia are a lifeline for her, helping her to process her emotions, advocate for her daughter and stay strong for the rest of her family.





The Parent Liaison Officer programme

The Parent Liaison Officer programme

The Parent Liaison Officer programme aims to help parents:

- Increase their knowledge of the nature and effects of grooming and child exploitation
- Gain greater understanding of trauma and trauma bonding, its impact on their child's behaviour and on them as parents
- Improve relations with their child and other family members
- Co-create safety plans with their Pace support worker
- Increase their confidence and ability to protect their child
- Be better informed about the roles of safeguarding agencies
- Learn how best to record and pass on information to assist police with their investigations, and help with the disruption and conviction of offenders

In addition, police and safeguarding partners (social workers, youth workers and school staff):

- Increase their awareness of child sexual exploitation / criminal exploitation and its impact on families
- Achieve best practice on working effectively with families affected by child sexual exploitation / criminal exploitation
- Better safeguard children exploited by abusers outside the family home

Pace has eight Parent Liaison Officers based in seven local authority areas (two work in one area) and a programme manager. The Parent Liaison Officers are based in North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Lancashire and Merseyside. Most Parent Liaison Officers work within a multi-agency child exploitation team and offer specialist support to parents affected by child exploitation.

The Parent Liaison Officers are a mix of full time and part time staff. The Parent Liaison Officers are generally working within multi-agency teams that consist of the police, children's social workers and youth workers. Full-time staff have a case load of about 15 parents and these parents have children who have been assessed as being at high risk from child sexual exploitation or child criminal exploitation. There is no capacity to work with families in which young people are assessed at low-medium risk.

When parents are referred to a Parent Liaison Officer, they initially receive a phone-call, followed up by a visit if desired. The Parent Liaison Officer's work in a flexible and responsive manner recognising the urgency of the situations many parents are facing.

“ I contact parents within 24hrs of referral.
I explain about Pace, focus on not being a social worker, or police but there to support and advocate for parents... not here to blame.”

Parent Liaison Officer

Although some parents may at first be sceptical, generally speaking once Parent Liaison Officers have explained their role, parents are responsive and trust is built up quickly. This is possibly due, not only to the interpersonal skills of the Parent Liaison Officer, but also because parents know that the Parent Liaison Officer is from a voluntary and independent organisation, unlike the majority of other services involved with families. Offering specialist support such as this, places Pace in a unique position. In the areas where Parent Liaison Officers are based, there is no other such services available for parents.

The Parent Liaison Officer helps develop the parent's knowledge about grooming and child exploitation, alongside offering emotional and practical support parents may need. The Parent Liaison Officer's aim is to provide a safe space for parents where they can feel more in control of their situation and also can be honest about their feelings, knowing that Pace has no 'agenda' except to support them and increase the safeguarding of their child. Parent Liaison Officer's felt that this approach eases the burden for parents:

“ The approach of Pace is unique, congruent with family and integral. We recognise their feelings, use real language about offenders and are honest. Parents often want to kill the offender, we give them space to say how they really feel.”

Parent Liaison Officer

“ We help parents process their feelings: guilt, anger, blame of young person, frustration at system not moving fast enough and not getting the outcome they want.”

Parent Liaison Officer

Parent Liaison Officers undertake safety planning with parents and enable parents to understand what their child is going through due to the exploitation and how to respond effectively to their child when behaviours can be challenging. The Parent Liaison Officers aim is to enable parents to strengthen, or at least maintain, a relationship with their child. This can be an iterative, long-term process as parents under stress may need to be reminded and have things re-explained.

“ There's a lot of going back over the same stuff, mum zones out when unwell. I have to repeat information. She is asking why it is happening, why is he behaving this way, going over things repeatedly, getting them through each week”.

Parent Liaison Officer

The Parent Liaison Officer programme

Parent Liaison Officers work holistically and often go the extra mile when it comes to supporting parents. They see parents in their home, or go for a walk or a drive. (One Parent Liaison Officer helped a mother with her gardening - they spoke and weeded - because she did not have the time to sit down and talk.)

A Parent Liaison Officer probably has more contact with parents than any other professional and therefore hears things no one else will hear. The amount of information that parents share with the Parent Liaison Officers is considerable and they are able to pass valuable information on to the police and social care.

Parent Liaison Officers advocate for parents at appointments and meetings and support them through court hearings:

“ I helped the family write very powerful impact statements about the ongoing trauma of it. He pleaded guilty. He got a heavy sentence. The victim impact statement made a difference to the sentence.”

Parent Liaison Officer

Parent Liaison Officers feel that most young people are happy for their parents to have a Parent Liaison Officer's support. The Parent Liaison Officers, although not there to specifically support young people, afford them a high level of respect and consideration. Parent Liaison Officers address conflict that is going on between young people and parents and work closely with the young person's worker so that their work aligns and the same messages are reinforced.

Interviews were conducted with a total of 36 professionals from partner agencies working alongside Parent Liaison Officers across the seven teams. (See Appendix A for details.) Partners were overwhelmingly positive about the contribution of Parent Liaison Officers. Many expressed a sense of relief that their team has a Parent Liaison Officer as they do not have the time to spend with parents that they would like to. Many thought that more of this type of support was required.

“ I don't know how the team would have managed without them, it is another level of safeguarding.”

Social Worker

“ We would like more Parent Liaison Officers. Massively overworked, she is just brilliant, really does bring a lot to all of our multi-agency meetings and discussion. If we are struggling with a family, we have loads of faith in Parent Liaison Officer that she can do something, strike up a conversation with parents, it is invaluable. Definitely enough work for another Parent Liaison Officer.”

Detective Sergeant

An evaluation of Pace support to parents whose child has been exploited

Partners recognised that Parent Liaison Officers are committed advocates ensuring that the parent's viewpoint is represented and their concerns are articulated:

“ Our Parent Liaison Officer gives parents' perspectives in core groups and supports them. She supports parents in meetings and attends with them. Parents might not come to meeting if Parent Liaison Officer not there.”

Social Work Team Manager

“ It is about being the voice of the parent when they don't feel able to talk. Parents can feel intimidated around police, the role of Parent Liaison Officer works brilliantly.”

Detective Sergeant

Partners clearly understood that parents are trying to navigate unfamiliar territory regarding children's social care services and police systems/policies. They believed that information and support from Parent Liaison Officers makes a significant difference to relationships between parents and children and partners and parents.

“ If you can get parents on board you will get the child on board. If parents are on your side/child's side that's really helpful. Especially if the perpetrator has done a lot of damage with that parent child relationship.”

Young Persons Worker

“ It is a scary time for parents, parents need a bit of TLC; processes and terms explained. The Parent Liaison Officer does that with no responsibility for investigation which means parents can download on the Parent Liaison Officer without any expectation of an outcome.”

Sergeant

The understanding of the partners was that the positive safeguarding outcomes they achieve, would not be nearly as likely without Parent Liaison Officer support:

“ In a lot of cases, without the Parent Liaison Officer, some of the children would have ended up in local authority care and did not because of Parent Liaison Officer support. The resilience she builds in parents is key in keeping children in families.”

Social Work Team Manager

The Parent Liaison Officer programme

The tenacity of Parent Liaison Officers in consistently reiterating to parents what their child is experiencing from the perpetrator, combined with encouragement from Parent Liaison Officer to keep the 'door open' to their child often means children are kept safer.

“ Supporting parents about how to support their child, which battle to choose. Telling parents to open their arms and tell a child you love them when they come home from missing. I learnt that from Pace”

Social Worker

Professional partners interviewed for this evaluation understood that parents often don't trust them and worry that if they speak about their child's situation, or share information, the child may be removed and/or criminalised. Moreover, the child and their family may face repercussions from offenders. The Parent Liaison Officer offers reassurance and guidance about how to share information and what will happen with it.

“ If parents are speaking to police, the young person maybe called a grass, but because Parent Liaison Officer is independent and not police it is not an issue, good for parents and young people.”

Missing Young Person's Police Officer

Partners felt that most parents are willing to speak to, and trust a Parent Liaison Officer because they are independent of the police and social services. Unlike with statutory services, no parent has to engage with the Parent Liaison Officer, it is up to them. Partners felt that this may give parents a much-needed sense of control, when there are so many interventions by other safeguarding professionals.

A significant part of the Parent Liaison Officer work that partners identified is to bridge the gap between parents and professionals; professionals and young people and parents and young people. The independence of the Parent Liaison Officer role is central to that 'bridging' and the part the Parent Liaison Officer plays in developing mutual understanding between parents and services was viewed as pivotal.

“ She breaks barriers down, connects really quickly, becomes that trusted person and for the wider family such as grandparents as well. They prefer to go to Parent Liaison Officer than the social worker. That happens a lot, they go to Parent Liaison Officer first.”

Social Worker

Equally important is the actual intelligence that may be provided:

“Parents know everything, phone numbers, where their child is going, vehicles, we don't know any of that unless we fall lucky and just happen to see them. The Parent Liaison Officer feeds that massive intel gap.”

Police Intelligence Officer

Many of the partners spoke about the knowledge of criminal exploitation and contextual safeguarding that Parent Liaison Officers contribute to multi-agency working, but also what supportive colleagues they are and how pivotal they are to the functioning of the team.

“The Parent Liaison Officer brings ideas to the table: Have you thought about this? Do you want to link up with this person? What if we try this? She brings the contextual safeguarding stuff in, she is phenomenal.”

Child Vulnerable to Exploitation Social Worker

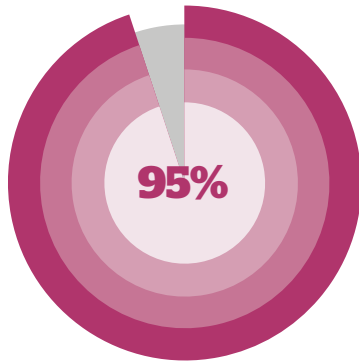
Finally, partners recognised that there are many other children who are deemed to be at risk of harm but do not reach the threshold for support and they expressed their regret that Parent Liaison Officers do not have the capacity for providing early intervention.

What parents think of Parent Liaison Officer support

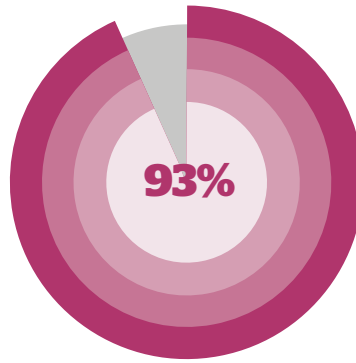
As part of this evaluation a survey was sent to 399 parents and carers who had received support from a Parent Liaison Officer. We received 72 responses. This is a relatively low response rate and is due to the fact we were only able to email 10% of parents with the surveys. The majority of surveys were posted, which may have deterred some parents from responding. To improve future evaluations, Parent Liaison Officers are now requesting parent email addresses. Therefore, our findings should be viewed with some caution as they may not represent the views of those parents who did not respond. (See Appendix B for full analysis of survey responses).

The Parent Liaison Officer programme

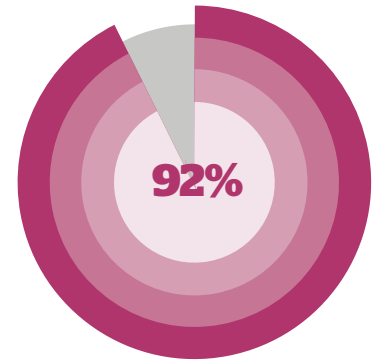
The feedback from parents about their experience of having support from a Parent Liaison Officer was extremely positive.



of parents felt listened to



of parents agreed their Parent Liaison Officer had been reliable



of parents felt that they had been consulted and kept informed

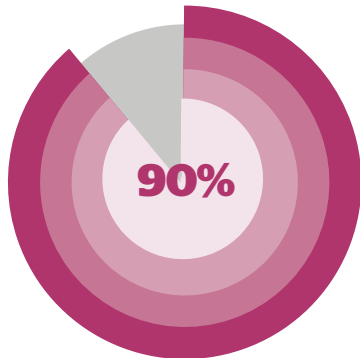
When asked about the support they had received, parents' comments were extremely positive, with many using terms such as 'fantastic', 'helpful', 'brilliant', 'reassuring' and 'amazing'.

“ Without the help and support from Pace, I would not be here, it's that simple. I received news about the case and I couldn't cope. The fear was immense, there was no way I could see beyond the worst possible outcome. My Parent Liaison Officer sorted everything. I could see light at the end of the tunnel. I was suicidal, without her help I would not be here.”

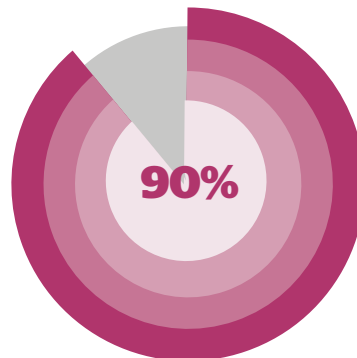
“ My Parent Liaison Officer was absolutely key in guiding us through a difficult time. We learnt a lot from her, she was never patronising or judgemental. She has enabled us to put a safety plan in place when we were clueless and this has increased our confidence.”

An evaluation of Pace support to parents whose child has been exploited

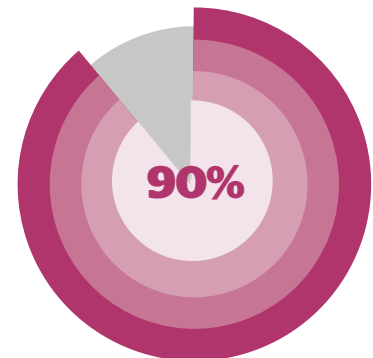
A few respondents would have liked to have had the support of a Parent Liaison Officer much earlier and a couple had only had very limited contact and this had not been sufficient to meet their needs.



of parents' understanding about the impact of trauma on their child improved

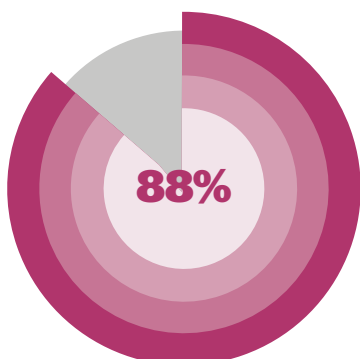


of parents' understanding about child exploitation improved

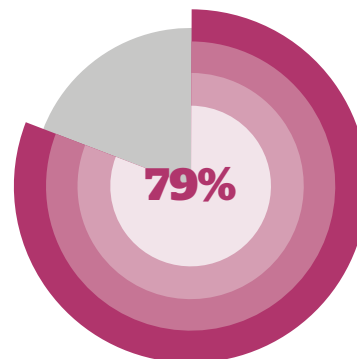


of parents' understanding about how abusers control children improved

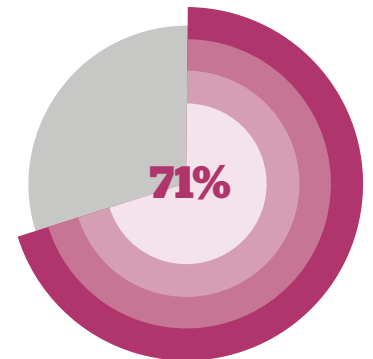
Relationship with their child



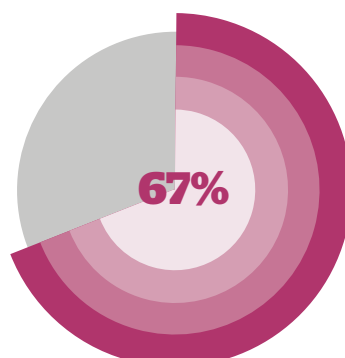
of parents felt that their Parent Liaison Officer had made a positive difference to their family life



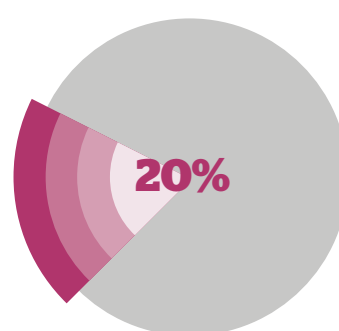
of parents felt more confident to respond to their child's trauma effectively



of parents felt more able to resolve conflict with their child



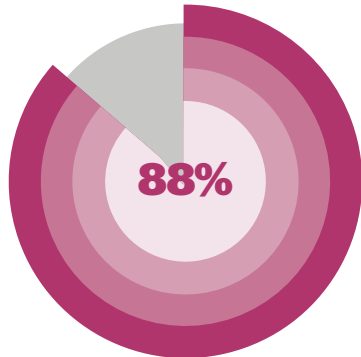
of parents felt that communicating with their child had become easier and their relationship with their child has improved



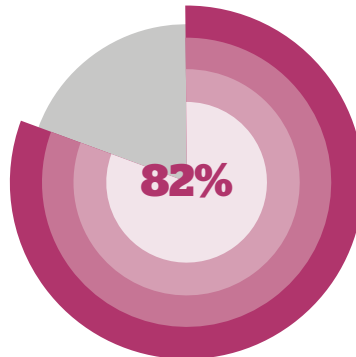
Sadly, in over 20% of cases respondents did not feel these aspects of their relationship had improve

The Parent Liaison Officer programme

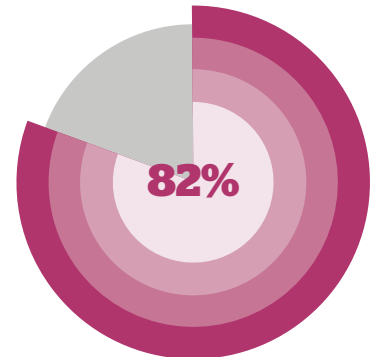
The survey also asked about parents understanding of safeguarding processes and support available.



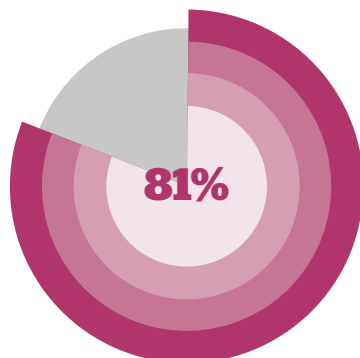
of parents' understanding about police and social care services safeguarding processes had improved



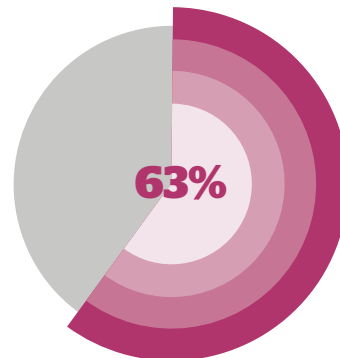
of parents' understanding about internet safety and parental controls increased



of parents felt supported by their Parent Liaison Officer to play a full role in safeguarding planning



of parents' understanding increased about what other services are available to them



of parents said that information they had provided to their Liaison Officer had been used by the police to disrupt the offenders.
(This may not have been applicable to all cases, as some did not involve much police or social service intervention.)

An evaluation of Pace support to parents whose child has been exploited

It is clear from both the survey and our interviews with partners that for many parents, many children, and for the professionals working with Pace Parent Liaison Officers the intended outcomes of the programme are frequently achieved. In particular parents:

- Increase their knowledge of the nature and effects of grooming and child exploitation
- Are better able to understand and participate in safeguarding processes
- Increase their confidence and ability to protect their child and enjoy improved family relationships
- Learn how best to record and pass on information to assist police with their investigations, and help with the disruption and conviction of offenders

While police and safeguarding partners:

- Increase their awareness of child sexual / criminal exploitation and its impact on families
- Work more effectively with affected families
- Are better able to safeguard exploited children



The Parent Participation Programme

The Parent Participation Programme aims to enable parents to:

- Build stronger relationships with other parents affected by child exploitation
- Share their expertise with key policy-makers, operational managers and the media
- Increase their confidence and resilience as a parent

“ The Parent Participation Programme made me feel less isolated, and that in the situation I was in that I was not to blame, so it made me and my husband feel empowered.”

It is managed by one part-time member of staff. Parents who want to be involved in using their own experience around child exploitation to influence policy and practice can be part of the Parent Participation Programme. Parents participate in a range of activities including delivering live or recorded presentations to training delegates, participating in research and consultancy and talking to the media.

Pace was set up 26 years ago by affected parents and their supporters. Since then parents' voices and involvement have continued to be pivotal to the work and direction of Pace. Since 2015, the Parent Participation Programme has been run with a part-time funded programme manager.

When parents support has ended with either their Parent Liaison Officer or National Parent Support Worker, they are given information about the Parent Participation Programme. If a parent shows an interest, the Parent Participation manager contacts them and explores with them what they might like to be involved with.

There is a core group of about 20 parents who are regularly involved with the programme and they contribute to training, consultations, media work and a range of other activities.

The nature of the work is responsive and flexible, with lots of opportunities for participation. The priority for the Parent Participation Programme is that parents' voices are heard and inform the work of Pace and importantly, that parents feel their level of involvement is manageable and that the programme is serving their needs. Participants are often still dealing with the repercussions of the exploitation their child has been through and this can sometimes mean they need to 'dip' in and out of the programme. Ensuring that parents feel able to withdraw when they need to is important. To that end, the Parent Participation manager checks in regularly with parents and prioritises their welfare.

Parents have the space to talk with each other, for example about their experience of being involved in such activities as training. Parents often understand each other in a way no-one else can. Connecting with other affected parents and feeling heard can be empowering and life-affirming. Moreover, parents are not just heard by Pace or other parents in the programme, but by a wider audience, such as safeguarding professionals and policy makers. Furthermore, the

The Parent Participation Programme

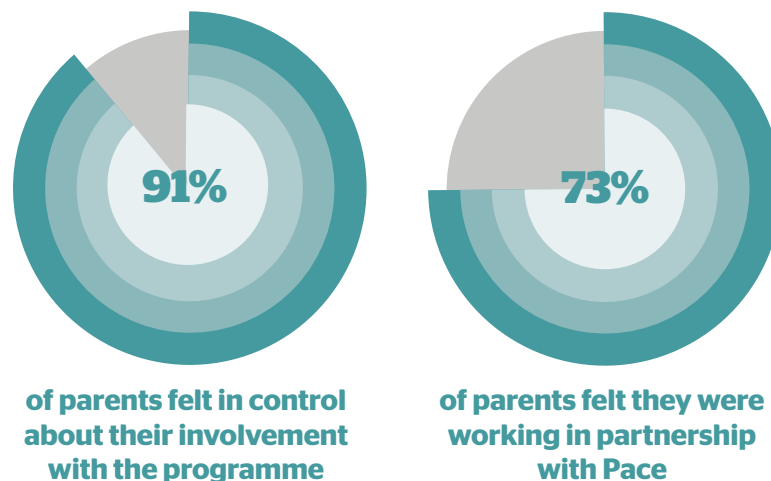
Parent Participation manager says that being part of the programme can create comradery and humanise the experience they have been through.

A survey was sent to 61 parents and carers who had taken part in the Parent Participation Programme. Twenty-two parents completed the survey between September and October 2021 – giving a good response rate of 36%. (A full analysis of survey findings is included in Appendix B)

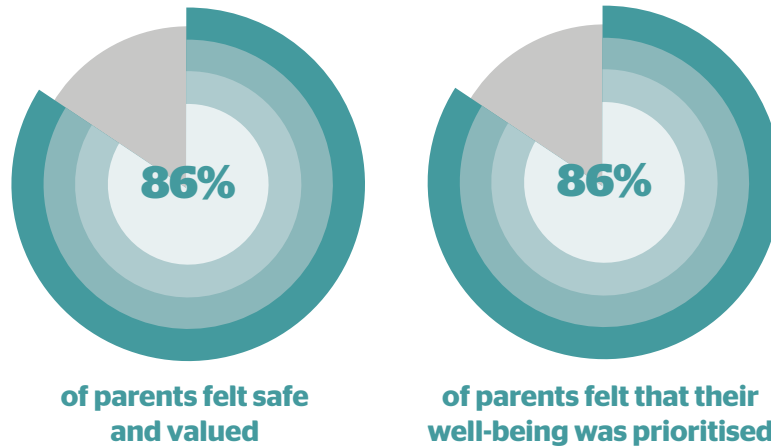
Respondents to the feedback survey had taken part in a variety of activities as part of the Parent Participation Programme, ranging from receiving a newsletter to speaking at conferences. A large proportion of parents had attended ‘parent networking’ days or weekends; contributed to research and consultation projects; been involved with the Parent Open Group; and given feedback about Pace’s policies and documents.

A third (seven parents) had been involved with the development of new projects, such as the parent campaign, parent’s charter and working agreements. Others had taken part in films or audio recording (6 parents); had consulted with safeguarding professionals about child exploitation and their practice (6 parents); or had shared their experiences in a variety of ways, including on the Pace website, the newsletter, by speaking to the media, during Pace training or at conferences. Four parents had also raised funds or supported fundraising for Pace.

Parents involved with the Participation Programme were asked how they felt about their involvement and their relationship with Pace.



Involvement in the programme



The survey asked parents for their suggestions to what other work the Parent Participation Programme could be doing. Six parents offered suggestions, including Parent Participation Programme parents running a support hotline, offering more localised support, undertake more influencing work with politicians and the media, evaluate their impact on other parents, and expand training to include criminal exploitation.

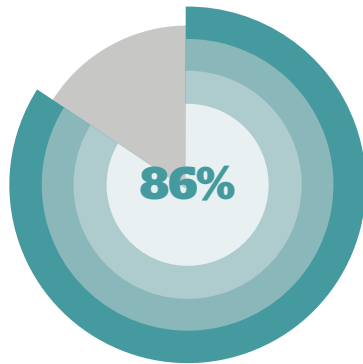
In terms of the impact of the Parent Participation Programme on participants, most parents agreed that they had experienced a range of positive outcomes as a result of being involved with the programme. The vast majority strongly agreed or agreed that they felt 'heard' and 'empowered'. While over half felt that their self-confidence had increased.

Parents were also asked to describe the impact of the participation programme in their own words.

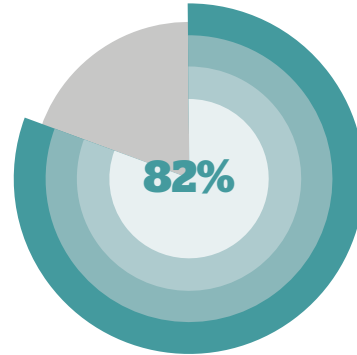
The most common theme was that it had made them feel less alone or isolated. Being able to share their experiences with other parents and learn that they were not the only parents going through the same experience had been a positive outcome that one parent described as 'empowering'.

The Parent Participation Programme

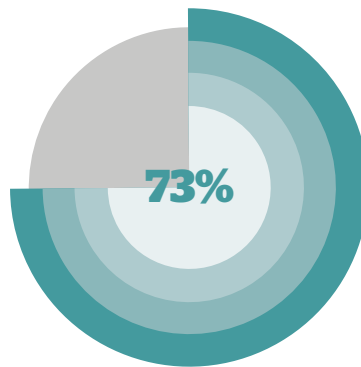
Impact on parents



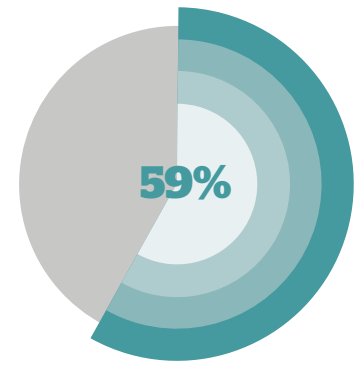
of parents felt heard



of parents felt empowered



of parents felt less isolated



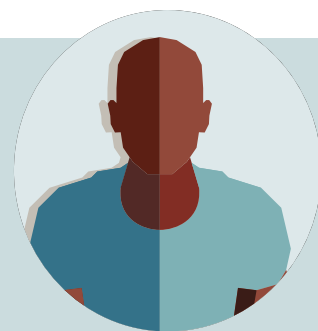
of parents felt their confidence had increased

“ A lovely diverse group of people meet and we all have our own sad experiences. It is good to hear others’ stories as you can get so down with your own circumstances.”

Responses to the parent participation survey provide good evidence that the programme outcomes are being routinely achieved for many of the parents involved. Through their involvement they are able to:

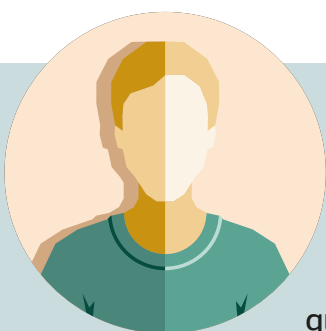
- Build stronger relationships with other parents affected by child exploitation
- Share their expertise with key policy-makers, operational managers and the media
- Increase their confidence and resilience as a parent.

Joe



Joe approached Pace because his daughter was being sexually exploited. The National Parent Support team supported Joe in challenging 'parent blaming' from social care and advocating for interventions that could actually safeguard his daughter. The initial punitive response from social care caused Joe additional distress and had undermined and threatened his relationship with his child. Joe's motivation in joining parent participation was to highlight the impact of interventions and how they could either exacerbate an already challenging situation or provide meaningful support. Joe has been active in in-house and external consultations, the parent open groups and supporting Pace training via guest speaking.

In the debriefs following training delivery Joe has explored his journey from feeling emasculated by both the exploitation of his daughter and the services response to it, to finally being heard, regaining his sense of worth and recognising his value and much needed contribution. Joe has reflected on how this has enabled him to shift from a place of powerlessness and anger to better observe and consider the systemic barriers to effective safeguarding. Joe also feels that his training style, whilst still focusing on the realities he experienced, focuses on creating rapport and connection. Joe has shared his understanding with other parents via the Parent Open Group when considering the kinds of strategies, approaches and actions that parent participation can pursue to achieve the best outcomes.



Anna

Anna's child was criminally exploited. Anna did not have a positive response from agencies and only discovered Pace after the exploitation, by hearing a Pace guest speaker. Anna felt that Pace understood, and had an approach to child exploitation that resonated with the needs of families and became active in parent participation. Anna has attended parent open groups, consulted on Pace projects such as the parent campaign for social media, the documents 'The Parents' Charter' and 'Working with families affected by child exploitation,' has been involved in media interviews and wishes to become a guest speaker in Pace training. Anna has stated that being involved with parent participation has enabled her to channel traumatic experiences as a tool for change and has moved her from a place of hopelessness to hope.

4 Conclusion

Parents caring for an exploited child require a high level of reliable, non-judgemental and specialist support. Pace aims to provide that support and achieve change for exploited children and their families. This evaluation demonstrates that these aims are being achieved and that both parents and partners greatly value the work of Pace and understand it plays an important role in safeguarding young people and supporting families.

The evaluation shows how all three programmes are working effectively. Parents feel supported and listened to; their sense of isolation decreases and their understanding and knowledge about exploitation increases. This enables parents to be active partners in the safeguarding of their child: responding helpfully to their child, managing their own trauma and knowing what information is useful for the police in order to disrupt and prosecute perpetrators.

Partners working with Pace are extremely positive about the Parent Liaison Officer role. They recognise the extra layer of safeguarding that Parent Liaison Officers provide through the independent support they offer parents and families and the 'bridge' Parent Liaison Officers create between statutory services and parents.

Parents who contact the National Parent Support Team have often not received the support they needed from the police or children's social care services. They find the caring and non-judgemental response from National Parent Support Team workers very affirmative. The isolation parents feel when caring for an exploited child lessens and confidence increases as they develop their knowledge about child exploitation and how to work with services to increase the safeguarding of their child.

Those parents who become involved with the Parent Participation Programme feel listened to and valued. They appreciate the opportunity to share their expertise and knowledge and influence change. The sense of community and support parents gain from being part of their Parent Participation Programme involvement is clear.

The findings presented here echo those of recent research which suggests that parents need to be treated as safeguarding partners in tackling child sexual exploitation (Firmin, 2020; Munroe, 2011; Scott et al., 2019). No one person or organisation can be expected to safeguard an exploited child on their own, true partnership working is vital and parents must be central to that. It is clear that when parents are empowered and supported this can improve the safeguarding of their child and significantly contribute to the disruption of offenders.

Appendices

The Appendices are available on the Pace website. Please go to:

<https://paceuk.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Appendices-2022-1.pdf>

©Pace 2022

Pace

Parents against
child exploitation

Waverley House, Unit
10, Killingbeck Drive,
Leeds LS14 6UF

tel 0113 240 3040
email info@paceuk.info
www.paceuk.info



Registered Charity No. 1092560 Company limited by guarantee in England and Wales No4249272