

Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership



Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership Multi-Agency Youth Justice Service Audits September 2022

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1. Introduction

Although the rate of children entering the justice system in Dorset has reduced in recent years, the reduction has been less marked in those aged 13 and younger. In the period April 2020 to January 2022, a total of 10 Dorset children and 25 BCP children, in this age group, entered the justice system. Initial analysis shows that almost all these children were first known to police as victims or witnesses of harm; most were known to Children's Social Care; the majority had been identified as having SEND (either an EHCP or SEN Support) and most had experienced fixed term or permanent exclusions from school.

A system-learning multi-agency case audit (SL-MACA) was agreed to be undertaken by the Dorset placed-based Multi-Agency Quality of Practice and Action Group, to try and identify the reasons why these 10 young people living in Dorset were continuing to enter the justice system at a higher rate than other cohorts of young people.

2. Summary of findings from SL-MACA

The children in our sample are all unique. They all have individual strengths and vulnerabilities which have been supported through assessment and intervention by professionals across the PDSCP. The overriding finding of this SL-MACA is that 90% of the children in this sample have experienced adverse childhood experiences which have been previously recognised by researchers as contributory factors towards youth offending. Despite this correlation we have collectively been unable to prevent these children entering the Youth Justice System. Our audit findings suggest that earlier recognition of the cumulative risk factors impacting these children, in association with trauma-informed responses to their needs, and those of their parent/caregiver; might have prevented the children's progression to youth offending. The findings suggest that earlier provision of therapeutic and trauma informed interventions delivered to children and their families may have reduced the number of children in Dorset entering the criminal justice system.

3. Findings from SL-MACA

No.	Quantitative findings
1.	80% of children in our sample experienced domestic abuse during childhood and were recognised as suffering one or more of the following: emotional abuse, physical abuse, or neglect.

2.	70% of children in our sample were cumulatively impacted by domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and/or parental mental health difficulties.
3.	70% of the children in our sample had periods where they missed education. 4 of these children have accessed a learning centre or alternative provision.
4.	70% of the children in our sample had been identified as having a learning difficulty. Of these 7 children, only 1 had not been impacted by domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and/or parental mental health difficulties.
5.	50% of children in our sample had or still lived with a parent experiencing mental health difficulties.
6.	40% of children in our sample were impacted by parental substance.
7.	0% of children were identified as having a parent with a Learning Disability to Learning Difficulty because this information did not feature in the information provided by agencies.
No.	Qualitative findings
8.	Parental difficulties cumulatively impacted on the children's social, emotional, health and cognitive outcomes (Cleaver et al 2011).
9.	Where conflict existed in familial and parental relationships children did not learn socially acceptable problem-solving strategies to manage conflict.
10.	Multi-agency interventions did not positively impact the behaviour of the 'top offending' young people (when known to Youth Justice Service).
11.	Strong links to peer associations were seen as a contributory factor for the young people's offending behaviour.
12.	When children were open to Children's Services in Dorset on Child in Need or Child Protection Plans; and parental issues were identified, the plans often focused on 'fixing' the parents issues, offering them services from REACH for substance abuse, The Freedom Programme for victims of domestic abuse etc. This approach did not always address the issues underlying their problematic behaviours such as mental health difficulties. This presents as a missed opportunity.
13.	Parental difficulties that impacted on child outcomes were not always assessed within a historical context during case allocation and subsequent assessments by Children's Social Care. Attention to this could have allowed professionals to understand the parents' patterns of functioning across their lifetime and to consider their capacity for change within this context (Ward et al 2014). It would have also allowed consideration of the cumulative impact of these events on the children. This was a missed opportunity.

15.	Underlying patterns of attachment for parents which can impact on how they engage with professionals (Ward et al 2014) were not considered or addressed as part of the child in need or child protection plans. This was a missed opportunity.
16.	Parental trauma was not always recognised or addressed as part of the child in need or child protection plans which negatively impacted on the outcomes achieved. This was a missed opportunity.
17.	Where childhood trauma was recognised, some children were referred to CAMHS but were not always offered a service.
18.	Some children received interventions from therapeutic services commissioned by education and Children's Social Care to address childhood trauma, but these were mostly offered late in the child's journey at a point that their behaviour was causing concern. This was a missed opportunity.
19.	Children missing education and subject to exclusions were mostly offered an assessment their educational needs and their emotional needs which informed future planning for them. This was a positive.
20.	Education Professionals held a lot of information about the child's lived experience and made appropriate referrals into Children's Services. This was a positive.
Good Practice Finding	
1.	There was good information sharing between agencies when children were open to Children's Social Care.
2.	Where children were at risk of child exploitation MACE planning was considered and instigated where required.
3.	Education services were quick to escalate their concerns to Children's Social Care when children were experiencing difficulties that could impact their health and wellbeing.
4.	Children were offered ELSA or emotional support within their education setting to support their wellbeing.

4. Recommendations

Recommendations	
1.	The attachment issues and trauma experienced by parents themselves needs to inform plans for children. Understanding parental history and their functioning across their lifetime will enable us to better understand their capacity to affect change that will benefit their child's outcomes (Ward et al 2014).
2.	For the abused parent, we should be focusing on building their skills within an attachment parenting framework such as PACE. This would support them to put effective boundaries in place with their child. Children who have experienced inconsistent and

	neglectful parenting will from an attachment perspective try to take control in their relationship with their parent or caregiver if they cannot trust them to keep them safe (Howe 2005). There is the potential for the parent/caregiver to be re-traumatised by their child in this circumstance and professional intervention is likely to be necessary to help them navigate their relationship, so it becomes a mutually rewarding, respectful and healthy.
3.	We need to be offering children and young people trauma therapy for the domestic abuse they have experienced. This is likely to be bespoke and specialist work which may fall outside of the remit of CAMHS on occasion. We should be offering this work as soon as it is understood that the child has been exposed to domestic abuse within the home environment due to the potential for this experience to negatively influence the child's outcomes.
4.	We need to look at expanding our availability of therapeutic domestic violence programmes for families.
5.	It would be beneficial for PPNs to be completed and shared with agencies when children are at risk of criminality. This would potentially allow interventions to be offered at an earlier stage in the child's journey.
6.	There is a need for improved level of support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for children who have experienced childhood trauma.
7.	School nursing should have better attendance at multi-agency meetings such as Child in Need and Child Protection.
8.	A higher level of professional curiosity is required when deciding how to progress referrals into Children's Social Care. Consideration of what the child is communicating by their behaviour would support professionals to take a more objective approach to deciding if a Child and Family assessment is required.
9.	Factors that could support a child's capacity for resilience such as high-quality relationships with a trusted adult, high self-esteem, positive relationships with peers and a positive school environment should be supported through interventions (LGA 2018)

5. Purpose

The audit looked at identifying key themes across the cohort of 10 young people in relation to why they have become involved with the youth justice service. The audit looked at identifying any potential areas of development, areas of good practice, or those that required a more focused approach.

6. Areas of scrutiny

The purpose of the audit is to look at the journey of 10 young people to understand:

- What the turning points/influential factors were for them in terms of them offending and their subsequent involvement with the justice system
- Whether there were opportunities that the young people could have taken that were missed and the reasons for this
- What agencies, or the young peoples' families, could have done differently to try and prevent a young person from following a certain path
- Their perspective on their journey to date and how they became involved in the justice system, and what could agencies or their families potentially could have done to prevent them from taking a certain path

7. Audit process:

The audit had two components:

1. Agencies were invited to complete an audit tool (see appendix A) with the purpose of identifying significant 'touchpoints' that they had had with the young person. Agencies were not asked, therefore, to provide an in-depth chronology of their involvement but were instead asked to reflect on, from their awareness, what incidents or events may have affected or contributed to that young person becoming involved with the justice system. As part of this, agencies were asked to identify the interventions or support they had established with the young person and/or family, whether this support was accessed, and the outcomes for the young people. Agencies were invited to identify any good practice, areas for development and anything they could have done differently to prevent the young person from entering the justice system.
2. The young people in the audit cohort, alongside their parents/carers, were invited by the Youth Justice Service to contribute to the audit by providing their views on the journey that the young person has taken to date. The feedback from the young people and/or their parents and carers can be found below.

8. Agency Participation Matrix

KEY:

NO-This means that there was no response from the required agency received for this individual case audit.

YES – This indicates that a response was received from that agency for the audit. **NOT KNOWN** – This indicates that the child is not known to the individual agency and so there was no completed audit. **ATTENDANCE TOO LIMITED TO COMMENT** – This is in relation to responses from education placements.

Responses from education placements:

	St.Michaels Middle	St Catherine's Primary (Wimborne) - school now CLOSED	Dorchester LC	Ferndown Upper	Compass	Budmouth Academy	Beechcroft St. Paul's	Bincombe Valley	Harbour Vale	Shaftesbury School	Shaftesbury Primary	Sturminster Newton High	Buckland Newton	Stower Provost	Purbeck School	Wey Valley	Marchant Holiday	Manor Park Primary	Henbury View First	Lockyers Middle	Forum Centre	St.George's First	Allenbourne Middle
Young person 1		N/A																					
Young person 2																							
Young person 3																							
Young person 4																							
Young person 5																							
Young person 6																							
Young person 7	NO SCHOOL/EDUCATIONAL PLACEMENT LISTED ON RECORD																						
Young person 8																							
Young person 9																							
Young person 10																							

Other agencies responses:

	Probation	REACH	Dorset Healthcare	Dorset County Hospital	Dorset CCG	Dorset CSC	Youth Justice	Dorset Police	CAFCASS	Adults SC	UHD
Child											
Young person 1											
Young person 2											
Young person 3											
Young person 4											
Young person 5											
Young person 6											
Young person 7											
Young person 8											
Young person 9											
Young person 10											

9. Challenges faced / learning

This report has analysed the findings from our SL-MACA, it has detailed the quantitative and qualitative data produced through the audit. The ten children who were subject to this audit process were known to have committed offences that led to their involvement with the Youth Justice Service prior to commencement of the audit. For these children their life trajectory had led them to offend despite significant periods of intervention from health, social care, and education across their childhoods. It is important to note the limits of this audit; the sample does not enable comparison between the sample children and children with similar life trajectories who have not committed an offence which could provide the opportunity for wider learning.

Eighty percent of children in our sample experienced domestic abuse during childhood and were recognised as suffering one or more of the following: emotional abuse, physical abuse, or neglect. Our audit findings were consistent with previous research on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and how they negatively and cumulatively impact on children's health and development but are also associated with increased trauma symptoms and behaviour problems in young adults (Shen 2009 in Cleaver et al 2011). Research suggests that timing of experiencing family violence matters in terms of likelihood of youth offending. Stewart et al. (2008 in LGA 2018) reported a '*consistent finding that young people whose maltreatment persists from childhood into adolescence, or starts in adolescence, are much more likely to be involved in the youth justice system than those whose experience of maltreatment was limited to their childhood.*' In our sample eight of the ten children were first referred into children's social care years before they were first known to the Youth Justice Services so this suggests that there were missed opportunities to intervene in a way that would prevent these children committing offences in later childhood.

The learning from this SL-MACA indicates that most of the children in our sample experienced singularly or cumulatively '*a specific sub-type of family violence that predisposed them to involvement in youth offending*' (LGA 2018). This being '*violence against women and girls (VAWG), childhood physical abuse, child to parent violence and witnessing domestic violence.*' (LGA 2018). Therefore, this indicates that there is the potential for professionals from health, social care, and education in Dorset to improve their responses to children who are presenting to services with this mix of vulnerabilities in early childhood and beyond. Earlier assessment of these children and earlier interventions could prevent them from progressing towards youth offending in later childhood.

Seventy percent of our sample were identified as having special educational needs and poor school attainment which are recognised risk factors identified as having a positive correlation with youth offending (LGA 2018). Within our sample professionals from health, social care, education, and youth justice were proactive in seeking an assessment of the child's needs when their difficulties became apparent, so that interventions could be delivered in a way that met the child's needs. However, the narratives of education professionals who worked with these children in early childhood indicate that for many of these children, learning difficulties were not evident in their primary education setting and for many the gap widened as they progressed through education. For these children it is unclear if the cumulative impact of their adverse life experiences led them to experience difficulties at a later stage of childhood, or if their early life experiences pre-disposed them to vulnerabilities in later childhood. Research indicates that: '*abuse and neglect are likely to have long-term adverse consequences across children's physical, cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural development*' (Norman et al., 2012 in Ward et al 2014). These children may have been prevented

from experiencing difficulties within education if they had received interventions within early childhood that supported, their emotional wellbeing, or if they had access to individuals or interventions that facilitated their self-esteem and promoted their capacity for resilience. Professionals from education contributed the view that they would like more training to enable them to work with children who are living with domestic abuse within education settings and to understand when to offer additional support to children who are at risk of harm due to exposure to parental difficulties in the home environment.

Some of the children in our sample were open to Speech and Language services in early childhood which is a universal service so is not in itself, a cause for concern. However educational professionals felt that it can be an indicator of emerging vulnerability and consideration needs to be given around how young people are assessed for speech and language difficulties at the earliest possible opportunity, so that their difficulties do not impact on their educational attainment. Not all children with speech, language or learning difficulties will present with these difficulties when they first start school and so it is important that education professionals track behaviours that may indicate a difficulty.

Children missing education is a known risk factor for youth offending (LGA 2018). Seventy percent of the children in the sample had periods of missing education but there was good evidence of proactive planning and alternative provision being offered to support these children back into education.

The audit identified that when children were recognised as needing therapeutic intervention to address childhood trauma this was not always offered by health services (CAMHS). For some children who were misusing substances or prescribed medication to treat ADHD this was cited as the reason for the service being refused. The audit findings suggest that there is a need for a greater dialogue around these children between health and other professionals when children are open to Youth Justice Services. Many children were or had accessed interventions designed to support their emotional health. These interventions were delivered in a mixed way across the group, either by health, education, or commissioned services. The audit findings do not detail the consistency of these approaches and how they addressed the children's experiences of childhood trauma including trauma from witnessing or experiencing harm. Therefore, it would be beneficial to map and review the therapeutic interventions available to children across services in Dorset and assess their evidence- based utility.

For some children their opportunity to engage with services was denied by their parents who did not agree to Child in Need planning. For these children there may have been further opportunities for education and health services to support them which were not explored.

This audit did not capture data in respect of the child's ethnicity. In the UK statistics suggest that boys from black and mixed heritage backgrounds are over-represented in the Youth Justice System (so this should be a consideration in future Multi Agency Youth Justice Audit.

One of the limitations of this audit activity is that current ways of working in Dorset Children's Services in accordance with our strengths based and restorative practice framework is not evident in the historical records for children audited. Children who have been known to services across a considerable number of years would have received a much better trauma informed response in recent years because we are now practising differently and have more robust programmes in place.

In conclusion, our sample of children represent a homogenous group in terms of their adverse childhood experiences. Their collective experiences correlate with those identified by researchers as contributory factors influencing youth offending. Therefore, despite evidence of

good multi-agency practice within Dorset when children are open on child protection or child in need plans, it is imperative that these risk factors are better understood and responded to at an earlier stage in the life of the child. Preventative and therapeutic family interventions should be offered at an earlier stage in the child's journey to prevent progression to youth offending. A whole family approach will need to encompass the needs of the child and the parent/caregiver to achieve positive outcomes.

10. Next steps

- Therapeutic services across the partnership to be mapped and understood in terms of utility.
- Domestic abuse offers across the partnership to be mapped and understood in terms of utility.
- PACE parenting training to be delivered across the partnership to support relationships between children and their parents/primary caregivers.
- Training to be delivered across the partnership to highlight the risk factors that contribute to youth offending and the factors that reduce the risk of offending.
- Training delivered by Youth Justice Services across the partnership to allow professionals to understand their work and the interventions they deliver as part of their involvement with the young person.
- Greater emphasis in Child in Need and Child Protection planning for the child's experiences to be understood within the context of the parent's history to enable a broader understanding of parental capacity to change.
- Better information sharing between schools when children are transitioning to the next school and between schools and alternative provision providers.
- Education Professionals would like the opportunity to have information shared with them by other professionals, prior to young people and families meeting the statutory threshold of intervention with children's social care, so that they can support the children at an earlier stage.
- Schools would like more training on how to support children who are exposed to domestic abuse in the home environment.

11. References

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List of Appendices

Appendix A

Dorset placed-based YJS Multi-Agency Case Audit

Please complete and return to: pan-dorsetscp@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Timeframe – Start of agency involvement with Young Person – [insert date of disposal for YJS]

Agency providing audit:

A. PERSONAL INFORMATION – Pre-populated by Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership Business Team

Child's name, date of birth and addresses:

Child subject to EHCP

Child subject to SEN Support

Household composition - name, dates of birth and connection to the child (attach genogram if available).

Please complete the following:

Significant Others outside of the household – name, dates of birth, address, and connection to the child

Any siblings known to Youth Justice Service (currently or previously) & dates of involvement:

B. Referrals/periods of involvement with this young person/family member, what the intervention was and the outcome of the work

Notes for completion:

Note to all agencies: Please consider the key touchpoints your agency has had with this young person and/or their family, the work that was completed with them, whether this support was accessed and what the outcome of this was for the young person and/or family member.

For Schools: Please think about any focused work that has been completed with this young person, for example regarding their EHCP, SEN support, behavioural management, any disclosure they may have made

For Children's Social Care: Please think about any focused work that has been completed with this young person and their family, for example through child in need, child protection and care plans

For Police: Please think about your agencies' contact with this young person through any missing episodes or child protection.

For Health: Please think about your agencies' contact with this young person through your individual services and any focused work that has been completed with them, for example through a medical plan. Please also consider any other family member that your agency has worked with.

For REACH: Please think about any focused work that has been completed with this young person by your service

For Probation: Please think about any focused work that has been completed with the adult family member

For CAFCASS: Please think about any focused work that has been completed with the young person and family

Start date of referral/period of involvement	End date of referral/period of involvement	Intervention/additional support provided to young person or parent/carer	Was identified support accessed? (Y/N)	Outcome of intervention/support for YP

C. Summary of own agency involvement:

D. Did your service have an awareness of other agencies/services that had been working with this young person and/or their family during the time that you had been and/or prior to your involvement?

Yes/No (please delete as appropriate)

If yes, please list the agencies that your service has knowledge of in terms of having had involvement with this young person and/or family.

-
-
-

--

E. Please provide your reflections on the child's history and how you think this has contributed to their involvement with the Youth Justice Service?

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F. Record below your analysis and consideration of the potential improvement to safeguarding/promoting the welfare of this child (own agency and multi-agency)

Reflections on areas of good practice to promote (single and multi-agency)
•
Is there anything your agency could have done differently which may have prevented this young person from entering the Youth Justice Service or contributed to them having their involvement with the service ended earlier?
•
Reflections on practice development for multi-agency working
•

G. Completed by:

Name	
Designation	
Date	

