

Learnings from Risk Outside The Home (ROTH) pilots

When young people are facing extra-familial harm that is significant, traditional child protection pathways which are focussed on parenting are not sufficient in addressing the social conditions where harm is actually happening i.e. the contexts where harm occurs. When the new ACP pathway was piloted in our test sites, five key findings emerged that highlighted what this new approach might offer in cases of significant extra-familial harm. The below infographic provides how this approach might be suitable for significant cases of extra-familial harm, where some of the challenges lie, and some key learnings from the sites involved.

Alternative Child Protection Pathways...

1. ...Shifted the focus of child protection plans

We noticed a difference in what professionals focused on when discussing and planning responses to extra-familial harm. Some of these shifts were beneficial (green) others were challenging (red)

- Focus moved beyond caregiver or parents' capacity to protect their child
- Professionals assessed risks faced by families rather than risks created by/within families
- Parents became partners in creating, not subjects of, plans
- Sites expanded who they viewed as a safeguarding partner (in guidance documents, less so in meetings)

- Young people were often the subject of interventions (rather than the contexts where they were unsafe)
- Pathways were unable to manage situations where young people were at risk of harm both within and beyond their families

Key learning

ACP pathways need to be capable of considering **ALL** contexts where young people are at risk of harm, including within their families, and target responses at those identified contexts

2. ...Changed the nature of familial engagement

One of the biggest benefits of ACP pathways was the change they seemed to facilitate in relationships between families and professionals. In the green box are some specifics of how this manifested:

- Social workers reported feeling less likely to 'blame' parents for the risks their child was facing when supporting them on an ACP pathway, compared to a traditional child protection pathway
- Parents/carers appeared more able to engage when they were partners in the process rather than the subject of it
- On ACP pathways families and professionals developed a shared understanding of harm

Quote from practice

'One of the really massive, especially as someone who's done social work for some time, one of the really beautiful things that came out of the conference for me was that you know there is a real sense that blame is not being placed on any particular individual or group or party.'

3. ...Generated a different response to extra-familial harm

Key learning

Always work with young people and their families to agree which professionals will participate in ACP pathway meetings where they will also be present. This is essential for facilitating collaboration, can help to identify where system/service harm has occurred and warrants attention, and does not preclude wider partnership working outside of those meetings.

ACP pathways reduced responses to extra-familial harm that focused on parents. This reduction did not always translate into increased responses to the contexts where young people experienced harm. We highlight the opportunities (green) and challenges (red) that came with changing responses to extra-familial harm

- Establishing an ACP pathway alone is not enough to generate contextual responses. The pathway needs access to services and interventions professionals can draw upon to effectively target extra-familial contexts
- Prioritising partnerships with parents/carers and young people can highlight tensions with other statutory partners such as the police which need to be addressed sensitively and effectively (see our key learning on this)

ACP pathways can create conditions in which professionals challenge each other to create safety in the contexts where young people are unsafe. In one site we observed a social worker critiquing an education provider who suggested a young person stop attending college for their own safety, instead of working to make college safer for the young person

4. ...Reframed the roles of professionals, young people and families in child protection

The roles played by professionals, young people and parents/carers on an ACP pathway looked different to what one might expect on a traditional child protection pathway

Key learning

Advocacy can also include how you assess - e.g. instead of assessing the likelihood that a young person will reoffend, professionals can advocate for services that create the conditions/context in which offending is less likely to occur.

- **Professionals within children's services:** became geared towards advocacy; from assessing and intervening with parents, to assessing risks beyond the control of parents and working alongside them to access appropriate support
- **Young people:** rather than being positioned as a 'victim' or a 'perpetrator' young people's holistic needs were assessed and responded to
- **Parents:** played a partnership role alongside professionals to deliver a child protection response, rather than being the subject of it
- **Other professionals:** had an identified role for creating safety in extra-familial contexts, not just sharing information about or providing services to individual young people

5. ...Shifted power dynamics between those involved in child protection planning

ACP pathways created the conditions in which power relations between different professionals, and between professionals and families, were rethought or re-practiced.

- Social workers' role and their use of power appeared to change when their remit was not to solely focus on the assessment of, and intervention with, the capacity of parents to be protective
 - Social workers appeared better placed to raise concerns about the actions of other professionals and the impact of services on young people's welfare
 - ACP pathways created space for social workers to acknowledge that not all harm faced by children was attributable to parents, and that the professional network also held responsibility for creating safety beyond family homes
 - This helped restore negative associations parents had with social workers
- ACP pathways increased the visibility of young people's perspectives
 - While this was positive, it was undermined by lack of services that young people have actually said they needed, alongside an increased focus on young people's behaviour instead of on contexts

Quote from practice

'I also think as well, because obviously with a [ACP Pathway], we're not making any judgements or opinions on people's parenting, and what's going on within their home. So, we're able to build that relationship very quickly, compared to if we're doing a, a standard child protection conference.'

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