



Kindness • Justice • Equality

The Den Blackpool, Fylde & Wyre 2020/21 Reaching Communities Report

Project ID: 20101587

The DEN



Tel: 0300 32 32 100 • Email: admin@empowermentcharity.org.uk • Web: www.empowermentcharity.org.uk

The Empowerment Base, 333 Bispham Road, Blackpool, FY2 0HH

Registered Charity No: 1155897

The Den Blackpool, Fylde & Wyre Project 2020/21

Welcome to our report, the last 12 months have been by far the most challenging here at The Den but through these challenges have come some excellent successes. We would like to take this opportunity to thank The National Lottery Community for your commitment to our service, as it would not be possible for us to achieve all we have without you. We will now take you through our achievements and challenges, the impact we have made, our key developments, partnerships and what the future will bring. Within this report, we have included the thoughts of children and young people who have accessed our support.

Our achievements & challenges

Over the 12 months, we received 296 referrals for children and young people ranging from 4 years through to 16 years. A total of 306 children and young people received support during this review period and 1,569 support sessions took place.

The past 12 months have been a very challenging time for everyone especially the communities we support. As the country went into a national lockdown in March 2020 and schools got closed, we needed to change our service delivery rapidly. The Den predominantly provide one to one support often in an education setting and this was no longer an option. What we did know was hundreds of vulnerable children's support networks were shrinking and to keep the country safe from the virus children were placed at further risk overnight. For a number of families life is already comparable to lockdown due to the abuse they are facing at home. We knew we needed to act fast, our biggest achievement over the past year is continuing to support the most vulnerable children and young people ensuring vital support took place despite a global pandemic. Service delivery changed significantly but at no point did it stop, we knew this was not an option; children needed us more now than they ever had before. One to one support sessions took place via zoom and WhatsApp. The team delivered resource packs to families, including closed cases, open cases and new cases. This enabled a face-to-face contact with families (socially distanced) we were able to gain the children's wishes and worries and speak with parents about any concerns they had. These packs included a wide range of items from skipping ropes to arts and crafts supplies. Through this, a number of families required the basics such as food parcels and essentials items like children's beds and cookers. Our primary focus remained supporting children affected by domestic abuse but due to the limited contact with other agencies who were no longer providing support we began to meet the wider needs. 147 resource packs were delivered across Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre.

At no point did our referrals stop; very briefly they slowed down which was concerning. Within a 3-month period, our referrals tripled and at one point, we considered closing our referrals, as we did not have the capacity to ensure each child had support and the wait for support increased. At this point, we needed to increase the staff team in order to meet the demand without compromising on quality provision. We received additional funding which enabled us to continue accepting referrals and meant the waiting time for children to receive support significantly reduced.

As soon as it was possible one to one support at The Empowerment Base took place, we transported families to ensure children received the support in a safe environment without delay. Some weeks we saw over 25 children individually. As we could not provide our positive activity programme, we ensured one to one support took place every week until schools re-opened. So many children did not attend school despite being key worker children or vulnerable children, which added further concern to all the staff. For the children attending school we were able to provide virtual sessions and school staff facilitated this for us in a private space.

The Den was able to provide four positive activities very recently over the Easter school holiday. They took place at The Empowerment Base and 55 children in total attended. These activity days gave children an opportunity to meet others in similar situations and socialise with peers, which over the last 12 months has been extremely limited.

The Den delivered 17 positive activity sessions in partnership with Blackpool Football Club Community Trust (BFCCT). This allowed us to deliver 2 weekly issue-based sessions, which included an element of physical activity. Due to the large facilities BFCCT have we could safely accommodate 15 children each week. The Den also delivered our youth provisions on a weekly basis after pausing this provision with immediate effect due to lockdown. Seventeen youth groups took place on Zoom before we could welcome groups of young people back into the building.

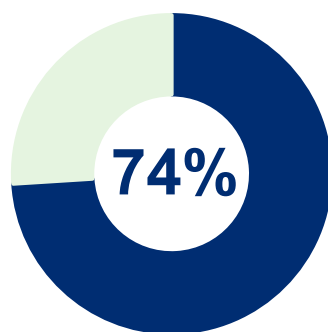
Biggest impacts for children and young people

Every child and young person we have supported over the year has a safety plan; this is a vital part of the role. A safety plan is created with the child and provides practical guidance surrounding; how to keep safe if an incident were to happen in the future, to never intervene during angry actions or words and getting help from the emergency services or other adults when it is safe to do so.

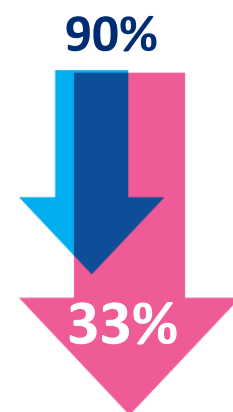


306

children and young people **accessed support** with The Den



Three quarters reduction in children **witnessing domestic abuse** after support from The Den

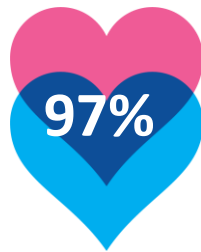


Two thirds (64%) reduction in children experiencing **direct abuse** following support

99%



of children saw their **safety improve** after support from the Den



of children saw an **improvement in their wellbeing** after receiving support with their mental health



After support, 3% of children **felt worried** a lot compared to 13% before support



94%

of children supported with their mental health had **improved coping mechanisms**

85%



of children supported with safety **understood what a healthy relationship is**



98%

of children supported with safety **knew how to seek help when in unsafe situations**

(SafeLives insights data 2020-21)

What children & young people have to say?

Jack's story *(Name of young person has been changed to protect their identity)*

Jack is a 16-year-old male who our male Children's IDVA has been supporting for the past 5 months. Support is due to end next month.

Jack has witnessed emotional, financial, physical and sexual abuse at home and has been a direct victim of physical, emotional and financial abuse from his Father.

Our support started weeks after a serious incident took place, which required police involvement. Jack, his Mum and his siblings fled from the family home due to this. We were able to start our support within weeks, which has been key for this family.

I asked Jack 5 questions regarding our sessions and the support. Below are his answers.

How did you feel about support before meeting your worker?

"I was a bit nervous at first as I never had any support and I was optimistic about having the support."

What was your impression after your first session? How did you feel?

"I felt really good, like a weight lifted off my shoulders as I could speak to someone and they had advice and they listened."

How has the support benefitted you and what have you learnt that you will take away with you?

"The support helped me massively as I have a problem with anger and also I worry a lot. I have calmed down massively and I have learnt to take a step back and not be so irrational, helping me to make better choices for myself."

What was the biggest light bulb moment from your sessions?

"I had a few lightbulb moments when we did activities, realising that domestic abuse comes in different shapes and sizes and he helped me realise why my Mum felt like she did and it gave me answers on why certain things happened so I wasn't as angry about them as I used to be."

Is there anything you would like to see be done differently in sessions or any improvements that The Den can make?

"I cannot think of much. It is not a big thing but I think that maybe some sessions out of school and maybe for sessions to be more often. It's sometimes a pain being interrupted by students and teachers during the sessions."

Jamie's story (Name of this child has been changed to protect their identity)

Jamie came into the service by mums IDVA. The IDVA is supporting mum in gaining a non-molestation order following several domestic abuse incidents between herself and the child's father. The last incident involved the child being not only a direct witness to the visual assault on mum, but during the incident father threw Jamie over his shoulder in an attempt to take him away from mum. This incident happened outside the child's school and thankfully witnesses intervened, called the police and stayed with mum and Jamie whilst they were waiting for the emergency services to arrive.

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, Jamie was not attending school. Thankfully, we have still been able to carry out one to one sessions at our building. Sessions took place every Tuesday. Jamie completed support on safety, support networks, feelings and emotions, healthy and unhealthy relationships, anger, resilience and self-esteem. During session 2, Jamie disclosed he was having trouble getting to sleep at night, and on one occasion had a panic attack when he had been remembering the last incident with his father. We spoke through some coping strategies to implement each night to see if they could help. These strategies started to help after a few weeks of trying and this helped Jamie's emotional wellbeing. Jamie's mum has her own learning difficulties so I supported her in gaining an appointment with the GP who has referred Jamie into CAMHS for an assessment. Jamie responded positively to The Den intervention and was sad to see the sessions end. Positive activities took place during school holidays to ensure children still has access to a worker, in order to express any wishes and worries they may have.

The family are currently waiting for a final date at court regarding a child arrangement order. We will be providing a report to the courts once requested to do so by the judge to provide an overview of the support we have provided, and to ensure Jamie's wishes and feelings are heard and are central in the court arena.

Comments from children, young people, parents and professionals

Feedback we received during Blackpool's schools safeguarding leads forum; *"I would like to thank Kerrie and her service for continued support during this challenging time. Children have accessed Zoom calls which have proved invaluable."* Roseacre Primary School, Blackpool.

Feedback from a parent following support; *"The support has improved my child's life in so many ways. It's like a weight has lifted, she is smiling again, she knows how to keep safe and speaking to others is so important. I cannot thank you enough"* Parent of a 5 year old.

Feedback following completion of support; *"I feel Timmy has really benefitted from the sessions you have delivered, he has been able to use some of the strategies you gave him to help him manage his feelings in lots of situations in school. You just clicked with Timmy from the first session and he often talks about you in class. Timmy was in denial about some of his negative feelings but now I feel he is able to step back and think about how he is feeling and how he can help himself to manage that."* Head teacher at SEN school

Some of the key developments

One key development is the duty and assessment process. This has significantly improved. Our new process, which we developed as a direct result of the pandemic and being forced to work from home we were unable to adhere to this process in the traditional way. This is a process that needed reviewing prior as we needed to move away from being paper-based. Very quickly a new process was developed and our case management system allowed us to do this much more effectively and reduce the previous delays in making contact with families as duty and assessment work could be completed from anywhere. The previous process also meant duplication was unavoidable. This sharpened the way the Children's IDVAs worked. As referrals came into the service so rapidly and having to adapt quickly has meant change has happened for the better.

Due to the pandemic, we limited home visits to essential visits only and did not enter properties at all. In order to adhere to government advice and keep staff safe we had to change our service delivery. Consent visits take place to meet the safe carer and the child prior to support taking place. The Children's IDVAs also complete initial assessment paperwork, which is crucial to understand the journey and experience of the family; more importantly the child. These initial assessments had to take place via telephone. This enabled staff to type up assessments whilst on calls, gather the key information without the travel time, and following the visit the recording of the visit and assessments. Again, as the pandemic forced us to change service delivery so many positives came out of this and capacity to complete more assessments each week significantly increased. However, we do recognise this did mean we did not meet with the parent prior to support and the child has not met their worker prior to their sessions. The worker also did not get to see home conditions and get a true sense of what is going on for the family. As a team, we have reflected on this and an area of further development has now been identified. To ensure we meet the safe carer and the child/ren prior to the support starting, an introduction meeting will take place. This will allow ten minutes to meet the family and answer any questions they might have. This will also give staff an opportunity to see home conditions. The initial assessment will still take place over the phone but having that brief face-to-face contact with the family can now take place.

Relationships with schools have strengthened; schools heavily relied on our support continuing for both children attending school and children who were being home schooled. The communication with schools regarding families were key to safeguarding. Children who fell into the vulnerable category due to experiencing domestic abuse initially did not get spaces in our area. The children's IDVAs challenged this and several children were given places, this ensured children got vital respite from their homes.

Families were financially struggling more than ever and we knew with less services operating, so many children would wake up on Christmas day without a gift. Our Children's IDVAs could not let this happen and the whole team delivered over 200 Christmas presents across Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre. We also distributed food hampers.

The final key development was staff and the amazing levels of creativity which was amazing to see! The team completely stepped out of their comfort zones and jumped with both feet into the unknown. They created resources that were interactive for virtual sessions, they came up with ice

breakers to build relationships with children they had never met. They took activities and resources to empty car parks to deliver sessions with children, they walked alongside children in the rain listening to children's worries, they completed safety plans in bus shelters and all of this quickly became the norm. It is with great pride, dedication and an extremely hard working team that even when we could not see our own families and all of the challenges this brought, we focused our passion and efforts to get out there supporting families we knew needed us more than ever.

Building connections & strengthening partnerships

We work closely with Fylde Coast Women's Aid (FCWA) and this continues to be an excellent partnership. FCWA continue to be our main referral routes for children in Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre. Over the last 12 months, this has been increasingly important with so many vital services not providing the support they previously did. As domestic abuse services increasingly felt the pressures of long waiting lists and increased referrals, Lancashire Domestic Abuse Forum met fortnightly to share good practice, funding opportunities, and enabled councils to understand the true picture of families living in constant fear. The forum supported a campaign #noexcuseforabuse; this campaign spread the message that support was still available and that fleeing domestic abuse was deemed essential travel meaning families could seek help and safe accommodation when necessary.

Blackpool Council commissioned support for high-risk children affected by Domestic abuse for several years. Unfortunately, this commission ended in June 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving some of the most vulnerable children with no support. Due to the concerns that were emerging from the negative effect lockdown was having, specifically to victims of domestic abuse and the abuse children and young people were experiencing, the Den were approached by the local authority to deliver 3 training sessions to all the children's workforce at Blackpool Council. These sessions covered specialist training on safety planning for children under 5, children under 11 and young people over 11. These sessions were well received by social workers and family intervention workers who gained knowledge and understanding of what is crucial when safety planning. The feedback received highlighted that staff felt more confident and are now able to complete robust safety plans with children of all ages. Blackpool Children's Social Care now have three safety plans that the entire workforce are using for the children at the highest risk in the town.

The Future is bright

The Den is growing due to the demand for service and we are determined for this to continue. Our vision is for every child who is experiencing domestic abuse or the long-lasting impact domestic abuse, to have support.

Very recently, The Den have received additional funding to provide support to children who are high risk due to ongoing domestic abuse they are experiencing. These dedicated staff will complete robust safety planning, creating and building support networks and enabling a link with the pastoral

lead for when our involvement ends. This is crucial to keep children at the greatest risk equipped to keep themselves safe.

As Sex and Health education is now mandatory in all schools, we have been a key partner in the development of a Healthy Relationships Charter Mark. This will enable both primary schools and high schools an opportunity to gain a bronze, silver and gold award. This will enable school staff to identify children who fall under the radar when experiencing domestic abuse at home. Within education settings we can encourage 'Stay Safe' days that will allow services to come into the school and deliver informal discussions to raise awareness of healthy and unhealthy relationships. The Den are keen to be involved and supporting schools to deliver this.

The Den have brilliant links within schools and the referral pathways are strong, however, there is still some way to go. Over the last 12 months our referrals from schools have decreased by 14%. School closures will have affected these figures. It is our hope that we can attend a Head Teachers Networking meeting in order to promote the service and provide an overview of the support that The Den would also like to influence, and also support schools to have a dedicated staff Domestic Abuse Champion within the school. Part of this role would be to assist with the support provided to families when domestic abuse is a current concern. Another element of this role would be for colleagues experiencing domestic abuse to know they have a safe space for support when they need it. The Den would provide twilight training sessions to support schools on a practical level.

The Den are exploring an additional provision, a junior provision that mirrors our current youth provision. This additional provision would also take place on a weekly basis. The average age of children accessing our support is 9 years old. Our current youth provision accommodates 11+. A junior provision would provide that ongoing support following the completion of one to one support.

The final pilot programme we are aiming to deliver over the next 12 months is our Recovery Toolkit programme. In our previous report, we shared the successful completion of this facilitators training with the view of delivering in the future. This is particularly exciting as currently there is no support provision for children who have historically experienced domestic abuse. This 8-week group programme for families will fill this gap. We are exploring the possibility of co-facilitating this with FCWA.

The DEN

Brighter Days...

No two cases are ever the same.

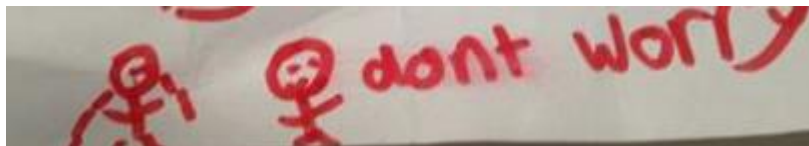
The children feel guilty, some parents no shame.

Being a child and seeing ill treatment,
It does not bode well for their future or achievements.

Learning to live with *"this is how it is"*,
Knowing deep down *"it's not meant to be like this"*.

Seeing a CIDVA, oh how they can help,
To make sense of feelings, with the story they have been dealt.

We educate these children, that there is hope,
To live life free and it is not the end of the rope.
The world works its magic in mysterious ways,
Having a service like ours brings so many brighter days.



This is a poem written by The Den's Senior Practitioner.