

# Working with parents

This case study is about how bringing parents together to safeguard their young people can be really effective. At a meeting to talk about extra-familial harm with different agencies, workers found out that a young person had been seriously hurt by someone in their friendship group. The workers were worried about the group. Many of the boys were not in education or employment and the workers felt they were at increased risk of child criminal exploitation in the community. The parents felt fed up with the police, and workers were worried that there had been arrests but often no further action taken to support the boys. Normally, when young people are in this situation, workers would assume that a way to bring about safety would be to put them into care. This case study shows a different way.

## What was the response?

The workers held a 'complex strategy' meeting to discuss the peer group. They worked together to make a plan to support the boys individually, but they also came up with a way to support the parents. In the meeting the workers came up with plans for the boys which included:

- Making sure they had more opportunities to go to school with less time out and about in the day on their own. This was supported by the education inclusion manager
- Mentoring for the boys on a one-to-one basis by a charity that offered youth and community work projects with the plan to bring the young people together as a group
- Providing activities such as quad biking

Workers also held meetings with parents of the group.

### Meetings with parents

One of the parents mentioned that a WhatsApp group had been set up so the parents of this group could speak to one another and share information on their children's whereabouts. To build on this, a worker from the family support service set up two in person meetings with five parents. The meetings were set up to:

- Provide a space for parents to talk with biscuits and a drink. The meetings helped parents share their experiences, minimise any sense of blame and provide support to each other
- Support the parents with safety planning to build a network of people around the boys who cared about them. This was particularly important when parents were asking their child to leave home and live elsewhere, often with friends within the group
- Understand better where the young people were spending their time, who with, and where conflict was occurring with other young people
- Undertake 'Signs of Safety' mapping with parents to help them to talk about their worries

## What were the challenges?

It was difficult to support the parents to come to the meetings because in the past, parents had experienced services as not being helpful. Also, over time relationships in the group with both the young people and parents changed, and this was at times hard to manage. There were some tensions between parents when some young people were arrested and in custody and others were not.

## What difference did this make?

By bringing the parents together, they continued to support each other. The parents and workers started to learn more about the young people's friends and their individual needs. They also learnt about the places the boys went to where they may have been being harmed. Some parents said they liked having the time and opportunity to talk within a safe, supportive space with other parents that understood what they were going through.

Parents started to think of ways to make sure their young people were safe as a group, including contacting each other or a worker if they were worried. Outcomes for young people varied, but some parents felt more able to engage openly with workers and more able to manage some of the harm to young people in the community. Parents said that they felt it had reduced the stigma they had felt from being part of safeguarding processes.

## What did we learn?

When you work with parents and take steps to reduce blame, you can start to bring parents in as partners. When children experience harm outside their families it's so important that parents don't feel judged and that they can make decisions about what happens.

The parents meetings built on existing networks of support that the parents themselves had started. This example shows how parents networks can be supportive and protective forums for parents of children experiencing extra-familial harm. We learnt that it's important to think about the needs of all parents involved and make sure there are ground rules for how the group works together so that everyone feels heard and valued.

Building relationships between parents and workers and speaking and listening to parents were important aspects of the work. For example, by talking about young people's friendships, workers learnt more about both the young people's and the parents' needs.

As a way to enable more meetings where supportive networks are not already formed, this Local Authority is developing a policy for 'multi-family network meetings'. This will include ways to think about how to build trust within the group.