

Blackburn with Darwen Families Project

POP EA 3/2004

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- NCH Blackburn with Darwen Families Project
- Blackburn with Darwen Community Safety Team (CDRP)

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Blackburn with Darwen The Families Project **POP EA 3/2004**

Scanning

The Blackburn with Darwen (BwD) police identified issues with nuisance families. This was causing huge damage to already fragile communities with problems ranging from dropping litter to violence. These few families had a major impact on the lives of many residents with their behaviour having a detrimental effect on the wider community and also themselves through possible eviction.

Analysis

BwD has some of the most deprived wards nationally. The offenders can vary between family members - some are children some are parents and some are both. The local community and the nuisance families are the victims. These families cause a large number of calls to be made to the police. The root cause of the ongoing nuisance problems has been a reactive policy of enforcement and eviction that displaced offending families to other areas where their behaviour often continued and the families often lost touch with support services. The use of enforcement did not resolve the underlying causes of the behaviour and consequently the problems faced by the families spiralled out of control with the families often feeling they were beyond help.

Response

The police and other agencies were able to make referrals to BwD Families Project. The criteria being, families who are at risk of being evicted through anti social behaviour, are in receipt of housing benefit and accept the project. A tenancy support plan is used to improve housing conditions, ensure all benefits are received and to address each family member's individual needs. The goal is to challenge anti-social behaviour, prevent/reduce re-offending and re-introduce families to society. The whole project is based around a carrot and stick approach. However if the family do not take up the service offered the traditional methods of dealing with them will be employed.

Assessment

The Families Project has been found by the police to be an effective way of dealing with problem families. In 14 months the project has dealt with 34 families (43 Adults and 101 Children), these have been the most problematic families across the policing area. In one case the year preceding the projects involvement 30 calls were made to police, in 7 months since the projects involvement 2 calls have been made (1 of these by the family reporting a loss). A neighbour also sent a Thank You letter. Only two evictions have been necessary to date.

Blackburn with Darwen Families Project

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Objectives

To reduce Nuisance Disorder by problem families across Blackburn with Darwen

To reduce displacement of problem families

To tackle the issues that face problem families

To improve the Quality of Life issues across Blackburn with Darwen

Stake Holder Agencies

The NCH Families Project

Eastern Division Police

The Youth Offending Team

Social Services

Blackburn with Darwen Community Safety Partnership (CDRP)

Twin Valley Homes (Registered Social Landlord)

Education Welfare Service

Primary Care Trust

Supporting People Programme

Scanning

Problem

The Police, Twin Valley Homes (R.S.L), Blackburn with Darwen Community Safety Team (CDRP), Youth Offending Team, Probation Service, Environmental Health Department, and Social Services Department had identified a problem common in most areas across the country i.e. families who cause or display anti social behaviour in the community.

The traditional approach by Police and housing agencies was to use enforcement powers to threaten or ultimately evict the families causing problems. These powers were mainly used in

isolation without consultation with other supporting agencies who were involved with the same families.

This not only led to conflicts between agencies but often interrupted or ruined ongoing interventions aimed at helping the problem family. These confusing mixed messages gave the families a very dim view of the establishment agencies. The families often lost touch with the supporting agencies and hence no longer had the potential to benefit from their support. Families working with supporting agencies who had been trying to address their behaviour with some success sometimes found themselves facing eviction through historic behaviour and minor infractions. The families often complained to service providers "Why should I bother" when their progress was given so little credit by the Police or housing agencies. This wasted many hours of work by the supporting agencies that may have yielded excellent results but the task was left incomplete through no fault of the agency.

In short, the policy of threatening and implementing use of the law and eviction had proved cumbersome, did not solve the underlying problems and did not necessarily diminish the demands made on all service providers. The major demand for the Police was the amount of calls generated to the communications centre.

The effects of anti social behaviour are often most damaging in communities that are already fragile and where services are overstretched. Anti social behaviour can range from dropping litter to serious harassment. Typically the behaviour of perpetrators of anti social behaviour has a disproportionate impact on large numbers of people. BwD is not immune to the impact of anti social behaviour. Research has shown that you can have a firm anti social behaviour policy but that only goes so far. Even if a robust anti social behaviour policy is implemented, it will still have limitations i.e. sanctions can be imposed and people can be evicted. However this action does not tackle the underlying problem of anti social behaviour. Instead this anti social behaviour will manifest in other neighbourhoods by these same perpetrators.

The anti social behaviour affects all members of the community; i.e. local residents, all of the service providers and even the offenders themselves who maybe evicted from their homes. On a daily basis; for example, one or more of the following agencies may indicate there is a problem- Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, Lancashire Constabulary, Probation Services, Social Services, Youth Offending Team, Voluntary Sector Agencies, Twin Valley Homes, Private Landlords and the Education Authority. It was noted by all agencies that not only a gap in services existed but also a lack of coordination in relation to the perpetrators of anti social behaviour and their victims.

Analysis

The above agencies through the BwD Community Safety Partnership decided to identify a problem-oriented approach to tackling the causes of anti social behaviour.

Like most social problems, anti social behaviour reflects a correlation between socio-economic, environmental conditions and individual or family influences. Most families who exhibit anti social behaviour are poor and lack an employed person in the household. The concentration of disadvantaged families within the same area often fosters problems.

There may be a difference between factors affecting 'low level' nuisances and very serious anti-social behaviour, with life-style and perception differences being more important in the former and severe mental health or addiction issues figuring to a greater extent in the latter. In using this research it became obvious that a multi agency approach was needed to highlight interventions in particular situations.

The Community Safety Partnership is making efforts to tackle the anti social behaviour across the Blackburn with Darwen area with the aim to improve the Quality of Life issues. Three key principals will be used to deliver these objectives and targets within the strategy:

- Early Intervention
- The problem solving approach (SARA model)
- Re-engineering key processes

The Community Safety Partnership's strategies and activities link into and complement many of the plans, strategies and service developments across the Borough. The ethos of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and particularly Section 17 of the act is to consider crime and disorder implications in every aspect of service delivery.

The partnership wanted to take the recommendations of the Home Office Policy Action Team 8 (PAT8) Report on anti social behaviour and develop policies that would concentrate on:

1. Prevention and early intervention
2. Enforcement
3. Resettlement

The actions set out in the 2002-2005 strategy include the development of Virtual Multi Agency Teams within each neighbourhood area, led by Police and local authority to facilitate early intervention and community involvement. This process was completed in December 2002. The Police re-introduced community policing with Community Beat Managers and Police Community Support Officers. The local authority introduced Neighbourhood Co-ordinators who would act as a lens for all council services. The Fire and Rescue service along with other agencies changed their working boundaries so that they were all co terminus with the Police and local authority neighbourhood areas. These small teams then welcomed other groups from their area so that people could get to know each other and work on the local issues.

The Community Safety Partnership provided high quality, problem-solving training from Malcolm Hibberd to all of the neighbourhood areas across the borough. Malcolm is the Director of Training at the Police Foundation. He runs a range of courses on performance management, research, analytical methods and he is nationally regarded for his expertise in the field of social research within the work of Policing and Community Safety Partnerships.

Also completed in December 2002 was the development of policy and practise guidelines with regard to anti social behaviour for all partnership staff. During the formation of these guidelines a meeting took place between Twin Valley Homes (T.V.H) the largest local registered social landlord and the National Children Homes (N.C.H) around the issue of anti social behaviour by tenants and the process of terminating tenancies, at which the Dundee model was discussed (The Dundee project was a residential intensive family support project that reduced by half the number of tenancy terminations by addressing the needs of identified tenants and offering them sustained support to address their problems).

The Dundee project was established in 1996. Initially, the aim of the project was to deal with families after eviction in a central unit. However, after discussions with their proposed partner, the emphasis changed to more preventive work with families who were facing eviction. This project was cited in the Westminster Government's Social Exclusion Unit report on Anti social Behaviour as ***an innovative and ground breaking idea that others were urged to follow*** (PAT 8, 2000). The Chartered Institute of Housing also conferred a 'Good Practice' award.

The Dundee project evaluation highlighted areas that could be improved and notably these were that the media had to be controlled. The Dundee project centred around a residential block that housed families in the short term while they were given support. The media and

local residents plagued the initial months of the project, and reports in the newspapers ran

with headlines such as 'sin-bin' and 'Colditz' to describe the core unit. This was found to be unsettling to the families being offered support.

Due to the BwD N.C.H Manager having previous experience of Youth Justice, Probation and social work the issue was looked at in the wider arena of an approach to anti social behaviour rather than the narrow tenancy issue. Discussions then took place with a broader representation including the Police, Youth Offending Team (Y.O.T), Blackburn with Darwen Community Safety Partnership (C.S.P) and Social Services.

The Community Beat Team was involved in The Families Project from the start. The Y.O.T and Social Services used its funding mechanisms to pump prime the project financially via the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, the Police offered statistical analysis and officer time and T.V.H and Social Services gave the infrastructure for the first referrals. TVH also provided free office accommodation.

Location

The locations of anti social behaviour problems are spread across nearly all of the residential housing in the borough. The problems are dependent upon many complex factors. The problems caused by individual families cannot be defined by location other than they are generally in the more deprived wards. Any intervention will need to cover the whole of the borough to make an impact.

Victim

All of the community can be classed as victims; they can be neighbours, visitors, people working in the area and to some degree, they can also be the offenders. In general the victims of the anti social behaviour are repeat victims. The low level anti social behaviour usually needs to be proven over time to receive a response from most agencies. This lack of initial action often leads to the behaviour escalating without any checks being made with the victim. The intervention will need to include victims.

Offender

The offender is non-specific, and often they are those that are seen as being on the margins of society and socially excluded by their peers. They are usually from poor economic and social backgrounds. They tend to be the hard to reach people who have many complex issues. Anti social behaviour cannot be easily classified and no two offenders will have similar needs. The previous working practice of enforcement and eviction, has led to the escalation of problems faced by the families to the point where they feel they are beyond help. They often blame their problems on establishment agencies. This can push them further from the support that they actually need, which results in their problems being left untackled and thus increasing over time. The intervention will have to be flexible to the needs of the families.

Time

The majority of anti social behaviour problems continue all year round due to the previously mentioned complex nature of the people who are causing them. It is apparent that the issue relating to juvenile nuisance increases during the summer months and school holidays. Also it is noted that alcohol related disorder increases in the residential areas during summer. This is believed to be due to the increase in barbecue type parties. The majority of housing in Blackburn and Darwen is terraced housing with small rear yards. This puts most neighbours in very close proximity, which can lead to disorder.

Family-based interventions

The Dundee Families Project is a rare example of an intensive intervention targeted at families deemed to have exhibited anti social behaviour. Previous research regarding families projects have suggested that families benefit when there are a range of options available, whether from within the same service or from a combination of services. Also disadvantaged families tend to respond well when there are structured programmes, presented in a non-stigmatising way alongside informal support. Cognitive-behavioural and multi-disciplinary approaches have also been effective with problems in relation to both parenting and adolescent behaviour. Group and family work have been shown to be useful, although not necessarily having a lasting impact. These findings accord with the multi-method and collaborative approach of the Dundee Families Project. However, research has also shown that families with the greatest difficulties may be the most challenging from whom co-operation to engage with mainstream services can be gained.

Response

The key elements of the Dundee approach have remained. The BwD Families Project aims to take a systematic and holistic approach to each family's problems. It will work intensively, in a flexible, time-limited and focussed way to address the problems. An agreement was reached to use Supporting People Funding and to develop multi-agency support for this project. The media strategy was to be very low key.

The Blackburn with Darwen Families Project Steering Group decided that a residential block was not only expensive but also actually helped to stigmatise families who were placed into it. Also it would have provided the sometimes-irresponsible local media an opportunity to dismiss the project before any progress could have been made. A decision was made to have the project provide outreach to families in their own homes. This also gave the project the opportunity to work not only with the offenders but also the victims of the alleged anti social behaviour.

A review panel was also formed to ensure that the referral procedure and criteria procedure for access to the service is consistent with the service objectives.

The criteria for the service was decided to some degree by funding requirements and to be eligible the following rules applied:

- Families at significant risk of eviction and or homelessness due to
 - Alleged anti social behaviour
 - Neighbour nuisance
- Families who receive Housing Benefit
- Families who want to be supported by the project
- Families whose health, education and development of the children and or young people are being affected by the insecurity of the tenancy
- Families who require support to live in mainstream society

The project would take referrals from the Police, Social Services, self-referral and other agencies, notably Twin Valley Homes. In initial cases the Police would visit the offender/offending family and victim in order to identify and in some cases resolve the nature of the complaint. Only when it has been identified that the problem is of a long term and complex nature, is the project involved through referral. Invariably the referring agencies have previously attempted more traditional methods to resolve the problem, such as threaten with eviction, gather evidence for ASBOs or deal with the problem in a reactive way as opposed to a pro-active stance to resolve the problem.

Planned Police Response

The Community Beat Managers play an integral part in reducing anti social behaviour within their particular beats. There is a strong partnership ethos in the community beat team in order to resolve the long-term problems on their neighbourhood areas. The partnership

approach has allowed the team to use many local non-Police resources to resolve Police problems. The Families Project has become an extremely useful tool to community officers in day-to-day Police work.

Research has indicated that the majority of families that fall into this category tend to be anti-establishment. Traditionally the methods employed to deal with these families has included eviction.

A simple example of this is where a family is evicted from registered social housing where there is a degree of control over their behaviour, to a private rented property where it is more difficult to influence their behaviour and actions. However The Families Project does work with families living in the private sector, and these referrals always emanate from the Police.

Criminalising their anti social behaviour through ASBOs has little impact on offender's attitudes in resolving the underlying cause, as frequently the punishments at court do not meet the expectations of the victims who have been sold ASBOs as a panacea of all their problems. The use of ASBOs can run alongside preventative work to support that work if needed.

Many of the organisations that work with these families offering support, advice and resources tend to be establishment. Herein lies the problem. The families frequently feel stigmatised having the Police or Social Services visit them. They also often have no desire to work alongside these agencies that they see as responsible for their current position.

Consequently working with an independent voluntary organisation; i.e. the NCH, which has no allegiance or ties to the establishment may give greater credence to the project and allow NCH to have some success where others have failed. The ultimate goal is to prevent/reduce re-offending and anti social behaviour and in a utopian world to re-introduce families into mainstream society.

From a Police perspective apart from referring families a pro-active approach should be used in partnership and where appropriate Acceptable Behaviour Contracts can be implemented. Police Community Beat Managers, Twin Valley Homes Tenancy Enforcement Officers and Families Project staff will share responsibility for the problem. Diversionary tactics will be employed for the young people in the families.

The whole project is based around the carrot and stick approach. However if they do not agree to take up the service it is pointed out to them that the traditional methods of dealing with them would be employed.

Planned Partners Response

For children and families who are experiencing disruptive living arrangements due to anti social behaviour, Blackburn with Darwen Families Project will support them in order to achieve:

1. A reduction in crime and anti social behaviour experienced by people where they reside.
2. An improvement in the social, health, education and learning outcomes for children and families.
3. Enhancement of the quality of life for communities and neighbourhoods.
4. The prevention of, and reduction in, tenancy breakdown.
5. The effective partnership of service providers. The project aims to work with the families for a maximum period of 6 months. However, if problems recur the family can be re-referred either by an agency or by the family itself.

The role of other partners is to act as a referral mechanism and to offer support and advice, or alternative housing arrangements when necessary. T.V.H agree to work closely and hold back on evictions and to use the project as a primary resource. A similar agreement exists with landlords of private rented accommodation.

Time Scale

The project has funding initially for 3 years and is financed by the Supporting People Fund and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. It is anticipated that funding will be available from Social Services next financial year. The multi-agency steering group ascertains successes/failures within the project every three months. (Response/Assessment)

Resources

The project is externally funded from partnership agencies. Time of the individual community beat manager is utilised, where they have specifically referred families to the project. There is no overtime expenditure envisaged with this plan. Neither is there a need to access resources from other departments. There may be occasions where specialist departments may already have involvement with the families and if this does occur there will be consultation with, for example, the Police public protection unit, prior to engagement with the family.

How the POP will be assessed

1. The setting up of the project with a robust referral mechanism. To improve the quality of life issues across the borough.
2. Statistical analysis of the number of calls made to the Police pre- and post-referral. This can be seen as a measure of geographic Police time and resources used to deal with the families.
3. A reduction in evictions. This can be measured in terms of the number of referrals made and the number of evictions needed. A prime aim is to avoid displacement and this is an excellent measure.
4. Also information from other agencies with regards to re-introducing structure to family life. For example, information from educational establishments regarding attendance or non-attendance of children once The Families Project have been involved.

The main objective within this POP is to make The Families Project the primary resource used by frontline agencies; including the Police, as opposed to a secondary resource.

Assessment

The Police have provided referrals of families presenting anti social behaviour to the NCH families project. In 14 months the project has dealt with 34 families (43 Adults and 101

Children and young people), these have been the most problematic families across the policing area.

1. The project has been successfully launched; it has been operating for about 14 months now. It has an established referral mechanism that is widely available throughout the partner agencies. The Police and the Community Safety Team have noticed an improvement in the quality of life issues in the areas surrounding the families dealt with. This however has proved very hard to quantify.
2. Examples of reduction in calls to Police can be shown using all the families that have been dealt with (Please also see Appendix 1 for more examples):
 - a. WNR case- The year preceding the projects involvement 30 calls were made to the Police, in 7 months since the projects involvement only 2 calls have been made (1 of these by the family reporting a loss). The neighbours were also supported through the project and the council/Police received a complimentary letter from a neighbour who had previously been writing to complain.
 - b. JS case-A young mother and newborn daughter moved into a private rented terraced home. This lady and her guests began displaying anti social behaviour and the month that followed led to 8 calls to the Police. They also made calls to the Community Safety Team asking for help. Since the projects involvement in over six months only 3 calls have been made to the Police and no further calls have been made to the Community Safety Team.
3. In all thirty four cases dealt with by The Families Project, so far only two evictions have been necessary. This obviously is a significant improvement from previously, where offending families were regularly displaced.
4. In a number of cases dealt with by The Families Project there has been considerable impact on the structure of family life and this has been noticed by education in the improved attendance record of young people who are being dealt with by the project. (Please see Appendix 2 for examples)

Difficulties Encountered

The Families Project can only work with twelve families at any one time. This creates difficulties, as the policing issues associated with problem families tend to flare up sporadically. In emergency cases The Families Project has always accommodated the referral. However in less serious cases after a referral is made, it may be some time before the project can take action.

Police Outcome / Result

The results for the Police have been excellent. The Families Project is available to all areas throughout Blackburn with Darwen. Once a referral is made The Families Project deal with

the case, organise multi agency meetings and liase with all the relevant agencies. The project takes on the role of co-ordinator between all agencies. The local CBMs can then concentrate on other policing matters without being tied up in multi agency administration.

Partners Outcome / Result

The Police partners are allowed closer working relationships in local problem solving. It allows all service providers to gain a greater understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities. The multi agency approach allows effective targeting of resources by reducing the amount of duplication between agencies. It also sets up a local base of good practise that can be used in other areas.

Could the assessment have been improved

The response from The Families Project shows that the project is an excellent improvement on the services available previously. A recent review with the funding bodies has allowed The Families Project to work with the private sector, dependent upon the severity of the case and at the discretion of the Project Manager. This sphere of work could be enhanced and widened, subject to increased funding and staffing levels.

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Appendix 1, 2 and 3

Appendix 1

Further examples of reduction in calls to police since the involvement of The Families Project:

1. There had been 18 complaints made to the Twin Valley Homes Tenancy Enforcement Officer and the Community Beat Manager regarding the anti social behaviour of two boys that lived in Twin Valley housing with their parent. These complaints were mainly about abusive behaviour towards other residents on the estate. The boys were put on anti social behaviour contracts and The Families Project worker began intensive one to one work with them and the parent in order to tackle their behaviour. During the Project's involvement there has been only one complaint, which has since been resolved.
2. Activities at a private address were brought to the attention of the police and the Community Beat Manager, after several complaints by residents and the local councillor. Complaints ranged from late night parties, loud music, excessive drinking and contributory anti-social behaviour that impacted on the quality of life of the local residents. The complaint centred round two teenage girls living at the address. Also living at the address was the mother and an 8 year-old boy. Since working with The Families Project and the Community Beat Manager, one of the teenage girls is attending a full time course at Blackburn College, whilst the other has full time employment. The mother has started a part time beauty course and the young boy has been engaged in various youth activities through the Youth Inclusion Project. With regards to the individual family members their self-esteem has increased and they feel fully supported. To date no further complaints have been received.
3. A family comprising of two adults and one child generated 26 calls to the police over a three-month period. The complaints ranged from allegations of racist abuse to assaults on neighbours. The police had employed the usual response, but this had not prevented repeat offending and poor behaviour. Since the project's involvement, the police have continued to receive calls, but to a lesser degree and predominantly from the family itself as opposed to the local residents. There have been 16 calls from the family to the police and only one complaint from a neighbour. The problems faced by this family have been particularly challenging and has involved a large number of agencies including the probation service, teacher's, learning mentors, Barnardo's Out of schools club, community psychiatric support workers, Twin valley homes, social services, Nacro Time Out Project and the police minorities team. (Please also see example 2 in Appendix 2 as these examples are linked)

Appendix 2

Examples of information from other agencies with regards to re-introducing structure to family life, information from educational establishments regarding attendance or non-attendance of children once The Families Project have been involved:

1. A comment was received from a member of the Education Pupil Referral Unit who had been dealing with a young person whose family were involved with the project. The pupil was at the point where he completely refused to attend school, on the occasions that he did he was creating incidents to get himself excluded. It was clear he was spending all his time with other older youths during the day, causing nuisance in the community and getting involved in offending behaviour. The introduction by The Families Project of an Acceptable Behaviour Contract brought everything to a head, the young man in question quickly realised that all agencies were working together and monitoring his behaviour not just in school but out of school too. He knew this was going to be taken seriously, the contract was signed in school and the young man agreed to keep to the contract and was made aware of the consequences if he failed to. It was clear to him that all agencies were working very closely with each other. Reinforcing the parts of the contract such as attendance at school and good behaviour, has been beneficial during times in school when the young person has tried to leave early or began to instigate disruption in class. A strong reminder of his agreement has helped to de-escalate the situation, made him think about his actions and turned his behaviour around. Attendance has increased by 70% and the police have not received any reports regarding incidents in the community. The young man has developed a pattern of attending school and is increasingly engaging positively in learning again. The appropriate use of a contract has served to assist a more co-ordinated response to a young man who was a cause for concern to various agencies.
2. The Families Project team were part of a support package for a student in Year 7 at Queen's Park Technology College. This involvement started in September 2003, as the student arrived from Folkestone, with very little known about his background/problems. The family structure was extremely fragile, with Mother estranged from the child's father; herself recently completing a term in prison, and no family support available in Blackburn. The student presented extremely challenging behaviour, resulting in a fixed term exclusion in the second week of the autumn term. Three multi agency meetings and two school based meetings were held in this term, resulting in improvements in the student's behaviour and attendance (from 65% to 84%), an agreed set of targets shared by home and school; positive input from mother; a meeting in school attended by both parents (Mother and stepfather) and support from home for homework and report systems. This contrasted favourably with strategies used in Primary school in Folkestone, where the evidence in his file showed antagonism between school and home at times. Mother and student were referred to CAMHS subsidiary programme called Healthy Minds, based in school. This requires work to be done with the whole family; although the mother felt threatened by this approach, through direct support from the Families Project team some progress was made in resolving difficulties. Both parents and child have attended meetings supported by project workers, and the improvement in their self-confidence is noticeable. Specific problems over out of school activities, attendance at meetings and consistent approach to dealing with behaviour problems have also been dealt with by the mother with the support and guidance of the team.

3. A report from an Education Welfare Officer has been received that states the Families Project has assisted in the co-ordination of multi agency services/plans for young people & families. It has also helped in cases that would have otherwise gone unnoticed by providing a forum for new focus, direction and challenge. It has helped to prevent young people entering the care system during family crisis by providing swift and consistent support.

All of the above has enabled parents/carers to be more effective in supporting the young person which ultimately has resulted in not only personal progress but also the young persons progress and achievement, to include: -

- Improved school attendance and behaviour
- Improved attitude towards Education & Out of School' activities
- It has helped to maintain young people within their own families

The feedback from parents/carers has been very positive: -

They have felt listened to for the first time. They have expressed that the support offered has been consistent and of great value. It has enabled them to directly or indirectly challenge other agencies that they feel have been or are being unhelpful and unsupportive. Most importantly they have made progress personally in coping with the challenges faced when caring for their own children.

Appendix 3 – Problem Solving Model

