

IVAR

Learning to collaborate

The Child Sexual Exploitation Funders' Alliance: Final report from the Institute for Voluntary Action Research

Institute for Voluntary
Action Research



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Authorship and acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the members of CSEFA, Expert Reference Group, grantees and researchers at the University of Bedfordshire who contributed to this research. A full list of contributors can be found in Appendix B.

This report has been written by Leila Baker and Houda Davis. It is based on research carried out by the authors together with Ben Cairns, Charlotte Hennessey and Charlotte Pace.

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Introduction

This report presents findings from an evaluation of the Child Sexual Exploitation Funders' Alliance (CSEFA) carried out by the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR). The evaluation – which focused on the Alliance itself – was commissioned to test the underlying assumption that aligned funding is a suitable strategy for achieving systemic change in a complex field such as child sexual exploitation. The evaluation builds on interim findings published in 2016.

Methodology

This report draws on fieldwork and reports conducted by IVAR between 2014 and 2017 to support the development of CSEFA. We interviewed representatives of the 14 independent trusts and foundations that make up CSEFA, first in 2014 and again in 2015 and 2017, as well as carrying out a one-off survey of the first grantees in 2016. These interviews were complemented by reviews of CSEFA's governance documents and interviews with the Chair of its Expert Reference Group and with the Principal Investigator at the University of Bedfordshire. Appendices A and B provide more detail.

About CSEFA

CSEFA is a group of 14 charitable funders (see Appendix B) who came together in 2012 to bring about a step change in the way child sexual exploitation is dealt with in the UK. Together they funded The Alexi Project, an £8m development programme, designed to rapidly increase the capacity and coverage of specialist, voluntary sector child sexual exploitation (CSE) services. Specifically, they wanted to see responses to child sexual exploitation positioned as an integral part of mainstream safeguarding.

Around the time CSEFA was established, public awareness about CSE was growing and many funders were keen to support developments and provision in this field. CSEFA founder members identified the opportunity to improve funders knowledge of and confidence in this area, whilst rapidly increasing resources available to projects.

Fifteen child sexual exploitation services have been funded for three years each, over a five-year period,¹ with the aim of:

1. Making specialist support available to children in a series of new locations across England.²
2. Improving the coordination, delivery and practice of local services responding to child sexual exploitation – including the police, children’s services and other partner agencies.

To achieve this, CSEFA adopted a model of development known as ‘Hub and Spoke’ as a vehicle for rapid expansion, increased coverage and improved capacity. In this model, a voluntary sector organisation (the ‘hub’) places experienced child sexual exploitation workers (‘spokes’) into neighbouring local authority or Local Safeguarding Children Board areas. These spoke workers undertake a variety of activities, including casework with young people, consultancy, and training and awareness-raising. Fifty-three new spoke workers were employed across thirty-five local authority areas.

The Hub and Spoke funding programme was one element of a wider strategy, developed by the Alliance, designed to create a ‘step change’ in how local areas respond to CSE. The Alexi Project website³ has information on the full range of these activities and outputs, including a strand of work promoting the meaningful involvement of children and young people in their own care and service provision.

1. Key features of the collaboration

CSEFA is characterised by a number of key features, some that were envisaged from the start, others that were introduced in response to needs that were identified later on.

Expert strategy and evaluation

Funders developed a shared strategy with expert researchers at the University of Bedfordshire, led by Professor Jenny Pearce.⁴ The strategy comprises three work strands:

- Development of a Hub and Spoke model of specialist service provision.
- Promotion of the meaningful involvement of children and young people in their own care, and in service delivery and development.
- Creation of a knowledge hub to share knowledge about child sexual exploitation (CSE) and the evidence base for good practice.

Decision-making

Potential projects were collectively identified by CSEFA, in line with the agreed strategy. The projects were invited to apply to specific funders individually, with funders continuing to use their own application, decision-making and monitoring processes. Funders were aligned in *purpose*, but they were independent in terms of *process*.

Open membership

CSEFA operated an open membership policy, enabling new members to join in line with their own charitable objects and grants policies. Members sign a Memorandum of Understanding, outlining the collaboration parameters. Other funders are welcome to join meetings and papers are circulated via an online platform⁵.

Lean administration

A core group of funders has led CSEFA for the majority of the Alliance's lifetime. The wider membership met every two months in the first phase – reduced to twice a year once all grants had been awarded – to review progress and plan ahead. Paperwork was kept to a minimum and there is no paid secretariat; responsibility for chairing, minuting and organising meetings was shared by the core group and has rotated according to capacity. While this has not been without its challenges, it has not significantly hindered CSEFA's operations. The core group was disbanded in April 2016 following staff changes; however, one former core group member was funded to chair further meetings.

Policy

As CSEFA's work has progressed, so too has recognition of the skills and time needed to develop relevant and vital policy and advocacy work. CSEFA has therefore also funded a policy position within the University of Bedfordshire, to enable key analysis and messages to be synthesised and shared with different audiences.⁶

2. Benefits

Amount and reach of grants awarded

Thirty-seven grants totalling £7.3m were made to support 15 individual Hub and Spoke developments (voluntary sector projects in the field of child sexual exploitation) across England. As a result, these services expanded their geographical coverage into 35 new local authority areas including Sussex and North Yorkshire, areas that previously had limited or no services available. In the majority of cases, funding terms are for three years – a feature welcomed by grantees.

Ten dedicated hub managers were employed over the period of the evaluation, and a total of 53 new spoke workers were employed (49 at full-time equivalent). During the period of the evaluation 783⁷ new cases were opened. These were children and young people who would not otherwise have had access to a specialist service. As some services are still underway, these figures will increase. Most spoke workers had a caseload of between 10 and 12 children and young people at any one time, and worked with around 20 per year. Therefore, it is estimated that the spoke workers are undertaking casework with approximately 1,060 children and young people per year of the project.⁸

Speed of response

As funding was aligned rather than pooled, CSEFA was able to move quickly, which was important in terms of seizing the moment on a topical issue. Funders being able to retain their own grant-making processes may also have supported faster decision-making.

In-depth evaluation

Working separately, funders would not have been able to fund such an expert and extensive evaluation. The evaluation fieldwork provided valuable real-time insight into how the projects were operating on the ground:

*'Having the evaluation running alongside and their [University of Bedfordshire's] active participation ... a realist evaluation looking at process ... gave us confidence that we have a handle on how things were going.'*⁹

The evaluation provides a robust evidence base for the projects to use when making a case for funding, as well as information and guidance for policy makers and commissioners. Funders have also had stronger confidence in the decisions they make in this complex (and, for some, unfamiliar) field because these decisions are underpinned by an expert-led strategy and evaluation. One funder commented that there was a need to continually remind themselves (and explain to any new members) what a realist evaluation does and does not involve.

The Evaluation has also provided a basis for conversations about how difficult and unhelpful it is to try to track outcomes for young people. Rather, long-term studies like this get the right people and ask the right questions relevant to learning about how to scale up and roll out voluntary and community services, and how they work with the statutory services. This learning is relevant to child sexual exploitation and also to other fields.

Young people's participation

Some funders also supported work around young people's participation. This included a literature review and focus groups with young people in different Hub

and Spoke projects, asking them about their experiences of child sexual exploitation services. Working with their Young Researchers' Advisory Panel, researchers at the University of Bedfordshire have synthesised the messages into 10 principles for working with young people affected by child sexual exploitation. This work was highly valued by funders because *'the production of those messages is quite powerful.'* This has provided valuable learning for funders on the problem of setting outcomes, the importance of relationships, and how difficult it is for young people to participate in a non-tokenistic way.

Shared learning (for funders)

Funders reported strengthened peer networks and relationships, and improved understanding of what other funders do and how they work, as well as insight into how to fund work related to child sexual exploitation.

Working with the University of Bedfordshire has ensured that funding decisions have been based on evidence about the needs of children and young people and that funders are well-informed about voluntary-sector work around child sexual exploitation.

'I am confident that bringing funders together to think about how they are funding a particular issue is really productive a) for the learning they can give themselves and b) for the time spent with researchers. It's very valuable as a coherent way for planning funding and in terms of rationalising resources.'

Shared grant-making processes

Some progress was made around shared grant-making processes, for example shared forms and joining up on visits. Information from field visits has allowed funders to support projects more effectively and share learning; troubleshooting between funders has enabled better support to grantees more broadly: *'The sharing and benefiting from technical skills and knowledge and an understanding of challenges facing the sector have been invaluable.'*

Shared learning (for grantees)

The University of Bedfordshire has facilitated an annual learning event between all of the projects funded as part of the collaboration - something that would be unlikely to happen with individual grants. Grantees have benefited from introductions to other funders who have already made the decision to make aligned grants around this issue as well as introductions to other practitioners.

Diversity of funders

CSEFA has attracted a large and diverse group of funders (size, type, geography, focus); both scale and diversity of funding priorities are thought to be critical to implementing the strategy.¹⁰ The loose structure has enabled CSEFA to respond to the differing constraints/needs of its members, and the amount of time commitment required of members has been small. Some funders also thought being part of CSEFA presented an opportunity to build relationships with individual grant-making colleagues from other organisations who they might not otherwise work alongside.

3. Challenges

Having multiple stakeholders is always a challenge and this played out in a

number of ways.

Grantee experience – ‘Living with a faulty system’

Grantees described the familiar experience of having multiple funders with different application and reporting processes and timelines. While they did not necessarily want CSEFA to divert resources into addressing this problem, they did suggest that small organisations needed extra support and flexibility. There have been some examples of funders agreeing to share processes, but such progress has been limited: *‘It takes time to trust each other’s systems.’* There tended to be different views on whether more could have been done: *‘... an aligned fund means that we should ask for the same information from grantee’*, rather than duplicating and creating additional burdens.

Diverse experience and expectations

Arriving at a shared understanding of what is an appropriate policy, advocacy and communications role for independent funders in a fast-moving context, was unlikely to be straightforward, particularly for those with a public facing-role and public accountability. In response to this challenge, the funders who had policy and advocacy experience took the lead and, as described above, a policy position was created. Whilst having expert involvement was important, there was reportedly some misalignment of expectations around academic findings and *‘softer findings’*. Some members of the Alliance felt that researchers should have been given more of a steer about what findings were important to the sector.

Establishing and sustaining structures

In many ways, having a loose structure has benefited CSEFA’s work, though it has relied on a core group to drive the work forward. Establishing where tighter structures were necessary has been a challenge.

In April 2016 the core group disbanded due to staff changes. One former member of the core group was funded to continue to chair the CSEFA meetings. Interviewees tended to agree that losing the core group impacted on the coherence and energy of CSEFA meetings.

CSEFA was designed to be lean in its operations; however, some interviewees suggested that they would have benefited from a staff member who could take responsibility for administration and that this would have led to more cohesion and engagement. People’s views diverged on meeting format and frequency.

It has been beneficial to have people coming in and out of CSEFA, bringing in new resources and energy. However, one of the challenges has been the need to balance this with consistency around messaging, learning and dissemination. The number of newcomers has in reality been relatively limited; this may have been because all the relevant people in the sector were already involved.

Grant management and reporting with multiple stakeholders

As grants and reporting progressed, some funders commented on the complexity of managing their grants with multiple parties involved. Some funders reported that getting input into the dissemination strategy was a particular challenge, as well as planning for longevity and sustainability (although this was always the responsibility of individual funders). Perhaps more focused subgroups within the Alliance would have helped, or subgroups working closely with some services on particular issues.

'One of my grants has been messy to manage and I think services may have suffered having to produce applications and report to several funders. I've heard other funders say that these grants have been messy to manage. It's hard getting people to feed into things i.e. dissemination strategy or otherwise. Perhaps more focused subgroups would have helped with this issue.'

There were also suggestions that perhaps future meetings could involve more informal discussion and opportunities for understanding the learning from the projects.

Making the most of outside expertise

CSEFA has sometimes invited outside experts to share their knowledge and expertise at meetings. Funders have found this useful, although some felt that it could have happened more often, perhaps making the involvement of outside expertise a standard item on meeting agendas. CSEFA may also have missed an opportunity to make better use of grantee knowledge: *'... meaningful collaboration is about learning, bringing in delivery organisations to share experiences with funders at every meeting'*.

Context and flexibility

In the four years since CSEFA's inception, the context of this work has changed dramatically, driven largely by the high-profile media cases of child sexual exploitation. Many statutory authorities are investing more in this area. For CSEFA, while this is most welcome, it also highlights the need to continually reflect upon and review the original strategy, relevance of the work and ways forward: *'The vision and focus of work has not changed when the context has ... If we are going to learn, we have to reflect critically.'*

Beyond the collaboration/creating a shift across the sector

Being part of the network has provided a welcome opportunity for funders to network, connect, share practice and begin to refine their processes. People's views diverged on whether funders have made the most of this opportunity and whether the learning has been shared sufficiently beyond CSEFA. It's possible that not enough of a shift was made to learning and dissemination once the grants had been allocated. However, CSEFA has achieved what it set out to do: *'get money out the door'* and expand child sexual exploitation services into areas where previously there was no provision.

Youth voice

The work strand on young people's participation was highly valued by funders we spoke to. Opinions on appropriate levels of youth participation diverge, and some have suggested that the youth voice should have been more visible. However, young people's participation is not straightforward. Based on past experience, child sexual exploitation professionals have expressed concern that sexual exploitation should not become part of young people's identities, making it difficult to engage them in planning service provision. There was conversations about this early on in CSEFA which all funders may not have been aware of. This links to the need to balance new members to the Alliance with consistent messaging around decision-making and learning to date.

Getting the level of youth voice right is a challenge, in particular making sure young people are able to influence programmes without doing them further harm. Some funders think the youth voice is absent from CSEFA, but according to the University of Bedfordshire evaluation, projects allow young people more choice

than they would get if dealing with statutory services. Revisiting this issue – and what level of participation is appropriate – more frequently may have helped.

4. Conditions for successful collaboration

Respect

Interviewees agreed that the culture of CSEFA is respectful, trusting and calm, with a marked absence of egotism. Everyone is welcome and can find a place at the table and a role within the group. Most interviewees also agreed that a *'habit of positive communication'* makes it easy to discuss difficult issues when they arise.

Focus

CSEFA has, from the outset, had a shared plan – in the form of a strategy – which has enabled them to align their funding, specify boundaries and set priorities. Members underline that CSEFA is only as good as its strategy and acknowledge that maintaining focus on that strategy is critical to its success.¹¹

Leadership

All those involved in CSEFA were conscious that even a successful collaboration needs constant attention (*'collaboration management'*) as well as champions with the vision to drive it forward. CSEFA has been chaired skilfully in ways that were described as flexible, accommodating and pragmatic. Meetings have been purposeful and well attended.

Diverse voices

Including diverse voices in the Alliance, whether that be new members, services or other experts, was felt to be important for learning and maintaining energy and interest. During the early stages of the Alliance's work, most members were happy to fall in with the guidance of the core group and the university. During the latter stages (after all grants had been made) some felt they would have liked the chance to question and debate the approach being taken. With the considerable benefit of hindsight, they thought it would have helped to consciously pause after all grants had been made and review what members wanted to get from membership going forward.

Members valued the work undertaken on youth voice and some would like to see this developed further.

Expectations

Expectations around the purpose and role of CSEFA have shifted over time, in particular the desire to see things become more systematised. This requires continuous reflection and exploration of new ways to collaborate.

Infrastructure

Those involved in CSEFA recognised the value of having a core group to facilitate the process (in a broad sense – not just the meetings) and also connect people and ideas and developments. The organisation of the Alliance was purposefully light touch, but some members suggested further admin support may have been beneficial.

5. Closing remarks

By bringing together funders' knowledge, reach, resources and time, more has been achieved than would have been the case had the funders worked individually. The funders drew confidence from the strategy created by the University of Bedfordshire, and from the real-time learning generated by the evaluation.

The Alliance has achieved what it set out to do. This was to adopt and test the 'Hub and Spoke' model as a vehicle for rapid expansion, increased coverage and improved capacity in the specialist support available to children in a series of new locations across England, and improve the coordination, delivery and practice of local services responding to child sexual exploitation.

In this sense, CSEFA has been a highly successful collaboration. It has evolved in terms of membership, structure and activities. Given the number of stakeholders involved, there are inevitably some different perspectives on issues such as:

- Whether more could have been done to share processes (future work might look at the barriers or where this has worked successfully before).
- A greater shift in focus from grant-making to learning after all the grants had been made might have helped with sector-wide learning and dissemination (i.e. bringing in outside expertise including those of funded partners).
- Individual funders will behave differently in the future, forming new funding alliances or supporting new models like the Hub and Spoke.

What next...?

- The funding collaboration is now in its final stage and met for last time in January 2018.
- The University of Bedfordshire published the evaluation of the work funded by CSEFA in November 2017 alongside policy and practical resources building on the experience.¹² Over the next couple of years there will be knowledge sharing and evaluation dissemination events.
- For more information about the University of Bedfordshire Evaluation please contact: Julie Harris Julie.Harris@beds.ac.uk

Appendix A: Methods

Phase/report	Methods
Report on the scoping phase, 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with 10 trusts/foundations that had signed an Memorandum of Understanding to be part of CSEFA • Interviews with Chair of Expert Reference Group and Principal Investigator at the University of Bedfordshire • Review of documents
Views of grantees 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with seven early grantees
Feedback report to funders, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with 13 CSEFA members • Interviews with Chair of Expert Reference Group and Principal Investigator at the University of Bedfordshire • Review of documents
Interim report: Funder Collaboration: Is it worth it? 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reanalysis of data collected to date and document review
Final report, 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final interviews and/or survey of CSEFA members (seven responses) and Principal Investigator at the University of Bedfordshire

Appendix B: Funders involved in CSEFA

Barrow Cadbury Trust
 BBC Children in Need
 Big Lottery Fund
 Blagrave Trust
 Bromley Trust
 City Bridge Trust
 Comic Relief
 Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
 The Henry Smith Charity
 Lankelly Chase Foundation
 Northern Rock Foundation
 Samworth Foundation
 Sainsburys Family Charitable Trusts
 Trust for London

Appendix C: Contributors

List of contributors (NB most people contributed more than once)

Sue Berelowitz - Children's Commissioner; Maggie Blyth - Maggie Blyth Associates; Katherine Brown - The Henry Smith Charity; Jan Carruthers - BBC Children in Need; Teresa Elwes - The Bromley Trust; Jenny Field - City Bridge Trust; Amelia Fitzalan Howard - The Henry Smith Charity; Sharon Jones - Big Lottery Fund; Laura Lines - Esmée Fairbairn Foundation; Felicity Mallam - Samworth Foundation; Jenny Pearce - University of Bedfordshire; Debbie Pippard - Barrow Cadbury Trust; Max Rutherford - Barrow Cadbury Trust; Cathy Stancer - Lankelly Chase Foundation; Rachael Takens-Milne - Trust for London; Jo Temple - Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts; Nicola Thurban - Big Lottery Fund; Debbie Walmsley - Comic Relief; Cullagh Warnock - Northern Rock Foundation; Jo Wells - Blagrave Trust.

We also interviewed seven grantees. Their views have been fully anonymised.

¹ The funding was available 2013-18 and the programme used a phased approach. Eight services are still delivering the work.

² With the exception of the original Hub and Spoke service which was established prior to the funding programme and so received continuation funding for a period of one year from Funders' Alliance (2013-2014).

³ <https://www.alexiproject.org.uk/>

⁴ The strategy '*Child Sexual Exploitation: Funding for the Future, University of Bedfordshire*' supported by the CSEFA was developed by Professor Jenny Pearce at the University of Bedfordshire. She and her colleagues continue to advise CSEFA. The implementation of CSEFA's strategy started in September 2013. It is overseen by an Expert Reference Group, chaired by the Deputy Children's Commissioner, Sue Berelowitz.

⁵ CSEFA uses an online platform provided by Ariadne, which is a European peer-to-peer network of more than 400 funders and philanthropists who support social change and human rights.

⁶ Julie Harris and Debi Roker, with Lucie Shuker, Isabelle Brodie, Kate D'Arcy, Sukhwant Dhaliwal, Jenny Pearce (2017) *Evaluation of the Alexi Project 'Hub and Spoke' programme of CSE service development Key Messages*, Institute of Applied Social Research: University of Bedfordshire, <https://www.alexiproject.org.uk/assets/documents/Key-messages-Alexi-Project-Evaluation.pdf>

⁷ This figure is an underestimate of the actual number of young people worked with as some services provided incomplete data.

⁸ Julie Harris and Debi Roker, with Lucie Shuker, Isabelle Brodie, Kate D'Arcy, Sukhwant Dhaliwal, Jenny Pearce (November 2017) *Evaluation of the Alexi Project 'Hub and Spoke' programme of child sexual exploitation service development – Final Report*, Institute of Applied Social Research, University of Bedfordshire, <https://www.alexiproject.org.uk/assets/documents/Final-Report-Alexi-Project-evaluation.pdf>

⁹ 'The evaluation adopted a realist approach. This focuses not just on whether programmes or interventions work, but on how or why they might do so (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). It takes a theory-driven approach to evaluation rather than concentrating on particular types of evidence or focusing on 'before' and 'after' type data. It starts from the principle that interventions in themselves do not either 'work' or 'not work' – rather it is the people involved in them and the skills, attitudes, knowledge and approach they bring, together with the influence of context and resources, that determine the outcomes generated.' See Julie Harris and Debi Roker, with Lucie Shuker, Isabelle Brodie, Kate D'Arcy, Sukhwant Dhaliwal, Jenny Pearce (November 2017) *Evaluation of the Alexi Project 'Hub and Spoke' programme of child sexual exploitation service development: Final Report*, Institute of Applied Social Research, University of Bedfordshire, <https://www.alexiproject.org.uk/assets/documents/Final-Report-Alexi-Project-evaluation.pdf>

¹⁰ This echoes one of the findings of the review of the Corston Independent Funders' Coalition which identified the importance of having '*a diverse group of funders and a critical mass with sufficient funds to make things happen*', Kaufmann, J. (2011) *Funders in Collaboration: A review of the Corston Independent Funders' Coalition (CIFC)*, London: CASS Business School

¹¹ Maintaining vision is a common challenge for collaborative working. See, for example, IVAR (2011) *Thinking about collaboration*, London: IVAR

¹² Julie Harris and Debi Roker, with Lucie Shuker, Isabelle Brodie, Kate D'Arcy, Sukhwant Dhaliwal, Jenny Pearce (November 2017) *Evaluation of the Alexi Project 'Hub and Spoke' programme of CSE service development: Final Report*, Institute of Applied Social Research, University of Bedfordshire, <https://www.alexiproject.org.uk/assets/documents/Final-Report-Alexi-Project-evaluation.pdf>