



Securing Change

a new project to support mothers leaving our residential family assessment service without their child

Summary

For many years we have been troubled by the lack of support for mothers leaving our residential family assessment service without their child. Without assistance, many of these mothers quickly become pregnant again and lose their next baby to care proceedings. We wish to pilot a new programme 'Securing Change' to help mothers exit the cycle. We want to demonstrate to the local authorities who commission our residential family assessment service that Securing Change is an effective use of resources, leading them to invest in this service where necessary in future.

Recurrent care proceedings

Remarkably, skilled staff at our [residential houses](#) are often able to help parents to change their behaviour even during the very limited period of the assessment. In 2015-16, two thirds of the 67 families we worked with in residence returned home with their children. This included 30 families from whom a total of 61 children had previously been removed.

Nevertheless, each year between a third and half of mothers from our residential parenting services leave without their child because their problems are so entrenched that they are unable or not ready to make the changes necessary.

There is currently no statutory support for these mothers. No practical help. No counselling. Inevitably, some quickly become pregnant again in an attempt to replace the lost child. The result is that a new baby may soon be taken into care.

The problem of recurrent care proceedings has come to national attention and is highlighted by [the work of Dr Karen Broadhurst](#). We are monitoring and learning from published evidence and national and local and projects.

What makes Securing Change different?

- We have established trust with the mother before Securing Change
- The service begins as soon as the mother leaves our residential service
- Securing Change is non-coercive

We believe in the capacity of people to make changes in their lives. These mothers have already experienced many coercive relationships and will not require them to use Long Acting Reversible Contraception to access Securing Change.

How it works

The pilot is a three-year programme with dedicated staff providing holistic and tailored one to one support in Lambeth and adjacent local authorities for mothers who leave our residential service without their child. This support will be complemented by a weekly facilitated peer support group.

Securing Change is a development of our family assessment and outreach services and based on learning from [DiVa](#). We will link with appropriate family, agency and community groups. Support will be tailored to the each mother's needs and she will be involved in structuring her support. Securing Change is designed to promote ownership and to be flexible within certain parameters. We will promote activities (individual and group) can be taken forward independently of St Michael's; eg using free local parks rather than special trips; linking to existing local facilities and support.

Why we believe Securing Change may be successful

Securing Change centres on the nature of the relationship we establish with families in our houses. We are honest with parents, communicating clearly what is going well and where improvement is needed.

"You are the only professionals that have ever worked with me that have done what they said they would do." (Parent)

Building on this promising foundation is the knowledge we have about the family background and individual circumstances of these mothers. During residency, staff may have uncovered a history of previously unknown childhood abuse, undiagnosed mental health issues, learning needs and hitherto undisclosed domestic violence. These disclosures come about only because of the way we work with parents.

Research & Evaluation Partner Middlesex Centre for Abuse & Trauma Studies CATS

In 2015 CATS devised a semi structured questionnaire enabling practitioners to discuss with parents their experience when a previous child had been removed. Parents told us:

Of social stigma and guilt

"I lied, I was so ashamed, I told people that my kids lived with their dad."

Of lack of support

"After removal there was nothing whatsoever."

What support would have helped them to change

“someone who had been in the same situation as me, a group would have been good for support...Something needs to be in place as I did go on to have another child. .. someone other than social services as I was so angry ... I would not have worked with them.”

Funding the project

We have secured some funding for this project from a trust and have now been invited to approach several others. At the same time, we are asking our supporters to contribute £50,000 towards the cost of this project.

For more information, please contact [Hillary](#).

One family left St Michael’s residency with their child last year having had nine previous children removed.

We want to offer support to those mothers leaving without their child so that they can make changes to their lives and any future children are safe and content.

Can you help?

Please visit virginmoneygiving.com/fund/securing-change