

**An independent evaluation of 'Securing Change' project at St Michael's Fellowship**

**Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies, Middlesex University**

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**Executive Summary**

***Background***

The problem of repeat removals of children by social services from the same mothers has affected an estimated 16% of mothers in the care system. A disproportionate amount of resources are required for such families. Many have drug or alcohol problems, experience domestic violence and have poor mental health, all of which can be exacerbated by the child removal. Breaking the cycle of such repeated child removals would help the mothers, the children and the social care system. Securing Change is a project intervention to address such issues. This report is an evaluation of the service.

***The Securing Change Service***

The service was in place from 2018 until currently and was evaluated up until December 2021. Its focus was in providing support to parents leaving assessment centres following court care proceedings, to help them manage in the community and to reduce likelihood of future repeat proceedings or hurried pregnancy. It went through one key change early in its development to include a wider range of parents leaving assessment centres: not only those with children removed but also those who kept their children. Many of these may also have had children removed in the past or a history of repeated care proceedings and had similar vulnerabilities to those losing their child. The service comprised a dedicated project officer and was delivered by St Michael's Fellowship who provided supporting liaison staff, management and data collection. The aim of the service was to support parents in the community on leaving residential assessment centres linked to care proceedings. The support offered was emotional support to develop confidence; practical support with housing and finance; and parenting support and/or grief therapy. Additional help with accessing local authority services and for those with learning disability also occurred.

***The evaluation***

The evaluation took place between October 2021- March 2022 by the Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies, Middlesex University. The evaluation comprised scrutiny of service implementation and outcomes. It involved reading Securing Change reports, exit/progress questionnaires given by the service (23), interviews with parents (5 and one completed a questionnaire) and workers (3), questionnaires for workers (3) and a focus group (2) with practitioners. Its focus was on 23 of the 30 parents who had been through the service, this number following the change in inclusion remit. Outcome variables included the key ending of repeat care proceedings and new pregnancy supported by seven different outcomes linked to aims above. Three case studies were also produced.

## **Findings**

**Implementation:** The information provided showed successful implementation of the service even under the difficult conditions of the Covid 19 pandemic. Parents were willing to access the service, including those with children removed. Given high levels of service mistrust typically involved in these families this is attributed to key positive characteristics of the Project Officer engaged and her personal interaction with them. The parents were largely referred from St Michael's own assessment centres, with one house in particular being responsible for most. Average length of engagement in the service was around 12 months. To date one worker was able to sustain the case load required. The data sheet provided about parents in the service was useful, but needs more constant update and attention to missing information.

**Outcomes:** Questionnaires showed improvement in a range of the domains examined – the highest being for improved coping and support with health/ mental health and domestic violence. Parents voiced positive impact of the service and particular praise for the project worker. This was common to parents with children removed and those who kept their children. Practitioners questioned were also very positive about the service.

In terms of repeated care proceedings or pregnancy, most avoided this in the period after closure. There were two pregnancies – one immediately prior to the Securing Change help and kept secret to a mother with learning difficulties; the other was after the service once some child arrangements had fallen through and the mother was again drinking. This reported by a local authority social worker. There was also a parent who was later reunited with her children as a consequence of Securing Change support and coping well.

## **Recommendations**

### **Service expansion:**

The project worker selected proved to be an invaluable resource for Securing Change. However, to ensure sustainability and stability of service as well as its expansion ideally more workers should be involved. At present the service is dependent upon St Michaels worker support. One aspect to consider is the different working required for parents with a child removed and those who retain their children. These could be more clearly demarcated by worker and ways of working. Another issue is that of parents with learning disability and the additional specialist work needed. The current caseload of 14-16 mothers and fathers was considered the current maximum achievable working with the tailored, open-ended approach to meet the needs of the parents. Further referrals from St Michael's houses as well as more widely would require an expansion of this valuable service.

### **Further follow-up data**

In order to examine the longer-term impacts of Securing Change, further follow-up data after leaving the service would be valuable. Funding to allow contacts in the year following leaving the service, and to keep an updated database of parents experience would be a valuable asset. (See also resourcing of current data listed below).

### **Clarification of service boundaries & identity**

It would be useful to identify more clearly the boundaries between Securing Change, St Michaels residential service and social work input. In addition, the messages disseminated about Securing Change service and success may benefit from the identification of a clearer theoretical approach. This may tie together aspects of the eclectic, relational and personally-tailored approach. This might include Attachment theory in the importance of attuned parenting and valuing close relationships, as well as the therapeutic model focussing on loss and grief work involved in losing a child.

### ***In-service procedures improvement***

- The **database** on clients held by Securing Change needs to be updated more regularly so up-to-date information can easily be retrieved when needed. Also, the of checklists approach/ongoing monitoring and categorisation of work undertaken using the categories identified would help with continued self-monitoring.
- Parents **Information Leaflet** to be given out by Crawford House and Jigsaw staff to help inform parents should be reinstated.
- **Use of standardised assessments** (whether questionnaire or interview) would establish markers of change in parents more definitively. St Michael's utilise the Attachment Style Interview and Parenting Role Interview for attachment and parenting respectively – these assessments could potentially be used to inform the Securing Change service and on occasion repeated to look for sustained improvement in both relationships and parenting care. Alternatively, questionnaires could be used for this. This may require further funding but could be justified in terms of establishing the mechanisms by which longer term change for parents occurs.
- **Ongoing analysis of outcome data continued:** Keeping on top of this would provide strong evidence regarding the benefits of Securing Change and it would be always readily available for reports and funding bids as required. This work to input this data, analyse questionnaires and help undertake ongoing evaluation is valuable and resources should be provided for it.

### **Conclusion**

Our overall conclusion is that Securing Change has done very valuable work in supporting parents who have undergone care proceedings and have had children recently or previously removed. The flexible and personalised care provided has supported them with their loss or their ongoing parenting and other needs. It clearly filled a gap in services and worked with very deprived client group. We would like to see it continue and grow.

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## 1. Introduction

St Michael's Fellowship is a charity working with disadvantaged families in London and the South-East to improve their lives and futures and to secure the best possible future for their children. They look to break intergenerational cycles of poverty and underachievement and keep families together where this is in the best interests of the child. They currently have three services to help families change their lives: Family assessments; Support in residency and the community; a Family contact service and outreach service for young parents in a South London borough to build parenting skills and to support them into education, employment and training. This outreach work has enabled St Michael's to build a very strong network of local partner agencies, organisations and community groups in social and healthcare, education and employment. The Securing Change service was launched by St Michael's in August 2018 seeking to recruit parents who had recently had a child permanently removed from their care by social services with the aim to break the cycle of child removal by focusing on the support needs of these parents so that they are able to build an independent future. The project was funded for three years by KPMG Foundation, Philip King Charitable Trust, Pilgrim Trust, and the Big Lottery Fund.

*"This programme exists to embed positive change and for practical and emotional support. We know that parents often need support after leaving residential centres. We provide a support network that can help make a difference. We want to help parents continue with the changes they started during their stay with us to help secure change... St Michael's offers support to parents who have stayed at our residential family assessment centres regardless of their present situation. We offer Practical support (We help with finding housing, helping with benefits and access to health services), Emotional support (We help parents deal with their feelings after the assessment), Going forward (We help guide and support new learning, providing access to resources for returning to the community)."*  
[Securing Change | St Michael's Fellowship \(stmichaelsfellowship.org.uk\)](https://stmichaelsfellowship.org.uk)

A year into the service (July 2019) St Michael's adapted the Securing Change Model to include all families leaving the residential assessment, regardless of the outcome of the assessment thus including those who kept care of their children. This is because of an observed lack of support in the community for these families many of who had prior child removals. This evaluation therefore seeks to examine outcomes for this wider range of parents who went through the service.

### 1.1 Policy and research background

The problem of repeat removals of children by social services from the same mothers has been highlighted in recent years. Broadhurst et al (2015)<sup>1</sup> demonstrated the scale of the problem in the UK, showing that over a seven-year period (2007-13) 7,193 birth mothers were found to be linked to recurrent care proceedings); these mothers constituted 15.5%, and their children 25% (22,790), of all cases. These figures indicate that a disproportionate amount of resources are devoted to these cases, and that a focus on their issues may substantially reduce overall costs and caseloads (McCracken et al, 2017)<sup>2</sup>. Although still relatively sparse, previous research strongly suggests that mothers (the focus of the vast majority of studies) who have multiple children removed tend to have complex personal histories and lives that are marred by problems such as alcohol/substance abuse, poor mental health, learning difficulties, and/or domestic/intimate partner violence (Marsh,

<sup>1</sup> Broadhurst, K., Alrouh, B., Yeend, E., Harwin, J., Shaw, M., Pilling, M., ... & Kershaw, S. (2015). Connecting events in time to identify a hidden population: Birth mothers and their children in recurrent care proceedings in England. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 45(8), 2241-2260.

<sup>2</sup> McCracken, K., Priest, S., FitzSimons, A., Bracewell, K., Torchia, K., Parry, W., & Stanley, N. (2017). Evaluation of Pause, July 2017.

Robinson & Shawe, 2014)<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, involuntary child removal tends to exacerbate pre-existing problems (e.g. increase symptom intensity), produce complex grief reactions, lower self-esteem, damage identity, reduce social support, and induce feelings of powerlessness and distrust of social services processes and professionals. Given little support provided after child removal, these problems remain unaddressed (Schofield et al 2011)<sup>4</sup>. These can lead to a repeat removal of children (Neil, 2017).<sup>5</sup>

The Securing Change service was implemented initially to help mothers with a child removed from care, including those from their own residential assessment services in London. This was then adapted to offer the service to all parents, including fathers, and families that were able to keep their children. This was in response to the recognition that fathers also experience the removal of a child as traumatic and goes some way rebalance the focus on mothering that is present in child welfare settings, even when the father is active and involved with their family (e.g. Dominelli, Strega, Walmsley, Callahan, & Brown, 2011)<sup>6</sup>. The opening up of the service to all families, not just those who experienced the removal of their child, underpins the need that all families have for ongoing support after the assessment for issues of child protection. At-risk parents experience high levels of stress, and report an ongoing need for help combined with a lack of adequate services, even if they keep their children (Bolen, McWey, & Schlee, 2008)<sup>7</sup>. Crucially, this includes parents with learning needs. Parents with intellectual disabilities are over-represented in the care and protection system and are therefore at heightened risk of losing their child. It is estimated that between 30-40% of the children of parents with intellectual disability are removed from their parents' care and placed in protective custody, in foster care, or in a residential setting (Mayes & Llewellyn, 2009)<sup>8</sup>.

## **1.2 Evaluation team: Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies Team (CATs),**

### **Middlesex University**

CATS is a centre for research, practice and training in the domains of lifespan development, victimisation, wellbeing and mental health. Its focus is on both stress experience and resilience. CATS undertakes research, both academic and applied, ([catsresearch.org.uk](http://catsresearch.org.uk)) and has particular involvement with child abuse issues and services providing knowledge exchange and learning as well as service evaluations for child and family services ([lifespantraining.org.uk](http://lifespantraining.org.uk)). Members of the team worked on an evaluation of parents in St Michaels assessment centres in order to form recommendations for the first stage of planning for the Secure Change grant application (Barry & Lucas, 2018)<sup>9</sup>. On the basis of evaluation of parents in the service who had a child removed, recommendations were made for a new service that was (a) individualised (b) service-user led and (c) which modelled trustworthy relations. It was recommended also that the service attend to clients

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<sup>3</sup> Marsh, W., Robinson, A., Gallagher, A., & Shawe, J. (2014). Removing babies from mothers at birth: Midwives' experiences. *British Journal of Midwifery*, 22(9), 620-624.

<sup>4</sup> Schofield et al 2010 Schofield, G., Moldestad, B., Höjer, I., Ward, E., Skilbred, D., Young, J., & Havik, T. (2011). Managing loss and a threatened identity: Experiences of parents of children growing up in foster care, the perspectives of their social workers and implications for practice. *British journal of social work*, 41(1), 74-92.

<sup>5</sup> Neil, E. (2004). *Supporting the birth relatives of adopted children: a review of relevant literature*. Researching Adoption Support Project, University of East Anglia.

<sup>6</sup> Walmsley, C., Brown, L., Callahan, M., Dominelli, L., & Strega, S. (2011). Engaging with fathers in child welfare. *Connecting research, policy, and practice: Child welfare*, 385-397.

<sup>7</sup> Bolen, M. G., McWey, L. M., & Schlee, B. M. (2008). Are at-risk parents getting what they need? Perspectives of parents involved with child protective services. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 36(4), 341-354.

<sup>8</sup> Mayes, R., & Llewellyn, G. (2012). Mothering differently: narratives of mothers with intellectual disability whose children have been compulsorily removed. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*, 37(2), 121-130.

<sup>9</sup> Barry & Lucas (2018) Experiences and support needs of mothers who have had a child removed into care. Final Report for St Michaels Foundation, Centre for Abuse & Trauma Studies, Middlesex University.



understanding the reasons for the child's removal and coming to terms with the loss and grief; managing emotions and building self-esteem; creating goals for change and education (e.g. basic care and child development). Suggestions for shaping the service included counselling, informal key work, signposting to services, peer support group, community visits and creating a safe space (Richard & Lucas, 2018) (See Appendix 2 for abstract). Members of the team had also delivered training for over forty St Michael's staff the evidence based measures of the Attachment Style Interview and the Parenting Role Interview in the five years prior to this evaluation.

### **1.3 Evaluation Aims**

The research was commissioned by St Michael's (June 2021) to evaluate both the implementation and impact/outcomes of the Securing Change service as evidenced by interviews, focus groups and questionnaire data involving clients, staff and local authority Social Workers. Also to make recommendations about the service going forward.

### **1.4 Evaluation Method**

A range of quantitative and qualitative measures were used in this evaluation in a mixed-method design to evaluate service implementation and outcomes and to examine the service model utilised.

- Quantitative measures involved analysis of Securing Change data spreadsheet, data about clients using the service, and referral pathways, provided by St. Michael's.
- Qualitative measures included focus group interviews with project staff, one-to-one semi-structured interviews with parents, an interview with St Michael's CEO and questionnaires to Social Workers. (Due to Covid19 restrictions the interviews and focus group were held by phone and zoom).

The analysis comprised sections on the model, the approach utilised by Securing change and the outcomes. These are illustrated by three case studies (see Appendix 1).

To aid with clarity and ease of reading the interview quotes, the practitioner responses and service information are shown in green boxes, parent interviews in yellow boxes and local authority Social Worker questionnaire comments presented in blue boxes.

## **2. Process**

### **2.1 Set Up**

On starting the project, the evaluation interview and focus group schedules were designed and Middlesex University Ethical permission sought. Liaison with St Michael's workers was undertaken to enable the sharing of client data and previous Securing Change progress reports.

Ethical permission was granted by Middlesex University Psychology Ethics Committee. St Michael's workers were approached to distribute requests for parent client interview consent and service workers for focus group consent.

### **2.2 Quantitative evaluation**

The Securing Change three-year outcome data (2018-2021) was provided by the service in an Excel spreadsheet initially up to end May 2021, but then updated to August 2021, although data covering

the period up to December 2021 had been requested. The service completed missing data on request. The evaluators also scrutinised internal summary and process documents.

### 2.3 Qualitative evaluation

#### 2.3.1 Parent interviews

Between September and December 2021, the Securing Change Project Officer shared nine client parent's forenames and phone numbers to the evaluators for interview after consent received. In terms of participation, five of the nine finally agreed to the interviews. One had withdrawn consent to an interview but agreed to fill in a questionnaire with brief responses.

For the three not engaging (a single father and a mother and father couple) they didn't respond to texts, voicemails and emails over a four-month period of repeated contacts by the evaluation team and the Project Officer, so were not interviewed. 'Thank you' remuneration for those six parents interviewed were provided.

#### 2.3.2 Local authority Social Worker questionnaire

Initially 6 local authority Social Workers, were invited to share their views in a focus group. However, agreement was not established despite lengthy attempts and lack of response. Therefore, a different approach was planned with a brief questionnaire developed and sent out instead. These were sent out by St Michaels CEO. This established three responses.

#### 2.3.3 Securing Change practitioner focus group/ interviews

The Project Officer and two members of staff, a St Michael's home manager (K) and Community Manager (E) were invited to an online focus group. After lengthy attempts to find a suitable date due to practitioner pressure of work, this was finally undertaken in January 2022. Unfortunately, the project officer could not attend so was interviewed separately.

It was suggested in the focus group than a worker from Crawford House (D), who works with the Securing Change Project Officer regarding referrals, would be an additional useful person to interview for the evaluation and this was undertaken in January 2022. The Project Officer was interviewed in February 2022. She provided additional content for the report by summarising and describing the models and theories employed in her working approaches. She added details of the nature and breadth of her work to case studies written by the team. In January 2022, the St Michael's CEO was also interviewed by the team. This was at the point when much of the evaluation analysis was done so informed questions could be asked.

**Table 1 Data utilised**

Type of method	Persons involved
Excel data on clients using service (service provided)	Parents (23)
Exit/update questionnaire given by service	Parents (23)
Focus group by evaluators	Manager of Project Officer and Crawford house (2)
Interviews by evaluators	Parents (5) Project officer (1) CEO (1) Liaison officer Crawford House (1)
Questionnaires by evaluators	Social workers (3) Parent (1)

**Table 2 Characteristics of parents interviewed & case studies:**

Parent number (also case study *)	Characteristics	Child removed?
1 Father	Father in his 50s, daughter born 2019, previous child removed.	No
2 Mother *	Mother age 40 of a teenage son (removed) and the daughter (born 2019) the cause of referral. Homeless, alcohol and drug user.	No
3 Mother	In her early 30s, child born 2017, drug/alcohol abuse, prior child removed.	Yes
4 Father (partner of 3)	Severe learning needs.	Yes
5 Mother*	Mother of a 5 and 15-year-old (removed). Past trauma in childhood; DV victim	Yes, but were reunited later
<b>Questionnaire</b>		
6. Mother	Questionnaire response only	Pending court process
<b>Information from service</b>		
7.Mother*	She had learning needs, partner a gambling problem	Yes (but then repeat pregnancy before SC service)

### 3. Analysis of the Securing Change Model

#### 3.1 The Securing Change Service

The service comprises a dedicated full-time project officer, with some aid from St Michael's staff including liaison workers within the residential assessment centres from which most of the parents come, and input to a database of parents. The project officer was supervised by a St Michael's manager and its CEO. St Michaels Fellowship<sup>10</sup>, is the charity who run the residential assessment homes. Securing Change is funded on a limited time scale on the basis of project grant funding by a consortium including KPMG Foundation, Philip King Charitable Trust, Pilgrim Trust, and the Big Lottery Fund.

There were 30 parents in total involved in the three years of the service. Only 6 were in the service at the time of the modification of the inclusion criteria, the remainder (23) parents had been supported from July 2018 to August 2021 when most of the information available. These latter are the focus of the evaluation. Of these 23 parents using the service, 14 were female and 9 were male. There were 16 classified as White British, 2 were Asian, 3 were Black British, 1 was Black Caribbean and 1 mixed race. At the time of the evaluation (August 2021), half of the 23 cases were closed (range of 1-9 months in the service), the remaining 11 still open (4-36 months in the service with an average of 13 months).

<sup>10</sup> [www.stmichaelsfellowship.org.uk](http://www.stmichaelsfellowship.org.uk)

Of these parents, half kept their child, either under a supervision order or an interim care order at the end of the assessment period, and half had a child removed. One parent was reunited with children previously removed.

### 3. 2 Securing Change Referrals

The evaluation team ascertained the referral pathways into the service through the spreadsheet data held for 23 parents. The pathways to referral were determined through interview data.

Most referrals to the Securing Change project were internal from St Michaels. The majority (21) were from Crawford House (a St Michael's residential facility). A further referral was via St Michael's Jigsaw contact centre and another occurred from a parent contacting the website. **No referrals were found from the other two St Michael's houses** and it became clear that LA social workers did not refer directly to the Securing Change service.

St Michaels delivery action plan was to maintain regular contact with staff in their residential assessment houses, where they had Securing Change Leads, to be informed about progress of residents and to be alert to those suitable for intervention. This required completion of a referral form to result in post placement contact.

Suitable parents were introduced to the Securing Change Project through its officer and the service described to them whilst they were still at Crawford House, with the option of being contacted at any point. The service was signposted during the residential assessment but parents could wait sometime after leaving to make contact. Referral often followed a conversation followed up by email. It was emphasised that the relationship with the home lead was important for a referral to be made

*(Could you describe for me how referral from Crawford House to Securing Change works?) We don't use a form, it's more an (informal) chat over the phone. It is good there isn't an actual form and we talk as part of the same organisation. It's quite refreshing not to have yet another referral form, we do it via a chat, or via email. We don't have much contact with them when they have left, but AM is the in between person, she can feedback to us how the family is doing.*

Source: Interview Crawford House liaison worker

*The relationships between the house and the outreach and the outreach element of securing change those relationships, needs to be good as the parent is transitioning from the house back into the community. Those the communication that needs to be good.*

Source: Focus Group

*The project worker feels she can communicate well because with the residential home lead. That relationship is important and that the Project Officer feels that she can communicate easily and fluidly with, with the staff in the house.*

Source: Focus Group

*Before Covid around the time of the parent's first review meeting AM will come and meet with the family. So in the first few weeks we'll make verbal referral to AM, let her know how the assessment is going including a bit of background information and how are they've engaged she would then have a meeting with the whole family, introduce herself, so the family can find out what her role is within the organisation, and exchange contact details if the family is interested in continuing to work with her.*

Source: Interview with Crawford House liaison worker

The evidence shows that Crawford House and Securing Change have developed a relational, informal and face-to-face approach to introducing potential parents to the service and the project officer while they are in the first month of their assessment at Crawford House.

Initially a Securing Change leaflet describing the service, or information sheet was utilised but this was then abandoned.



*The first two Securing Change Project Officers, (Ellie and Emma) created lots of paperwork and referral forms and leaflets explaining what we did and leaflets in, you know, pictures for parents with learning disabilities and, you know, there was lots, lots of the initial work on the project was around that kind of thing. And the idea is to have initial-packs that every parent got and the securing change leaflet it was in there. And then the two initial workers left, and we had a temporary worker who covered for a few months in the interim, and she created a very simple like one-line leaflet. I don't really know what happened to the idea of the leaflet going into an induction pack.*

Source: Focus Group

### 3.2 Securing Change Project and Covid Impact

The evaluation also reflected a period of time during the period of the Covid pandemic March 2020 to December 2021. The Securing Change Project Officer continued to work with parents by phone and zoom and met with them when regulations allowed. So, the service continued with parent contact maintained. This is summarised below through the project officer evaluation and the internal progress report. It is believed that the pandemic affected the number being processed in the Securing Change service, but the level of service provision was maintained:

*I had four weeks off and then saw clients that wanted to face-to-face again as well as on online and on the phone. They were all happy to see me. And a lot of them, I must say were desperate to see somebody because it was like all professionals, had. That was it, cut them off. I was traveling each week after those first four weeks - And I had my PPE that the office had provided me with. For example - I was going every week to see a mum bringing packs of nappies, and sometimes bringing food from the food bank carrying food in my rucksack and nappies and stuff. I also took stair gates... I was doing that on a weekly basis. And I was the only professional that she saw the whole time. And I don't want any of the cases that I'm working on to end up as a service case review, because I didn't go and see them. Source: Project Officer Evaluation Interview*

*Impact of Covid 19 During the pandemic, we have been forced to operate a reduced service at our residential assessment centres to ensure social distancing between residents and for deep cleaning between family stays, to protect families and staff. **This impacted on the potential number of parents coming through to the Securing Change project.** Despite the obstacles, the project officer continued (where allowed) to see families face to face, even those living as far away as Bath. Parents are from a wide geographical catchment.*

*The Project Officer reported:- "The parents I work with really look forward to me coming. In lockdown, they had no communication apart from the local authority. They were alone with a baby. With a baby, there's joy but no conversation." Source: Internal progress report February 2022*

During Covid 19 the Project Officer was not however able to enter Crawford House to introduce the model to parents, but by January 2022, with the pandemic restrictions lifting the Project Officer has been able visit the home again.

*AM has not been able to come into the house as quickly during Covid. The way of working described above – that is how we prefer to work, meeting the family or meeting of two families together in a group. Did you still have verbal/email contact? I think I spoke with her about a family ... thinking about it we could have arranged a Zoom call with the family for her to introduce herself, but that didn't happen.. I know she was continuing to work with a lot of other families during the pandemic.*

*A few weeks ago, AM came and met one of the families we are working with at the moment who are coming to the end of their placement. The family are very keen to continue working with Ann-Marie after Crawford House and the family have learning needs so that is more important for them to get the support after here.*

Source: Interview with Crawford House liaison worker

### 3.3 Securing Change Caseload

In terms of the Securing Change caseload it seems there was no limit on case numbers. The project officer was viewed as being on top of the cases, given some not seen very often. But this has become more difficult as referrals have increased. The following comments made by the project officer:

*I don't have a limit, and that's the thing. In the beginning of this programme there was nothing really touched, because the two workers that came started to draw up with referral forms and things like that. One client in one year or something.*

*My caseload has worked so far but, you know, you couldn't do a lot more could you and now I couldn't, I mean don't get me wrong, I would never reject 46 or 52 but the amount of work I get from Crawford House is enough to keep one individual going.*

*I can't give everybody what I need to give them, because only one of me. And if we have two people doing this job IT would make a big difference. Yeah, I mean, the thing is because I get most of my referrals from Crawford House.*

Source: Project Officer interview

### 3.4 Securing Change Model and delivery

The 'Securing Change Model' is the term used here to cover the intervention project and service. In the reports of the service other terms such as 'delivery model' are utilised.

The original model, launched by St Michael's in August 2018, sought to only recruit parents who had recently had a child permanently removed from their care by social services with the aim is to break the cycle of child removal by focusing on the support needs of these parents. This worked on the model of loss and grief, as well as anger expressed by these parents who lose their child. The aim was to help heal the parents and prevent the likelihood of new pregnancies occurring. However, there were long time periods before final court decisions were made when parents needed support, and when the outcome of the cases were unknown.

In the focus group it was noted:

*Sue (CEO) had this image in mind of a mother who left the residential assessment without her children. Therefore, lost her housing because their housing was contingent upon having a family, and ended up living in a tent with no support and Family Services not wanting to offer any, any support because that support also followed the children. And so, this woman had no support. It is very difficult for parents whose children have been removed to want to continue a relationship with the organization that remains them, because their life has changed, they no longer have a child.*

Source: Focus Group

The Securing Change Model was considerably adapted in July 2019 on the basis of the observation that parents leaving with their children also exhibited post assessment trauma and whilst eligible for local authority care, this was often not forthcoming. This explanation was provided in an internal Securing Change document:

*Our original model was based on learning from other projects supporting mothers in repeat care proceedings (e.g. Pause, SPACE (Cambridgeshire), FDAC), our own investigations with residential families, and research carried out by Middlesex University with families who had left our houses. Our premise was that mothers who left with their children would not be offered the Securing Change service. As parents, they would have ongoing access to local authority support services where necessary to sustain the changes they had made during their 12-week stay. Conversely, mothers who left without their child would receive no local authority support around loss, trauma and practical need. We recognised that there were sensitivities, but believed the majority would welcome our support.*

*The model failed because:*

- It created a simplistic division, failing to recognise the complexity of parents' trauma post-assessment, whether they kept their child or not.*
- Grief & loss were often compounded by anger at St Michael's conclusions. Support was rejected.*
- We failed to appreciate sufficiently that responses to loss had highly individual timeframes.*
- We waited to approach parents until the Court decision was finalised. Due to extended Court decisions, this resulted in a delay of many months during which contact details changed.*

Source: Internal document titled: Proposed Revisions to the Project Y2 July 2019.

The current inclusion criteria for the Securing Change service is thus defined as including all parents, fathers as well as mothers who receive St Michael's assessment services for child protection issues, no matter what the outcome of the assessment. Its aim is to prevent relapse into the circumstances that brought the families into the assessment centre in the first place. It aims to replicate some of the care provided in the assessment centres when the parents go back into the community by providing ongoing support. It is defined as: '*holistic, relational, needs lead, strengths-based support .. embedding the change that has been already put in place in the houses*' (Focus Group). It is also trauma informed practice.

The CEO comments on how the residential service for assessment is supportive albeit focused on assessments of adequacy of parenting:

*The service we offer residentially is, is, yes intrusive, but highly supportive highly supportive and then when families come through that and move out into the community. Then all of that support suddenly just falls away and that is a real challenge for them.*

Source: CEO interview

This is echoed by the focus group response:

*Acknowledging the strengths, and praising the parents and keeping them going is a massive part of what SC does and also a continuity from the house as that's something we try and do very hard at the house. In the assessment houses it is really intense environment. They are here for three months and then suddenly they're on their own in their own house. They've got all their friends that you're associating with before that may have been probably causing some issues you've got the family dynamic, it's friends that may have been taking drugs, or, you know, causing harm or exploiting you know our families that we have here, but sometimes it's not even as big that – it's getting distracted from bedtimes and going out with friends and not being as focused as was they were at the house. So Securing Change provides an ongoing support service and a bit of a prompt and a reminder of, you know, this is important to me to keep going with me..... 'you're not on your own, all that hard work you did, you know, keep going with it'*

Source: Focus Group

Therefore, the service can be seen as a continuation of aspects of care provided in the residential assessment houses of St Michael's, but in the community to aid with the transition of living back in the community whilst retaining some of the support.

### 3.4.1 Securing Change Model Support Subcategories

In the model, the service aimed to provide direct help and support with the 5 categories of (i) housing, (ii) financial stability, (iii) progress to training/work, (iv) supporting physical mental health and domestic violence and (v) supporting parenting skills.

The type of help offered is noted from both staff and parent interviews.

#### (i): Supporting Housing

The liaison worker from Crawford house gives an example of a homeless family and helping them attend housing appointments. However, other examples of housing difficulties did not arise during the evaluation.

*I think the family were of no fixed abode, and they were struggling to secure housing prior to leaving Crawford House .. I remember Ann-Marie being supportive and helping them a lot regarding accessing housing, I think she might have attended housing appointments with them etc..*

Source Crawford House liaison worker

#### (ii) Supporting Financial stability

Securing Change provided support for parents with financial difficulties and during the pandemic St. Michael's opened a food bank. A high financial need was identified which was intensified due to the lockdown following the pandemic outbreak. The following information from the project officer (also quoted in an internal report):



*Parents were in desperate need due to poverty in lockdown... St Michael's had to provide weekly foodbank vouchers and food parcels for families with children who no longer had free school meals. When you're living on Universal Credit and your kids are getting a hot meal at school, you only have to provide breakfast and dinner. Suddenly they're at home eating all the time. I also had to make sure they had funds for pre-paid meter for gas and electricity. Yes, there was an extra £20 a week, but it doesn't stretch when you've got to feed those kids all day.*

*And I say to parents .... if it means I've given getting some stuff for you. That's what I'll do, because it makes your life easier so you're less stressed on certain things, because this baby seven months, and she's still sleeping in a travel cot... so it's hard to work with the parent to form bedtime routines until they have a bed and mattress.*

Source: Project Officer interview

Three out of the six parent interviews described how the Project Officer supported them with their finances:

*Participation enabled myself to access the help eligible for the support where required*

Source: Parent 6 interview

*...applied for a grant, some things to buy, you know because I'm on benefits, you know, that would help I got 3 stair-gates, a new wardrobe for XX (daughter)'s clothes, a slip mat - so basically I got £200 and I could choose what I wanted, but it couldn't be toys, it had to be something I needed, like I got a Hoover as the last one broke (laughs).*

*I mean they pay for coffee when we go out and we've been for a Nandos before... We went out a couple of weeks ago for chicken and chips and they pay for coffee, lunch if she comes*

Source: Parent 2 interview

### **(iii): Supporting Progress to Training or Work**

None of the six parents mentioned this aspect in their interviews. However, examples were provided for the 3 case studies (appendix 1) by the project officer. This included (Case A) where the Project Officer helped the mother to access online parenting programme, where she would learn the various milestones of development for a child. Case B where she provided child care for this mother's daughter and helped her look for voluntary work, and plan what her future could look like now she is free from any form of substances. Case C also was provided with help accessing an online parenting course during lockdown. Therefore, it seems that this overlapped with the parenting skills in section (v) and voluntary work, but rarely with paid employment.

### **(iv) Supporting Physical, Mental Health and with Domestic Violence**

Most of the parents asked talked about support received in this category. They describe general emotional support but also help with psychological disorder such as alcohol abuse and anxiety.

*She knows, she certainly knows, you can the next day, tomorrow you can wake up with a mental health episode, you know anyone can, and she understands.*

Source: Parent 1 interview

*When she first went, I was always negative, I was always negative about everything, 'she's not their daughter, she's mine', blah blah, but then I'm thinking she's got two families that love her, that's one little girl that is going to bring two families together ...When did you change to a more positive frame of mind and what helped you change? I think just having, getting all the grief out of my system Yeah I was thinking more positive, and then I think I think having the support of people and (A-M) the project officer, everybody that supported me, it changed my opinion.*

*It's helped me a lot because, I lost XX (daughter was adopted) in 2018. Securing Change has helped me a lot, I try and put my mind off losing her, the pain is not as bad as when I first lost her. Yep I think I've learnt how to deal with it .. And deal with the pain. It does help, the service does help, and I do recommend it to any person that's going through the same situation as I have, I do recommend it to anybody, to have that extra support*

*I have someone to talk to if I have to. Her emotional support, you can talk to her about anything, and I mean anything ... she will help, if you're are thinking you need help with certain things, then she will be there to try to help you, she might not be able to, but she will be there to help you*  
Source: Parent 3 interview

*Do you talk to her about your alcohol recovery? Yeah, yeah, I've said to her about my training, also when I first saw her I mean I have no front teeth due to domestic violence, I had them punched out, so I had no front teeth and I said to her I'd like to go to the dentist and get some dentures as it is not very nice for me not having no front teeth .. I kept going to the dentist and it took like four times to go there, so they can see it, fix it, so she watched my daughter, even though it was COVID and they wouldn't allow babies in there.*

*I said to her, she said well what if you get in a relationship and I said 'don't even go there' the hand came up to the face, you know my feelings towards that I said, if I meet a female friend they can blackmail you if you tell them too much stuff you know.... It's against you.. I know you were involved with social services type of thing ... you know. Like a man in a relationship. People can use it against you. So I wouldn't tell anyone anything And that's the kind of thing you can talk to Ann-Marie about? Yeah*

Source: Parent 2 interview

*Does she ever give you advice? Yeah like, if I get uptight, she'll say to me be calm and that Yeah, yeah Because I suffer with anxiety. Has she talked to about your anxiety and how to help you? Yes.*

Source: Parent 4 interview

The project worker herself reported on the satisfaction of being able to provide emotional support for the parents who openly told her about their problems.

*I love the fact that families want to work with me. I love the fact that I feel comfortable enough and they feel comfortable enough to be able to tell me about a really crap day or about something that's annoyed them and we talk about that*

Source: Project Officer Interview

#### **(v) Supporting Parenting skills**

Support over parenting was endorsed by a few of the parents including those with children removed. This included information about child development, such as potty training as well as interactions, such as not criticising the other parent or with a teenage child living away. Also signposting to particular parenting courses.

*She says don't tell anything bad to your child about her mother, and I'm not really that type of person, telling my child oh your mother did this or that, I can't do that. You know bad stuff so I leave it inside as much as possible...*

*She supported me to, you know, to work with .., what do you call them.... Development and all that, She gives me papers to read and discuss., ah yes...*

Source: Parent 1 interview

*'ve got my daughter who is two next month and it's been a while since I bought up a baby and potty training I had no idea about so I sort of ask her advice for some things you know and Like she kept getting out of bed at one point and then coming into my bed so I sort of could ask her like for advice and stuff like that*

Source: Parent 2 interview

*I had sort have googled things, if you know what I mean, I was going in blind, and then she, for example with the PPP, she had a qualification in that, so she told me what PPP I would need, how long it would take. After my PPP session she would call me up and we would go a little bit further in detail etc with it.*

*So, in a way sanity checking before approaching the LA whether or not they needed to be further change or the change was sufficient to warrant approaching the LA about a risk*

*I did some work with Ann-Marie for example I had therapy in place, I had parenting courses and she would guide me towards parenting courses that I would need, do you see what I mean? And then I did some pieces of work about my teenage son with her and pieces of work about my younger son, who was living away, with her as well, so she structured the need of the family and the service that she was going to provide with us and what she couldn't do she pointed me in the right direction of where I can source that.*

Source: Parent 5 interview

Therefore, evidence was found of Securing Change providing aid to families once they returned to the community around these 5 areas of need. Of these the health and domestic violence and parenting skills seemed to be the most active.

#### **4. Additional help provided for families in Securing Change**

The interviews with parents and workers also identified two more areas where parents needed considerable support from Securing Change. These were Supporting Parents with Learning Needs and Supporting Parents with Local Authority requirements. These will be described in turn.

##### **4.1 Supporting Parents with Learning Needs**

The need for support for parents with learning needs was clearly articulated in different parts of the service including the website, the CEO interview, an internal progress report and the focus group. It was believed these individuals were disproportionately represented in the service (around a third of parents in the service) but will little tailored support elsewhere.

This was justified below:

*We have discovered that there is a chasm in the support available which, we believe, needs a change at policy level, beyond the scope of this project but something we will share with others. This is particularly true of parents with learning needs, which are disproportionately represented in this project.*

Source: St Michael's Website, accessed 27.1.22

*This was a real concern that parents with learning difficulties were not receiving the level of support they required and this was whether they left with or without their children... There aren't the services out there to provide the level of support required.*

Source: CEO interview

*Parents with learning difficulties fall between adult services, who tend not to consider their role as parents, and children's services, who only see them as a risk to children.... This project has highlighted the difficulties these parents have, both in meeting their child's needs without support, and in understanding why their child has been removed*

Source: Internal Progress report February 2021

*Because, you know, there is this schism between the services that are there to protect the child and services that are there to help adults and children services will say these parents don't have capability to look after this child and adult services will say, children are not our business. There needs to be a shift somewhere where funding is allocated, because children may have a right to be raised by their loving parents with a learning disability, even if they sometimes forget to turn the gas off, you know, and then some other service that could straddle could pay for somebody. The worst and really sad cases where parents with learning disabilities were considered rightly so, on their own, not capable of raising their children safely. That doesn't mean they didn't love them care for them and that their children wouldn't have received the kind of love from those parents that they probably couldn't get anywhere else.*

Source: Focus Group

Securing change did engage on the learning disorder issue with parents affected as commented on below:

*The staff at 46 had been looking at an extended fostering type arrangement for families with learning needs to enable them to continue to care for their child and this was living alongside the whole family to have the oversight or it was about providing attached accommodation to their own home that enabled them to have that ongoing oversight. We thought that if something like that was available to this family and to others we've worked with then that would provide a solution.*

Source: CEO Evaluation interview January 2022

*Parents with learning difficulties are a significant proportion of the parents we work with in residential assessment. One third of Securing Change parents had learning difficulties, amongst other issues. This project has highlighted the difficulties these parents have, both in meeting their child's needs without support, and in understanding why their child has been removed. There is a chasm in the support available. Adult services need to consider parents with learning needs as parents and support them - not only to look after themselves but their children too. There is a potential to explore changes at interagency and policy level for these parents and their children. Many could then parent safely with the right support. They could keep the children they love and children could thrive living with the parents they love.*

Source: Internal Progress report February 2021

*We're working parents that can have quite significant learning disabilities, mental health difficulties that kind of thing... they don't always have an understanding of why they're with us, or what our concerns are.*

Source: Focus Group

*I'm supporting a couple with learning needs who only see each other. It's really taken its toll. In the end, I had to contact the local adult social services. They might talk to their parents on the phone but it was mainly just me who had any contact with them. They were vulnerable people left in a flat, struggling financially, with no idea where money goes **Ann-Marie Wallace, Securing Change project officer.***

Source: Securing Change End of Year report November 2021

It is evident that the support offered for learning difficulties in these parents who also have difficulty parenting by the securing change service is in fact filling a gap in services not provided by local authorities.

#### 4.2 Supporting Parents access Local Authority services

Following on from the last category where Securing Change filled a local authority gap, this category also points to who the Securing Change service was needed to mobilise statutory services for the families involved. So, the project worker will act as advocate for the families which also involves communicating to the families involved. The following comments showed similar views from the project officer, CEO and focus groups.

*I introduce myself to the Social Worker, I say hi, I'm Ann-Marie I look at some articles I'm securing change practitioner, and then they combined me into their plan.*

Source: Securing Change Project Officer Evaluation Interview

*Part of my job is to advocate on their behalf, housing, and the advocate on their behalf if they've asked me to do that... Once they've told me they want me to speak on their behalf I speak on their behalf.*

*I will fight tooth for, tooth and nail for my families, so they will get, you know, to an extent they get to stay in the community with their children.*

*I will contact the social worker because they're the person says the lead professional so I will notify them of any issues I may have, or if I go to the parent's house and then, and I'm worried about, or I feel that there's issues around any topic, finance, maybe the school or the children might need.*

Source: Project Officer Interview

*The work of this pilot suggests that: 1-2-1 holistic support helping to put parents in touch with local services, and advocating for those whose needs are complex and may be difficult to understand, is a fruitful way of working, with significant potential cost savings".*

Source: Internal Progress report February 2021

*Securing Change enables that relationship with a local authority social worker to function.*

*Sometimes obviously that involves delivering maybe a difficult message to the parent, or social worker to demonstrate what might not be in their best interests.*

*One of the things that I think, in talking about supporting parents LA requirements, is that she could also help to broker the relationship between the local authority social worker and the parent.*

*Another reflection would be comparing her to local authority social worker, because she's not holding sort of the statutory requirements of the local authority social worker role, and she's not holding the size of caseload that local search social workers, hold these days... And so, you know that the beauty of being able to have a conversation with the parent, know that it's been a difficult conversation for them, giving them the opportunity to reflect and then a day or two days to go back and check in with them and ask how they're feeling about that now. Do they have any other questions ... that is that is a real luxury is an important part of the service but it's also, you know, a luxury within this role, because she doesn't have the, the huge caseload the LA can have.*

Source: CEO interview January 2022

*For one mother the Family Court said that she had to get therapy and she didn't have quite the level of understanding to spot that the therapist should found wasn't giving her the type of therapy that the court dictated, they actually dictated what type of therapy she should have so SC*

*really helped out with that and they've read through lots and lots of her communications with the social workers, and with the courts. So again, a very bespoke kind of help, you know. She provides a level of contact that it was difficult for a social worker to ever achieve, but she also didn't have to carry that statutory responsibility, although she had to feed into, obviously anybody working with somebody who is under the scrutiny of the local authority needs to be very mindful of feeding information into that assessment process.*

Source: Focus Group

The work around this area seems an important one for Securing Change in providing support but also mobilising other support for the families. Parents also echoed this view, particularly parent 5:

*(I can hear you're are frustrated with LA, Do you talk with Ann-Marie about this?) Yes I do, sometimes I talk to her and say look A-M, they are so much behind with the work, I don't know why they do that, and they never respond, two meetings were set up that didn't happen, can you imagine... AM would be at the CIN meeting or is that nothing to do with her? no, yes, she said that to me, if you tell them, they will invite me and I did tell them and she got invited and it go through. You mean it didn't happen? Yeah it didn't happen, no. yeah ok (1)*

Source: Parent 1 interview

*AM collaborated with the LA, that's another thing that I do appreciate about the service, because you can get loads of services out there, but if you can collaborate with the LA, and she was qualified to ... She wrote a report about us, the workshops that we'd done together and yeah, like basically just being honest with the LA. Because she's been a social worker and been in the same position as a child protection social worker she had insight into the risk I posed.*

*Everyone had different approaches, I think AM's was the most proactive, so I went from being in a stagnant situation where the LA were very happy with the status quo (clarification - children in care she means), to getting my kids back ... Within Covid I think the LA also asked her to check in on me, because at that point my son had started having overnights with me, so they were also asking her to check in on us... She was allocated tasks as part of the plan, for my youngest son She showed me the NSPCC reunification assessment which is something I didn't know existed, but apparently there is this assessment parents can request to go through where you increase contact etc, so she explained all those steps and where I needed to be She won't tell me what to say, but she'll tell me where it's coming from, like yeah .... We'll talk ... So, yeah, it was a... the hardest bit really which was to make sure that everybody understands that these changes (she's made) are permanent, that I'm able to offer my children a safe and happy home. (How did you persuade the LA to move from the status quo of them in care to start working with you again), Oh I took them to court four times. Ann-Marie it was the last three court times she was there for all of the meetings and I think she wrote a report as well about what she knew about me and the work that we'd done together etc, so yeah initially, the first court was for contact because they were trying to scale it down (Clarification AM not working with her at that point) but then when AM was involved we returned to court for the care order to be discharged. So, she's come to meetings with me, like I said she wouldn't speak on my behalf but she would come to the meeting with me and part of that was for her really to be looped in so she was advising me ... on why the LA are behaving in certain ways, or saying certain things, she's got a good understanding of it, because she's been present in the meetings*

Source: Parent 5 interview

In terms of implementation it can therefore be seen that five areas identified in the service brief were all identified in the evaluation as being tackled effectively. There were two additional areas around learning difficulties and mobilising local authority services which Securing Change was very active in.

The next section will look at implementation in terms of the mode of approach and delivery of services in Securing Change.

#### 4. Analysis of Service Implementation and Delivery

To evaluate the service delivery, features of the Securing Change distinctive approach is defined through the various sources used in the evaluation.

From extensive analysis of their parent interviews, worker interviews and of internal documentation, the evaluation team have determined for this report that there are numerous delivery approaches and project worker skills that are uniquely employed in Securing Change to meet the needs of parents successfully. These they have categorised under 5 headings linked to staffing, pathways, strengths-based approach, personal tailored approach and range of service

**Staffing:** Experienced, social worker trained Project officer employed.

**Pathways and timing, communication:** Utilising a clear referral communication pathway; Critical timing when parents back to the community; Clear communication with Social Worker

**Strengths based and holistic:** Strengths based ways of working; Holistic approach

**Personal sensitive approach:** Gentle Persistence Approach to build trust; open & voluntary eligibility, ongoing and flexible, not fixed, support, straightforward and transparent working, tailored, consistent and parent-led support

**Range:** UK wide remit

The working in each of these areas as evidenced in the evaluation is reported in turn.

##### 4.1 Staffing

The project officer role is critical to the success of the service. The one selected had 15 years experience in social work and with families and proved highly effective.

The parents endorsed her effectiveness:

(Do you feel that she gets the balance right and she talks to you?) *Yeah, yeah, she is an experienced lady, she is an ex social worker so she knows what she is doing*  
Source: Parent 1 interview

(Did you know each time what the next step would be and did AM help?) *Well, because she's been a social worker and been in the same position as child protection social worker she had insight into the risk I posed.* Source: Parent 2 interview

(Were you working with any other agencies other than St Michael's, PPP and the Local Authority at that point?) *No AM was the main agency as she is qualified in the issues that I had So you didn't need anyone else as she was meeting your needs? No*  
Source: Parent 5 interview

The project officer was universally seen as highly effective and a good choice for this role.

##### 4.2 Pathways, timing and social worker communication

Pathways for referral have been described earlier, but a new element is the critical timing for when parents go back to the community. Thus the period after assessment is when positive change can be

underscored, but this is an important transition time when the potential security of the residential service is lost. Having a service which covers the period of going back to the community can be critical in effecting positive change. Both internal documents and comments by the focus group underlined this:

*Securing Change is there to support parents through the critical phase immediately after assessment. This is the time when positive change can be either consolidated or lost. When unsupported grief can lead to reckless decision-making or when new parenting skills can relapse outside the structured environment of the residential assessment. An intervention here allows the parent and relevant agencies the time and space to embed the conditions for successful longer-term outcomes, leverages the investment in assessment and support.*

Source: Internal Securing Change progress report February 2021

*It is very difficult for parents whose children have been removed to want to continue a relationship with the organization that remains them, because their life has changed, they no longer have a child.*

*And I think the family wouldn't be so receptive to AM if she felt like, oh, they're just an extension of the assessment houses .. there we're constantly telling them what to do, what not to do, giving them feedback, and they think you guys been watching us every day for the last three months and we're glad to be finished with you!*

Source: Focus Group

Implementing Securing Change successfully also involves ongoing communication with the family's Local Authority Social Worker to enable both agencies to work with a clear and separate remit and goals. This was outlined by the project officer

*I make sure I touch base with the social worker, so I if I see a family, I will send the social worker a bit of what the visit was like, so they know I do that after every contact ... and I always speak to the social worker, if there's anything. I will contact the social worker because they're the person says the lead professional so I will notify them of any issues I may have, or if I go to the parent's house and then, and I'm worried about, or I feel that there's issues around any topic, finance, maybe the school or the children might need, like, one father that I felt that needed to give his child more stimulation*

*I'll talk to the social worker, you know like, I'll say, tell him, whatever my concerns, there are, and what I what I feel may help the family*

Source: Securing Change Project Officer Evaluation Interview

#### **4.3 Strengths-based and holistic ways of working**

Securing Change appears as a strengths-based service and this is part of its success. This involves offering praise to the parents for positive actions, and consolidating the positive changes that have occurred since their time in the service. Evidence for this showed in both the project officer and focus group responses:



*I don't want to promise any parent anything that's what I don't do I can't promise and oh you're going to leave with your kids or any of that I don't want to promise me. But what I do is I praise them for the things they've done, and they continue to do.*

*Part of my job is to support families so that when they're in the community that they're able to continue to do the great work they're doing already. Like for example, one father had built a garden shed, and I sat there and I complimented him on how well he'd done, how he's gotten so amazing. He responded, 'I just want to get into carpentry'. So, I said 'Okay, so how are we going to do that?' How do you want us to do that is that I don't know, I said what do you think you need, I need a CSA card. So, I said 'Okay, let's look into it'. I try and hone in on the things that he wants, me going and telling him, do this, do that. He's got telling me so I can help him to get there, because I want it to be our journey*

Source: Project Officer Interview

*Acknowledging the strengths, and praising the parents and keeping them going is a massive part of what Securing Change does and also is a continuity from the house, as that's something we try and do very hard there.*

*The model is holistic needs lead strengths-based support.... you're embedding the change that has been already put in place in the houses.*

Source: Evaluation Focus Group

The service was described as both 'holistic and 'one to one' working'. The former justified by the range of difficulties tackled and the latter by the relationship between project officer and clients. The project officer was also able to describe some of the techniques she used in her working including systemic family therapy and narrative therapy as well as using reflective practice:

*I find that I use some of the theoretical modules, when I'm doing reflective work .. I can really do that with the families, especially if they tell me stuff I've kind of reflect back on what they just said, and the narrative.*

*The toxic trio\* - you have to work in that format and I think we can work with families in that, in that, in from the toxic trio, but we can do it and adapt because I think, for me, the key is to get as much information that they're willing to give me. I can tease out of them, so that I can work and support them so that, that circle of that can be broken. They don't have to perpetuate and keep on going. I've worked in families where we've had three generations. Yeah. Nothing's ever processed or changed.*

\* domestic abuse, mental ill-health, and substance misuse

Source: Securing Change Project Officer Evaluation Interview

The following summary was provided by the project officer for the evaluation team outlining her way of working in Securing Change:

As an experienced social worker, she utilises different ways of working and approaches that are tailored to the needs of her clients. She has trained in systemic family therapy and used it with families when doing both one to one and couples work. This approach enables parents to focus on the areas identified by the themselves, or the Local Authority. They can then work at their pace to enable lifelong change with Securing Change clients. Using systemic family therapy ways of working in Securing Change supports family members to explore difficult thoughts and feelings in a safe environment.

The project officer uses the following in her work in Securing Change:

- Reflective practice to look at the way she works and what she has done with the families and explore times when she has become stuck. By using reflective practice and discussing

current concerns, she states *'it gives me the opportunity to think of other aspect of reaching the families without undermining their values'*.

- Narrative theory to assist family to separate their problems from their identity, which encourages families to build their confidence problem solve and achieve positive outcomes.
- A relationship-based and motivational approach, incorporating compatible elements of a range of theoretical perspectives in social work. The Project Officer has worked with families using relationship-based practice and practical problem solving. She reports *'This considerably helps my building of trust with parents and helps give confidence in my professional working relationship with them. This work is client needs lead and involves building a relationship which is relevant with to the client at the times at the time. (For example, I helped a client to decorate their new home and using the time as well to talk about their history of sexual abuse and narrative they have attached to this.)'*
- Trauma awareness - the parents that come to Securing Change are often traumatised by their experiences while at the same time have to deal with practical problems such as accommodation and finance issues. The worker employs a careful approach at the start of her work by listening and empathizing with parents and by explaining the voluntary nature of the intervention. This approach aims to empower clients following a period of statutory assessment.
- Tailored approach - once a positive relationship has been established with a parent a variety of approaches are used to support the interventions, tailored to the client's presenting needs.
- A trusting professional relationship facilitates the opportunities for the Project Officer to both challenge and support the parents. At times a directive approach to good parenting is required, especially where there are ongoing safeguarding concerns, at other times a detailed exploration of the systems around the parent is valuable (such as when the parent is maintaining sobriety) and at other times a conversation in which the impact of trauma may be explored.
- Concepts from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and narrative therapy has also been incorporated into the approach to aid further understanding and exploration of the impact of thinking on the way parents approach problems.
- Critical elements of Securing Change involve starting where the clients are at, working towards goals which are meaningful to them and doing the work within the context of a professional relationship of trust and support.
- Over time the clients progress is reinforced by building their emotional resilience and enhancing parenting and problem-solving skills.
- Each intervention is unique, but the starting point of empathy, relationship-building and empowerment by voluntary engagement with the service is the same.

#### **4.4 Personal, sensitive approach**

Gentle persistence and consistent Approach to build trust were considered critical to the secure change working. This way of working was clearly reported in internal documentation and during the evaluation interviews:-

*We undertake 'gentle persistence' and it pays off.... We believe that a model of non-coercive gentle persistence is highly effective. Many of these mothers are the victims of abusive relationships, as children and adults. They have been coerced all their lives. We believe that giving them a choice is an essential part of the recovery process. Source: Internal report February 2021*

*Some families, I'm not gonna lie, I'm very direct with, others I have to tread carefully like that mom, I said you will have very, very carefully with her, very carefully. Yeah, yeah. Otherwise the barriers are going to go up on there. now I can see they trust me. And Some parents are not willing to work with me for some reason because they think they don't trust me ... like Parent xx - It's taken me two years to work with her. There's a line that she won't want you to cross with her ....*

*Every family I work with, I'm not lying, it's a carrot and stick to the beginning because I get my little carrot and stick. And that trust. It's a lot more easy for me. And that's why I say, I know if I hate this job I wouldn't be doing it. I literally love what I do.*

Source: Securing Change Project Officer Evaluation Interview

As well as the Gentle Persistence, consistency of working appears to be a key way to build trust with her families. The Securing Change Project Officer reported she follows a structured week whereby there is some flexibility to attend appointments with families, but wherever possible they are seen or communicated with one the same day consistently week after week. She reported:-

*I see one mum on a Monday; I'm in the office on a Tuesday; On Wednesday's I go to see a couple and another mum; I see a father and others on Thursday and Fridays, I have that free to go to office, or am able to go see other clients as well if they need me. So that's the flexibility that I have. But I also have families that don't live in London, Wales. Source: Securing Change Project Officer Evaluation Interview*

There was also substantial evidence from the evaluation parent interviews outlining the importance of this approach of gentle persistence at a difficult time in their lives:-

*AM has been honest and good with me and she has been excellent and quite helpful to me. Yeah. Emotionally. She has a laugh and a joke with me sometimes and a coffee.. so she's helped me anyway quite a lot (What is she like?) She's very pleasant*

Source: Parent 1 interview

(And do you trust her? Can you talk to her properly without having to worry about what you say?) *Yeah* Source: Parent 2 interview

And is that because of the type of person AM is that you can really trust her and talk with her? *Yes, yes, is that accurate, yes yes yes, She supports me in that way about anything that I do, she does support me and she will give me her opinion on it... You trust her opinion by the sound of it? Yeah, you know.. it's nice to know You know like you'd talk to a friend, that type of... you know even ... things you might not be able to talk to everybody about certain things, with Ann-Marie you can talk (strong emphasis) about anything to her and I think she treats you like a friend or a family member. You know what I mean? Yes, You know, she's brilliant*

Source: Parent 3 interview

Is she easy to talk to? *Yeah. ... when you first went into talking to AM was it easy to start working with her? Yeah, I had no trouble with her whatever So she made it easy from the start? Yeah She's polite, kind, you can have a laugh with her Is it easy to trust her? Yeah*

Source: Parent 4 interview

*I found it very easy to build trust with her because she is very honest, so when she found me in the wrong, I was made aware of it and she prepared me for that as well... So from the get go she told me that this is my approach, you can't take it personally, you know but if you want to do something we are going to do it properly and I am going to have to be able to be honest with you, because otherwise you may lose ..*

Source: Parent 5 interview

#### 4.5 Open & voluntary eligibility

An open approach was made to parents and all were eligible for the service on leaving the assessment centres. The project officer had to handle parental mistrust of services, particularly when children had been removed, but utilised a very personal approach and emphasised the voluntary nature of the service.

*I've gone to the houses and introduce myself to the families through the house. I say to them I have nothing to do with what happens in this house. I say I work in the head office. I'm the Securing Change practitioner or what the families that come out, come out of these houses and my aim is to work on what you want me to work with you. And I say, if you want to work with me it's a voluntary service*

Source: Project Officer Interview

There was little additional information from the parent evaluation interviews for this approach category.

#### 4.6 Ongoing and flexible support

Internal documents and worker interviews provided the evaluation team with a large amount of evidence for the importance of flexible working as a delivery approach.

*You have to be able to be flexible with the families that you work with. And even if I've seen them like for example, on a Wednesday, and they then also have a meeting on the Friday, I make sure I'm there at that meeting....*

Source: Securing Change Project Officer Evaluation Interview

*There are no preconditions to accessing support from this service. Every parent leaving a residential assessment is eligible and may choose their own timeframe. They may not immediately consider they need any support, believe it will not be helpful or do not have the energy to look beyond the day to day. These beliefs and feelings may change.*

*Support needs to be ongoing, or at least sensitive to time- points when vulnerability is increased (e.g. birthdays for previously removed children) The service is innately flexible.*

Source: Internal Document

*The project worker reaches out to families over several months.*

*The service is innately flexible. Our residential service is commissioned by local authorities from increasingly distant areas in England and Wales. Where it is not possible to offer regular face to face contact, Securing Change supports parents by phone calls and text messages.*

Source: Internal report February 2021

The example below (which was also seen in the analysis of supporting parents with housing in section 3 of this report) shows how the Project Officer works adaptively and flexibly, as with one family, who were having problems with housing, she stated supporting them and attended meetings with them two months or so before they left the assessment house:-

*One family she worked with as they were still being assessed by us. Can you remember what it was she helped them with? I think the family were of no fixed abode, and they were struggling to secure housing prior to leaving Crawford House .. I remember Ann-Marie being supportive and helping them a lot regarding accessing housing, I think she might have attended housing appointments with them etc..*

Source: Crawford House liaison worker

There was substantial evidence for the importance of this way working from the parent evaluation interviews:-

(How often do you see her at the moment?) *Every week at the moment. Yeah. (Does she come and see you face to face?) Yeah, she does - in lockdown she didn't - but after that yes.*

Source: Parent 1 interview

(And is it still going on now?) *Yeah, yeah (Is there no end date?) No (So it just continues as long as you want it?) Yeah Unless the charity runs of money ...*

*I could say to her, I feel I don't need the support anymore, I've been with you a while now And we had that conversation because she said that she was finished with another person because she had been supporting her for two years I think, but it's different with this other lady because she has family to help support her, so she goes to me, 'you have no-one you know' If I need to speak with her, I just pick up the phone her*

Source: Parent 2 interview

(Is it lead by you?) *Yes. (How often you want to speak or by AM?) It's mixed. If I ring her and she's with someone she'll ring me back, when she gets a minute*

*Yes, I think it is a comfort in a way that you will have that support no matter how long you want it for... You know that ...even if I'm ok and I don't want the support, I know if I need to go back I will, I know I can have that support for however long I want it....*

Source: Parent 3 interview

Does knowing she's long term help? *Yes. In what way have they helped you do you think? By talking to them and that*

Source: Parent 4 interview

You can stay as long as you like working with her? *Yeah, I know she felt very strongly about that, us not feeling abandoned as sometimes with social services, that can happen, so knowing that – yes it's currently ongoing, it hasn't ended, but my circumstances have very much changed (two sons back in her care for the past three months) So sometimes on the phone it could be every day of the week and sometimes it could be 2-3 times a week, in between face-to-face Basically, when I first met AM, she was very flexible with the way that her approach...*

Source: Parent 5 interview

*The service worker has to wear many different hats. They're all professional, but also an educator and a community bridge-builder*

Source: Parent 6 interview

#### **4.7 Straightforward and transparent working**

The Securing Change Project Officer reported during her interview:-

*Some families, I'm very direct with & others I have to tread carefully like that mum I treaded very, very carefully otherwise the barriers are going to go up on there. So I do like. And like I said, every single family that I work with. I tried to find out from the parents what they think is the priority for them as well as working on what the local authority is doing. I've done that with everybody – working transparently. It is different as a social worker they often have to go in there and say 'you need to do this you need to do this you need to do that' but not ask them what they want – here I can in a straightforward way.*

Source: Interview with Project Officer

The project officer had to be very direct with the parents over issues of child care and not having repeat pregnancies. It was made clear that if the project officer had to report them for their childcare issues, she would do. This honesty was appreciated.

*She says 'I have no concern with my child's care' and that's that. You are talking to someone different so you can talk about what is really happening and that... that's what it is. Do you feel you can be really honest with her? Yeah, normally she knows that I don't lie to her and will be honest with her*

Source: Parent 1 Interview

*Have you talked to Ann-Marie about those things - sterilisation? I have spoken to her and she said to me just have a proper think about it, think about the long run, I said that I have put my name down so at least then I have got a longer time to think about it. Yeah But she just said to have a longer think about it. She thinks I shouldn't have it done, but she's going to support me whether I do, or not. Ok. She will give her opinions on what I say, even if erm it's a negative opinion, at least she's giving me her opinion to it. That at least she is trying to help in a way.*

*I recommend anybody that wants to have that support to take it, have that support, Yeah Because you could have that support now, then you don't want it, but what if when you want it, it might not be there? It might not be there then so you might not need it now, but sometime... when you really need it, so you might as well take it*

Source: Parent 3 Interview

*But with AM I just like knew... before reporting me, I'd be like the first person to know... You know, She said if she had to do it, I'd know about it, so yeah It worked, I was very ..... what I went through and the way I held it together, because it has been really difficult, it was through the service, it was through St Michael's and specifically, in particular A-M's service, she's been a part of it and literally gone through it with me. When she thought I shouldn't do something or say something or I was being self-centred with things, which you do as a parent, she was very open with me. She would tell me and I'd go away and reflect on it and then she would check in on me again, you know to see how I felt about the conversation etc Personally, I don't know if that approach is for everybody, but for me I really like that approach, laughs, it was exactly what I needed*

*I felt that people were just kind of watching to see how I'd get on with things and were writing about it ..so with AM, I think that's the only person that I knew that a report from AM would not shock me, it would be factual as well, so a lot of the times the LA social workers, I've still got an ongoing complaint up until this day, because things were not factual, you've changed social workers and they haven't communicated with you, they haven't interviewed you, they've interviewed the old social worker, so you know opinions turn into facts, then it is on paper and you know it's presented in court, you know you don't get none of that with Securing Changes. What you see of paper, that person has discussed with you, it's all what she knows about you, whether it's good or bad, it's all factual ... It's transparent, everyone knows where she is at*

*it's transparent, everyone knows where she is at Were the first two workers also very much like that? No, the first one wasn't, but I asked her to be and in her exit visit, she said that was one thing she had picked up with working with me that she was, in the past, trying to save people's feelings, and she's realized that not everyone wants to work like that. When we started off I was like 'oh my gosh, where are you getting this from?' and then I had a frank discussion with her and said 'you know I can't work like this and be open with you, you need to be able to tell me, rather than write it down and send it to somebody else, can you please tell me*

Source: Parent 5 Interview

#### **4.8 Tailored and parent led support**

There was substantial evidence from the worker interviews and internal documentation for this Securing Change approach.

*I've learned not to put everybody in the same. I will adapt to that family and have the knowledge to know the different ways of working with parents and what's needed.*

*I will do things that benefits for them, housing, go to appointments, and you know if they want me to go with them to their Local Authority meetings  
And it's like come do many things, you know, if I need to do phones or tablets, phones, you know, if they want childcare for they need to have an appointment  
Source: Project Officer Interview*

*One to one support is tailored to the evolving needs of each individual. Each parent is therefore involved in structuring their support.  
Source: Internal report February 2021*

*For one mother the Family Court said that she had to get therapy and she didn't have quite the level of understanding to spot that the therapist should found wasn't giving her the type of therapy that the court dictated, they actually dictated what type of therapy she should have so SC really helped out with that and they've read through lots and lots of her communications with the social workers, and with the courts. So again, a very bespoke kind of help, you know.  
It's very much focused on the family and what they need and what they want.  
Source: Evaluation Focus Group*

Evidence for this approach came also from the parent evaluation interviews:-

*Securing Change provides a role very different from family and friends. Family can't do it like professionals can, they are emotionally attached as well e.g. I didn't want to hear (what I did hear from family) about how social services are wrong*

*2<sup>nd</sup> worker - she was only there between services, she was really helpful though, she came to court with me, I don't have much family in this country, so all my court proceedings I was on my own, so this lady was supportive in that way – she said 'I'll come with you' There was somebody there to have a coffee with, to talk to, you cry if I needed to.  
Source: Parent 5 interview*

*Securing Change, work with care and integrity, they take the time to understand people's unique situations. Source: Parent 6 Interview*

#### **4.9 UK wide remit**

A UK wide remit seems clearly defined by the service in internal documents. This is not currently stated on the website. The reach has included both inner and greater London, Basingstoke, Portsmouth and Swansea to date.

Evidence also provided about the importance, and gratitude from parents interviews that this approach is taken:-

*I think there should be more of them all over the country, because even the social workers that had been working on our case, said that, we do need a service like this, because a lot of parents are just left, and you know that, I mean when you get a child taken away the first thing that crosses your mind, and I've spoken to a lot, I'm also part of a parents family rights group, is so I speak with a lot of parents who navigate the system and a common themes is as soon as the kids are taken away, you just want to have another kid. And social services were saying, this is something really common, we see this experience and to be honest, I can tell you that If it hadn't been for Securing Changes, I know for a fact that I would.. it was in my head and that was literally all I wanted, I needed that at that time  
Source Parent 5 Interview*

## 5. Analysis of the Securing Change Outcomes

This is discussed in two sections, first the quantitative questionnaire assessment and secondly the qualitative (focus group, interview) assessments.

### 5.1 Internal documents – stated outcomes

The Securing Change service has identified positive outcomes in internal documents and on their website. Their methods are shown in table 3 and their aim to examine these for 28 of the 30 parents who were involved in the service.

**Table 3 -Outcomes examined by the service**

Source: Internal document: Proposed Revisions to the Project Y2 July 2019.		
	Indicator	Tracking Progress
<b>Outcome 1</b>	Participants will report having better coping strategies and being more able to manage in a crisis.	Self-reporting Backed by project worker observations Selected psychometrics
	Participants will report healthier personal relationships.	Self-reporting Selected psychometrics
	<b>Participants will not be involved in repeat care proceedings.</b>	<b>No pregnancy</b>
<b>Outcome 2</b>	Participants will report increased confidence in accessing general services and engaging in community projects.	Self-reporting Evidence of access and engagement ; e.g. visiting health services
	Participants will access volunteering opportunities, open training courses or similar.	Attendance
	Participants will feel more optimistic about personal development, their future, and sustaining positive change.	Self-reporting Backed by project worker observations

The outcomes as reported in the Securing Change Progress report (February 2021) are shown below:

**Target 1: Parents with complex problems develop capabilities to resolve past issues creating potential for sustaining better life chances.**

*A key indicator was that participants would not be involved in repeat care proceedings. Half of Securing Change participants say that as a result of the service they have better coping strategies and are more able to manage in a crisis. They report healthier personal relationships and improved feelings of self-worth. One mother has been reunited with a child previously removed.*

**Target 2: Parents are able to access general services, local groups and training projects to improve life skills.**

*A third of parents report increased confidence in accessing general services and engaging in community projects. Most (three quarters) have accessed volunteering opportunities training courses or found work.*



*The difference Securing Change makes Parents are able to resolve past issues, Have better coping strategies in crises, Relationships are healthier and Parents feel able to access general services, local groups, and training. Source St Michael's website accessed 28.1.22*

## **5.2 Ending repeat care proceedings and pregnancies**

The focus of Securing Change was to end the repeated care proceedings some families experienced with children often being taken away. Therefore, the most important outcome involved ending repeat care proceedings or avoiding new pregnancies to children at risk. Thereby retaining children in the family with improved parenting and/or no repeat pregnancies. **The majority of parents (21) worked with did not have a repeat pregnancy or recurrent proceedings in the year or so in the service.**

There were only two parents who did go on to have a repeat pregnancy following child removal, one just before she left the assessment centre and before the Securing Change service, the second after receiving Securing Change support but with three different care arrangements which broke down and she started drinking again. This child was also later removed from her care.

The first parent with a child removed (see also case study A) was referred to in the service progress report:

*They returned to care proceeding because the parents became pregnant so soon following the child who was removed.*

Source: Local Authority Social Worker (1) evaluation questionnaire January 2022

*This pregnancy involved the child being removed from the parents care. As they were leaving St Michael's assessment house 46 we discovered the mother was pregnant again. The Project Officer worked very effectively with that mother, but the Local Authority had decided to remove baby number 2 from hospital. Source: CEO contact*

A Local Authority Social Work Questionnaires returned to the evaluation team in January 2022 indicated that there was in fact a second pregnancy, not known until that point by Securing Change.

*Unfortunately, the parent became pregnant during the time she was working with the service so in that respect it didn't work so well. However, the worker engaged the parent to work with her very well and built a trusting relationship with her. I do think it was beneficial to the work we were trying to achieve.*

Source: Local Authority Social Worker (3) evaluation questionnaire January 2022.

This evidence was shared with St Michael's and the conclusion that there have been 2 pregnancies was reached by the CEO. This was contextualised in the email correspondence below:-

*During their assessment St Michael's felt the mother was fragile, but should be given an opportunity as she had become clean (of alcohol) and her care (of her child) whilst clean was good. She went into foster care with her baby, but this broke down and she went to live with her father and his partner, however that also broke down. She had started drinking again. She was given another chance and placed in supported living with 24-hour staffing, however when it went to court the baby was removed from her care. The Project Officer had been very involved in supporting her and continued to try, but the mother did not return any calls or answer emails*

*etc. We did not know she had become pregnant again until the Local Authority Social Worker returned the evaluation questionnaire in January 2022.*

Source: CEO contact

A very successful finding for Securing Change is therefore that the majority of parents they worked with did not have a repeat pregnancy (21 of out 23, 92%). In addition, one parent had children previously removed returned to her (parent 5).

Comments on this were made by 3 of the parents interviewed:

*None of my kids lived with me when I first met her and now they both do*

Source: Parent 5 Interview

*No repeated pregnancy and Vasectomy planned (3,4)*

Source: Parent 3 & 4 Interviews

*You know, if I had carried on having children without the work, that would not have gone well ... This is not something I've admitted, I don't even think I've told A-M, because she came after I'd got over that (wanting another child immediately) but if it hadn't been for Securing Changes I'd have had one -I was already trying.*

Source: Parent 5 Interview

### **5.3 Quantitative outcomes – exit/progress questionnaire**

An 9-item exit questionnaire designed and administered by the service asked about help received from the service. These were scored by the staff and information entered on the data sheet as Y=yes helped or N=not helped.

1. Solving day to day problems by myself
2. Understanding issues from my past which were holding me back
3. Understanding my relationship with family and friends
4. Feeling more confident
5. Confident to get the help I need from health and social services
6. Using resources in my area for example support groups, community centres, library
7. Feeling healthier
8. Feeling more optimistic about the future
9. Any further comments, questions, concerns.

Figure 1 shows the numbers (not percentages) who reported positive change in relation to coping, relationships and opportunities of the 23. The highest number (16) reported better coping strategies. This was about two thirds of the parents. Only around a third reported healthier relationships, confidence with other services and optimism. The lowest rate was for accessing opportunities (5 parents) around a fifth.

**Figure 1: Number of parents reporting positive change in coping and relationships (N=23)**

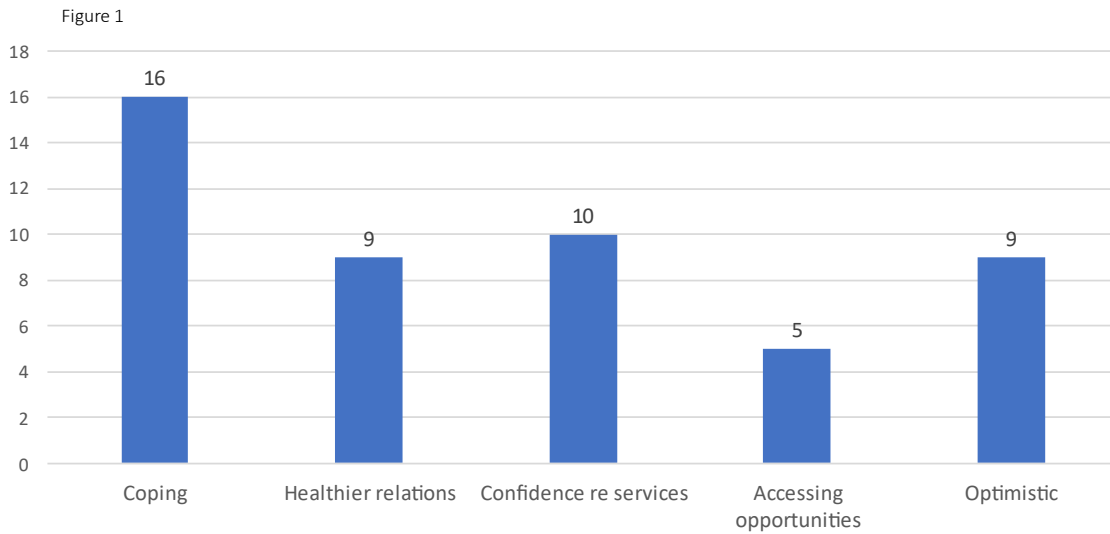
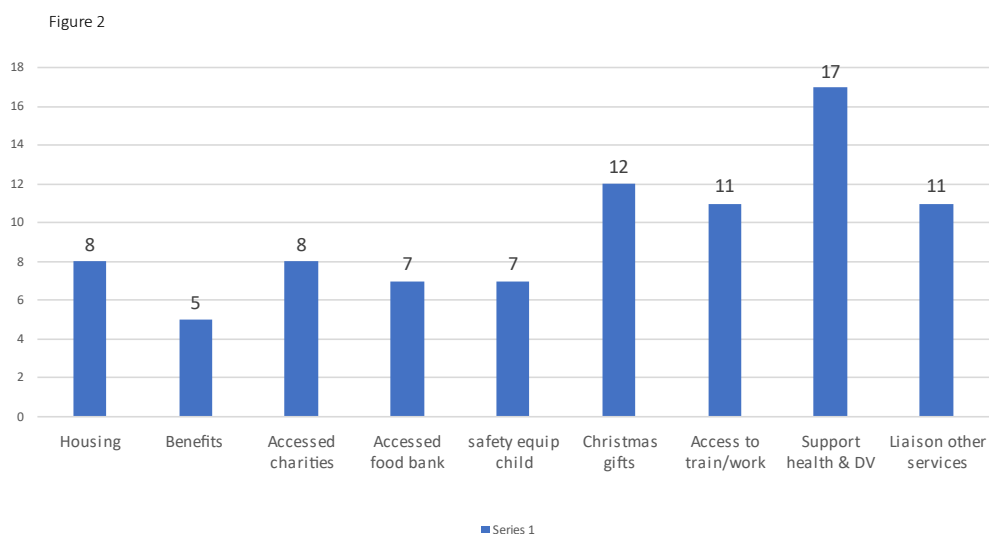


Figure 2 examines other outcomes involving housing, finance and service access.

The highest positive benefit was through emotional support for health and domestic violence (17) which represented around three-quarters. Numbers given access to work (11) represented around 48%. Eight parents received help with housing and financial help was represented by aid with benefits (5) accessing charities (8) food bank (7) child items (7) and Christmas gifts (12). There were 11 parents who benefited from help accessing other services.

**Figure 2 Number of parents who reported positive change in housing, service access and finance (N=23)**



### 5.3 Qualitative assessment of outcomes

#### 5.3.1 Parent Perceptions of the service

*It's just a fantastic thing they do to try and help people and families to stay together*

Source: Parent 3 Interview

The evaluation team's parent interviews elicited a very wide range of positive comments regarding how satisfied they were with their involvement in Securing Change and stating their satisfaction with the Project Officer in this role. Most of the praise was for the project officer and the positive relationship she provided and efforts on their behalf.

*No, I just think they are fantastic and that they, you know are giving a good service, cos it's different for me cos I'm a success and the other families she works with are in completely different situations, some might have their babies, some might not have their babies.*

(Waiting to see if they can get their babies Is there anything negative you've found about this service?) *No, (Is there anything she's done that hasn't been helpful or happy with?) No, it's all been good*

Source Parent 2 Interview

(Is there anything that A-M's service could do to help any more than it is?) *They are both (AM and Crawford House) doing a fabulous job There's nothing they can change.*

*It's just a fantastic thing they do to try and help people and families to stay together You know, I would recommend it to anyone that needs that support, even if it's not Ann-Marie but someone like her, even if it wasn't Ann-Marie and was another colleague of hers, or something, I would recommend that service to anybody*

Source Parent 3 Interview

*She's amazing Ann-Marie was absolutely brilliant, (*

(Can you give me an example of how she helped?) *By everything and that really.*

(How would you summarise what AM has done for you and (partner) in the last couple of years?)

*Well, everything and that really, I can't say one bad word about her... The woman is absolutely out of this world*

( Is there anything negative about how AM has helped you, what she provides or is it all positive?)  
*It is all positive. Source Parent 4 Interview*

*She's been, amazing, absolutely amazing. If I'm honest with you, no I cannot fault them, that's my experience again, I cannot fault them*  
Source: Parent 5 Interview

*Securing Change, show what they do matters, but how they do it matters more. I don't feel I planned to use this service, didn't know this service existed, before my experience with St. Michaels fellowship I mean. Any service that shows interest in helping other people, regardless of their reasons, in my opinion, is needed.*  
Source Parent 6 Interview

The interviews with parents elicited only a small amount of negative comments. This involved timings of meetings, the insecurity of the service going forward and its need for more workers.

*Do you normally arrange things by text or phone call? Normally it is a fixed day that I see her, ok, 12pm-1pm, sometimes she comes at 2.30 but she does turn up, most of the time I'm home anyway. Would you say she is reliable? Yeah, she's good, she's helped me quite a lot anyway. if she says she'll come at 2 or 1 she'll come at 3pm.*  
Source Parent 1 Interview

*Well I did ask AM how long are you going to work with me. She said obviously its charity funding and she is lucky to get funding up to next March (2022). So I don't know what's going to happen next March*  
Source Parent 3 Interview

*I disliked when people like to talk about my life, then asked me why am I so quiet about sharing my experience. It's rude to force communication on a disappointing experience. It requires more workers*  
Source Parent 6 Interview

### 5.3.2 St Michael's Worker Perceptions of the service

The evidence for the satisfaction of the service was intertwined with feedback concerning the competence of the Securing Change Project Officer in delivering the service. The Securing Change Project Officer's competence in her role was described very highly in St Michael's worker evaluation interviews. There were no negative comments.

*I love her enthusiasm and her professional support she offers families. it is invaluable. And she goes above and beyond. Nothing is too much for her, which is great. I can't think of anything she would improve – all credit to her.*  
*It is a much-needed service*  
*I can't think of anything she would improve – all credit to her*  
Source: Interview with Crawford House liaison worker

### 5.3.4 Social Worker Perceptions of the service

The perceptions from the three Local Authority Social Worker questionnaires received back to the evaluation team were entirely positive praising the project workers flexibility and proactive working and the positive relationship with parents established:

*AM was very proactive, flexible and worked well with both parents and all professionals. AM was very approachable.*

(Do you think parents are satisfied with the delivery of Securing Change?) *I think the mother valued the relationship with the worker and felt support by her.*

*I think that the work that AM done with the parents was positive and she managed to build a positive relationship with the parents. I feel that the parents were well supported during the time AM was working them. (What has worked well?) Parents felt supported. (Do you think parents are satisfied with the delivery of Securing Change?) Yes.*

*I think it was a positive service that was offered and would be beneficial to lots of parents Project Officer worked well with other professionals.*

Source: Social Worker questionnaire

There were no reported negative perceptions of the Securing Change from the three Local Authority Social Workers.

## 6. Analysis of the parent interviews

Detailed analysis identifying qualitative outcome evidence from the six evaluation parent interviews was undertaken by the team. The evaluation team found seven outcome indicators that the parents spoke about to entail the key ending of care proceedings described earlier.

For ending of repeat care proceedings and pregnancies:

1. Better coping strategies and being more able to manage in a crisis
2. Healthier personal relationships.
3. Increased confidence in accessing general services and engaging in community projects
4. Feeling more optimistic about personal development, their future, and sustaining positive change.
5. Improved emotional well-being, reduced psychological distress
6. Increased housing & financial security
7. Less isolation

### 6.1 Improved coping strategies

Parents reported improved confidence, one even saying it was this that allowed one to have sufficient voice to do the evaluation interview.

*At the beginning ... I wasn't ready at that time, I hadn't done the work (needed by LA) at that point .. so my main bit, where my confidence was really flattened, was where I felt like a was a failure to my children, But it has made me ... it has increased my confidence as I was in a place where I didn't even know where to start a while ago, and the first Securing Changes advisor ... they all helped me .... And they all found me at different stages*

*(Do you think she's helped give you confidence or stability?) She always tells me, you know, you are doing a good job with X (child).*

Source: Parent 1 Interview

*(Has it given you confidence or belonging or coping better?) I think I've coped a lot better now, than I did when I first left (Crawford House) and I think talking to A-M and CH, I think has helped (Do you think A-M has helped your self-confidence or belief?) Yes*

*If I'd done this (interview) four years ago I wouldn't have been able to do it, to be honest, I don't think I'd be able to do it back then, but now, I think because I've had time to readjust and think about it I can speak ... I think they need more people like A-M to do what they are doing*

Source: Parent 3 Interview

(Has she taught you or have you learned anything from her you can use in everyday life like what to do if you are feeling anxious or anything like that?) *If I am feeling anxious I go out in the garden and I sit there and have a little walk around the garden ... (Does that help you?) Yeah*  
Does she help make you feel more confident? *Yeah, yeah*  
Source: Parent 4 Interview

### 6.2 Healthier personal relationships.

There were few comments about personal relationships, but one parent was intending marrying his new fiancé and another learnt the importance of family:

<i>Married to new fiancée,</i> Parent 1 Interview	<i>Yes, I learnt the meaning/ importance of family.</i> Parent 6 Interview
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### 6.3 Increased confidence in accessing general services and engaging in community projects.

Parent interviews showed their engagement in training and community services (see parent 2) as well as accessing holidays and swimming lessons for her child.

Any more goals in the next year you'd like to get to? *I'm doing my training course, I'd like to be in paid employment in a year's time in the recovery service.. working with women or women and families, working with women who find themselves, you know, in situations like mine or pregnant and need some support*  
*Yes, AM helped, in July, went on a holiday to Haven's caravan holiday park, A-M sorted it out, she applied through a charity, so we could go on holiday. Did that all work well? Yeah, yeah I mean my daughter never been swimming before as we'd been in COVID and nothing was open so we went swimming there and when I got home I come back and signed her up for swimming lessons and we go three times a week now*  
Source: Parent 2 interview

(Do you think your experiences with Securing Changes and AM has made you easier to access other services?) *Yes.*  
Source: Parent 5 interview

### 6.4 Increased optimism about personal development, the future, and sustaining positive change.

Whilst parents did not necessarily form specific goals, they were at least able to look ahead. Parent 5 describes this:

(Where you do think you'd like to be in a year's time?) *So at the moment erm I don't really have goals for myself, other than like, keeping everything stable and you know, it's more about the children, just making sure, that, because their experiences means it's not like I can sit them down and it all comes out in one, you know, it comes out in play, it comes out after a film, it comes out at bedtime, so it's about... they catch me off guard, you know what kids are like, laughs,* Source: Parent 5 interview

*SC helps people to live fulfilled lifestyles.*  
Source: Parent 6 Questionnaire

### **6.5 Increased emotional well-being, reduced psychological distress.**

Parents in the service had to overcome a great deal of mistrust in services as described by parent 5:

*(Did you have expectations of her (AM) going in?) No I didn't have any expectations of AM, but I was coming from a place where I wasn't very trusting of services, you know, I had gone through court proceedings, my children had been taken away, you know, social workers were literally ignoring me and she is a social worker, if I say the wrong thing I get reported, you know you have those kind of anxieties I wouldn't say I had ... I was just a bit, like, not apprehensive, but like...here we go again.. another professional kind of thing. (When did it begin to change to the more positive, was that after the third court case or?) It started when I started feeling more positive, the court proceedings, in a way, like I always say everything happens for a reason, I made a mistake and it was going the wrong direction for my children, it was physical chastisement by the way*

Source: Parent 5 Interview

### **6.6 Increased housing & financial security.**

A few of the parents benefited from Securing Change help with housing and benefits. Parent 4 describes how essential this was:

*And they all found me at different stages ... so when everything had happened, I lost my job, I needed to look after my finances, I was about to lose my home ...*

Source: Parent 4 interview

### **6.7 Less isolation.**

Feeling less isolated through access to Securing Change was widely noted:

*And it is nice to speak to her, because apart from you know my course I volunteer in a charity shop, you know I sit in with XX (daughter) on my own so it is nice to have someone to speak to and just.. say what I'm up to and what I'm doing and if errr, you know moan about something like moan. Knowing that I've got that support if I need it ... Yeah*

Source: Parent 2 Interview

*I will take myself away sometimes and sometimes I do talk about it. Do you think having Ann-Marie there makes you feel a bit less isolated? Yeah*

Source: Parent 4 Interview

*There was somebody there to have a coffee with, to talk to, you cry if I needed to, Did it make you feel a bit less isolated at that point having her? Yeah, yeah, it did, yeah, so I think that was the time when I was feeling most isolated really, in between Emma and Ann-Marie, It was when the contact had reducing...*

Source: Parent 5 Interview



## 7. Discussion and conclusions

The Securing Change model has been adapted over the three years it has been in place in line with the work needing to be undertaken with parents (both mothers and fathers) and for parents with and without children in place on leaving assessment centres after court proceedings for child protection. This evaluation has also pulled together information on service delivery and implementation and outcomes from varied sources.

The service comprises a project officer, liaison workers within the residential assessment centres from which most of the parents come, and worker input to a database of parents. Securing Change continued throughout the Covid pandemic of 2020-2021 with the Project Officer undertaking face-to-face visits from May 2020 where the parent wanted this. Others spoke by telephone. The feedback from the parents' evaluations interviews was that this support was much needed and gratefully received. St Michael's also set up a food bank to help parents during this difficult time. The service, although new, showed much resilience in being able to function in such difficult services and should be applauded for doing so. Much was down to the resilience of the project officer in post but also of St Michael's foundation in supporting her.

Specifically, based on the extensive qualitative evidence they collected, the evaluation team identified the key outcomes and then seven subcategories to achieve this

Ending repeat care proceedings and pregnancy through parent support:

1. Supporting parents with their Housing
2. Supporting parents with their Financial stability
3. Supporting parents with Progress to Training or Work
4. Supporting parents with Physical, Mental Health and with Domestic Violence
5. Supporting parents with their Parenting skill
6. Supporting parents with their Learning needs
7. Supporting parents with the Local Authority requirements.

The evaluation case studies, written in Appendix 1 of this report, use the Securing Change model subheadings to provide rich examples of the in-depth nature of the work undertaken that in turn has led to the very high satisfaction with the service across the board that is shown above. Two of these involve parents who had children removed. But all three received help in parenting skills as well as with their material circumstances, and emotional and therapeutic support.

### ***7.2 Discussion of the evidence for Securing Change Outcomes***

Parental perceptions of the usefulness of the Securing Change, from the six parents who took part in the evaluations, was strongly positive. They felt a personal connection with the project officer and were very appreciative of her efforts on their behalf. This included parents who had had children removed.

St Michael's workers also indicated their high opinions of the usefulness of the service, alongside positive views of the Securing Change Project Officer's ways of working and skill set. Furthermore, the three Local Authority Social workers who took part in the evaluation also reported very high satisfaction with the delivery approach of the current worker and highlighted the professional nature of her collaborative work with them.

The repeat pregnancy of only two parents in three years is an achievement. This represents 6.6% compared to the national rate of 15%. Both would have been hard to avoid given issues of learning disability and repeat failed care arrangements.

### **7.3 Evaluation Limitations**

The evaluation also took place under the Covid19 pandemic which led to some delays in acquiring information given the increased workload of the service. There were delays of six months to the project by due to initial lack of engagement from both St. Michael's workers and Social Workers with the setting of the evaluation focus group and the interviews. This report is therefore delivered later than was anticipated.

Only a quarter of parents (6, or 26%) agreed to be interviewed for this evaluation. Their information cannot therefore be considered a comprehensive indication of the views of all 23 parents that have worked with Securing Change over the last three years. Nor indeed were any of the 6 in the early phase of the project. However, all those included in the evaluation engaged fully with the service also. They represented parents with and without child removal.

The quantitative evidence for this report was limited to the Excel database provided by St Michael's. This initially included missing information (much was able to be replaced) and was completed only up-to-and-including May 2021. In January 2022 as the report was delayed, the evaluation team enquired whether this database could be updated to allow them to comment on data up-to-and-including December 2021 and to fill in missing data. New data was then provided by St. Michael's, but this was only for the time period up-to-and-including August 2021 and therefore is not as up-to-date as it could have been.

## **8. Evaluation Recommendations**

### **8.1 Service expansion:**

The project worker selected proved to be an invaluable resource for Securing Change. However, to ensure sustainability and stability of service as well as its expansion ideally more workers should be involved. At present the service is dependent upon St Michael's worker support. One aspect to consider is the different working required for parents with a child removed and those who retain their children. These could be more clearly demarcated by worker and ways of working. Another issue is that of parents with learning disability and the additional specialist work needed. The current caseload of 14-16 mothers and fathers was considered the current maximum achievable working with the tailored, open-ended approach to meet the needs of the parents. Further referrals from St Michael's houses as well as more widely would require an expansion of this valuable service.

### **8.2 Further follow-up data**

In order to examine the longer-term impacts of Securing Change, further follow-up data after leaving the service would be valuable. Funding to allow contacts in the year following leaving the service, and to keep an updated database of parents experience would be a valuable asset. (See also resourcing of current data listed below).



### 8.3 Clarification of service boundaries & identity

It would be useful to identify more clearly the boundaries between Securing Change, St Michaels residential service and social work input. In addition, the messages disseminated about Securing Change service and success may benefit from the identification of a clearer theoretical approach. This may tie together aspects of the eclectic, relational and personally-tailored approach. This might include Attachment theory in the importance of attuned parenting and valuing close relationships, as well as the therapeutic model focussing on loss and grief work involved in losing a child.

### 8.4 In-service procedures improvement

- The **database** on clients held by Securing Change needs to be updated more regularly so up-to-date information can easily be retrieved when needed. Also, the of checklists approach/ongoing monitoring and categorisation of work undertaken using the categories identified would help with continued self-monitoring.
- Parents **Information Leaflet** to be given out by Crawford House and Jigsaw staff to help inform parents should be reinstated.
- **Use of standardised assessments** (whether questionnaire or interview) would establish markers of change in parents more definitively. St Michael's utilise the Attachment Style Interview and Parenting Role Interview for attachment and parenting respectively – these assessments could potentially be used to inform the Securing Change service and on occasion repeated to look for sustained improvement in both relationships and parenting care. Alternatively, questionnaires could be used for this. This may require further funding but could be justified in terms of establishing the mechanisms by which longer term change for parents occurs.
- **Ongoing analysis of outcome data continued:** Keeping on top of this would provide strong evidence regarding the benefits of Securing Change and it would be always readily available for reports and funding bids as required. This work to input this data, analyse questionnaires and help undertake ongoing evaluation is valuable and resources should be provided for it.

## 9. Conclusion

Our overall conclusion is that Securing Change has done very valuable work in supporting parents who have undergone care proceedings and have had children recently or previously removed. The flexible and personalised care provided has supported them with their loss or their ongoing parenting and other needs. It clearly filled a gap in services and worked with very deprived client group. We would like to see it continue and grow.

### Final Quotes

*Securing Change, show what they do matters, but how they do it matters more.*

*The service worker has to wear many different hats. They're all professional, but also an educator and a community bridge-builder*

Parent 6 interview

*Every parent is different. I treat each parent as an individual, that's the only way it can work.*

*I will go. I will support them with whatever aspect they need.*

Source: Project Officer

***Acknowledgments***

We would like to thank St Michael's CEO Sue Pettigrew, Managers, Elaine, Kate, Denise and most of all Securing Change Project Officer Ann-Marie Wallace for their time and help contributing to this evaluation.

## Appendix 1 Evaluation Case Studies

Three case studies were compiled to illustrate the work of the Securing Change team. These were based on the interviews undertaken with further Project Officer and CEO comments made on request. These have been set out according to the seven model subcategories described earlier.

### Case Study A

#### Parent 7 – Mother with learning needs and partner – child removed- repeat pregnancy

This is a mother and father with whom the Project Officer worked extensively over a period of 12 months. The mother had learning needs and the father a gambling problem and signs of depression leaving the mother to manage everything. She had a child removed and then got pregnant again but tried to hide this. The service supported her and a second court case was planned – outcome unknown but impacts of the service considered positive.

#### Supporting learning needs

The Securing Change Project Officer worked extensively with this mother and father regarding their considerable learning needs that were affecting their ability to run a household and parent their child. The specific work she undertook around with this family to help with their learning requirements is shown below:-

The CEO commented:

*We worked with a family who had significant learning needs. The father had lost a child prior to his relationship with the mother. Supporting parents with learning difficulties is what we were trying to do.. what was obvious was that these parents really loved the child they really did love her and didn't want any harm to come to her. We felt there should be more to support them. One of the things the staff at 46 had been looking at was an extended fostering type arrangement for families with learning needs to enable them to continue to care for their child and this was living alongside the whole family to have the oversight, or it was about providing attached accommodation to their own home that enabled them to have that ongoing oversight. We thought that if something like that was available to this family and to others we've worked with then that would provide a solution. CEO interview*

*So, firstly, I would break down everything, if there was anything that they didn't understand in their letters I would break it down for them so that they would understand it. I did forms and I sat with the mother and we went through it all. And I typed it up, wrote the up and then took it back to the office, we met in the community photocopied it sent her a copy back and send them the original. Project Officer interview*

#### Support with housing needs

The Securing Change Project Officer worked extensively with this mother and father regarding their extensive housing needs. The specific work the Securing Change Project Officer undertook around with this family in this arena is shown below:-

*I got charity applications so they could get stuff for their house and got donations of furniture. They had no heating. We managed to get some electric. When they got a flat I did the housing benefit and spoke to the house and benefit officer on their behalf. Project Officer interview*

*She and he were in a hostel temporary housing that was really not very pleasant at all.*

*Their food was being stolen.*  
Source CEO Evaluation interview

### **Supporting financial stability**

The Securing Change Project Officer also worked extensively with this mother and father to stabilise their finances needs. The specific work the Securing Change Project Officer undertook around with this family in this arena is shown here:-

*I filled out forms, like a welfare agency and they helped her to get paid.  
I also did the Universal Credit extension*

*There was many times when they had no food. I would get money, meet them get shopping. And after coming out of the hostel they had nothing - So we got them a washing machine, a bed, a donated sofa and rugs delivered.*

*The mother could not cook, so I tried to teach her how to cook .... we bought all the ingredients and, and showed her how to make a lasagna, because a lot of their meals were out of a packet. We've done work on dietary needs because it often. They drink a lot of soft drinks - waste a lot of money – so we worked on that.*

*And before the month they would have nothing. (I'm not saying that benefit money's a lot) They had no budgeting skills and just quite child-like really*

*The mum got back pay of £2000 something pounds. I tried to help her open up a savings account, to put the money in there as they were expecting a baby, but I found that every penny was gone. And then he also got back pay £4000 pounds and that went*

*I also contacted Thames Water to make sure they had a plan to pay as they were in debt... it was direct debit, so we've got all that organized so that they didn't get a debt issue. So, I did the Thames Water, and the gas and electricity.*

Project Officer interview

*The mother often didn't have money and would walk long distances in order to make her anti natal appointments. Later on the mother was supposed to be coming here to collect food because we have a food bank here now.*

CEO interview

### **Supporting training, or work**

In terms of supporting these parents to progress to training or work the Securing Change Project Officer helped the mother to access online parenting programme, where she would learn the various milestones of development for a child.

*I was able to find an online programme and which was design for parents will learning needs and the course goes at the pace of the parent. I spoke to the facilitator who was happy to have the mother on the course. The information was share to the parents and she did start the course. She did not complete the course, despite my help* Source Securing Change Project Officer Evaluation interview

### **Supporting physical, mental health and with domestic violence needs**

The Securing Change Project Officer worked with this mother and father to help them with their mental health needs. The specific work the Securing Change Project Officer undertook around with this family in this arena is shown below:-

*The dad had a gambling issue*

*I supported the dad to register for the GP, get assessed for depression and then for them to attend appointments.*

*I would support the to go to the hospital appointments, because she would have to go and get appointments with the midwife. And I also was going to see the mum, which was in hospital when she had the baby.*

*There were often issues between the parents, so I would help them to engage because there was occasions that the Dad wouldn't work with me, and the mum helped me.*

Project Officer interview

*She was doing it all, he wasn't, he was staying at home in bed feeling very low I would say.*

CEO interview

### **Supporting parenting skills**

The Securing Change Project Officer also worked extensively with this mother and father to help them with their parenting needs:

*We worked extremely hard with them at 46. They needed support all the time and we were never able to pull back to a point where you could say they would be able to manage on their own. And sadly by the time they moved from 46 she was pregnant again. The Securing Change Project officer was involved with her during that pregnancy and she tried so hard so hard to keep baby number 2 – she attended parenting classes kept her anti-natal appointments.*

*They were highly compliant you know wanting to do well. It was when we started to pull back a bit to see what they were capable of doing by that then there were some issues. When you think you know if something isn't put in place effectively here is a young woman in her early 20s ... Think of the years of childbearing that she has in front of her with someone who's desperate to be a mum and because that need hasn't been fulfilled there's still the need isn't there and the unresolved trauma and you know that doesn't you know the amount of work that needs to happen to process that.*

CEO interview

*And as well, when she was going to she was having contact. Now, when the baby got removed, I would meet her. And we'd go for because she often be upset so I'm meeting with go in the community and have coffee or something to eat, or just to make her feel a bit better. And I would attend all meetings, and they would be in the hospital. So, I would attend to all the meetings.*

Source Securing Change Project Officer Evaluation interview

### **Supporting with Local Authority requirements**

The Securing Change Project Officer worked extensively with this mother and father to advocate for them and would ensure they were able to access the information shared in meetings.

*I also would advocate on their behalf. My role was incorporated into the LA plan and I saw to support the parents to access services, as well aid them to cope within the community, such as budgeting, cooking meals from fresh, setting up payment plan for their utilities. I supported the midwife to do a memory box following their son being taken into LA care. I also provided individual sessions for the couple regarding grief and loss when their daughter was placed in care of LA. For me the most important thing was getting the parents to realise making the positive change needed, to care for child, before having more kids. Enabling this family was the best way forward, and helping them to place their child needs ahead of their own. Learning how to budget, accessing resources attend all medical appointments etc.*

*I used Attachment and Narrative therapy, Relationship therapy, child development, loss and bereavement and Maslow's hierarchy of needs with this family. I needed to use various models of therapy with this family due to their learning disability as it was sometimes difficulty in keeping them focus and on track. What also aided my work was using rewards - carrot and stick.*

Project Officer Evaluation interview

*At that time she was having contact with her first child. Later, she didn't turn up to the food bank and it turned out she was pregnant again and she was wanting to hide it was a long as she could, because she knew what would happen. She had the baby and it went to court with plans to remove. And the judge ordered a further assessment. The work we did was positive.*

Source CEO interview

### **Case Study B**

#### **Parent 2 – retained child – mother an alcohol and drug user**

This mother had her first child, her daughter, when she was in her 20s. Currently, she also has both a teenage son, and then the little girl who have both remained in her care.

The Securing Change Project Officer reports at the beginning of her work that this mother was homeless and the father of her child was someone she knew from the streets. The work carried out by the Project Officer included Child development, cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) to address the mother's low self-esteem, Narrative therapy to identify the areas of trauma in the mother life and the cycle of change.

*(When did A-M get in touch?) She got in touch a week or two after I was emailed about the service. I had finished the foster placement by that point, no actually it was near the end of it, so I was close to finishing it Why did they get in contact with you at that point do you think? Because Denise, my keyworker said to me about it – do you want to get in touch, I guess as I was going home and you know they might have thought it would be nice for me to have some support for when I'm at home because I don't have any support from my anyone else.*

Parent 2 Interview

*She had lead a difficult life and the interaction with services that she was very, very wary of St Michael's, and she was extremely challenging to work with, initially, because she didn't trust us. She really didn't trust us. We had to gain that trust, but having gained it. Then there was no real breakthrough with her, and I think she realized that we were supporting her determination to be successful with this child, and she did everything that was asked her.*

Project Officer interview



### Supporting this mother with her housing needs

*I supported this mum to live back in the community, accessing services for herself and daughter. I was able offer practical support. Source Securing Change Project Officer Evaluation interview*

### Supporting this mother with her financial stability

In her interview with the evaluation team, this parent reported:-

*(So what did AM's service do for you?) AM she got me. she applied for a grant, some things to buy, you know because I'm on benefits, you know, that would help. I got 3 stairgates, a new wardrobe for my daughter's clothes, a slip mat, so basically I got £200 and I could choose what I wanted, but it couldn't be toys, it had to be something I needed, like I got a Hoover as the last one broke – laughs. In July, we went on a holiday to Haven's caravan holiday park, A-M sorted it out, she applied through a charity, so we could go on holiday.*

*Did that all work well? Yeah, yeah I mean my daughter never been swimming before as we'd been in COVID and nothing was open so we went swimming there and when I got home I come back and signed her up for swimming lessons and we go three times a week now. And they donated me a computer because I write articles for a magazine, so I was using my phone basically... I bought a laptop for social services online meetings and stuff like, but they got donated a load of computers and so she came round and donated me a computer! Did she help you set it up too? Laughs yes she did! It wouldn't work with the wifi, so she phoned their tech services place and they said they'd need to be a wire that goes from the box into the computer. She went and got that and set it all up for me. And does she pay for the bits like that? Yes they paid. Source: Parent 2 Interview*

### Supporting this mother with her progress to training, or work

The Securing Change Project Officer provided child care for this mother's daughter and helped her look for voluntary work, and plan what her future could look like now she is free from any form of substances.

*I was able to provide mother with her own PC so she would be able to continue to write her free article for the homeless and this contributed to her developing a new positive identity born out of overcoming her adversities. Source Securing Change Project Officer Evaluation interview*

In her interview with the evaluation team, this parent reported:-

*(Do you think this bit with A-M has helped your self-confidence or belief?) Yes, And it is nice to speak to her, because apart from you know my course I volunteer in a charity shop, you know I sit in with my daughter on my own so it is nice to have someone to speak to and just.. say what I'm up to and what I'm doing and if errr, you know moan about something ... knowing that I've got that support if I need it ... (Any more goals in the next year you'd like to get to?) I'm doing my training course, I'd like to be in paid employment in a year's time in the recovery service, working with women or women and families, working with women who find themselves, you know, in situations like mine or pregnant and need some support. So I'd like to be in paid employment, I wouldn't say in a year, I'd say in two... Yes*

*(Do you think you'll be able to talk to A-M about job applications and things like that?) Yeah, yeah, I'd be able to if I got stuck on a question, or something, yes I'd be able to email and just ask what she'd suggest I'd write instead Yeah Source: Parent 2 Interview*

### Supporting with Physical, Mental Health and with Domestic Violence needs

The mother had been a long-term alcohol user and drug user and the Securing Change Project Officer reported she sourced information regarding the AA so that mother could access this within her local area.

The mother also successfully completed a DV programme and went onto train to become a facilitator *for women that have been subjected DV and is volunteering for turning point*. Source Securing Change Project Officer interview.

In her interview with the evaluation team, this parent reported:-

(Do you talk to her about your alcohol recovery?) *Yeah yeah*  
*Also, when I first saw her I have no front teeth due to domestic violence. I had them punched out, so I had no front teeth and I said to her I'd like to go to the dentist and get some dentures as it is not very nice for me not having no front teeth basically and my daughter will go to school and will call me 'gummy' and she'll get bullied and it's not good for my confidence, so, yeah she helped look after my daughter while I kept going to the dentist and it took like four times to go there. She watched my daughter even though it was COVID.. and they wouldn't allow babies in there*

(Do you feel like you can pretty much tell her anything in confidence?) *Well, yeah, I don't really have much to say in that way, I'm not a person that talks about feelings and stuff like that. I mean, you know, I've always been paranoid because you know, where people can just report you to social services for nothing these days, and because I've already been involved with them, it would be a lot more harder for me, you know so basically if I meet someone I'm not going to tell them anything about being in an assessment centre, you know, anything ... like that, so it will be just presume I'm like any other normal mum and I came home with my baby ..I'm not mentioning anything about that.*

(Have you talked about that kind of thing with A-M?) *Yeah, People can use it against you. So I wouldn't tell anyone anything.*

(And that's the kind of thing you can talk to A-M about?) *Yeah*

*Social services agreed that I could continue my recovery because they said that I was a pleasure to work with and they don't want to be involved with me again, they pay for nursery, while I go to recovery and then I'm not so isolated*

Parent 2 Interview

### Supporting with parenting skills

The Securing Change Project Officer supported this the mother with various child focussed activities and they discussed the milestones of development. Securing Change provided a stairgate to keep the child safe. Advice was provided to the mother so she could access financial support from the LA for child care in order for her to be able pursue her future goal to seek out voluntary work as well as her daughter getting interaction with her peer group. In her interview with the evaluation team, this parent reported:-

*I mean I've got my daughter, who is two next month and it's been a while since I bought up a baby and potty training ... I had no idea about so I sort of ask her advice for some things you know like she kept getting out of bed at one point and then coming into my bed so I sort of could ask her like for advice and stuff like that. Actually, I've gone to some baby groups and that to see if I meet anyone, but you know I find it hard, you know, obviously due to the situation I have been in, the assessment centre, being judged and that and I still find it a bit difficult and that But I've got so much other things going on She goes to nursery twice a week Source: Parent 2 Interview*

### Supporting with the Local Authority requirements

The Securing Change Project Officer helped this mother with her a supervision order and would have to attend 3-monthly meetings. The outcome was her two children are reunited with her and with no local authority involvement.

*I don't really need the support, I've done my things... she says she works with families who are still going through court procedures, stuff like that, it's a totally different thing* Source: Parent 2 Interview

### Parent Satisfaction with the service

This parent reported high satisfaction with Securing Change:-

*I just think they are fantastic and that they, you know, are giving a good service.. If I need to speak with her, I just pick up the phone her. Do you get on well with the Project Officer? Yeah, yeah Is the main idea just to have someone you can have a chat with? Is that right? Yeah*

*And do you trust her? Can you talk to her properly without having to worry about what you say? Yeah. Is there anything negative you've found about this service? No. Is there anything she's done that hasn't been helpful or happy with? No, it's all been good. I just think they are fantastic and that they, you know are giving a good service, cos it's different for me cos I'm a success and the other families she works with are in completely different situations, some might have their babies, some might not have their babies* Source: Parent 2 evaluation Interview

### Case Study C

#### Parent 5 – child removed – childhood trauma

This is a mother of both a 5 & 15-year-old. The Securing Change Project Officer worked extensively over a period of 41 months with her. In her interview with the evaluation team the Securing Change Project Officer reported:-

*This mother was having counselling to address past trauma in her childhood. I was able to do some attachment therapy with her as well as used some of the models of family therapy. We looked at her childhood and what she took from it and used in her own parenting for her children.*

*We talked about how she used positive discipline method for her 5 & 15-year-old. This mother was a victim of DV in her last relationship and we therefore did work on ensuring she recognised the signs of a perpetrator and what she needs to do in the future when she does enter into another relationship in order to reduce this happening again and how to identify this so that she does not become a victim again. This mother also dealt with loss and grief when her sons where taken in care. She developed low self-esteem and confidence and her ability to be a good parent and how she would manage challenging behaviour when her children returned back her care. I was able to do some worksheets where we did gratitude list, visualization exercise and strength exploration. This mother was able to draw on her abilities as a parent and when she felt unsure we would talk about her concerns and how she would manage the situation. Source Securing Change Project Officer interview*

The mother reported in her interview with the evaluation team:-

*and they just took both of them away so I do understand and I do agree with the proceedings and I did from the very get go... I didn't fully agree with the plan*  
Source: Parent 5 interview

### **Supporting this mother with her housing needs**

The Securing Change Project Officer reported in her interview with the evaluation team:-

*During lockdown I was able to assist the mother and we looked into what housing benefit she would be entitled to when her sons came back into her care. Source Securing Change Project Officer Evaluation interview.*

### **Supporting this mother with her financial stability**

The Securing Change Project Officer reported in her interview with the evaluation team:-

*I was able to provide Christmas presents for the family and food hampers. Source Project Officer interview.*

### **Supporting this mother with her Progress to training, or work**

The Securing Change Project Officer reported:-

*I provided information for the mother so she could do an online parenting programme during lockdown, which she successfully completed. Source Securing Change Project Officer Evaluation interview.*

### **Supporting this mother with her physical, mental health and with domestic violence needs**

The Securing Change Project Officer reported:-

*This mother had a non-molestation order, which was expiring and she asked for advice on it and I was able to look into this matter and share with the parent what I found. The mother was also having counselling to address issues relationship to her own past trauma and her relationship with her son father where she was a victim of DV. Source Project Officer interview.*

In her interview with the evaluation team the mother reported:-

*Obviously, I didn't want my kids to go away from me, but I got it and it was once I started addressing the issues that I had, that things started improving g but I wouldn't have even started to identify with them, I was in such a dark place, if it wasn't for the support of St M Source: Source Parent 5 Interview*

### **Supporting this mother with her parenting skills**

*I supported this mum with her having a better understanding the needs of her sons Source Project Officer interview.*

In her interview with the evaluation team the mother reported:-

*For me to be open, as anyone can take a parenting course, you know, it's not about taking and presenting at the sessions, it's about really believing that there's something wrong with you, that sounds bad, but I know what I mean... meaningful change? Yes ... Deep work so that was, yeah the biggest thing for me was that I stopped being in denial, about myself. It was a very dark time for me and I was very receptive, I just knew that I needed help, so, I was like I'm going to listen to as much advice as I can, then it was about understanding the advice so when I got to the .. it guess it took me about 4 months to actually realise you've got to change, your life has literally just spiralled downwards, and change is not just finding a job, you need to try and search for why you were so unhappy... So it's if I have any goals it is to be more natural with those kind of responses because I feel so guilty about the whole situation, and it is very adult things that have happened in my children's lives, so it is about that balance about being honest with them and learning to be better at that, because I have relied on A-M quite a lot, you know and said 'oh he's come out with this, what do I say to him?' Does she? Yeah, yeah, yeah We reflect on it Yeah Source: Parent 5 Interview*

### Supporting with Local Authority requirements

In her interview with the evaluation team the Securing Change Project Officer reported:-

*I attended all the LAC meeting and advocated on behalf of the mother, I did weekly home visits. My work was combined into the LA plan and I also was able explain any area she was confused about and the expectation of the LA for her. I also worked with the mother to ascertain her family history and identify why she was unable to recognise that physicals chastisement was abuse. I provided external parenting programme and we looked at how she would manage any of her son challenging behaviour, where she was not using any form of physical chastisement. Source: Securing Change Project Officer interview*

The mother reported:-

*A lot of the time she explained to me that she understands my feelings, she sometimes may not agree with them. (How does what she did compare to other services, support workers?) And like foster carers had social workers, and my boys had two different orders, so there were so many people involved so I have navigated all of that, so yes I would say again, for my liking, it (A-M's service) was ... what I found hardest dealing with the LA and professionals was that you would have a conversation with them, and then you'd come out of there not knowing how it's gone, anything could be written on paper. So, throughout all the review meetings with the LA I would be getting reports and I'm like, "oh my gosh, how can you say this about me?" type of thing, because they would never be open about, you know, pulling me up when I'm wrong, for example (Were you able to say to St M just how upset you were at times?) Yeah, I was very open with anybody from Securing Changes I mean to be honest, I was open with social workers as well, but it wasn't received the same way. Also, there was really poor communication with the foster carer so I wasn't sure what he (youngest son) had been told, I didn't want to confuse my child And A-M was there for all of that? Yes. I remember being in meetings where she raised that and said 'look, this is an Important point, there is no communication with the foster carer and this women doesn't know what her kid has been told, and the child is presenting questions that she needs to answer and she can't just ignore him'. Source: Parent 5 Interview*

### Outcome for this mother: Pregnancy prevention

The mother reported in her interview with the evaluation team:-

*For me the most important thing was having their involvement making me aware that having more kids was not a solution and actually taking that perspective away from my and turning right back into myself to look deep as into where I went wrong and try to repair those issues. Source: Parent 5 Interview*

## **Appendix 2**

### **Experiences and support needs of mothers who have had a child removed into care**

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#### **Abstract**

The human and economic costs associated with recurrent cases of child removal have recently been highlighted and efforts to understand and address the needs of birth parents have increased. Although still relatively sparse, previous research strongly suggests that mothers (the focus of the vast majority of studies) who have multiple children removed tend to have complex personal histories and lives that are marred by problems such as alcohol/substance abuse, poor mental health, learning difficulties, and/or domestic / intimate partner violence. Furthermore, involuntary child removal tends to exacerbate pre-existing problems (e.g. increase symptoms), produce complex grief reactions, lower self-esteem, damage identity, reduce social support, and induce feelings of powerlessness and distrust of social services processes and professionals. The study reported here aimed to further understanding of the experience of involuntary child removal by gathering the perspectives of seven mothers who had undergone this process, elaborating their experiences and garnering their views on their support needs both at the time and subsequent to losing their child. Formal thematic analysis revealed five themes, which described the common factors leading up to child removal and the mothers' understanding of them, the devastating experience of loss, how to move forward after the child has been removed, challenges presented by the system and related professionals, and their views on the support needed for parents in the wake of compulsory child removal. These findings indicated broad similarity with previous research in the area, highlighting the necessity of post-removal support with regards to grief and coping strategies, managing mental health, helping parents understand the reasons - both personal and practical - that led them to the point of removal, repairing social networks, and rebuilding identity and self-esteem. The fundamentally essential nature of trust in services and professionals was also emphasised, and the potential for explicit adoption of attachment models in providing support was discussed.

## Appendix 3 Interview and Focus Group Schedule

### *Interview*

1. Tell us about your experience of Securing Change
  - expectations of service
  - positive/negative experience of service
2. How does this compare with other services you may have used before?
  - positive/negative differences
  - what other services
3. Have you been able to use what you have learned through Securing Change in everyday life?
4. Has Securing Change made any difference to how you see yourself? (self-esteem/self-confidence, ability to cope with life and with crises, sense of belonging)
  - what was it about Securing Change that made the difference?
5. Has Securing Change made any difference to your relationships? (interest in forming new relationships/decreased feelings of isolation)
  - what was it that made the difference?
6. Has Securing Change given you confidence to access services?
  - participating in any voluntary/training opportunities?
  - accessing general services?
7. Is there anything you would change about Securing Change?
8. Where do you see yourself in a year's time?
  - any goals/plans

### *Focus Group Schedule*

1. Has Securing Change been implemented as planned?
  - If not, why?
2. How well do you think the aims of Securing Change have been achieved?
  - short term and long-term
  - What has worked well/not so well
  - what are best practices in relation to delivery
3. Do you think parents are satisfied with the delivery of Securing Change?
  - who benefitted and in what circumstances
4. What do you think the impact of Securing Change on parents has been?
  - personally (e.g. confidence/coping/relationships)
  - behaviourally (e.g. reduced repeated care proceedings, increased training opportunities)
5. Were there any unintended outcomes?

- positive/negative

6. How can Securing Change achieve better outcomes?