

The logo features a vertical rectangular background with a geometric, low-poly pattern. The colors transition from dark blue at the top to green at the bottom. The text is white and positioned on the left side of the background.

Centre of
expertise
on child
sexual abuse

Piloting the multi-agency Child Sexual Abuse Practice Leads Programme in Wales

Learning report

January 2022

Executive summary

Between October 2020 and March 2021, the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) piloted a multi-agency 'Child Sexual Abuse Practice Leads' programme in two Welsh local authority areas. The aim was to support a small number of professionals across different agencies to develop their understanding, skills and confidence in identifying and responding to child sexual abuse, and to help them improve practice within those agencies by sharing their learning.

The programme consisted of 10 one-day sessions, delivered online. The mornings were made up of formal teaching, and the afternoons focused on reflective case discussions.

Feedback for this learning report was collected immediately after the programme ended: 34 of the 46 programme participants completed an online survey, and 28 attended focus groups. Four of the participants' line managers provided additional feedback through a different survey.

Those providing feedback indicated that the programme had helped them increase their skills and knowledge on various topics related to child sexual abuse; even those who said they had not learned as much, because they already had extensive knowledge and experience prior to the programme, felt more confident about working on cases of known or suspected child sexual abuse.

Respondents said the training had generated new insights and made them challenge and reflect on their existing practice, with several highlighting specific changes they had made to their practice. Most reported that they had shared their learning with others, both within and outside their own agencies. Specific examples included:

- sharing ideas for future work and development with a safeguarding team and other partners
- giving presentations to fellow police officers
- setting up task groups to promote the learning and offering consultation for those who required support in dealing with cases involving child sexual abuse
- advising colleagues that other agencies should continue to work with children while a police investigation is ongoing
- providing training for their team on sexually harmful behaviour
- sharing learning with colleagues around signs and indicators of child sexual abuse.

The training's online format was generally well-received; respondents recognised that face-to-face meetings would have been impossible at a time of Covid-related restrictions, but a few said they preferred the online format anyway. The learning methods (such as presentations and breakout rooms) used in the training were valued, with the trainers said to be knowledgeable and supportive. Respondents welcomed the multi-agency aspect of the training, saying it had been useful to hear other perspectives and learn more about other agencies' roles in the response to child sexual abuse.

The Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse aims to root all its work in the best evidence available. For all our training courses and programmes, this starts with the development of the training, and we review the content regularly to ensure that it reflects the latest developments in research and practice. We routinely collect feedback from training participants, which is used for reflection and continuous improvement. When we pilot a new course, or offer it to a new group, we may undertake more follow-up data collection and publish a report. Our learning reports contain participant feedback; evaluation reports synthesise more types of evidence, such as interviews with participants' managers.

Contents

About the multi-agency CSA Practice Leads Programme in Wales	4
Programme aims	4
Learning objectives	4
Selection of participants	4
Programme design and delivery.....	5
The trainers.....	5
The programme participants	5
Collection of feedback.....	6
Feedback on the learning	7
Developing knowledge, skills and confidence	7
Applying the learning to practice	8
Changing their own practice	8
Disseminating the learning	9
Changing internal cultures.....	10
Cementing the learning and helping participants to take on their role.....	11
Feedback on programme content and delivery	13
The trainers.....	13
Learning methods	13
Programme content	14
Duration and pace.....	15
Learning online	15
Multi-agency approach.....	17
Suggested improvements	18
Participants' expectations of the role of CSA Practice Lead.....	19
Final comments	20

About the multi-agency CSA Practice Leads Programme in Wales

The multi-agency Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Practice Leads Programme was piloted between October 2020 and March 2021 in two Welsh local authority areas. A small group of professionals from a range of agencies in those areas were selected by their managers to take part.

The programme had previously been piloted with social workers in three English local authorities, and in an organisation supporting adults with substance misuse issues; evaluations had found the programme to be effective in both settings. (The evaluation reports are on [the CSA Centre website](#)). It was then adapted to suit a multi-agency audience, and to online delivery in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Programme aims

The programme aimed to support a total of 46 professionals, across agencies in health and social care, education and the criminal justice system, to become 'CSA Practice Leads' – a role that involves:

- being the main point of contact within an agency for colleagues seeking advice on matters relating to child sexual abuse
- supporting agency colleagues with cases of child sexual abuse, through training or consultation
- where appropriate, developing services relating to children and families where there are concerns of child sexual abuse.

Learning objectives

The programme's focus was on:

- developing participants' knowledge, skills and confidence in identifying and responding to child sexual abuse
- supporting them to disseminate this learning throughout their teams/organisation
- facilitating the development of internal cultures/systems of learning and development within their organisations, in collaboration with the CSA Centre
- improving cross-agency understanding and communication in relation to child sexual abuse.

Selection of participants

Agencies in the two local authority areas were advised by the CSA Centre to select programme participants who would "maximise sustainability of knowledge sharing within the organisation". Managers in those agencies were asked to send a briefing document to all potential participants, to ensure that they would be committed to undertaking the role of CSA Practice Lead; the briefing included a 'health warning' about the impact of the programme, particularly for those with lived experience of sexual abuse.

The CSA Centre recommended that the participants should:

- be competent practitioners/managers in their own right, with an established reputation within their agency for good practice
- have some skills and experience in sharing their knowledge with others (e.g. cascading training, delivering group supervision or training)

- be interested in developing their knowledge and expertise in the field of child sexual abuse
- plan to remain with their agency for the foreseeable future
- be willing to take part in the evaluation of the pilot
- be committed to attending the programme and sharing their knowledge.

A separate briefing document for line managers outlined how their agency could embed the learning.

Programme design and delivery

The programme involved 10 one-day sessions; each combined a half-day of formal teaching with a half-day of reflective case discussion connecting evidence to 'on the ground' practice experiences. The sessions used research, evidence and practice expertise to explore key areas for understanding and responding to child sexual abuse. The programme was delivered online through methods including:

- PowerPoint presentations
- multimedia – videos, podcasts, audio etc
- discussion in small and large groups
- guest experts (from either the CSA Centre or the local area)
- reflective case discussions
- skills practice
- booklists and references.

The participants' line managers were invited to attend the first 90 minutes of the first training session, to ensure that they understood what the CSA Practice Lead role would be and how they could best support the participants during the training.

The trainers

The CSA Practice Leads Programme was delivered by two trainers per session.

In the first local authority area (LA1), it was delivered by one of the CSA Centre's practice improvement advisors with a background in nursing and many years' experience in healthcare, along with a practice improvement advisor from the CSA Centre who had extensive experience as a frontline social worker and service manager in child safeguarding settings.

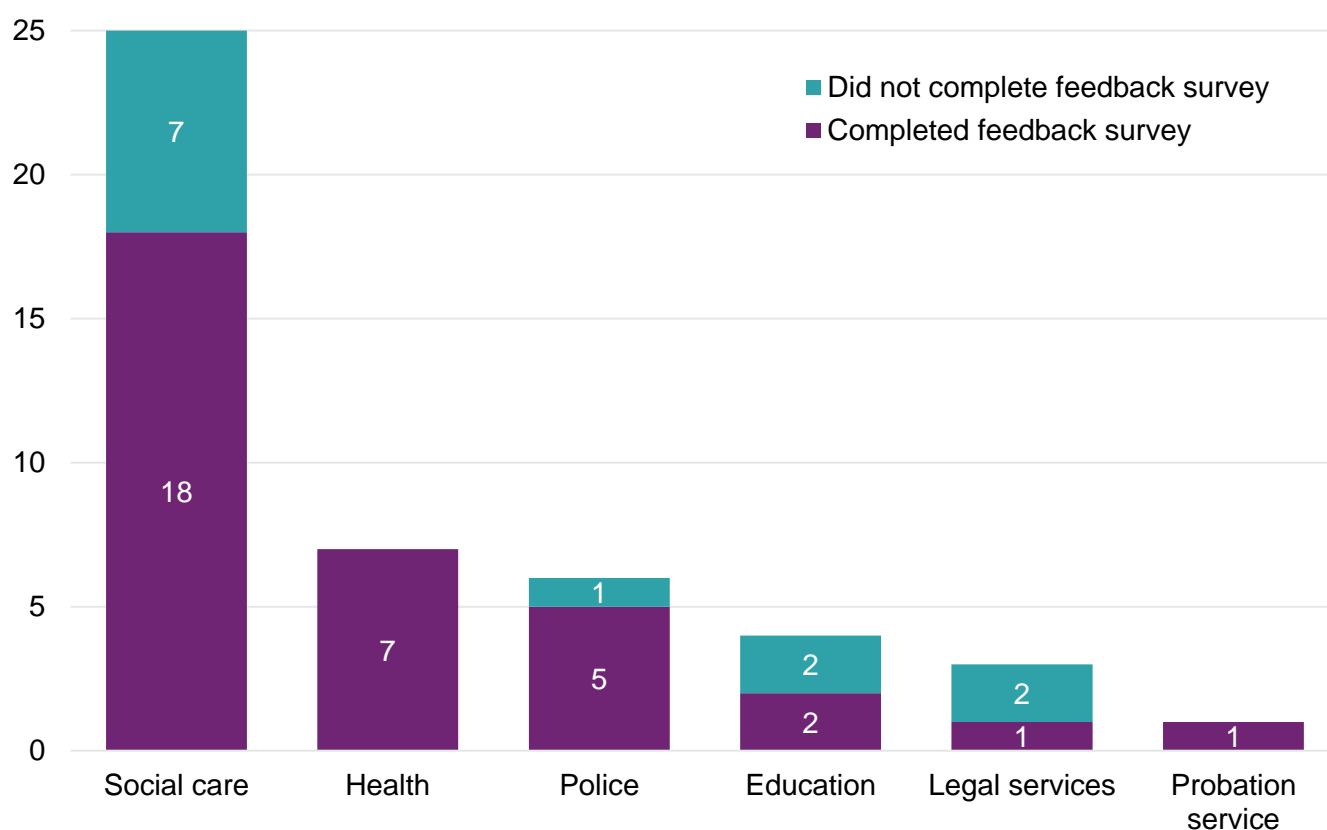
The programme in the second local authority area (LA2) was delivered by two practice improvement advisors from the CSA Centre – one with a background in social work and as an author of serious case reviews, and the other with a background as a public protection detective inspector.

The programme participants

This was the first version of the CSA Practice Leads Programme to bring together participants from different agencies, including those in health, social care, education and policing, for training. The range of agencies represented across the two local authority areas is shown in Figure 1.

There were a total of 46 participants in the programme: 21 in LA1 and 25 in LA2. They included police officers from public protection units; social workers from children's services, as well as those from a vulnerable adults service and a community wellbeing service; safeguarding nurses and a specialist paediatrician; a local authority lawyer; youth justice workers; a specialist advisor for education; and the manager of a children's centre.

Figure 1. Number of participants working in different types of agency



n=46. Source: programme registers.

Collection of feedback

At the end of the programme (late March/early April), participants were asked to provide feedback by completing an online survey. Additionally, four focus groups – two in each local authority area – were held. Table 1 shows how many programme participants provided feedback through these methods.

Four line managers of participants from health and social care completed a separate survey about their experience of the programme.

The surveys and focus groups gathered information on expectations of the CSA Practice Lead role, the multidisciplinary focus of the programme, the training content and outcomes, and the programme delivery: its duration and pace, the expertise of the trainers, the online delivery, and the training format.

Table 1. Numbers of participants providing feedback on the programme

Local authority area	No. of participants	No. of survey respondents	No. of focus group members
LA1	21	13	12
LA2	25	21	16
Total	46	34	28

Feedback on the learning

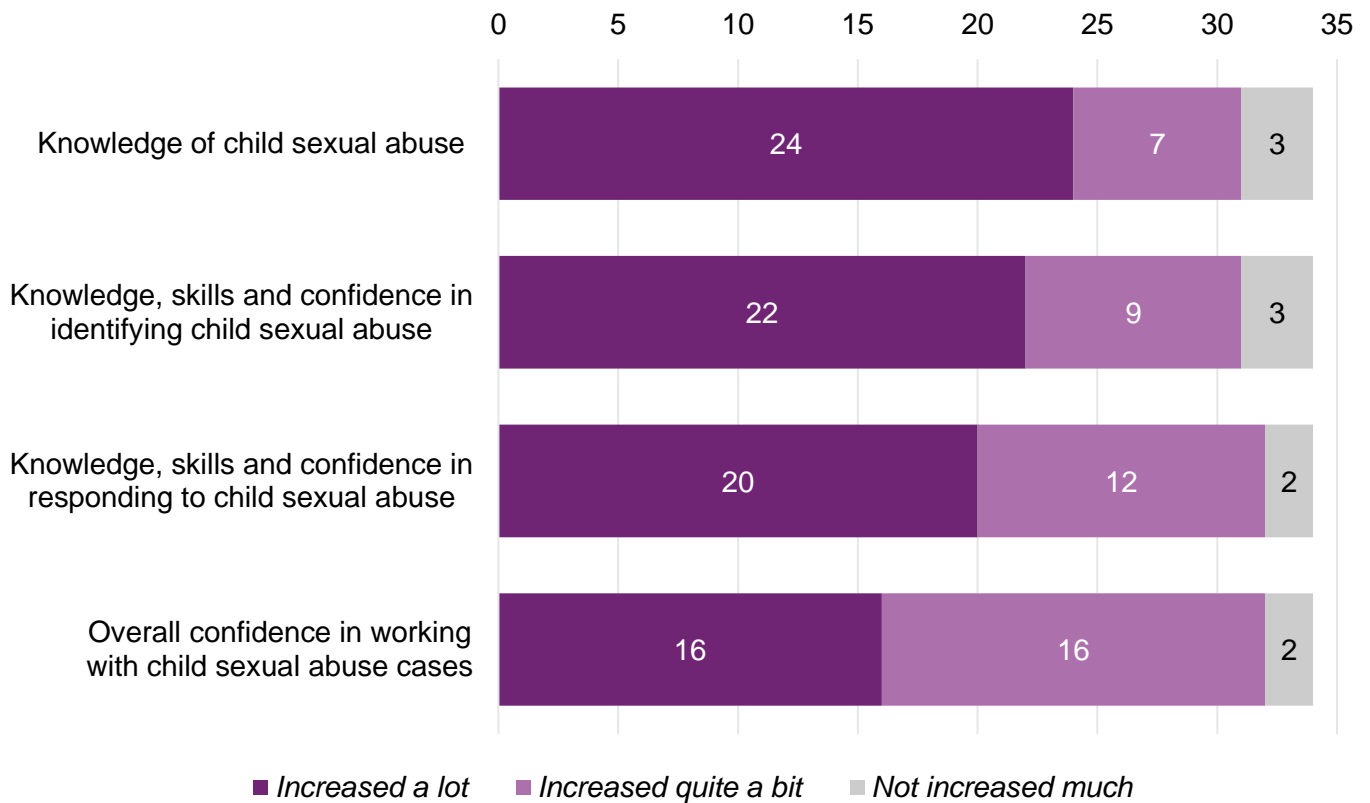
The programme participants provided feedback on how well the training had met the programme’s learning objectives.

Developing knowledge, skills and confidence

Most of the 34 participants who completed the survey reported that, by attending the programme, they had increased their knowledge, skills and confidence in identifying and responding to child sexual abuse (see Figure 2). Managers attested to this increased knowledge and confidence.

A few respondents indicated that their knowledge and skills had not improved much, since they had already had extensive knowledge and experience at the start of the programme; however, they said they had still benefited from the programme, particularly because of its multidisciplinary focus.

Figure 2. Changes to the respondents’ knowledge, skills and confidence



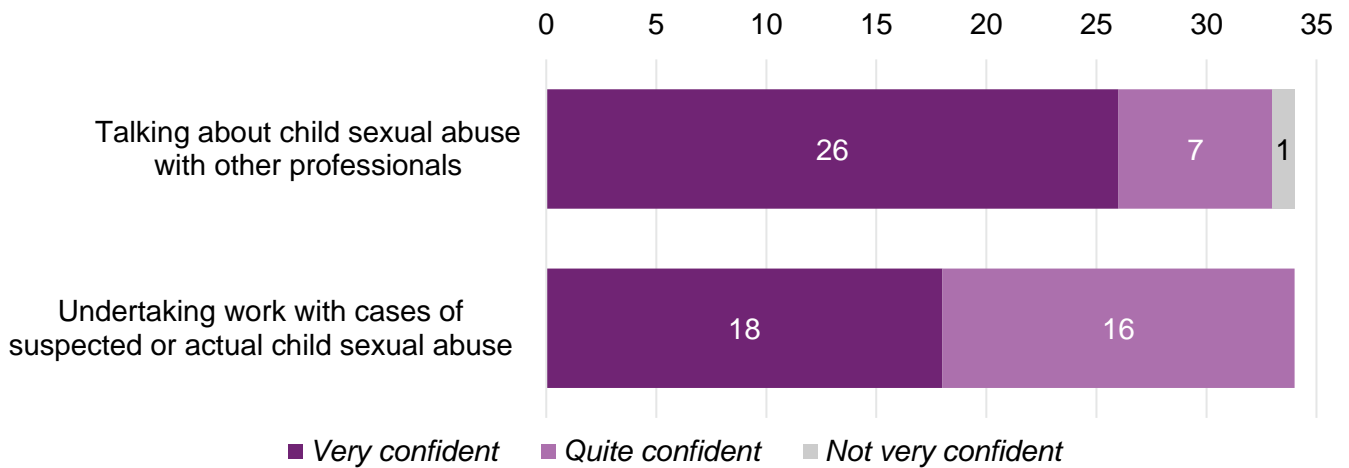
n=34. Source: participant survey.

As a result, all the respondents felt confident in undertaking work with cases of suspected or actual child sexual abuse, and all but one in talking with other professionals about child sexual abuse (see Figure 3):

“I feel more confident that I have the tools to work with families and children who have been exposed to [child sexual abuse].”

“Having a better understanding of processes is really useful in being able to support young people.”

Figure 3. Respondents' levels of confidence in relation to cases of child sexual abuse



n=34. Source: participant survey.

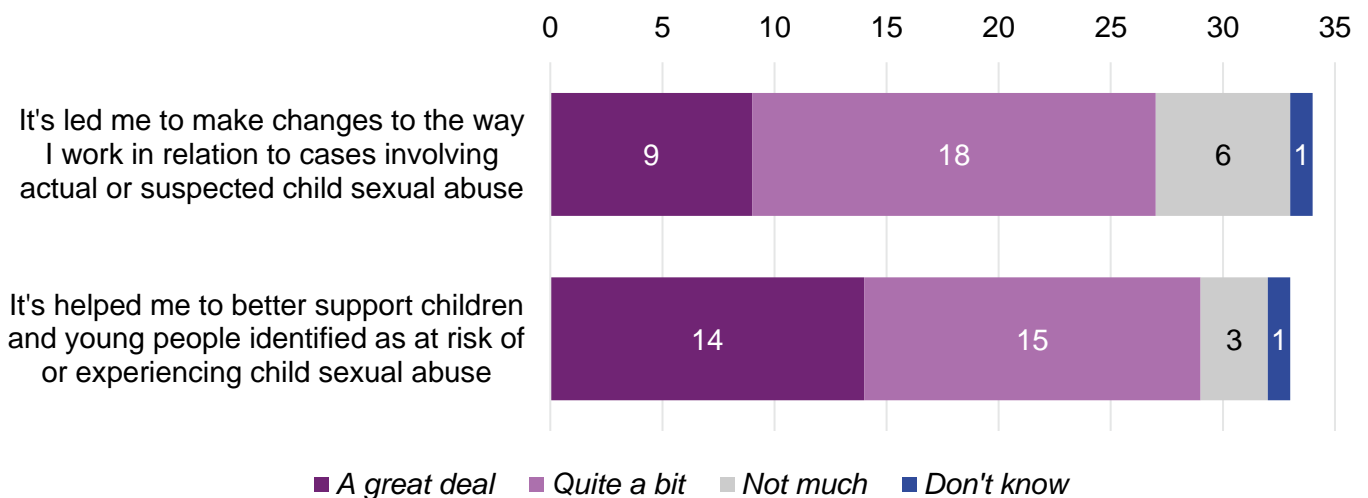
Applying the learning to practice

As part of the programme, participants were expected to use their knowledge in their day-to-day practice, as well as provide support and guidance to other practitioners. All the survey respondents said they felt well equipped to be CSA Practice Leads in their agencies.

Changing their own practice

The survey asked whether taking part in the programme had helped the participants better support the children and young people they worked with. Four-fifths (n=27) of respondents felt that the programme had led them to make changes to their practice, and even more (n=29) felt better able to support children and young people identified as being at risk of or experiencing child sexual abuse: see Figure 4. The few who disagreed explained that organisational barriers prevented them from changing their practice.

Figure 4. Effect of the programme in relation to supporting children and changing working practices



n=34 (first question); n=33 (second question). Source: participant survey.

Some explained the difference that the programme had made to their practice:

“I think much more deeply/widely about possible responses and approaches to these cases now, and am more able to put forward an informed and evidence-based case for a particular approach when speaking with colleagues.”

“The training has encouraged me to also look for and consider non-verbal disclosures as well as verbal disclosures.”

“I have applied a lot of the knowledge I have learnt in order to be able to better explain processes to children, and to ensure that we are taking a wider range of issues for them into consideration.”

In the focus groups, participants reported that the information covered by the training had led to new insights, with some reporting that it had made them reflect and challenge their own perceptions and approaches:

“It’s really made me think about things that I probably wouldn’t have thought about had I not done this training. It challenged my thinking and assumptions as well.”

“There was a session on online abuse, and thinking about the perpetrator’s child, even if they’re not necessarily within the perpetrator’s group of interest, things like that – that would make me think very differently about things... Thinking also about different signs that I would not have necessarily associated with sexual abuse.”

“Also language, the way things are recorded. I hadn’t really thought about that before – that was a real eye-opener for me – and how records are being produced.”

“...the need for a holistic approach. I’m not sure how we can support that young person if we’re not supporting the people around her.”

“When there is a disclosure made, and there’s an investigation into sexual abuse, there can be a lot of reliance on the police, and if there’s an NFA [no further action], children’s services take the stance of ‘it didn’t happen’. So personally, I have a better understanding... We can continue to support, there’s an NFA, but it could have happened.”

“It will definitely help with assessments, assessing families. [In the programme] we’ve been hearing a lot of information on what to look out for, dealing with family members who may have experienced [child sexual abuse].”

Disseminating the learning

The survey respondents were asked whether they had been able to share their learning with colleagues. Almost all (n=32) said they had been able to do so with others within their organisation – for example, by:

- sharing ideas about future work and development with the safeguarding team and clinical board services as well as with regional safeguarding board partners
- giving presentations to fellow police officers
- setting up task groups to promote the learning and offer consultation for those requiring support in dealing with cases where child sexual abuse is involved
- advising colleagues that other agencies should continue to work with children while a police investigation is ongoing
- providing training for their team on sexually harmful behaviour
- sharing learning with colleagues around signs and indicators of child sexual abuse.

In addition, 10 respondents had shared learning with people *outside* their organisation.

Almost half the respondents (n=15) reported that they had already been able to support colleagues with cases of child sexual abuse as a result of taking part in the programme. This included:

- cases shared by child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) following disclosure
- cases where there had not been a disclosure, leading to discussion about evidence of familial abuse
- cases where a disclosure had been made and support was required
- cases where child sexual abuse images had been found on family members' electronic devices
- interventions with and risk assessment of perpetrators
- advice to a colleague working in a children's learning disabilities team
- a case of a child exposed to online sexual abuse
- a case of a suicidal child with a history of being sexually abused.

Those who had not yet shared their learning explained that this was in the pipeline and further planning was needed.

In the focus groups, several participants said the training had given them the knowledge and confidence they needed to challenge incorrect information and/or practice:

"It's given me confidence to support others working with children, making sure they work in the correct way to get the best results for children and families."

"Now we're able to challenge incorrect information with proper backing."

Some still did not feel completely ready to do so yet, however.

One focus group participant described how they had shared their knowledge from the programme with multidisciplinary partners who were meeting to discuss the Violence Against Women and Girls agenda locally; another expressed interest in "setting up a CSE clinic where colleagues could bring their cases to discuss". Others talked about setting up organisational information or training sessions to present what they had learned to colleagues within their agencies:

"So much information was given over the six months, it was impossible to share it all in half an hour. But there was an appetite from the staff for wanting to know what we learnt – that was really encouraging."

It was noted that some agencies already have specialised departments: for example, one pilot area's police force had a team of specialist child abuse investigators, whom colleagues would usually approach with questions. It was felt that the CSA Practice Leads' expertise was still useful in those contexts, although concerns were expressed about how to ensure that it is available to frontline staff in practice:

"What I try and do is go round to their daily briefings and then share whatever we've learned... We had specialist departments in police stations, and they were accessible. [Now all the specialist departments are in] divisional HQ, which is out of the way... so people have got to pick up the phone now and sometimes are scared to do so."

Changing internal cultures

The survey respondents referred to specific activities being undertaken to improve support for children and young people as a result of the programme:

"We are looking within the Health Board to develop a Routine Enquiry type pilot around [child sexual abuse] in midwifery services."

“I’m at the start of the process of consulting with the team I work in to look at how we do this in the disability 0–25 team, as a collaborative approach.”

“It has given me the knowledge to develop a training programme for the University Health Board and how we are going to raise awareness and promote organisational learning in this subject area.”

Changes to the management of cases of child sexual abuse were also highlighted in the focus groups:

“We’re looking at things like developing an assessment tool around ability to protect.”

“[In one of the programme sessions] we discussed a case of mine, and I took that back to my line manager and suggested a different approach, which would not have necessarily been accepted before.”

Another focus group participant had identified gaps in services and were seeking opportunities to address them:

“In my role, I’m more likely to come into contact with adult survivors of sexual abuse, as opposed to those living it at the moment, and it’s the gap in service provision for those who disclose and need immediate support... Internally, we’re not trained to do that work, and I suppose it’s about having the time to do an in-depth analysis on how we can develop that service.”

Managers indicated that their organisations had made changes in how they work with cases of child sexual abuse as a result of staff members participating in the programme. Two managers mentioned specific plans to share knowledge in organised meetings.

Cementing the learning and helping participants to take on their role

In the focus groups, programme participants expressed a desire to stay in contact with each other and with the CSA Centre, with that contact potentially facilitated by the CSA Centre. Given that research continues to evolve, they added that would value further training to continue developing their knowledge and understanding:

“Research will change, and we need to be mindful of that, and share that. I don’t know if there’s a plan to get people together again when things change, but that would be useful.”

Similarly, survey respondents felt equipped in their role as CSA Practice Leads but said that ongoing support and a refresh of the resources would help cement the learning:

“As with any learning, I feel that I will need to build my confidence now and build the role. This is where I feel some element of ongoing support would be useful.”

“There is always more to learn, and we need to keep the momentum by keeping up our knowledge and sharing research.”

‘Update days’ or a conference were proposed as ways of helping them as a group to maintain their knowledge and develop multi-agency working.

Some in the focus groups mentioned local or national government initiatives, and how the programme could fit into that, as well as the kind of role they could or would like to play in any such initiatives. Existing developments at regional levels were also mentioned:

“The course came about at the same time as the Welsh Government is trying to get a national, regional, and local action plan for how all agencies respond to child sexual abuse. The local

safeguarding board has picked up on this, and I'm hoping we'll play a pivotal role in taking that action plan forward in [LA2]. We'll certainly have plans for how best to use [it] ourselves and where we'd like to be in the future. I'd like us to get back together, to go on other training courses together."

"The health board did a lot of work around developing Safeguarding Ambassadors across [LA2 and the surrounding region]. We'll be looking to tap into them, to develop their knowledge and awareness, and that cascades further. We're very keen to be part of this regional action plan, and certainly this is what we'll be looking at: how to reach wider audiences and get the message across."

When asked what else would have helped them feel better equipped to take on the role of a CSA Practice Lead, the survey respondents suggested:

- a workbook of all the resources and presentations in one place
- manager attendance at a session on taking things forward
- information from previous CSA Practice Leads on best practice/examples of using the learning in practice
- a certificate of attendance.

Feedback on programme content and delivery

The trainers

Asked what they liked most about the programme’s delivery, the 34 survey respondents most often mentioned the experience of the trainers and the guest speakers, who were considered engaging, expert, passionate, supportive and open to answering questions:

“I have enjoyed the guest speakers and the wealth of information and knowledge that the facilitators have.”

“Facilitators were very engaging and supportive as sometimes very emotive information was discussed.”

These comments were echoed in the focus groups: trainers were said to have handled sensitive issues well and encouraged participants to join in discussions, and were generally perceived as friendly and knowledgeable, and made participants feel at ease:

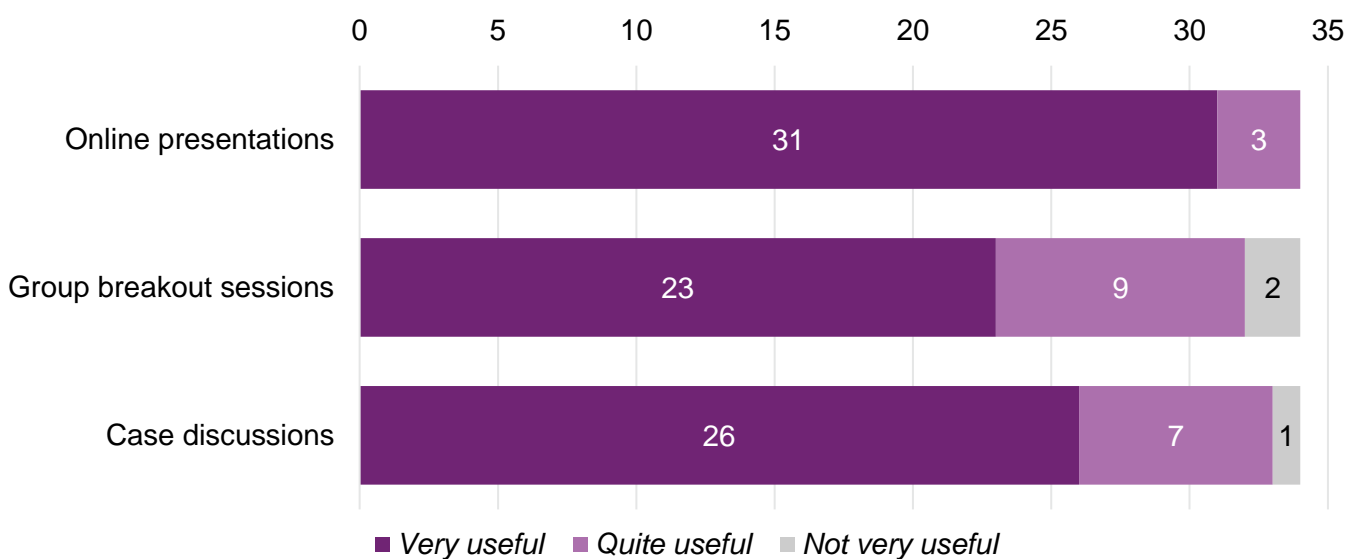
“They had a chat with anyone who was on screen during lunch, chatting about whatever, keeping things a bit more down to earth, after having discussed horrendous child sexual abuse. I do think that their style is flawless...”

All the managers rated the ease of communication with trainers during the programme as quite good or very good. One pointed out that information about staff attendance had not been forthcoming; they would have welcomed this, so that they could have chased up those who had missed sessions.

Learning methods

Asked to state how useful they found the different learning methods employed in the programme, all the survey respondents reported that they found the online presentation useful, with the vast majority saying the same of the breakout groups and case discussions (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Usefulness of specific learning methods employed



n=34. Source: participant survey.

The focus group attendees said that, during the early stages of the training, they had felt there was too much emphasis on breakout rooms – but in the last few monthly sessions they had generally felt there was a good mix between presentations and these more interactive elements. The diverse ways in which they were encouraged to engage with the material helped in keeping participants focused:

“Yes, it was quite good. In the one day you had a mix of things, so you’re not just sitting and staring at the screen, there is encouragement to get involved in discussion. They made it as interactive as possible, and that keeps you focused. It was a good balance.”

Similarly, survey respondents liked the mix of learning methods, with time given for presentations and discussions, and the mixture of theoretical information and practical tools in the programme content:

“Good balance between presentation and discussion/reflection.”

“Plenty of time to present information, group discussion, get to know other colleagues on the course. Beginning of the course – time given to talk about self-care and coping with difficult material covered.”

Respondents also thought the breakout sessions worked well, especially with a multi-agency group:

“It has all been excellent. However, I have particularly enjoyed the breakout sessions.”

“The breakout rooms – opportunities to discuss learning from presentations/presenters, but also to better understand how each agency works within [the response to child sexual abuse] (and the challenges they face).”

However, there was also a suggestion to organise groups by sector, e.g. health.

Others felt that the breakout sessions did not work so well:

“Some group breakouts felt rushed... Some, there was too much time and it was difficult engaging in a group online.”

“In the breakout sessions, experience varied depending on who else was in the group. I feel lacking in confidence and, at times, other participants seemed to take over the discussions.”

Some focus group attendees indicated that, on occasion, breakout rooms went off-topic, and suggested that targeted discussion on action plans may prevent this.

Programme content

Focus group attendees reported that the training content was effective and relevant to them, the scope covered was varied, and the amount of information was appropriate:

“Going back to all the information we have been provided with is refreshing, because there is a lot of information but it’s all relevant. I don’t think there’s too much.”

They felt it important that more people, within both their own and other agencies, should have access to the training:

“I think just the sheer amount of knowledge and information that’s been shared... if this could be offered to many more people and social workers and other agencies as well, I think that would be really helpful. It was a really good piece of training.”

A number identified specific areas that they felt were particularly informative, or highlighted information that was new to them. For example, some were shocked to learn about the prevalence of online abuse,

several were new to the topic of female abusers, and the importance of the language used in case recording was described as “a real eye opener”. Some said they had deepened their understanding of the theoretical background to child sexual abuse, and stressed the relevance of this to their practice:

“For me, the practical application, a lot of the underpinning theories, you have some awareness from wider reading, but really focusing it on elements like the Finkelhor model and things that we don’t really talk much about within the service but actually offer so much insight in practical application.”

Duration and pace

The structure of the programme was praised, with appreciation for its being spread over six months so that participants had time to digest information and fit the training around their working schedules:

“It has been spread out over six months so has been achievable with work commitments.”

“I like that it was done over a number of months which allowed time for digestion of information and for reflection.”

Focus groups respondents felt that having fortnightly sessions was beneficial. One attendee suggested spreading the sessions out even further so that it would be less intense, and several agreed that a condensed block of five days would not be desirable:

“The subject matter being so difficult, I would have found five days in a row quite challenging. Getting away and reflecting, in bite sizes, is easier to cope with.”

“A five-day block online would have been too much. And being over a length of time allowed people to relax into it and contribute more.”

However, others felt that a more condensed block of training would have enabled them to fit attendance on the programme alongside their other work responsibilities more easily, or would have been more effective:

“I wonder if solid blocks of five days would have been better, because you do one day and then deal with so much other stuff, maybe blocks of days would have compounded the learning.”

Learning online

Half (n=17) of the survey respondents reported that their experience of attending the programme online had been quite good, with a further two-fifths (n=14) finding it very good; three said it had been difficult. Many were simply glad that technology had enabled the programme to take place:

“I am so grateful that Covid restrictions didn’t prevent the training from going ahead and that we were able to complete it.”

A few thought that this method of teaching was preferable to meeting in person, or felt that it had facilitated their ability to participate:

“I have really enjoyed completing this programme online... participants have been more relaxed and open, which has allowed for some excellent discussion around such a sensitive topic.”

“It was useful for me that it was online, because I was able to keep track of my emails. In fact, I don't think I would have been able to commit to 10 days, if it had involved physically going to some place.”

Not being completely disengaged from other work responsibilities during the sessions was seen by others as a challenge, however:

“Because of my role, there are times when I have to cover when my manager's off, so to be on the course all day and trying to manage my team and what's coming in has been really hard at times. Had we been in a classroom somewhere, I wouldn't have had to do that, someone would have had to stand in for me, but because it's virtual, people assume that you're still contactable.”

“Doing it on your laptop, you see your emails coming in and you get a bit distracted.”

Some participants found the online learning aspect the only downside of the training. While recognising that this had been necessary because of COVID-19, they would have preferred face-to-face training:

“There is something about virtual training that dilutes or distracts me much easier than classroom events.”

“Homeworking alone doesn't allow for additional time or conversation that may be helpful sometimes to debrief/wind down, that you may have in the classroom environment.”

This point was also raised in the focus groups, where attendees said they missed having an opportunity for informal discussion or reflection at the end of a session to digest the challenging nature of the training content:

“The nature of what we were discussing, two full days, and there's no one you can go to and say, ‘Oh my god, that was really hard,’ because some of it has been challenging. So to have had that classroom thing, where you can sit back at the end and talk about how hard it was, would have been good.”

Most agreed that they probably would have taken the time for such a discussion online if someone had suggested it at the end of a training day, although some commented that they had typically felt fatigued by that stage.

Focus group attendees also raised issues relating to their home environment, with two voicing concerns about having children at home while attending online training of this nature.

Overall, though, participants were satisfied with the online format and generally enjoyed engaging with others in the breakout rooms:

“It ran smoothly, considering it was all online. The breakout rooms were really positive.”

“It's always more challenging, being virtual, looking at a screen all day, but I think it's gone really well, with the mix.”

Technical support provided by the CSA Centre was considered to have facilitated the smooth running of sessions and swiftly resolved any issues.

“[The technical support person's] skills in making sure everyone was able to connect, and support [those who initially were] unable to, were really appreciated.”

Multi-agency approach

All 34 survey respondents said that taking part in the programme with people from other agencies and in other roles had been useful.

Focus group participants welcomed the multidisciplinary focus of the training and noted several benefits of this approach. Firstly, they said it was helpful to receive information consistently across the different agencies and sectors and to increase their understanding of different agencies' perspectives:

"...and also that we all have the same information, which very rarely happens. So the information we're being told is exactly the same for all of us, which I think is really positive."

"Being able to pool our resources and our expertise, in that multi-agency forum. We never get that opportunity to talk about all these different challenges and dynamics, and how the services can support each other more and understanding the challenges our colleagues face, outside our team."

Secondly, they felt that it was helpful to hear from others about their specific role in safeguarding and to exchange ideas across different agencies, reporting that they did not usually have an opportunity to share information in this manner:

"I also think that having a multi-agency attendance is positive, because we can see from their viewpoint what role they would play in the interventions..."

"Also being able to understand, from the police perspective, what actually goes on in these cases, because often – I work with the young people in CAMHS – I just get their opinion, so explaining what anything means and actually being able to take that back to young people is just really useful."

"I think all training should be multi-agency, that's how you work every day. Listening to everybody else's knowledge, I think it's the way to do safeguarding training, it's just a shame that we don't do it as much as we should."

Participants also felt that the opportunity to discuss their own cases made them feel supported by the others and they valued the input from those working in different areas.

"I was able to talk about a particular case I'm dealing with, and for the first time I felt supported."

"The opportunity to talk cases through without feeling judged about what you're doing."

It was suggested that it would be helpful to have frontline professionals from education attend, such as schoolteachers, as many disclosures happen at school. (Education professionals did attend the training, but they were not mainstream school teachers.)

Twenty-one survey respondents felt that taking part in the programme with people from other organisations helped to improve communication between their organisations and others "a lot", and a further nine indicated that it improved communication "a bit".

Focus groups participants also viewed the training as a helpful setting through which to build inter-agency relationships. Several reported that the training had helped create a professional network that they could reach out to:

"I think we've developed that professional learning community. We got to know each other better, relationships have been made that will last..."

“...if there’s ever a need for us to speak to other agencies, we have those connections now – there are people who will share their knowledge with us...”

Survey respondents explained how the multi-agency nature of the training had helped with understanding different perspectives, gaining advice, and providing a fuller picture of a child’s journey:

“Getting perspective from police and lawyers has been really helpful! They have given advice on how they would like practice to be.”

“The multi-professional aspect of the course has been invaluable. It’s allowed me to have insight into other professionals and their role, as well as processes beyond my scope of practice. I have a fuller picture of how the pieces fit together.”

On the whole, this had helped to improve cross-agency communication, with future meetings arranged and contacts identified for future assistance:

“I now know who the practice leads are in differing services so will have a point of contact.”

“We are having more meetings and improved joint working.”

Even where respondents felt that close cross-agency relationships had already existed, they said the training had given them a better insight of what each agency does:

“I think there was already a good level of multi-agency communication in [LA2], but it has been useful to link with professionals who I don’t already have day-to-day contact with.”

Suggested improvements

Some improvements to the programme content and structure were suggested, including:

- breaking up some of the long presentations with more discussion
- giving more time to the session discussing female offenders, which had felt “squashed”
- spending more time focusing on a plan for implementation, as reflection on cases did not feel relevant to all roles
- ensuring that there were no two consecutive days of teaching
- providing a workbook of all the programme materials
- having a mix of online and face-to-face teaching.

Managers commented that it would be useful to have a follow-up session where they could receive feedback on the participants’ engagement with and attendance on the programme.

Participants' expectations of the role of CSA Practice Lead

Survey respondents were asked to state what they had hoped to get from taking part in the CSA Practice Leads Programme. Most said they had wanted to increase their knowledge of child sexual abuse and to use this for their personal development, to support colleagues, and to make organisational improvements:

“To gain a much better knowledge and understanding of child sexual abuse, which I can in turn share with my colleagues... in order to best safeguard and support our pupils.”

“To enhance and develop my knowledge and interest and practice in this area, and to be actively involved in developing this in [LA2].”

Some also mentioned wanting to network with other agencies, in order to gain contacts and better understand other working practices:

“To learn more about child sexual abuse, learn more about the different agencies that operate within child sexual abuse and understand their remits.”

“Better understanding of other agencies' working practices when it comes to child sexual abuse.”

In the focus groups, some discussed how training generally facilitates cultural change, and said they were committed to supporting cultural change in the management of child sexual abuse cases. A few attendees said they did not have specific expectations prior to starting the training.

Managers had hoped that, through the programme, the participants would increase their knowledge of child sexual abuse as well as their confidence in dealing with these cases. One had hoped that it would allow participants to share their knowledge across different services. Managers reported that identifying staff to participate in the programme had been straightforward, as most had volunteered. In future, they suggested, it may be useful to select those in key positions to attend the programme and take on the role of CSA Practice Lead.

In terms of what it meant to be a CSA Practice Lead, participants noted that expectations of the role may vary across agencies. One emphasised the importance of an overarching multidisciplinary approach, even though the specifics of the role may differ across organisational contexts:

“I wonder if [CSA] Practice Lead means something different to us all. It may do, slightly, because all our structures are different. We might need to spend time thinking whether there is a standard definition. We'd all like to agree on what [the title of CSA] Practice Lead is going to mean.”

Several said they were not sure what was expected of them, as their role had not been clearly defined by their agency, and felt that it would have been helpful before they started to have had clarity on how they were supposed to make use of the training:

“I still don't know. I have been trying to find out what I'm supposed to do with it, we still haven't had clarity, but it's an organisational issue.”

Managers hoped that their trained staff would be a specialised point of contact for their colleagues and that they would raise awareness and challenge practice as well as be involved in policy developments. They felt confident to support their staff in this role; two managers indicated that they would like to increase their own knowledge, and would welcome training targeted at managers.

Final comments

“I just want everyone at the CSA Centre to know that I found it really useful, and the support that was provided to individuals as well, after the sessions.”

“We’ve all got something really positive out of it. It was a delight to see the passion, the dedication to want to make something out of it.”

“In 17 years, this is without doubt the best training and experience of learning and multi-agency working together that I have had :)”

Research and evaluation team
Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

We’d like to hear from you. If you would like to find out more about our training, from historical successes and learnings to our forthcoming programme or bespoke packages, please contact us at info@csacentre.org.uk