



UNIVERSITY OF
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**The impact of the CELLS Project ‘Lean on Me’ initiative
and the significance it has on the lives of the carers and
parents that attend**



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Introduction

Client organisation

CELLS has recognised the need to help and support young people and those around them especially their families. ‘Lean on Me’ does this by helping parents and carers to understand their child’s behaviour and issues while supporting them through situations that teachers and social care workers would struggle to help with. ‘Lean on Me’ is a beneficiary-led initiative, run by the CELLS Project organisation, that helps parents and family members to understand and deal with aggressive and challenging behaviour, as well as issues that lead to crime and/or those actively involved in the criminal justice system.

The ‘Lean on Me’ team includes individuals with lived experience of such difficult circumstances whether that be having a loved one in prison, having a child at risk of this, or even themselves as a family member or parent being vulnerable to crime due to these factors. The lived experience of the beneficiaries is valued by the initiative and encouraged to be shared in order to help others who may have experienced or are experiencing similar situations. Some of the leaders of the Lean on Me sessions having lived experience allows them to navigate issues they are familiar with and understand what needs to be done for the secondary beneficiaries who attend these sessions as participants.

Executive Summary

This client report addresses the impact of the ‘Lean on Me’ initiative and the significance it has on the lives of the people that attend and/or their families. The report answers the following questions:

- How have the Lean on Me users benefitted from engaging with the service?
- How has it impacted their lives/family etc?

- Do they believe their well-being has improved since attending the sessions?
- Do users feel adequately supported?
- Would they recommend it to others?
- Any recommendations for improvements/positive change

The research aimed to help the CELLS Project to better understand the support that beneficiaries require, ensuring their services are tailored and effective. This will enable improvement and development and, in turn, have a greater contribution to the reduction of offending/reoffending behaviours.

The data analysis in this client report has four thematic contexts. It presented that beneficiaries feel emotionally supported whether that is by the leaders, the sessions, or the support of other beneficiaries. Practical support is also given through this service by connecting those that attend to agencies that can help them in their home life and also developing an understanding of these agencies and how to engage with them. One overarching theme was that of the beneficiaries gaining confidence through joining the groups. This is evident in the shift in their abilities as well as their self-esteem through how they engage with the service week by week. The outcome of the initiative and what this data has found is a focus on expanding and outreaching the service in order to reach a wider area. The data conveys the exceptional support the beneficiaries receive from the service and that this initiative could benefit even more people in need if expanded.

Literature Review

Existing literature outlines the allocation of resources for youth crime, including early intervention through organisations and programs which support families and whether these resources are effective. Early intervention as well as the violence and vulnerabilities that parents can experience from their children being involved in crime are all important when discussing the effectiveness of the initiatives that address these issues.

Problems that families may face

Domestic violence can be a common issue within many households in areas of deprivation. This can take a variety of forms which leads to difficulties in seeking help. If children are exposed to domestic violence in any form, whether that is active or passive involvement, they are at an immediate risk and disadvantage to other children within the community (Stanley et al., 2012). Within disadvantaged areas, domestic violence is more common, and social services are often involved with households (Stanley et al., 2012). This means multiple agencies could be involved in these households. This also poses the risk that mothers who are experiencing domestic violence may be reluctant to report their abuse due to the risk of the child being removed from the household as a consequence of the primary or secondary harm caused by this (Stanley et al., 2012).

On the other hand, there is an underrepresented issue of child-parent domestic violence which mothers with children with challenging behaviour and involvement in the criminal justice system may come across. This is underrepresented due to the limited response by the police or lack of reporting especially in less serious instances of child-parent violence (Strom et al., 2014). These problems within households are often not seen in the data so they often go unnoticed as a wide-spread issue (Strom et al., 2014). Situational factors influence why police may respond to some child-parent assaults over others. For example, if the juvenile has already

been in contact with the police or other younger children are in the household and could therefore be in danger the police may be more likely to intervene (Strom et al., 2014). This poses the risk of parents not having help or support if they are not reported or the police decide not to take the issue further. This results in a distrust of police and leads them to become isolated or seek support elsewhere.

Early Intervention

Arthur (2002) discusses the importance of family dynamics in relation to youth crime. The competency of the parents is important for creating an environment that supports the child through articulating standards of behaviour, encouragement, monitoring of behaviour, and consistency of discipline when these rules are broken or when bad behaviour is being presented to the parents (Arthur, 2002). If this competence is not present it puts the child more at risk of engaging with the criminal justice system. Arthur (2002) presents the idea that 'at risk' youths are typically more likely to offend when their family types exhibit traits such as marital disharmony, lack of support from family or the community they reside in and the poor physical and mental health of parents. It is argued that youth crime is seen in deprived areas where families do not have the resources to improve the young person's chances of avoiding the criminal justice system (Arthur, 2002). There is therefore an evident gap in these areas where parents may not be given the resources they need. This literature shows that parents need to have support through guidance on how to create a safe and nurturing environment for their child and how to utilise support services when needed.

Youth Crime Policy

Family intervention programs on youth crime and 'whole family' approaches have been a focus of the government in the past and present (Arthur, 2002). In many cases these have been seen to help with family relationships along with helping to handle the challenging behaviour of

their children (Arthur, 2002). Evidence of this focus from the government is seen through the Home Office's 3-year program 'On Track' in 1998 which had operated in 25 deprived high crime areas throughout England and Wales and aimed to provide potentially 'at risk' children with a series of coordinated, multiple interventions to address their needs (Arthur, 2002). This was helped by the Family Support Grants when money had been provided to projects which develop an enhanced range of evidence-based preventive services for children and their families (Arthur, 2002). Both show the government's focus on early intervention through projects and interventions.

Family Intervention Projects (FIPs), which have similar aims and values to the CELLS project 'Lean On Me' initiative, were introduced in Scotland and then were adopted by a limited number of English local authorities (Nixon and Parr, 2008). The focus on parents and family life has been developed through the recognition of how parental skills and disruptive family life can impact the likelihood of a child having challenging behaviour or being at risk of going into the criminal justice system (Nixon and Parr, 2008). However, these are often regarded as a final resort to youth crime intervention services due to the recognition of gaps in what social services provide meaning another form of social care would need to be provided for those that the system has failed (Nixon and Parr, 2008). Overall, they do this by addressing the most deprived areas with services to help the challenging behaviour of both children and other family members to reduce victims of crime and ensure the safety of the households at risk as well as the broader neighbourhood (Nixon and Parr, 2008). These areas of social care are focused on by FIPs due to the risks that are disproportionately found in these areas; low incomes, high unemployment, mental health risks, educational disproportionality, and other forms of disadvantages (Nixon and Parr, 2008). These have an effect on social exclusion which creates a risk of challenging and criminal behaviours.

However, the effectiveness of these interventions is difficult to measure as they target different areas to help a range of different issues relating to youth crime and reoffending rates. An issue is, therefore, a lack of consistency, which is where researching the effectiveness of organisations whose focus on early intervention/family intervention is useful so that they can be available to families throughout the UK if seen as effective. It is not only useful for the organisation itself but for parents and family members themselves as it reveals the issues that need to be addressed to help in the long term.

Methodology

Interviews

Qualitative data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with the leaders who run the 'Lean on Me' sessions as well as a beneficiary of the 'Lean on Me' initiative. There were three interviews in total. The first interviews were with the leaders in order to gather information about the sessions they run so that I could ask the beneficiary about how impactful they have been on their day-to-day life, their well-being and their confidence in not only handling their young person's challenging behaviour but also their own lives and the challenges they face.

I conducted semi-structured interviews to collect this data. This was done by using an interview guide of questions which allowed open-ended answers where follow-up questions were introduced where appropriate (See Appendix 1). Semi-structured interviews produce qualitative data where data can be investigated in more depth (Clark et al., 2022a). This method is more flexible and discursive so that the participants can give a more thorough point of view on the topics presented (Clark et al., 2022a). It also allows the participant to direct the focus of the interview in their own direction giving the data validity and reliability (Clark et al., 2022a). This also allows for the possibility of altering later interviews in line with the variables the participants cover in the earlier interviews which they bring forward themselves (Clark et al., 2022a). This highlights the variables which they find the most important in line with what is presented in the interview guide.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used to enable a greater number of individuals who have participated in the 'Lean on Me' initiative to take part. The questionnaire was available for up to ten participants and five took part (See Appendix 2). The questionnaire intended to address the

effectiveness of the initiative and it used the same topics as in the interviews, by quantifying this data to see trends and by comparing the different contexts of each participant explored in each dataset (Bergman, 2008). These are intended to back up the data found in interviews by reaching out to more beneficiaries where interviews were less possible to carry out.

Ethics

The participants were both the leaders and those that use the 'Lean on Me' initiative who are the families of children with challenging behaviour and/or are currently in the criminal justice system. They were all adults which meant they were able to give consent themselves. The questions covered in both the questionnaires and the interview of the beneficiary asked about their experiences of the service itself and not about personal topics regarding any personal difficulties they may have faced. This avoided any emotional harm when interviewing these potentially vulnerable participants.

In order to recruit participants for the interviews and questionnaires I used convenience sampling (Turner, 2020). My link worker, the CELLS Project manager, chose my participants based on those most willing to take part in the research, ensuring also that any potentially 'vulnerable' participants were not included in the sample. However, this sampling method risked creating a bias (Turner, 2020) as the link worker had the autonomy over who participated in the interviews and questionnaire. This may have enabled a possibility for those participating to have expressed a more positive experience of the initiative with that being a desired outcome for the project. I reduced this by having a balance of questions covering both areas for improvement of the initiative as well as whether it has helped beneficiaries and in what ways. This avoided bias as much as possible by the questions themselves being balanced.

My questionnaires were paper-based and placed on site of the organisation, so that they were accessible to the intended participants. There was a folder available so that participants could

place their questionnaires in a secured envelope to ensure confidentiality. These were monitored by my link worker which ensured that they did not get misplaced as well as to further ensure the confidentiality of their data.

Informed consent is important for the participants involved in the research study as they need to know what they are agreeing to and that they are clear about how their data will be used (Ferreira and Serpa, 2018). In order to gain informed consent, I gave the participants and read out a participant information sheet (See Appendix 3, Appendix 4 and Appendix 5). This was also outlined through the consent forms which were also read out and verbally consented to (See Appendix 6 and Appendix 7). Informed consent legitimises the researcher's actions as it allows participants to give consent for the data they will provide and is done so that they can make an informed decision (Clark et al., 2022b and Given, 2008). To ensure informed consent is given before the interviews take place, I also got verbal consent from participants that I interviewed at the beginning of the audio recording, ensuring everything they have agreed to is clear and addressing any concerns they may have prior to the interview.

The intended participants were able to voice any concerns during the process of completing this report. This was outlined in the consent forms so that they were aware of being able to retract data and ask if they have any queries over the data taken during the interviews. The consent forms for the questionnaires outlined that the questionnaires themselves are anonymous, so once they completed them and placed them in the folder provided, they could not retract their data. Within the report, the data provided has been kept anonymous so that their confidentiality is respected. This was done as the transcripts were anonymous as the audio recordings did not include names or personal data and if any names were disclosed, this was taken out in the transcription process. Any identifiers of the beneficiaries who have shared their data have been removed and pseudonyms have been used instead in order to protect their identities. The data collected within this report has been anonymised for this purpose. The

pseudonyms Charlotte and Amy are given to the leaders that I interviewed and Lucy for the name of the beneficiary of the 'Lean on Me' initiative whom I also interviewed. This is to ensure their confidentiality as well as their safety.

Data Analysis

To analyse the data, I used themes that encompassed the aims and outcomes of the 'Lean on Me' initiative in order to analyse these. I used thematic coding to structure my findings. This was produced by using codes from the dataset through quotes that all relate to an overarching theme (Gibbs, 2018). The hierarchy and coding frame of the thematic analysis is seen through my development from examples into explanations and outcomes of the theme representing the topics that emerge from the dataset (Gibbs, 2018). This is a way of organising findings and categorically presenting the dataset in a qualitative way (Gibbs, 2018). This helped me to explain the way the 'Lean on Me' initiative functions and measure the success of the support and whether that needs development or positive change.

Findings and discussions

The data collected through questionnaires and interviews both presented the themes of emotional support, practical support and the growing of confidence for beneficiaries through these. The 'Lean on Me' initiative leaders and also the beneficiaries themselves provide emotional support as well as practical support. This is seen both day-to-day and through the weekly sessions. Through this support they can grow in confidence which is key for them to not only help each other but also be able to deal with whatever life throws at them.

Practical Support

What the support service users need is identified by the leaders as they have become aware, through the CELLS Project, that, as Amy states, "if the kids are having problems, then what is happening at home?". Charlotte found that there are many "parents that are struggling and don't know where to turn for support". The leaders expressed in their interviews that to facilitate their sessions in a safe way they do risk assessments which occur through home visits to avoid the possibility of clashes that would leave individuals at risk. The home visits allow them to "understand a better picture" of their home life, says Charlotte. Therefore, the risks of them being a part of certain groups are minimised. This ensures that there is a comfortable environment for each individual in this group to meet and be open. For them to be open and engaging, Charlotte states that it needs to be a "safe place", which Amy backs up by expressing that the group needs to be a space "that's suitable for everybody". This also enables the leaders to tailor sessions to the specific needs of individuals, some of which overlap, to ensure they can give each of the beneficiaries the support they need. This also shows that, with the leaders' experience with parents going through hardship but also their lived experiences, means they can sympathise and in some cases empathise with their situations by recognising where help is needed. This could be difficult for an outside organisation to see so this experience is valuable.

The leaders support the beneficiaries in a practical sense through a range of practical support as well as providing women who are struggling in specific situations with the tools to enable them to fix their own problems and help each other. For example, they bring in agencies to communicate their purpose, what they can offer in support, and how to seek the right support for them. This can also give the beneficiaries connections to an individual who they are comfortable with, after the session, and then the agency worker can help them if they need to seek out the agency's service.

Additionally, the sessions focus on who they are as a person as well as a parent and this is not only beneficial to their confidence but also can help their children. The first sessions do this by getting them to look at their own past situations, what their lives looked like when they were younger, and what could have had a negative effect on them. This enables them to reflect on whether they are expressing the negatively affecting actions they have experienced in their own lives by acting the same behaviours onto their children and they can reflect on the effect that these actions could have. They can then recognise that some aspects of their life are not the norm and can improve their skills and themselves. Amy believes they can do this by "looking at the impact of their own behaviour" on others as well as their children. This recognition of the past, as well as the present, can have a knock-on effect on their children and the support they can offer them through being confident in themselves and gaining the skills to deal with challenging behaviour as well as other aspects of home life. This is reflective of the work of Nixon and Parr (2008), as mentioned above, through the initiatives focus on the struggles of the parents, the importance of parental skills, and the effect these both have on children. The response has been positive as the leaders have recognised that the beneficiaries have implemented these skills in their lives.

The intimidation and fear of outside agencies is suggested by the leaders to be rooted in the lack of understanding of the different systems and what they do to help them as well as the fear

of what they will do with their family. The fear of social services, for example, comes from mothers believing that their motive is to take the children away from them which is the last thing they want. To explain to the mums that they are there to help them, and not take away their kids, Amy explained that they brought in “a guest speaker in who was a social worker”. They also bring in other workers from a range of sectors including social workers and housing officers as well as drug teams and the probation service, which Amy and the other leaders believe are “organisations that the parents are frightened of”. This means that the speakers can explain their job role and what they do as well as this giving them contact with an individual that they now know so that, if they have any issues, they can contact specific people from these sectors who they may trust more than a stranger in order to help them instead of fearing them. Through linking service users to these services, the leaders, as Amy says, “picked up loads of leaflets” to do with housing to give to the women so they know who they can contact and feel confident enough to contact. These links to agencies give the women knowledge and understanding of the agencies and what they do to help them as well as contacts directly to them so that they can use them to get the help they and their family need.

The leaders also help directly with these practical issues with agencies and sectors. This reflects the description of Family Intervention Projects as another form of social care due to the gaps many agencies have found to be missing (Arthur, 2002). They do this by going with beneficiaries to meetings which they are often intimidated by. They recognised that a lot of mothers have experienced meetings with school boards and other boards within different agencies which know all about their situation without the parents understanding of what is being discussed or suggested and they often feel lost. Due to the fear of situations like this, which they may not understand, Amy explains that “half of them walk away” and others “can’t even remember what was being said” due to fear and misunderstanding. So, the leaders in some cases offer to support them by going in with them, or Amy states that the leaders “can ask

another agency to go in and support them”. This means the mothers/carers are not alone and have someone to help them understand that they can ask questions and get the information they need. The leaders of the groups recognise the frustration that comes with not knowing or understanding the systems and agencies they need for help and that Amy and the other leaders “know that they can do it” from individual experience as well as experiences with women who have been able to do so through taking part in these groups so far.

Emotional Support

The practical support beneficiaries get can often come from how they feel emotionally towards certain situations they are put in. They can sometimes feel lost in the systems and procedures they are being put through, and they believe these systems do not benefit them. In many cases, parents don't feel safe or comfortable contacting certain agencies. Amy recognises that this is due to the fear that the agencies such as social services would “take their kids off them” or other consequences feared by this group if they come in contact with these agencies. This means that the practical support offered through ‘Lean on Me’ is also providing emotional support by recognising the emotional effects of these services and helping them understand how they work and what they are for so that they feel less fear or isolation when needing to use these services. Charlotte also recognised that the women had “low self-esteem”, so their main objective was to give them a positive outlook as well as confidence in their own abilities.

The emotional reinforcement created by the leaders for the beneficiaries is seen through allowing many of the weekly sessions, particularly at the beginning of the initiative, to start with the sharing of how their week has been. This allows them to open up if they wish to and unload any stresses or problems they have come across during the week. Charlotte understands that this permits “each mum to be able to speak up and say what they felt and when they felt it”. Charlotte as a leader has recognised that many women with difficult home lives often have

no one to speak to, meaning it takes a lot of courage sometimes to expose something that's going on in your life especially when they know many of the women are "really isolated and have got nobody". The vulnerability associated with coming to the group in the first place, let alone sharing the most difficult parts of their lives, was recognised by the leaders so ensuring a safe space for this was very much necessary.

Lucy recognised that the group and feeling safe are helpful both practically but also emotionally for support:

"They've either dealt with something similar, or they are just a comfort sometimes for just offloading."

They have delivered listening and communication sessions so that the women in the group do not talk over each other but instead can listen and then give support if needed. Amy believes this ensures that "mums aren't arguing with other mum" which means they are in a safer space to offload about their week as "no one judges". Other sessions that Charlotte has run have directly focussed on the "holistic side" of emotional support through "relaxation", and "how to deal with stress" as well as the weekly catchups where the leaders try and focus on the individual's positive parts of their week and emphasising that just because they have had a bad week it "doesn't mean that that's always going to be the way". All of this can support their mental health by having a more positive outlook on their lives as well as giving them the drive to improve this for themselves and their children.

Another aspect of the leaders helping the mental health of beneficiaries is through a WhatsApp group. This group, made for the first group they began, had been created by Charlotte in order for them to have "positive affirmations" on a daily basis, as just one of these messages could "lift you up" if they're feeling isolated or in a low place. The group themselves share in this and can ask questions or help each other with practical situations as well as using the same

affirmations for their mental health. This allows the women to not feel isolated and alone and helps them to know that they have a support network not only once a week but throughout the week. As well as the weekly sessions, this contact group has given the women a “lifeline” which is expressed by both the leaders that have been interviewed and also the beneficiary that I interviewed.

The beneficiaries that took part in the questionnaires all said that their stress levels had gone down to some extent since being a part of a ‘Lean on Me’ group. This is a positive response to the sessions and shows that the leaders have supported parents in being able to cope with the stress and deal with the stressful situations they face in day-to-day life including with their children’s challenging behaviour or the stress of dealing with other outside agencies to get help with life at home. One respondent shared that ‘Everyone listens, a problem shared’. This shows that they take comfort in sharing the problems they face with the group as they feel listened to by both the group and the leaders.

The sense of community and togetherness that they have found was seen through the friendships that they have made over the time that they have spent in the group. The bonding has come about through opening up to each other and helping each other through really low points in each of their lives. The leaders have recognised that “they’re all friends now” and that these bonds are important to expand their support network not just in the group but outside of the group. The beneficiary also recognised this as she noticed that she has made “new friends” and that “all the women are amazing” and that these bonds as well as the sessions themselves help them to overcome difficult situations. The women have developed skills to show each other that “they’re listening and are there to support you”. The support of their peers within the group, facilitated by the WhatsApp group, means to Lucy that; “there’s always somebody there who can support them in whatever way they need” and that “there’s always someone with advice”.

All respondents to the questionnaire answered that they feel a sense of community and togetherness and that they feel emotionally supported by the sessions. This backs up what the leaders expressed in the interviews as well as reinforcing what the beneficiary shared in her interview.

One respondent stated that they feel the sessions are ‘A safe space’ where they feel they can ‘offload, cry and laugh’. This vulnerability further shows the comfort they feel within the group itself and that they feel they can share emotions with the group openly.

Confidence

The leaders have noticed that service users’ confidence has been seen to grow. They began with individuals who struggled to leave the house or even consider going to the group for fear of people knowing their business. But now they have grown the confidence to share their problems and that they can and do help others who are in similar situations. Charlotte recognises this as the beneficiaries are now “comfortable enough to ... expose something that’s going on” in their life. Equipping them with the knowledge they need to overcome whatever difficult situations they face gives them power and therefore the confidence to go out and seek help from agencies as well as understand what help they need. The beneficiary, Lucy, said that the sessions are “so good for your mood, and your confidence” which shows that the support they get is benefitting them and enriching their lives both emotionally and practically through their confidence.

Charlotte, a leader who developed the ‘Lean on Me’ initiative, expresses the change she’s seen in the women who attended the original group:

“Watching that group come from these people that ... did not want to come out and some don’t go out of the house, to now, watching what we’ve got is just ... it’s unbelievable”.

This confidence has been developed over time. Lucy stated:

“When I started, I had no confidence.... it took me a long time to go to the groups. And then, after a couple of weeks, my confidence started growing.”

“I wasn’t leaving the house at all and now I’m going to these meetings, I’m starting this mentoring course and I’m feeling confident”.

After seeing the confidence of those who have been using the group for a longer period, and also recognising that there is a possibility to expand with wider outreach, the aim of the ‘Lean on Me’ initiative now is to develop the skills of women who are willing to lead their own groups. This means that those that have been part of the original ‘Lean on Me’ group can share their lived experience and have the confidence and desire to run their own groups in areas where it is not currently set up. Lucy states that the group has given her “a bit of ambition” to take on this role in the future by having been able to “complete a mentoring course” meaning that she now believes that her “confidence has gone through the roof”. Her desire to take part in this and the shadowing of the other leaders shows that once they build their confidence, this can support others the way they have been supported. This confidence has been given by the leaders through giving her independence which shows the strength of support she has been given through this initiative to be able to have this independence. Lucy is now “open to starting” her “own group” which shows that the ambition to expand and give the women the confidence to do so is becoming a reality and is possible for many of the women to build up to the point of having the confidence to run their own groups.

Outreach

Amy states that she and the other leaders take clients to different areas and places such as “open church”, “food banks” etc to meet a range of people, expand the community and enable outreach to those also in need of the services the ‘Lean on Me’ groups provide. Expanding the

community also expands the support they can give as well as giving experiences of a range of activities for the current parents/carers in the groups to take part in. The group can therefore reach out to different areas within their community and identify individuals that use other services and may need help through the 'Lean on Me' initiative as they share the problems which the current parents in the group face.

However, Amy, and the other leaders, recognise that the parents who are in difficult situations are not concentrated in one area but are "dotted all over the place". This makes it difficult for a small number of leaders to help as many parents as possible. Expanding to other areas is therefore seen as important so that parents can access support and these services wherever they are and not be restricted by the area they are in.

Through the confidence that many have built, the leaders want to equip them with the skills so that they can eventually lead a 'Lean on Me' group in another area. This not only develops the individual's skills who will be running the future groups but also reaches more parents who find themselves needing this service in a range of areas. They hope to provide the skills needed through the delivery of courses. One beneficiary hopes to take on this role in the future and has "completed a mentoring course" (as mentioned above) and plans on doing more courses and shadowing in order to take on a group in another area. This will also pass on her lived experience and therefore a deep understanding of what individuals need in similar situations.

Concluding thoughts

To conclude, the findings from my interviews and the responses to the questionnaires show the many successes that have come from the 'Lean on Me' initiative. The stand-out feature is the strength of the support they provide. The practical support ensures that the parents, in particular mothers, could not only understand and use the agencies they need but also provides the opportunity to develop independence when it comes to dealing with and using the tools that these agencies can provide them with. The literature revealed the fear such agencies generate, which was backed up by the experiences of both the leaders of the 'Lean on Me' initiative but also the beneficiary taking part in this research. The practical support enabled service users to combat this fear and provide individuals with the knowledge to be able to use the services which will help them and their households.

The importance of emotional support for parents was evident throughout both data sets. The emotional support has given many of the women a lifeline through the positivity the leaders aim to reinforce. They find that through this service they can not only lean on the leaders but can also lean on each other as often as they need. This gives clients the capacity to improve their lives by giving more stability to their children as well as themselves. Overall, this support improves the well-being and mental health of beneficiaries who take part regularly in the 'Lean on Me' groups.

This is also evident through the development of their confidence which is pivotal to the services 'Lean on Me' provides. In the 'Lean on Me' sessions, groups and leaders build up each individual's confidence which gives them the drive to make their lives better and improve their skills as an individual as well as a parent. This opens up opportunities such as the possibility of taking on a 'Lean on Me' group of their own.

The newly emerging aim of the 'Lean on Me' initiative is now to expand the services to create outreach in a range of areas they identify as needing their services. The introduction, within the initiative, of these courses for women to complete who desire to take on a leadership role has expanded their skills and their confidence in themselves but also allows for this service to reach more parents in need.

Development and recommendation

Overall, the findings from this research overwhelmingly support the continuation of this initiative; it is vital for helping parents struggling with children who have challenging behaviour or are involved in the criminal justice system. It is imperative that they expand their services as much as funding will allow. The drive of the women who have seen and experienced the success in this service and wish to use their lived experience to help women in similar situations would be impactful in the groups that they will be able to lead. This will ensure that the service reaches as many parents as possible and becomes even more useful and supportive if run by these individuals with the help of original 'Lean on Me' leaders and the CELLS Project.

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Appendix 1

Interview questions for the 'Lean on Me' initiative Staff (Those who run the meetings):

How are the meetings run?

What kind of skills do you try to develop to assist your clients?

Why do you think the support you give in these sessions is important for the participants?

Do you feel that the 'Lean on Me' initiative has created a sense of community and togetherness between those who run the sessions and those who take part?

Has there been one session where you have seen a direct impact on those participating in the session? Which session was this and was the impact, positive or negative?

Is there any further support you believe you can give that you don't give already?

Do you think the initiative, as a whole, could be improved in any way?

Interview questions for beneficiaries of the 'Lean on Me' initiative (These may be altered and more specific after the staff interviews and more interactions with the CELLS Project):

In what ways do you feel supported by the sessions?

Have you felt a sense of community and togetherness through the project and, if so, how?

Do you think the sessions have improved your day-to-day life? In what ways?

What have the main benefits of the sessions been for you?

How have the regular sessions for the 'Lean on Me' initiative benefited you in your day-to-day life?

Has one meeting stood out to be very helpful for you and/or your family? Why do you think that is?

Are there any areas you feel the project could help you which have not been covered in the meetings so far?

How could the service be improved?

Appendix 2

Questionnaire

How long have you been a part of the 'Lean on Me' initiative? (required)

- 0-6 months
- 6months – 1 year
- 1 – 3 years
- 3 years +

Is there one meeting with the 'Lean on Me' group that has helped you the most? (required)

- Yes
- Not one specifically
- No

If yes, which session and how was it helpful? (comment below):

Do you feel 'Lean on Me' has helped you feel a sense of community and togetherness? (required)

- Yes
- No

If yes, in what ways has this helped you (comment below):

If no, why has it not helped with this? (comment below):

Do you feel emotionally supported by the sessions? (required)

- Yes
- No
- Other

Extra comments:

Has the 'Lean on Me' initiative helped your stress levels? (required)

- More stressed than before taking part
- I am slightly less stressed day-to-day
- I am less stressed than before taking part
- My stress levels have not changed

How do you feel you have been best supported by the 'Lean in Me' staff? Discuss below (optional):

How could you be more supported through 'Lean on Me'? (required)

Discuss below:

Are there any other improvements that can be made to make 'Lean on Me' more helpful for you?

Discuss below:

If not, why do you think that is?

Appendix 3

Participant Information Sheet

For Service Users

The impact of the CELLS Project ‘Lean on Me’ initiative.

Questionnaires

Version 3; 08/02/2023

You are invited to be a participant in a research study. Before consenting to do so, please read the information below regarding the study. This will ensure your understanding of the research study, what it will be used for and what it will involve. If there are any questions you have for any part of this sheet or if you would like more information, feel free to ask us. You do not have to accept this invitation; you should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading.

1. Purpose of the study:

The main aim of this study is to find what impact the CELLS Project ‘Lean on Me’ initiative has on the people that attend. This will explore how it has affected their well-being, the skills they have gained from being involved in this, and whether there is more support to be given through this service. This is so that the CELLS Project can see how the project is doing and make any improvements that this research may highlight. It will ensure that the ‘Lean on Me’ service can continue and give as much help as possible to those who need it.

2. Why have I been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen to take part in this study as an adult who uses the services which ‘Lean on Me’ provide. It will be a questionnaire open to other users of the ‘Lean on Me’ initiative with an intended 6-8 others taking part in the questionnaire.

3. Do I have to take part?

It is completely your decision whether you would like to take part in this research study or not. You can withdraw at any point with no need for explanation. Please do not feel pressure in making this choice.

4. What will happen if I take part?

You will complete an anonymous paper questionnaire sheet situated in a folder in the CELLS Project office, which you will then put in an envelope provided. Once this data is collected by the student researcher, Evelyn Smart, the results will be collected and stored in a password-protected file to ensure further confidentiality.

5. Are there any risks in taking part?

There have been no risks identified for anyone taking part in this research study. We do not plan on talking about any sensitive issues in the questionnaire and so any emotional harm will be avoided. If you are uncomfortable with any questions, please skip them

6. Are there any benefits in taking part?

The research is investigating the support offered by the 'Lean on Me' initiative and whether there is more support that could be given that isn't already. If this is identified, then these recommendations can benefit participants.

7. What will happen to the results of the study?

Currently, the report on the results of the study is not planned to be published.

8. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

Due to the questionnaire being anonymous from the outset, and collected by the date 01/03/23, withdrawal cannot be possible once you have completed the questionnaire.

If this is a query for you, please contact Evelyn Smart, email hsesmar2@liverpool.ac.uk, the student researcher.

9. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting Evelyn Smart, hsesmar2@liverpool.ac.uk, or Lynn Hancock (L.Hancock@liverpool.ac.uk, 0151 794 2980) and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Ethics and Integrity Office at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Ethics and Integrity Office, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 0303 123 1113.

10. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

Student investigator:

Evelyn Smart: Email – hsesmar2@liverpool.ac.uk

Principal investigator:

Lynn Hancock: Email – L.Hancock@liverpool.ac.uk

0151 794 2980

Appendix 4

Participant Information Sheet

For Staff/Volunteers

The impact of the CELLS Project ‘Lean on Me’ initiative

Interviews

Version 2; 28/11/2022

You are invited to be a participant in a research study. Before consenting to do so, please read the information below regarding the study. This will ensure your understanding of the research study, what it will be used for and what it will involve. If there are any questions you have for any part of this sheet or if you would like more information, feel free to ask us. You do not have to accept this invitation; you should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading.

11. Purpose of the study:

The main aim of this study is to find what impact the CELLS Project ‘Lean on Me’ initiative has on the people that attend. This will explore how it has affected those who use the service’s well-being, the skills they have gained from being involved in this, and whether there is more support to be given through this service. This is so that the CELLS Project can see how the project is doing and make any improvements that this research may highlight. It will ensure that the ‘Lean on Me’ service can continue and give as much help as possible to those who need it.

12. Why have I been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen to take part in this study as an adult who provides the services for the ‘Lean on Me’ initiative. There will be approximately 2 staff/volunteers chosen to take part in this research, based on the same reasons.

13. Do I have to take part?

It is completely your decision whether you would like to take part in this research study or not. You can withdraw at any point with no need for explanation. Please do not feel pressure in making this choice.

14. What will happen if I take part?

During this research study, you will be asked to take part in a one-on-one interview with the student researcher, Evelyn Smart, who will organise this with the help of Shaun Glanville, CELLS Project manager. This interview is one interview that is semi-structured meaning there are topics of discussion and conversation will be had regarding these where you can answer in however much detail you feel comfortable with giving. This interview will take no more than an hour and will be audio recorded in order to transcribe. If direct quotes from this are being used in the research study, this will be anonymous and if you would prefer quotes not to be used, please inform the student researcher of this. All the data from the interview will be anonymised and stored in a password-protected file to ensure its confidentiality.

15. Are there any risks in taking part?

There have been no risks identified for anyone taking part in this research study. We do not plan on talking about any sensitive issues during the interviews and so any emotional harm will be avoided. If any subjects do arise which you are uncomfortable with, please tell the researcher and this will be handled.

16. Are there any benefits in taking part?

The research is investigating the support offered by the 'Lean on Me' initiative, how impactful that is and whether there is more support that could be given that isn't already. If this is identified, then these recommendations can benefit the 'Lean on Me' program and guide staff/volunteers on what is working and what further support they can give.

17. What will happen to the results of the study?

Currently, the report on the results of the study is not planned to be published

18. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

As a participant of this study, you can withdraw your participation in the study at any time, without explanation.

Results up to the period of withdrawal may be used, if participants are happy for this to be done. Otherwise, you can request the data you provided to be destroyed and no further use is made of them. With the results being anonymised, your data may only be withdrawn prior to anonymisation, by the date 01/03/23.

If this is the case you can contact Evelyn Smart, email hsesmar2@liverpool.ac.uk, to inform the researcher of your withdrawal. If the data has already been anonymised, after 01/03/23, this will not be possible.

19. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting Evelyn Smart, hsesmar2@liverpool.ac.uk, or Lynn Hancock (L.Hancock@liverpool.ac.uk, 0151 794 2980) and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Ethics and Integrity Office at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Ethics and Integrity Office, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 0303 123 1113.

20. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

Student investigator:

Evelyn Smart: Email – hsesmar2@liverpool.ac.uk

Principal investigator:

Lynn Hancock: Email – L.Hancock@liverpool.ac.uk

Appendix 5

Participant Information Sheet

For Service Users

The impact of the CELLS Project ‘Lean on Me’ initiative

Interviews

Version 2; 28/11/2022

You are invited to be a participant in a research study. Before consenting to do so, please read the information below. This will ensure your understanding of the research study, what it will be used for and what it will involve. If there are any questions you have for any part of this sheet or if you would like more information, feel free to ask us. You do not have to accept this invitation; you should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading.

21. Purpose of the study:

The main aim of this study is to find what impact the CELLS Project ‘Lean on Me’ initiative has on the people that attend. This will explore how it has affected your well-being, the skills you have gained from being involved, and whether more support can be provided through this service. This is so that the CELLS Project can see how the project is doing and make any improvements that this research may highlight. It will ensure that the ‘Lean on Me’ service can continue and give as much help as possible to those who need it.

22. Why have I been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen to take part in this study as an adult who uses the services which ‘Lean on Me’ provide. There will be approximately 3-5 others chosen to take part in this research, based on the same reasons.

23. Do I have to take part?

It is completely your decision whether you would like to take part or not. You can withdraw at any point with no need for explanation. Please do not feel pressure in making this choice.

24. What will happen if I take part?

During this research study, you will be asked to take part in a one-to-one interview with the student researcher, Evelyn Smart, who will organise this with the help of Shaun Glanville, CELLS Project manager. There will be topics of discussion and we will have a conversation where you can answer in however much detail you feel comfortable giving. The interview will take no more than an hour and will be audio recorded. If direct quotes from the interview are used in the research study, you will not be able to be identified. If you prefer quotes not to be used, please inform the student researcher. All the data from the interview will be anonymised (any identifiable information will be removed) and will be stored in a password-protected file to ensure its confidentiality.

25. Are there any risks in taking part?

There have been no risks identified for anyone taking part in this research study. We do not plan to talk about any sensitive issues during the interviews and so any emotional harm will be avoided. This

research is solely concerned with your experiences of the 'Lean on Me' service. If any subjects do arise which you are uncomfortable with, please tell the researcher and this will be addressed.

26. Are there any benefits in taking part?

The research is investigating the support offered by the 'Lean on Me' initiative and whether there is more support that could be given that isn't already. If this is identified, then these recommendations can benefit participants.

27. What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the study will be made into a report for CELLS and it will be used as part of my assessed work at the University.

28. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You can withdraw from the study at any time, without explanation.

Results up to the period of withdrawal may be used, if participants are happy for this to be done. Otherwise, you can request the data you provided to be destroyed and no further use would be made of them. Please note that your data may only be withdrawn prior to anonymisation which will take place by the date 01/03/23.

Please contact Evelyn Smart, email hseamar2@liverpool.ac.uk, to inform the researcher if you wish to withdraw. If the data has already been anonymised, after 01/03/23, this will not be possible.

29. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting Evelyn Smart (hseamar2@liverpool.ac.uk) or Lynn Hancock (L.Hancock@liverpool.ac.uk, 0151 794 2980) and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Ethics and Integrity Office at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Ethics and Integrity Office, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

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30. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

Student investigator:

Evelyn Smart: Email – hseamar2@liverpool.ac.uk

Principal investigator:

Lynn Hancock: Email - L.Hancock@liverpool.ac.uk

Appendix 6

Participant consent form

Questionnaires

Date: 08/02/2023

Title of the research project: The impact of the CELLS Project ‘Lean on Me’ initiative.

Name of researcher: Evelyn Smart

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated, 08/02/2023, for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that taking part in the study involves an anonymous questionnaire. I am aware of and consent to your use of the data given by taking part.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to not take part in the study. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any question or questions.
4. I understand that the questionnaire will be anonymised from the onset and the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Liverpool and then deposited in a password-protected file in a secure server.
5. I understand and agree that this data may be used in academic research papers and presentations (e.g. as quotations).
6. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.
7. I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant name	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of researcher	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____

Academic Advisor

Lynn Hancock

Student Researcher:

Evelyn Smart

Email: Lynn0406@liverpool.ac.uk

Email: hsesmar2@liverpool.ac.uk

Appendix 7

Participant consent form

Interviews

Date: 28/11/2022

Title of the research project: The impact of the CELLS Project 'Lean on Me' initiative

Name of researcher: Evelyn Smart

Please initial box

8. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated, 28/11/2022, for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
9. I understand that taking part in the study involves an audio-recorded interview. I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the following purposes: transcribing interviews.
10. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any question or questions.
11. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can ask for access to the information I provide, and I can request the destruction of that information if I wish at any time
12. I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Liverpool until it is fully anonymised and then deposited in a password-protected file in a secure server.
13. I understand and agree that this data may be used in academic research papers and presentations (e.g. as quotations).
14. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.
15. I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant name

Date

Signature

Name of researcher

Date

Signature

Academic Advisor

Student Researcher:

Lynn Hancock

Evelyn Smart

Email: Lynn0406@liverpool.ac.uk

Email: hseamar2@liverpool.ac.uk