

SHiFT Bexley

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CONTEXT

SHiFT Bexley launched in July 2022 and, after staff training and a detailed scoping exercise to identify and invite children for support, started working with children in September 2022. As of March 2023, the Practice has therefore been working with children for six months – a third of the way through SHiFT’s typical 18-month practice cycle. At the half-way point (i.e. nine months) we expect to see ‘green shoots’ of progress and impact. Data shared in this report is for the period 1 September 2022 to 31 March 2023.

The Practice launched with two Guides and one Practice Coordinator led by a Lead Guide, Imogen Moore-Shelley. One Guide and the Practice Coordinator remain in post. One Guide was largely absent from work owing to illness from late November 2022 until handing in her notice in early March 2023. A first round of recruitment to that Guide’s role was successful but the candidate withdrew, a month into pre-employment checks. In the latest round of recruitment in May, two new candidates have accepted offers to join the Practice as Guides from July/August this year, SHiFT having offered additional funding to increase the Practice’s capacity and resilience. This report is being written in the immediate aftermath of Imogen’s tragic death at the end of May. The Practice is therefore currently without a Lead Guide.

When SHiFT Bexley was created, the partnership agreed that it would strategically advance the vision for Children’s Services in Bexley by supporting the embedding of systemic practice. The partnership expected to see a direct impact on practice in relation to:

- Systemic practice
- Consistent use of child centred language
- Relationship based practice

For children and families, the partnership’s goal was that SHiFT’s work would contribute to:

- Reducing entry into Local Authority Care
- Reducing risk and safeguarding concerns enabling children to be safe without care pathway support
- Reducing exploitation (concerns or proven)
- Reducing offending – preventing entry into the criminal justice system
- Reducing offence gravity and/or frequency
- Increasing stability of placement or home/family life
- Demonstrating restorative approaches/whole family work which reduce risks of coming into care
- Improving education and employment outcomes

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

SHiFT COMMITMENTS

SHiFT Commitments are essential elements of all SHiFT Practices based on values and evidence and experience of 'what works'. We keep the SHiFT Commitments under regular review to ensure outstanding outcomes through our partnership working.

SHiFT Commitment	RAG Rating	Brief Narrative Summary
Recruitment	Green	The national SHiFT team has been involved at each stage of the recruitment process for new Guides and has secured additional funding to increase the number of Guides from 2 to 3.
Support & quality assurance	Amber	Due to changes in staff in the national SHiFT team and the Practice this has been a challenge, however systemic training has now been provided and the new Partnership Meetings together with ongoing practice development support are ensuring that any support require is provided in a timely fashion.
Who we work with	Green	The national SHiFT team and Lead Guide were involved throughout the process.
Breaking Cycles	Amber	Staffing challenges have impacted on some of the core ingredients e.g. around investing in the relationship with the child although individually Guides are working to deliver.
Guides	Red	Due to staffing challenges Guides have needed to work with more children than the maximum expected by SHiFT.
Internal Communications	Green	Strong internal links within Bexley allowing the team to challenge narratives and to ensure that the child is at the centre of all decisions made.

Goals	Amber	Due to the staffing issues the Lead Guide has been required to work with more children than agreed, which has meant this has not been focused on in the ways expected.
Persistence	Green	Despite the challenges posed by reduced staffing, the Practice has demonstrated persistence, following children as they moved across localities. The Practice hasn't been able to engage 1 child out of the original group of 14.
Risk assessment	Amber	The Local Authority has processes, policies and procedures for risk assessment and mitigation but there is inconsistency in implementation and recording.
Child's resource	Green	Funding has been fully ring fenced and the Practice is working with the Practice Development Lead to ensure that this is used effectively.
Approaches	Green	All approaches/interventions are scrutinised to ensure they have clear theoretical underpinning. The Practice used mental contrasting in setting goals.
Supervision	Green	All staff receive clinical supervision. This alternates between individual supervision in one month and group supervision the next. The national team is supporting the Practice to embed systemic reflection in weekly Practice meetings.
Data collection and evaluation	Amber	Due to the staffing issues this hasn't always been able to be as timely and complete as we would like, but the national team have been able to lean in to support where possible.
Governance	Green	Local Boards are held at the right time and are chaired by the Director of Children's Services. Multi-disciplinary attendance has been variable, but the partnership continues to work hard to maximise participation.
Communications	Green	This has been agreed by Bexley and the national team will share additional templates to support with consistency.

PRACTICE

SHiFT uses the Breaking Cycles ingredients to achieve great outcomes for children and families by reducing opportunities for harm, identifying and building on strengths, and changing the way young people are viewed and how they view themselves. We are laser focused on realising positive change for the children and families we serve.

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

SHiFT Bexley identified and invited 14 children and young people to work with, 13 of whom were still working with their SHiFT Guide as of 31 March 2023. Some key information that we know about the children we are working alongside is as follows:

Characteristic		Number of children
Gender	Male	13
	Female	1
Age	11-14	3
	15-18	10
	19-25	1
Race and ethnicity	Black/Black British/ Caribbean/African	7
	Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	3
	White/White British/White Other	4

SHiFT IN ACTION – A CHILD & FAMILY STORY

MEET MICHAEL

Michael is a sixteen-year-old boy of Nigerian descent. His father left the family home when Michael was seven, ceasing to have any contact with him and his younger sister. Michael's mother struggled on her own and when he was eight, both children were taken into the care of the local authority. An uncle, who was the only other family member in this country, had previously been violent to the children so was not a suitable placement. Michael and his sister were placed separately and contact between them was irregular. Their mother died when Michael was twelve.

Michael received specialist educational support for his social, emotional, and mental health needs and had a good rapport with his key worker at school. Over time, Michael was trusted to travel home independently from school. Through this, he started mixing with older children. He started going missing regularly and professionals suspected he had a much older girlfriend. They were concerned that he might be groomed or criminally exploited but Michael did not trust them and did not want to speak to them, so they found it difficult to assess the risks to his and others' safety. School had been a positive factor in Michael's life but, as his missing episodes increased, his attendance declined and fears for his safety and wellbeing increased.

SHiFT started working with Michael in December 2022. Almost immediately after, Michael was arrested for attempted robbery and assault. Although Michael was described by some professionals as 'evasive', 'difficult to engage', and someone who did not like new people, Michael's Guide knew that his keyworker at school had a good relationship with him and used that relationship to gain Michael's trust. With this support, Michael's bubbly character quickly shone and together they began having mature and structured conversations about what was important to him so that support could be tailored to his needs. Michael's Guide worked closely with him throughout the police investigations, helping him to understand what was happening and advocating to ensure his rights were respected. His Guide offered consistency and space for Michael to feel heard and held while what was going on around him felt scary and uncertain.

Unfortunately, by the point of Michael's arrest, his long-term foster placement had completely broken down. His foster carer described his behaviour in and out of the home as aggressive and out of control. She was very worried about Michael's safety outside of the home and felt she could no longer manage this risk. Through conversations with his SHiFT Guide, Michael voiced that he wanted to stay with his foster carer as he had lived with her for approximately four years, and this was the closest experience he had to 'real family'.

SHiFT assessed that the risk to Michael and others was high but believed that a placement move within the borough or a neighbouring borough supported by a robust and tailored safety plan that included intensive monitoring and support from his Guide would enable risk to be managed and Michael to rebuild the healthy relationship he had previously had with his foster carer.

The professional network disagreed and decided that a placement at a significant distance from Bexley was required to safeguard Michael. Although his SHiFT Guide tried to challenge this, taking the view that a forced move so far away from home would cause Michael to relive previous childhood trauma and his experiences of being taken into care, a Deprivation of Liberty Order was granted by the courts and Michael was moved to a placement in Scotland.

Unconstrained by geographical boundaries, Michael's Guide has travelled several times to Scotland to support Michael in transitioning to his new home and to 'break the cycle'. She has continued to invest time in building their relationship and make it clear to Michael that she will persist and continue to support.

One of Michael's goals was to complete his GCSEs and SHiFT advocated successfully for Michael to be able to complete his GCSEs at an external education provider. A practical next step was that Michael needed to be taken to the school – in Newcastle – to sit his exams. His placement said they were unable to provide transportation. Doing whatever it takes, and recognising the vital importance of Michael being able to achieve his goal to complete GCSEs so that he can attend college, Michael's Guide has stepped in, travelling from London to Scotland and then driving Michael to and from his exams. During their long drives together from Scotland to Newcastle, Michael and his Guide have had open and powerful conversations about Michael's childhood. Michael has felt safe to share things with his Guide he has never previously shared with any professional - the loss of his mother, the abuse of his father and uncle, and his time in care.

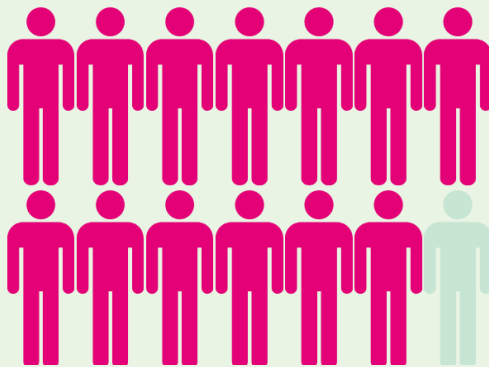
Michael has opened up to his Guide about feeling out of place in Scotland, especially due to his race and his Guide is supporting him to explore these feelings further, reflecting on his identity. Michael and his Guide are already discussing and planning his transition out of this placement, considering what he would like to see happen. Keeping in mind his hopes, strengths and achievements as well as needs, risks and vulnerabilities they will work together to set staged and structured goals that will help him to come back into the community where he wants to be.

Michael's Guide will continue to help him to navigate his world differently, walking alongside him and working with everyone in his world, including his foster carer and the wider professional network to help to change limiting patterns of behaviour and relationships.

PROGRESS AND IMPACTS

SHiFT is a learning organisation, laser focused on realising positive change for the children and families we serve. SHiFT Practices continually collect and reflect on data to measure progress, consider impact and enrich practice. Lead Guides and Practice Coordinators are supported in data collection and analysis by SHiFT's Research and Evaluation Lead who provides detailed insight from evaluation at the mid-point and end of SHiFT Programme cycles. This includes qualitative data from children, families, and professionals.

SHiFT IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Because of persistent and creative practice over many months, **13 of the 14 children** initially identified and invited for support from SHiFT are working with their SHiFT Guide. As such, the following outcomes relate to the 13 children with whom Guides are working. Data refers to the period from starting with a SHiFT Guide (September 2022) to the date of the last quarterly return (31 March 2023).

SHiFT IS REDUCING THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN ON A CARE PATHWAY

9 of the 13 children we are working with were on a care pathway at the start of their time with SHiFT. Over the last nine months this has reduced to 7, 2 of whom are now care leavers.



2 children moved from 'Child in Need' to no care status.

1 child has moved from being in the care of the Local Authority to a Child Protection Plan.

3 of 9 CHILDREN HAVE STEPPED DOWN SINCE WORKING WITH SHiFT

SHiFT IS REDUCING MISSING EPISODES



10 children had missing episodes in the 12 months prior to working with SHiFT.



This reduced to 7 children who had missing episodes in Q4 2022 (October-December) 2 children had multiple missing episodes, and one described as having 'repeated' missing episodes lasting up to a week.



Only 2 children have reported missing episodes in Q1 of 2023 (January-March 2023).

8 OUT OF THE 10 CHILDREN WITH A HISTORY OF GOING MISSING HAVE HAD NO REPORTED MISSING EPISODES IN THE MOST RECENT QUARTER (JANUARY-MARCH 2023).

SHiFT IS SUPPORTING CHILDREN TO REMAIN IN EDUCATION

Of the 5 SHiFT children who are of school age, 4 are in mainstream education (one having returned from Alternative Provision) and one has a placement in the PRU. Persistent absence and behaviour issues continue however, their SHiFT Guides report 2 of the children starting to improve with 1 advocating for themselves to have a reduced timetable and the other improving their timekeeping.

Of the 8 school leavers, only 2 children were in any form of education, employment or training (FE College) at the outset of SHiFT. They have both remained in college, with one using his Guide' support to appeal successfully against an exclusion decision. Of the remaining children, one has now gained steady part time employment, another has had some employment and a third has expressed a desire to start a business.

2 CHILDREN HAVE BEEN SUPPORTED TO REMAIN IN COLLEGE AND IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND 1 SUPPORTED TO FIND AND MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT.

SHiFT IS BREAKING CYCLES OF CRIME

In the 12 months prior to working with SHiFT, 7 of 13 children were convicted of offences with gravity scores ranging from 2 to 6.



5 of these children have not been convicted of any further offences committed during their time with SHiFT.

Of the remaining 2 children, 1, already open to the criminal justice system, received a conviction for an offence (gravity score = 6) committed in the first week of working with his SHiFT Guide. The second has been convicted of two further offences but there has been no increase in the gravity score.

Of the remaining children in the group of 13, only 1 has received a conviction since being part of SHiFT which resulted in a community order.

8 children were arrested at least once in the 6 months prior to their engagement with SHiFT, 5 of whom were charged at least once. Three children were arrested multiple times with one child being arrested 5 times and charged 4 times. In total, 9 children have been arrested since being part of SHiFT with 7 being charged with offences. **However, this has gradually declined with 4 children being arrested in the most recent quarter (Jan-Mar 2023) and only 1 charged.** However, the one child that has been charged is on remand for a charge of serious violence.

11 OUT OF 14 CHILDREN HAVE COMMITTED NO PROVEN OFFENCES SINCE WORKING WITH A SHiFT GUIDE.

SHiFT IS HELPING TO KEEP CHILDREN OUT OF CARE

A particularly important focus for Bexley's Director of Children's Service in relation to SHiFT is keeping children and families together wherever possible and, where Local Authority care is necessary, improving experiences and outcomes for those children.

1 CHILD (OUT OF 6) IS NO LONGER IN CARE AND HAS SUCCESSFULLY RETURNED HOME TO THEIR FAMILY SINCE WORKING WITH A SHiFT GUIDE.

NO CHILD HAS COME INTO LOCAL AUTHORITY CARE SINCE WORKING WITH SHiFT.