



BUTTLE UK

Evaluation of the Buttle UK Chances for Children Grant in the West Midlands
Executive Summary

March 2021



Executive Summary

Background and context to the study

In England and Wales, an estimated 5.5% of adults (2.3 million) aged between 16-74 years experienced domestic abuse in 2020¹ and, as a result, many families leave home in fear for their lives. Families often experience significant hardship; children and young people's education can become disrupted, and many children become anxious and isolated.² Without specific interventions early on in their crisis, the impact of domestic abuse on children can contribute to long-term poor outcomes.³

Buttle UK's mission is to ensure that children who are exposed to poverty and who experience family crisis can receive appropriate support to maintain their engagement in education and wellbeing. To support this vision, Buttle UK offered agencies working with families who had been victims of domestic abuse, an opportunity to apply for a Chances for Children Grant (CCG). The grant fund was part funded through the National Lottery Community Fund and Comic Relief, and ran from March 2018 to March 2021.

The aims of CCG programme were to improve longer-term outcomes for children by improving their living circumstances, offering children opportunities to engage in educational activities and to improve their mental wellbeing.

Agencies working closely with families who had suffered from domestic abuse were able to apply to Buttle UK for a CCG up to a value of approximately £2,000. The CCG was provided as part of wider support delivered by family practitioners who were working intensely with families to help them recover from a crisis. The CCG could be used for household items such as essential furniture and white goods, learning resources such as books, educational toys, laptops, online platforms, and activities such as dance classes.

Aims of the research

The research was tasked with evidencing the extent to which the CCGs achieved Buttle UK's three priorities identified in its theory of change designed at the time of the domestic abuse programme's inception. These were to:

- ensure that the children live in a safe, healthy, well-equipped home
- allow the children to better engage in education and have the same access to education as their peers
- allow the children to access activities that promote their wellbeing and personal development.

An additional key element of the research was to identify the impact of the use of CCGs on agencies themselves. This included looking at how it had influenced practitioners'

¹ Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)

² Devaney, J. (2015) Research Review: *The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children*. Irish Public Journal, Volume 12, October

³ Unicef, Behind Closed Doors: the Impact of Domestic Violence on Children
<https://www.unicef.org/media/files/BehindClosedDoors.pdf>

assessment practice and whether it had resulted in any efficiencies for the agency. Potential efficiencies were identified at the research design stage and included:

- improved family engagement in support
- families' capacity to move forward, and
- case closures.

The research then went on to consider any potential cost savings to agencies derived from increased efficiencies and, whether agencies themselves saw a benefit in providing a similar form of grant to support their families going forward.

Method

The research was conducted using qualitative interviews with agencies who had applied to Buttle UK for a CCG for their families. Interviews with agency family support workers focused on: how agencies identified the need for a CCG among children, young people and families; what impact they considered the CCG had on families, and whether they perceived the grant had a positive impact on the family's engagement with their support.

Interviews also included a series of questions aimed at obtaining a confidence rating regarding any impact of the CCG on agencies' efficiencies. One of the original aims was to identify from agencies' case management systems, whether there was a discernible difference in the duration of support for families who had received a CCG. However, agencies responded that this was too onerous a task and would be unlikely to show any patterns in case closure: decisions to close cases were complex and included multiple factors. The cost benefit estimates are, therefore, based on family practitioners' perceptions and can only be considered indicative of any potential savings to agencies as a result of administering CCGs.

In total, nine agencies engaged in the study, who between them, had received 366 CCGs from Buttle UK. From these agencies: 22 staff (6 agency managers and 16 family support practitioners); 17 parents, and eight children/young people were interviewed. These families were identified and engaged in the research by their support agency and had all received a CCG. Nine of the 17 families interviewed had left their original home, leaving behind all their possessions apart from essential clothes and one or two of their children's items.

The original approach had been to conduct focus group with CCG recipients. However, the Covid-19 pandemic restricted the extent to which the researchers could engage in focus groups and all research activities were conducted over the telephone. This did not detract from the quality of the evidence generated.

Analysis of the impact of the grant was viewed within the framework of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This illustrated the connectivity between Buttle UK's three priorities and how they contributed to achieving stability and security, and self-efficacy among children and young people.

Ethical considerations

Interviews with families did not cover any detail regarding their prior experiences relating to domestic abuse. The questions focused only on their current situation and the impact of the CCG. All participants were assured of their anonymity and the confidential nature of the interviews. All names presented in the case studies have been changed.

KEY FINDINGS

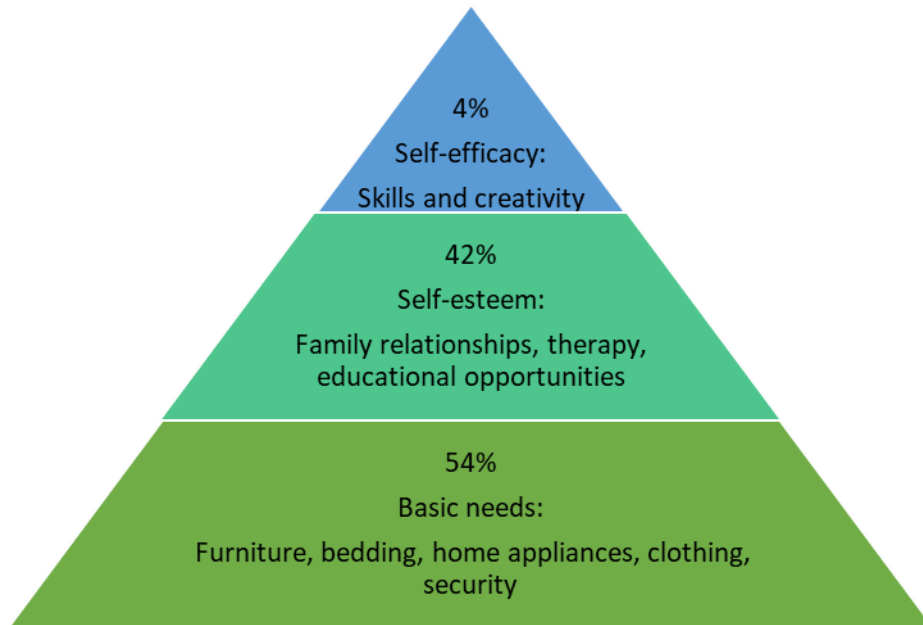
Access to the grant

The total value of the CCGs distributed across the West Midlands via agencies from April 2019 to January 2021 was over £750,000.

Fifty-seven agencies in the West Midlands received a grant on behalf of 544 families, supporting 1,252 children/young people.

The number of items/activities funded was 2,916. **Figure 1** shows the distribution of the fund across Buttle UK’s key priority areas linked to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.

Figure 1: Distribution of Chances for Children Grant across Buttle UK’s priorities



The bulk of the fund was used to purchase household items, for example beds, carpet and wardrobes (54%), and educational items including books, toys, IT equipment, school uniforms and stationery (42%). A smaller portion of the fund (4%) was used to fund after-school activities or creative sessions for young people. The potential for support workers to organise/fund this element was severely limited by the Covid-19 epidemic during 2020.

Nearly all the parents (97%) supported were women, and the majority (80%) were single women over the age of 21. The ethnic diversity of families supported through the CCGs was evidenced through the demographic data; just under one-half of families were non-white.

The West Midlands has the second highest level of ethnic diversity outside of London, with the Asian population making up 14.3% of the population and Black/Black British making up 9.8% of the population.

Impact of the CCG on children/young people and families

Qualitative evidence from both family support workers and families revealed the significant impact the CCG had made on home life. For some families getting ready to leave refuge, the CCG gave them a feeling of hope that they would be able to recover from their trauma. Some children were provided with a wide range of items including children's beds and bedding which meant they were able to sleep comfortably in their own bed for the first time. Other families were equipped with fencing and security where this was considered essential for their future safety.

The educational toys and books provided for the young children helped ensure that children were growing up in a stimulating environment.

"Mum is spending more time with the child and taking an interest in her education...they are sitting down together, and this has an impact on both of them." (Support worker)

Many children/young people received a tablet or a laptop and/or a Smartphone. This made a considerable impact on their ability to participate in education. Without the grant, many would not have been able to continue with their school work so easily.

"For the first week, I didn't have this, and I got behind straight away, so when I got the laptop, I had a lot of catching up to do with the homework." (Young person)

The holistic support available through the grant enabled families to move past the inefficiencies of their home environment and to concentrate more on looking at individual goals they wanted to achieve.

Some of the funding was used to give children and young people opportunities to experience a day out together with the family. This helped create shared experiences and memories for families, so rebuilding family life.

"We had a really lovely day [at the zoo] and the children still speak about it now and their faces light up." (Parent)

Impact on agencies' assessment practice

The study looked at how, by completing a CCG application with families, support workers' assessment and understanding of children/young people's needs improved. The research found that, due to a significant policy shift from government over the past ten years⁴, support workers were already assessing the needs of children/young people within the context of the family. However, understanding the wishes and feelings of children/young when applying for the CCG, did, according to support workers, add value to their conversations with the family. A few support workers commented that having conversations separately with the child or young person helped them to build a positive relationship with

⁴ For example, see Kendall, S., Rodger, J. and Palmer, H. (2010) The use of whole family assessment to identify the needs of families with multiple problems. Department for Education.

the child/young person. One support worker described the conversation was like *“turning on a switch”* in some young people.

“For the first time in a long time, you can see they realise there is a possibility that they may be able to do something different...like boxing or go to the gym. For many young people, this has not been a reality.” (Support worker)

Most parents agreed they had the opportunity to shape how they wanted to use the fund, although a few families reported they felt restricted with what they could apply for. It was evident through interviews that support workers had become very familiar with the nature of the grant and what Buttle UK would and would not fund. Therefore, in order to be assured of a successful application, and to be efficient with their own and Buttle UK’s time, support workers shaped conversations with families in order to meet the family’s needs, and to fit with the requirements of the fund. There is no evidence of families being denied any items that were needed in order to make a difference to children/young people’s opportunities to thrive.

Impact on efficiencies in agencies’ support

The study also looked at whether the grant created any efficiencies which could lead to potential cost savings for agencies. Recent research published by the Child Poverty Action Group⁵ evidenced that poor living standards are a barrier to families engaging in support and feeling they have the capacity to deal with their challenges. Support workers were asked to rate the extent to which they perceived the grant led to increased efficiencies including: improved trust between the family support worker and the family; family engagement in the support/intervention; families’ confidence in their own ability to move forward, and ultimately early case closure.

There was a high level of confidence from family support workers that the CCG resulted in improved levels of trust and increased families’ engagement in their support. One social worker described the grant as *“a bridge that can provide a vital link between us and them”*.

Applying for a CCG on behalf of families enabled support workers to demonstrate understanding, care and concern for their current situation, and provided a practical solution to a family trying to rebuild their life after a crisis. This was felt strongly among social workers or family support workers in the statutory sector where a family’s engagement is not always voluntary (e.g. families engaged with child protection and looked after services).

“The grant ...shows a real commitment to the family. For some of our clients, there is a natural distrust. They think we are going to take their children away. The Buttle grant [CCG] makes such a difference to how we could work together...it reminds me of why I am there.” (Social worker)

Similarly, there was agreement from agencies that families were more confident in their future and in their ability to move forward with their lives as a result of the CCG. *“It’s really*

⁵ Child Poverty Action Group (2020) *The Safety Net is Gone. Understanding the impact of child poverty on the lives of children and families in England: a survey of social workers.*

empowering, they have choice and a voice and Buttle UK has given them this opportunity.”
(Support Worker)

Agencies also agreed that for some families, the CCG aided decisions regarding case closure and step down (e.g. from Child Protection to Child in Need). This was felt particularly pertinent for families in statutory services, where concerns regarding the home environment were removed.

However, evidence of the impact on early case closure in the voluntary sector was more mixed: where families were in need of rehousing, case closure was dependent upon the family achieving stability in their housing tenancy. In areas such as Birmingham, housing was in short supply and cases remained open until appropriate housing could be acquired. However, other family support workers reported that because the grant was often approved in a short space of time, this enabled them to move quickly and effectively with providing the necessary emotional and practical support. As a result, some families' cases could be closed more quickly and with greater confidence. However, Buttle UK stipulated that cases need to remain open for three months post-receipt of a CCG which limits the impact on early case closure.

Costs and benefits to agencies when administering the grant

The evaluators were asked to deliver a cost study which looked at the potential costs and benefits to agencies of holding and managing their own grant scheme (and not applying to Buttle UK for this support).

The costs to agencies of managing and administering a grant scheme similar to the CCG were estimated to be between £1,833 and £1,968 per grant. This included:

- the average grant spend of £1,405
- the cost of each support worker making an application and managing the spend of that award (estimated to be between £120 and £255 per grant)
- the broader management and administration of the grant by agencies including for example costs associated with funding raising, financial expertise and IT/admin support). Using cost information from Buttle UK for 2019/20, this cost was estimated at £308 per grant.

Potential benefits from increased efficiencies (e.g. increased family engagement in support and early case closure) were then compared with the cost of relevant interventions. These included support for children/young people registered on Child Protection Plan or on the edge of care, or support delivered to families recovering from domestic abuse in the voluntary sector (e.g. through the Troubled Families programme). The costs of these interventions to the public purse are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Potential cost savings to statutory service

Outcome (per year, unless stated)	Unit cost, i.e. potential annual cost saving	Monthly saving
Benefit of a 'step-down' from Child Looked After to Child Protection Plan	£52,834	£4,402
Avoiding temporary foster care	£35,628	£2,969
Benefit of a 'step-down' from Child Protection Plan to Child in Need	£2,104*	£175
Benefit of a 'step-down' from Child in Need status to universal services/case closure	£3,062 ⁶	£255

Source: All unit costs are sourced from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (formerly New Economy) Unit Costs Database (<https://greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/research/research-cost-benefit-analysis>), apart from the cost of a Child Protection Plan which is National Audit Office (2019) Pressures on Children's Social Care.

Interviews with children's services' staff evidenced perceptions that a GGC did indeed impact on step downs and prevented young people from returning to care where they had just come from temporary foster care: their houses were better equipped with items such as beds and cookers, and children were generally better cared for. Therefore, stabilising the family with the support of a CCG can remove the need for temporary foster care, at a cost of £685 per week, which equates to over £35,000 per year. Where a child is registered as a Child in Need, the grant can help to close cases due to improved home conditions and increased engagement in support such as parenting programmes, leading to improved family functioning.

The costs benefits of the CCG are established by dividing the cost of each grant by the potential benefits (savings made by avoiding further interventions). Estimates indicated the cost of delivering each grant (approx. £1,900) could be recouped within two weeks to one month for the more expensive statutory interventions (local authority care and temporary foster care).

However, for agencies supporting families in the voluntary sector, recouping the costs of each grant by increased efficiencies would take much longer (because the costs of interventions estimated at £457 per month, are much cheaper than in statutory services) and would be unlikely to be fully recouped. Other benefits from accessing CCGs were apparent, however, for voluntary agencies. Where families were supported on the Troubled Families programme, agencies were in a stronger position to evidence outcomes achieved, including the family being stabilised in a secure and well-equipped home.

⁶ It should be noted that these costs are being reviewed as they are considered to be an underestimate of the actual total figure for assessment and support of a Child in Need. Therefore, potential cost savings could be considerably higher.

Potential for agencies to provide their own grant similar to the Chances for Children Grant

Agencies were asked about their potential to hold a grant similar to the CCG. No agencies felt this could be something they would consider currently due to the financial constraints they were operating under. In addition, there was a lack of confidence in being able to raise sufficient funds to deliver a grant of similar flexibility and value as the CCG grant. Agencies had come to rely on the CCG because it allowed family support workers to meet a range of needs within a family through one grant application. This saved time for family support workers by negating the need to apply to multiple grants which took up a considerable amount of their time. One family support worker reported she did not know how she had managed to support families prior to the Buttle UK CCG. There was evidence the CCG applications had become embedded in some agencies' support offer. Other positive comments included the trusted relationships they had developed with Buttle UK over the period of the fund and the confidence among agencies that this fund was providing added value to many families across the country. A summary table of the benefits and some of the challenges emanating from the Buttle UK CCG is provided in **Table 2**.

Concluding Remark

This research evidenced the positive and significant impact of the CCG for some of the most vulnerable children/young people suffering from domestic abuse in the West Midlands. The combination of the one-to-one support from dedicated support workers and the CCG made a significant impact on the capacity of children/young people to reach their potential. Families reported how their lives had been irrevocably changed and were grateful for the generosity shown through the grant scheme. The availability of the grant had impacted positively on how agencies were able to engage with children, young people and their families and in turn, how well families responded to their intervention and support. Although there was a perception that the CCG had resulted in increased efficiencies for agencies, agencies felt unable to provide a similar grant 'in-house' due to the current economic climate. Agencies valued the contribution being made by Buttle UK to families in a crisis. Any changes to the fund would need to be carefully planned and communicated with agencies in order to avoid a detrimental impact on children and young people caused by a loss of support.

Table 2 : Summary points of the impact of the Buttle UK CCG programme

Positive impacts of the CCG programme	Challenges and considerations of the CCG programme
<p>The flexibility and size of the CCG for each family meant that the impact was felt by the whole family. The CCG improved the quality of home life and more directly increased the educational opportunities for children and young people.</p>	<p>The holistic nature of the CCG required considerable input from each family practitioner to manage the spend. Buttle UK required receipts for each item bought or funded which had to be uploaded on to Buttle UK's systems. This was a time consuming task for family practitioners.</p>
<p>The CCG encouraged family practitioners to focus on the needs of children and young people, and family practitioners felt this was a real aid to engaging them in their support. The size and flexibility of each CCG also reduced the burden on agencies of multiple applications to other small grant providers.</p>	<p>Some families felt the CCG restricted their choices as family practitioners recommended what they could and could not apply for. CCGs were not awarded where there was no clear benefit to the child or young person.</p>
<p>The bulk of the funds were used on building a safe and secure home and on educational resources. A small amount of funds was used on self-development.</p>	<p>The impact of the pandemic limited the extent to which the fund was used on extra-curricular activities that would have helped children and young people develop interests and skills.</p>
<p>The CCG improved agencies' ability to engage with children, young people and families. Families developed strong and trusted relationships with their support workers following receipt of the grant.</p>	<p>Some family practitioners were disappointed when applications were unsuccessful as they felt there was a need for financial support. In these situations, Buttle UK reported a lack of evidence as to how the CCG would benefit the child or young person in the household directly.</p>
<p>The cost of providing a grant was estimated at approximately £1,900. Evidence suggested that for families supported by social care, the CCG contributed to cost savings by improving family outcomes and keeping children out of temporary foster care. Cost savings for agencies in the voluntary sector were more difficult to identify. This was due to a higher 'cost to savings' ratio available in the voluntary sector.</p>	<p>There are resource inputs for agencies applying to the CCG. Some family practitioners were holding off from applying for a CCG because of the time required to apply and manage the spend. Estimates in cost savings were derived from family practitioners' perceptions of the impact on case closure or step-down. More research using case data is needed to provide more robust evidence for a full cost benefits study of the CCG.</p>