Eighteen And Under is a small charity (Charity Number SC026688) based in Dundee but providing services for young people across Scotland. It was formed in April 1994 and provides support and information to young people aged 18 and under who have been abused in any way. Mainly, we work with young people who have experienced sexual abuse and we work with around 500 young survivors every year. In addition to the support work, we have developed evidence based abuse and violence prevention resources, which we deliver to around 6000 children from nursery age to adult every year in schools and nurseries.

Since we began in 1994 we have worked with many young people involved in sexual exploitation. Mostly this has involved young people who are looked after by local authorities but it has also included young runaways and throwaways (young people thrown out of the home by parents) and young people living at home. We have occasionally had small amounts of funding dedicated to sexual exploitation and on those occasions we have been able to carry out more targeted work in the field of sexual exploitation.

We have found that there is no simple model of exploitation with each young person’s case being different and complex. The main thing we have found in common with the young people we have encountered is that the majority of the young people have already suffered sexual abuse (usually by a family member) and they have low self-esteem.

In the last 3 years, we have worked with around 240 young people directly involved in sexual exploitation. We have suspected exploitation in a further 100 cases. Over the past 2 years we have had a partnership with Project No-1, which focuses on trafficking and exploitation and carries out street work. This Project is based in Dundee also but works across Scotland too.

We have seen a variety of pathways into exploitation and can share a few examples. We have commonly encountered young people in residential units (and residential schools) and looked after young people being involved in exploitation. These young people tend to be quite hostile to authority and often have complex backgrounds involving neglect and abuse. They often regard themselves as in control and able to exploit men into giving them money, which they can then use for cigarettes, clothes, drugs and alcohol. They are often encouraged into exploitation by friends they meet in the units and men (and sometimes women) who befriend them. They lack parental control and often constantly run away and are generally a bit chaotic. Those we have worked with regard the sex as a way to get easy money and they do not see any risks. As they are already taking big risks with their lives (using alcohol, drugs and running away) and have low self-esteem some of them see the exploitation as a way of being in charge. Some of these young people
hold the opinion that it is better to get money for sex than do it for nothing.

Runaways and throwaways are at huge risk particularly if they are not reported missing by parents. Under 16’s have no independent means to survive and are in need of shelter, food and heat. We have encountered many of these very vulnerable young people being “taken in” by an older friend they have encountered. Payment for the food and shelter takes the form of sexual favours and this is often extended to include others over time. Some young people are provided with drugs and alcohol and over time become dependent and compliant.

The past few years, we have seen an increase in young people introduced to exploitation by their drug-using parent, usually the mother. We have found that a mother involved in sexual exploitation herself to pay for her drug habit is less able or likely to protect her children from abuse. We have supported young people who have been sexually abused by their mother’s clients. We have also supported young girls who have been encouraged and coached by their mothers into sexual exploitation. We have come across other family members who have done the same including brothers, sisters, uncles and cousins. We encountered one case involving a 9-year old girl being groomed and coached by her mother. (This was passed to police and social services). Some of these families are known to social services but the families tend to stick together and stay silent. Generally we have found huge family loyalty, a dislike of authorities and careful grooming of the victim to ensure compliance and silence. Some families are under the radar of social services and abuse and exploitation.

We have encountered young people who have learning difficulties and mental health problems who have been pulled into sexual exploitation by their peers and by older people. Often these young people do not understand the difference between sex and love and some of them are very easily manipulated. We have encountered males and females who have been exploited sexually and financially in their communities.

The best practice we have seen has been the police and social services working with us and trusting us to build a solid relationship with a young person before taking action. As we offer confidential services to the young people the young person can open up and share with us in a way that they cannot and will not with other agencies. If the authorities move too fast or do not take time for a relationship to build up, the young person can simply retracts their story of harm. We have not often seen good practice but when we have seen it, it has been excellent and resulted in making a huge difference to the lives of the young people.

We have encountered a lot of bad practice and lack of multi-agency work. For example, in Dundee, where we are based, social services refuse to talk to us. Some statutory agencies do not like that we provide confidential services to young people. We also find that many statutory agencies are defensive and intent on denying the problem particularly denying that any young person who is looked after is involved in sexual exploitation. Politics seem to get in the
way of providing services that the young people want and need.

We have had cases of young people aged 15 seeking help and asking to be taken into care but being refused and told to go home to their families. Some of these young people have ended up on the streets and moving in with older people who exploit them. We also find that once the young person turns 16, no one is then interested in any abuse they are experiencing. The Vulnerable Adults Bill is supposed to protect vulnerable adults but we have supported many who cannot get help or support.

Young people need to have a confidential service, which they can trust. There needs to be much earlier intervention with young people to make them aware of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and work needs done to identify young survivors sooner and prevent further abuse. Once young people are involved in exploitation, it is harder to identify them because they hide and it is harder for them to get out. Earlier intervention work would have a much higher impact and perhaps prevent some of these young people being taken into care. Confidential services from an independent voluntary agency (i.e. one not linked or funded by social services) should be provided to young people in care or at risk of going into care. There also needs to be less defensiveness and better working relationships between all agencies. Agencies who provide different services, have different policies and aims ought to work together for the benefit of the young person.

Refuges for young people would really help a lot too but it would have to be provided in a multi-agency manner with a reduced focus on getting criminals into court, getting young people to talk to police and taking young people into care. The focus and priority should be solely on the needs of the individual young person.

Views from young people we have asked.

A. I am a 28 year old and female. I live in Fife and was involved in sexual exploitation. The exploitation began by peers when I was about 12/13 yrs old, I was pressurised into performing sexual activities. Given drugs and alcohol in exchange for sexual relations.

What was helpful? Counselling that was provided whilst awaiting an appointment with a psychologist through the NHS was very helpful. Also helped to put me in touch with other services that were beneficial.

Not helpful? One organisation simply sent me away with a business card with a telephone number on with no explanation of what the service was and how it might help.

Prevent involvement or escape? Better talks in school about CSE, maybe a tv ad campaign could be beneficial? Simply more awareness about CSE and what forms it consists of. CSE through peer pressure is especially prevalent amongst young girls- more needs to be done to address this in particular, especially through talks in schools, sixth form and colleges etc.
B. I am a 27 year old male from Angus. I was exploited and I have had a number of friends who were sexually exploited when in care or when they were on the run.

Some of my old friends were sexually abused by older foster siblings, attacked or groomed when they were on the run from social care and I heard of a few claims about carers in the social system exploiting young people physically, emotionally and sexually to return favours or maintain their authority through fear and blackmail.

I didn't seek support from any support organisation as I felt I didn't need any help. The NHS system wasn't helpful at all. I never heard of a support organisation for boys when I was young.

Not helpful? NHS and their psychologists and councillors were too busy labelling my "condition" and forcing my to take all sorts of medication for me to be normal.

To help? Listen to them, no PHDs, no meds, no forms to fill in, no fear of not been believed, not waving the bureaucratic system in your face and telling you what you have to do, just listening to the young person.

C. I am a 27 year old male from Dundee and was involved in child exploitation from the age of 12/13. It started with sleeping with some older women when I was not living at home.

Helpful organisations? nothing, there was no organisations for boys and you would not at that age consider such things as exploitation, actually you probably wouldn't at any age unless you were well educated on the subject, or it was an older boy/younger girl of course :P

Not helpful to me? sending out the message that only men/boys can abuse people, and only girls/little children can be abused.

What would help not getting involved or escaping? healthy families, prevention work (education), confidential services.

Also, social work are s***.

D. I am female and aged 22 now. I live in Dundee. When I was 5 or 6 my cousin started to sexually abuse me. It went on for years. I tried to tell but no one believed me. When I was 13 he started forcing me to have sex with his mates and he took money. Things were getting worse and worse but when I was 15 one of my sisters told on my cousin for abusing her. The police asked me and I said it happened to me too but I was too scared to tell it all. It went to court and he was found guilty but was not jailed. When I was 16 he started stalking me and saying he was going to tell about what I had done with men. He tried to get me to do it all again.
I went to 18 and Under and they listened and helped a lot. They were confidential and the more I was able to talk, the easier it got. They helped me get a health check and then a lawyer to get advice. They gave practical help too like helping me fill in forms.

What was not helpful? I was scared of the social work in case they took me and my sisters away. The doctor offered pills.

What would help others? Confidential services that listen. Education at a very young age, someone to trust in.

E.

I am 21 year old girl and live in Stirling. I was taken into care at age 3 because my mother was an alcoholic. I moved from foster carer to foster carer and at age 10 was sexually abused by a carer. I started acting out and got moved again and then got put in a residential unit. While there I was involved in sexual exploitation and all the girls were doing it to get money. The staff didn’t care and could not keep us in anyway. I started fire raising and getting really out of control and was put into a secure unit. That was the most abusive place I ever lived. It was worse than a prison, at least in prison you have some rights. I was strip searched, left with no clothes or bedclothes and had to eat with plastic cutlery. 18 and under was helping me by visiting and listening but staff did not always let them in. Staff didn’t like that they were confidential.

At 18 I was put in a flat in an area I did not want to be in but the through care team for the area I was under was responsible and other teams would not take me. Who Cares and 18 and under helped and supported me. They still do. Social work are useless and obstructive.

In the flat I had no skills and was lonely. Mates got me involved in exploitation and that helped financially as I had no money. It soon got out of control and my flat was trashed and I was beaten up.

Helpful? The confidential services of 18 and Under who always stood by me and believed in me. They gave practical help when I needed it. They never colluded with other services.

Not helpful? Social work, NHS. They call me attention seeking, give me labels and wrote reports.

What might help? More services that are independent from the authorities and confidential. Safe places to live and education.