18 Plus is a relatively new support organisation, which was set up by volunteers in 2009. Its remit is to provide confidential support to all survivors of childhood sexual abuse. We have planned to offer services to male survivors as a priority as there are currently so few support services available for males. To date we have focused on consulting with survivors and males in particular to identify their needs and opinions to help develop our services. We have had huge practical support from Eighteen And Under, a children’s charity and Izzy’s Promise, an organisation, which works against ritual abuse.

While we do not yet have huge experience of working with young people involved in sexual exploitation we have provided support to homeless people, drug users and people who are in and out of the prison systems. Many of these people are currently involved in sexual exploitation and have been since they were much younger.

We have encountered some CSE involving young people who are using drugs and substances. Their involvement seems to revolve around their need to finance their drug use. All have been abused in childhood and some have been in the care system.

Those we have worked with have become involved in exploitation through peers, older friends, and homelessness and all began prior to the age of 16. To date we have only worked with 2 young people involved in sexual exploitation and most of our experience has been with older people involved in exploitation. They do seem to tell very similar stories though. In common they all have families who are not able to look after them properly, childhood abuse and a lack of education and ambition.

We have experienced some good practice through the sharing of premises and close working relationships and help from other charities. Homeless agencies have also been helpful.

Statutory agencies have been generally unhelpful. We have seen people go into prison and lose their accommodation and belongings and then come back out to start over again from scratch. They are charged highly for being accommodated with other people with the same problems and it is easier to get money through exploitation to meet their needs.

The younger people we worked with were in residential care and provided with supported accommodation at age 16/17. Both young people we worked with found it too difficult to sustain independent and as they were already involved in sexual exploitation and using drugs, having their own place just made it easier to continue. One moved in with a man in his 50’s who looked after her and the other, a male, became a male escort with an agency.
If we really want to make changes we need to fully understand how complex an issue CSE is. There are so many factors pushing vulnerable young people towards it and very few safeguards and alternatives each step of the way. The young people do not wake up and decide to be exploited on day. It is a gradual process which begins with the erosion of self-worth, no one caring enough about them, the need to belong, have basic needs met and simply survive that drives the young person into the hands of other people who have no scruples about exploiting the young person. Once they young person is hooked it can be extremely difficult to get them out of it. Prevention would surely be a key component in changing things for the better. Other than that, support and information services are crucial for each individual.

18Plus has worked with a vary of young adults aged 16/17 and older within the homeless services, these young adults at times have gone straight from the care service into homeless accommodation looking for suitable housing. The very clear problem with this is that these young adults are then sharing accommodation with alcohol/drug users, ex-offenders all who are waiting on the same stream of housing. When speaking with some young adults the reasons for being in their current situations are varied from abuse as children either by physical, sexual, or mental abuse or just simply having an argument with parents over “typical” teenage life issues. Thinking then that they are old enough and strong enough to live on their own. Living in these settings with little contact from other family and friends and the support they would get forces these young adults to socialise with already vulnerable adults (alcohol/drug dependant/users etc.) showing them examples of this is how they cope in their current situation. These examples of how to live in harder times is not the right message and this is something we are dedicated to help and support these young adults into making what is the best decisions for them. These mixed issues can be easily supported and have better outcomes than what is currently on offer from other services. We hope to change these situations into more positive and successful outcome for young adults.