Public Petitions Committee
Tackling child sexual exploitation in Scotland

Written submission from Project No-1

My name is Keiran Watson and I am the development worker for the Project No-1 which is a sexual exploitation and human trafficking prevention project run by the Scotland based charity Izzy’s Promise

What are the most common types of CSE your organisation has witnessed in your service users?

It is hard to define any main types of CSE as each case can be so unique, the only universal commonality is that CSE occurs when a person in a position of power abuses that power over a person more vulnerable than their self.

Often this power comes from an abuser being older, we often encounter children with a slightly older boy/girlfriend with whom they believe they have a loving and healthy relationship but of course this is often not the case.

One distinct advantage that a person over the age of 16 may have is access to their own home, young people in care, runaways, and young people otherwise escaping an abusive/neglectful living place, will not often remain cold and hungry on the streets, they will make their way to these ‘safe’ places and stay there, they then become very easy prey for abusers as the young person will be easily pressured or more often perfectly happy to have sex with the home owner. This same thing holds true to men/women who have cars.

Most young people know of an older person’s house where they can go, and even if they don’t a lone (or more often pair) of vulnerable young people are easily identified on the street.

One of the biggest problems in trying to tackle CSE is that the young people often do not recognise that what is happening is exploitation, and it is almost impossible to convince them of this fact.

In the last 3 years or so, how many cases of CSE involving your service users have you known or strongly suspected?

200

What are the main routes or pathways through which the young people you work with have become involved in CSE?

When a young person is separated from their family and friends, for whatever reason, they become vulnerable to exploitation, this seems to be particularly true for young people that are placed in care.
In my opinion there are several reasons for this, one is the damage that is done to the young person’s sense of self worth, and this makes them much more likely to crave the attention of older people. There is also a very unnatural atmosphere within these environments, and a lot of peer pressure for the young people to be sexually active. Young people within these places also introduce each other to abusers, often running away together to an older persons house, or travelling there during the day/at the weekend (depending upon those young people’s situation).

Another reason for the added risk to looked after children is that, aside from other young people in care, the young people have no one that they can speak to about their concerns/problems/intimate life. Social workers are very much viewed as the enemy by the young people in care and indeed by most working class background young people.

There is no possible replication of the protection a family can give to children by the current system of child protection.

Young people and children who have previously been abused are at increased risk for many of the same reasons, with the addition of an unhealthy desire to please people, and a very skewed view on healthy relationships and partners, along with a nonchalant view on sex.

**Could you give an example of good practice you have witnessed through multi-agency working?**

Small grass root level partnerships between passionate and diverse charities, individual schools, churches, and individual police officers often result in very impactful and tangible differences in the lives of young people, as a human based approach can be taken towards helping individual young people and children in terms of their protection and recovery.

**Could you give an example of unhelpful practice you have witnessed through multi-agency working (or lack of it)?**

Anything which involves politics, which unfortunately means pretty much any of the local authority funded organisation’s partnerships.

In most areas of Scotland there are groups set up between police and local authority to tackle various forms of exploitation, the focus of these groups is very much set by the funding requirements of the local authority agency rather than any evidence based need, over the last few years this has been almost exclusively focused on MVAW.

One of the most unhelpful practices that I have experienced was being told once by a very large and prominent government funded national agency, and once by the chair of a local partnership group (a DS within the local police) that if I wanted to work with them in partnership I would first have to put in writing that my organisation agrees that all violence is gender based, frankly I find this ridiculous and as a result of my stance that violence is more complex than this my agency is excluded from being a part of these partnerships.
What changes would be most helpful in preventing young people getting involved in CSE and in helping them escape it?

Greater emphasis on keeping families together and the support necessary to help them provide a happy and healthy environment for the young person or child. More evidence based prevention work in schools and care homes.

Independent confidential support for young people and children in all environments, but with particular emphasis on providing this to young people in care, in particular it would be helpful to have this provided by people coming from a similar background to that of the young person.

A safe place for children and young people to go to should they run away from home for any reason. Preferably a place where they could stay for at least a short time.