Public Petitions Committee

Tackling child sexual exploitation in Scotland

Written submission from Caledonia Youth

Caledonia Youth supports the committee’s current inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation and fully supports both the aim and work of the inquiry.

Caledonia Youth supports Barnardo’s Scotland in achieving five key aims from the Scottish Government namely:

2. That every CPP area should be able to provide an appropriate service response to victims of Child Sexual Exploitation.
3. There should be a nationwide education programme with support materials. Delivered in every high school.
5. There needs to be a consistently high commitment to disrupting perpetrator activity and identifying those at risk. Police Scotland should work with relevant agencies to develop protocols to achieve this.

Scale and Scope of Child Sexual Exploitation

Caledonia Youth recognises the huge dimensions and scale of the issue. We appreciate that in order to significantly and realistically tackle the problem a range of strategies require to be embarked upon. Caledonia Youth is not an expert in extreme issues relating to Child Sexual Exploitation however the charity feels qualified to share its experience in dealing with the impact of “lower tariff” abuse.

Caledonia Youth would wish to draw attention to the benefits of preventative work particularly in relation to “lower tariff” forms of abuse. These require to be acknowledged and addressed. Without doing so we risk the real danger of creating a culture which tolerates unacceptable and abusive behaviour; at worst if we fail to tackle concerns relating to an individual’s behaviour these could escalate to becoming more serious. The charity has seen an increase in the numbers of young people accessing services who have put themselves at risk in terms of their safety and sexual wellbeing. This has included being coerced into having sex under the influence of alcohol. Whilst many of those we have worked with recognise this is a regretful situation they would not feel comfortable in pursuing the issue; many describe feelings of shame and guilt. What is intrinsically important to the charity is to
support these young people in equipping themselves with the skills to prevent a repeat of a similar incident together with ensuring they understand that no coercive sex is acceptable. In addition we need to ensure that young men understand the implications of inappropriate sexual conduct which they may not perceive as being abusive together with instilling an appreciation of the importance of equality in relationships. This is of particular importance when you consider that one of the observations made in YouthNet’s 2012 report Alcohol and Sex, that 42% of young people surveyed reported that what happens when being drunk doesn’t really count. We are concerned that tackling “lower tariff” issues remains a priority in ensuring attempts are made to prevent future more serious issues relating to child exploitation emerging. The advent of the internet poses particular issues relating to Child Sexual Exploitation and much more needs to be done at an earlier age to educate children and young people about the real dangers that exist. we should also work with supporting parents and carers on the internet as again many will feel intimidated with technology.

We believe that in order to support children and young people a priority needs to be given to investing in education and tailor-made children and young person centred services. Whilst we appreciate and value the benefits of the provision of “standardised” services we should make increased efforts to recognise that individuals and communities require specifically tailored support addressing particular issues and circumstances. These require investment not only at the point of delivery but also recognising that core activities are considered and valued. Gaining the trust of local communities and groups of children and young people is of paramount importance; the answer to successfully delivering a particular intervention requires careful consideration.

It is particularly important that those delivering services and working with young people feel comfortable and competent with appropriate experience and training. We have anecdotal evidence from young people of examples where they believe they have been unfairly treated or misunderstood by those who they have sought support and help from. In addition, we have been delighted to offer support to colleagues in health, education and social care

Investment is required with appropriately targeted resources. There is a need for an integrated, partnership approach to be adopted with a genuine need for openness, accountability and transparency.

We believe that the value and contribution the third sector can provide is yet to be realised to its true potential. The sector has particular skill and experience in developing and working with challenging and often difficult to reach groups. The importance of trust cannot be underestimated in relation to working with children and young people, this is particularly the case for those children and young people who have been victims of Child Sexual Exploitation; the third sector has a real and
valuable role to play here which can complement and support statutory sector colleagues.

**Caledonia Youth Background and Supporting Information**

Caledonia Youth has provided sexual health and relationships support services to people under 25 in Scotland since 1968. Our services are funded by health boards, local authorities and independent trusts and foundations.

CY’s objective is to enable young people to make informed, responsible choices about their relationships and sexual health and in doing so reduce the risk of unwanted pregnancy and STI transmission.

We deliver our client-centred services via clinics, education, counselling and one-to-one support. In our last reporting year (2011-12) we delivered just under 20,000 individual interventions across all services and projects.

Our services are targeted mainly at vulnerable groups including young people with learning disabilities, young people who have been excluded from mainstream school; with drug and alcohol dependency and young people in care and in custody. In the last year we have developed new services for young people with a learning disability and for international students. Given the complex issues and challenging nature of those we support it is crucial that considerable time and effort is spent on developing trusting relationships with young people to ensure that interventions provide the right “fit”, are sympathetic to individual circumstances and complement any existing work on-going with the individual.

In the context of our work we support young people who have been subjected to sexual abuse; in addition we have worked with young people who have themselves been perpetrators of sexual abuse in a variety of forms.

We also provide training and consultancy services for professionals working with young people. This has recently included the development of a resource pack (in partnership with a substance misuse charity with whom we have close ties) for teaching staff adopting an integrated approach to relationships, sexual health and substance misuse education.

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