Public Petitions Committee
Tackling child sexual exploitation in Scotland
Written submission from Break the Silence

What barriers exist to identifying, disrupting or prosecuting child sexual exploitation perpetrators? How might these be overcome?

One of the biggest barriers in identifying, disrupting or prosecuting child sexual exploitation perpetrators is the fear that is experienced by victims. Lack of knowledge/preparation for the victim about the entire process from identifying and making a formal statement to what will actually happen versus expectation. This is often compounded/reinforced by the treatment the victim receives in court. This includes the lack of information and contact the court has with the victim when a case has been closed. It is important to note that the fear of how the victim is treated has a knock on effect for other victims having the confidence to come forward.

A second barrier for victims identifying, disrupting or prosecuting child sexual exploitation perpetrators is the fear as to what will happen in relation to the perpetrators and what will happen to them and or their family should the case be closed.

A third barrier is the fact that there is not enough financial support available to local specialist support agencies already in existence that can provide the on-going long term support victims require, that can handle the capacity. There needs to be more open and transparent collaboration between support agencies to ensure continuity of support for the victim.

In attempting to offer solutions to these barriers, it is important to note that we take the position that unless a victim has the confidence and support to identify child sexual exploitation perpetrators to the relevant statutory agencies then there can be no disruption or prosecution. Therefore the most effective method of ensuring that the victim is capable of doing this is to provide core ring fenced budget for local specialist support agencies to support the victim. Currently the Scottish Government through their delivery agency Survivor Scotland provide funding for organisations that have more of focus on the perpetrator rather than the victim, and we need to be careful about the (contradictory) message this conveys. In addition to focused funding to specialist agencies, these barriers can be overcome by raising awareness as to the process of court cases to the general public and training court staff as to how to effectively support victims.

What difficulties exist around keeping looked-after children and young people (accommodated or at home) safe from CSE perpetrators? How might these be overcome?

The first difficulty in attempting to keep children and young people safe from CSE perpetrators is the lack of awareness amongst this vulnerable group as to what constitutes CSE. This lack of awareness includes not knowing where or who to go to
for help especially if the perpetrator is within the victim’s home or accommodation. A second difficulty is the fear of the consequences of telling. There is a fear with victims as to what the aftermath of telling will be and how this will affect not only them but also their family.

To address these difficulties more awareness training is required for this vulnerable group in relation to what is CSE and its many guises. This awareness training should be also be directed at staff training. More cohesive partnership working between social services and specialist support agencies would also help keep this group safe.

What barriers exist to combating perpetrators’ use of online/social media? How might these be overcome?

It has been well documented that the sheer size of the internet and social media sites makes ‘policing’ the content extremely difficult if not impossible. To overcome this it may be more effective and manageable if we alter the perspective and look at this issue from the victim’s perspective. If we refocus, then we are able to put in place concrete prevention measures such as national awareness campaigns using TV, Social Media sites and making use of existing Young related Government funded organisations such as Young Scot to get the dangers of CSE to children and young people. Developing an educational guide for parents and families would also help address the lack of knowledge that is currently out there.

What types of training has your organisation had on ways of identifying, disrupting or prosecuting CSE perpetrators?

Training organisations in identifying, disrupting and prosecuting CSE perpetrators is important. However we can have the most well trained frontline workers around but unless the victim has the confidence and support to tell their story and see it through they will not identify perpetrators. The most cost effective way of combatting this is to financially support specialist agencies to work with victims to help develop their confidence and support them through the process of disclosure.

If you have experienced an example of good practice in relation to any of these questions, please describe this for us.

We do not have any good practice examples to submit.

Kate Short
Project Manager
Break the Silence