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

In my view one of the barriers which exist is the issue of not wanting to explore the possibility of there being sexual exploitation even when it is suspected. I find this reticence to explore the situation is present with regards to the person who may be doing the exploitation and the individual who may be exploited. I find that prior to sharing information individuals with concerns reflect thoughts of their possibly being considered ‘bad minded’. Perhaps this could be attributed to our natural defence mechanisms but it is my view it behoves us to be alive to the possibility of exploitation.

In terms of overcoming barriers I consider that the education system could hold the answer. However, I do recognise that there are many children who are home schooled and would not benefit from input at school. Given that abusers may seek to separate children from support networks perhaps there should be some vigilance, where appropriate, regarding children who are not attending main stream education. In terms of prosecuting perpetrators one of the aspects I found to be most difficult was supporting a child through the process of giving evidence. It was harrowing for all concerned. There were several children involved and when the case was eventually held in court it was during the time for the young people’s examinations. The system itself caused further harm to the children’s futures. Therefore I would suggest that the justice system could inadvertently be a barrier.

With regard to keeping ‘Looked After’ children and young people safe from CSE perpetrators there should be input at the Children’s Hearing system after an Order has been put in place. It is my view that vulnerability and availability are two of the issues which allow perpetrators to influence this particular group. If an Order has been put in place then these two issues are normally present.

The barriers which exist to combating the use of online and social media are 1) the reluctance of manufacturers to sell equipment with the highest safeguards in place which actually need to be overridden by the owner to be used 2) good enough policing of the online and social media 3) lack of awareness by young people of the consequences of using online and social media. These barriers can be overcome by 1) settings on equipment being set at the highest level 2) better policing of online and social media and 3) better education of young people.

It is my view that there should be generalised, introductory training available to all. Circle has encouraged the staff to attend appropriate training which was offered at the Police College.

It raised awareness and was thought provoking. Appropriate training could perhaps be rolled out to parents and their children at local schools.
It is my view that Circle evidences good practice in terms of working to address the problem. Circle staff members have taken advantage of appropriate training. Circle builds relationships with the whole family and provides support in the family home. This allows the support worker to build a relationship of trust and allows for behaviours to be challenged which may, even inadvertently, leave children at risk. The relationship formed with the children helps reduce risk to the children and helps reduce risk taking behaviours as guidance and advice is offered at appropriate opportunities.

In summary it is Circle’s view that prevention, wider education and early detection can assist all concerned individuals to work towards a safer future for children and young people either in the online or real world.

Yours sincerely

Ms Marina Shaw