

Vulnerable Children

Young runaways and children abused through prostitution



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Making it work together

**VULNERABLE CHILDREN:
YOUNG RUNAWAYS AND CHILDREN
ABUSED THROUGH PROSTITUTION**

YOUNG RUNAWAYS AND CHILDREN ABUSED THROUGH PROSTITUTION – WORKING GROUP CONSULTATION PAPER

Introduction

1. All children deserve the best possible start in life. They deserve to be cared for and to be protected from harm. Many children will, however, experience pressures in their lives – from within their family or from their peers and wider community. For some children these pressures will increase the possibility of damaging behaviour and negative outcomes such as self-harm, substance misuse, sexual exploitation through prostitution and running away.

2. Research has shown that one in nine (11%) children in Scotland ran away or were forced to leave home before the age of 16.¹ We know that children are sexually exploited through prostitution across Scotland. We do not know how many children are involved but we know that it is happening. The Scottish Executive has established a Working Group on Young Runaways and Children Abused through Prostitution. The Working Group included representatives from Barnardos' Scotland; Aberlour Child Care Trust; ChildLine Scotland; the Association of Chief Police Officers Scotland; Children's Panel Chair's Group; Community Education Managers Scotland; Crown Office; Scottish Children's Reporter Administration; Child Protection Committees; The Big Step Social Inclusion Partnership; and the Association of Directors of Social Work. The Working Group has considered support for children, guidance for professionals and effective early intervention to prevent abuse and exploitation before it happens.

3. This paper outlines:
- why the needs of young runaways and children involved in sexual exploitation through prostitution are important;
 - the preventative work which is being taken forward to address the underlying issues which may increase a child's vulnerability; and
 - the provision of services to support children and young people.

The paper seeks views on:

- the emerging findings of the Working Group; and
- the draft guidance on the development of local protocols for professionals working with children.

Children are at the heart of the Executive's agenda and the work on young runaways and children sexually exploited through prostitution should not be seen in isolation.

¹ Missing Out Young Runaways in Scotland, Jim Wade, University of York

Why are these issues important?

4. Running away puts young people in danger and is often a sign of underlying problems in a young person's life. Sometimes these problems may be very severe such as physical violence or abuse. In some instances it may already be clear that a child is in need but in many instances these problems may be hidden. The fact that a child has run away should alert agencies to the fact that this child may require support.

5. We know that running away is associated with a number of short-term risks including sleeping rough, involvement in crime, sexual exploitation and substance misuse. There are also implications for the long term outcomes for children who run away in terms of increased levels of homelessness, social exclusion and unemployment. These long term outcomes could be addressed if we identify young people at risk and provide them with appropriate support.

6. Sexual exploitation through prostitution is abuse. We do not know how many children and young people are being sexually exploited through prostitution in Scotland. This is largely a hidden problem and these children may not be visible on the streets. Some young people may not recognise that they are in an exploitative relationship. We need to raise awareness amongst young people, professionals working with children and the general public. Good progress has already been made in tackling the misconception that children sexually exploited through prostitution have made a free choice about their lifestyle.

Prevention

7. The majority of children who run away from home do so because of problems at home² although personal problems and problems at school are also significant issues for many children. There is a lack of information on why children are drawn into prostitution. However, children who are sexually exploited through prostitution are likely to be experiencing other problems. These problems may include parental disharmony, physical violence, relationship problems, sexual abuse, bullying, truancy or substance misuse (either by the child or by a member of their family).

8. It is important that the needs of young runaways and children sexually exploited through prostitution are not seen in isolation. It is important that action is taken to address all of these underlying issues that can increase a child's vulnerability and potentially lead to their involvement in high-risk activity. This preventative work is not solely about preventing running away or sexual exploitation through prostitution but is about supporting all children and young people and seeking, through early intervention, to prevent a range of negative outcomes. The Executive is supporting work to address many of the issues identified as trigger factors and supporting better integrated delivery of children's services throughout Scotland to ensure that every child has the best opportunities to prosper. The Changing Children's Services Fund is a catalyst for change in enabling local authorities, health boards and voluntary organisations to work together to deliver better outcomes for the most vulnerable and deprived children.

² Still Running Children on the Streets in the UK, Safe on the Streets Research Team, The Children's Society 1999

9. Examples of work to address some of these underlying issues includes:

Bullying

- Scottish Anti-Bullying Network enabling teachers, parents, young people and other members of the school community in Scotland to share ideas about how bullying should be tackled.
- ChildLine Anti-Bullying Helpline is a free, confidential telephone helpline for any child or young person concerned about bullying.
- The Scottish Schools Ethos Network aims to encourage the creation of a positive ethos in schools.
- The implementation of the Discipline Task Group report will have a significant and positive impact on bullying in schools.

Early Intervention

- Sure Start Scotland provides support for families with very young children (0-3) with a focus on families living in areas of deprivation
- Child Health Demonstration Project Starting Well aims to demonstrate that child health can be improved by a programme of activities to support families and provide access to enhanced community based resources.
- Improving access to high-quality, affordable day-care for children aged 0-14
- The Executive is pledged to provide a quality part-time pre-school place for each eligible 3 and 4 year old.

Support for Parents

- ParentLine Scotland is a free telephone helpline for parents which is operated by Children 1st
- The Parent Zone website provides information for parents and carers on a range of issues with a focus on school educational issues
- Support for parents is an important element of the New Community Schools programme, the Child Health Demonstration Project Starting Well and Sure Start Scotland
- The Supporting Parents programme encourages the involvement of parents in their child's education

10. Schools have an important role to play in supporting children and young people. The move towards delivering health and social advice in a universal setting such as a school is a positive development. It is important that targeted services for children and young people are delivered in a non-stigmatising way. Awareness of the underlying issues which can lead to vulnerability can also be addressed through Personal and Social Education Programmes.

EMERGING FINDINGS: YOUNG RUNAWAYS

Services

1. Almost 9,000 children in Scotland run away every year. The experiences of each child will be different and there is no single model of provision which will meet the needs of all runaways. A range of services and service providers (both statutory and voluntary sector agencies) are required including:

- Telephone helplines;
- Outreach teams which identify and support children and young people;
- Family mediation and counselling services;
- Centre-based provision and
- Universal services delivered via the health and education services.

2. Young people often experience crisis points late in the evening, outside standard office hours. It is important that support, delivered by a range of service providers, is available as delay can often result in the young person being placed at risk. This could be provided through helplines, better prioritisation of calls on police time, voluntary sector provision and a better developed approach to emergency refuge provision.

3. Children and young people often welcome the opportunity to discuss issues via a telephone helpline. The use of a helpline allows the child to remain anonymous and to retain control of the discussion. They may choose to terminate the discussion at any time. It is important that children and young people know that they can contact a helpline and that these are freephone numbers. **Consideration should be given to increasing the advertising for such helplines in areas where young runaways or other vulnerable children may congregate such as railway and bus stations.**

4. There are issues around the provision of support through helplines. Helplines are an important element in supporting children but they should be part of a range of available services. There remain concerns that some children who want to contact a helpline are unable to get through and that their call goes unanswered. Helplines are often useful as an initial point of contact for young people but it is important to ensure that children are then able to access further support locally as required. Helplines should have the ability to put children in contact with appropriate local services and these services need to have the capacity to provide support. **The Executive has already announced additional support for helplines that provide counselling and support for children (ChildLine and ParentLine) including £500,000 to allow ChildLine Scotland to open up a new call centre and increase by up to 60% the number of children they are able to help.**

5. A number of police forces have appointed a dedicated officer for runaways and feedback suggests that this is helpful in addressing repeat running away.

6. It is important that support for the child does not ignore the wider family context. There is a need to offer advice and support to parents who are experiencing difficulties with their children. Family conflict has been identified as the primary reason why children run

away from home³. Running away puts children in danger but it is also a time of anxiety and fear for many parents. It has been suggested that many parents find it difficult to determine whether their child is experiencing normal teenage angst or is at risk. Support to address family conflict through helplines and other support mechanisms can help to resolve problems before they reach crisis point and to assist young people and their families or carers in resolving issues.

Running Other Choices

The Aberlour Childcare Trust's Running Other Choices Project in Glasgow has been developed to work with young people under the age of 16 who run away. The Project seeks to build relationships with young people who have run away and their families to assist them in finding solutions to the circumstances which have caused them to run away from home and to find alternatives to running.

Refuge Provision

7. Children who are in need because they have run away from home may have an immediate need for somewhere safe to stay. Some young runaways may be able to return home immediately while in other instances it may take some time to consider the needs and best interests of the child.

8. Section 38 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 enables local authorities to provide short-term refuge in designated or approved establishments and households for children who appear to be at risk of harm and who can request refuge. A refuge does not need to be a dedicated centre. There are other models for providing support to young people, for example with foster carers or in other local authority accommodation. The aim is to provide the child with somewhere safe to stay and access to advice and help for a short period in order to resolve the crisis, to reconcile him or her with family or carers or to divert the child to other suitable services or accommodation.

9. The extent to which local authorities are currently making use of Section 38 of the Children (Scotland) Act is not clear. However, there is concern that children's needs for refuge are not being adequately met. **An assessment of how local agencies are meeting the needs of young people for refuge in their area and levels of demand should be conducted as a matter of priority by the Scottish Executive. Additional work is also required on models of good practice in the provision of refuge throughout the UK. Following this work additional guidance should be provided on the provision of refuge support for children and young people in Scotland.**

³ Still Running, Children on the Streets in the UK, Safe on the Streets Research Team, The Children's Society, 1999

Running Away from Home

10. The majority of young runaways have run from their family home. The most common reasons that young people give for running away from home are arguments and conflict with parents or step parents, neglect and rejection, experiences of emotional or physical abuse or to seek respite from parents' personal problems such as alcohol/drug dependency or mental health problems. Running away is closely associated with problems at school and young people who run away are more likely to be unhappy at school and to have missed time due to truancy or exclusion.

11. Young people who have run away say that they did not have anyone to talk to about their problems or enough information about where to go for help. Research has suggested that increased information about local services which might help to address the underlying problems identified by young people would be helpful⁴.

Children in Substitute Care

12. While most young runaways run from their family home a higher proportion of young people in substitute care (40%) run away compared with those who have never been in care (9%) and children in care are more likely to run away repeatedly. Some children may have started to run away from home before their entry into the care system.

13. The quality of care experienced by children is clearly important in relation to rates of running away. The Executive is seeking to improve the experiences of children in care. New resources are being provided for throughcare and aftercare to help young people to move into independent adult living and for improving the educational attainment and qualifications of looked after children. However, for some children it is the fact that they are in care or that limits are being placed upon their freedom (possibly for the first time) which results in them running away. It is important that agencies work together to identify those children who are most vulnerable, to ensure their immediate safety and to consider the need for appropriate support to prevent a pattern of repeat running developing.

Information

14. It is important that agencies have readily accessible information on the numbers of young people who go missing. Poor data collection and monitoring makes it difficult to provide an accurate picture of how many children are missing and the outcomes for those children - whether they been found or not. It also makes it difficult for information to be shared between different agencies or across local authority/police boundaries. The Police National Database does hold some information on missing children but that information is not available to other agencies. **Computerisation of records at local and national level would be an important step forward in addressing this issue. The Executive is seeking to develop an integrated assessment framework for children and young people, supported by electronic information sharing. This would make it easier to share information among agencies for those children already identified as being potentially in need of support.**

⁴ Missing Out, Young Runaways in Scotland, Jim Wade, University of York

Children who cannot return home

15. A proportion of children – especially older children - do not run away from home but are forced to leave by their parents or carers. There are also a number of children for whom it is not safe to return home. For some older children running away is a transition to independent living. Children who cannot return home often need support to prevent them becoming homeless or drawn into high-risk activity.

16. The final report of the Homelessness Task Force, published in February 2002, recognised strongly that access to accommodation and appropriate support services is often a key issue for older children who cannot return home. The Task Force made specific recommendations to strengthen the legal rights of young people assessed as homeless, to improve the support of affordable, entry level, ready access housing for young people seeking their own accommodation for the first time, and to ensure provision of advice, throughcare and aftercare services to prevent homelessness amongst children who have been in care. All of the Task Force's recommendations have been endorsed by the Executive and are being implemented by a wide range of agencies. Delivery of the recommendations is being monitored by the national Homelessness Monitoring Group.

Guidance for Professionals

17. A child who has run away should have the opportunity to discuss with a professional their reason for running away, the risk of it occurring again and what action needs to be taken to reduce the risk, including the need for additional support. The planning and development of services for young runaways should be taken forward within the wider children's services planning process. Local protocols should be developed to support young runaways and to identify and agree the roles of different agencies. Guidance on the content and development of local protocols is attached. Progress reports on protocol development will be considered at the meeting of the Chairs of the Child Protection Committee scheduled for the end of 2003.

Legislative Framework

18. Clear information on the legal position on young runaways and the responsibilities of statutory agencies should be provided to assist professionals working with children and young people. **The Executive will issue this information with the final version of the Guidance for Professionals.**

EMERGING FINDINGS: SEXUAL EXPLOITATION THROUGH PROSTITUTION

Awareness Raising

1. Sexual exploitation of children through prostitution is abuse. We do not know how many children are abused in this way in Scotland and we lack information about the routes into sexual exploitation through prostitution and what works in supporting young people in exiting this situation. Children may not be visible on the streets and therefore it is difficult to gather meaningful data. However, we know that it is happening. **Research should be commissioned by the Scottish Executive as a priority on the scope of the problem in Scotland to raise general awareness of the problem amongst professionals working with children.**

2. The work undertaken by organisations in raising the public profile of this issue is to be welcomed. It is important to challenge the attitude that young people sexually exploited through prostitution have made a lifestyle choice. The focus of the criminal justice system should be targeted on adults who abuse and coerce children. Consideration should always be given to the possibility of taking criminal action against those adults.

3. Some young people may not recognise that they are in an exploitative relationship although this may be clear to those around them. It is important that professionals are aware of the potential indicators that a child may be involved in sexual exploitation through prostitution and treat any complaints or concerns from a child, parent or carer seriously.

4. Sexual exploitation through prostitution is not just an issue for girls. Boys and young men may also be sexually exploited through prostitution and it is important that professionals working with young people are aware of the risks to young men.

Services

5. It is important that the needs of children sexually exploited through prostitution are not viewed in isolation. Children are lured into sexual exploitation through prostitution because of a range of issues which may include abuse, family breakdown and conflict, low self-esteem, substance misuse and truancy. A range of interventions may therefore be required to address the child's underlying problems.

6. Children and young people may welcome the opportunity to discuss issues via a telephone helpline and consideration should be given to increasing the advertising of helplines in areas where vulnerable children may congregate. There is no single model of provision which will meet the needs of all children sexually exploited through prostitution. It is important that a range of services are available to young people which may include outreach support, sexual health services, support to address substance misuse, counselling and mental health services. Children sexually exploited through prostitution may be wary of statutory agencies and therefore voluntary sector agencies may have an important role as an initial point of contact.

7. Services for those sexually exploited through abuse often focus on the needs of girls. It is important to ensure that the needs of boys and young men are not overlooked.

“Well do you think I just woke up one day and thought ‘I know, I’ll be a rent boy today?’ Thousands of things have happened to get me here – mum leaving, no-one at home, hanging around the pub late and waiting to go home with dad, having blokes try to touch us up, seeing boys do tricks and getting cash and fags. If you want to change me, you’re probably going to have to do thousands of things too, to balance it out”⁵

8. Some organisations are developing packages for use in schools on sexual exploitation and prostitution. If handled appropriately this can be a helpful way of exploring difficult issues with children and young people in a non-stigmatising way. It is important that teachers are provided with suitable materials to allow them to discuss these issues and to deal with any problems which may arise.

Guidance for Professionals

9. The planning and development of services for children sexually exploited through prostitution should be taken forward within the wider children’s services planning process. It is important that professionals work in collaboration with each other across agency boundaries and in partnership with children and young people. Local protocols should be developed to support children sexually exploited through prostitution and to identify and agree the roles of different agencies. Guidance on the content and development of local protocols is attached. Progress reports on protocol development will be considered at the meeting of the Chairs of the Child Protection Committee scheduled for the end of 2003.

10. Professionals working with vulnerable young people should be aware of the risk that children may be targeted by adults within the community seeking to exploit them and in partnership with the police consider what preventative action should be taken.

Legislative Framework

11. Sexual offences against children are covered by both statute and common law and a child under 12 cannot legally consent to sexual activity. The Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995 contains a number of provisions that apply to children including relating to indecent behaviour and unlawful sexual intercourse. The primary aim of agencies should be to provide support to the child and to take action against the child’s abusers. It is important therefore that clear information on the legal position on children abused through sexual exploitation should be provided to assist professionals working with children and young people. **The Executive will issue this information with the final version of the Guidance for Professionals.**

⁵ Words of 14 year old boy abused through prostitution quoted by Tink Palmer in No Son of Mine! Children abused through prostitution published by Barnardo’s

GUIDANCE FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH YOUNG RUNAWAYS

Introduction

12. Almost 9000 children run away each year. A number of these children will run to a relative or friend's house or if they are in care they may seek to return home. While many young people who run away from home will be safe, research shows that running away puts a young person at risk. Research undertaken by the University of York found that around one in six of the young people who ran away reported being either physically or sexually assaulted while away from home while more than a quarter had slept rough on at least one occasion.

13. This Guidance is for police, health, social services, education and all other agencies and professionals that may work with children

Principles

- Children's welfare and safety must be the paramount consideration when decisions are made about them.
- Children and young people have the right to be protected from abuse and exploitation.
- Children have the right to safety, stability and security of care
- Children have a right to express their views and for their views to be taken into account when decisions are made about them.
- Agencies should work in partnership with children and young people
- Agencies should work in collaboration to protect and support children and young people
- Children have a right to express concerns in confidence in so far as their safety and that of others is not compromised.
- It is important to recognise the responsibilities of those with parental duties for children and young people including local authorities where they are acting in loco parentis.

Definitions

14. For the purposes of this Guidance, a child or young person is a boy or girl under the age of 18.

15. Running away is difficult to define and may mean different things to different people. For the purposes of this document a young runaway is a child or young person under the age of 18 who spends one night or more away from the family home or substitute care without permission, or who has been forced to leave by their parents or carers. The welfare of the child must be the primary consideration and in some cases therefore concerns may be raised about the safety of the child after a shorter absence.

Local protocols - Development

16. Local protocols should be developed to respond to young runaways and children sexually exploited through prostitution. It is for local agencies to decide whether they wish to develop 2 separate protocols or a joint protocol. It is important that any protocols are placed within the wider spectrum of services for children in need. Child Protection Committees have a key role in the development and monitoring of any protocol.

Protocols should be developed involving representatives from:

- local authorities (education and social services);
- health services;
- the police;
- the criminal justice service;
- Scottish Children's Reporter's Administration;
- relevant voluntary agencies; and
- the local inter-agency domestic violence forum.

17. Child Protection Committees may wish to involve other agencies with a relevant interest in this issue, including relevant local and national voluntary organisations (where they have a local presence). Consideration should be given to involving other relevant professionals such as local Sheriffs and the Procurator Fiscal. Young people who have experience of being sexually exploited through prostitution or running away, and who are willing to help and advise, should also be involved, as appropriate.

18. There are 2 groups of young people who need to be considered in the preparation of a protocol: young people in care and young people living at home and different approaches may be required to address the needs of these 2 groups of young people.

Local Protocols - Content

Prevention

Local Protocols must:

- **Consider how to signpost young people to information on local services available to help them.** Research has suggested that young people would welcome opportunities to access advice on issues around family conflict, parental separation and divorce, substance misuse (including misuse by members of their family) and mistreatment.
- **Stress that all young people in residential care should be provided with advice on sexual health, drug misuse and other matters relating to their personal safety and welfare.** Staff should be equipped to discuss matters of sexuality and sexual health, drug or alcohol misuse, running away, offending or other high risk behaviour with the young people in their care and to respond to young people's concerns. Young people should be able to discuss these issues in confidence, provided there are no concerns about their safety.
- **Emphasise the need to assess the risks of running for each child in care.** This could be included within a wider care plan addressing any risks to the young person and their needs in a holistic manner. The risk assessment should include information on past patterns of behaviour and a priority rating if the child goes missing. Some authorities operate a red/amber system to indicate the different levels of risk. The priority rating should reflect the child's age, vulnerability and past involvement in high-risk activity. The risk assessment should also include information on when the police should be informed and action to be undertaken in seeking to find the child. The assessment should be reviewed regularly and updated to reflect changing circumstances.
- **Encourage young people's residential units, in partnership with the police, to consider what protective action should be taken to ensure that vulnerable children in their care are not targeted by adults (or other young people) in the community who might wish to exploit them or involve them in high risk or criminal activities.** Consideration should also be given to appropriate action to be taken if there are concerns about a young person's associates.
- **Include information on when a child in substitute care who has gone missing should be defined as having run away.** This may differ according to the age and vulnerability of each child and should be considered when assessing the risk of running away.
- **Include guidance on when the police should be notified about the child's absence.** This may differ according to the risk assessment for each child but once a certain period of time has elapsed all unauthorised absences should be reported to the police.
- **Confirm who else should be informed about a child's absence** (parents/social worker).
- **Confirm that when discussing issues with young people the practitioner must be clear about how information will be dealt with and any limits to confidentiality.**

Immediate Safety

If a child goes missing the primary focus of any response must be to ensure the immediate safety of the child. If a child goes missing from home then parents or carers are more likely to report their child as missing to the police than to any other agency.

Local Protocols must:

- **Outline the responsibilities of individual agencies and clarify the responsibilities of different agencies in attempting to locate the child and return them to their home or care placement.** Generally the initial responsibility for children in substitute care will lie with the local authority acting in ‘loco parentis’ but any risks to the child or the worker will need to be considered before any action is undertaken.
- **Clarify the format and type of information to be provided by local authorities to the police.** Information to be provided could include a photograph of the missing child; an indication of the priority attached to this case and an outline of the action already taken.
- **Include guidance on actions once a child is located.** This should include information on who should be informed of the child’s return. It should also address the question of who should have responsibility for returning the child to their care placement or home (if return is considered to be in the child’s best interests). Guidance on addressing the needs of young runaways normally resident outwith the local authority area should also be included. Where necessary the local authority in which the child is found should provide overnight accommodation for a young runaway prior to discussion with the child’s home local authority about responsibility for the child’s return or accommodation.

Support for the Child

Local Protocols must:

- **Confirm that every young person who runs away should have the opportunity of discussing with a professional the reasons for their running away, the risks of it occurring again and what action needs to be undertaken to reduce the risk.** Ideally discussions should be held before the child is returned to their home or care placement (if return is judged to be in the child’s best interests) and should not be held in the presence of the child’s parents or carers. Young people should have the option of discussing their reasons for absconding with someone independent. If a young person is looked after, responsibility for ensuring that this opportunity is provided, will rest with the local authority. Local agreements will need to be established in respect of other cases. Where young people remain at risk within their homes or their communities, the police and social work services should ensure that enquiries are made about the risks and action is taken to protect the runaway. This may require a criminal investigation, child protection enquiries or discussions with other professionals who are involved with the young person. It may not always be possible to resolve all of the child’s concerns, however, it is important that the issues are explored and fully considered.
- **Recognise that the interview with the young person may identify child protection issues or a need for information on sources of support or advice.**

- **Recognise the need to consider whether any support is required for the child or the wider family.** Consideration should be given to developing with the young person a plan to reduce the likelihood of further episodes of running away.
- **Remind professionals of the need to be aware of signs that the child may have been involved in high risk activity or abuse during their absence.**
- **Stress the importance of welcoming a child or young person who returns to a residential establishment having previously run away.**
- **Emphasise the importance of information both in identifying children at risk and in building up a profile to help determine the priority rating for an individual child in substitute care should they abscond again.** It is important that statutory agencies share information about young people who run away to ensure that young people in need are identified. Information may also help to identify any area-wide patterns in absconding. Aggregate information will also be helpful in service planning.

Examples of Good Practice

Grampian

A protocol for dealing with missing persons from residential establishments and foster care placements has been developed by the Directors of Social Work Departments of Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils along with the Chief Constable of Grampian Police. The protocol sets out the roles of the different agencies and a series of actions which should be considered by the Police and Social Work Departments when a young person goes missing from a residential unit.

The protocol builds upon research undertaken by Barnardo's on Young Runaways in Aberdeen commissioned by Grampian Police.

Glasgow

Glasgow Child Protection Committee set up an interagency working group to develop procedures and guidance for working with vulnerable children and young people. As part of their work they recognised the need to improve and formalise information sharing in relation to missing young persons. A small group was set up involving the police, social work, Barnardo's street team, out of hours Social Work Standby to produce a pilot protocol for the sharing of information.

The group produced a protocol which was piloted in June 2002. The protocol involves the sharing of information about a missing young person between social work, police and Standby.

GUIDANCE FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ABUSED THROUGH SEXUAL EXPLOITATION THROUGH PROSTITUTION

Introduction

1. There are children sexually exploited through prostitution across Scotland. We do not know how many children and young people are involved but we do know that it is happening. We also know that children and young people may not always recognise that they are being abused or exploited. Sexual exploitation through prostitution robs a child of their childhood. It is abuse. Children and young people need support to prevent exploitation and to help them to exit. The focus of the police and legal process should be directed at those who exploit and abuse children in this way.
2. While this may be more commonly perceived to be an issue affecting girls boys can also be abused through prostitution and professionals should be aware of the risks to boys and their need for support.
3. This Guidance is for police, health, social services, education and all other agencies and professionals that may work with children.

Principles

- Children's welfare and safety must be the paramount consideration when decisions are made about them.
- Sexual exploitation of children through prostitution is abuse
- Children and young people cannot consent to their own abuse and exploitation
- Children and young people have the right to be protected from abuse and exploitation
- The focus of the criminal justice system should be targeted at adults who abuse and coerce children.
- Children have the right to safety, stability and security of care
- Children have a right to express their views and for their views to be taken into account when decisions are made about them.
- Agencies should work in partnership with children and young people
- Agencies should work in collaboration to protect and support children and young people
- Children have a right to express concerns in confidence in so far as their safety and that of others is not compromised.

5. Sexual exploitation through prostitution is difficult to define. It may include the provision of sexual services in exchange for some form of payment, such as money, drink, drugs or consumer goods or even a bed and a roof over one's head for a night. In some cases there may be no exchange of material goods and the child or young person may not recognise that they are being sexually exploited. The relationship, however, will generally be characterised by coercion and intimidation.

Identifying Children at Risk of Sexual Exploitation

6. Children sexually exploited through prostitution may not be visible on the streets. It is important that professionals are aware of the potential indicators that a child or young person may be involved in prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation. A list of potential indicators is at **Annex A**.

Local Protocols - Development

7. Local protocols should be developed to respond to young runaways and children being sexually exploited through prostitution. It is for local agencies to decide whether they wish to develop 2 separate protocols or a joint protocol. It is important that any protocols are placed within the wider spectrum of services for children in need. Child Protection Committees have a key role in the development and monitoring of any protocol.

Protocols should be developed involving representatives from:

- local authorities (education and social services);
- health services;
- the police;
- the criminal justice service;
- Scottish Children's Reporter's Administration;
- relevant voluntary agencies; and
- the local inter-agency domestic violence forum.

8. Child Protection Committees may wish to involve other agencies with a relevant interest in this issue, including relevant local and national voluntary organisations (where they have a local presence). Consideration should be given to involving relevant other professionals such as local Sheriffs and the Procurator Fiscal. Young people who have experience of being sexually exploited through prostitution or running away, and who are willing to help and advise, should also be involved, as appropriate.

Local Protocols - Content

Prevention

Protocols must:

- **Include a clear statement that sexual exploitation through prostitution is abuse and should be treated accordingly.**
- **Include information on the roles and responsibilities of individual agencies and recognise the legal responsibilities of parents and carers.**
- **Stress that all young people in residential care should be provided with advice on sexual health, drug misuse and other matters relating to their personal safety and welfare.** Staff should be equipped to discuss matters of sexuality and sexual health, drug or alcohol misuse, running away, offending or other high risk behaviour with the young people in their care and to respond to young people's concerns. Young people should be able to discuss these issues in confidence, provided there are no concerns about their safety.
- **Recognise that when young people are involved in, or at risk of, sexual exploitation or abuse, practitioners will need to consider how to approach the issue with the young person concerned.** How the issue is tackled will depend on the young person's age, vulnerability and understanding and the specific circumstances of each case. It may be appropriate to consult with others about the child's circumstances, particularly if abuse is likely to be one of many problems that the young person is experiencing.
- **Encourage young people's residential units, in partnership with the police, to consider what protective action should be taken to ensure that vulnerable children in their care are not targeted by adults (or other young people) in the community who might wish to exploit them or involve them in high risk or criminal activities.** Consideration should also be given to any action to be taken if there are concerns about a young person's associates.
- **Contain guidance on the sharing of information between agencies.** The need to ensure proper protection of children requires that agencies share information promptly and effectively when necessary. Guidance on sharing information is contained in *Protecting Children – A Shared Responsibility*.
- **Confirm that when discussing the issue with the young person the practitioner must be clear about how information will be dealt with and any limits to confidentiality.**
- **Provide information for professionals on the warning signs that might indicate that a young person is involved in prostitution.**
- **Include guidance on the importance of providing follow-up interviews for children who have returned to care having run away.** Staff should be aware of the signs of involvement in prostitution/sexual exploitation.

Immediate Safety

Protocols must:

- **Emphasise the importance of treating any complaints or concerns raised by a child or member of their family seriously.** Professionals should be aware of the risks that a child may be being groomed or lured into high risk situations.
- **Advise the action that must be taken to protect the child if a professional believes that a child may be involved in prostitution.** In many instances this will include the triggering of child protection procedures.
- **Emphasise that the priority must be to secure the best interests of the child. Any criminal justice action must focus on investigating and prosecuting those who are involved in abusing a child (this includes those who sexually abuse a child and those who coerce or are involved in the prostitution of a child).** Careful consideration should be given to whether a crime has been committed. Staff from any agency, who gain knowledge about the activities of abusers should ensure the police are informed, whilst ensuring the confidentiality of the young person is maintained. Police and social work staff will need to work together to ensure that if there are investigations into allegation of sexual abuse or exploitation, the young person is protected.

Support for the Child

- **Emphasise the need to support rather than stigmatise children who become involved in sexual exploitation through prostitution.**
- **Emphasise the importance of supporting young people leaving care to assist them in accessing accommodation/balancing finances and making the transition to independent living.**
- **Recognise that it may take time for a young person to exit prostitution or a sexually exploitative relationship.** It is important to support them through this process. A child may need support for a range of issues over a significant period of time including safe and supported accommodation; access to employment, education or training opportunities; the establishment of a positive network of friends and relatives to offer continuing support and drug or alcohol services. An exit strategy should be developed with the child and address the individual needs of that child.

The Barnardo's Street Team provides a crisis responsive service to vulnerable and at risk young people in Glasgow city centre and surrounding areas who have nowhere to stay at night, have run away, are at risk of being abused through prostitution, or may be involved with drugs or alcohol. The Team operates a streetwork service at night as well as providing a follow-up service during the day, the primary aim of which is to link young people into mainstream services and advocate on their behalf. An underlying principle of the work is the practice of involving young people in developing their own solutions to allow them to retain control and choice.

Potential indicators of involvement in sexual exploitation and prostitution

The indicators should not be read as a definitive list and should not be taken, in themselves, as proof of involvement in prostitution or sexual exploitation. They are intended as a guide which would be included in a wider assessment of the young person's circumstances.

These indicators may include:

- Physical symptoms (bruising suggestive of either physical or sexual assault)
- Prevalence of a sexually transmitted infection
- Young person known to be sexually active
- Reports from reliable sources suggesting the likelihood of involvement in prostitution
- Reports that the child has been seen in places known to be used for prostitution
- Evidence of substance misuse
- Leaving home/care setting in clothing unusual for individual child (inappropriate for age, borrowing clothing from older young people)
- Reportedly consorting with unknown adults outside the usual range of contacts and /or other children know to be involved in sexual exploitation.
- Phone calls or letters from adults outside the usual range of social contacts
- Adults loitering outside the child's usual place of residence
- Significantly older "boyfriend"
- Accounts of social activities with no plausible explanation of the source of necessary funding
- Persistently missing or returning late with no plausible explanation
- Returning after having been missing, looking well cared for in spite of having no known base
- Missing for long periods, with no known base
- Possession of large amounts of money with no plausible explanation
- Acquisition of expensive clothes or other possessions without plausible explanation
- Low self image

- History of physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect
- Truancy
- Entering or leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults
- Going missing and found in areas where the child or young person has no known links
- Possible inappropriate use of the Internet and the forming of relationships, particularly adults, via the Internet.

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