

Reachable Moments

Background

The Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership commissioned a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review focusing on the fatal stabbing of a teenage boy, and two other young men who were with him at the time of the incident. The independent review considered all aspects of agency involvement in the lives of the boy, the young men and their families. The purpose of the review was to identify systemic learning and specific areas where we can continue to improve frontline practice to safeguard children and to prevent or reduce the risk of recurrence of similar incidents.

In January 2020, the boy and young men, who were all from Birmingham and believed to have been involved in an urban street gang, travelled to a small country town where the violent assault took place. The police investigation found that the purpose of their visit was linked to 'County Lines' and the illegal supply of controlled substances. The boy and young men were recognised as being victims of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). The perpetrator has been brought to justice, together with three individuals who have been convicted of perverting the course of justice. All four received substantive custodial sentences.

The key learning from the review focuses on circumstances when a child or young person is more likely to take up an offer of support - 'Reachable Moments'. Practitioners can capitalise on these to maximise the opportunity to connect with vulnerable young people to help change their lives.

Key Findings, Good Practice and Learning

- The review highlighted the quality of partnership arrangements and practitioners' knowledge, passion and commitment to make a difference for children at risk of criminal exploitation.
- The review endorsed the partnership approach in Birmingham to safeguarding exploited young people, seeing them as children and victims first, rather than just offenders. However, it was felt that understanding of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) could be improved across agencies working with children at risk of CCE.
- The 'One Day One Conversation' (ODOC) and Disruption Planning meetings were seen as key to the effective co-ordination of partnership intervention for children at risk of criminal exploitation and disrupting perpetrators.
- The detrimental impact of school exclusion was again highlighted, along with the importance of a partnership approach to working with schools to intervene early to support and work with children at risk of expulsion and at risk of CCE.
- It is important that children who go missing have a Return Home Interview (RHI), especially where it is suspected CCE is involved. The timely sharing of information from RHIs not only helps to build a more holistic picture of the child's lived experience, but also provides vital intelligence about perpetrators to help inform the work of the EMPOWER U Hub.

Improving Practice

- When there has been a dramatic deterioration in a child's behaviour and wellbeing, when there is a risk of exclusion from school, when they receive medical treatment for an unexplained injury, when arrested and in police custody or when found having been missing, practitioners need to reach out and connect with the child to gain their trust and confidence, in order to make a difference. Practitioners need to seize these '**Reachable Moments**'.
- Practitioners should familiarise themselves with the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) guidance on safeguarding children from CCE.

- In educational settings early intervention is essential to find out why there is a deterioration in a child's behaviour at school, to focus support to prevent the need for exclusion where possible.
- Educating children about the dangers of knives and being involved in gangs and serious youth violence is key to preventing future exploitation. This should start from in the last years of primary school as well as continuing at secondary school.
- When practitioners carry out an RHI, they should maximise the opportunity to build trust and confidence with the child and ensure the timely sharing of information with the EMPOWER U Hub.

Next Steps – What you can do

- a) Circulate this Briefing Note to all members of your team and discuss the case at your next team meeting or supervision session. Use the PowerPoint presentation to ensure everyone understands and is able to apply the learning.
- b) Make sure you and your team understand that Criminal Exploitation is a form of child abuse ([Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#)).
- c) Familiarise yourself with and use the screening tool to help assess risk for both criminal and sexual exploitation, which is available on the BSCP website - [click here](#). The screening tool, once completed, must be attached to a Request for Support Form and submitted to the BCT Children's Advice & Support Service (CASS) via cass@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk. Further advice and information is available via the Child Exploitation and Missing Hub on 0121 464 7967.
- d) Make sure your team are aware that the Right Help, Right Time (RHRT) guidance is currently being refreshed and will be available to download from the BSCP website before the end of September 2021. For a copy of the RHRT guidance – [click here](#).
- e) Visit the BSCP website (www.lscpbirmingham.org.uk) for details of free Multi-Agency Training on Child Exploitation and other safeguarding topics.