

Workshop in pod 2: Intersections between girls, gangs, and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and knife crime.

Workshop facilitator: Cllr Jasmine Ali.

Jenny Brennan, Assistant Director Family Early Help & Youth Justice gave a short introduction to the resource pack on Exploring Healthy Relationships, produced by London Bubble Theatre Company and Southwark Council. This includes a film: 'His Girl' and discussion materials. The film shows an emerging exploitative relationship between a younger girl, a young man and his associates. The resources were developed after research on the local profile of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in order to explore with young people what unhealthy and healthy relationships look like. The film and pack are available for use in school, youth clubs and the community.

Police CSE lead Lizzie Jones MD, and April Bald, Assistant Director Children's safeguarding, presented briefly on CSE. They explained that in Southwark on average perpetrators are about 18 years old and victims about 14. The young women involved often have low self esteem. They want likes on Instagram's and the kudos of older boys' interest which they equate with love. Often this is because they are not getting enough love and attention either at home or in school or in their community. Families want help - but often do not know how to make progress.

Girls can be used to carry knives and pay drug debts through sexual favours / coercion.

Mental health is frequently an issue. Mental health includes significant levels on self harm, and some have required admission to Snowfield. Drug use is also frequently a problem, particularly strong strains of cannabis.

MASE works with around 50 young people at higher risk. MASE is Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation meeting. It's a strategic meeting where partners come together on monthly basis, and have a single oversight of those young people we are most concerned about and at risk of CSE, and includes the perpetrators

The purpose of the MASE meeting is:

- i) To have tactical oversight of CSE cases, information, intelligence and activity both across Southwark and for Southwark children placed out of borough.
- ii) To identify and deliver a partnership response to short, medium- and longer-term themes, trends and patterns emerging from CSE cases.
- iii) To direct resources and activity in response to identified trends or patterns
- iv) To identify and remove blockages or obstacles in cases

MASE works with around 50 young people - mainly girls, however there are a few boys. 40% are in care, 20% on child protection plan, 15% worked with, 5% Early Help, others are on a Child in need plan (CIN) and some are still in the assessment phase.

The risk factors for CSE are is not just the parents and immediate family but also the wider community: their peer group, community and the wider social and economic system.

As well as working on with identified targets of CSE we are also working on looking out for symptoms of abuse: e.g. seeing condoms and noticing signs of place based exploitation, this is referred to as 'contextual safeguarding'.

In addition to the young people at high risk that MACE work with there are lots of other children and young people at lower levels of risk that need the wider networks of support to keep them safe.

There are networks that tend to perpetrate CSE. These are very similar to gangs and interlink.

What about Rotherham? The young women who were targeted have reported that lots of people in the local community would have been aware of the signs of abuse they were experiencing. Southwark have a 'make safe' programme. This did enable a taxi driver to deliver young women to the police after recognising something was awry. There is MACE which meets to monitor and assist high risk young people. This works well but we do need more coordination; particularly with schools.

Police officers present said that the more we engage with CSE the more we understand how much it intersects with other types of criminal exploitation.

A contributor who is doing a PHD on the CSE remarked that sometimes CSE amongst young people is referred to as 'peer on peer' CSE; when it looks like rape to her. She asked if this reframing can diminish the seriousness of the offence. Police officers agreed this phraseology can risk minimising the seriousness: an 18 year old is raping a 14 year old. Someone else commented we need to hold on to the fact they can be children.

Police officers present said that they do workshops in Year 9 on CSE. It has been quite shocking to see the extent that by this age exploitation has become normalised e.g. buying gifts for favours.

Jenny Brennan spoke about the work undertaken with Youth Offending. This is often working with other issues e.g. drugs but also Brooke Advisory who are delivering work on sexual health.

There is a concern with girls groups and how unhealthy the relationships can be.

The police officers present commented that there are other gang related incidents where young people have been sexual exploited, but this is more motivated by the desire to humiliate and silence. This is traumatic and can lead later down the line to acting out. We try and find out if perpetrators have also been victims. There are many examples of where that happens.

A committee member commented that we need to focus on the the victim and their needs when something happens. Officers agreed. They remarked that they had one case where it took 18 months for the victim to start talk. That is a resource challenge. Pauline Campbell, Senior Anti Social Behaviour officer, remarked that with a partnership approach that is easier and the advantage of this drawn out timescale is that it does enable us to keep engaging with that young person.

Pauline Campbell then spoke about her work with people involved in gang violence and seeking to exit. Her small team provide intense support in a safe space. Formally they worked with whole families; now due to cost pressures it is with one person. The cohort she works with is in the age range of 15 /16 years old to early adulthood. Over the last few years the service has taken on women. Their stories indicate 90 % have experienced trauma. Other issues are drug dependency, frequently to 'skunk', a strong strain of cannabis. With the 16 year olds they are trying to change the mind-set. Young people are saying: ' I am making a grand a week on the street why are you asking me to sign on?' .This about saving lives if you look at the statistics .We have 62 life places , 40 on high risk ratings. There are regular meetings, which are well attended. There is also a London Gangs Exit programme. There is a hub to bring young people back and to debrief. The key thing is the mental health and trauma.

A question was asked about online grooming. Social care officers said this needs careful handling as nowadays we are all very attached to our mobile phones. There is a danger with banning in secure units; confiscating a young person's mobile phone can trigger runaways. The other danger with banning is that inappropriate relationships can go underground; there was a case where parents banned social media use but the young person was groomed via a game. The emphasis ought to be more about forming trusted relationships with young people so they can disclose risks and be supported in developing healthy relationships.

The chair invited participants to make recommendations:

We would love you to come to our church to enable us to inform young people and have honest conversations. We would also welcome professional support to help us inform and support parents and approach families.

The police reported that they are going into Surrey Square Primary school to work with year 5 & 6 and then they are going to hold a session work with parents. The Police said it will straightforward and upfront. Going into primary schools was supported.

There was a discussion about coming to a church congregation or smaller groups. The church youth leaders present said that they can talk to their peers - they know the reality, however the parents may not know.

Mentors were recommended and starting young.

Educate younger and get this right. Could Peer Navigators be used?

Teaching parents / grandparents / children - through church's and other community venues

Educating parents - so they can create the right relationships.

Fund peer networks.

The underlying challenge is that this is about relationships - being kind to each. How can we promote healthy relationships, resolve conflict constructively and promote values such as kindness, empathy etc. Could we have 'being kind' as a council value? For example could being kind to each other be a council principle as part of the Council Fairer Future promises.

Gang violence is related to domestic violence and abuse.

Funding for Safer London to come back (higher risk). This was cut and there was plea for this to be reinstated.

Community engagement and this needs to be multifaceted.

Victim support.

Group work.

