UK Youth Advisors Presentation on Preventing Sexual Exploitation

Introduction to the presentation

We are part of the UK delegation with the principle aim of working towards the eradication of sexual violence against children and young people. Our group includes four youth advisors on sexual exploitation with a delegation of academic researchers, project workers, a regional manager and parent. The group is coordinated by staff at the University of Bedfordshire. We come from different organisations and different parts of England. As a group we are committed to working in partnership with one another and with other conference participants to share learning and understanding, create new dialogues and to develop new ways of moving forward with this work. Young people’s role and contribution to this work is of central importance. We believe that working to ensure that this conference launching the campaign to stop sexual violence against children is accessible to everyone, including young people, will help to create a more positive environment for all participants.

The role of the UK Youth Advisors
The youth advisors travelled to Rome to share learning about the participation of children and young people in work to stop sexual violence against children. They shared their own perspectives on the value of youth involvement in this work and ideas about how this can be done. The youth advisors within the group have been involved in working with a range of different projects. They are young experts who bring additional knowledge and perspectives to this work. They all have prior experience of working alongside professionals and other young people to raise awareness and understanding of child sexual exploitation within the UK. As a group we recognise that talking about sexual violence towards children is difficult for everyone. We also recognise that sometimes children and young people are not included in discussions or decisions about work in this area. This may be for good reasons, with the aim of protecting young people from further abuse or victimisation. However we believe it is valuable to provide a platform for young people's voices. We have learnt that there are ways in which this can be done in a safe way, protecting young people from further harm or abuse while providing them with opportunities to develop their own knowledge, confidence and skills.
"Hello and welcome. We are a delegation from the UK and we’re here to talk to you today as young people.

We sit here as representatives from many different organisations across the country. Before I begin, I would like to thank everyone for allowing us this opportunity to come to Rome and for giving us your attention.

We are here to talk to you today about why it is important to keep young people involved in your work and the European campaign to stop sexual violence. The four of us here today are all young people who either work with projects or independently. We want to talk to you about the work that we as young people have been doing to combat sexual exploitation.

My Name is Cynthia. I am a young trainer with the nia project and the children’s society in London.

As a young trainer I co-facilitate and sometimes lead training sessions or workshops. We train both professionals and young people. Professionals are often surprised to see a young person come in and train them.

When delivering training to young people, I have come to find that young people respond and interact better with people from the same age group. I think the reason why is because they tend to pay more attention to people of their own age. If you put a young person with six adults, they are highly unlikely to speak.

But if you put them in a group with people their own age or their peers, before you know it, they begin to talk as if they are friends.

After a training session many young people ask me questions and take an interest in the work I do.

Many young people don’t understand that sexual exploitation can be a process. It can happen from an early age and it can happen to anyone, male or female.
That’s why it is important to keep young people involved in this work – because, if we don’t involve them from the beginning they are never going to take an interest, and thus never confide in anyone when there is a problem.

Understanding that young people are easily intimidated around qualified professionals and adults in suits is not easy

Many young people feel that adults can be quite patronising. They encourage what we’re doing but they don’t take us seriously.

When they hear about the work that we are doing they often say “that’s so good that you’re doing this work” but then they try to tell you how to do it.

As a young person what I would like is to be encouraged and not patronised.

Embracing that young people know how to work with other young people is a concept that not many people are able to grasp.

Being young now is so different from how it was 15-20 years ago. At the present time we have exploitation through the use of new technology, such as the internet and mobile phones. Also nowadays, young people are easily influenced by what they see in the media and what they watch on TV.

That’s why I urge all nations before me to allow young people into your projects to encourage other young people to come forward and not necessarily share their story but to let someone know that there is a problem.

Thank you. “
“My name is Leonie. I am currently working on 2 projects as a peer educator.

My first project is ‘Missing from home’ which is based at a project called SECOS.

Young people going missing from home is a real issue today. It puts young people at risk of many different things. It is a sign that something is seriously wrong.

I deliver a workshop to other young people who have been missing from home. As a young person I believe that this is important because young people relate to other young people.

Society has changed, and young people understand today’s real life issues. I try to raise awareness of the push and pull factors that put young people at risk.

A push is something that makes you run away – like family issues. A pull is something that pulls you away – such as an older boyfriend, grooming, or peer pressure.

The second project I’m working on is “What works for us”, which is a national campaign that is trying to raise awareness about sexual exploitation around the UK.

We are trying to inform the government that young people’s voices are missing and trying to get them heard and involved.

The policies are being made without young people having a say which I personally think is wrong.

Recently we have given out questionnaires to other agencies to find out about young people’s views of services and support. We are also developing a leaflet with statistics about sexual exploitation and what services are needed. We are also trying to lobby parliament to raise awareness.

Both projects are led by young people who are trying to raise awareness and bring other young people together to try to develop services.

Thank you “
VICKY – Creative Writing Project Participant and Young Advisor with Streetreach Doncaster

**Streetreach Project Doncaster**
The overall aim of the STREETREACH Project is to provide a confidential service for adults involved in or at risk of prostitution and for children and young people who are being sexual exploited. In order to work towards this aim and make contact with our target group we provide an outreach/detached provision and a centre-based provision. Our aim is to help our clients to move on to more positive, safer, healthier lifestyles.

**Contact:** Marilyn Haughton: marilyn.haughton@doncaster.gov.uk

“My name is Vicki, thank you for inviting me to Rome to talk to you.

I think it is important for young people to tell their own stories in their own words. It might not be what adults want to hear, but we know the real truth about what happens to us.

I hadn’t talked about what was happening to me before because I didn’t want people to think I was bad or stupid.

I was excited when I first got involved with the men. The more that adults told me not to go with them, the more fun it was, and the more secretive I was about it.

It was really hard to be honest with the project workers because I thought they would think I was stupid for putting up with it.

I didn’t want to tell the truth when Streetreach staff first tried to help me because even though I knew I was in a harmful situation.

It is still a bit hard to be horrible about some of them even though I know that they just use girls.

I still thought the men cared about me and wasn’t ready to leave them. But the staff didn’t give up on me, and the Streetreach project was a place I could go to any time of the day.

I had the chance to be part of a Comic Relief, Creative Writing Project at Streetreach project along with other girls.

It felt safer writing things down, knowing that no-one would change my words.

Young girls I know don’t read proper books but the Creative Writing Booklet was easy to read and understand and that’s the best way to get a message across - keep it simple!

I did lots of activities that led to awards and certificates and they helped me to gain a one year place on a volunteering programme and I am now in employment.

I’d like to finish by saying that moving on isn’t easy but it helps to be able to say that without being judged. I can only do this for myself - NOT because family and workers want it.

This is why I want you to listen to the voices of young people because if you Listen - you might just hear. Thank you. “
LUCY - Independent Trainer and Author

“Hi I’m Lucy. I’m a published author and the book that I wrote is about my own experiences of sexual exploitation. In the UK I do a lot of work with a project that I used to go to myself when I was younger.

The things I do are things such as delivering the prevention work in schools, training staff on grooming and sexual exploitation, group work with children and young people who are been sexually exploited and writing safeguarding procedures with local authorities.

Prevention work in schools is a big part of what I do and something that I feel strongly about. We need to educate children on how to keep safe and potential risks that are out there because if we don’t educate children and young people on these issues how can they possibly keep themselves safe?

Because I’m young I find I understand and identify with children and young people in my group work, which automatically makes them feel more comfortable and more able to open up to me.

I think they also find it easier to open up to me because instead of just focusing on the risks in their life I support them with their ambitions to help them be able to see a brighter future.

When I helped write the safeguarding procedures it made all the safeguarding staff more sympathetic towards children who are affected by issues such as sexual exploitation, it also made the procedures much better and easier to understand and makes a big difference in how authorities deal with the victims.

These are some things I would like you to take away about why it is important to involve young people.

These are

1. That we need to involve more young people to work alongside professionals to support young victims of sexual violence.

2. Children and young people are very good at knowing what adults want to hear. Therefore children and young people only tell certain parts of what is really happening.

3. Professional language can be alienating and hard for young people to make sense of. That is why we need young people to connect better with other young people.

Thank you for inviting us and involving us in this conference.”

If you would like any further information please contact: Jenny Pearce Email: jenny.pearce@beds.ac.uk