

National Youth Justice Conference, 17-18 June 2015

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This Information Sheet highlights practice learning points from the National Youth Justice Conference 2015. Full presentations can be found at www.cycj.org.uk

Child Sexual Exploitation - Stuart Allardyce and Lisa Gamble, Barnardo's Scotland

"...The sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 might involve young people being coerced, manipulated, forced or deceived into performing, and/or others performing on them, sexual activities in exchange for receiving some form of material goods or other entity" ([Scottish Government, 2014](#)). [Bedford \(2015\)](#) has advised across serious case reviews that "the overall failings were those of a lack of knowledge and understanding around a concept (of CSE) that few understood and where few knew how it could be tackled, but also of organisational weaknesses which prevented the true picture from being seen".

It is imperative that practitioners working with children and young people understand:

- Significant risk indicators and vulnerabilities which may be evident in cases of CSE and gender similarities and differences ([Barnardos, 2014](#))
- That children and young people of any age have the right to protection from physical, emotional and sexual abuse.
- The links between sexual exploitation, abuse and crime. Research suggests boys externalising their anger and trauma linked to their experiences of CSE are more likely to be criminalised for their behaviour, whereas girls may use crime as an escape from their situation through arrest or as a means of getting justice for crimes committed against them (Phoenix, 2012; [Barnardos, 2014](#))
- Scottish research on CSE ([Lerpiniere et al., 2013](#); [Rigby and Murie, 2013](#)).

Challenging behaviour and group living - Gina Fearn, St Mary's Kenmure

If we are to manage the behaviour of looked after children in group living environments and prevent escalation to the point where young people are criminalised for their vulnerabilities, it is imperative that:

- A safe, nurturing, predictable and consistent environment is provided
- Staff members have a theoretical model that guides practice and ongoing support, supervision and opportunities for reflection
- Behaviour is recognised as a response to an interaction with another. This requires looking beyond the presenting behaviour to understand the interaction
- Staff members understand the role they play in behaviour to ensure that relationships with staff do not replicate avoidant patterns of attachment
- When recording information, descriptions of behaviour must be detailed and move beyond generic terms (e.g. challenging, manipulative, aggressive, sexualised)
- The capacities and experiences of young people are recognised and expectations placed on them are appropriate and manageable.

‘Safe Ships’ - Kate Black and Linda Robb, IVY, CYCJ

Empathising and working with people who have experienced trauma and bearing witness to distressing and violent events is an inescapable element of practice for helping professionals. This can impact on our emotions, relationships and view of the world, through emotion fatigue, vicarious and secondary traumatisation, and burnout. As a result it is crucial that organisations maintain a reflective approach to their work at all levels, and practitioners are able and supported to utilise strategies to maintain their safety and well-being, for example:

Professional Strategies: Remind yourself of things about your work that are positive; make your workplace as comforting as possible; take a proper lunch break; take time out to support your colleagues (debrief/defuse); set up peer review/supervision groups; say no to extra tasks; and know when to ask for help at work.

Personal Strategies: Get plenty of sleep, take your holidays, and take time off when unwell; leave work on time; change out of your work clothes when you get home; spend time out of work with people whose company you enjoy; make time for activities; monitor alcohol/drug use; know when to seek help for your wellbeing.

The effects of early years trauma - Iain Macaulay, North Lanarkshire Council

The effects on trauma on brain development (on both size and function) are devastating. Key learning points from this workshop included:

- If you have experienced trauma in early childhood you are four times more likely to develop cancer in adulthood
- 74% of young people who are involved in offending have speech, language and communication needs, much of which is unidentified
- Resources should focus on the early years where brain development is at a peak
- One of the challenges of working with children who have experienced trauma is the need for repetition, which can be draining and time consuming for practitioners
- Interventions for young people who have experienced trauma should include stress management, exercise, music, dance, sleep and touch. With teenagers, focus on making them feel supported but also holding them accountable for agreed actions. Support without accountability will not help development; accountability without support will create high stress situations and re-traumatise them
- It is difficult to maintain the high accountability and high support approach; workers need help from their colleagues and supervisors to maintain this.

Young people’s use of NPS (legal highs) - Austin Smith, Scottish Drugs Forum

For every category of drug there is an NPS version. These have a similar chemical composition to the drug they imitate but contain a number of other substances which likely add to negative side effects. Risk factors associated with using NPS:

- Increased strength - “it was like smoking a joint, multiplied by ten, dipped in acid”
- Easy accessibility, affordability and anonymity through the internet
- Packages and brands stay the same but the substance inside changes
- Increase in numbers of people, and frequency of, injecting NPS
- High risk sex and increased overall vulnerability.

The Scottish Government also launched the new youth justice strategy [“Preventing Offending – Getting it right for children and young people”](#) at the conference. See the [CYCJ blog post](#) for further information about the new strategy.



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