

Birmingham Youth Service Report – 17th May 2023

To: Education & Children's Social Care O&S Committee
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Authors: Soulla Yiasouma, Head of Youth Service

This report provides the Youth Service response to the Child Criminal Exploitation Inquiry.

1. Background Information

1.1. Birmingham Youth Service operates from 16 Centres in Birmingham and works with young people aged 11 – 25 with the core group being 13 – 19 years old. The Youth Service is an open access service open to all young people. The majority of our youth centres are in areas of high deprivation and therefore reach the most vulnerable. In addition to our youth centres, we also have some city-wide project work – Sexual Health, Youth Violence and Youth Voice.

1.2. Each Youth Centre offers:

- Information, Advice and Support to young people by a qualified youth worker
- A safe place for young people – somewhere they can be emotionally and physically safe.
- A positive relationship with a “trusted adult” (the youth worker) which is built on honesty, respect and is non-judgemental.
- The Umbrella Scheme – provides sexual health programmes, STI testing and condom distribution.
- Targeted programmes – examples include PVE, youth violence, sexual health, health and employment
- Opportunities for young people to get involved in activities, examples include drama, sports, events, residential experiences.
- Volunteering Opportunities
- Youth Participation – an opportunity for young person’s voice to be heard.
- Intensive support for NEET young people
- Resilience 2 Resolve Youth Violence programme

1.3. Birmingham Youth Service **empowers young people to achieve and live their best life by creating a safe space where they can access high quality youth service.** The Service worked with 7,010 individual young people and had 97,245 attendances in 2022/23.

2. Youth Service Contribution to CCE agenda

2.1. Our 16 safe spaces and the relationship built with the young person creates the right environment for the young person to feel safe and have a trusted adult to share their concerns and fears as well as their hopes and aspirations. It also allows the youth worker to get to know the young person and help them to overcome their challenges and barriers as well as reaching their goals and aspirations.

2.2. Through the relationship built with young people youth workers are in an excellent position to notice changes in behaviour, peer groups and other indicators of CCE. When youth workers identify concerns around a young person they will always act on these and will always try to involve young people in these actions. Examples include

- Talk to the young person
- Sharing information with school or other agency involved with the young person to see if they have noticed any concerns
- Consider sharing info with parents
- Support their friendship group to see if they have concerns
- Contact EmpowerU
- Submit a FIB form to the police if appropriate

2.3. Through our Youth Participation Work (Youth Voice) we support 45 young people to influence change to ensure that services are responsive to the needs of young people. An example of this is through the IAG (Independent Advisory group) which supports the police to listen to feedback from the community. We lead on a young person's IAG and have established a young women's IAG group to addressing the police response to violence against young women. These groups meet bimonthly. Through the young women's IAG, young women have talked to police officers about how they can change their practice to improve their relationship with young women and be more responsive.

We will be supporting 4 young people to attend the Op Sentinel Conference in June and they will be sharing their experiences of forced marriage and running a workshop with the police. There will be over 40 forces across the country attending this conference.

These young people have also met with the Home Office to discuss forced marriage and the effects on the children born from this relationship. Their voices and experiences will influence a paper with recommendations that will go to the border force about how they can improve their service.

2.4. There has been an increase in the delivery of single sex provision in the service and in particular "Girls Groups" from three groups to nine. These spaces allow for sensitive topics to be discussed with peers and youth workers in a constructive and meaningful way. We use these group to discuss exploitation, healthy relationship, misogyny and resilience.

In 2022/23 we worked with 304 young women across these nine groups

2.5. Among many examples the following highlight some of our work

- A youth worker at Clifton Road Youth Centre identified changes in behaviour and friendship group of a young person in care. Talking with the young person the youth worker was able to bring this out into the open and have the discussion with their carer's. Working together with the care home and school we have been able to support this young person to move away from this group and no longer associated with this group.
- The youth workers at Concord Youth Centre in Sparkbrook have been able to be that constant positive adult in their life and supported them to positively engage with wider organisations to address his exploitation. Through open and honest conversations and mutual respect this relationship has benefitted the young person as we are able to challenge support and advocate on his behalf, support him to understand interventions that have been put in place and be someone that is there for him and not only for what he is going through

3. Scale and risks

3.1. Youth Workers are reporting back anecdotally that the scale of CCE has increased in recent years. This observation is based on conversation we have with young people which is supported by feedback and discussions we have with parents, partners, and community stakeholders.

3.2. Factors that we have been able to identify through these conversations with young people include:-

- The cost of living crisis has left many young people vulnerable to exploitation. BYS conclude through engagement with CYP that many more young people are more likely to be exploited into criminal activities to make ends meet. This, coupled with poverty, social exclusion, and lack of support, has made them easy targets for gangs who offer them money, drugs, and a sense of belonging.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has also played a role in the rise of CCE in Birmingham. The pandemic has disrupted education, young people's development, contributed to an increased feeling of isolation and lack of support.

3.3. Youth workers have identified the following risks for young people

- The trauma associated with exploitation can have long-lasting effects on young people's mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.
- The physical risks associated with CCE are also significant, with young people being exposed to increased level of violence used as a method of control.

4. Partnership work

4.1. The Youth Service has developed some strong partnership work to ensure that we can be effective in our support young people. We will advocate on behalf of young

people as well as supporting them to access services. The importance of walking alongside the young person can make the difference as to whether they engaged with more specialist services or not.

- 4.2. The relationship developed with EmpowerU (The Contextual Safeguarding Hub) is critical to this work ensuring there is good communication between the two services enabling a joined-up response to young people.
- 4.3. The close relationship with the Violence Reduction Partnership allows for a more strategic approach to tackling this issue. Services offered to young people are looked at in a wider context ensuring that gaps are filled, and duplication of provision reduced. Examples of these include joint commissioning of activities with the VRP, establishing networks of providers for summer activities in hot spot areas and working closely with VRP when allocating resources so that they can fill the potential gaps in provision.
- 4.4. The Youth Service is part of Operation Wellington which is a police led response to supporting young people at risk. Key partners (Housing, Education, BCT, Schools, health, Violence reduction partnership and Youth Offending Service) meet regularly to share information, identify interventions to help support young people with a focus of young people exploited.
- 4.5. There is a close relationship with the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) around delivering the Resilience 2 Resolve programme (youth services response to youth violence) and we are also developing links with the Violence Against Women and Girls lead to explore how we can work more closely together on this agenda.

5. Summary and Reflection

- 5.1. The Youth Service supports young people to build their resilience and develop strategies to cope with their situations. This is based on a voluntary relationship between the **youth worker and young person centred on building a positive relationship with the young person. This relationship** is based on trust and mutual respect which supports and develops the learning experiences and personal development of the young person. Youth workers adopt a young person-centred approach and they work with the young person with no pre-set agenda and this allows the young person to navigate the relationship and set the pace. Using their skills and their professional approach they support the young person to navigate their feelings and support them to access other services.
- 5.2. It is important through our work around exploitation and when working with young people we use language that recognises young people as being victims rather than a lifestyle choice. This will help reinforce that this is about abuse and exploitation and will support young people and agencies to understand their journey.
- 5.3. The majority of our work is around early help and prevention. It is difficult to measure the preventative work we do with young people unless we explore the social return on investment. We may never know how many young people that we have actually prevented from being exploited. We raise young people's hopes and aspirations, develop their skills to be more resilient, increase their awareness around CCE and ensure that they have fun and memorable experiences. As the

saying “not everything that counts can be counted”. However, we are planning to measure the impact of the youth service more effectively with our partners.

- 5.4. In addition to the direct support we offer young people its important to recognise that this has to be a partnership approach with other agencies. We have a role to broker support for the young person and also to bridge and potential barriers that can prevent the young person engaging with these services. Our role is to support young people to positively engage with more specialist services and ensure this joined up approach offers the best possible services to our young people.