



TREES Newsletter

Together Reducing and Ending Exploitation in Shropshire

Issue 1 • Summer 2020

Welcome

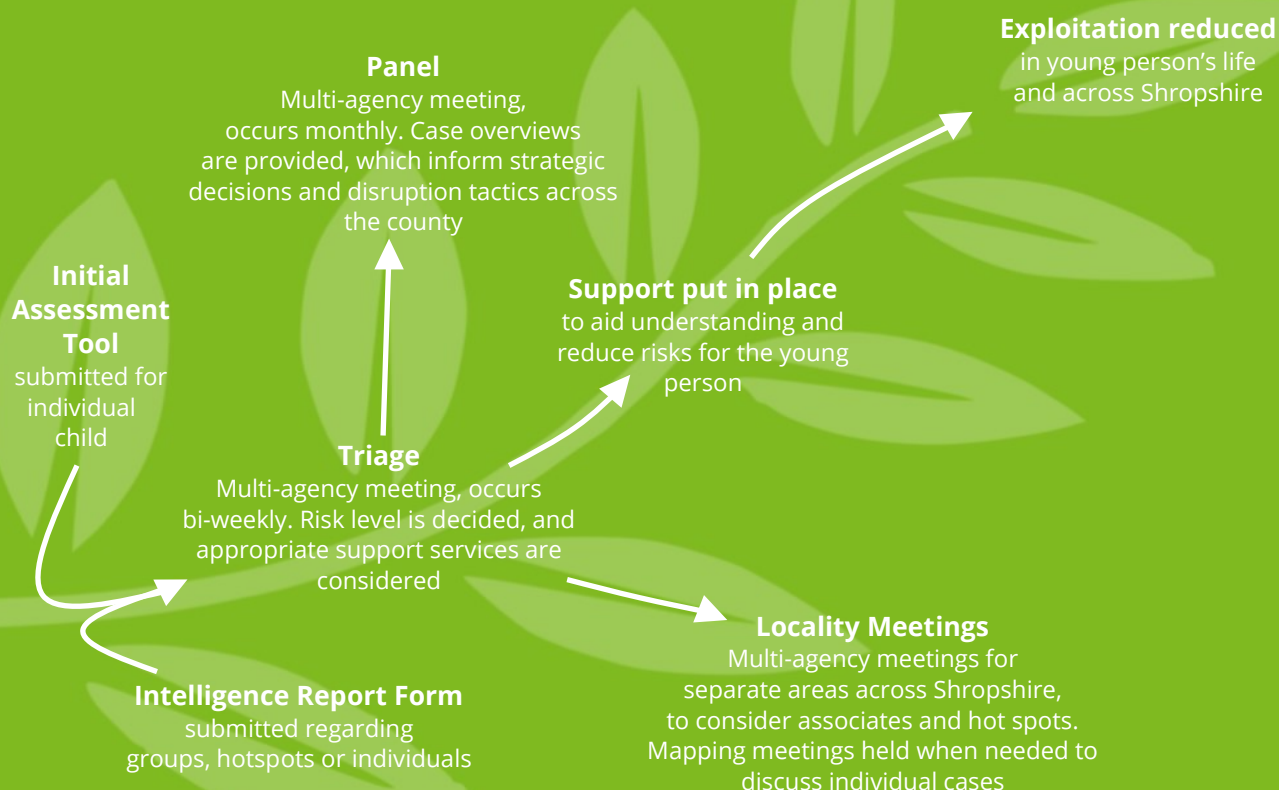
..to the first edition of Together Reducing & Ending Exploitation in Shropshire (TREES), a quarterly newsletter which we hope you will find interesting and informative. The aim is to provide you all with updates on the latest information regarding exploitation in your local area - this will include useful links and resources, which we hope will raise awareness amongst professionals across Shropshire. If there's anything particular you'd like to be featured in the next issue, please get in touch.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued hard work and commitment in protecting vulnerable children at risk of exploitation. For any advice or support regarding the completion of the initial assessment tool or if you have any questions regarding the pathway, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Clare Jervis
Exploitation and Missing Lead
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How does the pathway work?



Current patterns and emerging themes

Exploitation referral figures are analysed each month, to gain a picture of Exploitation in Shropshire - this information can then be used to identify what is going well, and what needs improvement. This data is reflected in monthly quarterly and annual reports.

For the financial year March 2019 - April 2020, a total of 106 new referrals (not including reviews or re-referrals) were received. The introduction of the new pathway in September 2019 has seen an influx of CCE cases, so the majority of referrals for the year were CCE, with a higher majority of males being referred than females.

This pattern has continued into the new financial year, with 78% of the referrals in April being male cases, 22% female. 78% of the referrals in April were CCE, while 22% were CSE.

Throughout lockdown restrictions, our main referrers have continued to be schools and social workers, however we also receive regular referrals from Early Help, YJS and We Are With You. We've also seen an increase in referrals from a variety of other sources, such as residential placements, further education and the Education Access Service. We are receiving a lot more low risk level risk assessments previously, which demonstrates that we are continuing to see professionals identifying exploitation at an early stage - ensuring that the right support is identified at the right time.

We continue to see an increase in violence and links to debt bondage, with drug use identified as the main pull factor for the majority of young people. One of the concerns has been the number of children with drug and alcohol issues never having had a SMARTER screening completed with them. This was flagged up within a recent Focused Locality Meeting which was held in April as a number of the young people identified were not known to the We Are With You service. We need to ensure that professionals are aware of the 'Meet & Greet' service that We Are With You offer, particularly where there is some resistance from parents as well as young people who are not sure what to expect from the service.

Locality meetings, which we plan to hold twice a year in 5 separate areas of the county, are currently being replaced with smaller, virtual "Focused Locality Meetings" while social distancing restrictions are in place. These meetings are focused on specific groups of young people or schools - if you would like more information, please get in touch.

Moving forward we need to continue to work on supporting frontline staff, including schools - especially as they begin to come out of lockdown. Risk assessments need to be completed at the right time, this needs to include open and transparent lines of communication with parents at the earliest opportunity to ensure that Targeted Early Help is delivered quickly and efficiently.

Hot Spots

Recent referrals and intel have identified the following areas of concern. Disruption tactics will be considered as part of regular triage, locality and panel meetings, but if you hear about or witness anything concerning in these areas, please be alert and report any concerns using the Intelligence Report Form (link provided on back page)

- Tesco, Whitchurch
- Ellesmere Lake
- Ellesmere Cricket Club
- The Centre, Oswestry
- McDonalds, Meole Brace, Shrewsbury
- Quarry Park, Shrewsbury
- Gobowen train station
- Shifnal train station



Cannabis: A gateway drug to exploitation and criminality

By Sonya Jones, We Are With You Shropshire Team Manager & Safeguarding Lead

I've worked in the field of young persons substance misuse for 20 years and have seen many changes, trends come and go just like designer labels from the popularity of MDMA (Ecstasy) to the rise and fall of Legal Highs. Many will remember names such as M Kat, Meow Meow, Spice, Exodus Damnation, Cherry Bomb and Pandora's Box, the use of legal highs exploded in Shropshire reaching its peak in 2011. This would see me attending team meetings all over the county informing teams that the legal high phenomenon would change the face of young people's drug use forever. Thank goodness my prediction never came to fruition. The reason for this was due to the popularity and rise in use of Legal Highs by adults who were predominantly part of our prison, hostel and rough sleeping communities. These drugs very quickly gained a reputation of being a "dirty drug" so young people just fell out of love with them, plus they were far too strong. Luckily, they became no longer fashionable. However, in all my years of working in the field the one thing that has remained consistent is the popularity of Cannabis - it still remains the number one substance used by young people. What we are seeing is the young cannabis users coming into service with We Are With You Shropshire have more complex vulnerable needs than ever. For some of these young users, their cannabis use is problematic in relation to being a gateway drug into exploitation and criminality.

As the manager of a service working with many young cannabis users, practitioners are seeing increased numbers of young people who are being exploited by drug gangs to run drugs. It's a constant similar pattern and a never ending cycle, cannabis is the substance that is used as part of the grooming or brain-washing process. It starts when young people come into contact with other like-minded young people who all smoke it together. Buying cannabis brings them into contact with older users, many are only teenagers themselves, 18-19 year olds. This is when the grooming process can sometimes begin by these adolescents giving them quantities of drugs to sell on to other young people - a clever way of gaining their trust and confidence. It's very rare to start at the distribution of Class A drugs in relation to County Lines exploitation, as cannabis is less scary if you get caught. Gangs use cannabis to groom and entice them into thinking they are their friends so they can exploit them for their own gain. Young people tell us that "dealing weed" stakes are not so high, plus it's a great way to make a lot of money, not forgetting you can gain a reputation with peers as the go-to person to buy drugs. There's also the added advantage of being able to have a smoke yourself at little or no cost whilst making money, so it's seen as a win win situation. At this stage, the young people feel like they are in complete control of the situation but reality tells us otherwise—the tables can quickly turn, with them soon being pushed into debt bondage, threatened, abused and under the complete control of the gang. They then have to pay back, which is when the running of Class A drugs starts.

The gangs are forever changing the models of who they target - once it was our Looked After Children who were the main targets. This then changed to young people who were attending Pupil Referral Units and had been excluded from school, or were on reduced timetables. The exploitation we are seeing today can happen to anyone's child. There are concerns around 16-18 year olds who are focusing on the recruitment of 13 -16 years olds as these older adolescents move up the chain of exploitation. They can exploit these younger ones to be out and about on the streets via mobile phone contact so that they are no longer the ones who are coming into contact with police, and therefore able to stay under the radar. These older teenagers are still being exploited themselves, by a higher tier in the chain - this is how it works, just like pyramid selling. For many of these young people, it all began with smoking a bit of weed with friends but it can have disastrous consequences that could stay with them forever. Many will end up with criminal convictions, which will have huge implications on their future and prevent them from reaching their true potential.

Early interventions are crucial - cannabis use is a key indicator, sadly for many of the young people we support they are already trapped in debt bondage. Referring a young person to We Are With You is very easy, you can call 01743 294700 or complete the SMARTER Screening Tool which is on the Early Help Website. In Shropshire we are ahead of the game as we have an Exploitation Pathway that covers all forms of exploitation, sexual and criminal. We are able to understand and track all vulnerable young people who are at risk of exploitation. Many local authorities only focus on CSE as there is a national strategy for this unlike CCE - therefore many local authorities do not have to have a strategic plan for this. I feel very fortunate that our service works in an area where we have robust strategic plans that cover all types on exploitation.

Shropshire will now have a national voice in relation to County Lines as I have been asked to sit on the National County Lines Co-Ordination Centre's Advisory Group - I will attend quarterly area meetings all over the UK, including South London, Central Birmingham, and Leeds. My role will be as a Non-Parent Advisor working closely with SPACE Stop & Prevent Adolescent Criminal Exploitation, a national charity.

An introduction to Climb

from Jessica Whitfield, Team Manager



I am pleased to announce that we have now launched Climb, the new Diversionary Service funded by PCC John Campion for young people across West Mercia.

The programme aims to support 10 to 17 year olds who are at risk of entering the Criminal Justice System. We will offer young people who are not already involved with support agencies the holistic support to help divert them and raise their awareness to vulnerable situations.

Climb is a preventative programme. We will work one-to-one with young people, listening to what they need to create their positive future path. We also have participation workers in the team to support young people into sustainable positive activities within their local communities.

The Children's Society will work closely alongside each local authority to ensure that young people have the right support in place.



What is the criteria for referral?

- Those missing education, excluded, not in training or employment (NEET)
- Those going missing with indications that they are being 'pulled' into an environment where they would be susceptible to CCE – as early as the first missing episode
- Intel/arrest for possession of Class A drugs
- Intel/arrest for possession of weapons/knives
- Those engaging in ASB
- Those at risk of entering the Criminal Justice System.

To find out more or to make a referral, visit www.childrenssociety.org.uk/climb

Children's Society resources

The Children's Society create a wealth of resources and guides, many of which you may find useful. Please click on the links below to view - if you are reading a printed copy of this newsletter, typing the document name on an internet search engine should provide you with a link.

- [Capturing and Reporting CSE/CCE Intelligence: Guidance for families, professionals and the community](#)
- [Children and young people trafficked for the purpose of criminal exploitation in relation to county lines: A toolkit for professionals](#)
- [Appropriate Language: CSE/CCE Guidance for Professionals](#)
- [Guidelines for writing a clear referral for the National Referral Mechanism \(NRM\)](#)
- [Emoji Dictionary](#)
- [The First 72 Hours – Speaking to a migrant person when they first come into local authority care](#)
- ["You Can Save Me" COVID-19 poster](#)

THE BRANCH PROJECT

Services throughout COVID-19

Whilst we are experiencing an unprecedented period coupled with government restrictions, we have tailored our emotional and practical support for young people & their families. We continue to ensure that young people receive the safest ongoing professional support from the Branch Project. Presently we are not conducting face to face meetings with young people and professionals.

However, we are engaging with our clients through a range of mediums such as text messaging, phone calls, emails and when appropriate and safe to do so we can connect through video calls. Branch continue to collaborate with multi-agencies and signpost children and young people when appropriate. We also continue to signpost to online services, such as Young Minds, Childline, Bee U and ThinkuKnow, as these services were beneficial pre COVID-19 and have proven to be a good resource in the interim to aid additional support. Branch also accesses WMRSASC Purple Leaf CSE resource material and if appropriate we can post out to young people.

Professional meetings and core groups are now performed via video conferencing. To date we have kept all our commitments to advocate for our clients at professional meetings. The Branch Project administrator continues to accept and process new referrals whilst Claire Fox, Branch Project manager, continues to allocate referrals to Branch Project Workers. Referral information can be accessed via the website or by calling our main office on 01905 611655.

- Carrie O'Keefe & Kelly Outram, Branch Workers

During school closures, we are unable to offer our group awareness-raising sessions for children and young people (CYP). Our 1-hour session for professionals who work with children and young people is currently being developed as an e-learning resource. The session explores Child Sexual Exploitation and grooming and its impact, allows staff to sample some of the Branch activities for CYP and introduces the Branch Project's services and referral processes. Please contact jessica.carter@wmrsasc.org.uk or call 07458 119873 for further information.

- Jess Carter, Branch Training Officer

Useful Links

Child Exploitation Initial Assessment Tool - To be completed if you have concerns about a particular young person, consent must be gained from the child or a parent for this to be completed.

Child Exploitation Intelligence Report Form - To report information about activity, perpetrators, hotspots or vehicles. Evidence or consent is not required for this.

<http://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/local-content/4cjN/exploitation-tools-and-pathways/?b=Shropshire>

SSCP (Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership) - www.safeguardingshropshireschildren.org.uk

Early Help - www.shropshire.gov.uk/early-help

We Are With You - www.wearewithyou.org.uk/services/shropshire

Branch Project - www.wmrsasc.org.uk/the-branch-project

Climb - www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-services/climb

SPACE (Stop & Prevent Adolescent Criminal Exploitation) - www.bespaceaware.co.uk

For support or advice, please contact clare.jervis@shropshire.gov.uk

If you have any comments or suggestions for this newsletter, please contact amy.amber@shropshire.gov.uk