

AMBITIOUS SCRUTINY PANEL

Integrated Youth Services

REACH (Reducing Exploitation & Absence from Care or Home)



1. INTRODUCTION:

Since attending the last Ambitious Scrutiny Panel, there have been a number of developments with the Missing Young People Team. The first thing to note is the change of name. Initially the team was called Missing, Intervention and Support Team (MIST), but after various discussions and to reflect the complexity of the work undertaken by the team, it was decided to use the name REACH Plymouth (Reducing Exploitation and Absence from Care and Home). In addition, in January the Government issued revised Statutory Guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care. It details that every child that goes missing from home or care will have an independent return interview, organised by their local authority; with the introduction of REACH, we already comply with the Guidance.

2. STAFF AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

The team has been able to recruit an 18.5hr additional Professional Youth Worker post utilising the funding that has been made available by the Police Crime Commissioner, through the Community Safety Partnership. In addition to the post, Devon and Cornwall Police have seconded a Detective Constable who brings a wealth of experience from the force child sex exploitation unit in Ashburton.

REACH is also offering a dedicated helpline number for out of hours and weekend cover (0800 9530053) and linked to the national charity Missing People. The government has given £220,000 to the charity Missing People to help them deliver helpline services for missing children and adults this year.

REACH Performance Data

(April to December)	2013
No of total referrals Q2 (Apr-Jun)	124
No of LAC Q2 (Apr-Jun)	46
No of total referrals Q3 (Jul-Sep)	139
No of LAC Q3 (Jul-Sep)	38
No of total referrals (Oct-Dec)	229
No of total LAC (Oct-Dec)	100

There were a total number of **492** referrals to REACH in the first nine months from April 2013, of which, **184 (37%)** were Looked after Children.

3. ADDITIONAL DEVELOPMENTS:

Operation Global and Operation Weevil

Background:

Operation Global was undertaken as a result of a range of concerns emerging across the multi-agency network in relation to a range of young people centred on a Plymouth address and the placement of a small number of vulnerable young people. The concern was that this may have been evidence of networked/organised child sexual exploitation (CSE) within the City.

A joint operation took place between Police, Youth Service & Children's Social Care (CSC) which resulted in identifying and visiting a group of vulnerable young people to gather information and offer them the chance to disclose any concerns. These young people were either known to CSC or considered at risk of CSE over the previous eighteen months, or were young people about whom concerns were emerging in the community. Fourteen young people were identified and visited originally as part of Phase 1. A further tranche were visited under stage 2 and these visits confirmed the findings of Phase 1.

Findings:

Operation Global uncovered no evidence of an organised network of CSE within the Plymouth area.

However, there were a number of outcomes both for CSC and other partners. Those focusing on REACH and the wider youth service include:

- Better recognition of the expertise held within Youth Services which can be used to inform future practice development around CSE.
- Police have recruited and developed a role to work closely with REACH Plymouth to provide a point of contact and dynamic Police response to disclosures or reports/concerns of young missing persons being subject to criminality/exploitation. Partnership arrangements have been developed through this process and there is a more coherent approach to dealing with intelligence. As a result this can lead to a more speedy response to emerging concerns.
- Development of the missing persons processes whereby all young people reported as missing to the police will automatically be notified to the Local Authority (via the REACH) and again updated when they are located.

Role of Social Media

Operation Global and other contacts with young people with issues about CSE are raising concerns regarding the role of social media, not only for links between young people but also exposure to perpetrators of CSE via Facebook etc.

As a result of this it has been recommended that all social work practitioners develop an understanding of the role of social media within young people's lives, the risks that this can pose to them, and how to mitigate against this. REACH has started to deliver preventative packages within the school environment and more individualised support to foster carers and others looking after children in the community. Having reviewed the number of children and young people who have become looked after in the last six months, this would mean an additional seven assessments and offer of support per month.

Feedback from T/Detective Chief Inspector Charles PITMAN

"Plymouth REACH team has provided a level of safeguarding to young people previously missing within Plymouth.

The risks linked to young missing people cannot be underestimated and whilst the Police will lead on the response and investigation to 'locate' a missing child, crucial to the identification of risk, development of the safety planning, prevention and risk assessment, is the return interviews and outreach work provided by the REACH team.

The information and intelligence gathered by the team is crucial to inform trends and patterns, and individuals at risk of harm which in turn provides opportunity for proactivity and investigation to intervene early and prevent risk escalating.

The team has been fundamental in the response to key Police led investigations within Plymouth.

Operation Global was the response to high level concerns regarding a cohort of young people considered at significant risk through certain associations and behaviours. The REACH team provided a vital contribution through its' support to the investigation team providing demonstrable support to the young people with holistic support provision and clear pathways to other support services for longer term interventions. The joint approach to the investigation provided the young people with options, all of which focused on the welfare and safeguarding of the young people.

The presence of the qualified social worker within the team provided clear a link to the child protection and safeguarding processes ensuring a seamless and coordinated approach to the young people considered at risk. The involvement of the REACH team enabled comprehensive and thorough approaches to the young people which has provided a much clearer picture of the level of risk and better intelligence picture to inform and focus service provision. The relationships developed

following these approaches has led to a number of young people making disclosure of offences resulting in investigation and prosecution of offenders.

Operation Weevil was the investigation into suspected sexual exploitation of young females by a cohort of young men in Plymouth. A sensitive enquiry run with a multi-agency command structure to manage community impact and agency provision of service to those involved. The REACH team was able to provide contribution to the overall management of the investigation through advice and service provision to the young people at risk, but also, through the networks of young people with whom they now work, were able to inform the intelligence picture and therefore the assessment of threat and harm within the communities of Plymouth.

Working 'hand in hand' with Police and other partner agencies, the day to day contribution of the team ensures a coordinated and considered approach to vulnerability of young people at risk of sexual exploitation, particularly those risks linked with being missing from home. Whilst working in partnership the team provides an appropriate level of independence from statutory agencies enabling the development of relationships with young people who may otherwise not engage, ensuring the young people have the options and information to allow them to make informed choices, whilst the clear link with the safeguarding processes ensures the appropriate interventions are delivered at the right level when necessary."

School pilot 'b'wise to sexual exploitation'

Following the last Ambitious Scrutiny Panel, arrangements were made by the Youth Service for members of UK Youth Parliament, to have the opportunity to look and evaluate the content of the programme and to provide their feedback. A meeting was held on 25th September, with members of UKYP and the feedback was extremely positive. Following this a request has been made that the group are offered the opportunity to undertake the program themselves. This will be explored further in the near future.

First programme delivery at Stoke Damerel Community College:

The BWISE 2 Sexual Exploitation (BWISE) programme was developed by Barnardo's and promotes healthy relationships and provides information for young people around sexual exploitation. The programme used a range of materials and methods to explore six key themes: What is child sexual exploitation, The grooming line, power and control, risk management, equal, consensual and respectful relationships, support, protection and the law.

The programme was delivered to a Year 9 class as part of the PSHE curriculum during the last period on Wednesdays. Although the programme has six units it was decided that an additional two sessions would be added; induction and ground rule setting and an evaluation / feedback session.

According to the Director of Specialist Services, Mr Simon Kelly, the students responded very well to the material and were challenged by the case studies.

“The programme has been very successful and has influenced the thinking of our young people. Some of the students have been proactive in seeking advice and bringing things forward to members of our Safeguarding Team.” (Mr Simon Kelly).

The young peoples’ feedback suggested that a large proportion found the case studies interesting and useful. The feedback suggested that some of the students found the group discussions and the encouragement to talk a positive learning experience. Some students found the advice useful whilst others benefited from looking at the definitions of positive and negative relationships.

The school have recommended that the programme is continued with other PSE groups and this is currently being explored. The current plan is to offer the next programme to other schools within the City.

4. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

The Service Manager of REACH is a member of the multi-agency group focusing on Missing & Child Sexual Exploitation in the City (a sub-group of Plymouth Safeguarding Children’s Board. The service was created following identified needs and concerns by the Safeguarding Children’s Board. REACH is now part of continuum of support that includes CSC, NSPCC and Barnardos that deals with CSE and young people going missing.

5. REPORT PREPARED BY:

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