

# **CSE Research: Short films for practice Research Briefing Note #10**



## **Making justice work for victims and witnesses in child sexual exploitation cases**

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### **Text of the Film**

*“Investigation and prosecution are vital aspects of protecting children from sexual exploitation. But involving young people in these processes currently means exposing them to the potential of further trauma and re-victimisation.*

*Young people who have been involved in child sexual exploitation cases - as victims or witnesses - and the professionals supporting them, repeatedly describe the distressing and disempowering nature of the experience. As one young person in our research explained – ‘from the minute you make first contact with the police you lose all control’*

*Our research, which is done in partnership with young people who've experienced these processes, explores how things could be different and illustrates that more positive experiences can and do exist.*

*So what needs to happen for this to become the norm?*

*Primarily we need to make sure policy commitments are translated into practice; to prioritise victim's welfare – recognising how this improves investigative outcomes; and to make child-centred justice a reality - enabling young people to claim their right to be involved in decisions made with them rather than for them.”*

### **Research Summary**

Making Justice Work is a pilot research project, developed in response to the priorities identified by young service users who expressed concerns about shortcomings in criminal justice responses to child sexual exploitation (CSE) (CEOP, 2011; Barnardos, 2014). It also sought to address the limited presence of young people's direct voices in existing discourses on this issue. The project aims were therefore threefold:

- I. to identify how investigative and prosecution processes are experienced by young people in cases relating to CSE;
- II. to work with ‘experts by experience’ to identify opportunities for change and improvement; and
- III. to explore the feasibility of involving young service users safely and positively in research on this topic.

Following an initial literature and policy review, a series of participatory workshops were designed and undertaken with nine young 'experts by experience' supported by three local, specialist projects. These workshops facilitated discussion with young people to explore the potential journey of those affected by CSE through the criminal justice system. This process drew out reflections on young people's own experiences, identified some key practical or emotional challenges and explored opportunities to improve the process. Findings from these workshops were then triangulated and contextualised with data from focus groups with a range of frontline and strategic professionals. An initial thematic analysis of the data was then undertaken and cross checked with groups of young people and key professionals. Alongside the emphasis on young people's voices and perspectives throughout the work, partnerships developed with three specialist frontline services were critical components of the work, enabling young participants' safe and meaningful participation.

The key findings of the research are presented according to the chronology of young people's journeys through the system. This spans early engagement with the police, evidence gathering, decision making about charging, court preparation, court attendance and cross examination through to post court experiences. In addition a number of key themes are identified. The findings suggest that many young people's encounters with professionals are experienced as dismissive, lacking in empathy or disrespectful. The research highlights the disempowering nature of navigating these complex processes for young people and the broad and far-reaching impacts on their wellbeing and wider lives. However, it also identifies the importance and meaning of effective communication and approaches to advocacy which help to mitigate some of these issues. Finally, it highlights a pressing need to identify the continuing barriers to implementing best practice in existing policy and guidance.

### **Questions for practice reflection**

You may want to discuss or consider the following:

- What additional risks or vulnerabilities might a young person face as a result of engaging with the Criminal Justice System (CJS)?
- What new needs may arise for a young person as a result of their engagement with the CJS?
- What opportunities are there in your practice to promote young people's sense of control as they navigate aspects of the criminal justice process and engage with services?
- The research suggests that many of young people's big asks are feasible, and are indeed, already recommended within current guidance. From your own experience, what are the barriers to consistent application of good practice guidance and what approaches might help to address this?

**Is there someone you know who would benefit from seeing this short film?  
If so, take a minute to pass it on <http://youtu.be/YpILGMWBiTs>**

## **To cite this film**

University of Bedfordshire (2015) *Making justice work for victims and witnesses in child sexual exploitation cases*. Available at: <http://youtu.be/YpILGMWBiT8> (Accessed day, month, year).

## **References**

Barnardo's (2014) *Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the effectiveness of legislation for tackling child sexual exploitation and trafficking within the UK*. Barking: Barnardos  
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Beckett, H. and Warrington, C. (2015) *Making Justice Work. Experiences of criminal justice for children and young people affected by sexual exploitation as victims and witnesses*  
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CEOP (2011) *Out of Mind, Out of Sight: Breaking down the barriers to understanding child sexual exploitation*. London: CEOP  
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# The International Centre

## Increasing understanding of, and improving responses to, child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking

The International Centre at the University of Bedfordshire is committed to increasing understanding of, and improving responses to, child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking in local, national and international contexts. This is achieved through:

- academic rigour and research excellence
- collaborative and partnership based approaches to applied social research
- meaningful and ethical engagement of children and young people
- active dissemination and evidence-based engagement in theory, policy and practice



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Staff at the International Centre work collaboratively in teams with internal and external staff on applied research, evaluation, consultancy and training. We prioritise a focus on children and young people's participation, taking this seriously in all aspects of our work.

The University of Bedfordshire has been awarded the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education for The International Centre's pioneering research into child sexual exploitation. This prestigious prize is the highest form of national recognition open to higher and further education institutions in the UK.

### **What is Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)?**

The following definition of CSE is that used in the government guidance 'Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation' (DCSF, 2009, p.9)

*Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.*