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Report for the Office of the Police and Crime Commission Victims Conference July 15 2015

By Liz Patterson, Team Manager, Elmore Community Services

Introduction

Elmore Community Services has been providing services in Oxfordshire for 26 years. We work with people with complex needs who do not easily fit into existing service provision, or who need support to access services in their local community.

We aim to identify gaps and barriers in services, and create and implement models of working that address these issues. We work directly with people on the margins of society and aim to enable such individuals to have equal access to the basic rights of society.

Our Complex Needs clients will have at least three separate support needs such as mental health problems, homelessness, substance misuse, offending, difficulty in forming and sustaining relationships, physical disability, self-harm, learning difficulties, domestic abuse, sex working or experience of neglect.

Our Mental Health clients will have a range of mental health difficulties. We work to support clients to manage their mental health and work toward recovery.

Over the years Elmore has successfully developed other innovative services. These have included working with offenders, working with homeless clients accessing A&E, working with troubled families, working with offenders with communication difficulties, working with sex workers, and with clients under Antisocial Behaviour Orders.

Slavery and Human Exploitation

As a result of this deep and varied experience, we were well placed to see the problem of exploitation and trafficking. Slavery and human exploitation has been highlighted in Parliament as a significantly under-identified form of victimisation. In November 2014 the Home Office released figures on Modern Day Slavery which estimated that between 10,000 and 13,000 victims exist in the UK. This new estimate, based on a review of police sources, the UK border force, charities and other bodies, far exceeds the previous estimate provided in 2013 by the National Agency Human Trafficking Centre, which put the number at just 2,744 (including 600 children). The latest estimate indicates that 700-900 men women and children may have been subjected to modern day slavery across the Thames Valley in 2014.

In the Thames Valley, recent and on-going investigations involving sexual exploitation, forced labour and slavery/ servitude have led to the identification of a growing number of victims of suspected human exploitation from both within the UK and overseas.

Police Action

In the aftermath of police action, difficulties in providing effective support for victims became apparent, including practical support (like safe emergency accommodation), support for victims' immediate physical and mental health needs, and suitable interventions to help manage complex emotional relationships between victims and exploiters. Many victims also display entrenched problems such as substance misuse, self-harm, or offending behaviours.

These cases highlighted gaps within the existing skill set and capacity of the police and other first responders to engage with victims. Victims also often found it difficult to see 'past the uniform'.

Following a successful bid to the Thames Valley PCC in 2014, funding was provided for two small pilot studies in Oxfordshire and Reading, to provide a small team of Independent Trauma Advisers. Elmore provided the Oxfordshire ITA team. Our role was to provide immediate crisis intervention and emotional support to victims of exploitation. However it soon became apparent that we could also provide operational support before, during and after police raids on brothels where there were potential victims of exploitation and trafficking, and also on other operations where other forms of exploitation are suspected. Through our work we have continued to share new and emerging intelligence with the police.

Let me give you a flavour of the work we have been doing.

CASE STUDY 1 (names have been changed)

Naomi

Naomi is an 18 year old women placed in care due to having been sexually exploited (aged 15 -16years). At 16, she was accommodated in another city, as it was believed that she remained at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). However, whilst she was in this accommodation, she was exploited by a group of local men, and also by a male care worker. She was also befriended by a male called Joseph, and this friendship continued when she returned to Oxford, aged 18. She states that this was not a sexual relationship; he used to 'be nice to her' and buy her alcohol and drugs, and on occasion, gave her money.

The first incident happened in July 2014. Naomi was contacted by phone by Joseph in the late evening. He collected her from her home address and took her to a house in another city by car. On the way she was given brandy and cannabis. At the house, she was led to a bedroom and then sexually exploited by 10 males. Naomi did not speak to anyone, as she felt too fearful to say 'no', or 'stop'. She remembers them all speaking in a language. She did not recognise. Joseph then took her back to her house, arriving home in the early hours of the morning.

Similar incidents occurred on most weekends. Each time Joseph travelled to Oxford to collect her in a car, and would take her to different houses, in five different cities.

Naomi was fearful that 'Joseph would kill her', and he had told Naomi that he had pictures on his phone of her that he would show her family if she sought to end the relationship.

Naomi was referred to Elmore's ITA Service by her social worker. We met with Naomi and completed the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) form, agreeing with Naomi that we would not sign or submit it until she was 100% sure that this was her wish.

(For those that don't know, the National Referral Mechanism is a process set up by the government to identify and support victims of trafficking in the UK. It was born out of the government's obligation to identify victims under the council of Europe Convention on Action against Human Trafficking, which came into force in February 2008. The support element of the National Referral Mechanism is provided by The Salvation Army, who's nearest office is in Dover.)

We made a provisional appointment with Thames Valley Force CID for the following week to submit the NRM form. We discussed with Naomi ways of keeping herself safe over the weekend, and (if at all possible) not meeting with Joseph, helping her to rehearse an excuse that she had a family event if he made contact.

Naomi made the decision she wished to consent to the NRM, so we supported her to meet with CID and submitted the NRM. We faxed a copy of the NRM to the Anti Human Trafficking team at the Salvation Army, and she was accepted as having 'Reasonable Grounds' to suspect that she had been trafficked. This meant that her case would be investigated for 45 days, before a final decision would be made, and during this time she would be entitled to support and financial assistance. Due to the level of risk that Naomi was at, a referral was made to a Safe House in another city that had 24hr support. A very important and intensive element of this work was understanding Naomi's obsessive compulsive disorder. She was very afraid of going to a dirty house and required a lot of reassurance from the team. This included purchasing cleaning products and toiletries for her.

Naomi spent a week at the Safe House, but found the placement inappropriate, as the other residents were of the same ethnicity as her traffickers: hearing again the language spoken by her abusers triggered Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms. She panicked, and twice procured a mobile phone to call us. The second time she was evicted from the Safe House as a condition of residence was that no mobile phones were allowed (due to safety). She took a train back to Oxford.

On her return, we met with her social worker to discuss her housing situation. Naomi was reluctant to leave Oxford again. She felt that as a 'victim' she should not have to be the one to leave Oxford, as her college is here and she has built a support network that she trusts. As there is no Safe House in Oxford, it was agreed that in the interim, she could stay with friends and family, but she would need a strong safety plan in place. We worked in partnership with the police to devise a safety plan, which was updated at each interaction. We agreed to have daily contact with Naomi, and support in her in accessing housing, finances, and physical and mental health services. We also agreed to support her in assisting the police with the two on-going investigations, into her abuse from the care worker and at the hands of the traffickers.

Naomi received a conclusive decision from the NRM. It took seventeen days for the NRM outreach provider to meet with Naomi after leaving the Safe House as their office was in Dover; during this time the Elmore ITA team and the Kingfisher Team were her sole support. As the continuation of her financial assistance was contingent on meeting with her NRM Outreach worker, we were also left to financially support her during this time.

We advocated on Naomi's behalf in making a Homeless Presentation to the Duty Housing Worker at Oxford City Council. As the Duty Housing Worker had not heard of the NRM, it took some time to help her to understand the situation. She then involved her manager, the Senior Housing Options Officer, who spoke to social services, and found that the duty was in fact with them, under Section 20 of the Children's Act.

As Naomi had been severely abused on a weekly basis for five months, she was been experiencing a range of health problems. We supported her to attend GP appointments, for a liver check and scan, an urgent referral to mental health services for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and to attend a full check up at the sexual health clinic.

Most significantly, we encouraged Naomi to take control back over her own life; in her own words, she feels now that 'the best revenge is success'. To stick with the process, despite the numerous hurdles that have come her way, is testimony to her determination and resilience.

This is an on-going case, and the Elmore ITA continues to support Naomi.

CASE STUDY 2 (names have been changed)

William is a man in his late forties who lives alone in a housing association flat with his cat. He has a grown-up daughter and a younger sister who lives locally, but from whom he has been estranged for some years. This is based on his feelings of shame around his drug use and his inability to maintain good personal hygiene and reasonable appearance.

He came to the Elmore ITA team at the suggestion of his GP.

William has poor mental and physical health. He suffers from severe depression, anxiety and paranoia. He is also a hoarder. His condition is exacerbated by his use of Crack Cocaine; this also affects his physical health by way of weight-loss and lung congestion. He admits to feeling hopeless about the future and often expresses suicidal thoughts. William is criminally exploited by a known drug dealer. The main elements of exploitation are: William's benefits are taken from him as soon as he receives them in order to pay his 'debt'. He is not left with enough money to feed or clothe himself. He is forced to do drug 'runs' for his exploiter. He is forced to harbour goods which have been left with his exploiter in lieu of payment by other drug users. He is awakened at all times of day and night in order to run errands. His exploiter will send him to buy food and then eat it in front of him, knowing that William is starving. If he makes any attempt to withdraw from the situation, he is subjected to verbal abuse and physical harm. He has had to resort to begging on several occasions.

His condition improved significantly during the time that his exploiter was in prison earlier this year. He was not using Crack, he was eating well and his sleep patterns returned to normal. His mental health greatly improved. He did not have to deal with the constant stress

associated with the exploitation he has been subjected to for some time. On his exploiter's release, things very quickly degenerated again and he became both mentally and physically unwell. William's exploiter was recently evicted from his flat on the grounds that he had no recourse to public funds and was therefore ineligible for housing benefit. His exploiter now expects William to allow him to sell drugs from his flat and he is too frightened to refuse. His tenancy is now at risk because of complaints from neighbours regarding people coming and going at all times of day and night, and although the Housing Association are aware of the situation and are sympathetic, they are legally obliged to act to protect the other residents in the block.

William finds it difficult to trust professionals, particularly enforcement agencies, but has become increasingly inclined to put his trust in one particular police officer, in the hope that he can offer a way out of his current situation. We have supported William to meet on an informal basis with this officer as he is currently too scared of the potential reprisals if he makes a formal statement to the police.

We have explained the various options available to William. He is contemplating being referred to the National Referral Mechanism. However does not want the support element of this as it would mean moving away from Oxford, where he has lived all his life and where his support systems are. He is understandably very frightened by the prospect of being isolated in a strange town. Being separated from his cats that he has had for 14 years is something William just cannot contemplate but he would not be allowed to take them into a Safe House.

The legal route would involve William and others giving enough formal evidence to secure a conviction against the exploiter. However, none of the victims feel that they could be protected by the authorities if they take this action, given that the exploiter has close family in the area and he has made it clear that if he is convicted, they will take severe revenge.

We are currently working with William's Housing Association to look at using the Exceptional Circumstances Panel as the best option for William. This could see him re-housed in the Oxfordshire area, but far enough away from his exploiter. This would enable William to feel safer and hopefully then, more able to cooperate with police action against his exploiter. We are working closely with the police, his housing association, his doctor and his drug treatment service. We will continue to offer intensive practical and emotional support in the meantime.

These are just two of the 34 victims we are working with.

Raids

The ITA team also support police operations. For example, at the end of last year the police had reason to believe there were up to 6 Romanian women at a local guesthouse who were being sexually exploited/trafficked. A few weeks before the planned raid, we liaised with the officer in charge of the operation, and provided an overview of the National Referral Mechanism, in case they encountered women who may have been trafficked. We offered practical advice regarding the welfare management of the women during the operation and explained the need for an appropriate reception centre.

We liaised with the Thames Valley lead for Trafficking and Exploitation, Vicky Butler, and also advised the Salvation Army of the planned raid as a pre-emptive measure.

Our practical preparation for this operation included producing cards in Romanian and English for the women identifying ourselves as support workers and not police officers. The cards acknowledged that they may be frightened and reassured them that we were there to support them.

The bags we take out are made up of:

- emergency blankets (as the women are usually scantily dressed)
- socks (as the women often only have slippers rather than shoes, so as to make escape more difficult)
- mobile phones (as often the phones they have are given to them by the trafficker)
- sexual health material and our organisation contact information, and
- a good supply of chocolate!

On the day of the raid, we attended the police briefing and advised the rest of the officers of our role and how we would be working once on the raid. We also produced a quick overview for officers on what to expect when encountering possible victims of exploitation, and the many reasons they may not want to or be able to engage with them. We explained that victims of exploitation and trafficking may be extremely vulnerable, and are often fearful and suspicious of help:

- They may have complex issues around psychological, emotional and physical health and well-being.
- They may not identify themselves as victims, seeing their situation as "normal"; they often prefer to remain where they are.
- They may feel that they are in some way responsible for what has happened to them
- Relationships with traffickers/exploiters can be complex - there can be misplaced trust, a belief that they are in love, and/or a fear of what their trafficker/exploiter may do to them or people they wish to protect such as their family.
- They may be unsure of their right to remain in the country
- Many victims feel a sense of shame and fear because of their involvement in criminal activities, even though they may have been forced or coerced
- Mistrust of authority figures or of anyone new is common, and of course,
- They may be suffering trauma or shock. For some victims sharing details is a re-traumatising experience.

Once the house had been secured by the police, our role was to do an immediate risk assessment of the women including identifying any that appeared to be under the age of 18 and any that appeared to be being controlled. We quickly and carefully observed all the women to identify the most dominant of the group, in this case, a woman who was fluent in English and spoke for and over the other women. The women were taken to separate rooms within the guesthouse. We identified 1 woman who appeared to be under the age of 18, and took her first to the reception centre. We used Language Line (a telephone interpreting service) to explain our role and to advise her of our concerns regarding sexual exploitation. We explained about the National Referral Mechanism and how we could support her with this. After discussion with the Kingfisher team, it was decided to contact Social and Health care emergency duty team. She was taken to a different location to be further assessed and her age verified by the emergency duty team.

We then repeated the same intervention with the other 3 women in the house, leaving the most dominant female with police officers. It was interesting to see how her demeanour changed rapidly during the operation, starting with charming and co-operative to aggressive and volatile. Initially all the women denied any involvement in sex-working. We asked them if they were in receipt of their own passports: 2 were however 2 were not (including the youngest woman). The passports were located during the search by officers in the handbag of the dominant female along with cash. Because of this find along with ledgers and other key indicators the dominant female was arrested for managing a brothel. The landlord of the property was also arrested.

After these arrests, we met with all the women again and advised them that Woman X had been arrested. Two of the women became extremely agitated and emotional. We again talked to them about the NRM and how this could support them, including assisting them to return home if that was what they wished to do. Two of the women asked for this support. All of the women at this stage admitted to sex-working and began to tell us about how much they were expected to pay the landlord and Woman X, and how she had retained their passports. The other 2 women, whilst admitting to sex-working, stated they were there of their own choosing. We gave them safe sex packs and our contact details.

We supported officers to complete the NRM referral and took the women to safe accommodation for the night. It turned out that the woman we suspected as being under 18 had adult identification; all the professionals involved doubted this to be the case but were unable to prove it.

The conclusion of the raid was that both women received a positive result from the National Referral Mechanism and were helped to return home to Romania. Woman X and the Landlord were released on police bail. Throughout the operation we continually communicated with police officers, passing on disclosures from the women where possible. We undertook follow-up visits to the two women who had chosen to stay, offering further sexual health advice and support. They both left the area shortly after the raid.

Scale and scope

To put all this in perspective, from September 2014 to date, we have joined the police on 9 raids. We have completed approximately 160 victim identification checks, which have been raised with us by various police operations

From September 2014 to the present we have worked with 35 individual victims of modern day slavery, including sexual exploitation, forced labour, debt bondage, and criminal exploitation

We have referred 4 victims to the National Referral Mechanism, of which 3 were given a positive conclusive decision.

The people the Police have consulted us about for victim ID checks are mostly very vulnerable and may have complex needs. We have been able to give advice on how best to manage these complexities, providing detailed information and insights based on our knowledge of the person, and/or similar situations that we have encountered. In some cases, we have acted as a broker between the police teams and the victim.

In partnership with local police inspectors, we have set up a multiagency meeting which looks specifically at Romanian victims of sexual exploitation, and victims of exploitation within the homeless community.

We also continue to sit on the Sex Workers' Initiative Panel. This is a multiagency meeting supporting the needs of street sex workers, some of whom we are aware are both historic and current victims of exploitation and human trafficking.

We have discovered that the internet has become one of the preferred methods of communication for sex-workers, using adult websites such as Adult Works. Through Adult Works, we have been able to track the location of victims within and beyond Oxfordshire, and identify new cohorts of women as well. This has been fed into Area intelligence officers; collating this with other intelligence at the addresses has enabled swifter identification of suspected victims. Early indicators by Thames Valley police report a potential 62% rise in intelligence submission during this pilot.

What else have we learned?

To sum up just two lessons from this work so far, we have learned that, sadly, appalling and harrowing exploitation is taking place in Oxford, the city of dreaming spires. Once you start to look you realize there are a large number of victims. It is not necessarily a growing problem but may appear to be so because we are becoming much better at recognizing it. A key element of this is being clear that these people are victims who deserve our support.

Secondly, it is abundantly clear that in these complex situations there is no quick fix and the skills, knowledge and powers of many different agencies are required. Partnership working is vital. It is something we all say all of the time, but what does this mean in practice? It means understanding each other's role, learning each other's language, respecting each other's constraints and limits, and taking the time to build strong working relationships.

I think this is the moment to say how much I appreciate my colleagues in the Police, Social and Health Care and Oxford city Council - they genuinely do understand and work with a victim focus.

We cannot underestimate the time it takes to unravel these complex stories, to begin to build trust with very vulnerable people, and to empower them to start to make changes in their lives.

Where next?

Finally we are delighted to have received a further 2 years funding from the Police Innovation fund and the PCC to develop this work in Oxfordshire. The partnership includes academic support from Dr Nadia Wagner of the University of Bedfordshire's Exploitation and Trafficking Research Group. This will assist us in drawing out lessons for the future. Over the next 2 years, we will refine our approaches and our tools for working with victims of exploitation and trafficking, and develop awareness-raising and training materials for many different agencies. I look forward to reporting back further lessons to you in 2 years' time.



Liz Patterson, Team Manager, Elmore ITA Service

Employed with Elmore since 2006, Liz has more than 15 years' experience in the fields of homelessness and young people. Liz has successfully developed innovative services which have supported prisoners leaving prison with accommodation needs, Anti-social behaviour projects which have been specifically designed to support individuals who are causing anti-social behaviour with complex and multiple support needs.

Tamsin Jewell, Elmore Chief Executive

Tamsin has worked with and for a wide range of organisations from charities like Crisis and Oxfordshire Mind to large international bureaucracies like UNAIDS. Social work trained, her career spans social and development work in the UK and internationally, with a focus on health –mental and physical – forced migration and human rights.