



Barnardo's NI Response
Draft Northern Ireland Human Trafficking and
Modern Slavery Strategy 2016/17

9th September 2016

Organised Crime Branch
Protection and Organised Crime Division
Department of Justice
Room B4.20
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BT4 3SG

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Introduction

Barnardo's NI is the largest children's charity in Northern Ireland. We work with approximately 10,000 children, young people and families across more than 40 different services and programmes and in up to 250 schools. We provide a wide range of services, from providing family support to working directly with children who are disabled, in the care system, asylum-seeking families, and other groups in need of support. We believe that every child deserves the best possible start in life, and our service provision reflects that philosophy.

Amongst our services is Safe Choices, a specialist child sexual exploitation service, which also supports children who go missing from their accommodation within the care system and can provide specialist therapeutic support for children trafficked internally for sexual exploitation. More recently, we have also developed a service in collaboration with other local voluntary organisations to provide intensive support to refugees placed in Northern Ireland as part of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme, supporting families and children to cope with both trauma and integration in Northern Ireland.

Barnardo's NI welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Northern Ireland Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Strategy 2016/17. We previously provided a response to the 2012 consultation on the Private Member's Bill on Proposed Changes in the Law to Tackle Human Trafficking. In this brief response, we will highlight a small number of issues we urge the Department to consider in finalising this strategy; some of our points echo that of our colleagues in the

Children's Law Centre, who have raised pertinent points with reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Our comments are informed by our extensive experience of working with children and families in Northern Ireland, particularly those who are marginalised and who have either experienced or are at risk of experiencing sexual exploitation, primarily as a result of internal trafficking.

1. Internal Trafficking

Child trafficking is child abuse. As such, it must be considered as a serious child protection issue and addressed in all its forms. It is therefore critical that this strategy recognises and addresses that there are two distinct forms of human child trafficking. Whilst the strategy (rightly) seeks to address human trafficking from other countries, we recommend that more consideration is given to those people – specifically children – trafficked internally. Internal trafficking was noted as an issue of concern in the Barnardo's NI research *Not a World Away* (Beckett, H, 2011), and we have since had experience of identifying local children who have been trafficked within Northern Ireland. We note that page 15 of the draft strategy states:

“It is worth emphasising that potential victims are not always foreign nationals and indeed the United Kingdom and Ireland feature amongst the most common countries of origin of potential victims.”

Given this acknowledgement, we are concerned that the strategy makes no explicit reference to internal trafficking, and consequently the actions do not appear to be focused on this element of trafficking. **We therefore recommend that internal trafficking is acknowledged and addressed as a specific strand of trafficking within the strategy.**

We welcome that prevention is listed as a strategic priority, and that objectives include engaging with perceived 'at-risk' groups to reduce risk and raising awareness to increase reporting and reduce demand. With reference to internal trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children and young people, **we recommend that there is a specific action point requiring partnership between the departments of Justice, Education and Health to work together to strategically reduce risk, as well as to help others (including teachers and social care workers) to identify risk.** Supporting pupils to develop

an understanding of healthy relationships, self-esteem and consent is important in addressing the circumstances that facilitate child sexual exploitation and can be delivered through quality sex and relationship education; this, coupled with the awareness sessions mentioned in the strategy, would help provide the information that can help keep children safe. Similarly, a non-stigmatising safe place to talk and share worries or concerns, such as school-based counselling, can provide an important opportunity for a child to disclose experiences or indicate a risk of internal trafficking and/or sexual exploitation.

2. Data capture and responding to need

It is critically important to monitor, record and publish the number of people (by age and gender) affected by human trafficking, so that the appropriate support services and prevention programmes can be developed based on the learnings, and so training to frontline practitioners engaging with victims can be kept up-to-date and responsive to developing need.

We know from our work with sexually exploited children that victims need ongoing support to cope with their traumatic experiences. Whilst we have limited experience of working with children trafficked internationally, we know from working with refugees that assimilating into a new culture – especially following trauma - can be difficult and so families and children affected need intensive support. **We therefore recommend that this strategy takes account of continued inter-agency support for those impacted by trafficking, as well as the immediate requirements referenced on page 17 of the draft strategy.**

In this vein, we are concerned that the action point relating to the procurement and establishment of an Independent Guardian service (p24) for children is yet to be agreed and does not have a target date: we believe this service could potentially be an integral support for trafficked and separated children and **we urge that it is prioritised.**

3. Protect victims from prosecution

Finally, Barnardo's NI wishes to echo the point made in our initial response – and that made by the Children's Law Centre in response to this draft strategy – that **victims of trafficking should not be prosecuted for any offending behaviour resulting from their trafficking.** Children and young people, as well as adults, who have been trafficked should be regarded as victims, and this status should

not be dependent on their willingness to act as a witness for prosecution.

Conclusion

Barnardo's NI welcomes the opportunity to respond to this draft strategy. As this important piece of work continues, we would be happy to engage further with the Department to represent the views of the children, young people and families we work with to share our experiences and findings.

If you have any questions or require any further information on the issues raised in this response, please contact:

Julia Kenny

Assistant Director, Policy

Barnardo's NI

Julia.kenny@barnardos.org.uk

028 9067 2366