



Going the Extra Mile

Learning from SECOS's child sexual
exploitation service

Emilie Smeaton



Paradigm Research
Social Research, Evaluation and Consultation



Contents

Executive summary	5
1. Introduction	9
Barnardo's work to address CSE	10
SECOS	10
Definitions and explanation of key terms	14
Protecting young people's identity	15
2. Practice that effectively meets the needs of young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE	17
SECOS's CSE awareness-raising activities	18
Identifying young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE	19
Ensuring provision of support	20
Building relationships based upon trust	21
Responding positively to disclosure	23
Increasing young people's awareness of CSE	24
Supporting young people to identify abusive and exploitative behaviour	25
Building young people's resilience to CSE	27
Supporting recovery from CSE	28
Meeting the needs of diverse groups of young people	31
Supporting young people who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour	31
Provision of advocacy for young people who experience CSE	32
Improving relationships between young people and parents and carers	33
Ensuring stable and secure accommodation	33
Reducing episodes of young people going missing from home or care	34
Reducing association with risky peers and adults	35
Reducing substance use, or ensuring safer consumption of substances	28
Improving knowledge of sexual health strategies	40
Supporting satisfactory attendance at school or college	42
Ensuring young people remain in contact with SECOS	42
3. Concluding comments	49



Executive summary

This report presents evidence-based learning from an evaluation of Barnardo's SECOS (Sexual Exploitation Children's Outreach Service) child sexual exploitation (CSE) service based in Middlesbrough. These findings show 'what works' in terms of effectively meeting the needs of young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE:

- SECOS delivers CSE awareness training to statutory and voluntary sector agencies. This training includes a focus upon Ecological Systems Theory to highlight that relationships are re-directional and that reactions to young people will, in turn, inform how they respond to others. SECOS's awareness-raising training has resulted in an increase in CSE referrals, and in improvements to the ways professionals respond to young people.
- Since 2001, SECOS has worked tirelessly to identify young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE, both through outreach work and through ensuring young people are brought to the attention of statutory services. To identify this group, SECOS works closely with the police and the education sector, as well as supporting sexual health and drug and alcohol services.
- SECOS provides support for those affected by CSE, including young people, parents and carers, its own project team and external professionals. Young people are supported, where appropriate, to work as volunteers or peer mentors for other young people.
- Building relationships based upon trust is recognised as the first step towards gaining a young person's willingness to engage with SECOS. This enables other work to take place that includes parents, carers, and other agencies.
- SECOS recognises that it can take a long time for some young people to feel safe enough to disclose CSE. Positive responses to disclosure of CSE provide young people with confidence to open up to others.
- To prevent the risk of CSE escalating, and to aid recovery from CSE, young people are helped to identify abusive and exploitative behaviour. This begins in an indirect way, and often involves third-person work that provides a safe space for young people to talk about issues and experiences.
- To reduce vulnerability to CSE, or in some cases to ensure no re-victimisation, SECOS works to build young people's resilience to CSE, recognising that some young people require significant amounts of time to develop this resilience.

- SECOS understands that recovery from CSE can mean something different to each young person, and can take differing amounts of time; SECOS is able to work for as long as required to support a young person's recovery from CSE. SECOS's theoretical approach is based upon learning from neuroscience about brain development, disordered attachment and the impact of trauma. SECOS also models support and care for others to aid recovery from CSE. Recognition of young people's malleability and the need for other agencies' input is built in to SECOS's work.
- SECOS adapts its practice to meet the needs of diverse groups and individual young people, drawing in other agencies where additional specialism is required.
- SECOS ensures young people who exhibit sexually harmful behaviours are responded to with a welfare-based approach rather than a criminal justice response.
- Relying on Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), SECOS's advocacy work ensures young people's views and needs are represented in decisions that affect them. SECOS empowers its staff to be assertive, and to be aware of legislation supporting action they are advocating for.
- SECOS works with young people, parents and carers to improve relationships and reduce young people's vulnerability to CSE. SECOS intentionally models positive examples of family life to support this.
- SECOS's CSE service works closely with its Missing from Home service to identify when a young person is living in unstable accommodation. SECOS has its own accommodation for young people aged 16 and above who are able to cope with independent living. SECOS also works closely with partner agencies to ensure provision of safe and secure accommodation.
- Together with the Missing from Home service mentioned above, SECOS's CSE service works to reduce episodes of young people going missing from home or care, co-operating with the police and social care organisations to disrupt these patterns of behaviour. SECOS's outreach work identifies young people at risk of CSE who have been reported to the police as missing, as well as those young people who are missing but not reported to the police or known to services.
- SECOS effectively reduces association with risky peers and adults, providing young people with substitutes in the form of alternative activities, networks and opportunities, and other people to spend time with.

- SECOS helps young people to reduce or cease substance misuse by seeking to understand what might lie behind a young person's substance misuse. SECOS works in partnership with a specialist substance use service, both to address high-level substance misuse concerns and to ensure members of the SECOS project team are provided with appropriate substance use training.
- By fostering confidence in discussing sexual health needs with others, SECOS is able to improve young people's sexual health strategies. SECOS has a long-standing relationship with a sexual health professional that aids this work, and also supports young people's attendance at sexual health clinics. SECOS ensures external professionals recognise that some young people are not in a position to say no to sex or to adopt sexual health strategies, and that third-party work is required to enable young people to discuss sexual health issues strategies without having to disclose what has happened to them.
- SECOS supports young people to have satisfactory school or college attendance by: improving education-based professionals' awareness of CSE; advocating for young people in order to improve relationships between them and their school or college, and supporting educational establishments to develop realistic expectations of young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE.
- SECOS ensures young people remain in contact with the CSE service by simultaneously being persistent and consistent with young people, and by working with them on their own terms. As a young person's risk of CSE diminishes or ceases, SECOS reduces the time spent working with the young person, while reinforcing that young people can retain their attachment to SECOS for as long as they want.
- At the heart of SECOS's practice and effectiveness is its ability to build relationships based upon trust, and to maintain relationships with young people, their families and external professionals. SECOS is able to work in a consistent, flexible and tenacious manner that means they can retain and build relationships even when young people do not express willingness to engage. SECOS also focuses upon reflective practice, helping the CSE service to constantly reappraise what it does, to adapt to changing needs and circumstances, and to ensure service development continues



1

Introduction

This report presents evidence-based learning of ‘what works’ in Barnardo’s SECOS (Sexual Exploitation Children’s Outreach Service) child sexual exploitation (CSE) service to support children and young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE. The findings stem from an evaluation of SECOS that took place from April 2014 to April 2015. The report aims to add to existing knowledge about practice responses to CSE, through presenting aspects of SECOS’ services that work well and including the views and opinions of key stakeholders including young people, the SECOS project team and external professionals working with SECOS in the local area.

Barnardo’s work to address CSE

Barnardo’s has been working to address CSE for more than 20 years. In 2014-15 Barnardo’s worked directly with 3,200 children and young people who were experiencing, or at risk of, CSE. As well as providing specialist CSE work in more than 40 locations across the UK, Barnardo’s also tackles CSE through campaigning, research, policy and lobbying activities.

SECOS

SECOS (Sexual Exploitation Children’s Outreach Service) has been established in Middlesbrough since 1998, covering Middlesbrough, Darlington, Stockton, Redcar, Hartlepool and Durham. SECOS has a number of services that play a supporting role to its CSE service. These include: the Independent Sexual Violence Advocates (ISVA); the Missing from Home service and SECOS’s supported accommodation project; outreach work, and Operation Stay Safe.

SECOS works within Barnardo’s ‘four A’s’ model, which stands for:

- access
- attention
- assertive outreach
- advocacy for young people in need.

To briefly address each of the four A’s in turn:

Access

To enable access to CSE services, Barnardo’s ensures an easy referral process for children and young people, professionals, and parents and carers. Their projects are safe and attractive environments for children and young people, with project teams who provide flexible and responsive approaches and allow time to build relationships based upon trust. Children and young people are provided with support on their own terms, and practical aid is given through provision of – for example – showers, food and clothing, guidance from sexual health nurses, and

support to address substance misuse. Children and young people are also helped to enhance relationships with their families, and to gain access to supportive professionals from the police, health, social care and other support services. They are provided with educational and career opportunities, and with paths to safe accommodation and housing services. Children and young people supported through Barnardo's CSE services are also offered participation activities with other children and young people, and there is peer support available.

Attention

Children and young people affected by CSE may often have few attentive and concerned adults in their lives, and can be attracted to attention offered by abusive adults. Barnardo's CSE services ensure children and young people receive consistent attention that focuses on issues important to them, including the development of protective and supportive relationships. This occurs through a strengths-based model of working rather than a deficit model. Attention is given to addressing:

- family history, scripting and trauma bonds
- attachment and relational patterns
- the child or young person's developmental age and related learning and educational needs
- emotional health and resilience
- self-esteem and self-presentation.

Barnardo's CSE services also make certain that attention is given to the abuse of children and young people both on and offline, and to diversity issues including ethnicity, sexuality/sexual identity and disability.

Assertive outreach

Barnardo's CSE services undertake assertive outreach with children and young people on their own 'terms and turf' to identify those who are experiencing, or are at risk of, CSE. Initial contact – including late-night contact – may take place, for example, in parks, on the street, at takeaways, at leisure venues, or in pubs and clubs. Assertive outreach also takes place in residential units, including the secure estate, educational settings and in children and young people's homes. Barnardo's assertive outreach focuses on proactively identifying children and young people (rather than waiting for a referral from other services), and on making substantial efforts to create positive relationships with children and young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE. To achieve this, Barnardo's CSE project teams establish and maintain contact through text messages, phone calls, sending children and young people cards, and meeting them in places where they feel comfortable. Through this consistent and steady approach, project teams gradually demonstrate the genuine concern that is required to counteract the influence of often equally persistent and abusive adults.

Advocacy for young people in need

Barnardo's understands that children and young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE may feel let down by agencies and their families, and that their rights and voices may have been overlooked. Barnardo's believes in children and young people, and seeks to place them at the heart of all its work. To achieve this, Barnardo's:

- involves children and young people in decision-making processes
- prioritises the rights of the child in meetings and discussions
- advocates for high quality of care, including constructively challenging negative stereotypical statements and poor practice
- supports children and young people through court and legal processes
- helps children and young people who are recovering from CSE.

Barnardo's CSE services also fulfil their advocacy role through partnership working with other agencies, in which they raise awareness of CSE and provide training. They give children and young people opportunities to understand and voice their rights and needs, and act as mediators between children and young people and other services.

SECOS's CSE service provides both one-to-one and group work with children and young people experiencing, or at risk of, CSE. The service also uses street-based teams to engage proactively with children in their own spaces, such as shopping centres, parks and on the streets. The core purpose of this intensive, street-based youth work model is the personal and social development of children and young people through informal education. Relationships are built through a non-judgmental approach, supporting individuals and groups to address any needs they identify and, if required, brokering access to other relevant services.

A second engagement model utilised by SECOS is the multi-agency approach to Operation Stay Safe, a national police partnership scheme to protect vulnerable young people late at night. Operation Stay Safe takes place monthly between the hours of 10pm and 4am, as children and young people can be at very high risk during these hours. This can be due to factors relating to the night-time economy, drug and alcohol use, incidents where young people have gone missing from home or care, lack of supervision from parents or carers, and heightened rates of crime, antisocial behaviour, violence and exploitation. SECOS takes the lead role in Operation Stay Safe, working in partnership with Cleveland Police and Middlesbrough Council Children's Services. In this case, the approach is based on identification, assessment and safeguarding. The multi-agency team identifies vulnerable and hard-to-reach children and young people in Middlesbrough, assesses their needs, and carries out any required actions to promote and safeguard them and their families. The follow-up service

has been key to the positive outcomes for children and young people. Due to the Operation Stay Safe initiative, children, young people and their families are quickly offered the appropriate service to meet their needs. These services have included safeguarding protection services, family interventions, young people's services, Common Assessment Framework (CAF) intervention, and identification of perpetrators of criminal activity and CSE.

In addition to its work directly with children and young people, SECOS also supports strategic and operational multi-agency responses to CSE, and delivers CSE awareness training.

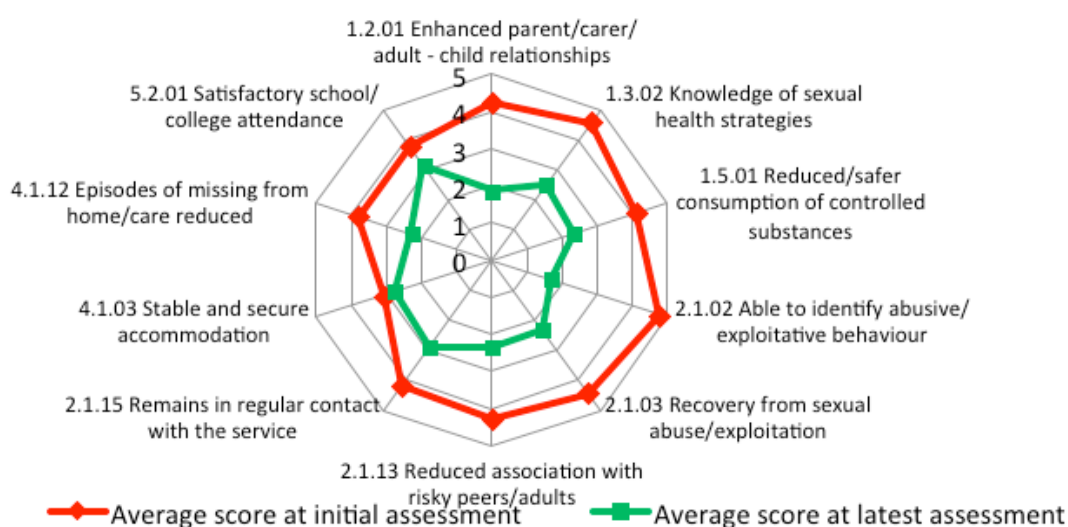
During 2014-15, SECOS worked with a total of 425 children and young people. Of these, 349 are female and 76 are male. While the majority of these children and young people are white British, some are from black and other minority ethnic backgrounds:

Ethnicity	Number of children and young people
White other	2
Asian or Asian British	6
Black or black British	2
Czech Roma	9
Mixed ethnicity	12

During 2014-15, SECOS also worked with a number of children and young people with some form of disability or impairment:

Nature of disability or impairment	Number of children and young people
Autism spectrum condition (ASC)	9
Behavioural-based disability	6
Complex needs excluding invasive treatment	1
Learning disability	15
Sight impairment	1

The following diagram presents the changes in average outcome scores for children and young people supported by SECOS's CSE service in 2014-15, with a score of five representing high risk and a score of zero meaning no risk:



Definitions and explanation of key terms

The following definitions are used in the report:

Definition of CSE

Barnardo's uses the definition of CSE as presented in the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) 2009 guidance addressing sexual exploitation:

'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.'

(DCSF, 2009; 9) ¹

¹ Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation London: HM Government.

Definition of children and young people

In England a child is defined as ‘anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday’ (DCSF, 2010),² and this is also reflected in the definition under the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the UK ratified in 1991. Throughout the report the terms ‘young person’ and ‘young people’ are used to describe children and young people who participated in the evaluation and shared their views and experiences.

Protecting young people’s identity

Where names of young people have been given, these have been changed to protect their identities.

² Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) Working Together to Safeguard Children London: HM Government.



2

**Practice that
effectively meets the
needs of young people
who experience, or
are at risk of, CSE**

This main section of the report presents details of SECOS's practice that have proven effective in meeting the needs of young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE, in addressing the impact of CSE, and in supporting young people to move forward with their lives.

SECOS's CSE awareness-raising activities

As well as receiving requests for CSE training from individual agencies, SECOS delivers CSE awareness training that is offered through the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to social care, health, education and voluntary and community services. In recognition that different professionals require different levels of knowledge and understanding of CSE, one local authority has requested that SECOS provides three different levels of training for professionals from a range of agencies, in order to meet young people's needs.

SECOS's training to its own staff team and colleagues in Barnardo's includes learning about brain development, neuroscience and the impact of trauma; there are plans for this to be delivered to professionals from external agencies. SECOS recognises that young people's development is affected by everything in their surrounding environment, and builds its practice upon Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979).³ This theory outlines how human development is influenced by the different types of environmental systems, and why individuals may behave differently when they are in different settings such as in the presence of family or at school. As well as incorporating this theory into its practice with young people, SECOS also includes Ecological Systems Theory in its training, to raise professionals' understanding that relationships are re-directional and that their own reactions – and those of others – to young people in their microsystem will affect how those same young people treat others.

The awareness-raising work undertaken by SECOS has resulted in an increase in referrals to its CSE service. In addition to this, members of the project team have witnessed a change in the language used by many professionals, which has had a positive impact upon how professionals respond to young people:

'So instead of "attention-seeking" they would talk about "looking for love"; they don't talk about sexualised behaviour. ... If they've been on the training, they're more aware that a child is a child until 18, so they're more open to referring, say, a 17-year-old for CSE work. They won't necessarily talk about a young person "putting themselves at risk" which is a phrase that's often used in referrals where someone isn't as aware.'

(Professional from SECOS)

3 Bronfenbrenner U (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development; Experiments by Nature and Design* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Additionally, SECOS also seeks and accepts opportunities to deliver ‘ad hoc’ consultancy and advice. The service delivers presentations at local and national events, and also holds open days at the service base for any professionals who would like to visit the project, learn about the service, and pick up information and resources.

Identifying young people who experience or are at risk of CSE

Since 2001, SECOS’s work to address CSE, adult prostitution and trafficking has resulted in identifying young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE. SECOS’s work began by identifying young people who were at risk of CSE on the streets, and has progressed over time to identifying young people at risk of CSE in a range of different locations and networks. As outlined in the introduction to this report, Operation Stay Safe and the street-based intensive youth work include outreach work that enables SECOS to actively seek out young people at risk of CSE. When young people are identified as being at risk, SECOS works hard to share concerns and to refer individual young people to statutory services, insisting that safeguarding meetings take place and ensuring that safeguarding procedures are followed.

Furthermore, the training that SECOS delivers to other agencies enhances the abilities of these external professionals to identify young people at risk of CSE. SECOS has also supported these other agencies through its role as the CSE lead practitioner for the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), and through establishing the first local multi-agency group to focus upon CSE.

Identifying ‘hidden’ young people

To access ‘hidden’ victims of CSE, SECOS’s CSE service and its Missing from Home service focus upon building external partnerships through their work with the multi-agency Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing and Trafficked (VEMT) group.

The Operation Stay Safe outreach work, in particular, is a key opportunity to identify young people who are not known to services:

‘We might get alerted to certain hot spots or parties where we can actually visibly see young people going from one party to another, and we can just intercept and just do some risk management and identifying vulnerability.’

(Professional from SECOS)

SECOS encourages other agencies to join them in its outreach work. While on outreach, it helps them to identify possible signs that a young person may be at risk of CSE, and to look for young people not known to services.

SECOS has developed good relationships with other agencies, supporting them as they identify young people at risk of CSE in the local area. In particular, SECOS has a very positive working relationship with the police. The two organisations work in partnership on Operation Stay Safe, and regularly share information that can be turned into police intelligence. Recognising the importance of adopting a welfare approach with young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE, the police invite SECOS to accompany them when they are planning operations, so that SECOS can provide support for young people. External partnerships with the education sector are also important, as young people who are not attending education can be hidden and harder to access, making identification more difficult. SECOS works closely with the '0 to 19' service,⁴ which seeks to engage young people in alternative education programmes. SECOS also works with agencies such as sexual health services and drug and alcohol services, encouraging them to look for young people who may be experiencing CSE, and to ask the right questions to enable these young people to be identified.

Ensuring provision of support

A theme that resounds through SECOS's work is its recognition of the need to provide support across the board: for those who are personally affected by CSE, for those providing direct help to young people, and for professionals working to tackle CSE in general. The SECOS project team recognises that they both offer and receive a significant amount of support. For example, members of the project team describe how they are vigorously supported by the SECOS children's services manager, while other members of the management team are also recognised as attending to these support needs. Members of the project team also share concerns with one another on an informal basis, along with insights into what has worked well in their casework with young people, and they gain support in this way too. Reflective practice is at the core of SECOS's approach, and it ensures that its practice is reviewed and developed. Members of the SECOS project team receive personal and professional development (PPD), which takes the form of group clinic supervision and helps them to develop their own practice.

External professionals overwhelmingly describe how SECOS works tirelessly to support young people. This work takes place at local level to ensure that strategic and operational developments address the needs of young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE, and that these developments provide the required levels of appropriate support. The SECOS project team is recognised as constantly doing everything it can to meet the needs of individual young people, both through direct support and through advocacy:

⁴ '0 – 19' was previously the Youth Service.

‘They really do go the extra mile with all of the young people they work with.’

(Professional from social care)

External professionals describe how the supportive nature of SECOS’s environment is evident as soon as they enter the project building:

‘Someone always makes you a cup of tea or offers you a bacon sandwich, and will give you the time to talk about any work-related matters you want to talk about.’

(Professional from the police)

‘They actively encourage you to contact them if you have any concerns about a young people and want some support to help you work with a young person.’

(Professional from education)

Having been supported by SECOS for a number of years, some young people have come to the point where their needs have been addressed and they are able to look positively to the future. Some do not want to cease their involvement with SECOS and, in a supported and appropriate way, are working as volunteers or peer mentors with other young people supported by the SECOS project team. For example, young people who have experienced CSE and been through the court process will visit and talk with others who are going through the same thing. One young volunteer described the benefits of receiving information and support from someone who has already been through the court process:

‘It’s always like adults who take you to the court and through the process and say “and this is what it will be like”, but they’ve never been through it as a victim [of CSE] and they don’t know what that’s like ... And the young people we visit always say how nice it is to see someone who has come through the other end.’

(Young person supported by SECOS)

Building relationships based upon trust

Building relationships based on trust cuts across all of SECOS’s work. This is crucial in gaining a young person’s willingness to engage with the service, and is the first step towards any work with a young person. Building relationships based upon trust is also necessary to enable work to take place with parents and carers, and is intrinsic to enhancing relationships between adults and young people:

‘It always comes back to the trust that young people have in us and that we can forge with the parent.’

(Professional from SECOS)

Young people identify trust as necessary to building a relationship:

‘I need that trust-building because I find that if you don’t have trust, it’s like talking to a stranger.’

(Young person supported by SECOS)

Through developing trust, SECOS also helps external professionals to improve their relationships with young people:

‘We have noticed a difference in how some of the young people engage with us after they have worked with SECOS. ... Sometimes they didn’t want to engage and then they seem to be in a better place and able to engage. ... SECOS are able to give that time to building a relationship with a young person which we and other agencies aren’t able to give and that benefits us all.’

(Professional from the police)

SECOS’s work with Czech Roma young females, for example, has enabled these young women to trust other professionals:

Professionals raised concerns about a group of young females who are Czech Roma, relating to CSE and involvement in crime. The young people felt stigmatised by the few professionals they had contact with, and did not trust them or want to engage with them. SECOS’s street-based team recognised the need to car

ry out some general preventative work with these young people. They started the engagement process by introducing themselves, and slowly began to build relationships with both the young people and their parents/carers. SECOS made efforts to find out about Czech Roma culture.

SECOS did not rush the young people, but allowed them to decide in their own time whether or not they would engage. After some time, the young people stated that they would like to accept SECOS’s invitation to come to the project base for group work. Activities focused upon music and other interests that the young people had. Group sessions included discussions about drug and alcohol use and about sexual health. The young people went on a residential visit with SECOS and enjoyed their time away.

Despite having initially mistrusted professionals, the young people could see that SECOS behaved differently towards them and their families than other professionals had done. The young people developed trust in SECOS project workers, and also trusted professionals who partnered with SECOS in their outreach work. As a result of this, the young people now realise that some professionals can be trusted and will treat them well, and they have stated that they would be more willing to engage with other professionals in the future.

SECOS may act as a broker between young people and other agencies or professionals including the police, social workers, youth services and education providers. This brokerage is possible due to young people's trust in SECOS, and their willingness to work with other professionals or agencies that SECOS agrees to work with – or broker a relationship with – on behalf of a young person. For example, SECOS works with the police to gain their willingness to work in a positive way with young people, and young people in turn are willing to engage with the police because they have learnt that professionals can be trusted. These young people feel confident that SECOS is working with other agencies in their best interests. While the police and young people may not share the same aim of gaining criminal convictions, and while many young people do not want to be involved in criminal investigations resulting in convictions, young people may be prepared to provide information to police officers that can be turned into intelligence.

Responding positively to disclosure

When young people choose to disclose CSE – or to discuss any other difficult or personal issues – receiving positive responses from SECOS gives them the confidence to open up to others, and helps them to understand that opening up to other adults can work out well:

'Like opening up and talking and it [being supported by SECOS] made me realise that ... if you do ever want to talk, people are there to listen. I was always worried, like before, about telling parents things because I didn't want to worry them or because I was too embarrassed but now I realise that it [opening up and talking to the young person's parents] is a good thing and it's helped me like that 'cos now me and my parents are just so much closer now.'

'When I opened up to staff at SECOS, it just helped so much more and then one day I just sat down with my parents ... and it just got better from then on. And because I opened up and was honest [with the young person's parents], they trusted me more.'

(Young people supported by SECOS)

Young people particularly appreciate how SECOS staff members do not pressurise them to talk about anything they do not want to:

'You went at your pace; it would never be that on a fixed session – you would have to talk; it was just like "whenever you're ready"; it's like you decide.'

(Young person supported by SECOS)

The lack of pressure to talk or to disclose CSE is part of what helps young people to actually make these disclosures:

‘Because that pressure to talk was dropped, you felt like more comfortable talking.’

‘I can’t stand people who try to drag it out with you. I like daft activities ... where you gain their [the professional you are doing the daft activity with] trust. Like going out to daft places, that made me closer to her [the young person’s project support worker] and then I opened up a lot more.’

(Young people supported by SECOS)

It can take a long time for some young people to feel safe enough to disclose CSE:

‘They keep it quietly to themselves until they are feeling safe enough to say more. ... It can take 18 months before someone can say “can I talk to you about x, y and z? Well you know that was me really.”’

(Professional from SECOS)

Young people often feel a massive sense of relief when they are finally able to disclose CSE and receive a positive response:

‘It’s just like someone has grabbed that weight off your shoulders and they’re holding that weight now. ... ‘Cos you feel like one single person to believe something like that, that is really bad and really hard – so when you’ve got someone to talk to who is on your side, that is like there for you no matter what, believing everything you say, who can talk you through it and support you through it – it’s amazing. You couldn’t ask for anything more.’

(Young person supported by SECOS)

Increasing young people’s awareness of CSE

SECOS works constantly with young people on a one-to-one basis and in groups, increasing their awareness of CSE through a range of techniques and resources:

‘We have programmes of work that we can go through with young people when they are ready to hear it [about CSE]: DVDs, online material, hand-outs; all sorts of stuff. And particularly using conversation, like group work, where we might put scenarios like “lets imagine”. ... Whether it is art or music we are using with a young person, we focus on the modern-day things they might need to talk about. If we’re using music, we might ask “what’s the real meaning of the lyrics of that song?” The lyrics might be inciting someone to be harmful to others, and we’ll discuss it with the young person.’

(Professional from SECOS)

Much of SECOS's work to raise young people's awareness of CSE does not focus directly on the young person, but upon highlighting and discussing issues – such as use of social media and sexualisation – that are relevant for young people as they grow up in the world. The words 'sexual exploitation' may not be mentioned in conversation with young people for some time:

'We talk about good and bad relationships: "What do they look like?" "Tell me ten great things about your boyfriend." "Give me ten things that you don't like." ... We talk about consent and what do we really mean about consent?'

(Professional from SECOS)

SECOS recognises that exploring CSE-related issues in a gentle and indirect manner is crucial to raising young people's awareness, as this offers ways in which young people can engage. To help young people with learning disabilities or those who have experienced trauma to increase their awareness of CSE, SECOS considers their cognitive developmental age, rather than their chronological age, and works with resources and conversations aimed at that age group. A young person's cognitive ability can influence the length of time it takes for them to develop awareness of CSE. SECOS recognises that it may be possible to only go 'so far' with some young people who struggle to develop an awareness of CSE, as their ability to think about things differently or realise certain things may be limited and take a long time. However, as one professional puts it:

'So far" might be better that it would have been if no-one had supported the young person to develop some awareness of CSE.'

(Professional from SECOS)

Young people describe how SECOS has increased their understanding of CSE through subtle but effective means:

'You learn so much but you don't actually realise that you're learning it.'

'Instead of someone chucking a bucket of water at you, it's like a little tap that's [turned] slowly on.'

(Young people supported by SECOS)

Supporting young people to identify abusive and exploitative behaviour

Young people's ability to identify abusive and exploitative behaviour is necessary to prevent risk of CSE escalating, and to support recovery from CSE. Work to enable this has to be undertaken over a long period of time. To begin with, SECOS does not directly discuss exploitative and abusive behaviours with young people, as doing so could mean losing the opportunity to work with a young person. Case scenarios may be used with inclusion of the question, 'If you had

a friend in this situation, what would you think?’ Play acting or art, for example, can also be used to ask young people to describe what CSE looks like in general without asking about individual experiences. SECOS carries out a lot of its work with young people in the third person, as this is safe and allows young people to talk about issues and experiences as a start to identifying abusive and exploitative behaviour. Talking about CSE in the third person avoids or reduces possible feelings of shame. Shame is recognised by SECOS as ‘the most horribly damaging feeling’, and one that young people understandably want to avoid at all cost. Third-party work can be used with young people who are friends. In the past, young people who were friends – or who associated with one another at parties and other locations where there was risk of CSE – were often separated for group work to avoid the potential for coercion. However, SECOS’s thinking has shifted to building on existing friendships and working with them:

‘They are actually associating with each other ... so let’s work with that. ... We are doing a lot more joined-up working [with young people who associate with one another] ... and we are looking at trying to help them identify situations together. And look after each other. ... We can empower them to protect each other, and in turn they protect themselves and so they are able to identify their own situations where they are vulnerable and where they might need support.’

(Professional from SECOS)

In this case, something that can hinder protecting a young person from CSE – associating with other young people who are involved in CSE – can be turned around to have a positive impact on that young person’s ability to identify exploitative behaviour.

There are times when SECOS needs to be more direct about a young person’s risk or experience of CSE, but this honesty has to be applied in a gentle manner that isn’t problematic for the young person. This more direct approach can take place after time has been spent developing trust with the young person, and when the young person is ready for a more direct conversation.

SECOS recognises young people as being able to identify abusive and exploitative behaviour when they shift from talking in the third person to talking about themselves and what has happened – or could happen – to them, and what they are going to do. Some young people can take a long time to reach a point where they are able to identify that someone’s behaviour towards them is (or was) abusive and exploitative, while others may never reach this point. There can be a number of reasons for this. For some young people, having to say out loud everything that has happened to them is too frightening, and causes panic because this disclosure will set off a chain of events. Young people also have to consider the consequences for others as well as themselves:

‘It isn’t only “what will identifying abusive and exploitative behaviour mean for me?” It’s also “what will happen to my family? To my worker? Will they feel the same about me?”’

(Professional from SECOS)

Sometimes young people do not want to have to live with the reprisals of disclosing abuse:

‘There are all these cases of child abuse and they’ve lived with it because they thought the repercussions of being exposed were greater in their mind than what’s happening to them.’

(Professional from SECOS)

Control issues may play a part in hindering some young people’s identification of abuse and exploitation:

‘We are talking about children and young people who have been overpowered and controlled through abuse, sometimes for a long time. The only bit of control they may have is “I don’t have to say a word”, and if that control is taken away, they don’t have any control about what happens next.’

(Professional from SECOS)

Building young people’s resilience to CSE

Building resilience is an important preventative measure to reduce vulnerability to CSE, and is also important in ensuring that young people who have already experienced CSE do not suffer re-victimisation. SECOS successfully builds young people’s resilience to CSE through a number of means. As mentioned previously, SECOS works relentlessly to make young people recognise that there are people who care about them. Project workers spend time with young people on a one-to-one basis and, for example, take them to pleasant places, such as a nice cafés or the beach, to reinforce to them that they have the right to pleasant life experiences. SECOS’s work with young people promotes their ability to think and develop understanding in general, helping them to develop self-worth and a sense that they are doing well. As such, SECOS makes a point of explicitly acknowledging that young people are doing well, regardless of the size of step they take. SECOS may, for example, encourage young people to engage in music activities, to perform or to learn a new skill. SECOS ensures their work widens a young person’s circle of opportunity in any possible way, encouraging them to be positive towards these opportunities and towards any other people they may meet along the way. Some young people may require significant amounts of support to engage in activities that build their resilience, and this requires tenacity and constant attention on the part of the SECOS project team.

Supporting recovery from CSE

SECOS's overarching intention and long-term goal is to assist young people to recover from CSE. This is facilitated by SECOS's ability to work with a young person for as long as they require. The theoretical approach to recovery is based upon neuroscience concerning brain development and the impact of trauma and disordered attachment. SECOS builds upon this learning to ensure provision of consistent and continuing support, emphasising that people can be supportive and treat others well.

SECOS recognises that recovery from CSE can be a continuing process that takes different lengths of time for individual young people, and that it may last a lifetime for some. The term 'recovery' can also mean something different for each young person:

'Recovery can be someone who is not in an exploitative relationship at all, or has moved from one exploitative relationship to a lesser one. ... Obviously the ideal is that they are completely clear of exploitation but this won't happen in every case. ... When you start to see their empowerment and self-esteem and their ability to say "no" and taking charge of things – when they do that they are going to be taking charge of their relationships a bit more. The more you see that resilience and self-esteem, and the more they want to do things differently, you know they are on the road to recovery.'

'One young person talked to me about how her body was like a filing cabinet and what had happened was one of the drawers. It would always be part of her but actually it made her who she was. She was okay with the drawer being there – she just didn't want to dip into it. It was part of who she was now, and if it hadn't happened to her, would she be so strong?'

(Professionals from SECOS)

SECOS supports young people to recover from CSE through providing a supportive presence:

'Just by being there, like knowing that they were there if you needed anything.'

(Young person supported by SECOS)

Young people described how the SECOS project team believe in them, and how this facilitates gaining, or regaining, self-belief:

'They all like believe in you, and because they believe in you, you think "well, they believe in me so there must be something to believe in".'

'They let you know that they believe you and they're going to support you. It's empowering.'

(Young people supported by SECOS)

SECOS's belief in young people was also identified by external professionals, who saw it as a factor that aided recovery from CSE:

'They are very young-person-focused; ... they believe in them. ... They give them the chance to open up and talk about what is going on in their lives. They never appear to be shocked and young people see that and respect them for that.'

(Professional from education)

Young people described how difficult it was to express the impact of SECOS's support:

'I can't even put it in words: it's mad. ... It's such a big impact.'

(Young person supported by SECOS)

As young people work with SECOS to address the effects of CSE, they begin to feel better and happier in themselves. This is partly due to being able to talk openly about what has happened to them. There is also a sense of relief after fears that other people would blame them or become lost to them once it became known that they had been sexually exploited:

'Because I don't think I thought I could ever say it out loud [that they had experienced CSE] ... because I thought I'd lose everyone. ... I thought ... "oh my god, this is so horrible, like, I'm losing myself so I'm going to lose all these people around me".'

'I thought that people would just like not believe me and just think "oh, I don't want to be involved with her [the young person] anymore". ... You always have that fear.'

'You hear things as well, like when you're at school, about all these TV programmes where [other young people say about the young person in the television programme] "oh, she must have been asking for it" and then you think "oh, I don't know if I should say anything".'

(Young people supported by SECOS)

Working with SECOS helps young people with depression and anger management issues alongside a whole range of other emotions and experiences. Young people described how, prior to talking with SECOS about their experiences of CSE, their moods were very 'up and down' with conflicting feelings that, at times, they felt unable to cope with:

'I was like seriously depressed and it got to the point where I was thinking about suicide and it was awful. ... I just used to paint this smile on when I was with my friends and family. I couldn't be sad when I was with them because then I'd have to tell them why I was sad and that couldn't happen.'

(Young person supported by SECOS)

Young people also benefit from meeting other young people who have experienced CSE:

‘You get to meet other young people who might have experienced the same as you ... and you know you’re not the only one and that does make you feel better – not that you want other young people to have been sexually exploited.’

(Young person supported by SECOS)

Improving self-esteem is also an important element of a young person’s recovery from CSE:

‘This is about building self-awareness and self-esteem and believing and understanding why we (The SECOS project team) believe in them. Supporting young people to believe and understand that the support is there because they are worthy of recovery in whatever way that manifests.’

(Professional from SECOS)

The recovery process involves giving young people access to wider opportunities, moving them out of an insular network where they can be controlled and where abuse can take place:

‘It’s about supporting young people into wider networks of friends – more trustworthy friendships – education, college, career. ... Getting them into mentoring; asking them what they would like to do.’

(Professional from SECOS)

SECOS also realises it cannot provide every aspect of support that might be necessary for the recovery process, and that it needs to work alongside other agencies:

‘We can say that we will do some things but [for example] what we try to do with the youth service is to ask them what they can do to support work that we do. We can look at the college training centre and other opportunities for training which will lead to a job or career. ... We now have links now with the Princes Trust.

(Professional from SECOS)

Building on Perry’s claim that ‘Children are not resilient, children are malleable’ (Perry, 1997),⁵ and on what young people say about their experiences of CSE, Barnardo’s knows that young people don’t just ‘bounce back’ from CSE, but that these experiences – and others – reshape them in some way. An understanding of this malleability is built into SECOS’s work with young people as it supports their recovery from CSE.

5 Perry B D (1997) ‘Incubated in Terror: Neurodevelopmental Factors in the ‘Cycle of Violence’ in J Osofsky (ed) Children, Youth and Violence: The Search for Solutions New York: Guildford Press.

Meeting the needs of diverse groups of young people

SECOS operates in areas where there are a number of black and minority ethnic communities. SECOS's intention is to respond to any young person who is referred to the service in the best way possible, including adapting practice to meet the diverse needs of individual young people. It also ensures appropriate agencies are engaged where necessary:

'We embrace the opportunity to work with any young person who is at risk of CSE. If it's beyond our own skills, then we will lean on partner agencies who have got that kind of specialism.'

(Professional from SECOS)

External professionals identified that SECOS has a good understanding of the diverse needs of the young people they work with and their communities:

'They seem to recognise and be very well-versed in the diversity of all the young people they work with.'

(Professional from social care)

SECOS also recognises the need for tact and sensitivity when addressing diversity issues, in order to maximise engagement. For example, SECOS is aware of the need to support young people with their sexual identity. To meet this need, a group for young people was established, and was marketed as addressing identity, rather than as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) group. This avoided any potential stigma associated with attending a LGBTQ group.

SECOS's approach to diversity is to move beyond having specific workers for certain communities or young people, and to ensure the whole project team is able to understand diversity.

Working with young people with disabilities

The SECOS project building is accessible to wheelchair users and can meet the needs of young people with physical disabilities. SECOS can provide transport and collect young people where there are any challenges around the young person being able to get to the project base or having any anxieties about coming to the project. The project team are willing and flexible when it comes to meeting the communication needs of young people who are referred to the service. For example, the project received a referral relating to a young person who is deaf, and so SECOS has worked with National Deaf CAHMS to ensure project workers are fully able to meet the needs of this young person. As well as working to upgrade the skills of the SECOS project team, National Deaf CAHMS loans resources and plays a consultancy role as required.

One young person supported by SECOS has a physical disability and an autism spectrum condition (ASC). Both this young person and the professionals who have worked with her described how, with SECOS's support, she has made considerable progress:

In order to feel 'normal', Lucy sought friendships online and was exploited through social media. Other agencies' responses to Lucy focused upon risk assessments of her disabilities and working with her, and Lucy's needs were not met. SECOS helped Lucy to develop networks and friendships, and addressed any issues relating to her disability and ASC as they emerged, while simultaneously enabling her to participate in general activities and group work provided by SECOS. Lucy is now a spokesperson and volunteer mentor for SECOS, and makes a valuable contribution to the support which the service gives to other young people.

The project has a bank of resources that can be used with young people who have learning disabilities. SECOS also works with partner agencies where any specialist support is needed.

Working with young people from black and minority ethnic communities

SECOS has very close links with a partner agency working with black and minority ethnic communities in the local area. SECOS delivers CSE training to black and minority ethnic communities and, through this training, forges links with young people within black and minority ethnic communities. SECOS's outreach work is also directed at black and minority ethnic communities and, as previously mentioned, this outreach work has recently supported Czech Roma young females. The experience of working with the group revealed that it is possible to reach young people often identified by others as 'hard to access' and 'difficult to engage'.

SECOS's experiences of working to support individual young people from black and minority ethnic communities reveals how cultural issues can play a part in the young person's vulnerability to CSE. This can have an impact on SECOS's work to meet young people's needs. The following example provides an illustration:

Ayesha is from the Pakistani community. While her mother was supportive of the work with SECOS, she found it difficult to accept support to address Ayesha's sexual health needs. Ayesha's parents used threats of forced marriage to coerce her into behaving in a way they viewed as acceptable, and plans were made to marry Ayesha once she reached 16. Ayesha's grandfather favoured Ayesha continuing her studies, rather than leaving education and getting married. SECOS recognised that this support was a key factor in ensuring that Ayesha remained in education and was not married at a young age. SECOS therefore worked with the wider family to achieve this.

Work with boys and young men

SECOS's work with boys and young men who experience, or are at risk of, CSE has recently been extended through its partnership in Operation Stay Safe. SECOS works closely with police and housing services in relation to this, and targets local business communities to raise their awareness of the sexual exploitation of boys and young men. SECOS has also started to look at attitudes and behaviours of young males who could potentially be peer exploiters. SECOS works with a professional from another agency who has delivered work in the Balkans focusing upon machoism, homophobia, sexism and young males' attitudes to sexual relationships in general. The service is in the process of setting up a group for boys and young men to explore masculinity, sexuality, and boys and young men's part in sexual relationships and sexual exploitation. SECOS sees it as important to work with boys and young men from different black and minority ethnic communities. The work with the group of Czech Roma young women also drew out the need to work with boys and young men from this community, and SECOS has been considering how to establish group work to meet their needs.

Supporting young people who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour

Some of SECOS's service users exhibit sexually harmful behaviour, and have been groomed to introduce other young people to perpetrators of CSE. This process of becoming an 'introducer' can take place because of the trauma bond between young people and perpetrators of CSE, which allows perpetrators to manipulate young people into facilitating sexual exploitation. SECOS is recognised by external professionals as having an in-depth understanding of young people who have been victims of CSE and display inappropriate sexual behaviours, and as 'standing their ground' in the local area to ensure this group of young people are supported, advocating for a welfare approach rather than a criminal justice response. SECOS refers young people who exhibit sexually harmful behaviours to Barnardo's Bridgeway Service, which specialises in dealing with sexually harmful behaviours.

Provision of advocacy for young people who experience CSE

SECOS's advocacy work relies heavily on Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC),⁶ stemming from the principle that young people should have a voice about anything that is going to impact upon them, and that their views should be sought:

'They either have support in doing that where we voice their views for them, or we enable them to voice their views. ... It's not about colluding with young people but it's about making sure they are listened to and they are given some element of control over what happens.'

(Professional from SECOS)

The SECOS management team supports and empowers the staff team, both to understand SECOS's principle of a young person's right to advocacy, and to be assertive so that they can be effective in their advocacy work. One way in which members of the staff team are empowered is by ensuring that they know the relevant legislation, allowing them to respond appropriately and with confidence to any challenges to a course of action they are advocating for.

It is very important that SECOS is seen by young people to be representing their views and needs and generally being supportive of them. SECOS's advocacy role helps to build relationships based on trust:

'The child needs to see you are willing to stick up for them and say "No I don't agree". If we want them [young people] to see these relationships with us as trusting, then the child has to see that you're on their side.'

(Professional from SECOS)

Young people benefit from SECOS's advocacy work in a number of ways. The example below outlines how SECOS provided advocacy for a young person who had not been given the opportunity to share her views in a child protection meeting:

Chloe was placed in a secure unit in another part of the country. She was aware that a child protection meeting was taking place and that her social worker had not asked for her views. Chloe managed to phone a SECOS worker, who rang the office where the meeting was taking place. The SECOS worker spoke to the chair of the child protection meeting, explaining that Chloe had asked to have her voice heard in the meeting and that it was imperative that this happened. A telephone call was made from the meeting and Chloe was able to share her views.

6 In summary, Article 3 states that 'The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all things that affect children'. Article 12 states that 'Every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously'.

www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf accessed 10 April 2015.

One young person particularly appreciated the advocacy role that SECOS played through their links with members of staff at her school. SECOS informed a member of staff of the difficulties that the young person was experiencing, and this meant that the young person was able to have some time out of lessons. The young person found it very helpful that the communication about her situation was between her SECOS project worker and the school staff member:

‘Because then I didn’t have to explain it. ... You know the teacher knows and you didn’t have to tell them so that was alright.’

(Young person supported by SECOS)

The Independent Sexual Violence Advocates (ISVA) service is specifically for young people who have reported a sexual violence crime to the police. ISVA workers support young people throughout the criminal justice process, and their advocacy work is an important element of their role, particularly in reminding criminal justice professionals that the young person is a victim of sexual abuse:

‘Many of our young people tell us that the process [of going through the criminal justice system] is more traumatic than the incident [of CSE] itself. So, as advocates, it’s our job to make sure that the professionals within that system remember that the young person is a victim and that they need to be treated with care and listened to.’

(Professional from SECOS)

Improving relationships between young people and parents and carers

Improving relationships between young people and their parents and carers is a vital element of work to support young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE, and is paramount in reducing young people’s vulnerability to CSE. External professionals described how SECOS is particularly adept at achieving this:

‘SECOS are the specialists at not only working to address CSE but in working with children and their families, and they have that ability to enhance their relationships.’

(Professional from social care)

Young people recounted how, at the time when they were being sexually exploited, they were very distant from adults, including parents, and how they struggled with these relationships:

‘I just didn’t want to be around people, and I would bottle it up and I wouldn’t talk to anyone; I would just keep all my feelings inside and then I’d run away and stuff like that just to get out of the house and be alone. But it was hard

because what I was going through at that time, it was hard for me to have people around.’

(Young person supported by SECOS)

Due to resource constraints, SECOS does not have a dedicated parent worker. To avoid young people perceiving that the project team are colluding with parents/carers, the service has to consider carefully how they can advocate for the young person and also work with parents/carers. It is important to keep young people fully informed, so they are clear about what work will be carried out on a one-to-one basis and what will take place with the wider family. SECOS’s work with young people now automatically assumes the need to include work with parents and carers unless assessment reveals this is not the case. To maintain the balance between working with both young people and their parents/carers, CSE project workers are ‘doubling up’ so that one worker provides direct support to the young person and a second worker provides direct support to parents and carers.

Work with parents and the wider family helps SECOS to assess young people. Project workers are able to understand the family histories, and this, in turn, means they can respond more effectively to the young people:

‘It just gives us a good assessment of the additional problems that the child may have to face if their home life isn’t okay or an additional assessment that the home life is reasonably stable. ... The whole assessment of the family and the “script”, if you like, of that family can help us better. ... For instance, if a youngster has lost her father at six or seven years old through divorce or bereavement ... there is a deficit there for that child about a relationship of loss. And if we understand that we can maybe understand some of the dynamics of their [the young person’s] attachment.’

(Professional from SECOS)

Work with families through both the Families and Communities Against Sexual Exploitation (FCASE) project⁷ and SECOS’s general work to meet young people’s needs has revealed that some families have experienced extensive historical damage. Often family experiences, dynamics and issues that have hindered positive relationships between the young person and the wider family start to emerge, enabling SECOS to fully understand why a young person does not feel that s/he has strong relationships at home, and why they experience, or are at risk of, CSE. Through the FCASE work, some parents/carers recognise that some of their own experiences have played a part in why they have not acknowledged or addressed what has happened to their children. While this self-awareness may not stop their child from being sexually exploited,

⁷ Barnardo’s FCASE project was funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and launched in April 2013. The project was funded for two years and ended in March 2015. FCASE was piloted in three sites: Birmingham, Hampshire and Middlesbrough. The model included: a structured six-week programme of direct work with young people and families where risk of CSE had been identified; delivery of CSE training to professionals; and community awareness-raising.

development of self-awareness still has a positive impact, as parents recognise that something has happened to them in the past that they have not dealt with but which has an impact upon their relationship with their child. This is often played out in the parent being angry with their child. As a result of this recognition, some parents and carers have independently received counselling or therapy to address previously unmet needs.

When support for a young person involves collecting them from home, bringing them to the project base, delivering a session and then returning the young person to a chaotic home environment where there is no understanding of CSE, the young person remains vulnerable. In these and other circumstances, work needs to take place with both the young person and their parents and carers.

It is sometimes necessary to improve parents' and carers' understanding of CSE, and to help them recognise that their child has been groomed to be a victim of CSE. The SECOS project team has identified how parental attitudes towards grooming and CSE can block them from viewing their child as a victim, which the FCASE project has been able to address through assessing the family's understanding of CSE, its impact upon the young person, and the family's capacity to protect them. The FCASE work has provided SECOS staff members with the opportunity to consider how they work with parents and carers who are not supportive of the messages that they are giving young people. While SECOS has always been aware of the integral importance of having parents' and carers' 'buy-in' to the work it carries out with young people, the FCASE work has provided the opening for this to be put into practice:

'So now what we do is at the initial home visit we talk openly with the parent and the young person about the work plan, about addressing the need for the building of support ... looking at what sessions we can do jointly with the young person and parent and what things need to happen separately because of the direction we are going to take'.

(Professional from SECOS)

Work with parents and carers can only take place once there is a safety net around the young person. Once again, the lack of time restrictions imposed upon SECOS's work means it can take the necessary time to make sure the young person is protected:

'The benefit of SECOS's work is that we are not restricted by time, and in that time building the relationship with the young person we can spend the time looking at the relationship between the parent and the young person. There is no point us doing any work with either of them if they are at loggerheads. What we want to happen is for the parent to continue our work (of) putting in safety measures, looking at reducing risk, and empowering the parent and the young person to work together.'

(Professional from SECOS)

SECOS has a trained mediator in the project team. This role supports work to strengthen relationships between young people and parents and carers:

‘She (the trained mediator) does the assessment work and if she thinks there is obviously conflict between the parent and young person that will prevent engagement from both or that will hinder joint work we put mediation in and look at how to mend the relationship between parent and young person before we look at diving in and doing the focused work.’

(Professional from SECOS)

Intentional positive modelling of family life to support relationships with others

To help enhance young people’s relationships with others, SECOS intentionally provides positive models of family life for young people:

‘That’s why we’ve done things where we have a family environment in the project – family space – we do things around food and nurture.’

(Professional from SECOS)

This is recognised by young people, who described how SECOS is not like other services they have been involved with but is ‘like a family’. The manner in which SECOS consistently supports young people also has positive consequences for relationships with their families:

‘Like everything we say in SECOS, it’s like supported. They never say “oh, that’s a bad idea”. ...They guide you through it. You never get judged and that and I think that, as a child, people would always think “she’s just a child; she doesn’t have good ideas and that” but ... it’s helped me with my parents as well because I can say to them, you know like, if I’m not happy with something or “I don’t really like it when this happens”.’

(Young person supported by SECOS)

Ensuring stable and secure accommodation

SECOS’s CSE service’s work to ensure stable and secure accommodation is supported by working closely with its Missing from Home service, as this plays an important role in identifying when a young person is living in unstable or insecure accommodation. One response available for young people who live at home is SECOS’s mediation service, which works to address any issues that cause instability or problems with the young person’s accommodation.

SECOS has its own accommodation in the Daniel Court complex, consisting of seven flats plus an additional two flats in the local area. SECOS’s accommodation is suitable for young people aged 16 and above who cannot remain in their own accommodation and are assessed as being able to cope

with independent living. SECOS employs a dedicated accommodation worker and an outreach worker, both of whom visit young people a couple of times a week. Young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE are provided with a lot of support at the point when they first enter the accommodation and, through developing stability, form a supportive network of young people. Additional benefits for young people housed in SECOS's accommodation are linked to developing or improving self-esteem and, through being nurtured by others, learning to self-care. The following example reveals how SECOS's CSE service and Missing from Home service work together to meet young people's needs and provide solutions:

After being referred to SECOS's Missing from Home service, CSE concerns were identified and Abi was referred to SECOS's CSE service. Abi's relationship with her mother had broken down and she was staying with different friends, sofa-surfing. When she was aged 16, Abi was offered accommodation in the Daniel Court complex. She took pride and joy in caring for her accommodation, re-engaged with college, and her relationship with her mother slowly started to improve. Abi's risk significantly reduced as she ceased associating with risky adults. After a year of living in the Daniel Court complex, Abi's relationship with her mother had improved to the extent that she was able to return home.

Positive outcomes for young people staying in SECOS's accommodation are more likely when those young people have wider support networks and groups. When young people who stay in SECOS's accommodation do not have wide support networks and do not receive support from family or friends, their only support is from their accommodation worker and SECOS's CSE service. In these circumstances, SECOS generates opportunities to build friendships with other young people in SECOS's accommodation.

SECOS also works with partner agencies including social care, the police and 'O-19' to ensure safe and secure accommodation for young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE. When a young person is aged below 16 and has accommodation needs, SECOS works with social care and housing to ensure these needs are met. In some circumstances, SECOS has to consider the wider locality and perpetrators' access to young people in the local area. SECOS may take on an advocacy role, seeking to address accommodation issues on behalf of young people or their families.

Other activities SECOS undertakes to ensure safe and secure accommodation include working with Depaul UK⁸ to provide temporary accommodation for young people under the age of 16, and campaigning in the local area to prevent young people from being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. While SECOS advocates against placing young people in bed and breakfasts,

⁸ Depaul UK helps young people who are homeless, vulnerable and disadvantaged, and works with local communities towards the prevention of youth homelessness.

sometimes it has to be pragmatic, and consequently it also works with one local authority to identify bed and breakfast accommodation that is safe for young people. SECOS also works with young people who are in private accommodation, and has been working with private landlords to ensure safety and security. It has established a positive landlord scheme for accommodating vulnerable people.

Reducing episodes of young people going missing from home or care

Addressing the issue of young people who go missing from home has been a key part of SECOS's work against sexual exploitation. The fundamental need to address going missing is constantly reinforced by messages from the police and young people themselves, as well as by a national research study addressing the relationships between running away and CSE.⁹ SECOS's work to reduce episodes of going missing from home or care¹⁰ with young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE is supported by SECOS's Missing from Home service. This service works with young people who go missing from home and care, provides return home interviews (RHIs) that are crucial to identifying issues and risks, and ensures young people's needs are addressed to reduce incidences of going missing. SECOS's partnership work with the police and social care are seen as critical to reduce episodes of young people going missing from home or care. To break patterns of young people going missing to be with the perpetrators of CSE, SECOS has worked in partnership with the police and social care to use a range of disruption tactics:

'So it's working alongside police and social care and using disruption tactics which include SECOS offering the young person alternatives through the relationship they have with the young person, providing the young person with attention, and the provision of other activities which young people can engage in.'

(Professional from SECOS)

SECOS has had a very positive experience of working with individual police officers in the Public Protection Unit (PPU). This has benefited SECOS's work to support young people, as the police can help SECOS to gain access to a young person:

'If we are concerned about a missing young person the police will come with us, if necessary, and get us through the door.'

(Professional from SECOS)

9 Smeaton E (2013) Running from hate to what you think is love: the relationship between running away and CSE Barkingside: Barnardo's.

10 During the latter stage of the evaluation, an agreement was made with '0 – 19' that, due to the increase of their understanding of young people who go missing – developed through their partnership work with SECOS – they will carry out the general return home interviews, while SECOS will focus upon providing return home interviews to looked-after young people and for other young people identified as high risk.

The SECOS team identified how outreach work often results in contact with young people who are reported as missing to the police. Many of these young people are vulnerable to CSE through going missing, and though at the point of contact with the outreach service they are often not being sexually exploited, they are still at risk of being so. Identifying these young people provides the opportunity to carry out preventative work and reduce the risk of escalation to CSE.

External professionals who work closely with SECOS to reduce episodes of young people going missing from home or care value the impact of SECOS's work:

'We've seen a reduction in the numbers of missing from home and care over the years SECOS has been doing this work. Their work on the return home interviews is invaluable and plays an important role in reducing police time.'

(Professional from the police)

Going missing is a coping strategy for some young people who experience CSE. Young people described how SECOS supports them to recognise that there are alternatives to running away to deal with the impact of CSE, and how it helps them to develop alternative coping strategies:

'Like how to cope with it [the impact of CSE] more 'cos I thought "ah right, if something like bad happens to me, if I'm running away, I'm like running away from the problem" ... so it's recognising that, actually, if you stayed, then you can talk it through; you don't have to run away to deal with something.'

(Young person supported by SECOS)

SECOS is aware that many young people who go missing are not reported as missing to the police by parents or carers. In addition, some young people who go missing are not known to services, and do not receive support to address the reasons behind their behaviour. SECOS is able to identify young people who have not been reported as missing to the police through its outreach work. The Operation Stay Safe outreach, for example, has identified a number of young people who are missing but have not been reported as missing to the police. When SECOS is working with a young person and finds out from a source other than the police that the young person did not return home, SECOS will feed that information to the police who, in turn, will feed that information to the VEMT group.

Reducing association with risky peers and adults

SECOS effectively reduces young people's association with risky peers and adults, through providing substitutes for young people both in the form of people to spend time with and alternative activities to engage in. Knowing that young people associating with risky peers or adults are often looking for love and attention, SECOS shows and models these things in its everyday business, allowing young people to experience love and attention that is not exploitative and can be a positive force in their lives. SECOS provides alternative networks where positive behaviour is explicitly and implicitly modelled to young people. SECOS also provides group activities and/or education and training opportunities as alternatives for how young people spend their time.

SECOS works with other professionals, encouraging them to understand and respond positively to young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE so that young people can engage with them and feel comfortable spending time with professional networks.

A further strand of SECOS's work to reduce association with risky people is its support for disruption activities through providing information and working with other agencies:

'For instance, if we know that the pizza shop is a front for exploitation, we can work [with other agencies] so it closes down. This will only work temporarily but it's a bit of disruption. More importantly [its absence] will give young people other activities and things to do.'

(Professional from SECOS)

Reducing substance use, or ensuring safer consumption of substances

Due to the links between CSE and substance use, reducing a young person's use of substances and/or supporting young people to use substances in a safer manner is an important part of addressing CSE. SECOS's work focuses upon both illegal and legal substances. The theory underpinning SECOS's work to address young people's substance misuse is recognising that a craving for excitement is part of adolescent development. This is why young people sometimes find themselves in situations that may appear exciting but are also dangerous, and it reinforces the need to provide young people with excitement and thrill-seeking that is positive and safe.

The SECOS project team is trained to work with young people to address low-level drug and alcohol concerns. SECOS works in partnership with a specialist substance use service for specialist support when there are higher levels of concern about a young person's substance use. SECOS also consults with this specialist service when delivering team training, and the partner service delivers group work sessions to young people at the SECOS project base.

Approaches to addressing the substance use of young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE have to attend to why young people use substances. Some young people use substances to cope with CSE through self-medication, and this can progress to more problematic use. To address this, SECOS project team members broaden their conversations with young people to help them understand the reasons behind their substance use, the side effects, and the long-term impact. This is done in a way that informs young people about the choices available to them. Where possible, this work is undertaken by posing questions to young people so that they can come up with the answers themselves.

Activities are viewed as an important way of diverting young people's thoughts away from their substance use. SECOS has made effective use of residential visits, as the structure (three meals a day, and activities from morning to night) and provision of activities that are exciting and fun are thought to be particularly effective in addressing substance use. Young people enjoy and benefit from the work that takes place with SECOS in residential settings:

'You get to know the other young people you are with better and get to know the staff more. ... You feel even closer to them and that helps with your work 'cos you trust them more.'

'You do things you've never done before – or thought you would do. ... It gives you confidence and makes you realise you can be okay when you're away from home and where you usually live.'

(Young people supported by SECOS)

Other elements of SECOS's work to reduce or ensure safer substance use include increasing young people's self-esteem through introducing positive coping strategies to reduce risk. The following provides an example of how SECOS's work to address substances use is intertwined with other work:

Janie's alcohol consumption in general, and the risks she faced when attending parties, caused significant concern. Janie's project worker undertook extensive work with Janie, focusing upon increasing her self-esteem. As her self-esteem increased, Janie reduced her use of alcohol.

Janie's parents were setting unrealistic boundaries and expectations, and the SECOS project worker addressed this with Janie's parents. Through negotiation that took place via mediation, Janie's parents shifted their boundaries and became generally more relaxed with her. Janie and her parents also became more open with one another. Their relationship improved and Janie felt settled and was able to attend college.

With support from her SECOS project worker, Janie has developed new coping strategies that work well, and she has significantly reduced her reliance upon alcohol.

Feedback from the SECOS project team, young people and external professionals reveals that SECOS's group work sessions and one-to-one work with young people to address substance use have resulted in young people:

- becoming confident to openly discuss substance use
- being informed about the effects of substances
- obtaining the opportunity to consider substance use as a coping mechanism, and considering alternative coping mechanisms
- recognising that some people give young people substances so they can exploit them
- becoming informed about the specialist service working to address substance use, meeting the service team and learning how they can access the service.

Improving knowledge of sexual health strategies

SECOS's project team is able to talk meaningfully with young people about sexual health and sexual activity, and finds alternative means to communicate with young people when they do not want to talk directly about sexual health and sexual activity. Young people's knowledge of sexual health strategies has improved through both explicit discussions with the SECOS project team and other more implicit means:

'I think you just pick things up along the way [as the young person continues their work with SECOS]. And they do like sexual health stuff with you as well and it's just so interesting.'

'You don't have to speak [about sexual health] but you can still learn about it; it's really good.'

(Young people supported by SECOS)

SECOS's work to improve young people's knowledge of sexual health strategies fosters a confidence in young people so that they are able to discuss sexual health with family members and other adults. Young people who have developed options to protect their sexual health feel more confident about keeping themselves safe sexually, and have developed expectations that others they are considering having sex with accept safe sex practices:

'I wouldn't dare let anyone talk me out of it [keeping the young person sexually safe]!'

(Young person supported by SECOS)

To improve young people's sexual health strategies, SECOS works in partnership with a provider of sexual health services in the local area. Since 2002, a named sexual health worker has attended SECOS's project base to deliver group work with young people. The long-standing relationship with the sexual

health professional, and her ability to work with young people, are valued as contributing to improving young people's knowledge of sexual health strategies and encouraging them to access the sexual health clinic. After meeting a young person at the project base or the sexual health clinic, the sexual health worker will ensure that their details are entered on the sexual health agency system, and it will be flagged to this professional if the young person accesses sexual health in Teesside. In this way, there is a trail relating to the young person's sexual health, and the ability to ensure they are receiving support in the present and for the future. When appropriate, SECOS takes young people to the sexual health clinic, and encourages their attendance, meaning that they become aware of the clinic and the services it provides, and feel safe attending.

SECOS produces resource packs that help professionals to improve young people's knowledge of sexual health strategies. These resource packs include information on working with young people who are not able to say no to sex and/or able to give consent, and they direct professionals to consider what this might be like for young people without asking young people directly about their experiences:

'When young people are in an exploitative situation and people say "you haven't used a condom", I don't think they have really much choice they can make about that. And when we talk about improving strategies we might be talking about what's available [to young people] and what they can do but actually if there is no consent or no ability to consent, and someone doesn't want them to have a sexual health strategy as it were, it's very difficult.'

(Professional from SECOS)

SECOS recognises that it is not enough to give a young person a range of sexual health strategies – the tools to keep sexually safe – but that work has to be done to ensure that a young person has the ability to use the strategies. This raises issues around young people's capacity to consent to sexual activity. Some young people, for a variety of reasons, are not be able to say no to sex, and therefore it is important, when working to improve young people's sexual health strategies, to take into account what young people can and cannot do, what options are available to them, and how SECOS can support young people who have very little choice in the first place. SECOS also acknowledges the importance of ensuring that work to address sexual health strategies does not unintentionally result in those young people who don't have an option to consent to sexual activity or practice that is good for their sexual health feeling worse about themselves and their situation. These young people should be provided with options to discuss sexual health issues and strategies in the third person, without having to say what has happened to them.

Supporting satisfactory attendance at school or college

SECOS undertakes a range of work to ensure young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE have satisfactory school or college attendance. In addition to this, SECOS helps young people who have been excluded to get back into school or a pupil referral unit (PRU), and offers support when young people have to change schools. SECOS's work to ensure satisfactory attendance at school or college includes the following:

- improving awareness of CSE by providing training to education-based professionals
- ensuring schools and colleges are more informed to link episodes of going missing from school to CSE, and empowering them to make referrals to the service
- advocating on behalf of young people to improve relationships between young people and the school or college, and to increase understanding of the young person's vulnerability
- supporting the educational institution to develop realistic expectations young people who experience, or are at risk of, CSE
- attending school meetings
- negotiating course work extensions and timetables.

SECOS also has well-established links with training and education providers, and can arrange for young people to attend a 12-week education course, have apprenticeships, and attend college courses to widen their skills, scope, opportunities, activities and access to positive role models.

Ensuring young people remain in contact with SECOS

The vast majority of young people who are referred to SECOS remain in contact with the service on a regular basis. External professionals described how SECOS is very good at ensuring young people keep in touch with the service:

'There was one young person we referred and she hadn't engaged with anybody. I know it took SECOS some time but they did get her to engage with them and she stayed working with them for a long time.'

(Professional from education)

In supporting young people to remain in contact with the service, SECOS is consistent and persistent, while simultaneously working with young people on their own terms. SECOS is able to do this because it can work in a flexible manner that allows time for the young people to engage, as the following example reveals:

SECOS received a referral relating to Ella who was identified as being at high risk of CSE. Ella was reluctant to engage but SECOS was able to invest in a lengthy timescale to build a relationship with her. At first Ella refused to come out of her bedroom when her project worker came to the family home to visit her. Ella was told, as all young people are, that SECOS was not going to give up on her, and that the project worker would return at the same time every week. Eventually Ella left her bedroom and sat on the stairs when the project worker came to see her, but she still would not engage with the worker. One day, she left the stairs and came into the room where the project worker was. More time passed before Ella agreed to leave her home with the project worker. It took nine months from the first attempt to make direct contact with Ella for her to come to SECOS's project base.

Ella has remained in contact with SECOS, and project workers have helped her to reduce her risk. She was placed in foster care and has a good relationship with her foster carers, who worked collaboratively with SECOS to reinforce boundaries and other work that SECOS carried out. After two years of receiving one-to-one support, Ella is still in touch with SECOS and still comes to the project base of her own accord to attend group sessions.

SECOS continually reinforces to young people that they are there for them, and will do everything they can to facilitate the young person remaining in contact with the service. SECOS also reassures young people that they are welcome to make contact with the service at any point – even if it is agreed that the young person will exit the service at the present time:

‘With a small number of young people, we realise that now is not the time to work with the young person and that the young person is not ready to address their risk of CSE, but will let them know that they can come back to us at any time.’

(Professional from SECOS)

As a young person's risk reduces or ceases, SECOS may no longer need to work intensively with the young person as, for example, they may have become engaged in other activities or a life free from CSE. In such circumstances, SECOS starts to reduce the time spent with the young person, moving from weekly support to fortnightly, to monthly, and then to seeing the young person once every six weeks. SECOS may get to the point where it only sees some young people twice a year, but it ensures that young people know they can retain their attachment to SECOS for as long as they want to. SECOS still retains contact with some young people who they may only see twice a year through, for example, buying the young person a Christmas present. In this way, SECOS lets young people know that SECOS thinks and cares about them, and that SECOS is available if the young person needs them. There are some young people who remain in contact with SECOS for years and continue to visit the project despite having ceased to need help addressing CSE.



Be aware

1

2

3

Support for
victims of
domestic
violence
www.barnardos.org.uk

3

Concluding comments



Concluding comments

SECOS's practice to meet the needs of young people who experience, or are at risk of, child sexual exploitation (CSE), incorporates a wide range of responses that are effective in tackling CSE. At the heart of SECOS's practice and effectiveness is its ability to build relationships based upon trust, and to maintain relationships with young people, their families and external professionals. The SECOS project workers are able to work in a consistent, flexible and tenacious manner, meaning they can build and retain relationships even when young people do not express a willingness to engage. SECOS's focus upon reflective practice also helps the CSE service to constantly reappraise what it does, to adapt to changing needs and circumstances, and to ensure the continuation of service delivery and sustainability.

Going the Extra Mile:
Learning from SECOS's
child sexual exploitation
service

© Barnardo's, 2016
All rights reserved

No part of this report, including
images, may be reproduced or
stored on an authorised retrieval
system, or transmitted in any form
or by any means, without prior
permission of the publisher.

All images are posed by models.

The author of this report is
Emilie Smeaton.

www.barnardos.org.uk

Head Office, Tanners Lane,
Barkingside, Ilford,
Essex IG6 1QG

Tel: 020 8550 8822

Barnardo's Registered Charity Nos.
216250 and SC037605 17561b16



Paradigm Research
Social Research, Evaluation and Consultation