

CYPM19 St Giles

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Plant a phobl ifanc sydd ar yr ymylon | Children and Young People on the margins

Ymateb gan St Giles | Evidence from St Giles

Please set out any views on missing children below.

You may wish to consider:

- **Nature and scale of the issue and regional variations.**
- **At risk groups: including the impact of care experience and out of area placements.**
- **Practice: issues such as information sharing and data collection.**
- **Policy: the effectiveness of devolved policy and practice responses, including Welsh Government oversight. Whether there is effective read across to relevant Welsh Government strategies.**
- **Devolved and UK powers: how joined up is the interface between devolved and non-devolved policy such as criminal and youth justice.**

St Giles has 5 projects across South Wales and Gwent that currently support young people and their families.

Through CLIC, our county lines project, we are supporting young people from Cardiff and the vale who are being exploited to supply drugs by county lines gangs. The project also assists with young people from out area to be safely returned home. An example of this is London young people being returned home using our St Giles Rescue service. The service is based out of the Cardiff Bay police station, and support is offered from the point of arrest and aims to support young people to safely exit county lines.

We run a Serious Organised Crime project across Gwent. Gwent includes significant rural areas with different trends identified across the three local authorities. As part of this project school facilitation sessions are offered to all secondary schools, co-delivered alongside Crimestoppers through their Fearless campaign. These sessions are county lines and Knife crime awareness. Referrals come from Operation quartz and social services.

We run an Aspiring champions project in Cardiff, supporting young people aged 18-25 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and have been involved with the criminal justice system. We help them with accommodation, employment, and support around exploitation. Referrals come from Police and probation.

We also work with children and families, providing holistic support for families across Cardiff and Vale and Swansea. St Giles identified that families are often the forgotten victims when a child is exploited, support is around exploitation and missing children but also offers support with housing, benefits and employment. Part of the project supports a Cardiff Secondary school (Fitzalan) where young people can be referred around concerns involving exploitation and missing episodes.

All projects work with a multi agency approach, St Giles Caseworkers will attend exploitation meetings with statutory agencies.

In our experience there is significant crossover between missing children and children who are subjected to exploitation, including financial, sexual and criminal exploitation.

The projects support both statutory agencies and the third sector. St Giles attend meetings that will raise missing episodes for children, Operation Quartz Gwent refer into the Gwent project when a child is identified as high risk of exploitation and missing episodes. St Giles is experienced with identifying trends of missing children across areas, our expertise is often called upon with children identified with missing episodes and county lines.

One complicating factor that affects the accuracy of data on the number of children reported missing is that, in our experience, looked after children are more often immediately reporting missing when they go missing compared with children who are not in care where there might be often significant delay before they are reported missing.

We have also noted that in the earlier days of county lines work (2012 to 2017) there was a strong correlation between vulnerable children who were reported missing and county lines activity. This has reduced as exploiters have realised that a child who is reported missing is more likely to be looked for and more likely to be apprehended- therefore creating risk for their operation. Their response has been to groom local children and young people in import areas, as they can carry out the jobs required without being reported missing. For agencies this is important- earlier training on county lines emphasised the link with being Missing, so if training hasn't been repeated/ updated it can leave some professionals looking in the wrong direction for evidence of county lines type exploitation.

Children who are homeless and/or in temporary accommodation are, in our experience, particularly likely to be exposed to the risk of exploitation and to be groomed by gangs. This exploitation often leads to those children

Please set out any views on children and young people who are victims of criminal exploitation below.

You may wish to consider:

- **Nature and scale across Wales and regional variations (e.g. traditional, drug related, sexual, financial).**
- **At risk groups: including care experience, children experiencing trauma in the home and children not enrolled in mainstream education.**
- **Policy: The effectiveness of devolved policy including Welsh Government oversight. Whether there effective read across to relevant WG strategies such as Child Sexual Exploitation.**
- **Practice: Approaches to prevention, community resilience, early intervention, support provided and exit strategies for victims. Practice issues such as information sharing and data collection.**
- **Devolved and UK powers: How joined up is the interface between devolved and non-devolved policy such as criminal and youth justice? Are there any points of tension between criminal law and safeguarding?**

Across our projects we see significant regional variation in both the volume and type of criminal exploitation children experience.

In Cardiff we identify more county lines involving children and young people, outside gangs often travel to Cardiff and locally recruit young people. We see the same with Swansea.

In Gwent, Newport has a higher number of children being exploited by family members, often generational exploitation. In Monmouth/ Torfaen, Children have been identified travelling to West Wales areas to supply drugs, we also supported multiple young people that were recruited during Covid lockdowns when a young person from Ipswich was moved into the area.

Swansea has a higher number of children and young people that have been moved into the area and are looked after children in Care, the children will often recruit and befriend local children.

Many areas that we support children in are deprived with high rates of unemployment and poverty. St Giles has raised concerns around children selling vapes in school settings to support their families with the cost-of-living crisis.

St Giles supports schools/colleges with facilitated sessions to increase awareness of county lines/knife crime/girls empowerment. These sessions are aimed at year 7 above.

Lived experience and cultural competency are used to support children and young people who are at risk of or are being exploited.

Recommendations:

There needs to be more training for professionals (police, social workers, teachers, etc.) in spotting the signs of child criminal exploitation and how to support and refer to appropriate services children who they think might be at risk of exploitation or being exploited. It is also important that training is refreshed and updated to reflect the evolving models of exploitation.

A multi-exploitation approach should be taken that recognises the connection between criminal and sexual exploitation of children.

When professionals working in county lines, sexual exploitation, extremism and other areas where the young and vulnerable are groomed exploited the observation is that a common set of deprivation indicators can make it more likely a person can be groomed- that those indicators are common across all forms of exploitation- for example, the ACEs identified in a victim of sexual exploitation can be very similar to those identified in a victim of criminal exploitation, though the outcomes differ.

Many of those we support around criminal exploitation are also victims of sexual exploitation- almost all the females and a high proportion of the males, but as an organisation we aren't best placed to support with these issues. To address this we are seeking support for a multi-exploitation approach that would involve teams with staff with a different range of expertise, ensuring that these issues can all be well addressed. We are also developing supportive partnerships with specialist agencies so that appropriate advice and support is available to our caseworkers.

Please set out any views on other groups of children on the margins.

You may wish to identify other groups of children “on the margins”. These would be groups of children in circumstances that require a specific response from children’s services or other statutory providers and for which there are concerns about the current policy or practice.

Engaging the ‘hard to reach’

We would recommend that projects are supported in smaller, more isolated, often BAME (but not always), communities where statutory agencies struggle to engage and support those experiencing exploitation.

Our approach is to train and develop people from those communities to become ‘community champions’ – people who better understand how the statutory support systems work and can help their peers navigate these systems. For example, the parents of an exploited child may be reluctant to involve the authorities, fearing that their approach will be judgmental and punitive, but if they were supported by

someone from their own community they may be willing to approach e.g. Children's Services with their concerns.

We have a local example of this approach working with a Somali led youth organisation in Grangetown.

If you have anything else you wish to share with us, please do so below.

There are services that work well in supporting young people who are at risk of, or already subjected to, sexual, criminal or financial exploitation. These services can be well placed to identify risks of, and prevent instances of, children going missing. However, funding constraints mean those projects are not always able to meet the needs of the number of young people who would benefit from that support.

Similarly, funding processes are not set up to support success. Funding is often awarded for only 1 year which severely limits how effective projects are, given the length of time required for finding and training caseworkers, and how long it takes to build trusting relationships with young people. 1 year funding also causes retention issues as caseworkers often leave projects if they know funding may be coming to an end.

We recommend that funding periods should wherever possible be changed to a minimum of three years, and that projects that can demonstrate significant impact should be considered for automatic funding extensions, rather than being required to re-apply.

Funding Imbalance:

We believe it is important to note that much of the funding for support around county lines has gone to the export areas (London, Birmingham, etc.) and hasn't come to import areas where many of the impacts are felt. There is a need to support work in smaller towns and villages where the impacts of county lines are felt. It's unlikely that the same approaches used in the large city based projects will be appropriate, not least due to lower population density and rurality. It may be that a multi-exploitation approach would be more appropriate in such areas, as it would have the range of skills need to respond to different types of exploitation, there may also be a greater need for mobility (services based in vans rather than offices) and greater use of digital support, including giving people tech and internet access if needed.