

L is 14 year old boy he lives at home with his mum and younger brother and 2 sisters and things have been difficult for a long time. There has been a long history of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in his life. L's dad is a well-known drug user and is serving a 5 year sentence for drug offences. The family has an allocated social worker and L is identified as a child in need.

L started staying out late at night and was reported missing by his mum. He was found by police in the street on a number of occasions, and police protection notices (PPNs) were submitted for him. L then started to skip school and would hang around during the day and evenings.

L links up with a group of older boys, and starts to spend more and more time with them. This group are linked to a network known for moving drugs across the estate and wider and now they get L involved. At their instigation, he starts to commit crime. In return, L gets a few gifts and money, which he has not had before. This draws L in, and before he knows it, he is not attending school at all, and now he gets arrested on numerous occasions for theft of motor vehicles and assault.

L starts using cannabis and himself builds up a drugs debt. The thefts of these vehicles, namely motorcycles and mopeds, were in connection to repaying that debt. L describes being directed by 'elders' in the network to take these vehicles and sell them, for others debts owed by the original owner. L has also described on several occasions, receiving calls from the elders and telling him to be at a certain place at a certain time. L would then commit crime with others– including forced entry to properties to take drug supplies, assault rival network members and damage property. L knew that if he tried to leave the group, he would be badly assaulted. Not only was L under threat, but thought that this was the case for his wider family too.

A referral is made to the Willow Team, to provide specialist help and support to L. It was clear there were already multiple professionals involved with L and the family, including social worker, youth offending officer, Motiv8, police and the educational team at his place of learning. There were many and escalating concerns being shared regarding L, and there was a need to bring professionals together to formulate a plan to best support L and his family.

All professionals agreed that multi-agency working was the best approach moving forward. This included regular meetings to discuss concerns, share intelligence and information, review positive changes and discuss safety planning for both L and the family. Through collaborative working, professionals gathered enough confirmed intelligence and data to submit an NRM (National Referral Mechanism) for L. The NRM panel met and granted a positive RG (Reasonable Grounds) and CG

(Conclusive Grounds), which identifies him as a victim of modern-day slavery for the purpose of exploitation. This is important for L, as it provides evidence that he is exploited, that his offending is linked to this exploitation, and can help in mitigation should he come before a court. (Sect 45 defence).

Willow Team took over the direct work with L, and made sure he received the right support in the form of mentoring, advocacy, understanding his situation, and work with L to reduce the risk he is experiencing and how to safely exit if possible. Willow also provided specialist advice to other professionals around L on how best to work with him and protect him.

Over the past few months, L has made significant positive changes and through direct educational work with L, he can now identify the risks linked to these types of activities, the risks of going missing as a child, what child criminal exploitation is and how to reduce his risks from this happening in the future. Support has been given to mum regarding when to report L as missing, as well as what the signs could be, when a child is linked to exploitation.

L has been re-integrated into education, he is not going missing, he attends all his meetings with professionals, and he is making positive changes to keep himself safe when out in the community. Work will continue with L for the time being to ensure that further education can be delivered regarding all aspects of exploitation.

Questions

What am I doing to support my knowledge around child criminal exploitation and serious violence for children?

Do I know the signs of grooming and child exploitation?

Do I understand what is actually going on for that child?

Am I using the right language? Not victim-blaming language

Then what are my next steps? Can I access resources to help?

How can I escalate upwards if I am worried?

Do I know about CERAF requirements for my area of work?