

Written evidence to the Greater Manchester Police and Crime Commissioner on supporting victims of domestic abuse



1 August 2014

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Children's Society is a leading national charity, driven by the belief that every child deserves a good childhood. We provide vital help to the most vulnerable children, young people and families in our society through a range of services. We support nearly 48,000 children and young people every year nationally.
- 1.2 We believe in achieving a better childhood for every child but have a particular focus on children who have nowhere else to turn, such as children living in poverty, young refugees, children at risk on the streets, disabled children and children in trouble with the law. We seek to give a voice to children and young people and influence policy and practice so they have a better chance in life.
- 1.3 We welcome this inquiry by the Greater Manchester Police and Crime Commissioner into support for victims of domestic abuse. Many of the vulnerable children and young people we work with have been victims of domestic abuse and we believe that it is of crucial importance to ensure that they have timely and holistic support.
- 1.4 We support around 3,500 children and their family members in Greater Manchester by providing: counselling for young people with experience of domestic/sexual abuse; services for children who go missing from home, young refugees, children's rights and advocacy and children's centres.
- 1.5 Our submission focuses on children who live in families affected by domestic abuse, but also on teenagers who are victims of domestic abuse in their own relationships. Our submission is based on evidence from our research and learning from our direct work with young people in Greater Manchester and across the country.

2 Summary of key points

- 2.1 We strongly believe that any support for victims of domestic abuse must take into account the needs of children and young people. Children living in families where domestic abuse occurs may be the victims of abuse themselves or may need support to deal with the psychological impact of witnessing abuse, build self-esteem and develop personal safety plans and support networks.
- 2.2 We believe that there is a gap in availability of services for some specific age groups such as 0-5 year olds and adolescents (in particular, 16 -17 year olds). We believe that more services need to be commissioned for these age groups.
- 2.3 The safeguarding training for the front line police and other professionals should include information about the impact of abuse and neglect on teenagers, the link between domestic abuse, running away and sexual exploitation, vulnerability and the legal status as children aged 16-17. This will ensure that children are identified early and offered help and combat any negative attitudes these professionals may have.

- 2.4 More needs to be done to teach children and young people about healthy relationships and how to seek help in case of domestic violence or abuse. This can be done through greater involvement of the police with education providers as well as support services for victims providing better information for families involved.
- 2.5 All services that support victims of domestic abuse should be aware of the relationship between conflict at home and running away. Services should engage with local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs) to ensure they are sharing information and assessing risks to young people, including around missing.
- 2.6 Where services are aware of parents or carers not reporting their child as missing, they need to work with parents to educate them about risks of running away and to encourage them to report incidents of running away. This would result in more children being offered return interviews where any incidents of conflict at home can be followed-up.
- 2.7 Police call handlers should screen cases of 'absent' children for indications that domestic violence may be occurring. In which case, these cases should be upgraded to 'missing', and children offered a return interview, which may lead onto accessing domestic abuse support services.
- 2.8. When commissioning services, commissioners need to be aware of the role and value of the voluntary sector as a provider.

3 Mapping our current services and interventions

- 3.1 We run eight projects in Greater Manchester that work with children who are likely to experience domestic abuse at home. These include four Intensive Support Services delivering emotional support, psychological interventions and counselling for children who have experienced domestic abuse and/or sexual exploitation, and four projects supporting children who run away from home.

Resolve Children's Counselling Service

- 3.2 We provide four Resolve Children's Counselling Services in Greater Manchester: Bury Resolve - IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Interventions), Bury Early Help, Oldham Resolve, and Manchester Resolve. These four services work with children and young people aged 0-19 who have experienced, or are currently exposed to, domestic violence and/or sexual abuse. Together, the services worked with 269 children last year.
- 3.3 Manchester Resolve is a City wide service¹. Children are normally referred through a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) in partnership with Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs), children's social care, the police and Child, Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). These services also accept open referrals, most commonly from schools, health and other third sector providers. The support is short and intense, and we work with children for a minimum of eight sessions.
- 3.4 Through one-to-one counselling with a qualified and experienced counsellor, we help children and young people understand relationships in the context of an abusive family home. Children learn about safety planning, including developing their own personal safety plans and identifying where they can get help, mapping their personal support networks, focusing on their strengths and building their self-esteem. We also offer young people support in relation to abuse and complex support needs such as mental ill health and substance abuse.

¹ The latest annual report for Manchester Resolve is attached as an appendix.

- 3.5 We act as advocate for children we support, in liaison with statutory and non-statutory services who are working with the family. Our service supports the non-abusing parent in their relationship with their child/children, with a view to enable a child and a parent to take control of their own lives and enable parents to implement positive parenting techniques, ensuring a consistent approach.
- 3.6 In addition, we provide access to information, resources and support for professionals, including our own online support for teachers such as [`mylife4schools - When it hurts at home`²](#).

Missing from Home Services

- 3.7 Our Missing services located in Oldham, Rochdale, Manchester and Salford provide information, support, advice and advocacy services to children and young people under 18 years of age who are running away or at risk of running away from home or care. These services worked with 264 children last year.
- 3.8 We offer a confidential service allowing children to talk about their experiences and enable them to make safer choices and decisions.
- 3.9 We carry out need and risk assessments with children, young people and families, conduct return interviews, provide structured one-to-one programmes of support and carry out preventative awareness raising sessions in schools and refer to other specialist agencies.
- 3.10 Conflict at home, including domestic violence, is a key 'push factor' in many of these running away episodes. Our Still Running³ research found that children living in 'low warmth – high conflict' family environments were more likely to run away, and most children who run away say that problems at home are the primary cause (see more below). This supports what we know from our direct practice: that domestic abuse is a common issue – among others – for children missing from home.

4 Domestic abuse as an issue for children and young people

- 4.1 We strongly believe that any support for victims of domestic abuse must take into account the needs of children and young people. Children living in families where domestic abuse occurs may be the victims of abuse themselves or may need support to deal with the psychological impact of witnessing abuse, build self-esteem and develop personal safety plans and support networks. It is important to provide services for children and young people of all ages. Our practice suggests that in Greater Manchester there is a need for more support services aimed at pre-school children and adolescents.

Support for pre-school children

- 4.2 Our Resolve services are currently commissioned to work with 5-19 year olds. We believe there is scope for more support aimed specifically at the 0-5 age group. This would allow services to provide more age appropriate support, as well as ensuring intervention early enough to prevent young children learning (and repeating) negative behaviour from an abusive family environment. The experience of our practitioners is that the cycle of abuse is harder to break where the behaviour has become normalised or accepted within a family or community.

² Mylife4schools resources are available at www.mylife4schools.org.uk/teachers/home-life

³ Our young runaways research, including the Still Running 1, 2 and 3 reports can be found here: www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/research/research-areas/young-runaways

- 4.3 In addition, the short, intense support we offer to older children may not be appropriate for a pre-school child, where significant time needs to be invested just to establish a relationship with the child and get to the point where we can work constructively with them. More appropriate services could include play therapy, and this would require a specific set of training and skills for practitioners.
- 4.4 **Recommendation: support services should be commissioned which are appropriate for 0-5 year olds. This may involve the commissioning of bespoke services, or ensuring there is training and support for professionals to deliver support such as play-therapy.**

Support for teenagers

- 3.5. From our direct work with children and young people and our research we know that there are issues around how universal and targeted services respond to adolescents who experience abuse and neglect in families. Many professionals feel reticent about how to deal appropriately with adolescents, to some degree because they are misinformed about young people's capacity to cope, but also because systems may not be 'fit for purpose'.
- 3.6. The Children's Society led the first comprehensive research study in the UK on maltreatment of adolescents.⁴ Safeguarding Young People was conducted in partnership with the University of York and the NSPCC. The study explored accessibility of agencies and how they responded to young people and found:
- A lack of services for this age group.
 - Wide variability of responses – across different children's social care services but also within local areas – caused, for example, by different thresholds for referral.
 - Older young people – those aged over 14, but especially when approaching 16 – were increasingly less likely to be referred or to receive a child protection response.
- 3.7. The research also highlighted issues with professional attitudes that impacted on the operation of systems and processes. Professionals often perceive that adolescents are:
- Less at risk of harm than younger children (and sometimes perceived as 'putting themselves at risk').
 - More able to cope with the effects of maltreatment.
 - More likely to remove themselves from abusive situations.
- 3.8. Yet neglect and abuse that starts in adolescent years has a detrimental long-term impact on a young person's life. For example, research on life chances has estimated that adults who have experienced four of a range of risk factors (such as poor parental mental health or domestic abuse) during their childhood have a 70 per cent chance of multiple deprivation at the age of 30, compared with a five per cent chance for those who have experienced no risk factors.⁵
- 3.9. The Rochester Youth Development Study (RYDS), a comprehensive longitudinal study conducted in the US which has tracked the lives of around a thousand young people in a deprived district of New York (currently for over 17 years), showed that maltreatment during adolescence causes problems during late adolescence and early adulthood

⁴ <http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/research/research-areas/safeguarding-young-people>

⁵ HM Treasury (2007).

including “involvement in criminal behaviours, substance misuse, health-risking sexual behaviours and suicidal thoughts”.⁶

- 3.10. We are particularly concerned that young people aged 16-17 are very often seen as young adults and not safeguarded appropriately, despite the legislation clearly stating that any person under the age of 18 is a child.⁷ The Government changed the definition of domestic violence to include 16 and 17 year olds in March 2013. It is intended that this change will help to raise awareness of teen abuse amongst practitioners and police, and prevent young people from falling through the gap between child protection and domestic abuse services.
- 3.11. Our practice also reports that the attitudes of some professionals to children who run away, or are at risk of being sexually exploited (which is often linked to young people’s experiences of domestic abuse) remain an issue of concern. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Young Runaways and Missing Children and Adults inquiry into children missing from care found that in many cases, where children runaway or have experienced sexual exploitation, they were seen by professionals, including the police, as “promiscuous” and making an active “choice” to become involved in a particular “lifestyle” or were seen in some way “complicit” in their abuse⁸.
- 3.12. For example, as part of the APPG inquiry, a practitioner working with children and young people at risk of CSE told how a police officer responded to a young girl who disclosed sexual abuse by saying “...what do you expect dressed like that, you’re looking for it...”. In other examples, professionals could recognise CSE but believed that a young person could not be helped.
- 3.13. **Recommendation: the safeguarding training for front line police officers and other professionals should include information about the impact of abuse and neglect on teenagers, the link between domestic abuse, running away and sexual exploitation and vulnerability and legal status of children aged 16-17. This would ensure that these children are identified early and offered help, and would combat any negative attitudes among professionals.**
- 3.14. **Recommendation: those commissioning support services for victims of domestic abuse should be aware that 16 and 17 year olds are legally children, who are vulnerable and qualify for support from child protection services. Support services should be appropriate for teenagers who live in families experiencing abuse as well as for teenagers suffering abuse in their own relationships.**

Abuse within teenage relationships

- 3.15. As well as living in families experiencing abuse, teenagers are also vulnerable to becoming victims themselves. In recent years, there has been increasing evidence and awareness of the prevalence of abuse within teenage relationships. The British Crime Survey 2009/10 found that 16-19-year-olds were the group most likely to suffer abuse

⁶ Thornberry *et al.* (2010). Similar findings in Smith *et al.* (2005). [Similar findings by and Stewart *et al.* (2008) using official data in Australia]. Those who had experienced childhood-limited maltreatment were no more likely to behave ‘delinquently’ than those who had never been maltreated, although they were more likely to have ‘internalising problems’ like depression, and problem drug use. n.b. ‘Maltreatment’ was measured by having at least one substantiated incident logged in child protection records – which means that these results probably underestimate the effects of maltreatment, given the likelihood of other unreported incidents.

⁷ The Children Act 1989

⁸ The APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012) Report from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-lobbying/parliamentary-work/appg-inquiry-children-who-go-missing-or-run-away-c

from a partner. 12.7% of women and 6.2% of men in this age group suffer abuse, compared to seven per cent of women and five per cent of men in older groups.

- 3.16. As demonstrated by the Children's Commissioner's report into Sexual Exploitation in Groups and Gangs, girls and young women who are associated with gangs are particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of domestic abuse.⁹ Given the nature of these relationships within a gang environment, these young women are more likely to feel isolated and less likely to feel able to seek help and support.
- 3.17. Our work with female victims of violence in London showed that young women and girls who experience violence need support to rebuild their confidence and help them cope with the experiences of violence.

Example from the Safe Choices project in London

The Safe Choices model is a way of working that values a gender specific approach that can meet the needs of young women and support them to develop the critical thinking, self-confidence and skills necessary to make positive, safe choices to improve their overall well-being. The project also works with the professionals supporting them to promote the value of a gender specific approach and raise awareness of the differences in practice and the impact on outcomes for young women. Using creative methods, the project undertakes one-to-one and group work, narrative therapeutic work based around the young woman, especially focussing on identity issues. The project aims to improve the resilience of young women to live in their communities, understand the risks associated with the community they live in and give the women skills to develop a positive future.

- 3.18. **Recommendation: support services for victims of domestic abuse should allow for gender specific support that would allow victims to rebuild their confidence and improve their resilience and ability to build healthy relationships.**
- 3.19. In April 2014, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, at the end of her visit to the UK, asserted that "I have also noted the efforts of the UK Government, the Governments in the constituent countries, and also voluntary sector organisations, in the design and launching of campaigns aimed at reaching out to young people and educating them about different manifestations of violence, including in the home, in schools and in social media and on the internet. I was informed of the national prevention campaign *This is Abuse*, which encourages teenagers to rethink their views about rape, consent, violence and abuse. In order to play a truly transformative role in the longer term, this campaign, as well as similar initiatives, needs to be part of the curriculum and be institutionalised in the education system"¹⁰.
- 3.20. Although we recognise that changes to the national curriculum is not an issue within the powers of PCC, believe that at the local level, the police and other safeguarding services have a bigger role to play in educating children and young people about abuse, domestic violence, violence in teenage relationships and how to seek help.

⁹ www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/force_download.php?fp=%2Fclient_assets%2Fcp%2Fpublication%2F745%2FIts_wrong_but_you_get_get_used_to_it.pdf University of Bedfordshire and Children's Commissioner qualitative study of gang-associated sexual violence

¹⁰ www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14514&LangID=E Special Rapporteur on violence against women finalizes country mission to the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland and calls for urgent action to address the accountability deficit and also the adverse impacts of changes in funding and services

- 3.21. **Recommendation: Support services who work with young people from families with experiences of domestic abuse should ensure that young people are equipped with an understanding of healthy relationships, consent, non-violence and gender equality, and to be able to easily access information, guidance and support when needed.**

Financial support for victims

- 3.22. Our practitioners in Greater Manchester raised the importance of financial abuse - and a lack of financial support for victims exiting an abusive situation - as a factor keeping people in abuse situations.
- 3.23. While domestic abuse happens in families of all incomes, our practitioners find that many of the families have wider financial issues such as debt, lack of work or poverty. This is backed up by research showing higher levels of domestic violence are associated with lower levels of income.¹¹
- 3.24. Victims exiting an abusive situation may be faced with financial burdens such as taking on debts or reduced benefit support as a result of changing family circumstances. These could potentially act as a barrier to exiting abuse situations.
- 3.25. Our retail shops in Greater Manchester have on an ad hoc basis supported our domestic abuse services by donating items of clothing, furniture and toys to families who may be starting again following leaving an abusive relationship or families who cannot afford to buy the items they require.
- 3.26. **Recommendation: while not being able to directly address financial support, when commissioning services, the Police and Crime Commissioner should be aware that support services for victims should be part of a package, including financial support. Commissioned services should have in place a plan to work together with local financial and debt advice services – such as Citizens Advice or StepChange Debt Charity - so they can identify and sign-post victims to appropriate support.**

Children who run away

- 3.27 The Children's Society has produced a number of authoritative studies into the problem of running away. Our latest study - '*Still running 3*' published in 2011 - found that around 84,000 under 16s in England run away overnight on at least one occasion every year. The study shows that little has improved for children who run away with only a third being reported to the police. It indicates that family change and conflict play a significant part in children's decisions to run.
- 3.28 This includes young people who said they had experienced physical abuse or violence, emotional abuse or neglect (e.g. feeling continually blamed or put down, uncared for or rejected), domestic violence, sexual abuse or said that they were scared. In addition, there are particularly vulnerable groups of children who are more likely to run away such as disabled children, children with learning difficulties and children in care.
- 3.29 Of those children who run away fewer than 30% are reported as missing to the police by their parents and guardians. Only a small minority (5%) will seek professional help while they are away; either because they do not know what help is available for them, or they are worried about the consequences of asking for help. Young people experience different risks associated with running away:

¹¹ Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: findings from the 2004/05 British Crime Survey
www.ias.org.uk/uploads/pdf/women/rdsolr1206.pdf

- A total of 17% of overnight runaways either slept rough and/or with someone they'd just met.
 - 21% slept in one of these places and/or said they were hurt or harmed.
 - If begging in order to survive is also added, the figure rises to 22%.
 - If stealing in order to survive is also added the total proportion of young runaways with one or more of these experiences is just over 25%.
- 3.27. Following recent changes to statutory guidance, local authorities are now required to offer a 'return interview' to all children who go missing from home or care. Return interviews are *in addition* to 'safe and well checks' carried out by the police.¹²The interview is an opportunity to uncover information about why children went missing and can help protect children from risk factors at home. They should be 'in depth and normally carried out by an independent person who is... able to follow-up on any actions that emerge.'
- 3.28. Return interviews are a vital opportunity to identify children who are living in families experiencing domestic abuse, address the consequences of domestic abuse for children and engage a number of agencies – including social services, police and voluntary services – in a joined up way.
- 3.29. **Recommendation: all services that support victims of domestic abuse should be aware of the relationship between conflict at home and running away. Services should engage with local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs) to ensure they are sharing information and assessing risk to young people, including around missing.**
- 3.30. Just one in three children who go missing are reported to the police¹³. Children who go missing from home are less likely to be reported missing than those missing from care.
- 3.31. Support for missing children is often focused on children who go missing from care, as they are seen as a more vulnerable group. This is evidence by our Here to Listen? report¹⁴, which showed that children who go missing from home are far more likely to miss out on return interviews.
- 3.32. This means the scale of the issue is likely to be underestimated and services are missing out on an opportunity to pick up on children in families experiencing domestic abuse.
- 3.33. The Association of Chief Police Officers last year introduced new definitions of 'missing' and 'absent' for children and adults for who are reported as missing to the police. Police call handlers are responsible for classifying cases as 'missing' or 'absent' based on a risk assessment.
- 3.34. Where a child is recorded as 'missing', missing person procedures will be implemented. The young person will be offered a return interview, as per government guidance. Where they are recorded as 'absent', children will receive a lesser response. Again, this could result in missed opportunities to pick up on children in families experiencing abuse.

¹² Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care www.gov.uk/government/consultations/statutory-guidance-on-children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care

¹³ Still Running 3 http://makerunawayssafe.org.uk/sites/default/files/Still-Running-3_Full-Report_FINAL.pdf

¹⁴ Here to Listen: Return Interview Provision for Young Runaways http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/here_to_listen_report.pdf

- 3.35. **Recommendation: where service that support families with domestic abuse become aware of parents or carers not reporting their child as missing, they need to work with parents to educate them about risks of running away and to encourage them to report incidents of running away. This would result in more children being offered return interviews where any incidents of conflict at home can be followed-up.**
- 3.36. **Recommendation: Police call handlers should screen cases of 'absent' children for indications that domestic violence may be occurring. In which case, these cases should be upgraded to 'missing', and children be offered a return interview, which may lead onto accessing domestic abuse support services.**

Support services working in a joined-up way

- 3.37. Families and young people experiencing domestic abuse are likely to be dealing with a number of problems in their lives. This could include – but is not limited to - financial problems, debt or running away, as outlined above.
- 3.38. The recent Understanding Troubled Families report¹⁵ from the Department for Communities and Local Government highlighted how a multiplicity of problems means there is a need for different services to work in a joined up way. Families experiencing domestic violence were more likely to have a child truanting, involved in the youth justice system or suffering from mental health problems, for example.
- 3.39. The report highlights the importance of recording and collecting information about problems on a family rather than individual level, addressing clusters of interrelated issues and sharing information between agencies, to build up a true picture of the problems these families face.
- 3.40. Building a trusting relationship with children and young people takes time as many of them do not trust services due to previous negative experiences or lack of responses from statutory services. Our practitioners in Greater Manchester reported that being a third sector organisation helps us engage with victims. Many of those we support will already be engaging with social services, the police or other statutory agencies, and as a charity we are not seen as 'part of the system'.
- 3.41. As set out in the call for evidence, just approaching domestic violence through the criminal justice process can create barriers to people fearful of the consequences of engaging with official agencies. Third sector organisations are able to act as a bridge between statutory services and victims.
- 3.42. **Recommendation: When commissioning services, commissioners need to be aware of the role and value of the voluntary sector as a provider. Support services should work through MASHs to ensure that statutory agencies, not-for-profit organisations and other groups are sharing information and jointly assessing risk to young people.**

Awareness for professionals

- 3.43. Professionals working with children and young people need to be aware of the signs of domestic violence, even if that is not the main reason for their intervention. For example, police officers should be able to spot that domestic violence is happening even if they are dealing with a family for a different reason, for example a missing episode.

¹⁵Understanding Troubled Families

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/336430/Understanding_Troubled_Families_web_format.pdf

- 3.44. The current system relies heavily on victims coming forward and disclosing abuse. Moreover, some children and young people may not feel like they can disclose abuse because of negative attitudes, while others may not recognise abusive behaviour within their families or relationships.
- 3.45. **Recommendation: professionals or staff who work with children (such as GPs, hospital staff, parents, landlords, judges, magistrates, teachers, church leaders, youth workers, pub landlords and public venue security staff) should receive training on how to identify the warning signs of domestic abuse, including running away, and be aware of the support services available. Support services should have an outreach plan to reach out to these professionals and provide them with materials and guidance.**

If you have any questions about this submission, please contact
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