unseen Background

Our purpose is to work towards the eradication of slavery, wherever it is found, providing survivors with safety, hope and choice

As an NGO unseen believes the most effective way of achieving our goal is to tackle the issue holistically and operate in the following arenas:

- To support and develop frontline projects that actively seek to help vulnerable people from becoming enslaved both here in the UK as a destination country and in source countries.
- To raise awareness of human trafficking and deliver training courses to inform and equip people to spot the signs of trafficking and subsequently know how to act.
- To initiate and lead projects that will directly help survivors re-establish their lives, begin the process of recovering from the horrific ordeals they have been subjected to and avoid becoming re-enslaved.
- To work with government at all levels, its agencies, other NGOs and commercial businesses to raise awareness, gather information and act to prevent slavery and support survivors.

There are the beginnings of recognition of the link between children missing from care and exploitation and trafficking and locally many agencies are responding to and willing to partner with unseen as we try to establish a multi-agency partnership working model to effectively collate the necessary data and develop a model to effectively support and care for those children who are identified as being potentially trafficked – especially around what is considered to be the golden 72 hours where anecdotally children are more likely to go missing, returning to their trafficker.

Data Collection and sharing

4. The cross-Government Strategy for Missing Children and Adults states that in any area local agencies need to understand the picture and context of ‘missing’. Do you feel current data collection supports this objective?

Having just tried to conduct some research into the current scale of missing persons and specifically children, locally, unseen do not feel that the current data collection in our LA area is sufficient or supports the above objective.
unseen requested information around foreign minors known to the following agencies from UK Borders Agency, Crown Prosecution Service, Local Authority (CYPS) and the police Missing Persons team.

We were trying to ascertain:

- Number of foreign minors known to the local authority/in care
- Where they had entered the country and who they had been ‘placed’ with
- Number of missing children
- Nationality of missing children
- Where children were currently residing
- How many were seeking asylum
- How many entered the UK accompanied or unaccompanied
- Who they were accompanied by
- If there were any age assessment issues (mainly because even if deemed over 18 if they were trafficked they still get access to support and accommodation under the Convention of Europe)
- Age they claimed to be
- Identification of trafficking

**Agency Responses** – as you will see there is a definite willingness to explore this area and act on any findings – but currently data is scarce, if not non-existent.

‘Around 40 children are reported missing every week in Bristol. The majority return home of their own accord within a very short space of time. Those who remain missing for 24 hours and sometimes longer include children who are looked after by the local authority, children who are open to Social Care and children who are not known to other services. We do not have evidence suggesting there is currently a significant problem regarding child trafficking in Bristol but neither am I aware of there having been any detailed analytical research undertaken. As previously mentioned this is something we may look to explore in more detail’

‘Child trafficking is an area that hasn’t benefited from any detailed statistical evaluation at local or force level although this is something which we may be looking to explore in more depth as part of a wider strategic plan’

‘We don’t routinely collate info of children based on their nationality so we might have to have a think about how we collect it

‘I have made enquiries about the data you required but unfortunately we don’t keep data that would help with this, I wonder if this is something we all need to collaborate on and work out a way to do?’

All organisations recognised that whilst they have information about cases they believe would link missing children to potential trafficking cases that the data sets that they routinely collect does not allow for answers to the above to be sought.

It also raised the issue of identification and the possibility that all agencies interacting with children may not be aware of how trafficking may present and therefore may miss it.

5. What practical steps could be taken to improve data collection on children who runaway or go missing from home or care by the police and by Local Authorities?
All agencies have recognised, with the increasing trend of trafficked children going missing from care, the importance of collating data around this and we are beginning to work with the local authority, Barnardo's in the South West, Missing Person's and Child Protection Teams at Avon and Somerset Constabulary to try and improve this collation of effective data so that we can truly understand the nature and scale of the issue as well as how this links to trafficked and exploited children – both UK Nationals and foreign nationals.

unseen believe that an understanding of what is happening regionally is required. This must be a multi-agency approach with buy in from all agencies that interact and work with children and needs to involve Local Safe Guarding Children’s board. Each LSCB and Local Authority area needs to research and investigate the issue that is facing them in their area.

Practically from this research an agreed dataset and data collection method can be developed and implemented but this must have a multi-agency functionality and capacity for it to be anywhere near effective.

Also by answering some of the questions we have posed above unseen suggest that we would build up a better picture of the practises, routes and modes of operation of traffickers and those exploiting children.

Safe Guarding trafficked children who go missing from care

10. Please give your assessment of how well your local authority complies with the Children Act duties to safeguard and protect trafficked/exploited children. Does your local authority provide an effective standard of care and suitable accommodation for all trafficked or exploited children? How do they ensure the child’s best interests are at the centre of their decision-making?

unseen feel whilst there is a growing recognition of child trafficking and exploitation that this is accompanied with a general disbelief that is it is happening here. This again highlights the importance of 1. training of frontline practitioners and 2. collating effective data, evidencing the occurrence and nature of trafficking and exploitation in our area.

It is the general duty of the council to safeguard and promote the welfare of every child living in their area who is in need and, where possible, to promote the upbringing of the child by their own family, unless this is not consistent with their welfare – in the case of a potentially trafficked child we can assume that whilst some will be residing with family members, who may be complicit in their exploitation, many will be put into care. Anecdotally it is beginning to be seen that those who are put into care and who are trafficked will potentially disappear.

Bristol Safe Guarding Children’s board (BSCB) have CSE course that is delivered between Police, BASE and CYPS that is funded by the BSCB. Research in to local LSCB indicates that the majority of boards have a policy and protocol around child trafficking, few have specific trafficking sub-groups and little is said about the Safe Guarding boards statutory duty to effectively safe guard trafficked children and how best to do this. unseen have conducted research into LSCB responses and will make this available if helpful. LA and LSCB’s need to work together to provide a response to this issue.
unseen believes that suitable and effective accommodation for foreign national and exploited/trafficked children is not being provided locally. Children believed to have been trafficked are going missing from care. Foster care placements are not always appropriate for victims of trafficking and may put the child and the carers at risk of harm.

‘In the last 18 months I can recall two cases where children were reported missing shortly after being placed in care who were suspected to have been trafficked into the country in order to work for organised crime gangs. Both children were Vietnamese females, reportedly aged 14’.

‘Girl, nationality unknown came in via Bristol Airport, identified by UKBA as a PVoT and within 24 hours had disappeared from LA care and her placement’

12. The Government’s 2011 Human Trafficking Strategy commits to tackling the issue of trafficked children who go missing from care. What can local authorities and voluntary organisations do to better safeguard trafficked or exploited children and ensure they do not go missing from care?

Local authorities and social care have the policies, procedures and means (s47, s20) under the child act to ensure that trafficked children are correctly cared for – but this is currently not happening – the existing services we have in place are seemingly not working for this population group who are groomed and pre-programmed to return to their trafficker as soon as they are separated. More training is required across the board for on the ground social workers to understand the pull factors back to a trafficker that a child will be facing, as well as the trauma they may have experienced and their cultural background—this cannot always be gleaned from a one off meeting or an initial assessment it will take time and during this time a child needs to be safely accommodated and accessing a range of therapeutic and support services.

unseen advocate for and are developing a multi-agency model whereby children if believed to be victims of trafficking are enabled access to an assessment centre/safe accommodation. During their stay here (up to one week) police, social care, medical professionals can work with them and support them, identify their needs, safety plan and have the breathing space they need as professionals to decide upon the best course of action (foster care, safe house, family placement), for each individual child. It will also provide the child with safety, continuity of care and access to the services they need. We believe that this would be in line with the 10 principles outlined in the ‘On the Safe Side’ Report.

More training for frontline support staff to recognise potential victims of trafficking – including multi-agency training, effective safety planning, understanding the pull factors for trafficked children and training around the national referral mechanism.

13. How can the police better identify, track, protect and safeguard trafficked or exploited children who have gone missing from care. Please also give your assessment of police responses to trafficked children in your area.

This is an area we have heard time and time again that police find frustrating – if they identify a potential victim there is usually nowhere for this person to be safely house whilst they conduct any further investigations. Anecdotally we have heard numerous stories of
children being placed in care situations and not being there the next morning. By having a specific, multi-agency accommodation model this may reduce some of these frustrations and encourage police to pro-actively look for trafficked persons.

Currently off the back of cannabis factory raids the only safe place children (assumed children – prior to age assessment) can be taken is to the police station- this is far from ideal, but does provide a safeguarding mechanism. Police are able to use a protection order to safely house someone but again should a trafficked person be held in a secure unit?

Police locally are becoming more aware of this issue and are seemingly keen to work towards a mechanism that will assist the child and all agencies involved.

14. How would providing a guardian for separated migrant children as set out in International Legislation help protect trafficked or exploited children going missing from care?

The term Guardianship could well be confusing and unhelpful, although this may just be semantics; as it is already used in social care, both in terms of Special Guardianship orders (SGO’s) whereby parental responsibility is granted to the carers and Guardianship in terms of the mental health act – SGO’s are an avenue and an option that the LA may be considering for separated migrant children anyway.

It is our understanding that SGO’s can be applied for by a friend or a relative if a child is at risk of becoming ‘looked after’ or if they have been a ‘looked after’ child – post an initial LA investigation and application from the applicant if appointed by a court there is no further placement supervision and no reviews.

unseen would be interested to know and investigate if the social workers charged with investigating applications for SGO’s and reporting to the courts about this are aware of trafficking and the potential for a child’s exploitation to occur by another family member or friend. The depth of these reviews and the information that is gathered is something we would be interested to observe and comment on. It could also be an area where further training is required for social workers.

unseen fails to see how having a guardian will actively prevent a child from going missing from care.

An advocate/guardian, trained in the support needs, risk and trauma associated with having been trafficked, who works with the caring placement and the child to safety plan and support both parties and other agencies involved through the process is a step in the right direction and whilst the idea of an advocate/guardian for the child and their ‘carers’ is an incredibly positive one, even is parental responsibility is granted to an advocate/guardian we believe similar issues around missing children would potentially occur.

We believe advocacy/guardianship, as described above, is a potential stop gap solution until such a time when we have access to accommodation that is specifically set up and run to support the needs of those children who have been exploited and trafficked. An advocate/guardian would still be helpful in this process but from our understanding this should be and would be provided by a child’s social worker in conjunction with accommodation providers and the other agencies working with the child.
In terms of advocating for a child’s needs, every child could be granted an independent advocate but the job role and remit would need to be clearly defined, nationally monitored and reported on. An advocate would need to work closely with all the other services the child is accessing however we would consider the first priority to be keeping the child safe in order for them to be in a position to be advocated for.

Submitted by : K Garbers on behalf of unseen. For further details please E: kate@unseenuk.org T:0303 04 02 888

Extra Submission:

unseen’s response to the recent Rochdale Case

The case in Rochdale marks the first successful prosecutions for trafficking within the UK for the purposes of sexual exploitation of which the victim profile is exclusively UK children. This is a significant step forward for the courts in their understanding of child sexual exploitation and the seriousness of trafficking, and shines a light on what is a worryingly under-recognised crime. This case also dispels the common misconception that trafficking only takes place across international borders; this is a UK problem, taking place within the country.

Below we briefly explain why it is crucial that these incidents are correctly referred to as Child Sex Trafficking and not simply Grooming or Child Sexual Exploitation.

The benefits of utilising the legislation on human trafficking under the Sexual Offences Act, and understanding cases such as these as examples of trafficking, are three fold. Firstly, it allows the young people involved to be confirmed as victims, if they have been put through the National Referral Mechanism for victims of trafficking. This means that their status as a victim has been proven and is much harder to contest in court. Under a rape charge, for example, the young person’s victimhood can be questioned and scrutinised, and their consent can be argued. Under the Palermo Protocol to Prevent and Suppress Trafficking, consent of a child (under 18) is ‘irrelevant’. Through the NRM, data on numbers of victims (whether foreign nationals or UK victims ) will inform the incidence / extent of trafficking in the UK, which in turn will inform the UK response

Secondly, it informs the safeguarding and recovery response for the victims. The emotional and psychological consequences of trafficking upon a child are very different to those attached to familial abuse or grooming, and any therapeutic response to these children must reflect this. At present, there is concern that children are being ‘shoehorned’ into existing services which are inappropriate for them; the more young people can be seen as victims of trafficking and the unique symptoms that this crime involves the more it will be possible to request a specific response that will enable a positive therapeutic and behavioural approach to achieve skills for independence. The differences in experience must be recognised and responded to effectively.

Thirdly, utilising trafficking legislation in these cases can help to further the
understanding of the courts, police, government and public of the prevalence of trafficking in UK, and highlights that trafficking is not a problem of immigration or border security, but is taking place within the country, involving British citizens. This understanding is absolutely key if the UK is to have a proportionate, effective response to the problem of human trafficking.

Trafficking charges also enable investigators and prosecutors to reflect the full criminality of the perpetrators in presenting the case at court. It also gives the court a range of additional sanctions which are only available for organised crime offences such as human trafficking, where the convicted defendants have benefited from their victims exploitation.

The number of victims involved in this case reflects the great need for effective and widespread training for children’s services and practitioners working with young people; many of the victims in these cases have been previously known to social services, but the risks they are at were not recognised. A higher level of awareness of the existence and the indicators of trafficking is crucial in the safeguarding of children at risk of this form of exploitation. Sheila Taylor, Director of the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People says: ‘the more trafficking prosecutions that are brought to bear the more our understanding will grow, the more we will be able to improve our support to develop the responses we give in the future’.

So whilst the media have framed this as a grooming and racial issue we hope the above makes clear why terminology is so important in this debate in order to both tackle the problem but also provide the best for the survivors of trafficking within the UK.