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## Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme

# Community Awareness Raising – Key issues for strategic leaders

## Why should strategic leaders pay attention to this?

There is good evidence that if we want to respond effectively to different forms of child exploitation, we need to work with local communities to inform and educate. Children and young people, parents and professionals have highlighted their need for information and a better understanding of what exploitation means, how individuals, groups, services and communities can help prevent and disrupt exploitation, and help those who have been exploited (Scott & McNeish, 2017; Franklin, Raws, & Smeaton, 2015; Weston & Mythen, 2021). Child exploitation is a relatively new issue, and is not necessarily familiar to the general public, or information that is held will have been obtained via media descriptions of specific cases, which can be misleading (Britton, 2019; Krsmanovic, 2021).

Local awareness raising programmes do not come in a 'one size fits all' package. While useful lessons can be learned from work in different areas, it is important to tailor your awareness raising to the local context and to the specific group or groups you want to work with.

This resource tries to help you do this by identifying key questions for the planning and delivery of a local awareness raising programme. It is informed by research evidence and evidence from our delivery programme at TCE.

## What is our work at TCE telling us about community awareness raising?

*‘Of all the issues and challenges that face local safeguarding partnerships, and their crucial colleagues in education, adult, and community services, we repeatedly hear from local areas that child exploitation currently feels like one of the more high-stakes: driven in no small part by its – often political and emotionally charged – portrayal (and so perception) in society and the media.’*

See <https://tce.researchinpractice.org.uk/join-the-conversation-on-tackling-child-exploitation-2/>

Key issues include:

- > Definitions and understandings of ‘community’ can differ across partnerships and this can have an effect on how community awareness raising approaches are taken forward and implemented.
- > There is a need to question the drivers behind community awareness approaches and consider how and where they fit into local areas wider child exploitation strategies.
- > The practical response to community awareness raising approaches is an often overlooked area. As partnerships begin to question how, for example, they may respond to an increase in responses, there is a need to consider resourcing and commissioning issues which might need to run alongside awareness raising activity.

## What does the wider research evidence tell us?

If you would like to read more about the wider research evidence in this area of work, please see our evidence scope at <https://tce.researchinpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Walsall-community-CE-response-Evidence-Scope.pdf>

## What are we trying to achieve?

While there is often a recognition that awareness raising is important, or something that needs to be done, local areas are often less clear about how they should go about this. Effective awareness raising programmes are underpinned by thoughtful consideration about the communities which make up the local area, the current rationale for awareness raising and what information may be available to support the programme (D'Arcy, Dhaliwal, Brodie, & Pearce, 2015).

It will also recognise that if awareness raising is happening, then this will have consequences for services – for example, increased requests for further information, more individuals seeking help. Services also need to be informed and engaged with awareness raising activities, and prepared to respond.

- > Why is your local area considering an awareness raising programme at the present time?
- > How does awareness raising fit within other local strategies relating to child exploitation, including public health, youth crime?
- > Are the full range of different stakeholders who may be able to support awareness raising part of these local strategies?
- > Do these stakeholders include individuals from within communities themselves?
- > Are stakeholders geared up to offer support which might be required as a result of raising awareness or respond to an increase in reporting?

- > What data is available to inform the development of the programme?  
What needs to be done in order to make this data available?
- > How will the impact or effectiveness of the approach be evaluated?

## How do we define key terms?

Linked to the question of motivation and intention, and ensuring that your programme is underpinned by a clear rationale, is the matter of definition. This is important because we know from research and practice evidence that different services and individuals will understand key terms – including different forms of child exploitation- differently (Beckett & Walker, 2017).

It can be argued that awareness raising activity is best viewed as part of a spectrum of activities which can take place in anything from individual casework, to group work within services, to interventions in other services, and approaches that seek to increase understanding in the public realm. To this extent differences in the use of the term are not necessarily problematic, but clarity in how the term is being used by different stakeholders in the context of a community awareness raising project is important.

In the same way, it is well established in the social science literature that the term ‘community’ is used in multiple ways (Day, 2006; Bell & Newby, 1974). This is supported by evidence relating to child sexual abuse: IICSA (2020) reported that the idea of an ‘ethnic minority community’ was not straightforward or universally accepted. Religion, age and generation, migration and class were all factors cited as important differences between individuals in ethnic minority communities, and this was not the first point of identification for some individuals. Other literature has drawn attention to the fact that the most immediate ‘community’ for young people will be their friends and families. Understanding the role of peer support in the context of exploitation is therefore important (Cody, Bovarnick, & Peace, 2020; Brodie, Latimer, & Firmin, 202).

- > What are the key issues or concerns that underpin the awareness raising programme and how have they been identified?
- > What understanding of child exploitation underpins the community awareness programme that is being planned? Does it focus on one form of CE or child abuse, or take account of different forms?
- > How do those who are delivering the awareness raising programme understand the term 'community' in the context of their local area? What does the term mean for them, and what are the implications of this for the development of an awareness raising programme?
- > What data is available to help inform your understanding of this? Do you need to undertake some focus groups with community members and professionals to help map the meaning of community in your area?
- > What 'community' or 'communities' are the focus for the awareness raising programme?

## Where does awareness raising fit within your child exploitation strategy?

Awareness raising is not a tick box exercise, but a key component in a child exploitation strategy. This will involve consideration of different levels or aspects of your strategy – including education to help educate and identify exploitation and intervention to improve responses to exploitation (Public Health England, 2019). Ensuring that parents and carers, children and young people, and other adults working in different sectors have access to accurate information about child exploitation can have a direct impact on the identification of child exploitation. More generally, it can contribute to the development of shared community responsibility for safeguarding children and young people (Holland, Tannock , & Evans, 2011; Holland, 2014).

- > Will the programme be delivered as part of an existing programme, or separately? What might be the advantages or disadvantages of this?
- > Who is taking responsibility for this? Where does accountability for the awareness raising programme sit?
- > Who needs to be aware that the programme is being delivered? What additional support might they require?
- > How is review and evaluation built into the timescale of the programme and where does this sit within your partnership?
- > How will reporting about the awareness raising programme take place?
- > What will be put in place in the medium and longer term to respond to the outcomes or consequences of awareness raising and how will this meet the needs of the 'community'?
- > What 'community' is the target for the programme?
- > Who will *not* be included in this programme?

## What resources will be needed?

Awareness raising is an area of work which is often under-resourced, or where the source of funding is unclear. It is also important to remember that resources will be required at all points of the process – from planning and development, to delivery and service response.

- > What current knowledge and expertise exists within local communities about child sexual exploitation? Are these experts already known – what support do they need in order to educate their peers?
- > Has any previous work been undertaken nationally or in similar areas that is relevant to these communities?
- > What exploratory research or mapping could be undertaken to understand better the characteristics and needs of the communities? Who could do this?
- > What resources will be needed for the awareness raising programme? Are there existing budgets that can be used? How could the need for resources be shared across partnerships?

## How can we ensure the community awareness raising programme is accessible and acceptable?

The evidence is clear that any child or young person, regardless of background, can be exploited. It follows that awareness raising programmes will need to reach a range of different groups, including children and young people, parents and carers, professionals and other members of the community. These individuals are also members of other social groups, which may be structured by geography, culture, language or professional background.

Awareness raising will need to ensure that information is accessible and acceptable to different groups, and to this extent will need to be clearly focused and target different groups (Bostock, 2014; Hill, 2021). Drawing upon the expertise of different groups will therefore be important to the design and planning of awareness raising programmes.

The evidence from a range of studies highlights that some groups of children and young people are often missed from strategies aimed at education and awareness raising, including boys, disabled children and young people (Franklin & Smeaton, 2018) and children and young people from different minority ethnic groups (The Children's Society, 2018). There is also a need to consider how awareness raising can take place in different settings, for example alternative education settings.

- > How can young people/parents and carers/other community stakeholders be involved in the design of the programme? Is co-production possible? If not, how can views on what might be helpful be built into the programme?
- > How do different communities intersect, and what impact can/should this have on the development phase?
- > How accessible are different community awareness raising interventions, for example in terms of language and different forms of communication?
- > What products are being used to raise awareness? Are these inclusive of different groups within communities? Can this be checked before implementation via e.g. community groups?
- > Who might be excluded – either through deliberate targeting or as an unintended consequence of the programme? How might this be checked?

## How can we optimise the value of the awareness raising programme?

As noted above, awareness raising programmes can make a real difference to raising the profile of child exploitation throughout communities – but are not necessarily easy to implement. It is really important to start thinking in the planning stages about how to make the most of the programme in the longer term, and to ensure that the work of the programme is fully integrated in local area child exploitation strategy.

- > What is the desired outcomes from the programme? What are the aims and objectives?
- > What evaluation will take place? How can this be built into the life of the awareness raising programme so that timely decisions can be made? What kind of follow-up will be possible?
- > What additional resources might be required in order to make further integration a realistic option?

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**We want to hear more about your experiences of using TCE resources and tools.  
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