

Human

Trafficking

Foundation

Human Trafficking Foundation Online Forum: The Voice of British Survivors of Human Trafficking

25th January 2021, 11am–1pm, via Zoom

*Chaired by Tamara Barnett, Director of Operations, and Phil Brewer, Specialist Adviser
Coordinated by Katy Parker, Project and Communications Coordinator*

The recording of the meeting can be viewed [here](#).

Introductions by Human Trafficking Foundation (HTF)

This event has been co-created with two British survivors who are also anti-trafficking campaigners, who approached us about the lack of British survivor voices in our sector. British victims are now recognised as the main nationality in NRM referrals, although concerns that these figures are the tip of the iceberg. Survivors are often criminalised, not getting compensation and outreach support is often not sufficient.

1. Sarah Champion MP, Challenging the status quo: The path to an effective Government response to the exploitation of British children

Sarah has been MP for Rotherham for past eight years. In 2014 Sarah became aware of the scale of child exploitation in Rotherham, and has been working on this issue ever since. This operation has secured convictions, currently looking at at least 300 perpetrators and supporting 1,500 survivors.

Sarah became frustrated that trafficking laws weren't used for this issue, or generally, as the children often weren't seen as victims of modern slavery. Many of these children were seen as prostitutes and consenting for their abuse. The main driver for international women trafficked to UK is for the sex industry. Sarah is an abolitionist for sex work.

British victims of modern slavery have been overlooked for years and let down by the system. It's an uphill battle to get Parliament to look into the detail of how the legislation is applied and the resources that are required to make it work.

In 2013 report Shadow City, it reminds us of how backward our views were, with examples of prejudice against these exploited children and blaming them of their sexual exploitation. We've been more judgemental of British victims, influenced by assumptions of how a victim should behave. This ideal victim rarely includes boys, people from BAME communities or people who have a disability.

Sarah was a core participant of the ICSA inquiry. She was struck by how most boy victims are identified once they're in the criminal justice system, as they're not seen as victims but naughty children needing punishment. Our society doesn't know how to deal with the gangs exploiting children – or how to protect these children – and so we imprison them.

There is still misunderstanding in councils of British victims and if they can be referred into the NRM.

The conditions in unregulated children's homes is shocking, and Sarah is working on this issue and praises the work of the Children's Commissioner on this.

To be positive, we are seeing more British victims in the NRM referrals data, but we know many remain hidden. But these victims who are referred are often not getting the support they need, with few convictions, few victims getting compensation or the psychological support they need. So many hoops to jump through to get a positive NRM decision, long-term support, access education, overturn criminal convictions. Need to be a genius to get the support you need in this system.

We need to listen to, believe and act on what the survivors tell us, as they are the experts who can tell us how best to respond to this.

2. Dame Sara Thornton, Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Identifying and supporting British survivors of modern slavery: Challenges and establishing good practice Numbers of referrals of British nationals is increasing

Data about identification

The number of referrals is increasing. In 2019, 2,836 British nationals were referred, 26% of all referrals, mostly children. 2020 (first three-quarters) 2,531 referrals, 34% are British nationals. It's good that people are being identified, but highlights the extent of the problem.

Raises the issue of whether the NRM is the best way to help British children and adults.

Support for adults

A lot of UK nationals have a number of complex needs and vulnerabilities, including mental health issues and substance abuse addiction. The complexity of people's needs shows that the Care Act doesn't deal with adult victims very well, and there are challenges to applying the Care Act. What is Salvation Army or local authority responsibility in the VCC? People can drop through the gaps. She has raised this various times and told that it is 'eventually sorted out', but harm can happen during that time.

The statutory guidance says that the VCC generally provides temporary support, but long-term support should be pursued when available. For long-term issues, should it be the VCC or alternative forms of support?

There is also the issue of accommodation for adult victims. The Domestic Abuse Bill was amended, and Sara has asked if it could include MS, but told no. A victim might have priority need, but it's not explicit, and there should be more detail of the needs of victims in the homelessness code of guidance. Please contact her if you have any practical ideas.

She is also looking at whether reciprocal arrangements between local authorities could work, and has been working with LMSL and MOPAC. Homelessness is such a big issue that can lead to trafficking, so what can we do to prevent this?

The number of adults being referred has increased, but many are choosing not to be referred. We need to think about what the non-NRM pathways are and different ways we can support people.

Support for children

Children make up a substantial percentage of referrals. Last year, she was working on the statutory offence, and she found that sometimes there is the view that if a child is referred into the NRM, the LA has no responsibility – but this is incorrect. The guidance Working Together doesn't deal with child exploitation and extra-familial harm sufficiently. CSE and CCE should be NRM referrals and S47 inquiries, which should trigger child protection. We need to think more about how to support children when the threat is from outside the home – this is not as developed as the response to abuse within the home.

18 police forces now have violence reduction units. IASC has been looking at their work to prevent vulnerability to violence, particularly MS/HT. What more can Government, local authorities and police forces do to think about what the different levels of prevention are?

3. Karen, Survivor and Anti-Slavery Activist, In my shoes: My experience of the obstacles to identification, safeguarding and justice

Exploitation doesn't discriminate, it's completely inclusive and everyone needs to be considered, acknowledging the survivors from outside the UK also. It's important to remember that survivors aren't ATT numbers, they're individuals.

Anyone watching this could be in Karen's position if they'd come across her perpetrator. She was exploited through violence, when she eventually ended up in intensive care in hospital.

Karen was sexually exploited around the country, and was criminalised for this, as a child. It's important to acknowledge that she didn't come from a 'dysfunctional' family, and so it's offensive to assume that all victims have mental health issues, learning disabilities etc., because it can happen to anyone.

As her parents weren't to blame, the blame was placed on Karen, which she internalised, even though she's never committed any crime.

Professor Susan Edwards produced a report on how this happened ([Prostitution, Whose Problem?, 1991](#)).

She was fined as a child for being a prostitute, with no means of paying the fine. She then carried this burden with her to into adulthood, until she heard the words 'there's no such thing as a child prostitute', and realised that her adult life had been narrated by others' words and others' failings. This experience had put her into poverty, impacted her employment from having a criminal record.

The journey of recovery is also a journey of recovery, because during exploitation you are brainwashed and lose your identity, so need to learn to regain your autonomy.

She had roughly 40 convictions, and thought the NRM would help have those cleared, but the criminalisation was never addressed. She wasn't entitled to legal aid, as she wasn't seeking asylum. She was told she wasn't entitled to compensation as there was no criminal investigation. She didn't receive any subsistence.

In the RNA, she learned about subsistence, but this is needs-based, and as she was self-funded she was told she wasn't entitled to it as she could get benefits. Eventually, she got a back-payment and was immediately told she needed to repay it, and was told she wasn't entitled to subsistence because

she was British, which was incorrect. Ironically, she was also recommended to pay to join a gym for emotional support.

She's now on her eight RNA, which means she's had several exit dates during the pandemic. Each RNA takes up a session to complete the form, and another to collate the evidence, so that's two sessions lost, which could have been used for support with her caseworker.

If she exits the NRM, there are no support agencies where she lives, so she's left in a vulnerable position.

Victims do not all have drug issues, alcohol problems or learning disabilities. Anybody can be exploited. We're picking apart victims, rather than looking at the perpetrators.

More boys are being identified through county lines, but the girls are falling through the gaps.

4. SPACE, Radically rethinking our response to Criminal exploitation: Key challenges and solutions

SPACE campaigns for child and adult victims of CCE. Some of the points they make also apply CSE. SPACE has lived and professional experience of this issue.

Some of the key points they're seeing across the country:

- There is a real lack of willingness to view victims as victims. In county lines, this is judged on behaviour and presentation. They have been groomed, are taught hatred towards police, and don't want to be 'saved'.
- Primarily see boys being identified. Boys are challenged by the gender bias, with perceptions of choice and 'boys will be boys'.
- Victims are expected to self-declare as exploited to be entered into NRM, but due to successful grooming they don't see themselves as exploited, and are expected to identify their perpetrators. There is expectation that they should raise S45 defence. Nobody explains to them that if they're referred they don't have to say anything that would put them in danger.
- County lines victims favour pleading guilty and going to prison rather than speak up.
- Seeing no assessments of vulnerability. Lack of resource, expertise and will.
- Lack of evidence of pressure – language that appears consensual is used as evidence of lack of exploitation. Lack of understanding of the role of brainwashing in this.
- Victims are sucked into county lines and kept in, through grooming and misplaced loyalty, or threat. Grooming is preferable.
- Their reluctance to engage with authorities is interpreted as them not being victims.
- A referral is seen as an investigation, rather than an assessment for support.
- Evidence of police seeing NRM as recording an individual, and that's all.
- Some forces refer all children into the NRM, but this is often a forced referral and the referral is only triggered by a police investigation and is a poor referral. The delay in recognition is a safeguarding concern.
- Many first responders are telling parents that a referral decision is negative, and not advising of challenging this.
- Authorities are failing to give accurate information or advice about the process to parents and victims.
- Local authorities should not act as corporate parents of county lines victims when birth parents are present, meaning parents are not being included. Children's Services should purely be concerned with protection and support, but not as a corporate parent.

- There is no requirement for a minor to be made aware of their NRM referral, and a child doesn't have to consent or speak about their experience.
- It is an uphill struggle for these British victims to access support. Feel their should be a separate support pathway.
- Minors transition from exploited children, to vulnerable adults, to alpha perpetrators, to prison, and so will not process their exploitation. Some victims' parents are speaking for them.
- Within county lines are mostly British victims. Police and statutory authorities still resisting the notion of modern slavery among British victims, and are gatekeeping access to support.

If you look back far enough, there is an adult responsible. There needs to be greater focus on the grooming involved in this.

5. Emily, Survivor, Author and Anti-Slavery Activist, My journey: How the system set up to protect children and victims of human trafficking is set up to fail

Emily is a survivor of trafficking, activist and published author.

She was trafficked from 11-20, from criminal and sexual exploitation. She was failed by the police and local authorities various times.

In 2019 she was referred into the NRM by a first responder who did not know how to make a referral. She was left without support for three months because there were no English-speaking workers available. She's had to find her own way through the NRM.

She was told she was not entitled to legal help, counselling or face-to-face support and only managed to get legal help through an NGO.

Subsistence payments introduced in 2020 now takes survivors over the legal aid threshold, making justice and compensation harder to get.

The NRM does not cater for British survivors' needs and it needs to be changed, and instead navigating this process can cause yet another traumatising experience.

6. Ann-Marie Douglas, The Salvation Army, The NRM and British victims – a good fit?

The NRM should be victim first, nationality second, but will focus today on British victims.

Many British victims have experienced long-term social disadvantage that have led to chaotic lifestyles. She accepts the danger of labelling individuals in a certain way, and acknowledges that this is not true for all victims.

Of the nationalities TSA have supported in NRM, British victims in top 5 and prominent in victims of criminal exploitation.

They supported 'J' in the NRM, who became addicted to drugs, spent time in prison, became homeless and was then targeted by traffickers, who gave him drugs and then forced him to deal for them and his life was in danger. He tried to escape and they found him, so he went to the police. That was the first time he learned about modern slavery and the NRM.

These circumstances mirror the typology of British victims who TSA encounter. Many exploited by county lines or cuckooing. Many have complex histories. In many cases, there is evidence of exploitation starting in care, but little or no continuity of support for child victims when they reach 18, and their situation can spiral into adulthood.

Agencies and first responders need to identify British victims' needs from the start and not assume NRM is best fit for every situation. British victims in the NRM can be more discontent in safehouse accommodation than they are in outreach, meaning they are transferred around different safehouses. Every survivor is different, and decisions must be needs-led.

The NRM can provide a wealth of practical support. Many needs of British victims should be met by statutory services in local communities, as they have entitlements. Many do realise they are victims of modern slavery. Where services are involved, these cases may not be managed as modern slavery. Once a client is referred into the NRM, social workers often step back and it's difficult to get them to re-engage.

Under the new Victim Care Contract, TSA has introduced role of Partnership Manager to ensure that in all areas there is engagement with key stakeholders to provide wraparound support.

Where a British victim is referred into NRM, they are often moved from where they live and lose their home and belongings. Many are left with no option but to enter safehouse accommodation far from where they already live, to move them far from their exploiter. This is often a priority of a first responder. Police often do not have willingness or capacity to engage with other stakeholders, and there is pressure on referral team to house.

A British victim should be deemed as having priority need. We need the legislation to specifically mention victims of modern slavery, so that their rights aren't left open to interpretation.

Efforts should be made for the victim to be returned to their home, if safe to do so.

British victims should remain entitled to outreach support.

The system should help them to return to the community, with support available for the length of time that they need.

The response by local authorities is still inconsistent, and this needs to be addressed centrally.

7. Snowdrop Client, A Survivor voice: The impact and challenges I faced

'Sarah' is a British survivor of CSE. She met her traffickers aged 10 and wasn't rescued until she was 20. She has received long-term support from Snowdrop, which has been vital. This kind of long-term support needs to be available to all survivors.

Before Snowdrop, she'd been in various accommodation, where staff hadn't had trauma-informed training. British people are not immune from trafficking, yet there seems to be a different approach in the support services. There seems to be stigma, or their cases are viewed on the same level as non-British.

As a British survivor, you have to struggle to be recognised and accepted. The support can often create more challenges, and can be expected to navigate their own support themselves and manage better by themselves and less likely to be signposted to other support once their support ends.

British victims are often forgotten about and the system needs to be modified so that it's safe and supportive for all survivors. They can't do this alone, and shouldn't be expected to.

If they speak out about what's wrong, they can be labelled as troublemakers and ungrateful. If they stay quiet, they can be forgotten about.

Much of the support is faith-based, which can also present challenges.

The system has improved, but there is a long way to go in terms of British survivors. There needs to be a better safe space for them to share their experiences. There should be training specifically around British survivors.

She's been labelled a liar, prostitute, that she asked for it... These have come from professionals since being rescued. Since her rescue she's had to have operations every year to try to fix the damage done during her exploitation.

She feels that being British and articulate has been a hindrance. She's been moved around and felt like a burden on the system. None of her traffickers have been prosecuted. She's never received compensation.

8. Lara Bundock, CEO of Snowdrop, Outreach and out of sight: The challenges in outreach support for British victims

The Snowdrop provides long-term support once the NRM support has finished based on people's needs with no time limit.

We've come a long way in our understanding of British victims. There are a lot of misconceptions around this, which impacts housing and other support assuming they are not priority need.

Training needs to move forward and bring survivor voices into this space.

Need to look at appropriate pathways. The guidance is unclear of whose responsibility it is to support, with finger-pointing forgetting that there is a vulnerable person needing help.

We see organisations and local authorities working in silo. We need shared risk assessments.

We've seen post-NRM situations when people who haven't been moved far away and then have been identified. There are few systems in place to make these people safe if they've been identified by someone from their trafficking experience and to respond quickly.

British survivors who have been trafficked to other countries and return to UK, there is recourse and entitlement to support, but there isn't entitlement to PIP support because they haven't been in the country for long enough.

9. Professor Susan Edwards, Sexual exploitation: Confronting an unfit justice system

There's still a lot of blame placed on victims and lack of recognition of exploitation. There is continuing labelling and stigma of women and young girls especially, with their lives blighted by continuing criminal records due to exploitation. Women in the main have been discriminated against because of this, rather than their exploiters. The legislation was unfair towards women.

Palermo is not being applied in the way it should be.

There is a 'stigma for life' that we need to address. (See the Broadfoot case regarding the police retaining previous convictions.)

See this article: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/it-s-time-to-end-the-criminal-record-trap-for-sex-trade-survivors>

A lot has been said about Covid and domestic abuse, but enough is being said about how those trapped in slavery are further trapped by Covid, and the internet is being used more to groom and exploit.

Sexual exploitation is part of a wider context and structure of sexualisation.