

THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Witness Statement of Sheila Taylor, Chief Executive, NWG Network

I, Sheila Taylor , will say as follows:-

1. A difficulty with accurately reporting the numbers of children with ADHD or ASD who have been subject to CSE is the poor identification (and therefore, a lack of or late/inaccurate medical diagnosis) of these children's needs at school or colleges.
2. Girls in particular are at risk due to the lack of understanding and identification of how ASD and ADHD presents itself in girls, their behaviour traits differ from boys and can often go unnoticed until puberty has been reached.
3. The stresses of coping in a non ASD/ADHD understanding environment can lead to maladaptive coping behaviours, with children often seeking solace and friendship online which creates inherent risk and exposure to online abuse and exploitation.
4. These children are at a high risk of CSE as they are often self-isolating at home as they struggle to maintain friendship groups in school and feel left out and lonely.
5. Loneliness is not often recognised as individuals may have many friends online so this often masks their vulnerabilities to many parents and professionals.
6. As such these children are at an increased risk of CSE and other forms of exploitation.
7. There is a lack of training and awareness within the workforce on CSE and the nuanced responses required when working with this vulnerable group of young people

8. In many assessments the child's ADHD or ASD are often cited , however their specific sensory needs and how they process information is rarely mentioned, this detail is so important to understand the impact of the child's ASD/ADHD and how it can impact and impaired their abilities. Every child who has identified as ASD or ADHD is different, far too often assumptions are made about their needs based on outdated knowledge and a lack of understanding of the two presenting conditions.
9. A clear understanding of how ASD and ADHD affects children is required by professionals working with both children and families, quiet often many families are unaware of what

- their children's needs are and as such struggle to help keep them safe which can lead to families being seen and treated as part of the problem and not as full safeguarding partners.
10. Another point to be consider is prevention work and awareness raising with these children, which is more complex due to communication issues and differing levels of understanding. Equally the parents of these children require prevention information, safeguarding information and awareness raising around the different types of exploitation which their children may be subjected to. A question to raise is the frequency and quality of work delivered to this cohort of children and their parents.
 11. An example of a case where we were asked for advice was with regard to a child who was a victim of CSE and had been secured twice on welfare grounds as she kept migrating back to the perpetrators in her community. The social worker informed me that the LA were considering a third application for a secure placement, on questioning the social worker about the child it transpired that she has an ASD diagnosis but had little knowledge about her sensory needs or how she processes information, as such all of the interventions that both the social worker and staff from her residential placement had implemented were not working successfully which was increasing her vulnerabilities. The same applies for children with ADHD as well, too often a behaviourist approach is taken relying on compliance and punishment rather than a needs-based assessment of their actual sensory and cognitive requirements. If children cannot process or understand information given to them how can we expect them to be aware of risks and respond to the safely.
 12. Linked to this issue is the fact that the NWG, along with other agencies are offering a more trauma informed response and this will be especially relevant to this group of children.
 13. The NWG is aware of practice nationally by police forces to inform their officers about how conditions such as autism, spectrum disorder, learning difficulty traits impact on individual's responses to police contact. be they a victim or an offender. The Met police produced memo cards for officers to raise their awareness around autism, spectrum disorder, learning difficulty traits and other special need conditions. Equally now all custody blocks within police forces have been provided with awareness raising materials around neuro- diverse 'offenders'.
 14. Sex offender prison debriefs have also been completed in different areas, and it is recognised that many offenders who are imprisoned have autistic spectrum disorder, learning difficulty traits, which make them more prone to become offenders, simply due to their literal understanding of the relationship they believe they have developed with the victim.
 15. There have also been a disproportionate number of individuals targeted by Online Child Abuse Groups (OCAGs) previously known as Paedophile hunters, who have autistic, spectrum, learning difficulty traits. Again, due to their literal interpretation of the engineered conversations online, they agree to meet and are then exposed as online paedophiles/hebephiles. These are not the people who pose the greatest threat to children, but police resources are diverted to have to deal with these individuals as offenders.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed: _____ **DPA**

Dated: _____ 7th March 2020

Witness Name:
Statement No.: 1
Exhibits:
Dated:

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EXHIBIT [] / 1

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