

Witness Name:  
Statement No.:  
Dated:

## THE INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

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### Witness Statement of Amanda Quinn, Pebbles Care

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I, Amanda Quinn, will say as follows:-

1. Pebbles Care are a provider of children's residential care homes throughout the north of England and Scotland. We offer care to looked after young people, placed by their respective authorities, who are in need of a safe and nurturing home. We work with many different authorities in both England and Scotland.

We currently have one multi bedded home within our group that falls into the Durham area and six solo provisions within St Helen's.

Child sexual exploitation has been high on the agenda for care provisions for some years now due to the growing concerns and increasing risks presented to one of the Countries most vulnerable groups of young people. When a young person is referred to any one of our homes a strict matching process follows to ensure the placement is suitable, this will include a young persons history, any previous involvement in CSE, the homes location and potential risk areas. If there is clear evidence that a young person placed could become involved or targeted due to vulnerability or any of the other outlined factors, then the placement will not be deemed suitable and not go ahead.

Each of our homes have a location risk assessment that contain statistical information provided by the police and other relevant professional bodies around hotspot areas for drugs, crime, child criminal exploitation as well as child sexual exploitation, within the local communities that the homes are situated in. This obviously enables us to make informed decisions about who we can safely care for.

2. We have one multi bedded children's home within the **DPA** area of Durham, this has only been part of the Pebbles group since November 2018. Within that time there have been three young females that would have been deemed at risk due to historical involvement in CSE in their hometowns. However, there was no evidence to suggest that any of these young people became involved in any organised networks within the Durham area. **DPA** is semi-rural and often considered by authorities as a suitable place to move young people who have become involved in CSE in more urban areas as a way of trying to break established links. The home has been successful in achieving this.

We also have six solo occupancy homes within St Helens, these homes offer one to one support within an urban setting and have been part of the Pebbles Care group since November 2016. Within this time, we have had four young people placed who

have been deemed at risk of CSE and that we also had concerns about regarding their involvement with certain adult males. However, there was no evidence to suggest that any of these young ladies were involved in any organised networks so to speak.

3. Within the Durham area our home works closely with the ERASE team (educate & raise awareness of sexual exploitation) If we have any young people that go missing from home or are suspected of becoming involved in CSE, intelligence is passed to this team so that partnership working can start to try and build a picture, this team also provide the return home interviews. The police missing from home & CSE coordinator also becomes involved in this process. The services that offer direct work with young people to raise awareness of CSE and guidance on how to keep safe are Barnardo's. Referral to the CAMHS team (child and adolescence mental health team) are also made as and when required.
4. There are a number of services available to support the young people placed in all six of the St Helens homes, these include Ad Action (for Warrington placed young people), TAZ (teenage advice zone) and Catch 22, all who provide support and advice around CSE, MFH, keeping safe and drugs & alcohol. The home also works with the police MFH coordinator and has a great relationship with the local PPCSO's who build relationships with the young people placed and keep an eye out for them when out and about.
5. We have monthly quality assurance visits conducted by an independent visitor who closely scrutinize the care, welfare & safety of young people. These visits will often make recommendations if they feel a practice can be improved in some way, they are a critical friend who work alongside us to ensure that the needs and safety of the young people are always paramount. We also have annual visits from Ofsted who inspect to check we are compliant with legislation and standards. Again, recommendations and requirements are made if they feel improvements can be made.
6. **Theme 1** – Children's homes regulations and the quality standards we work from make clear the data and analysis required to be kept and carried out within the home. All intelligence gathered within the home for example: car registration numbers, location young people have been picked up, unexplained money / goods is passed to the police to support profiling suspected offenders. Overall the police in Durham work well with the home in doing what they can support the home to keep the young people safe, the MFH & CSE coordinator is quick to make contact with the home if there has been a missing report filed and agree a plan of action. However, we have at time seen frustration from the police when there are persistent episodes, it is often the view that young people should be moved on if this is the case.
7. **Theme 2** - Our homes offer a therapeutic and nurturing environment for the young people placed, they are encouraged to build positive, trusting relationships and are offered support, guidance and help when they become involved in any form of CSE / CCE. This is all provided without judgement, shame, or guilt. Whist I cannot discuss one specific incident from Durham it is my view that the police can at times lack empathy and display frustration when they deem a young person to continue to 'involve themselves' in CSE. It is as important for all police officers, not just the

specialists, to have a solid understanding that young people are the victims in this situation and that the focus and frustration should be placed with the offenders.

8. **Theme 3** – It is our responsibility to provide safe care and promote both welfare and wellbeing. Risk assessment and risk management plans form part of the day to day care plan of each individual young person. Risks are regularly reviewed and evaluated within the home. Police and social workers are called upon to support the home if risk is apparent but at times, they lack understanding of what the home is legally permitted to do to keep young people safe from harm. We are often asked to just lock the doors or restrain to prevent a young person from leaving, essentially depriving them of their liberty.
9. **Theme 4** – We have a responsibility to report any of our looked after children missing from home if they do not return within the time specified in the care plan and we are not aware of their whereabouts. We will also report that a young person is absent if they are refusing to return to the home but we have an idea or an address of where they may be. It is the child's local authority that have the responsibility to provide return home interviews. Overall, this works and if there is a reason an authority that have a young person placed in Durham cannot provide this service, an alternative provider is sought. Area's for improvement are when a child is reported absent but the home is aware of where they may be. We have experience in St Helens of the police refusing to attend addresses given and putting the responsibility of this back onto care staff, this is not always safe and police support in these incidents is not particularly forthcoming.
10. **Theme 5** – Our responsibility to male victims would be no different from our responsibility to female victims.
11. **Theme 6** – Our homes are registered to provide care to looked after children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. We have one young person placed in the home in Durham who would be considered disabled due to Autism however he is supervised by staff at all times and not deemed to be at risk of CSE.
12. **Theme 7** – We work in partnership with many different services to ensure all aspects of a young person's care needs are met. When there is evidence that a young person is at risk or has become involved in CSE referrals to appropriate services are made without delay.
13. **Theme 8** – Within the home care plans, risk assessments and risk management plans are considered live documents, they are reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Regulation 44 Independent Visitors, Ofsted & Authority Compliance Teams also visit to inspect the services we provide. This allow for multi-disciplinary overview and swift action to be taken as a result of any emerging concern. On the whole this process works well.
14. I have worked within residential children's homes settings for over 20 years and sadly Child Sexual Exploitation, although not given that title many years ago, has always been present in one form or another. In my view there has certainly been a significant change in how the young people are now rightly viewed as victims of abuse rather than willing participants as they were many years ago. However, I am alarmed at times how professional focus weighs too heavily on educating and restricting young

people as a means of trying to stop exploitation rather than directly dealing with the perpetrators. Within the last 18 months I was involved in challenging St Helens authority regarding their insistence in maintaining a placement in one of our solo provisions that clearly wasn't appropriate, simply because they did not want to move the young person out of area. The young person was becoming more and more involved with a known male within the area who had a concerning history and presented considerable risk. This challenge reached the then Head of Care in St Helens who thought it appropriate to suggest strategies for the home to implement which included to stop allowing this particular 15 year old to buy makeup and not allow her to have her nails done. This kind of response remains part of the problem. There needs to be higher focus on contextual safeguarding and known risks presented outside of the home environment.

**Statement of Truth**

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

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
**DPA**

Dated: 9/9/20