

REPORT OF THE FIRST NOTTINGHAMSHIRE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY GROUP FOR ADOLESCENT MALE SEX OFFENDERS.

October 1989 - January 1990.

This project is part of an inter-agency attempt to develop services designed to address the risks presented by male adolescent sex offenders. It evolved from the special interest group on this topic which has been meeting since the Summer of 1988.

The Boys Group began in October 1989 after several months of preparation. Following an introductory meeting for the boys and their workers the Group met for a three day course. This welded the group and introduced the boys to the basic concepts which underpinned the planned work. The group then met weekly for 12 sessions of 1 1/2 hours.

This report summarises the main features of the project and highlights issues for further consideration.

**The Workers:** This was an experienced team of white staff from different agencies who were in a position to do the work. They represented Health, Social Services, Psychological Services and the NSPCC. There were three women and one man.

**The Consultants:** We were given advice in both planning and process by Rachel Leheup, Psychiatrist and Malcolm Cowburn, Probation Officer. Recently we have been joined by Rupert Smillie, Probation Officer who will advise on issues of race. He will later become involved as a group worker.

**The Boys:** Our criteria for selection specified white youths in an age range of 14-17, minimum violence and an acceptance of responsibility for the offences. We did not accept referrals for black children at this stage.

Their offences ranged from touching to buggery and sexual intercourse. All were deemed sexual offenders on two counts. They had been cautioned or charged and also their offences involved younger children who were pressured or intimidated.

In fact we worked with 6 boys from the 8 invited. We learned that all had either been sexually abused/exposed to violence/seen siblings abused. Four were in residential care, one in a foster home, and one at home. Three were at school and three had left. Two were in the same community home which generated some conflict in the group. We did not have enough detail about the offences which handicapped our capacity to challenge. Some of the boys had had individual work prior to the group which helped our understanding of the way they had abused and helped them use the group. Three boys completed the group and are eligible to join the next one. One chose to leave midway. Another had to be asked to go because of persistent disruptiveness. The third missed sessions and despite group worker efforts to hold him, he ceased to attend.

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AIMS: Our objectives related to two fundamental aims.

1. To teach the boys that they remain a risk to themselves and others but they can learn some ways of reducing that risk.
2. To enable the workers and consultants to develop their knowledge of what is most effective in this area of work.

CONTENT: We identified 5 main areas. We were able to do only a limited amount of work in each.

1. Offending behaviour and consequences
2. Denial or Minimisation
3. Information on sex and sexual attitudes
4. Personal histories/families and their own abuse.
5. Self Esteem and ability to manage their behaviour.

METHODS: As well as the usual mix of pencil and paper exercises, we used video and camera, brainstorming and discussion. We adapted material from work with adult offenders. Only a limited time was spent on trust games as such. Sharing details of their offending behaviour generated much trust which developed quickly.

We now have materials suitable for individual work which could be made available to other workers, after some discussion about their use.

#### OUR BASIC ASSUMPTIONS:

It is important to identify the assumptions which have determined our approach to this project. They originate in research and practice in North America. Not a lot has been written on the topic in the U.K. However, local practice with adults supports our position. We have more to learn about the differences between adolescents and adults. Our assumptions are these:

1. Adolescent boys who sexually abuse represent a high risk of further offending. Unlike other youthful offenders they are more likely to grow into their offending than out of it.
2. Their behaviour is likely to become compulsive, regularly reinforced through fantasy and very resistant to change.
3. It is a mistake to attribute to them terms which minimise the degree of abuse involved eg "experimentation".
4. Contrary to notions of Juvenile Justice we believe early intervention is essential to the task of tracking and challenging these boys who too readily disappear from view.
5. We believe most boys have offended more than they are reported for.
6. Although most of the boys will themselves be victims in some capacity, the work should primarily focus on their offending.

This project has not attempted consideration of female adolescent sex offenders. We believe they will in turn attract attention. Males continue to present as perpetrators in the majority of cases and their abusing must be confronted at an earlier age.

#### EVALUATION:

The structure and length of the project, with a closed group seems appropriate as a beginning. We are under no illusions about the amount of work really needed. The boys who completed the first group are eligible to join the next one in February 1990.

We have to improve our ability to manage the balance between nurturing and challenging.

The workers need to separate their roles and have better recording and less staff interacting with the group.

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Clearer boundaries are needed between group activity and individual work.

Our focus on tasks needs sharpening. We can't cover all the work but we can handle the process more efficiently and take a more authoritative stance with the group.

It will therefore be important to include ground rules which emphasise the need to demonstrate commitment in order to keep one's place in the group.

We need more detailed background information on the boys including the finer details of their sexual offences from victim accounts.

We need a Fighter contract with Key Workers in order to identify tasks for individual work and follow up. Those making referrals to the group need to have more commitment to a joint approach. Group work alone is not enough.

Those who are caretakers to the boys need more information so that they can support rather than undermine the aims of the group.

#### THE BOYS' VIEW:

Those who stayed seemed engaged for primarily two reasons: the attention they received and their awareness that they could offend again. They showed some signs of increased self-esteem. They shared some of their other sexual behaviours and one boy disclosed other offences. None of the boys who stayed were known to have offended during the life of the group. They began the process of understanding the experience of their victims. Some remorse was evident.

#### CONCLUSIONS:

In an ideal world this work would be part of a long term package of services for young people involved in sexual abuse. It is therefore important not to devalue this piece of work because in isolation it is so limited. Most sexual abuse work suffers in this way.

A major part of the work is to begin to learn how to assess the risk these young men represent. The groups should begin to give us some clues, particularly if we can introduce some follow up system.

We should also become better at identifying boys who can make best use of the limited resources on offer.

Finally it is worth noting the value of an inter-agency approach. This route presents opportunities for skill-sharing and network approach. ~~This route presents opportunities for skill sharing and network building.~~ In such a climate there is less chance of damaging misunderstandings about the nature of the task in hand.

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