

Safety Net

– because sometimes friends may
not be what they seem

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Background

- In 2006 Steven Hoskin was abused, tortured and finally killed by people who he thought were his friends.
- The term 'disability hate crime' fails to recognise the counterfeit friendship
- 'Steven wanted friends. He did not see that the friendship he had so prized was starkly exploitative, devoid of reciprocity and instrumental in obstructing his relationships with those who would have safeguarded him.'



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What is 'mate crime'?

- Mate Crime happens when a person with a learning disability is 'befriended' by someone who goes on to abuse or exploit that relationship. This has led to people with learning disabilities being ripped off, sexually abused, groomed for criminal offences, even murdered.
- Mate Crime is part of (Disability) Hate Crime

Examples of 'mate crime'



- Someone with autism was befriended by a man at a football club in the Midlands at which they were both volunteers.
- The man persuaded him to take out a loan for £3,000 which he then stole

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Examples of 'mate crime'



- A woman with learning disabilities has been 'pimped out' (sent to work as a prostitute) by her boyfriend
- A man proposing marriage to a woman with learning disabilities and asking her for money to save for their wedding.

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What makes mate crime different?

Duration of contact

- Mate crimes take place within established relationships. Steven Hoskin had known his murderers for 18 months prior to his murder.

It may appear consensual

- The relationship, and even the abuse, might have been invited by the person with a learning disability, raising issues of mental capacity, consent and (informed) choice

What makes mate crime different?

It is often not recognised by victim

- People may well not realise that they are being abused or exploited, and even if they do the relationship may be more important to them than any abuse that takes place within it.

May not be illegal

- It's always at the expense of the person with a learning disability - always their flat, their beer, their food, etc.. This is clearly abusive, but not illegal.

What makes mate crime different?

It largely affects people not in the system

- It is worth remembering that 9 out of 10 people with a learning disability do not receive services from the state. These are the people who are most likely to be targeted for mate crime.

Why do you think people with learning disabilities are especially vulnerable to incidents of 'mate crime'?

Spend 5 minutes thinking of some reasons before clicking on the next

slide



Why? - Some suggestions

- Everyone needs friends and to find a place in a community or communities. Sometimes any friend is better than no friend at all.
- People with learning disabilities have been 'trained' to do what they are told to do or what is expected of them, and to give the answer that a questioner wants.
- People with learning disabilities have often been very sheltered from normal community life and are, therefore, lacking in experience and often naive.

Why? - Some suggestions

- People with learning disabilities are living independently in the community with reduced support from services. This is 'situational' not personal vulnerability
- Historical social attitudes towards disability have left people feeling worthless, despised and without human rights. This makes it easier for perpetrators to justify what they do and families/staff to say 'Just ignore it.' or 'Don't go into that shop then.' rather than challenge others

How can you tell when a mate crime is happening? Some suggestions

- Unexplained injuries.
- Being involved in sexual acts to which they cannot consent.
- Weight loss.
- Bills not being paid.
- An overly critical or disrespectful friend who may bully or undermine.
- Sudden loss of assets, or change of will.
- Deference or submission to a suspected abuser
- Change in behaviour or mood
- Isolation from usual network of friends/family/community
- Accumulation of goods/services bought from sales' staff, including telesales.
- Post party debris on a regular basis.

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Stopping mate crime - prevention

- Safeguarding processes must be triggered when someone is believed to be at risk of harm and not only when evidence of harm has become obvious. Agencies have to be proactive in undertaking risk assessments to ensure that preventive action is taken.
- People with learning disabilities, at present, are very unlikely to disclose mate crime. It is up to their peers, family, friends, neighbours, carers and the community to watch for it and to take action

Stopping mate crime - prevention

- ***Act on beliefs not evidence.*** Many reviews and inquiries concerning the abuse of people with learning disabilities have concluded that people strongly suspected that abuse was taking place, but were waiting for a last piece of undeniable evidence that never comes.
- Try to enhance people's self-esteem and relationship skills; creating and supporting social opportunities.

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Stopping mate crime - prevention

- ***Being part of the neighbourhood.*** People need to reach out to, become a vital part of, and strengthen, their local communities. Neighbourhood Management Programmes may be able to help.
- Are people in contact with their Neighbourhood Warden (if any)?
- ***Tenancy Support Packages.*** If people are in housing provided by Registered Social Landlords can they get a Tenancy Support Package which sees them linking with the third sector, and getting access to outside agencies, support and activities?

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Stopping mate crime - prevention

- **Campaigning.** It's a two way process with the Police. The Police do need to get better at working with people with learning disabilities. However, people with learning disabilities need to help them.
- People need to attend Police surgeries, influencing PACT (Police & Communities Together) priorities, and inviting neighbourhood officers in for a coffee.
- People should let the Police know, for example, that they cannot get on a particular bus without suffering verbal abuse.
- *Campaigning tools (e.g. model PACT letter) are available on the Safety Net website.*

Stopping mate crime

- ***Increase Awareness of the Mental Capacity Act 2005*** - Just because someone has capacity in some areas of their life, this does not mean they have capacity in all areas and at all times.
- ***Reporting*** - We need to encourage Disability Hate Crime reporting to ensure that it is given sufficient priority, as well as to ensure that people are protected.
- ***Training*** - People with learning disabilities need training in what makes a real friend, how to recognise when someone is taking advantage of them, and what to do about it.

Safety Net



Find out more at:

www.arcsafety.net

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