

## **Teaching Notes**

### **Background**

#### **Introduction**

The ARC 'Helping Each Other' peer education project on sexual exploitation for young people with learning disabilities started in Devon in 2013.

#### **Beginnings – mate crime**

The starting point for 'Helping Each Other' was the work ARC began in 2009 on what we called 'mate crime'. Mate crimes are crimes that are perpetrated on people by those who pretend to be their friends. Perpetrators form a relationship with their victim and then use the relationship as a vehicle for the exploitation or abuse of their victim. The 'Safety Net' project ([www.arcuk.org.uk/safetynet](http://www.arcuk.org.uk/safetynet)) was a response to this form of crime and arose partly as the result of ARC members' anecdotes, and partly as a reaction to high profile murders such as that of Steven Hoskin in St Austell in 2006. Such murders, whilst horrific in their nature, are fortunately rare, but the project came across a vast range of everyday abuses that we categorised as mate crime. These included women with learning disabilities being pimped out by their 'boyfriends', people whose accommodation was turned into crack dens, women being befriended by paedophiles in order to gain access to their children, and many accounts of perpetrators making a good living off the benefits of their 'mates' with learning disabilities.

The initial phase of the Safety Net project lasted for three years, and concluded that the two predominant forms of mate crime appeared to be financial exploitation and sexual exploitation, often with the two being linked.

An archetypal mate crime case was reported to ARC by a provider in South West England. They were working with a young woman with learning disabilities who was an avid user of the internet and social media sites. On one site she 'met' a man who, after a period of time, told her he had fallen in love, and if they got together they could get married, have kids, and the rest of their lives would be wonderful; then saying, "The only thing is, I'm a bit short on money right now, can you just send me £50 . . .". The service provider remained ignorant of the relationship until a member of staff entered the woman's room one evening to find her undressing for her 'fiancé' in front of her webcam.

This example is a perfect illustration of mate crime, involving the two main forms of exploitation and showing how the two link. Safety Net's experience was that there is often 'boundary testing' with financial exploitation, which if uninterrupted, can lead to sexual exploitation.

#### **Sexual exploitation and learning disability**

There are virtually no statistics on sexual exploitation for people with learning disabilities. The few research studies on sexual abuse and learning disability suggest that people with learning disabilities are anything between two and four times more likely to be abused than the general population. It is unlikely to be any different for sexual exploitation.

These are a few things that we do know that hint at the scale of the problem:

- 1 in 20 children in the UK have been sexually abused, perhaps more.
- 1 in 3 abused by an adult did not tell anyone.
- There was a 31% increase in child sexual exploitation referrals in the year 2014/15.
- People with learning disabilities are sexually abused at roughly double the rate of the general population. Perhaps more.
- There were 4,748 reports of sexual abuse perpetrated on adults with disabilities in the years 2012 – 14, which suggests massive under-reporting. 63% of these reports were about adults with learning disabilities.
- In a 2015 survey of people with autism in Merseyside 59% said that had been manipulated or forced to do the wrong thing by a 'friend'; 22% of those aged over 16 said they had been sexually bullied or manipulated by a 'friend'.

**Remember!** The vast majority of the time, when someone discloses sexual abuse or exploitation they are telling the truth, and must be believed. Only 2 – 10% of allegations of child sexual abuse are thought to be false. Most false allegations are actually made by parents; of these, most are involved in custody cases.

### **Peer Education**

'Helping Each Other' recruited young people with learning disabilities who had experienced exploitation or who were, at least, at risk from exploitation. Peer education is now well established as a model of good practice, and research indicates that the strengths are related to trainers' credibility within the peer group, their position as potential role models, and the expertise and insights they offer. If you do not have a learning disability, and are not at risk of sexual exploitation, you cannot tell those who are what that is like.

The lack of statistical evidence, combined with historical attitudes towards people with learning disabilities as second-class citizens, means that little attention has been focused on the area. Hence, there is little in the way of policy, very little in the way of political support, and really nothing in the way of suitable educational resources - either for people with learning disabilities or those aged over 16.

The Helping Each Other teams in Plymouth and North Devon concluded that they would have to design their own resources, and the work contained on this USB is the result of that work.

## **Developing educational resources**

Having watched the available educational resources, aimed at young people without learning disabilities the team concluded that they were: a) too fast and 'busy'; b) hard to understand; c) very upsetting. On this basis the teams decided to reject all existing resources, and to couch their training within a positive framework.

## **Keeping it positive**

The teams wanted to talk to their peers about how to have positive relationships, rather than just focus on the negative relationships that constitute sexual exploitation. This was for two reasons. Firstly, the hope is that positive relationships reduce the need for bad relationships. Secondly, we believe that by talking about good and bad relationships, and the differences between the two, people are less likely to mistake the two. First hand accounts from exploitation victims show graphically how people seem prepared to tolerate the most appalling abuses and still believe their abuser loves them.

The teams then made the decision to focus their training sessions on what keeps people safe rather what puts them at risk. In any standard list of risk factors for sexual exploitation, most apply to people with learning disabilities. The teams thought that including this as part of their training would alarm many people unnecessarily and serve no useful purpose. Hence we drew on the work of Dave Hingsburger, specifically the 'Ring of Safety'.

## **The Ring of Safety**

<http://www.wecarealot.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/The-Ring-of-Safety-article.pdf>

In the Ring of Safety, Hingsburger draws on the extensive work he has done with people with learning disabilities who have been 'sexually victimised' in his home country of Canada, and identified what he regarded were the most important elements of people's lives that helped to keep them safe. This includes such things as self esteem, a good sex education and having someone in your life who really listens.

The Ring of Safety is what the team decided to put at the heart of their workshops for their peers. So a large part of the peer education workshops is allocated to discussing what people need to keep safe and how those needs can be met. This is then followed up in the workbook and action plan that each learner leaves the sessions with.

## **Practical Issues**

### **Training material**

None of the PowerPoints or handouts are locked, so they can be adapted to:

- a) changing knowledge
- b) local need, e.g. contact details for your local 'People First'.

If you make changes we would be grateful if you continue to acknowledge ARC, the 'Helping Each Other' project, and Comic Relief.

### **Trainers**

The importance of co-delivery of this training with colleagues with learning disabilities cannot be over-stated. Not only is it morally right, but our experience is that the training packs a much more powerful punch when delivered by someone 'at risk', and even more so if the trainer has personal experience of abuse or exploitation. However, we carry a huge responsibility if the trainer is a survivor, and must ensure that they are adequately prepared, that we are sensitive to their needs throughout, and have adequate mechanisms in place to support them whenever necessary.

### **Group Size**

Our experience was that 8 is an ideal group size for peer education work and 16 for staff training.

In peer education sessions it is vital that people attending are supported by others who know them well and can support their communication needs. In some settings this meant 1:1 support.

### **Timings**

The timings provided are very loose and you must feel free to adapt to need, particularly in peer work. In practice we found that we often had to spend double the amount of time suggested and/or do repeat visits.

### **Pre-work**

For the staff training we asked organisations to complete some work prior to the sessions, auditing their service against the Ring of Safety. This mail out is included on this USB. We recommend sending it out a fortnight before the training is booked.

### **Equipment**

You will need:

- ✓ Computer
- ✓ Digital projector
- ✓ Screen or white wall for projection
- ✓ Loud speakers
- ✓ Flipchart and pens
- ✓ Handouts (as per teaching plan)
- ✓ Resources (Helping Each Other workbooks etc.)
- ✓ Local information (where you can report sexual exploitation, etc.)