



"CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING: AFRUCA ROUND TABLE MEETING ON COUNTY-LINES, CHILD TRAFFICKING AND CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION IN MANCHESTER"

20TH NOVEMBER 2020

REPORT OF THE MEETING

Chair: Debbie Ariyo OBE, CEO AFRUCA - Safeguarding Children

Speakers:

1. Professor Erinma Bell MBE – CEO CARISMA Services Ltd
2. DC Colin Ward - Modern Slavery Coordination Unit, GMP
3. Rose Ssali - Programmes Lead-Support and Action for Women's Network (SAWN)
4. Susan Butlin - Strategic Lead - Complex Safeguarding, Directorate for Children and Education
5. Ismael Lea South - Director, Salam Project
6. Elyshia Cantrill , Aka Lady E Bling - Founder, Pillar of Women

Attendees:

Home Office, Statutory Services, Voluntary Organisations, Practitioners, Community members

1. Subject

“How Do Communities Understand County Lines, Child Trafficking and Criminal Exploitation?”

2. Aim of the round table meeting

The aim of the meeting was to explore:

- How affected communities understand County Lines Child, Trafficking and the impact on children and families
- What role different parts of the community play in addressing this problem
- What challenges they face in their anti-trafficking work
- What more can be done to support various organisations, empower and strengthen their roles
- How statutory agencies can improve partnerships and collaboration with communities

3. Outcomes

Key issues of concern to communities in addressing County-Lines in Manchester

3.1 How affected communities understand County Lines Child Trafficking and the impact on children, families?

- Poverty linked to inability to work makes families not to care where a child is bringing money from because the family considers him as a breadwinner
- Culture affects women from BME communities and put them at risk of exploitation. This disempowers them from protecting their children who are falling in hands of perpetrators of County-Lines
- BME children tend to be expelled from school and end-up in having a lot of time in their hands; as consequence they become prone to exploitation
- Young people bring unexplained income that parents cannot question about due to family poverty
- Communities affected by County-Lines do not take cases of children missing as exploitation due to the fact that they have lived in that situation for long and becomes normal. As consequences, Cases are reaching the Early Help when it is late. Also children are not aware of being exploited, therefore no expectation of self-referral

- Offering an accommodation to a young and vulnerable girl exposes her to Child Grooming and Criminal Exploitation. This will still affect the children she is having in that situation the mother raised them in
- Children being raised by foster parents without any experience and understanding the young person's background and culture
- Schools not collaborating with parents in reporting children's behaviours. Instead all the blame is put on the parents when it is already late (eg. Instead of school reporting a child absence as missing from school, they say he is missing from home)
- Young girls being despatched in deprived area (eg. Mosside, Longsight, Withenshawe, Moston, etc) and this prone them to more abuse and exploitation.
- Social media plays a big role in pushing young people into exploitation to afford gadgets, designer clothes and shoes, etc. The number of online grooming victims are growing daily

3.2 What role different parts of the community play in addressing this problem?

- Working with parents to raise awareness on what is around their children and can put them at risk of criminal exploitation. To encourage parents to report any early sign
- Encourage Mothers to incorporate a trusted male (brother, friend, uncle, a positive role model) in supporting young boys
- Structured mentoring once or twice a week, tapping into a child aspirations, dreams and ambitions can be of a support for children and protect them from falling into abusers' hands
- Incorporate tutoring: misdiagnosed of learning conditions put children at risk of being targeted by abusers
- Encourage our young people to speak to the teachers, teaching assistants, mentors, etc.

3.3 What challenges they face in their anti-trafficking work?

- Lack of understanding accessibility of services in African communities

- Fear of reporting signs due to immigration status or any other vulnerability. Immigration plays an adverse impact due to no recourse to public fund, no right to work and no right to access higher education
- The grassroots organisations and communities still do not understand how guns come into the country
- The misconception of taking County-Lines and Criminal exploitation as a male/boy's activity has made services missing out on female/girls victims
- Children from affluent and middle class have been missed out as victims, however evidences have shown a vulnerability in that group too
- Lack of ethnic role models in the services supporting children at risk of County-Lines because some BME mentors cannot be offered a hierarchy position due to a criminal record they had at a young age. The government focuses more on the past of some BME role models and deprives our children from getting support from members of their communities who understand their background and what they are going through.
- The cases are reaching the Early Help when it is late. Before families get the attention of the authorities, things are already happening. That part of early preventive is still missing.

4. Key recommendations made by the speakers

4.1 What more can be done to support various organisations, empower and strengthen their roles

- More opportunities for grassroots organisations, statutory services and community members to seat together and share challenges and discuss the way forward
- Organisations in Manchester to work together and bring in their expertise
- BME communities getting involved at a strategic level; influencing policy makers (eg. GM combined authority where communities can represent Race and Equality in the forums)

- Community needs to be encouraged to do things for themselves (eg. Using local venues like churches, mosques, etc) to organise our youth activities and not relying on the local authorities only.
- Schools to get well trained mentors and the government should focus on funding this service because our children spend more time learning in school and from their peers. School should play a big role in protecting our children from criminal exploitation.
- Policy making to reflect the representation from the communities experiencing county-lines and Criminal Exploitation
- We need more “Cultural intelligence” training. We should not recognise “Unconscious bias” because we all have biases and we are very conscious. Unconscious bias is an excuse
- To address what can be done before Early Intervention (the attention of the authorities). This is for grassroots to raise awareness with families/parents and empower them on how to talk to their children about the issue.

4.2 How statutory agencies can improve partnerships and collaboration with communities?

- The complex safeguarding department in the police still have to improve on working around County-lines and criminal exploitation
- Agencies and local grassroots organisations to come together and share the information
- Grassroots Organisations, Statutory organisations and communities need to work together in raising awareness on online grooming. We need to find ways in lobbying against social media companies. They have done more of damage with little recompense to our young people.
- We need the way to building bridges between statutory and community organisations
- Local police to build relationship with schools to break the defence mechanism children have because of bad experience their families have had with the police

5. Way Forward by AFRUCA

- Enhance community education through partnership projects with faith and community groups as part of AFRUCA's "Manchester Against Modern Slavery" campaign
- Improve service provision for at risk families across Manchester via establishment of AFRUCA's new Family Support programme.
- Encourage stronger advocacy for community organisations through BASNET - our national network of grassroots' organisations working in anti-trafficking and anti-slavery
- Build stronger partnerships with statutory agencies as members of various working groups across Manchester

AFRUCA – Safeguarding Children

8th January 2021