

The Opal Team

12th March 2025

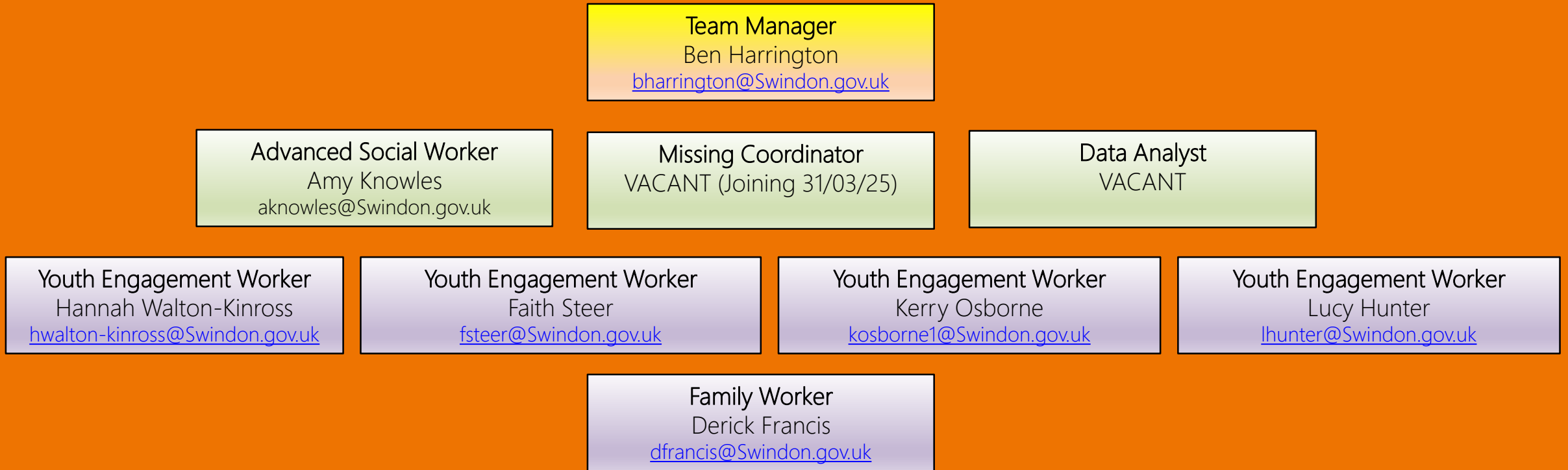
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The Opal Team

- Specialist team within children's social care supporting children and young people experiencing harm outside of the home (have to be open to social care at L3/4).
- Intensive intervention (offer at least weekly sessions but also at higher intensity at 'critical moments')
- Group Work / Outreach
- Support Children & Families Contact Swindon in identifying Harm Outside The Home (HOTH) concerns and responding appropriately
- Provide consultation to lead professionals & professional network
- Provide training to SBC colleagues and partners
- Education & training sessions for parents & carers
- Mapping
- Oversee response for our missing children.

The Opal Team



Definitions of Exploitation – CSE

"Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child... under the age of 18 into sexual activity;

- (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or*
- (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.*

The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology."

(Home Office, 2018)

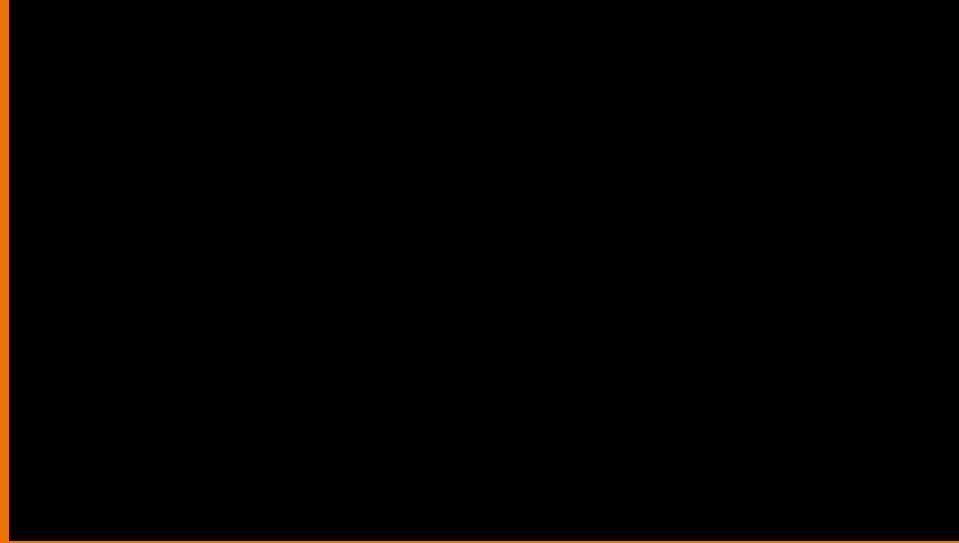
CSE – Billy's Story

[Barnardo's | Billy's story](#)

Definitions of Exploitation – CCE

- Child Criminal Exploitation again involves an abuser(s) taking advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child under 18 into criminal activity.
- Does not necessarily involve the supply of drugs.
- Children may have been trafficked and forced into child labour and modern slavery.

CCE - Consequences



Consequences (contains strong language)

Route in to Opal

Where concerns of exploitation are identified, a request for support should be completed. A Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (CERAF) can be completed to support the referral. CERAF is then shared by front door with Opal.

Opal review every CERAF completed. Opal will contact referrer within 2 working days and organise a case discussion.

Risk grading of CERAF will be agreed within case discussion. Opal worker will be offered to all children 'On the Cusp' of or 'Experiencing' exploitation

All children assessed as being 'On the Cusp' or 'Experiencing' will be added for discussion at the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) panel

Opal Criteria:

- Any child under the age of 18
- Care leavers under the age of 25
- Open to CSC at **Level 4** or **Level 3** or open to YJS
- CERAF graded at **Amber** or **Red** risk:

Emerging – Child has vulnerabilities with emerging concerns over and above peer group. There is no evidence the child is on the cusp of experiencing or is experiencing harm outside the home.

On the cusp – Child is on the cusp of experiencing harm outside the home.

Experiencing – Child is experiencing harm outside the home or has already experienced harm outside the home and is at risk of experiencing further harm.

Completing a CERAf – Key Points

- The Child Exploitation Risk Assessment considers both the child's experiences which could increase their vulnerability to exploitation, as well as considering potential indicators.
- Information should be gathered from everyone who knows the child well. This should be a multi-agency assessment.
- Information needs to be sought from the child and their family when completing a CERAf, **but** the form is not designed to be used as a tool directly with the child – many of the questions may be re-traumatising.
- Risks are dynamic – the CERAf should be updated every 2 months or when there is a significant change.
- When answering questions, context should always be provided to consider the concerns we are seeing through the lens of potential exploitation.
- If you need assistance, please reach out. The form and guidance are available @:

[Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework \(CERAf\) - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)

Integrated Adolescent Service



How to Support

- Give the child a safe space to talk about their experiences
- Take a non-judgemental approach that emphasises the child as victim
- Recognising behaviours as a form of communication
- Trust your senses – you know the children you support best and will recognise changes in presentation
- Share information and submit intel, even if it seems minor
- Seek support and advice – we are always happy to talk through concerns in Opal
- Promote pro-social activities and strengthen existing protective factors.
- If you are concerned, submit a request for help and support to Children & Families Contact Swindon. You can support your referral with a CERAf.

A Case Study – Kayden

Referral from school;

- Kayden is 11 year old and lives with his Mum. He is the only child. His Dad lives in Swindon and has regular contact, but there is no communication between parents. Kayden had previously been supported by children's services because of concerns around his Mum's drug use and mental health.
- Kayden is just about to transition to secondary school. His attendance is 65% and there are concerns around low-level but frequent disruptive behaviour.
- Kayden has been seen in the community with adults and older young people. Home is busy and there seems to be a lot of people going in and out.
- Kayden is seen almost daily at the local shop buying lots of snacks. He comes in with £10/£20 notes.
- Kayden's behaviour in school really began to dip in year 6.
- Kayden is using sexualised language not appropriate for his age.
- Kayden is seen out in the community by himself at 7/8pm. He hasn't had any missing episodes but school are worried he has no supervision at home.

Integrated Adolescent Service



A Case Study – Kayden

Police Report Received following referral:

- Kayden's home was searched following intel known drug dealers frequenting the property. Drugs were found and believed Mum's property was potentially being 'cuckooed'.
- Kayden was believed to be at the early stages of being exploited; he was being given cash by these adults and being asked to do 'favourites'.

What might exploitation look like for younger children?

- Children as young as 7 have been identified as victims of modern slavery.
- In terms of criminal exploitation, young children can be used in all stages of the drug line process however we may be more likely to see them;
 - Used as 'spotters'
 - Selling vapes
 - Shoplifting
 - Involved in ASB to divert attention from other activity

Conditions for Exploitation

- A **person/network** with access to the contexts where children spend time and the motivation to cause them harm.
- A lack of **protective structures** to disrupt/stop sources of harm.
- All children are **vulnerable** to exploitation. Other factors may increase risk but are not a pre-determinant of abuse.

(Beckett, 2011)



Responding to Exploitation – What Works?

- Recognising the child as a victim, not a suspect.
- Actively involving family in safety planning
- Supporting multi-agency approach to disrupt the exploitation.
- Recognising and being available at the 'Critical Moment'

Responding to Exploitation – What Works?

- Using strengths-based, relationship-driven approaches. Building a trusted relationship is crucial.
- Building a 'team around the relationship'.
- Acting to make the contexts where children spend time safer.
- Identifying and strengthening protective factors.

Indicators of Exploitation

- Change in presentation/behaviour ; changes in the language they use
- Withdrawal from family/friends
- Unexplained money/gifts/items
- Picked up/dropped of by unknown people
- Secretive about where they go
- Unknown friends/relationships
- Missing from home or school
- Multiple phones/sim cards/burner phone
- Travelling to areas where they have no known links
- Unexplained injuries, STI's or UTI's
- Secretive/unusual phone or social media use
- Fearful of certain people/places/situations
- Substance use
- More sexual knowledge / more sexualised behaviour than developmentally appropriate

Vulnerability Factors

These may increase risk;

- Low school attendance/exclusion
- History of abuse and trauma
- Being a child in care/care leaver
- Social isolation
- SEND
- Low self-esteem/confidence
- Living in poverty
- Substance misuse

Push/Pull/Control Factors



Push factors drive the child to detach from people who keep them safe



Pull factors are actions by perpetrators that lure the child in



Control factors prevent the child escaping

Push/Pull/Control Factors



Push

- Parental issues
- Experience of DVA
- Experiences of abuse
- Family Breakdown
- Bereavement or loss
- Socio-economic difficulties
- Unstable housing



Pull

- Being given money, drug, material items
- Believing they are in a loving, caring relationship/friendship
- Feeling accepted, sense of belonging
- Glamorisation, sense of status
- Excitement



Control

- Threat or act of violence against them/the people important to them
- Debt bondage
- Blackmail
- Isolating from protective networks
- Threat of criminalisation

Power of Language

The language we use matters...

It can empower and inspire but also silence, blame and influence the response to the abuse the child is suffering.

"prostituting herself"

"Beyond parental control"

"choosing to meet with"

"Putting themselves in risky situations"

"they are sexually promiscuous"

"not engaging"

Power of Language

- Be clear and specific, name the abuse for what it is
- Focus on the activity of the abuser
- Emphasise the presence of coercion and control
- Avoid acronyms – this can belittle experiences

[Language Matters.pdf \(barnardos.org.uk\)](https://www.barnardos.org.uk/language-matters.pdf)

*"has been
raped"*

*"under the
control
of..."*

*"being
forced to"*

*"the abuser
has taken
advantage
of..."*

*"they are
being
exploited"*

*"the support
is not
accessible"*

Adultification

- A type of bias that skews the perception of certain children, being viewed as more grown up than their peers and influencing the safeguarding response for them.
- Age, gender, ethnicity and sexuality can all affect how children are viewed.
- The impact – children left unprotected and vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.
- Professional curiosity and reflective practice is key – do not assume and seek to understand who the child is and continually challenge our stereotypes .

[Adultification - September 2024 - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)

If you are concerned...

- Where the child or YP is not open to social care, **complete a request for support to Children and Families, Contact Swindon**
- We are always happy to talk through your concerns – opal@swindon.gov.uk
- Where the child or YP is open to social care, lead professional to complete CERAf and send to Opal
- Where exploitation concerns are identified, the child or YP will be discussed at the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) panel.