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**LANCASHIRE CONSTABULARY SUBMISSION TO THE 2007  
HERMAN GOLDSTEIN AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN  
PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING**

**OPERATION AWAKEN PROJECT**

**Submitted By**

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## Summary

Awaken is a joint Police and Children's Services Project set up to tackle the sexual exploitation of vulnerable children and young people under 18yrs. The Project has been running for over 24mnths. The formation of the Project followed the realisation that Blackpool, Britain's largest seaside resort, has a problem of sexual exploitation that was not transparent until the tragic disappearance and suspected murder of a young girl, later found to be involved in sexual exploitation.

The initial scan identified over 60 children and young people exposed and vulnerable to sexual exploitation, connected to several Town centre takeaway premises (honey-pots). The exploitation often included the commercial exchange of money, food, shelter and gifts for the provision of indecent sexual acts. Children involved in any form of sexual exploitation face immense risk to their physical, emotional and psychological health.

It was against this backdrop that a decision was made by Western Division of Lancashire Constabulary and Blackpool Council Children's Services to form the Awaken Project.

Analysis showed the average victim to be female aged between 13 and 17, from single biological parent families and vulnerable to sexual exploitation from a number of avenues. The average offender was over the age of 31yrs, unemployed or un-skilled, often acting out offences alone and in premises controlled by them.

In response a multi-agency team was set up, consisting of police officers, social workers, education welfare officers, a health worker and administrator, managed by a Police Detective Inspector and a

Children's Services manager. All staff co-located, working together from Blackpool Police Headquarters. The Project focused its response on Town centre takeaway's, the targeting of care homes, amusement arcades, the on-street sexual exploitation of young males, massage parlours used as brothels and the Internet. All presented vulnerability to young people. The Projects multi-dimensional tactics of engaging with victims, targeting offenders and making safe locations, make it unique in the Country.

Consistent with The Projects assessment criteria and using the NIM, Awaken has established a comprehensive intelligence led sexual exploitation database, which assists victim safeguarding and offender targeting. 74 offenders arrested, 157 criminal charges laid and a 96.8% conviction rate achieved. The Project has used prevention and intervention to Safeguard 527 young people, serving 76 Abduction Act notices on suspected offenders and reducing the number of frequent MFH's known to the Project. Additionally Awaken has positively impacted upon both school truancy rates and children in placement breakdowns.



The Awaken Project is a joint Police and Children's Services Project set up to tackle the sexual exploitation of vulnerable children and young people in Blackpool. The town is Britain's largest seaside resort with up to 13 million visitors annually. Blackpool scores very high on all indices of multiple deprivation.

### **Scanning**

Following the tragic disappearance and suspected murder of a young girl in 2003 concerns were raised as to the extent and scale of sexual exploitation within Blackpool. Detectives carried out an initial problem scan by researching the Home Office Large Major Enquiry System, used as part of the above Murder Investigation and identified several young people exposed to sexual exploitation and linked to Town Centre "Takeaway" premises. This work was supported by a joint information exchange between Children Services staff and Police officers based at Blackpool. This initial work resulted in over sixty children and young people identified as vulnerable to sexual exploitation and exposed a cluster of Town centre food "Takeaway" premises, as places presenting added vulnerability to young people of being sexually exploited. The exploitation often included the commercial exchange of money, food, shelter and gifts for the provision of indecent sexual acts. The young people were being groomed and sexually assaulted both inside and outside of premises by a number of "Takeaway" owners and workers.

It was against this backdrop that a decision was made by Blackpool Council Children's Services and Lancashire Constabulary to form the Awaken Project.

## **Analysis**

Initial analysis presented a broad sexual exploitation problem profile. The Project identified a number of avenues presenting a risk of sexual exploitation.

Children and young people were vulnerable to sexual exploitation from several Town centre Takeaway premises (acting as Honey-pots). The victims were all young females from the age of 11yrs upward. With the majority aged between 13 - 15yrs. Friendship groups formed within some local high schools increased the vulnerability of young people encouraged by peer group pressure and the promise of money, gifts and other such enticement.

Analysis showed that in relation to the takeaways, non-white adult males, working alone or within friendship groups, were principally perpetrating the exploitation.

Further analysis identified that young people were vulnerable from predatory paedophiles targeting both Local Authority and privately run care homes, those frequenting amusement arcades as hunting grounds and those grooming families with young children. Analysis also revealed some on-street sexual exploitation of young boys and vulnerability from saunas/massage parlours, used as brothels exploiting under 18 year olds within the indoor sex industry.

The Awaken Project further enhanced analysis with the submission of offence variable documentation to Liverpool University for each victim and offender engaged. (Research commissioned by The Lancashire Constabulary).

## **Victim Analysis**

The average victim is likely to be female, and between the ages of 13 and 17. She will probably have 2

or more siblings, and will live with either a single (biological) parent, or a biological parent and his/her partner (who is not related to the victim). The victim will likely consume alcohol and will have engaged in underage sexual behaviours. It is expected that she will have encountered Social Services or the Police, often while still under the age of 11. Most often, these authorities will have been alerted because of the behaviour of other members of the victim's family (e.g., domestic violence, family member has committed a crime).

The overwhelming majority of victims are female (74%). (60%) of victims are over the age of 14yrs. Alarmingly (40%) are under the age of 14 years. This age group is likely to have at least some sexual awareness. There is also evidence of engaging in 'pseudo adult' vices, such as alcohol consumption (50%), smoking (32%), and, in a small number of cases, drug taking (6%). Most victims have siblings (91%), but only 20% of the victims are living with both biological parents.

The level and frequency of assault was greater for those victims in the sample who were truant (28%).

A significant proportion of the victims had been in contact with some statutory organisation (50% Social Services; 28% Police) prior to the offence occurring. It is notable that the most common reason for receiving statutory attention was a sexual offence perpetrated by a family member (20%), followed by the child displaying problematic (15%) or criminal behaviour (13%). Within the present sample, early entrance into the statutory system can be seen as a significant risk factor, increasing the severity of victimization.

Some characteristics were found to indicate higher risk to the victim of penetrative sexual assault:

VICE – victim uses drugs or alcohol or both

ABSENCE – victim truant from school

AUTHORITIES – victim had previous contact with social services or the police

SEX OFFENDER – victim has a sex offender in the family

## **Offender Analysis**

The prototypic perpetrator is a white male, over the age of 31, who lives in rented accommodation and has moved frequently during the previous 3 years. The offender is likely to be either unemployed at the time of the offence, or working at a job that involves unskilled labour. Often, he will never have been married, and will have at least one prior conviction (most frequently, this will be for acts of Dishonesty, Violence, or Damage committed as an adult).

The majority of the offenders were white (72%). The rate of non-white offenders in this sample is significantly higher than the demographic breakdown for all offenders across Lancashire (91% white, 4% Asian, 2% Black/mixed heritage) as reported in the Lancashire County Community Safety Audit. The ethnic breakdown within this sample is also not in line with the general population in Lancashire, which reports 6.6% of the population are from a black minority ethnic group.

The majority of offenders are over the age of 31 (65%), making them twice the age of the victim in most cases. They tended to have transient lifestyles, living in rented accommodation (63%), moving frequently (44%), and having no job (37%) or an unskilled job (35%) at the time of the offence. The majority had never been married (44%).

Most of the offenders known to the project were already in the system (74%) for some type of criminal behaviour, most commonly offences of dishonesty, violence, criminal damage, disorder, or burglary.

## **Offence Analysis**

A typical offence occurs in premises controlled by the offender, acting alone, and is frequently under the influence of alcohol. The offence occurs after several meetings between the victim and offender, after the offender has given the victim small gifts.

There are significant indicators that the offenders are engaging in grooming behaviour and premeditation in the majority of the offences. A large number of the offences occurred after several meetings between the victim and the offender (54%) and after they had become acquainted for at least a week (24%) and often for over a month (30%). The development of a 'pseudo relationship' between the victim and the offender is supported by evidence that in a number of cases the victim used their mobile to contact the offender (30%).

The most common strategy employed by paedophiles is to engage in 'autonomy granting' behaviours in an attempt to make the victim feel complicit in their own abuse. In 28 cases the offender engaged in gift giving of some type prior to the offence.

### **Assessment**

In response to the highlighted problems Western Division of the Lancashire Constabulary and Blackpool Children Services set up a truly dedicated multi-agency team made up of sixteen staff members. The team is managed by a Police Detective Inspector and a Children's Services Manager and made up of Police officers, social workers, a education welfare officer, a children's employment officer, a police volunteer and a primary care trust health worker. A team administrator supports the Project. All staff are co-located.

### **Project terms of reference**

- To establish effective systems for safeguarding those children identified as vulnerable and open to sexual exploitation and targeting offenders.
- To adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to disrupting and making safe locations and establishments used to facilitate the sexual exploitation of children and vulnerable persons.



- To engage with statutory and voluntary agencies working with vulnerable children\_who may be at risk of sexual exploitation or are receiving therapeutic services as a result of sexual exploitation.
- Develop information sharing arrangements between partner agencies.

### **Outcome Criteria**

It was agreed that success criteria should take in the below –

- Number of vulnerable children identified as at risk of sexual exploitation
- Numbers of arrests/prosecutions and pending prosecutions of offenders.
- Number of victim interventions and offender disruptions.
- Reducing the number of repeat Missing From Home. (Known to Project).
- Reducing the truancy/exclusion rates and SE awareness raising.
- Reducing the number of Looked After Children placement breakdowns.

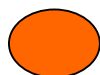
The projects tactics and multi-dimensional approach to engaging with victims, targeting offenders and making safe locations of added vulnerability to sexual exploitation make it unique in the Country.

## Main Tactical response

1. The Awaken team conducts joint police and social worker visits with all identified vulnerable children and young people under 18yrs, exposed to sexual exploitation. The Project has built up a comprehensive database of children and young people vulnerable to exploitation/continued sexual exploitation. The early identification, inclusion on the database and engagement of young people has increased levels of intervention, support and Safeguarding. Additionally it has enhanced the effective pro-active targeting of offenders and making safe of locations.

Victims are assessed against a simple priority matrix and graded high, medium or low. (See below matrix).

### HIGH PRIORITY (HP)



Red

Substantial Information exists indicating that a vulnerable person under 18yrs old is at “current risk” of being exposed to sexual exploitation by others.

**(HP) Requires planned deployment of resources.**

### MEDIUM PRIORITY (MP)



Green

Information exists which indicates a vulnerable person under 16yrs old has been, or is likely in future to be, exposed to sexual exploitation by others.

**(MP) Requires active Joint Service response.**

### LOW PRIORITY (LP)

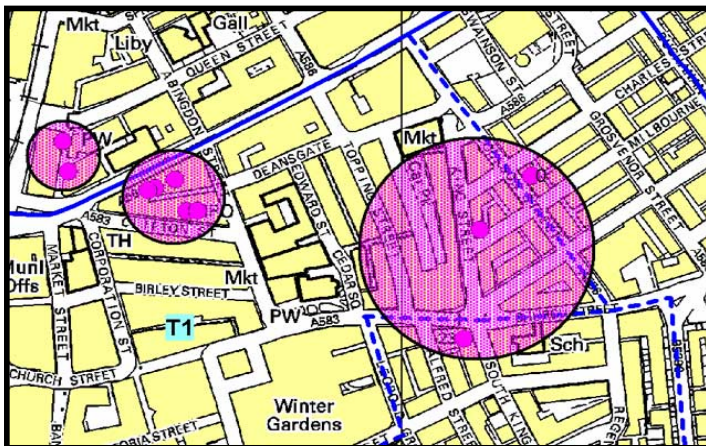


Yellow

Limited information exists which indicates that a person under 18yrs old has been, or is likely in future to be, exposed to sexual exploitation by others.

**(LP) Requires intelligence hardening and active Joint Service response.**

2. The pro-active use of section 2 of the Child abduction Act 1984, as a preventative tactic. In order to safeguard the welfare of vulnerable persons and aid the prosecution of offenders. The use of this tactic will require a statement of evidence from the parent/carer of the exploited child under 16yrs, the service of a warning notice upon the suspected offender, showing of victim photograph and linking the offender to the Police national computer system.
3. The use of community beat managers in support of Section 2 CAA 1984 and offender targeting.
4. To Identify and map premises/locations used to facilitate sexual exploitation and create “Zones of action” in order to raise awareness of those areas presenting added vulnerability to young people of becoming victims of abuse and in support of prevention and disruption tactics.



5. STOP, RECORD and REFER” tactic enabling identification of vulnerable persons U18yrs and offenders operating within identified sexual exploitation “Zones of action”. Thereby making safe locations.
6. The Licensing staff to enforce licensing legislation relating to fast food outlets identified as premises of added vulnerability to young people thereby assisting in making safe/closing down relevant premises.

7. Covert tactics have been used where appropriate in support of evidence gathering on suspected exploiters.
8. Increased engagement within local authority and privately run care homes. This serves as a necessary source of intelligence and early warning system to safeguard against those predatory offenders targeting vulnerable people in care.
9. The carrying out of return home interviews for ALL repeat MFH's known to the project.
10. The delivery of a bespoke Sexual Exploitation education package within schools.
11. To identify and build relationships with local agencies providing existing facilities for children and young people.

The above directory is not an exhaustive list of tactical options.

### **Victim response**

Using a combination of the above tactics the Project has undertaken 557 joint police and social worker visits to children identified as vulnerable to Sexual exploitation. The joint visit strategy has proven the gateway to increased safeguarding of victims and the springboard to criminal investigations, leading to a significant number of victims providing complaints of sexual abuse through Achieving Best Evidence interviews.

Project social workers have undertaken direct work with a number of the most vulnerable sexually exploited young people with excellent results.

## **Case studies**

**Child A** 15yrs, was at the upper scale of high risk, involved in selling sex and using crack cocaine.

Awaken coordinated a multi-agency exit strategy. Issues relating to integration to education and family attachments were addressed leading to successful enrolment to college and cessation of drug use.

Section 2 Notices were served on several males.

**Child B** was the victim, of "group rape". Police Officers arrested the offenders while supporting the young person throughout the Court process, in securing suitable accommodation and addressing complex health needs. The young person and the work of the Project was praised by the presiding Judge following the conviction of the offenders.

**Child C**, a child exposed to sexual exploitation, unhappy at home and who had made repeated attempts to take her own life, was engaged by Project worker in therapeutic work. This had a positive outcome in particular the cessation of what had been recurring flashbacks of previous sexual abuse.

## **Offender response**

The project has undertaken over 134 pro-active and re-active investigations against abusers and used the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to charge offenders with a wide variety of sexual offences. To date 76 warning notices have been served against suspected sexual exploiters using Section 2 of The Child Abduction Act 1984. The service of these notices and the tactics employed, have proven to be an invaluable preventative option against suspected abusers. The use of Section 2 notices has empowered despairing parents, severed links between the exploiter and exploited and led to criminal charges and convictions for those found breaking notices.

## **Case studies**

A **51-year-old male** "Takeaway" owner was identified as associating with 21 young females none of whom were older than 14yrs. The Project obtained the full support of parents and subsequently served the offender with 21 warning notices relating to Section 2 of The Child Abduction Act 1984. This effectively severed ALL links between the offender and the young females. The male offender was charged with a number of sexual assaults relating to some of the safeguarded children. (Remanded in custody). His "Takeaway" premises have now been closed.

A **48-year-old male** was frequenting Amusement arcades as "hunting grounds" to facilitate his sexual exploitation of children. The Project conducted an investigation that showed the male had propositioned four 9yr old boys offering them money in exchange for sexual acts. The Project presented the evidential case before Preston Crown Court whereupon the male received a custodial sentence of 7 years.

A **38-year-old male**, registered sex offender had infiltrated an Internet Social Networking site used by a group of high school pupils. When doing so he had purported to be a 19-year-old female. He made it appear to the boys that they were involved in a web camera chat with the female. Whilst doing so he incited them to engage in sexual activity, which he recorded without their knowledge. The offender then threatened one of the boys stating he would distribute the recorded images unless he committed sexual acts against his younger sibling. Police officers executed a search warrant at the male's address where he was found on the Internet, in his guise as a teenager. He had over 450 'buddies' linked to his account. He was charged with a variety of offences, pleaded guilty at Court and was sentenced to 3yrs imprisonment.

## Location response

Initially the project identified in excess of 60 young people frequenting town centre takeaways and/or associating with significantly older adult males employed within “Takeaways”. The Project has significantly impacted on these “honey-pots” by adopting a problem oriented 3 tier multi-dimensional approach using the problem analysis triangle. Tier 1 incorporates the early identification, joint police officer and social worker visits and direct and therapeutic work with children and young people. Tier 2 involves the pro-active targeting, arrest and prosecution of relevant offenders and the innovative use of Section 2 of The Child Abduction Act 1984 legislation. Tier 3 includes awareness raising and the setting up of “Zones of Action” in areas identified as presenting increased vulnerability to children and young people of Sexual exploitation.

This 3 tiered approach is supported by an over arching bespoke sexual education package delivered within schools with the aim of preventing future exploitation.



## Prevention and education work with children and young people

Awaken has developed activities based around “Things we don’t talk about”, in order to raise young

people's awareness of issues around sexual exploitation. Areas covered include identifying risk behaviour and vulnerability, loving/abusive relationships, the grooming process, keeping safe and seeking/giving help. In collaboration with a young women's project worker, Awaken deliver sessions to young women regarding sexual exploitation.

Additionally Awaken deliver a 6-week course to those pupils identified as at risk.

The Project has produced a bespoke education package being delivered to all local high schools and other partner agencies. The Project engaged with educators, young people and other professionals working within schools, raising understanding and awareness levels with the aim of "Educating out sexual exploitation".

The Project has delivered Sexual Education presentations to a large number of partner agencies and community groups; this has served to increase the level of intelligence and reporting by other agencies.

### **Project success criteria and Assessment**

#### **Number of children identified at risk of sexual exploitation**

The Project has identified and recorded on its database over **527** children and young people vulnerable and at risk of sexual exploitation (to varying degrees) and to date has conducted over **557** joint police and social worker visits. This has enabled a greater understanding of the scale and nature of sexual exploitation in Blackpool and enhanced more effective safeguarding of victims and early identification of offenders.



### **Arrest, disruption and prosecution**

74 Sexual Exploitation linked arrests have been made resulting in 157 Sexual Exploitation related criminal charges, 31 Convictions (96.8% conviction rate for cases heard at court), 13 pending prosecutions and 76 warning notices served using Section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984. A number of offenders have received prison sentences of several years.

### **Reducing number of repeat Missing From Home's**

A 2001 study (Children's Society) found that 67% of young runaways will stay with a stranger and get hurt. 25% will sleep rough and 21% will be physically and sexually assaulted.

As part of the strategy to tackle high-risk behaviour, Project staff have conducted joint police and social worker visits to all reported MFH's who are known to the Project and vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The initial base line for missing episodes for young people known to the Project was between 5 and 25 episodes annually.

Over the past 12 month period frequent MFH's known to and visited by Awaken Staff have reduced their instances of going missing by over 60%. This has significantly reduced the frequency and need for intensive and costly MFH enquiries.

### **Reducing truancy/exclusion rates and sexual exploitation awareness raising.**

The Project has engaged with Educators, young people and other professionals working within schools, raising understanding and awareness levels with the aim of "Educating out sexual exploitation". Over

1000 high school children have received input on this rolling programme.

The Project has delivered in excess of 200 sexual exploitation presentations to a large number of partner agencies and community groups.

### **Individual Educational case studies**

**Child K** had made herself vulnerable to sexual exploitation and not accessed education for the previous 6mnths due to bullying issues. School had attempted to resolve the problems unsuccessfully. Following home visits to discuss educational provision with Child K her case was discussed, especially her vulnerability. A referral was put together and submitted to an Education panel. It was agreed that Child K should be allocated a place at a specialist centre. Child K was admitted there on 15<sup>th</sup> July and her attendance is reported to be excellent.

**Child M** was in danger of exploitation and permanent exclusion from high school. She had been offered work related learning, but wasn't attending her work placement, spending her days in amusement arcades. Her mother was not happy with the provision offered and felt that Child M should be in full time education, studying for her GCSEs. Awaken's education worker intervened contacted school and requested a meeting to discuss these issues. Subsequently a Pastoral Support Meeting was held in school, which Child M and her mother attended. A Pastoral Support Plan was drawn up which enabled Child M to be re-integrated into school on a full-time basis. Child M is reportedly settled in school, her behaviour has improved and she hasn't had any exclusion this academic year.

### **Partnership awareness**

The Awaken Project in partnership with the PCT and Connect have produced a SE awareness raising credit card style contact card, leaflets, posters and information wallets, targeted and given to children and young people vulnerable to SE and their parents.



### **Reducing School Exclusion/truancy rates**

Data recorded by the project in relation to the number of 'successful education interventions' highlights 31 children have benefited directly from intensive support from the project ensuring they have returned to full time education or have avoided being excluded.

### **Breakdown of fixed term and permanent exclusions**

<u>2003/04</u>		<u>2004/05</u>		<u>2005/06</u>	
Fixed: 22%	Permanent: 3%	Fixed: 18%	Permanent: 3%	Fixed: 2%	Permanent: 0.5%

### **Reducing number of looked after children in placement breakdowns**

The Project has begun to record data on the number of interventions undertaken involving children who are in the looked after care system. The aim is to make a positive and sustained input ensuring that this particular vulnerable group is supported in relation to the sustainability of their placements both in children homes and in foster care.

The targeting of individuals seeking to form inappropriate relationships has led to increased confidence in the Police by caregivers and shared enterprise to protect.

### **Summary**

The Awaken Project has had a profound and far reaching effect on keeping children safe in Blackpool. Key offenders are serving custodial sentences and several “Takeaway” businesses causing concern have been closed and licences revoked.

The effective and successful use of a POP strategy and the Project’s multi-disciplinary formation/location has contributed significantly to information sharing, knowledge based learning and greater public confidence in Public Agencies.

The Project was recognised by the Governmental “Joint Area Review” Inspectorate as a positive, forward thinking approach, making a valuable contribution to the well being of children in Blackpool.

Importantly, the Project has been recognised nationally as a “model of best practice” (Home Office Guidance), which has led to the formation of Projects in other parts of the country who have actively sought our involvement in evaluating the approach taken in Blackpool to tackle Sexual Exploitation.

### **Agency and Officer information**

- The initiative was adopted at divisional level.
- The POP approach to Policing had been widely embraced across the County and embedded in working practices.
- Incentives to Police Officers were in relation to career development and departmental progression.

- The County's use of POP is well established, the Project made use of the SARA model, utilising the Problem Analysis Triangle. Use of National Intelligence Model (NIM) and National research on sexual exploitation.
- Factors in relation to the scale of the problem initially and level of understanding by partner agencies of POP model.
- Staffing for the Project initially came from establishment, however partner agencies matched funding and in the case of health, wholly funded the health post. One off set up costs were needed in terms of accommodation, ICT, vehicles etc.

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