

Mapping Survivor Journeys: Lived Experiences of Accessing Support for Sexual Exploitation

Growing up, she was exposed to an unsettled and at times unpredictable home environment, with limited emotional support and stability. This led to dysfunctional, and toxic relationships with older people who groomed her into exploitative situations.

In this resource we will follow Lucy's story as she becomes an adult, looking at the interactions between professionals and Lucy, and how these interactions impact the course of Lucy's life. As you read about Lucy's life, please remember that she has been subjected to a cycle of abuse and neglect before we meet her which makes it hard for her to seek help as she becomes an adult.

Supportive Response	Lucy is screened at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation. She receives support from Horizon including: regular multi agency child exploitation meetings, return home conversations after missing episodes, a referral and positive reasonable grounds decision from the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).	Lucy's transition to adulthood is planned through multi-disciplinary meetings she attends in the months prior to her birthday. She receives temporary accommodation, understands the NRM and the support available and makes an informed decision to continue in the process as an adult. She is also referred to a specialist exploitation charity.	Lucy explains she has been staying with Ivan, a 40-year- old man who "asks her to do things she doesn't like doing". Lucy is offered help to contact the police, but she would prefer to contact her accommodation and the specialist service she knows. Lucy returns to her accommodation with food, a phone, and an appointment with the specialist service the next day.	In the appointment, Lucy talks about how Ivan pressured her into dealing drugs when she was younger. Lucy feels Ivan groomed her into a sexual relationship which began around her 18th birthday. A month ago, he took her to a flat and forced her to provide non-consensual sexual acts to others. During this conversation Lucy appears unwell.
What Happens To Lucy	Children's Social Care is involved due to concerns about Lucy's home life, missing episodes, college absences, and links to older people involved in crime.	Lucy approaches her 18 th birthday. Her parents tell her she cannot continue to live at home as an adult.	A few months later, Lucy attends a drop-in. She's hungry, dishevelled and on edge and doesn't appear to have any personal possessions.	Overnight, Lucy decides she is ready to tell someone the full story of what happened between her and Ivan and get some support.
Missed Opportunities	Professionals lack an overarching view of all of the concerns around Lucy, due to limited multi-agency working. As such, they view Lucy's behaviour as a response to difficulties at home rather than exploitation indicators. She receives no specialist support or NRM referral.	No transition meetings, specialist support, or accommodation options are provided in the run up to Lucy's 18th birthday. She turns 18 without access to professional help. Lucy tells professionals that she will stay with people she considers friends, professionals accept this outcome without further exploration.	The drop-in is busy and Lucy feels rushed. She does not feel supported enough to give her details or disclose the argument with Ivan. After receiving a food parcel, she leaves with nowhere safe to stay. She spends the night on a bus, in a 24-hour fast-food restaurant, and walking in the city centre.	Without a phone, Lucy returns to her parents for help. An argument leads a neighbour to call the police, who remove her from the property. Lucy is distraught, exhausted, and appears unwell.

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Learn more about modern slavery here.

Supportive Response

Lucy is shocked by her pregnancy but is supported to understand her options.

The hospital safeguarding team coordinates a multi-agency response involving Police, Maternity, Housing, Children's Social Care, the Council's Modern Slavery Lead, NRM support, drug and alcohol support, and other specialist services.

Thanks to the support she receives Lucy agrees to give a statement.

Specialist officers speak with Lucy, and their investigations lead to the safeguarding of other women at the flat Lucy was taken to.

Lucy is empowered to add her recent experiences to her NRM, and understand the police processes, and her options around involvement with the criminal justice process.

After a period of support, Lucy receives a positive conclusive grounds NRM decision.

After some ups and downs, Lucy ends her contact with Ivan, moves into her own flat, and remains drug- and alcohol-free for the rest of her pregnancy.

Lucy's baby is born and Children's Social Care step away when Lucy and her child are living free from exploitation.

What Happens To Lucy

Professionals take Lucy to A&E where tests show that Lucy is pregnant and has illicit substances in her bloodstream.

The police contact Lucy.

Lucy continues with her pregnancy.

Missed Opportunities

The pregnancy and referral to Children's Social Care, which triggers earlier experiences, overwhelm Lucy.

She leaves hospital against medical advice and is reported missing to the police.

Police find Lucy at Ivan's address and remove her due to concerns for her and her unborn child.

She is under the influence and makes no disclosures.

She refuses advice to approach the Council for accommodation.

Officers allow her to leave and make a safeguarding referral to Children's Social Care.

Ivan continues to control and abuse Lucy, coercing her into substance use and sexual exploitation.

Isolated from support, Lucy's baby is removed at birth, and she remains in a cycle of abuse and exploitation.

Lucy's story represents the experiences of many girls and women who are subjected to sexual exploitation.

All of what you have read, in both sides of Lucy's story, has happened to at least one individual in Coventry.

Professionals have the power to change lives, please do what you can to ensure your change has a positive impact.

Coventry City Council

Kairos Women Working Together

Black Country Women's Aid – we listen, we support, we care

West Midlands V.O.I.C.E – Voice of Insight, Change & Empowerment

West Midlands Anti Slavery Network

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