



# Thematic Briefing #2:

## A summary of applications for direct support from the MsUnderstood Partnership

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## Introduction

In August 2013 the MsUnderstood Partnership opened an application process for local areas across England to bid for strategic and operational support to address peer-on-peer abuse. Applicants were required to approach us as a multi-agency partnership led by the local safeguarding children's board.

In total, 40 multi-agency partnerships bid for support to improve what they do, take a proactive approach, and to be at the forefront of developing a response to this issue. This level of interest demonstrates that this truly is a national challenge. This briefing summarises the content of the local area applications.

## Structure

This briefing is structured by summarising key points from responses to following application questions, from which qualitative data could be drawn:

- Why are you applying to be part of the MsUnderstood Programme?
- What do you know about the nature of peer-on-peer abuse in your local area?
- (Grouped together in the section "Current response"):
  - Do any of your strategies make specific reference to managing incidents of abuse when perpetrators are under-18?
  - What services do you currently provide to children affected by, or involved in, peer-on-peer abuse (including peer-on-peer exploitation, teenage relationship abuse, and gang related violence)?
  - Does your area have any strategic or operational multi-agency groups which consider cases of peer-on-peer abuse (i.e. child sexual exploitation sub-group, multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC), multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA), gang and serious youth violence group)?
- What do you hope to achieve by participating in the MsUnderstood Programme?

The briefing concludes by listing the successful applicants and summarising the work programme undertaken.

## Definitions

For the purposes of this briefing, and our work more broadly, the term 'peer-on-peer abuse' refers to all forms of abuse and violence between young people aged 10–18 years, including teenage relationship abuse, child sexual exploitation, serious youth violence, bullying and harmful sexual behaviour ([Firmin, C and Curtis, G 2015a](#)). Any response to this phenomenon needs to cut across these definitions and capture the complex web of young people's experiences. It is possible, after all, that a young person could be sexually exploited by a partner who is gang-associated, of a similar age to them, and who has also been physically abusive ([Firmin, C and Curtis, G 2015b](#)).

For more information about peer-on-peer abuse, please refer to '[Practitioner Briefing #1: What is peer-on-peer abuse? \(2015\)](#)', available on the MsUnderstood website.

## Why sites applied to be a part of the MsUnderstood Programme

The local multi-agency partnerships who applied for support were at very different stages in responding to the issue of peer-on-peer abuse, so their needs were diverse.

Some saw themselves as having made great strides in this area and had aspirations for continued improvement, others had developed their response to CSE and were at the beginning stages of approaching peer-on-peer exploitation specifically. On the whole, local multi-agency partnerships saw participating in the MsUnderstood programme as an opportunity for an objective review of current provision and future plans, and to ensure they are taking the best approach to support young people and those around them.

All applicants, whether they applied as a single local area or with neighbouring local areas, expressed an interest in bringing together the work of different departments and avoiding duplication. One application talked about 'seamlessness for young people' and another stated a need to provide the best service to young people, staff and the community.

Two applicants discussed their experience of relocating young people, one applicant in particular highlighted concerns with this practice.

Added to this is that [we] do not have 'home grown' gangs but are feeling the impact of high risk gang nominals being

placed in the borough, for the safety of these individuals. This displacement into a borough that does not have the resources or knowledge to cope with an imported issue is a strong reason why we [are] applying for this Programme.

One applicant understood the relationship between their young people and neighbouring boroughs particularly well and highlighted the benefits of working with neighbouring local authorities to respond to improve safety for young people.

Additionally, children and young people in [our area] are notably mobile and consistently move across borough boundaries for education, recreational, criminal, familial and other reasons. This is a feature of everyday life.

Applicants expressed a concern about identifying young people who were in need of support within a climate where sexual harassment and the sharing of explicit images is being normalised. One local area in particular highlighted the importance of working to their local profile:

Quite rightly at a national level there is growing concern about gangs and their exploitation of girls, however we feel that the experience of young people in [our area] is that the violence is perpetrated by more informal groups/gangs i.e. peer on peer abuse, "friends" and current and/or previous intimate partners. We are keen that this is not lost within the national discourse and we are keen that we retain a focus on the reality of the experience of our young people.

### **What applicants knew about the problem of peer-on-peer abuse in their local area**

While some local multi-agency partnerships were able to provide a detailed account of their local problem profile, others were able to raise single issues of concern such as cyber-bullying and sexting, rather than describe the context in which those issues were taking place. It was noted by five applicants that their data capture had been flawed or limited.

Applicants highlighted a lack of understanding among young people around consent, as well as a general concern about young people experiencing and

understanding abuse as the norm. Applicants also mentioned the use of new technology and spoke about sexting, cyber bullying and pornography. Some applicants spoke about young people being unaware of the legal and emotional impact of sexting.

One applicant identified the use of local hotels as 'trap houses' for the purposes of exploitation and another raised the issue of managing peer-on-peer abuse within and outside of their local authority.

We know that these children / young people frequently have connections across boroughs and that the abuse can take place [here] but also outside this area, the mobility of children in these situation makes managing peer on peer abuse more challenging.

Applicants identified risk factors associated to peer-on-peer abuse including witnessing domestic violence in the home and gang association. One applicant noted the high levels of pregnancy among teenagers in their local authority and highlighted this as a risk factor associated to peer-on-peer abuse.

One applicant noted a general increase in the reporting of violent offences, in particular multiple perpetrator rape and serious youth violence, including young women and sexual violence within their local problem profile.

### **Current response**

Applicants had a range of services to respond to peer-on-peer abuse, focussed on mental health, internet safety, housing, education, conflict resolution, harmful relationships, risk and self-esteem, sexual health, relationships, personal safety and gang exit. It is important to note that in most sites peer-on-peer abuse was not addressed as a separate matter, but was responded to within services for violence against women and girls (VAWG), serious youth violence (SYV), gangs, missing and child sexual exploitation (CSE).

Applicants described a range of multi-agency structures to aid identification and co-ordinate practice, including:

- Multi-agency sexual exploitation meetings (MASE)
- Multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH)
- Vulnerable young people's panel, areas covered include:

- CSE
- gangs
- self-harm
- domestic violence
- violent extremism
- missing
- Vulnerable groups panel
- Multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC)
- Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA)
- Vulnerable exploited missing or trafficked panel (VEMT)
- Gangs and serious violence panel
- Risk management panel

Applicants identified a range of statutory and commissioned voluntary sector provision to support individuals and their families when affected by peer-on-peer abuse. These groups, programmes and/or specialist services included the following:

- Harmful sexual behaviour services
- Specialist sexual exploitation support services
- Services for young people using or experiencing violence in close relationships
- Preventative programmes delivered in schools
- Counselling and group work
- Contraception and sexual health advice
- Mental health outreach services
- Psychotherapeutic services
- Services within the Troubled Families programme
- Specific programmes for parents with children at risk of CSE

Most applicants also discussed outreach, mapping and early intervention work (specifically around consent) as part of their response to peer-on-peer abuse. Four applicants specifically mentioned having social workers or independent

domestic/sexual violence advocates (IDVA/ISVA) with a responsibility for this issue.

## **What sites hoped to achieve by participating in the MsUnderstood Programme**

Applicants saw the MsUnderstood Programme as an opportunity to receive a detailed critique from independent experts who would supportively challenge and provide effective recommendations for service development. They wanted to ensure their services were fit for purpose and that they were responding appropriately to the issue of peer-on-peer abuse. Through participating in the programme they hoped to develop their systems informed by an evidence base and awareness of the scale of peer-on-peer abuse.

Applicants also wanted to improve mapping and data capture. They hoped that understanding effectiveness and best practice would stimulate innovation, expressing a desire to move from reactive to proactive responses. All applicants in different ways discussed the idea of a whole system approach, and many hoped that collaborating with neighbouring local authorities as a part of this programme would create long term relationships and joint resources. Prevention was a key issue, with many applicants speaking about that specifically and wishing to improve early identification.

Many applicants cited the importance of improving practitioner confidence, whilst others highlighted a need to develop resources for staff, young people and parents. They welcomed the opportunity for hearing young people's voices in this process and hoped that engagement in the programme would also address the risks of retaliation in peer-on-peer abuse cases. At the heart of the applications was an interest in meeting the needs of their local communities and improving their quality of life.

## **Conclusion**

Of the 40 local areas who bid for support, Buckinghamshire, the North London Cluster (Camden, Barnet, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey and Islington), and Sheffield were initially selected and started working with MsUnderstood in January 2014. In May 2014 MsUnderstood was able to recruit a London Programme Manager and extend its support to three additional sites; Croydon, Lambeth and Greenwich. All the successful sites were able to demonstrate shared commitment across their agencies to meet the challenge of peer-on-peer abuse. Following an audit of local

practice in 2014, each site is now receiving a bespoke programme of support which includes, but is not limited to:

- supporting local analysts through the delivery of workshops, training and the co-creation of data collection tools
- producing a framework for minimum standard approaches to young people across a cluster of local authorities
- supporting specialist organisations who provide CSE, domestic violence, harmful sexual behaviour and serious youth violence services to work together to deliver consistent messages on the nature and extent of peer-on-peer abuse

For a more detailed list of what is included in the bespoke programmes of support, please go to:

<http://www.msunderstood.org.uk/what-we-do/peer-on-peer-abuse-local-area-support-project.html>

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If you have any queries regarding this briefing, please contact

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