



Learning Project 2

Summary of findings

Peer-group mapping
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THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE
RESEARCHING CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION,
VIOLENCE AND TRAFFICKING



PEER-GROUP MAPPING

Over view:

The purpose of Learning Project 2 was to understand how practitioners develop and use peer-group maps and/or generate knowledge on a young person's peer associations in order to assess their vulnerability and/or as a means of developing a plan to keep them safe. In this briefing we highlight benefits of peer group mapping, pulling out examples of good practice and enablers for effective implementation, as well as outlining ethical considerations and practical barriers that practitioners are facing. The Learning Project was informed by practitioners operating in a range of sectors as well as insights and experience gathered from Ms Understood audits in 14 sites.¹

Summary of findings:

Using peer group mapping

- A range of practitioners across children's social care, education, policing, youth justice and safeguarding boards are implementing peer-group mapping, including within multi agency teams in some boroughs and cities.
- The extent to which the processes of peer-group mapping were formalised, and practitioners' perceptions of how effective these processes, however, were varied.

Benefits of peer group mapping

- Practitioners identified a number of benefits arising from peer group mapping. This included enabling early identification and effective intervention, increasing the scale of outreach for interventions, allowing future protection for those at risk, identifying patterns to support a whole school approach.

Ethical concerns

- Information sharing was repeatedly raised as a key barrier to peer group mapping. Practitioners had concerns around the ethics of information sharing,

¹ Firmin, C with Curtis, G., Fitz, D., Olaitan P., Lloyd, J., and Larasi, I., 2016. *Towards a contextual response to peer on peer abuse: research and resources from MsUnderstood Local Site work*. London: MsUnderstood. Available here: [https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/assets/documents/Towards-a-Contextual-Response-to-Peer-on-Peer- Abuse.pdf](https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/assets/documents/Towards-a-Contextual-Response-to-Peer-on-Peer-Abuse.pdf)

who did not always feel clear or confident regarding when and how to share information.

- They were also concerned that peer group mapping could identify young people who are not actually involved in the activity, thus subjecting them to stigmatisation and criminalisation, and therefore putting their safety at risk.
- Further concerns were raised around the trust of the young person; practitioners felt that being open about how the information would be used would prevent the young person from sharing, and decrease the level of trust between them and the young person and the practitioner.

Practical barriers

- Practitioners noted that in some agencies and areas peer-group mapping was not always as effective as it could be, if used at all, with a number of practical barriers coming into play. These included:
 - Staff confidence, staff experience, gaps in skills, rapid changes in personnel and a lack of strong leadership
 - Staff capacity and time, as well as financial resources and services available to support young people.
 - Managing large amounts of data across boroughs and localities
 - IT systems
 - Getting the right people around the table

Key enablers

- Practitioners were generally able to successfully implement peer-group mapping when they, and staff, were clear and confident on information sharing protocols.
- Ensuring that mapping is based on fact and not guesswork, as well as carrying out thorough risk assessments - firstly considering the safeguarding implications of all those involved to prioritise risks and working outwards from there-, both help to overcome barriers around information sharing.
- Oversight and scrutiny at every level was also identified as important, as was strong leadership and good professional relationships with multi agencies.

