

News



Social worker wins award for keeping girls safe from exploitation

A North Yorkshire social worker has won a national award for her exceptional work in keeping a group of vulnerable girls safe from serious harm.

Amy Bendall, from the Harrogate Safeguarding Children Team, carried out the work as part of North Yorkshire's Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) partnership working arrangements. She was one of 20 national finalists in the 2020 Child Exploitation Unsung Hero Awards.

"It feels great that the safeguarding work delivered has been recognised in this way," said Amy. "The approach taken was bespoke to the needs of the girls involved and was an alternative way of tackling and managing the exploitation risks we had identified. I'm so pleased with the results that were achieved, the support from managers and partner agencies and the subsequent recognition it has gained."

The awards are run by the NWG (National Working Group) Network, a charity formed as a UK network of more than 14,500 practitioners working on child exploitation and trafficking in the UK. The awards recognise individuals or teams who have made a significant contribution to tackling exploitation.

The North Yorkshire County Council social worker was nominated by North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP) for her innovative work on a safeguarding strategy for a number of girls who were frequently found missing and were classed as at risk of either Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE), or both.

The girls were all friends and while some of them were working with social care, some were avoiding their social workers and not wanting to discuss any concerns.

Amy developed a group which would enable targeted work with the girls in a way that was more likely to engage them. It was recognised that the girls were all known to one another and they would often go missing to spend time together, so were likely to feel more comfortable working as a group.

Amy contacted other multi-agency professionals including those working in sexual health, The Children's Society Hand in Hand project and North Yorkshire Police to develop a partnership approach.

She sourced funding through the local council partnership fund and identified the right venue so that the girls would feel comfortable and able to work creatively and, where appropriate, would transport the girls to the meeting place and provide food and positive activities.

She worked with them on healthy relationships, identified a wealth of intelligence and importantly built a working relationship with some girls who had previously not spoken to social care. Together with other professionals she also worked with their parents on safety planning and other areas.

The relationship Amy and the other multi agency professionals were able to develop led to them feeling more confident in talking to workers about what was going on in the community.

By building and developing a trusting relationship with the girls as a group, they felt able to share information about those who were exploiting them and areas they were going to that presented a risk to them.

Through the MACE arrangements the multi-agency partnership developed and shared information and built disruption plans to target those who were seeking to exploit the girls and there was a significant reduction in the number of missing episodes for these young people and development of action plans which is continuing to disrupt the exploitation locally.

Amy added: "I would like to be able to carry out a similar model in the future if we identify a group of young people who are at risk and in the same peer group. I have seen how well this model works and how much it increases engagement, successful outcomes and information sharing, and feel very confident that it is an effective way of working with groups of young people as a social worker."

Stuart Carlton, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services said: "I would like to congratulate Amy on winning this prestigious national award. Thanks to Amy's work, the perpetrators and their exploitation continues to be targeted and disrupted."



“It has also allowed multi-agency work to take place which has kept the girls and other potential victims safe from horrific exploitation. The determination and initiative she applied to working with the young people has been exceptional and, most importantly, has kept them safe.”

A virtual ceremony celebrating honouring the most outstanding work will take place in April next year.