

Ending Human Exploitation & Modern Slavery in the Black Country

A review of recent local action, awareness raising and partnership development

December 2020



A group attending modern slavery and human exploitation awareness raising training, 2020



**Civil Society
Consulting**

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What is Modern Slavery?

Human trafficking or trafficking in persons is defined by the UN in the Palermo Protocol as the act of:

“recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons.”

By the means of:

“Threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”

(Article 3a, Palermo Protocol, 2000).

Exploitation for modern slavery purposes is defined to include: **sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude and organ trafficking.**

Importantly, trafficking in the UK occurs not just internationally, but domestically across local regions. There is no typical victim and victims can be any age, gender, class or nationality.

Report Remit

The consultancy team was asked:

- To review and assess recent modern slavery and human exploitation local action, awareness raising and the impact of the partnership development funding grant with the formal development of a local network of relationships and partners working strategically to reduce criminal human exploitation and modern slavery in the Black Country; and
- To recommend any further actions to improve local partnership working to raise awareness of human exploitation and modern slavery, increase formal reporting and better identify potential victims, which would be all designed to enhance the delivery of support and care to them.



Transforming Communities Together (TCT)

Transforming Communities Together is a registered charitable company established in 2014 to help churches, faith communities and other local organisations **tackle poverty and the causes of poverty** in and around the Black Country, Staffordshire and northern Shropshire (the Diocese of Lichfield). As part of the *Church Urban Fund's* 'Together Network' the charity serves as a local hub for community cohesion and financial inclusion project work, for example, *Near Neighbours* and the *Just Finance Foundation*.

In the Black Country, TCT has **established a solid reputation of innovative and generous leadership**, bringing together partners from the voluntary and statutory sector around topics such as homelessness, modern slavery and human exploitation, mental health and wellbeing, financial inclusion, community and social cohesion, dementia and social isolation.

T @impactpoverty
W www.tctogether.org.uk

Civil Society Consulting Community Interest Company

Civil Society Consulting CIC is an independent not-for-profit Community Interest Company (CIC). Founded at the height of the then Government 'austerity' agenda 10 years ago, the CIC is committed to supporting smaller '**grassroots**' community-based organisations and their social action projects. As a social enterprise it works to enable them to **flourish** and to tackle the problems that exist in the **local communities they know and love** and maximise their leverage of social impact.

Recently, the team have worked extensively with faith and civil society organisations in: south-east and central London, Barking & Dagenham, Blackpool, Coventry, Derby, Ipswich, Leicester, Liverpool, Middlesbrough, Peterborough and across the West Midlands and East Anglia.

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1. Background

1.1 Transforming Communities Together secured partnership development funding from the Community Fund (National Lottery) for a short-to-medium term assessment of the further need for a co-ordinated multi-sector response to modern slavery and all forms of human exploitation. This included the recruitment of a specialist networker (partnership creator) with deep experience of criminal human exploitation and modern slavery. The funding also allowed for the provision of additional outreach and anti-slavery awareness raising, building further on nascent and (in some cases) highly developed 'grassroots' work and related anti-modern slavery initiatives.

Originally when the funding was agreed, the project proposed was titled '*End Human Exploitation*' but following immediate local consultations re-configured to reflect the overt criminality of human trafficking and modern slavery, and then referred internally as the **Criminal Exploitation Reduction Network** (CERN) project proposal. The consultations and partnership development work around this co-produced proposal are set out and discussed in section 6 of the report.

1.2 Criminal human exploitation and modern slavery is so pervasive in modern society that it needs to be challenged at every level. Moreover, much has recently also been reported upon about 'County lines' as well whereby young people are viciously exploited in drug running criminal networks (as explored further in section 3).

It is noteworthy, that the West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network, and its associated bodies, has strategically developed effective partnerships that bring together statutory sector agencies to tackle modern slavery; and they have a robust track record. The Partnership Creator position (a 6 month consultancy assignment) was held by one of the Network's key senior postholders and directors: Robin Brierley. He was able to bring expert knowledge and intelligence to the development of the proposal, and was someone with extensive statutory, especially Police, networks and understanding. Guided by the Chief Executive Officer (David Primrose) and the Senior Development Officer (James Henderson) at TCT, the charity was able to connect the Partnership Creator with a range of other non-statutory partners and organisations relevant to the work in hand. A project work group was formed and the Consultant was asked to participate as required and in an embedded consultancy 'critical friend' role.

It was understood, and quickly affirmed at the outset in early Spring 2020, that there is, as yet, no mechanism to coordinate the contributions of the voluntary, community, and faith sector alongside these established formal (often statutory led and directed) anti-slavery partnerships. The work group, led by the Partnership Creator, worked on agreed assumptions based on deep local knowledge and extensive professional experience in the subject matter, and partnership discussion that recognised that a proposed broad, hyper-local, ecology of small (often informal) faith communities and civil society groups could potentially enhance additional actions to better tackle all forms of human exploitation and modern slavery in the Black Country boroughs. And, that this would bring about significant added value and enhance the delivery of the current existing portfolio of local actions designed to identify victims and support survivors of modern slavery and criminal human exploitation.

1.3 As project champions, at the outset of 2020, TCT outlined that the Criminal Exploitation Reduction Network would have a central aim of bringing together groups in the voluntary and faith sector working to reduce modern slavery; with these groups being adequately resourced to raise public awareness of modern slavery, with clear guidance as to what actions can be taken. It would be envisioned that this awareness raising would be within specific communities, faith groups, and across the business and commercial sector. The projected outcomes for CERN would likely to encompass:

- Increased vigilance leading to the provision of vital information for law enforcement officers;
- The equipping of vulnerable groups to resist entrapment;
- Practical assistance for groups working to support victims of criminal exploitation;
- The resourcing of gaps in voluntary sector provision;
- The commitment of businesses to exclude modern slavery from their supply chain;
- Good networking to enhance collaboration and avoid duplication;
- And the fostering of a culture conducive towards the rehabilitation of those who have been exploited.

2. National Context

2.1 From the Global Slavery Index we learn that on any given day there may be upwards of **136,000 people living in the UK who are victims of modern slavery and human exploitation**. On an annual basis it is estimated in the UK that there are somewhere between 10-13,000 new potential victims of modern slavery.

Much of the data reporting on this human misery is according to the **UK National Crime Agency** just the '*tip of the iceberg*' as many victims are unable or unwilling to report to the appropriate authorities. Many victims go undetected and unrecorded. Modern slavery data is fed through the **National Referral Mechanism**, which provides a framework for identified victims. The main types of human exploitation include domestic servitude, organ harvesting, and sexual exploitation and of course labour exploitation.

Over a third (34%) of those experiencing modern slavery in 2017 were for sexual exploitation and had been lured (by false job promises) and trafficked to the UK. Moreover, a large proportion, upwards of 50%, are victims of labour exploitation and to be founded in various areas of the informal and formal economy, for example, food packaging and processing, nail bars, car washes, construction and agriculture.

Over half (52%) of modern slavery victims in 2017 were male and **41% of all referrals to the National Referral Mechanism were children under 18 years of age**. The top five nationalities of victims recorded through the National Referral Mechanism are UK nationals, Albanian, Vietnamese, Chinese and Nigerian.

2.2 The last complete year for **recorded** (2018) modern slavery and human exploitation statistics revealed that almost 7,000 potential victims were found in the UK - and were trafficked from 130 different countries with the top three source countries for victims still found to be from: the UK, Albania and Vietnam. UK nationals referrals continue to increase exponentially, doubling from 2017 to 2018, and this is reflected in the number of children also referred – which increased by 48% over the same period. These increases were driven by labour exploitation, which includes those exploited for criminal purposes by ‘County lines’ drug gangs.

Of the victims referred in 2018, we learn that 2,728 were female and 4,261 were male; 3,856 were adults and 3,137 were minors. The most common categories of adult human exploitation were:

- Labour exploitation: 1,993
- Sexual exploitation: 1,289
- Domestic servitude: 419
- Other: 155

2.3 The UK has a strong international reputation for taking measures and various concerted actions to combat modern slavery. In 2014 the UK government produced a **Modern Slavery Strategy** and followed this up with legislative action (the **Modern Slavery Act 2015**) to consolidate criminal offences of human trafficking, slavery, servitude and forced labour exploitation. The Act saw the establishment of an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner to encourage good practice, undertaking research and reporting on what public and other authorities could do better to stem the incidence and support survivors.

3. Modern slavery, human and criminal exploitation (including ‘County lines’) during the Covid-19 pandemic

3.1 The Covid-9 pandemic has almost completely dominated 2020 and had a devastating impact on initiatives and programmes of work from many agencies and initiatives designed to combat human exploitation and modern slavery. Simply put, all the key relevant agencies have simply 26 not been able to undertake their routine work during lockdown.

Reported incidents of human exploitation and modern slavery have, according to the latest *Home Office* figures, dropped by almost a quarter – some **23%** - during the coronavirus lockdown; but many organisations report being fearful that the pandemic has provided a cover for exploitation as labour inspectors and other enforcement agencies have not been visiting any sites or gathering local exploitation intelligence. There are five workforce inspection bodies; those who work for local authorities and focus on High street inspections, the *Health & Safety Executive* who carry out inspections at construction sites and in factories, the *Gangmasters & Labour Abuse Authority*, the *Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate* and lastly, the HMRC’s minimum wage team. It is hard to imagine that any of these agencies will have been in a position to take a pro-active inspection approach during much of the reporting period - and even from this Summer onwards until November 2020 (the time of writing), and the pandemic continues to rage and we enter a further ‘tiered’ semi- lockdown period.

Those victims of modern slavery referred to the National Referral Mechanism between April and June 2020, numbered **2,209**, and they were mainly for labour exploitation. In line with recent findings, the most common nationalities of victims were again from the UK, Vietnam and Albania. Local commentators and the organisation Focus on Labour Exploitation believe that the decrease in face-to-face inspections during lockdown, combined with growing job cuts and a deepening recession, is **leading to an increased vulnerability to a growing number of people willing to accept, in the absence of reasonable alternatives, exploitative work conditions.**

3.2 Human exploitation most closely linked with criminality and trafficking has been associated with the phenomenon commonly referred to as 'County lines' and how this increasingly relates to young people and children (please refer to Table 1: *Criminal exploitation of children and young people: County lines* for a Home Office statement about what the term officially means).

TABLE 1

Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: county lines

"Child criminal exploitation is common in county lines and occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology."

Home Office, February 2020

'County lines' are operated by gangs from urban areas, in particular London but also other cities including Birmingham and elsewhere in the West Midlands and Black Country boroughs, by introducing a mobile telephone number in a new area to sell drugs directly at street level. Potential buyers telephone the number and local runners are dispatched to make deliveries via a telephone 'relay or exchange' system. The 'runners' are almost invariably children, often male aged between 14 – 17 years old, who are groomed with the promise of money and gifts and deployed or forced to carry out day-to-day drug dealing. Gangs to expand inner city drugs operations into county towns and more rural hinterlands also use runaway and missing children. Children as young as 11 years of age have been reported as being recruited by these highly organised criminal networks; and they are at great risk of coming to harm and being mercilessly exploited.

Research locally shows that 91% of 'County lines' victims are male. The Children's Society charity estimates that there are upwards of 46,000 children involved nationally, and the Children's Commissioner recently put the figure higher at over 50,000. 'County lines' criminal exploitation cuts across many issues including modern slavery and incorporates a whole host of illegal activities around drugs, violence, gangs, safeguarding and all forms of physical and sexual abuse and cruel exploitation. **The vulnerabilities of victims are legion, flowing from poor socio-economic backgrounds, undocumented migrant and asylum seeking status, legacies of abuse, history of substance misuse and their precarious housing situations.**

4. Local context: Black Country and the wider West Midlands

4.1 The situation locally is not dissimilar to that of the national situation for modern slavery and human exploitation, especially in London. From West Midlands Police reports (August 2020) we learn that much of the local modern slavery and human trafficking is mostly found within criminal, labour and sexual exploitation categories, this was closely followed by grooming and criminal exploitation of children - **the West Midlands region has the second highest number of 'County lines' outside of London.**

Under the Modern Slavery Act between the three months of June to August 2020 (just as the country was temporarily emerging from the most stringent pandemic national lockdown 1 measures) we find that there were a total of **295 modern slavery offences recorded by the West Midlands Police – this is broadly 10 offences a week.** This period is the most recently available and relevant to this report, and is illustrative of the local context to human exploitation and modern slavery. In the West Midlands Police report it was noted that there was an uptick of offences in June and July, as we came out of lockdown 1. Labour exploitation crimes and criminal exploitation of young people and children (aka 'County lines') offences were especially prevalent in **Wolverhampton and Sandwell, each local authority area accounting for 8% of the total recorded offences** for the period. This is followed by offences in Coventry (7%). **Birmingham itself accounts for 61% of all modern slavery and human exploitation offences.** The National Crime Agency (January 2019) estimated that there were somewhere in the region of 2,000 'County lines' running out of urban centres in the UK. There are roughly 100 'County lines' in the West Midlands region, mainly running out of Birmingham and other urban centres in the Black Country.

4.2 Across the West Midlands Police area it was further revealed that:

- 40% (118) of crimes were for labour exploitation
- 33% (95) were for criminal exploitation
- 18% (52) were sexual exploitation offences
- **40% of victims were aged under 17 years old** (118)
- 20% were aged 18-25 years old (58)
- 18% were aged 26-35 years old (53)
- 70% of victims are male, 30% female
- Two-thirds of drug offences relating to 'County lines' activity was for crack and heroin (69%).

4.3 Noteworthy is that in **Wolverhampton over half of victims were aged under 17 years old (predominately British nationals)**, which is above the regional average, but in line with data shared by the National Referral Mechanism which shows a marked uplift nationally for child victims. There is emerging evidence that some of the young people involved are deliberately trafficked to be criminally exploited in this way, many being asylum seeker young people. There is a high level and probability of violence (often associated with firearms) which presents a very tangible socially challenging safeguarding threat for children and young people in the Black Country and the wider West Midlands region, one that causes particular angst to the West Midlands Police & Crime Commissioner and the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit. Furthermore, drugs also remain a key factor within modern slavery and human trafficking/exploitation criminal activities. 33% of all recorded crimes involved criminal exploitation and drugs in some way such as 'County lines' activity or related cannabis cultivation. **This highlights drugs as a key facilitator for these types of offences and also a critical vulnerability for many of the victims.**

So to re-iterate:

- Out of the 295 victims 118 crimes relate to children and young people, accounting for 40%. These victims were predominately British nationals being exploited for 'County lines'; and that
- 'County lines' has become one of the highest ranked threat for the UK from a serious and organised crime perspective and in the West Midlands Police area (particularly in Birmingham, Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Coventry) and that it remains the second largest exporter of such criminal exploitation activity nationally.

4.4 Additionally, from Police reports and other research, we find clear evidence that social and economical factors were significantly the highest vulnerability type for victims of modern slavery and human exploitation – this includes vulnerabilities such as homelessness, endemic poverty, being a missing person, language barriers (often as a asylum seeker or illegally trafficked young person), debt bondage, and whereby victims are subjected to threats or violence and victims being trafficked into the UK on an agreement basis so that they can carry out work for their exploiters.

5. Voluntary, Community & Faith sector responses and partnership development

5.1 There is significant national and local voluntary, community and faith sector action to tackle human exploitation and modern day slavery, pre-eminent amongst many examples, and from a faith sector perspective, is the *Clewer initiative* – this aims to enable Church of England dioceses and wider faith-based networks to develop localized strategies to detect modern slavery and human exploitation within their communities, mainly around raising awareness of what it is, how to identify victims and report incidents to the authorities and in a hyper-local context develop support and care for survivors.

Some Church of England dioceses have been highly pro-active, and few more than Lichfield Diocese and its joint venture charity *Transforming Communities Together* (TCT), which **has energetically sought to create wider networks of support and local partnerships dedicated to improving the local action response to modern slavery and human exploitation** in the communities it serves. This focused work activity has included bespoke training programmes and the provision of generous and exemplary leadership by TCT to facilitate a partnership of key stakeholders, community, church and faith leaders, and statutory and non-statutory agencies across the four Black Country boroughs.

Despite the constraints and challenges presented by the ongoing nature of the Covid-19 pandemic the continuing development of partnerships locally has remained a sustained work programme priority and TCT have determinedly pursued a strategy of leading from the front. This has been built on the firm foundations of earlier faith and community action to tackle human exploitation and modern slavery spanning more than five years - the first meeting of the *Wolverhampton Anti-Slavery Partnership (WASP)* took place over five years ago in June 2015 and in Sandwell an Anti-Slavery Conference was held in January 2018.

Undoubtedly, the WASP has been an impressive multi-agency response and **the partnership is extensive and rooted in local faith communities**; from evidence provided we can see that Wolverhampton Council, West Midlands Police, other pivotal statutory agencies and a plethora of voluntary, community and faith sector organisations are actively involved and engaged with its work.

The collage consists of three parts:

- Left:** A testimonial in a white box: "I've received this training tonight from Debbie and would recommend this to anyone who cares about justice for those who do not have a voice. We can all play a part in spotting the signs of modern slavery and reporting it - click on the link for more info. X". Below it is a yellow graphic for "Hidden in Plain Sight" with the text "Modern Slavery awareness for churches and the community Everyone welcome! Free Zoom workshops" and "EVENTBRITE.CO.UK Hidden in Plain Sight - Modern Slavery awareness Modern Slavery awareness for churches and the communit...".
- Middle:** A screenshot of a Facebook post by Dawn L. Ellis. The post text reads: "Very informative training this evening on Modern Slavery. The figures astounded me, especially upsetting to hear it's happening right now in Wolverhampton and that it also happens in the care sector. An evening gaining knowledge and understanding. I'd recommend it to you all. Thankyou to Debbie Huston for facilitating and Transforming communities Together #thinkmodernslavery". It shows interactions from Julie Bailey and Dawn L. Ellis.
- Right:** A text caption: "Modern Slavery Work – Participant Social Media Feedback".

Online Modern Slavery Awareness Training - 22nd July 2020 - Facebook

5.2 Five solid years of modern slavery awareness training has now been provided across the Black Country and elsewhere in the Lichfield Diocese (one of the largest in the Church of England extending 1,750 square miles and serving two million people), all designed to help communities respond to modern slavery and human exploitation. The most recent partnership development and provision of modern slavery awareness raising training has centred on the programme delivered by TCT and the Mother's Union (Lichfield), called '**Hidden in Plain Sight**', and this kicked off in April 2020 during lockdown 1.

Delivered entirely on-line, **monitoring demonstrates that training participants report feeling better equipped to recognize the signs of modern slavery and take effective action as individuals and within their faith communities.** Further stated initiatives centre on a 'Slavery Free Sandwell' and this significant partnership development work spearheaded by the Mother's Union and TCT has clearly established effective partnerships with the Police Commissioner, the police more generally, local authorities (especially their own various modern slavery partnerships), housing providers, the health sector, business groups (for example, the Black Country Chamber of Commerce), a host of local VCSE sector organisations – Hope at Home, the Children's Society, Black Country Women's Aid, the Refugee Migrant Centre and Jericho (see below for some of the pen-pictures of voluntary, community and faith sector organisations engaged recently as part of partnership and awareness raising activities – 5.3).

The Consultant has been provided with copious evidence of the Mother's Union and TCT's extensive promotion to faith communities and wider civil society of human exploitation and modern slavery awareness raising, providing the guidance to increased understanding and knowledge on how to identify victims, and also better understanding about 'County lines'.

The training has been provided in a wide range of community settings and included amongst many participating organisations:

- Wolverhampton Homelessness Forum
- Black Country Foodbank
- YMCA
- St Giles Trust
- Universities of Birmingham and Wolverhampton
- St Matthews
- Saddlers Centre, Walsall

Remarkably, just **over 1,900 people have participated in anti-slavery training sessions provided by the Mother's Union and TCT team, and we learn from these 807 participants have benefitted from provision since the partnership lottery funding was awarded.**

Furthermore, the Mother's Union agreed to supplement provision and appointed a Modern Slavery Campaigner (Debbie Huxton) for this specific purpose. The Campaigner is managed by TCT and works closely with the Senior Development Worker (James Henderson) and the Chief Executive Officer (David Primrose).

There has been some outstanding partnership working and admirable outreach and delivery work despite the present difficulties. **From pre-and post surveys we learn that there has been a sea-change in the levels of understanding by participants, from 30% knowing very little at all about modern slavery before the sessions to 96% then reporting that they felt they knew 'quite a lot', and this included knowing the signs of modern slavery and how to report it to the authorities.** The TCT and Mother's Union team has used a variety of creative community engagement tools to ensure the training reaches into faith communities and the wider civil society setting, including podcasts and short videos all backed up by vigorous social media promotion and linked up effectively with anti-slavery campaigning and hyper-localised media campaigning.

The image shows a Zoom meeting interface. The main screen displays a yellow background with the following text and logos:

- Top left: **WE SEE YOU.** THE CLEWER INITIATIVE (with a yellow circle logo)
- Top right: **Slavery Free Sandwell** logo (with a green background and white text)
- Center: **Slavery Free Sandwell: Modern Slavery Awareness Training**
- Bottom left: **TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER** (with a plus sign icon)
- Bottom right: **Mothers' UNION** (with a globe icon) and **Christian care for families**

On the right side of the screen, there are four video thumbnails of participants:

- Debbie Huxton
- James Henderson
- Wendy Sims
- Piotr Pula

5.3 The firm foundations for partnership working have been established and nurtured, and much of TCT and the Mother's Union awareness raising and training has linked into local networks of voluntary, community and faith sector support for victims of modern slavery and human exploitation. Clearly, the Mother's Union nationally and locally is a dedicated partner and is now an experienced deliverer of initiatives to tackle human exploitation locally. In terms of other organisations, and recent and emerging partnership development work, in brief, this includes outreach and awareness raising with the following:

- **Adavu Project** – established in 2011 this offers long term support to adult survivors of modern slavery by developing life skills, accessing benefits and education, and therapeutic provision, and is highly engaged in partnership development opportunities (and it contributed to the setting up of the West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network some 10 years ago) www.adavu.org.uk
- **Hope at Home** – a small to medium-sized charity (with National Lottery funding) providing training and supporting volunteers to host survivors into their own homes, preventing homelessness and re-trafficking – part of the wider Methodist Church activity to tackle modern slavery in Birmingham www.hopeathome.org.uk
- **Sophie Hayes Foundation** – a medium sized charity working to support female survivors and focused on their employability and social integration (again Lottery funded) www.sophiehayesfoundation.org
- **Medaille Trust** – a large Catholic charity working nationally and in some key localities, it provides supported safe house beds for survivors and links this with other practical support www.medaille.co.uk
- **West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network CIC** – with a wide range of regional and local partners, this social enterprise aims to facilitate and focuses in on multi-agency responses and best practice actions in tackling modern slavery. Its collaborative network has been established upwards of a dozen years seeking to raise awareness, reduce the threat and harms of slavery, rescuing and supporting survivors www.westmidlandsantislavery.org
- **Refugee & Migrant Centre** – based in Wolverhampton, this significantly sized regional charity (receiving Lottery funding) works to support refugees and migrants across the Black Country and in Birmingham; it deals with housing, homelessness and destitution issues, health and education and resettlement of Syrian refugees.

TABLE 2
Potential Partners

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| • West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network | • The Clewer Initiative |
| • The Children's Society | • Public Health England |
| • Black Country Women's Aid | • NHS |
| • Refugee and Migrant Centre | • West Midlands Fire and Rescue |
| • Red Cross | • National Crime Agency |
| • Seven Local Authority Modern Slavery partnerships | • West Midlands Police |
| • Black Country Chamber of Commerce | • Police & Crime Commissioner |
| • DWP | • Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) |
| • Mothers Union | • Salvation Army |
| • Medaille Trust | • Exploitation Hub |
| • GLAA | • Faith Groups |
| • Homeless Link | • Jericho Foundation |
| • Adavu | • Hope at Home |
| • The Trussell Trust | • The Sophie Hayes Foundation |
| • Black Country Foodbank | • Gateway to Freedom |

6. Consultations, findings & conclusions

6.1 A key element of the partnership development project has centred on the establishment of a network of, and detailed consultations and engagement with, local strategic partners designed to see how voluntary, community and faith organisations could contribute to the collective aim of more effectively identifying, reporting and supporting survivors of modern slavery and victims of all forms of human exploitation. Primarily, this has focused on outreach to established partners and some less so, to ascertain views as to how best garner support and engagement from those voluntary sector organisations most likely to serve survivor's service needs and faith communities wishing to serve their wider social concerns and humanitarian compassion. Please refer to Table 2 for full list of all the potential partner organisations, some corresponding to the pen-picture list set out in 5.3.

The proposal outlined by the project champions for which consultations have subsequently been held over recent months and have formed the basis of multi-agency partnership development and conversations are, in sum, as set out in Table 3:

TABLE 3

Community Exploitation Reduction Network

That a community-based exploitation organisation/forum be formed to work alongside the existing structures to provide a link between statutory and other sectors in the communities served. It is intended to be grass roots work with all communities, inclusive of all faiths, cultures and religions with the aim of reducing and eradicating slavery and exploitation (possibly extended across the whole of West Midlands as a model). The proposal although originally focused on the Black Country i.e. Wolverhampton, Sandwell, Dudley and Walsall may not be confined to these areas particularly later in a five-year plan but would be developed and expanded as deemed appropriate.

The network will work alongside existing structures to gain knowledge of current trends and problematic regions and/or business areas and provide a holistic coordinated response within the community based on tasking and sign posting from partner agencies. The new network will also be self-tasking and have the ability to work in areas that they see a need or gap in provision. For example, a current need is for an organisation to work in schools raising awareness of county lines.

It is proposed that a network coordinator is appointed and would produce a suite of materials and resources that are deployable for every type of exploitation, language, culture, faith group and for any local authority area. This could range from posters, leaflets, awareness stands, art, IT solutions and interventions, apps and software, volunteer-based activities etc. It would also help to build relationships with external partners to work with on specific projects i.e. DWP, NHS, Police, Local Authorities and other third sector organisations.

6.2 The Consultant met with local authority representatives (Community Safety Co-ordinators and individual authority anti-slavery partnerships) in Wolverhampton and also undertook a short survey to assess the views of strategic statutory partners: Police; NHS; from across local authority service areas such as housing, adult and children services; Immigration Enforcement & Border Force; Department of Work & Pensions. The Consultant was mindful of current more formal structures that are now in place across the area (as shown in Table 4), and that there is not one voluntary, community and faith sector organisation working at a grassroots level within the area's diverse communities which is raising awareness, informing and sharing information in relation to human exploitation and modern slavery.

6.3 A wide range of views were expressed as to the efficacy of current anti-slavery initiatives and partnership working, and also how best to co-ordinate support to survivors across a wider areas beyond individual local authorities (there is a mixed picture of delivery, prioritisation and support in each of the four Black Country boroughs), and that whether new partnerships and provision could extend even further than just the Black Country itself, especially **to encompass Birmingham**. This would appear to make sound sense based on the evidential needs identified in section 4 above, and **with 6 out of 10 recent modern slavery and human exploitation offences taking place in the city**.

Furthermore, based on consultations, TCT's sister-charity which operates in Birmingham called *THRIVE Together Birmingham* were keen to see new joined up partnership work across their area of benefit for example. Interestingly, **there appears to be strong support from civil society and faith-based organisations for Transforming Communities Together to continue to facilitate this proposed network and secure the resources to do so on behalf of an extensive statutory and non-statutory partnership. This review has found that recent partnership activities and awareness raising has been significant and far-reaching, with local networks and strong one to one and organizational relationships firmly developed.**

TCT's accumulated experienced and undeniable commitment to anti-slavery initiatives stands the charity in good stead. It would further appear that TCT as a faith-based organisation is well-positioned to act as an honest broker with a valuable and significant contribution to make in tackling modern slavery and clearly it operates effectively with all secular organisations, and groups from all faiths and backgrounds. **Its professional and relational approach stands it in good stead for solidifying the proposed CERN partnership model and bringing a comprehensive partnership initiative to active fruition.** With a strong track record of delivery TCT could be the lead organisation (with UK Charity and Companies House status) bidding for the resources to further establish the network and employ staff, and as the accountable body (supported by the wide partnership – membership - as indicatively shown at Table 2) not require the formation of a no legal entity. The terms of reference and various partnership agreements that may be required could be negotiated locally to ensure joined up working along the lines of that set out by the project champions (Table 4) with the CERN.

TABLE 4

Existing structure – what is currently in place in West Midlands

In line with the West Midlands Modern Slavery and Policy and Procedure Strategy document written and produced by the Prevention of Violence against Vulnerable People Board task group under the West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network, the following structure is currently in place in the West Midlands;

Oversight and Governance PVVP – now no longer in existence – this role will likely be replaced by the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU)



West Midlands Strategic Governance Board – Chaired by West Midlands Police on behalf of the PVVP/VRU



7 x Local Authority Multi Agency Partnerships



Supported by West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network and Barnardo's Panel for the Protection of Trafficked Children both currently funded by the PCC.

6.4 Others reported that improved partnership working could be achieved, if driven by a commitment coalition of voluntary, community and faith partners, across a larger area of benefit possibly to reflect that of the West Midlands Police and the West Midlands Metropolitan Authority areas; as the voluntary, community and faith sector did not have to work to proscribed authority boundaries the new proposed network could therefore be more fluid, responsive and agile.

Survey findings demonstrated overwhelming support for the proposal and for funding to be sought to underpin a strategic uplift in provision. In reply to the question 'should there be a grass roots organisation working within communities' this received 100% positive replies and in answer to 'would they support it' – this also received 100% positive responses.

The Consultant can report also that many statutory sector partners believe that the voluntary, community and faith sector are best placed to raise awareness of human exploitation and modern slavery in hyper-local community settings and best positioned to respond effectively to providing bespoke and tailored service responses to victims and survivors. The CERN proposal finds favour and is soundly based. The recent increase and partnership working which has raised awareness of human exploitation and modern slavery, means that the formal establishment of CERN (with significant external funder support) would further deepen understand of the issues throughout the voluntary, community and faith sectors sharpening their abilities to identify the warning signs and other indicators particularly within faith and BAME communities, so that there would be a further enhanced and increased understanding and confidence by them as local partners, faith groups and communities more generally to report incidents of modern slavery; and vitally also further strengthen organisational responses as they seek to help, care and support survivors in rebuilding their lives.

Who are we?

Civil Society Consulting (CSC) is an independent, not-for-profit social enterprise – a Community Interest Company (CIC). We aim to enhance community cohesion by enabling and empowering VCSE groups to leverage social impact in the communities they know and love. This includes nurturing individual skills and talents, as much of our support is delivered through expert training and mentoring to members of community groups and charities.

We have a particular focus on working in the most socially deprived and diverse neighbourhoods. Properly understanding the needs people have, and then working alongside them to plan, develop and run services and projects has always been at the heart of our people-led approach to consulting.

The team have worked extensively with communities - a wide range of groups, ethnicities, and ages. Our recent work includes working with BAME-led organisations up-and-down the country (including #Steps2Sustainability in Barking & Dagenham, Coventry, Liverpool and Middlesbrough) to secure funding for emergency Covid-19 frontline work, helping with the development of an on-line training programme for the Campaign to End Loneliness, strategic development and governance support for the Multi-Faith Centre in Derby, and engaging with new mums in South East London to provide NHS England and Mind UK with insights into perinatal mental health in Bromley and Southwark.

We are academically-inclined, and keep a focus on the bigger picture: the strive for socio-economic rights and equality; but at the same time, our track record of working 'hands-on' with local grassroots organisations means we're not afraid to get stuck in.

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