

Submission from Home: The Child Recovery and Reintegration Network to the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography on care and recovery of child victims

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<http://www.childrecovery.info/>

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[Home: The Child Recovery and Reintegration Network](#) was established in 2009 to support and strengthen research, knowledge and learning surrounding the recovery and reintegration of children affected by sexual exploitation and related trafficking globally.

The funding for the pilot phase for the network finished in late 2013, however the project has recently been re-established and this new project, Promoting Learning on Recovery and (Re-)Integration from Child Sexual Exploitation, is being led by [Family for Every Child](#) in partnership with [Retrak](#) and the [International Centre: Researching Child Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Trafficking](#) at the University of Bedfordshire.

This submission is based on the learning from the pilot phase which included the collection of global learning from children and young people affected by exploitation and the practitioners and organisations that support them.

Based on your experience, what elements are necessary for a comprehensive and rights-based care and recovery system of child victims of sale and exploitation, including sexual exploitation?

In 2009, 89 children and young people, based in seven different countries - who had been assisted by an organisation to reintegrate following exploitation or other forms of adversity - took part in a number of workshops that aimed to understand what children and young people felt were the most significant changes that had happened to them from their involvement in a reintegration programme; and what indicators they felt showed that a child had 'successfully reintegrated' (Veitch, 2013; Cody, 2015 forthcoming.)

Thirty five boys were involved in the consultation: seven boys from Ethiopia who lived and worked on the streets (13-17 years); eleven boys from Uganda, with similar experiences (14-18 years); ten boys from Ghana who had been trafficked into the fishing industry (12-14

years); and seven boys from Albania who had backgrounds of violence, abuse, abandonment and trafficking (10-14 years).

The 54 girls and young women involved included: ten young women from Uganda who had been sexually exploited and had experienced other forms of adversity such as labour exploitation and abuse (19-22 years); 15 girls from Kenya with experience of domestic work and/or scavenging (10-13 years); ten girls from Tanzania with experiences of sexual exploitation and street connection (11-14 years); nine girls from Serbia (15-20 years) who had been trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation; and ten girls from Albania (19-20 years) who had been trafficked for sexual or labour exploitation (Cody, 2015).

From these consultations, together with a literature review that explored the reintegration experiences of separated children (including those affected by sexual exploitation and trafficking), a number of themes were identified as being important for children and young people in the recovery and reintegration phase.

Promoting a sense of safety for children and young people

Establishing safety is a first step for many children who have experienced exploitation, abuse and violence. Children may have different views of what safety entails for them and what they need to help them feel safe. Safety is not just about locks on doors – children need to feel safe physically and emotionally (Delaney, 2008; Shuker, 2013). Emotional safety develops over time and may be displayed through building trusting, healthy relationships, feeling in control and having a sense of hope for the future.

Services need to work with children and young people to understand what makes them feel safe. Children also need to know how to keep themselves safe. This may include services supporting young people to understand what healthy and safe relationships look like, helping young people to find a secure place to live, and helping them to secure ‘safe’ work in the future.

- *‘In the beginning I felt like everything is unfamiliar to me and later I cannot describe it, I finally had people around me, I was safe.’ (Mija, 20, Serbia)¹*
- *‘There was a fence and nothing could harm you.’ (Irene, 12, Kenya)*

Developing a trusting relationship

Vulnerable children may ‘mistrust’ and may be ‘mistrusted’ (Brennan, 2010). Those working with children who have experienced exploitation often talk about the importance of ‘building trust’. Many note that without trust it is impossible to work effectively with young people.

Research with refugee children has identified ‘distrust’ as an important and functional coping strategy for young people. This distrust can increase young people’s sense of self-reliance and minimise the risk of them being hurt or betrayed (Ni Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010).

However, many service providers believe that the development of trusting and long-term relationships is central to recovery (Cody, 2012). It is important for young people to have someone in their lives that they can trust and confide in. In order that such trusting

¹ Quotes from children and young people who took part in the 2009 consultations.

relationships can develop, it is also important that a child or young person has a consistent person in their life.

- *'When I started talking with her [Elena – staff member at organisation], I didn't trust her, and now I'm with her the most. She helped me open up a bit more, and I had problems with opening up to people even before that.'* (Rihana, 20, Serbia)
- *'The people who work here mean a lot to me. When I first came here I was scared and I didn't trust people. I was in tears...I was so unstable, I still am, and I don't trust people.'* (Angelina, 18, Serbia)

Ensuring that children and young people have a caring adult in their lives

A caring adult who can be trusted and who will look out for a child or young person is critical. In consultations with children and young people, connecting with their families and receiving acceptance and support from staff members of the reintegration programme were key to their recovery and reintegration.

- *'Zoran helped me to overcome everything that had happened to me, not to think about what had happened...I used to have nightmares and he helped me solve that.'* (Rijana, 15, Serbia)
- *This red heart [referring to the heart on the picture she drew] ...that is my story with Elena. She gave me self-confidence, always supported me, gave me strength, I am more cheerful when I leave her office, if it wasn't for her...I miss her.'* (Angelina, 18, Serbia)

Establishing a sense of belonging and connectedness for children and young people

Establishing a sense of belonging has been connected to identity, self-esteem and well-being (Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). Feeling a connection with others – whether with peers or family – may be a helpful source of resilience in young people during recovery and reintegration.

Research has identified that socialising with others who have 'shared experiences', and have been in similar circumstances, can be helpful during the recovery and reintegration process (Cortes and Buchanan, 2007). Although bringing together young people who have shared experiences may be helpful in terms of them feeling 'normal' and not being judged, studies have also found that facilitating opportunities for 'vulnerable groups' to connect with other 'unaffected children and young people' in the community may also be important (Anthony et al., 2010).

- *'Reunion with my sister after many years changed my life; meeting with my mother; conversation with psychologist helped me to express my feeling; finding a foster family made me happy and I felt loved for the first time in my life.'* (Emanuela, 20, Albania)
- *'After I joined secondary school, I was reintegrated to live with my aunt who agreed to take me in and live with her family. I received a lot of counselling before*

reintegration and I am happy to be a part of a family, though life was different from that at the centre, I took sometime to adapt.’ (Betline, 13, Tanzania)

Promoting a sense of self-worth and success

Self-worth refers to the value an individual puts on his/her self. An individual’s self-worth can be affected by his/her environment and how he or she is treated and viewed. Young girls and boys who have experienced sexual violence are often stigmatised by the community (Taylor-Browne et al., 2002; Brown, 2006).

For many young people, their social status within the community is important. For example, young people who may have left home in search of work or better opportunities, and ended up with nothing, may want to demonstrate to their families and communities that they are not ‘failures’ and that they have achieved. Promoting opportunities that allow young people to achieve; through educational accomplishment, skills training, income generation, or by getting involved in activism and mentoring, may therefore be an important element of recovery.

- *‘I am a professional bagels maker; I’m learning English and this is really helping me with my job; I have become very successful.....I am happy and ready to face everything.’ (Viki, 22, Albania)*
- *‘I also discovered some of my talents like writing and singing.’ (LR, 13, Tanzania)*
- *‘Now I am proud of myself; I have my own styling shop which makes me think that I am rewarded for all my efforts and work; I have worked a lot to graduate as a fashion stylist and now I am living my dream...’ (Anxhela, 20, Albania)*
- *‘At the salon, I am the manger and take care of all the business matters. I pay myself and also leave enough for the business to continue and give something to my Auntie as the owner. I have made many savings that I started another business where I employ other young people.’ (Bezzo, 22, Uganda)*

Promoting agency

Having a sense of agency and being able to take control of some aspect of one’s life has been identified as an important marker of resilience (Cortes and Buchanan, 2007). For example, one study with youth with refugee backgrounds found that those with a better sense of control were significantly more likely to report higher levels of well-being (Correa-Velez et al., 2010).

Maintaining a sense of independence and self-reliance allows young people to gain an element of control over their circumstances and therefore can help them in their recovery. Children who have been through difficult experiences are often not viewed as decision-makers or social actors but instead as victims. Such a perception leaves little space for children to voice their views and make decisions about the future. However, supporting a sense of agency and control in young people is important, particularly where they have been in situations where they have had little control. Encouraging the development of agency in young people should be a key activity in reintegration programming.

- *'I think twice before I act and I have become reflective person; I can take decisions for myself.'* (Kleja, 19, Albania)
- *'I gained enough confidence and self-esteem, and was able to make some important choices in my life.'* (Shadia Abdalla, 14, Tanzania)

Developing hope, aspirations and a positive outlook for the future

Young people affected by adversity and exploitation can often display a sense of hopelessness. However, in studies exploring resilience and coping, the ability to preserve hope and adopt a positive outlook have been identified as an important element for children. If young people are able to see their experience as one of 'growth' and be hopeful for the future, this may provide a positive source of strength. Encouraging the development of hope and positivity may therefore help in the promotion of healing and recovery.

- *'I started saving some money to start my own salon and this is my dream.'* (Big Mama, 22, Uganda)
- *'Reunion with my family and my aunt give me hope to live.'* (Ina, 21, Albania)

Gaining respect and acceptance

The sense of acceptance and respect that children perceive from others has also been identified as useful in aiding reintegration.

Some children who have been separated from their families may be stigmatised or discriminated against due to people's perceptions of who they are or what they may have been involved in. Due to this stigma, children may not be accepted or welcomed back by their families, peers or wider communities. Studies have highlighted how important acceptance is for children in these situations.

For former child soldiers, acceptance from family members, peers and others in the community has been found to be critical (Betancourt et al., 2008). Acceptance from family members in particular has been identified as one of the most potent protective factors in the psychosocial adjustment and mental health of former child soldiers (Betancourt et al., 2008).

Through demonstrating for example that a young person has been successful, has helped others or been involved in community activities, they may gain more respect than those children who do not demonstrate such qualities. So although reintegration work should aim to change negative behaviours and attitudes of the community towards returning children and young people, building-up these elements and qualities in young people may also go a long way towards developing respect and acceptance.

- *'I now feel part of the community.'* (LNS, 14, Tanzania)
- *'I also continue with my peer education work and many young people see me as their role model. My father now believes in me and I support some of the scholastic needs of my younger siblings. My younger siblings are very grateful and I am proud because I sometimes hear them say that we have a responsible big sister who cares about us.'* (Bezzo, 22, Uganda)

Domains of reintegration

In addition to these cross-cutting elements, recovery and reintegration work needs to cover a number of ‘domains’ of support to ensure children and young people receive comprehensive, holistic care. It is unlikely that one organisation can provide high quality services in all of these areas and therefore partnerships and cooperation are key to ensuring children and young people are fully supported. It is also important to note that children and young people may require different forms of support at different times and that this support needs to be available over a long period of time (months and years) and should not simply end once a child has been reunited with their family.

- Health
- Care: basic needs and shelter
- Legal support
- Life skills and leadership
- Education and livelihoods
- Broader areas of support (religion and spirituality, tattoo removal, cultural practices for healing and reintegration)
- Working with parents, carers and the family
- Community sensitisation

Barriers to comprehensive recovery and reintegration

Some examples of the barriers and common problems which prevent children and young people accessing comprehensive, rights-based care and support are outlined below (further references and information available on request).

- Research suggests that children resettling back into a community, or starting over in a new community, may face a number of additional stressors that may compromise their psychological health (which is often not addressed). For example, survivors of trafficking may have to deal with legal proceedings, immigration and asylum procedures, stigma and discrimination associated with their exploitation, rejection and the poor economic situation they may return to (Hossain et al., 2010).
- The cost of health care may impact on the progress young people are making with their livelihoods as they may have to use funds to pay for emergency health care (McKay et al., 2011).
- Prolonged residential care may ‘institutionalise children’ and negatively impact on a child’s ability to reintegrate back into society (Hilton, 2008, Delap, 2011).
- If children receive a better standard of living in short-term shelters than at home, this may mean that children do not want to reintegrate and return home (Fanning, 2008). The establishment of children’s residential centres may in fact encourage the separation of children from their families or other carers, as both children and their families may think that the child is ‘better off’ staying in a centre.
- There are a number of potential barriers to education for children and young people who have experienced exploitation, these include: financial barriers; the loss of educational plans or papers during transition from one placement to another; the lack of identity documents; bullying or teasing that may take place in the classroom; geographical barriers; restrictions placed on girls’ movement when they return home; discrimination and corporal punishment; children being uncomfortable as they may be

asked ‘too many questions’ about their past history in school; difficulties in concentration; older children not wanting to be placed in classes with very young children; and children and young people needing to work and earn money rather than study.

- When education is provided in shelters this may mean that: children may be placed in the same class and yet may all have different abilities; that studying does not always lead to an accreditation; and that the quality of teaching may not be to the same standard as in government-run schools.
- Although vocational training is often provided to children and young people, a number of problems have been highlighted with such trainings including that: training is rarely tailored to the local labour market or economy; young people who have received training and wish to start their own business often find that start-up kits or funds are not available; training is often not completed and is often of poor quality; training programmes are not available in the smaller villages which means that young people often cannot access training from their homes and so instead need to access residential care or find and fund their own accommodation; training is often based on gender and promotes traditional skills that are not always in demand (e.g. tailoring, hairdressing); little support is available to help graduates find a job on completion of training; training is sometimes viewed as the goal, rather than the goal being employment; training is sometimes treated as therapy or something to entertain young people - rather than as a pathway to employment; training is often aimed at young people and does not take into account the broader household resources and the potential for involving other members in the family.
- There are also a number of barriers that may impact on a young person’s ability to secure a livelihood including: the inability to legally register a business, access credit or other financial services or open a bank account when identity papers are lacking; the lack of social capital; the stigma that some young people may face from customers or employers; and difficulties in finding child-care.
- In some cases children can be manipulated or pressurised into agreeing to be reunified with their family against their wishes (Feeny, 2005; Guntzberger, 2013).
- Children and young people who are returned to a family without a proper assessment and proper support are likely to leave home again, or may be faced with other rights violations such as early marriage.

Provide examples of good practices and successful initiatives of assistance and rehabilitation programmes which facilitate the recovery and reintegration of child victims of sale and exploitation, including sexual exploitation.

Due to the lack of evaluations surrounding recovery and reintegration programmes it is challenging to provide examples of ‘good practice’. Particularly when such an evaluation is based on the views of the professionals involved rather than the children and young people. A rights-based approach to care and recovery must take into account the views, wishes and perspectives of children and young people – often this does not happen.

Many organisations, when it comes to reintegration, measure success through the number of children who are returned to their families. However, consultations with children and young people who had experienced reintegration programmes identified a number of areas that they felt had to be considered in order to assess whether a child had been successfully reintegrated. These included:

- **That the child has their basic needs met** - ‘has good shelter’, ‘has access to water’, ‘has access to medical care’ and ‘feeds well’².
- **That the child has emotional support, safety and a relationship with the family and community** - ‘feels safe’, ‘acceptance’, ‘has good relationship with family and community’, ‘being able to associate with other people in the community’ and ‘respected by people in the community’.
- **That a child has internal strengths** - ‘being confident’, ‘children believe in themselves and abilities’, ‘children will not go back to previous situations’, ‘emotionally and psychologically stable’ and ‘independence’.
- **That a child is either in education or employment** - ‘the children are in school or skills training’, ‘goes to school’, ‘having vocational skills’, ‘has a sustainable income’, ‘has a sustainable job place’, ‘getting my own money from my sweat’ and ‘support family but not exploited’.

Although it can be challenging to ethically and safely involve children and young people in evaluations it is critical as children and young people, when asked, often highlight a number of problems with the care and assistance received. For example, being locked in rooms at night and not being able to go to the toilet; being verbally and sometimes physically abused by shelter staff; and experiencing discriminatory attitudes from those who should be caring and supporting young people (Hudd, 2003, School of Women’s Studies, 2012).

It is also useful to learn from different types of initiatives. As part of [Home: The Child Recovery and Reintegration Network](#) a [‘Practice Bank’](#) was developed to house examples and learning from different initiatives aimed at supporting children affected by sexual exploitation. However, these were framed as practice examples rather than ‘good’ or ‘promising’ practice as no criteria was applied to assess them.

Describe the challenges that your organization has identified in the establishment and management of assistance and rehabilitation programmes for child victims of sale and exploitation, including sexual exploitation.

The response to this question is based on 19 [‘Q&A’s’](#) with practitioners supporting children and young people affected by sexual exploitation working in reintegration programmes across the world in Tanzania, Ghana, Uganda, Cambodia, India, the Philippines, the UK, the USA, Canada, Bulgaria and Albania. Within their organisations the respondents to the Q&A had varying roles and worked as social workers, child protection officers, psychologists, clinical directors, global health consultants, solicitors and directors. Despite the differing

² Examples of the descriptions the children and young people involved in the 2009 consultations shared when describing a ‘successfully reintegrated child’

roles and the varying social, economic and cultural contexts in which they worked, it was striking that through their responses to the question *'What are the biggest challenges in your everyday work?'* the same themes emerged (see the [full report](#) Cody, 2012).

Lack of information

Practitioners draw attention to the lack of research data and the need for more accurate, coordinated data and local information to help them in their work.

Multiple challenges at the family and community level

Practitioners highlight the sometimes dysfunctional or problematic family environments that children come from, and are often returned to. This includes extreme poverty in some cases, poor living conditions, and alcohol problems in the home. Practitioners also mention the community's involvement in child rights abuses. Some feeling the community does not always act as a protective environment for returning children. When children do return to families, practitioners note that family and community reintegration can be very challenging.

Scale of support needed

A number of practitioners highlight that the need and demand for support outstrips the resources and capacity of organisations working in this area. Practitioners talk about limited spaces in centres and shelters and that, even when their organisations expand, the need continues to grow.

Funding and limited resources

The lack of funding is often mentioned. Many organisations do not receive any state funding and therefore have to rely on international donors and funders, who have changing policies which affect the implementation of their programmes. With such limited resources it is challenging to provide a holistic approach and address the child's multiple needs.

Insufficient trained and experienced service providers who understand the importance of mental and emotional health

A number of practitioners feel that service providers do not always understand the importance of mental and emotional health for survivors of exploitation. As exploitation can result in numerous psychological and behavioural issues – such as aggression, hypersexuality and hopelessness – knowledge and understanding of such issues is seen as important. It is also felt that there is a lack of health care professionals with experience in the care of traumatised children and young people. Practitioners express that organisations don't always give enough emphasis to psychosocial support and as a result many survivors of trafficking who return to the community may be re-trafficked.

Policy, procedures and legislation at the national level

The lack of National Action Plans in some countries to help guide work by various stakeholders in this area also poses challenges. Weak enforcement of the laws, lengthy legal procedures, state parties who do not respect the voice and views of the child, corruption and the lack of concrete guidelines and policies to direct interventions are also seen as problematic.

Poor levels of awareness

There are poor levels of awareness surrounding sexual exploitation and trafficking. One area where this is of particular concern is around the sexual exploitation of boys and men. The abuse of boys is often not perceived as a problem and there are many social and cultural barriers that need to be addressed in order for people to recognise this as abuse. The focus of donors and international organisations solely on girls is believed to leave male survivors ignored, neglected and isolated. Practitioners also draw attention to the general lack of awareness in certain geographical areas or within certain professions and the impact this can have on identification and subsequent care. Related to this, one practitioner expresses that many survivors do not realise there is support available to them; one of the challenges in encouraging those that have been exploited to seek help is to raise awareness about the support out there.

Threats to staff

One organisation reveals the dangers their staff face due to the nature of their work. Through disrupting the activities of trafficking networks and removing survivors of trafficking, they explain that their staff members are sometimes targeted with threats and therefore safety is an issue.

Time and patience

A few practitioners talk about the inherent challenges in working with this population, both engaging with young people and being prepared for a long, hard journey. One practitioner talks about the need for time and patience when working with young people who have been exploited.

Secondary trauma for staff

Secondary trauma experienced by staff members who are working intensively with children affected by exploitation and trafficking also poses challenges. One organisation which employs survivors to support other young people feels this is a continuing challenge for them.

Finding safe and secure housing

One of the biggest challenges for those organisations who do not have shelter facilities is finding safe and secure emergency and transitional housing for survivors of trafficking. The different regulations and requirements for people to stay at shelters mean it can be difficult to always find a good fit for them.

Practical challenges when it comes to decision-making

One practitioner raises a number of practical challenges faced by workers including: how to find a balance between the child's wishes and what is determined to be in their best interests (especially in cases where a child may want to go home but it is felt that this is not the best place for him/her); and deciding when to close a case and determining what is a 'success'.

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Key resources from Home: The Child Recovery and Reintegration Network

- Cody, C. (forthcoming in 2015) 'We can't collect comprehensive information on all of these changes': The challenges of monitoring and evaluating reintegration efforts for separated children. In: M. Malloch and P. Rigby (eds.) *Exploitation: The Complexities of Human Trafficking*. Edinburgh University Press
- Short film on the findings of the 2009 consultations with children on reintegration <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgwjW7jtSjE>
- Veitch, H. (2013) '*Feeling and being a part of something better*' *Children and young people's perspectives on reintegration* Home: The Child Recovery and Reintegration Network
- Cody, C. (2013) *Working paper – What do we know about safe accommodation and alternative care for children affected by sexual exploitation and related trafficking?* Home: The Child Recovery and Reintegration Network
- Cody, C. (2013) *Working Paper – What do we know about...integrating into a new community or setting: one option for children affected by sexual exploitation and related trafficking?*
- Cody, C. (2013) *Working Paper - What do we know about...returning home: one option for children affected by sexual exploitation and related trafficking?* Home: The Child Recovery and Reintegration Network
- Reimer, J. K (2013) *What do we know about...education and training for children affected by sexual exploitation and related trafficking?*
- School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University (2012) '*Look at Us with Respect*' *Perceptions and Experiences of Reintegration: The Voices of Child Survivors of Sexual Exploitation and Practitioners in West Bengal and Jharkhand*
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