

How CSE specials help keep children safe

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Practice note: 'Through this continued engagement, trust and confidence has grown, providing opportunities to intervene much earlier'

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Rachel Stringfellow (RS) works as a special constable in the child sexual exploitation (CSE) team alongside her day job as a personal assistant for a construction company. DCI Pete Quinn (PQ) is the lead for child protection within Nottinghamshire Police's Public Protection department.

PQ: Our Child Sexual Exploitation Disruption Team (CSEDT) draws on the skills and expertise of special constables to create a localised response to CSE. We established this at a time when the organisation was struggling to recruit and retain special constables in the numbers we once had. Feedback indicated that we were missing out on recruiting talented people who did not want to serve their communities in the ways typically associated with specials (night-time economy, sporting events). Some specials who were already serving felt stifled by a lack of opportunity to develop and use their skills in different areas.

RS: The team is looked after by Public Protection. When we arrive on duty, we receive our briefing from the detective sergeant. Tasks range from visiting vulnerable children, issuing Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWNs), visiting offenders who are on the sex offenders register and checking bail condition compliance. We also do a lot of proactive disruption work, which includes visiting CSE hotspots, such as car parks, train stations, cinemas, parks, nature reserves and hotels.

PQ: As specialist investigative teams are often centralised, it's easy to forget the importance of a local response to child safeguarding. This is a key benefit of the CSEDT. Over time, the team have become well known within communities and among local businesses. Through this continued engagement, trust and confidence has grown, providing opportunities to intervene much earlier, prevent crime and keep children safe.

DCI Pete Quinn

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RS: Our role is proactive. We go out on shift and find ways to disrupt offenders. For example, we had intelligence that someone was crossing the border, picking up children and using them to run drugs for him. At that time, we didn't have enough evidence to charge him. We visited him at all hours of the day. He pulled up in a car that wasn't his, so we seized the car. Simple police work, but it took him off the roads for a while, which stopped him picking up children and making them run drugs.

PQ: By empowering the team and giving them responsibility, those volunteering have developed a more rounded skill set. I had not anticipated how many would go on to successfully apply for full-time positions as police officers. The team has become a real recruitment ground, aiding better representation and inspiring others to consider volunteering as a pathway into the service.

RS: I always wanted to be in the police, but life took a different turn and I chose to become a personal assistant. I love my day job so I thought, why not have the best of both worlds? I applied to become a special. It's very satisfying knowing that I might have made a difference to someone. It's an exciting and interesting job – by being proactive, we create our own work. We have to constantly think outside the box, about how we can disrupt people. It's a very rewarding job when you know you have helped a child or family.

PQ: I'm really pleased with how the model has developed into other areas. Since the introduction of the CSED, similar teams have been formed to address the challenges of burglary and rural crime. Our Operational Support Department have also recruited specials to support their specialist search and public order capability. I would encourage everyone to challenge their thinking and be creative when deciding how volunteers in the Special Constabulary are deployed in their area.

- This article was peer reviewed by Special Superintendent Russell Morrison, Hampshire Constabulary

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