

Safer Lives – Support for people identified as having possession of images of children

Providing individuals investigated for online offences involving children with details of the support which can be accessed to help them address the criminal justice system.

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Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Reoffending
Topic	Child sexual exploitation and abuse Cybercrime including fraud
Organisation	West Yorkshire Police
HMICFRS	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). 2023. 'An inspection of how well the police and National Crime Agency tackle the online sexual abuse and exploitation of children' . [internet].
Region	North East
Partners	Police Health services Voluntary/not for profit organisation

Key details

Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	October 2014
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Offenders

Aim

It is acknowledged that individuals under investigation for offences involving children may be at an increased risk of self-harm and suicide following police intervention.

West Yorkshire Police understand this risk and work to ensure that individuals are signposted to organisations which can provide guidance and support following their interaction with the police.

Safer Lives has the following key aims:

- to give support and guidance to the individual in managing wellbeing through the investigation
- to provide information and answer questions about what to expect
- to help understand and address the circumstances and behaviours leading to the investigation through a tailored programme

Safer Lives offer an initial consultation within seven days (with a fee). Following this initial consultation their Safer Lives programme is delivered in one-to-one meetings. At the end of the programme, clients are provided with a letter of completion which can be presented at court.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of Safer Lives are to:

- support individuals under investigation for online offences against children
- reduce the number of suicides
- reduce reoffending

Description

West Yorkshire Police operate an Abusive Images Assessment Hub (AIAH) which receives all referrals from the National Crime Agency (NCA), the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Agency (CEOP) and other forces in relation to offences involving indecent images of children.

The AIAH conduct research and created a package for allocation to the district in which the offender resides (there are five districts within West Yorkshire). Within this electronic package, which is attached to the Niche crime management system occurrence record, the AIAH provide several leaflets which signpost to support services. These are provided to individuals under investigation by the officer in charge of an investigation (OIC) following intervention by police. One of these leaflets is for Safer Lives.

Officers and staff are also asked to provide this leaflet for all individuals who are under investigation for offences involving indecent images of a child, sexual communications with a child, voyeurism and indecent exposure.

Overall impact

An evaluation of the effectiveness of this practice has not been conducted by West Yorkshire Police.

Dr Jane Adlard from Sheffield Hallam University conducted an evaluation of the Safer Lives programme and stated: 'Engagement with Safer Lives was pivotal to reducing re-offending and suicide.'

Safer Lives have reported no known suicides in West Yorkshire for individuals working with them.

Impact on officers

Signposting resources can often provide reassurance to officers that they have provided individuals with access to support, should they require further help or guidance after their interaction with the police.

Impact on individuals under investigation

While it is difficult to measure the true impact of this practice, testimonials from clients show that the information provided by police to individuals under investigation has had a positive impact and leads to them to make contact with support services. The offender within the last testimonial below acknowledges that they may not have been alive had it been for this practice and the involvement of Safer Lives. Therefore it has been suggested that the overall tangible impact is significant.

Testimonials from clients being investigated by West Yorkshire Police

'The fear of being judged is what keeps many people from opening up, but I am glad I took part in the course. It helped me understand that my life is not over and gave me the key to understanding the processes to make the changes I want in my life.'

'The service is a life saver. It helped get my mind on track when I was at my lowest point and helped set me on a path of change in my future. Looking back each week of the course was just as valuable as the previous and I have learnt so much about myself from the sessions.'

'My whole time working with Safer lives I felt comfortable and safe talking about my situation.'

'I cannot thank you enough for the help and support you have given me! It has been absolutely invaluable for me, and you have given me some hope and positivity for the future. Providing a confidential forum and education has been critical for me in moving out of a seemingly unresolvable situation. Many thanks!'

'The sessions are a great help in giving a clear view about the future and what could happen and ways to move forward. Everyone I dealt with was professional and non-judgemental. The sessions help calm anxiety, and it is made easy to be open and this needs to be the case as what you get out of them is down to how much you put in. This was noticeable as sessions adapted to my input and worries.'

'Without Safer lives and the support received about opening up more as a person, I doubt I would still be alive.'

Safer Lives have been able to provide details of the number of individuals who engaged with them in 2023 after being informed of the initiative by West Yorkshire Police:

January – 4

February – 3

March – 3

April – 4

May – 3

June – 4

July – 2

August – 2

September – 1

October – 2

November – 2

December – 1

Learning

Challenges to overcome:

- Ensuring that the practice has become an integral part of dealing with such offences.
- Ensuring that this practice continues beyond the turnover of staff.

The key to this practice is engagement by officers and staff in providing the signposting information to individuals following their involvement with the police. This engagement has been managed through communication with the relevant departments and reminders about the support that Safer Lives can provide to individuals.

Safeguarding Governance have placed the Safer Lives leaflet on the intranet in order that this can be accessed by all officers and staff.

Safer Lives have been invited to attend supervisor meetings to discuss the benefits of their service.

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Tags

Child sexual exploitation Child abuse