



# ENGAGE

Child Sexual Exploitation

Submitted for the Herman Goldstein Award

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## **SUMMARY**

### **Scanning:**

Lancashire Constabulary's Eastern Division was concerned with an alarmingly high number of children who were being reported to them as missing from home. Numerous of these MFH cases were missing for more than 24 hours in any one period. Strategic Partners were unaware of the issues

- No analysis was available to inform why local children went missing
- No central information collection point with an investigative capacity was available to combat the issues of children going missing from home.
- No agreed national definition of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) existed.

### **Analysis:**

Analysis showed that although the police were the only organisation specifically tasked with dealing with children reported missing from home, they were the least likely organisation the young people would talk to about their experiences whilst missing. The police operation discovered, by gathering anecdotal evidence through debriefing the children most often reported as missing that they were:

- Often in the company of adults,
- Often experienced periods of violence perpetrated against them
- Were suffering through alcohol or drugs misuse
- Were often being sexually abused by the adults whose company they were in.

These children received a poor response from all the services designed to help them.

**Response:**

In response to this analysis Lancashire Constabulary in conjunction with Blackburn with Darwen Children's Services and under the auspices of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board formed The Engage Team, a multi agency and co located team aimed at tackling the issues surrounding Child Sexual Exploitation. The team includes Police Officers, Social Workers, Youth Workers and Sexual Health Workers and although the managers are from statutory organisations, charitable organisations Brook, Lifeline and Barnardos also make up a large part of the teams overall staffing. Each team member brings their own specialism to bear on the issues and form a collaborative approach that creates flexible and sustainable long-term problem resolution.

**Assessment:**

The work of the team has led to a dramatic overall reduction of children being reported as missing from home within the Division. Our partners have a much greater understanding of the issues surrounding CSE. Prosecutions of offenders for this type of hidden crime have significantly increased. Children are engaging with child centric, bespoke service that deals with their needs. Information flow between partners has increased. Future planning is underway to create a 'base' where the children's need's can be better met by the team.

## **DESCRIPTION**

### **Scanning:**

In 2005 *Operation Engage*, a police led initiative of one officer and one social worker, was set in motion to consider why Lancashire Constabularies Eastern Division had the highest number of children being reported as missing from home in the county (*appendix 1*).

In each case, when a child is reported as missing there is a financial cost to the police of between £1000 - £1500 or, on average, £1,063,750 per year within Eastern Division alone. Officers are tasked with taking the initial report and investigating the disappearance of the child and when found a 'return to home' interview is conducted by the police. Clearly there are significant resource and cost implications for the police. Of these children reported missing approximately 20% were in the care of the Children's Services Department, creating similar resourcing and cost implications. Nationally the Department for Children, Schools and families (DSCF) estimate that 100,000 children under the age of 16 years go missing each year.

Children reported missing from home were dealt with and searched for by frontline police response officers who often felt that dealing with regular, repeat cases took them away from their main duties. Often it was the opposite that was true with little emphasis being placed by them on locating these children.

*Operation Engage* over many months built up a relationship with those children repeatedly reported as being missing. During this interaction trust was built between them and the children began to feel more comfortable speaking to them. Anecdotal evidence linking missing children to violence, crime and sexual abuse being perpetrated against them by adults was garnered from the children who described previously unreported multiple rapes, physical violence, substance abuse and poor home circumstances. Their interpretation of what constituted a normal boyfriend / girlfriend relationship had become skewed to such an extent that they thought the crimes being perpetrated against them were normal. The grooming process they had undergone changed their behaviour leading them to rebel against their family, which was then reported as a missing from home statistic. The crimes against them remained unreported and investigated.

Between 2005 and 2007 only one offence of CSE was discovered and prosecuted within the division.

Nationally an established agreed and simple definition of what constitutes a case of CSE did not exist. Consultation with other agencies shows that this led to agencies and professionals misunderstanding the issues presented by the children, overlooking the potential CSE indicators and failing to respond adequately to their needs.

Lifeline (drugs and alcohol unit), Brook (sexual health clinic), the Primary Care Trust etc, despite having knowledge of these children, did not have any free and established procedure for the exchange of information surrounding sexual exploitation cases.

The children themselves, Police, Brook and Children's Services all accepted that the police were the least likely agency for children suffering CSE to confide in. They felt that the specialist skills brought by the police were not conducive to open conversation with children. Despite this the Police were the only organisation that kept local statistics and were in the main the only organisation who endeavoured to ascertain the reasons why children go missing and what has happened to them whilst absent.

Each stakeholder partner recognised they were failing to understand and respond to hidden crime, hidden offenders and hidden victims. They recognised that a lack of cooperation and coordination existed between them and that if this gap in their services could be filled then children would be better protected and the Every Child Matters agenda better served.

As a result of the scanning the following specific objectives were set:

- Initiate a preventative strategy in Lancashire for combating child sexual exploitation.
- Develop a team capable of impacting on children with entrenched views sufficient to challenge and change their risk taking behaviour.
- Empower young people and provide them with exit strategies for difficult and abusive relationships.
- Increase reporting of inappropriate relationships and child sexual exploitation.
- Reduce the number of incidents of child sexual exploitation.
- Increase the number of successful prosecutions.
- Increase the amount of inter service information sharing

## **Analysis:**

The agencies through Blackburn with Darwen Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), decided to identify a problem solving approach to tackle child sexual exploitation and thereby deal with the underlying causes of repeat missing from home episodes.

Local comprehension of Sexual Exploitation led to agencies only looking for children who were being internationally trafficked within the 'sex trade'. The media, professionals and members of the public had a general understanding that this was a crime that should be dealt with. But children pigeonholed as simply having sex at an early stage in life and not involved in this human trafficking were simply 'wayward', prostitutes, or the architects of their own downfall (*appendix 2*).

In many cases where Child Sexual Exploitation was taking place the child did not see themselves as a victim. They started out on their relationship with an adult believing it to be exciting and rewarding. They received gifts in the form of mobile phone 'top-ups', alcohol and drugs etc. In a process of grooming this relationship changes to one of dependency on the adult and a normalising of abnormal situations that leads the child into an abusive and often violent sexual relationship. The child's already low self esteem and self worth are further reduced by this dependency. They become withdrawn from their family and the protection that can offer, to the degree where they feel unable to return. Without the help of a trained professional who understands the often competing needs of a child and the family these relationship breakdowns may never be rebuilt.



To understand and identify the issue better a definition of Child Sexual Exploitation not dependant on human trafficking was required.

***Definition:***

*“AN ABUSE OF A CHILD’S VULNERABILITY BY A PERSON’S POSITION OF POWER OR TRUST, EXPLOITING THAT POSITION TO OBTAIN SEXUAL SERVICES IN EXCHANGE FOR SOME FORM OF FAVOUR FAVOUR SUCH AS ALCOHOL, DRUGS, ATTENTION OR GIFTS.”*

*CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION DOES NOT INCLUDE FAMILIAL OR STRANGER RAPE CASES.*

Like most social problems, children susceptible to child sexual exploitation reflect a correlation between socio-economic, environmental conditions and individual or family influences. Most families who have a child suffering from CSE are relatively poor, often have no employed person living in the home and have poor engagement with services be it education or other social services or may have a family member who has in the past been exploited themselves. We have seen that a concentration of children in the same locality, exhibiting these factors often fosters a greater susceptibility to the attentions of adult’s intent on exploiting them, creating ‘hotspot’ locations.

Children, who are in the process of growing up, go through a process of discovering and experimenting with their bodies in a normal and acceptable adolescent way. A distinction between this and CSE must be made. Professionals from all agencies often mistook a sexually exploitative relationship within this period in a child's life leading to an acceptance of the relationship. The development of a series of 'Risk Indicators' drawn from the scanning process, which organisations could refer too, would help alleviate this.

**Risk Indicators:**

- Periods of Missing from home
- Lack of engagement in education
- Drug use
- Poor accommodation
- Alcohol use
- Poor relationship with carers
- Lack of engagement with services
- Poor sexual health awareness

Although this list is not exhaustive when taken into account with a professional's judgement and a simplified CSE definition, it can assist in the early identification of a child suffering sexual exploitation.

Many vulnerable people are wary of police activity, especially those on the fringes of society. A child who is being sexually exploited is the one of the most vulnerable members of our society who may come into contact with the police at various stages of their early life. These interactions can shape their views for many years to come. Uniformed Police Officers who are tasked with reporting, searching for and the recovery of young runaways are often asked to complete a multitude of varying jobs in a day and have many demands placed upon them. They often resent what they consider the inconvenience these children place on their time. When several officers were questioned they said "*they just use us as a taxi service to get home when they are cold*". The DSCF in their scanning conducted during 2008 for National Indicator 71, have estimated that 16% of children who run away from home themselves believe they were harmed whilst absent.

This attitude, when a child is found or returns from a period of absence, and the subsequent interaction reinforce the stereotypical view they have of the police leading to further mistrust. Instead of identifying vulnerability in the child they compound it by creating a bigger gap in an already patchy service. In many instances the 'return to home interview', routinely conducted by the police, is the only point when a child may be questioned about the reasons they went missing and about what has happened to them whilst they were absent. Without a thorough debrief conducted by someone trained in interacting with children and who is more sympathetic to their circumstances and more trusted by the child, this vital information is lost.

It is accepted that not all children who go missing are sexually exploited. However the DCSF, with whom the team has contributed to their work on MFH cases, estimate that 90% of children who are subject to CSE have been reported as missing. Our own analysis of *Operation Engage* figures would suggest that this is an accurate figure, of the three children reported most often within Eastern Division, each had been subjected to CSE.

Between 2005 and 2007 only one successful prosecution for offences relating to child sexual exploitation had taken place within the division. Five others had been investigated without charges being instigated against offenders. Sara Swann MBE Home Office Advisor for Sexual Exploitation suggested during meetings held with her in 2007 that this was not an unusual statistic and that without a more collaborative working relationship between partner agencies was unlikely to change.

The ethos of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and in particular section 17 of the Act promotes the practice of partnership working. It places a statutory duty on police and local authorities to develop and implement a strategy to tackle problems in their area. The team approached the LSCB and, with the help of a parent whose child had suffered from sexual exploitation, persuaded them to tackle the issues head on. They considered that the formation of a multi agency collocated team with an ethos of information sharing and shared responsibility to 'plug' the gaps in services to these children was essential.

**Response:**

**THE ENGAGE TEAM**  
**A MULTI AGENCY TEAM DESIGNED**  
**TO COMBAT AN UNDERLYING CAUSE OF CHILDREN GOING MISSING FROM**  
**HOME – ‘CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION’**

The Engage Team is a Multi Agency team developed to take a child centric approach to dealing with children who are suffering from Child Sexual Exploitation.

The team is made up of the following organisations and has 12 staff members in total:

- Lancashire Constabulary
- Blackburn with Darwen Council
- Brook Sexual Health Services
- Lifeline Substance Misuse Services
- Blackburn with Darwen Primary Care Trust
- Barnardos Children’s Charity.
- BwD Primary Care Trust

The team has three basic work streams, the three 'P's', which draw on the specialism of its members. These streams complement each other to promote a seamless, sustainable problem solving approach that wraps around the children to protect them from themselves and from others. By applying each of the work streams to the P.A.T. analysis triangle we can; care for the victim, nullify the locations where recruitment and grooming takes place and remove the offender from the child, thereby giving room for the teams work streams to have an effect.

## **Prevention**

The team's role within this stream of work is to educate children and get them to reflect on important issues such as trust, flattery and self esteem. This work is carried out within schools and other educational establishments to children who may not already be ensconced within an exploitative relationship but are displaying warning signals exhibiting their vulnerability towards this.

To this end a film has been produced that highlights the dangers of exploitative relationships. It is used as a tool on which to base discussions with children, that team members use, not only as an education tool, but also to enable this reflective , self esteem building process to begin.

The Engage team works with children who are particularly difficult to reach through conventional means and who are often viewed by themselves, other professionals and members of the public as being responsible for their own downfall. Their problems are consequently heavily under reported. The team has challenged this thinking to change perceptions of what the issues really are and has in doing so increased awareness thereby reducing under reporting.

Scanning and analysis of the media has shown both locally and nationally that this view and the view that these crimes are only committed by minority ethnic men is created and perpetuated by the media and that it is only through informing this discussion that these perceptions can be altered.

The Engage Team as part of its Prevention strategy and in conjunction with the Lancashire Evening Telegraph newspaper assisted in the creation of the 'Keep Them Safe Campaign' that regularly highlights the issues, the cases we work on and promotes a greater understanding and community cohesion.

Nationally the team worked closely with the BBC Panorama program to create a Royal Television Society award winning documentary "Teenage Sex for Sale?" that again promotes the issues surrounding the sexual exploitation of children and informs the debate over how best to tackle the issues.

## **Prosecution**

The team works closely with the legislation of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and other acts of parliament to pursue and prosecute identified offenders.

Sexually active children, who rarely attend school, who often have fallen foul of the law themselves, who consented to sexual activity and who have difficult relationships with authority figures make very poor witnesses at court. It is partially these vulnerabilities that child abusers look for in a victim because they know of the difficulties they create for the police. What is clear is that a standard police investigation into this type of sexual crime rarely leads to a successful prosecution.

The Engage Team has overcome these difficulties by investing in a robust, intelligence led approach to the prosecution of offenders, utilising different pieces of legislation, so that less reliance is placed on the children themselves to form the basis of that prosecution case.

The team forms a central collection point for all information and intelligence that is gathered not only from traditional police sources but from other agencies that historically have been wary in sharing the information they have. Each team member shares valuable intelligence at an early stage with each other, with the police acting as a proactive arm to their work. In this way the team takes an effective and active role in being compliant with the Bichard report.



The team ensures that any child whose abuse is taken through to prosecution is fully supported throughout the process. This relationship building not only assists them to be able to attend court and tell their story but also allows them to accept they were not to blame for the abuse perpetrated against them. We have found that far from frightening the children a prosecution handled in this way can empower them and help them to avoid some of the risky situations they had previously found themselves in.

## **Protection**

All three of the basic work streams are equally important but perhaps the most difficult and least likely to succeed without the other two is the protection element. The children Engage works with have usually proved themselves to be very difficult to reach via conventional services and often have a very poor 'service take up' record. They often view themselves as being 'streetwise', and accept their position in life as being normal. When taking this into account alongside people's perception of them and the general under reporting of the issues they face, they can easily fall through the safety nets provided by each individual organisation tasked with working with them.

The Engage team provides family workers and other 'soft skill' workers with an outlet on which they can lay their fears surrounding children they are worried may be suffering abuse of this kind. It acts as a gathering point aimed at plugging these gaps in service and protecting children.

Each child taken on by the team is appointed an individual worker who can spend many hours on a one to one basis, gaining their trust and understanding the problems they face. Once this is underway a protection plan is discussed within the team and the risks posed to the child are assessed. The teams work is then based around reducing these risks.

In all cases of child sexual exploitation a child's self esteem tends to be at very low ebb and a lot of the work conducted uses cognitive behavioural approaches alongside motivational work to change their beliefs and create strategies for them to cope with their issues. One to one sessions are complemented by group sessions that can be as diverse as kick boxing to arts and crafts.

## **Assessment:**

### **Prevention:**

The team has conducted almost 25 awareness raising sessions to almost 800 delegates, mainly other professionals but also to targeted public volunteers who may influence the way other affected persons understand the issues around sexual exploitation. These sessions although tailored to the audience explain what CSE is and how to identify potential or current victims. Although the team do not view themselves as a training team they do understand the need to change perceptions and raise the profile of this type of offence.

All Police Probationary Constables within the division, as part of their initial training, now spend 2 days working with the team to address their preconceived ideas of children regularly being reported as MFH, and to give them a greater understanding of the role they can play in their protection. Return from home interviews conducted by these officers now contain much more information around where the child had been and the push/pull factors effecting likelihood of going missing again, leading to an increase in intelligence gathering and early intervention to prevent future occurrences.

The team has forged excellent links with our local Pupil Referral Unit, a school for children expelled or failing to attend their own school. We have been able to visit the school and provide awareness to the children of the specific issues surrounding CSE and how to keep safe. The CSE Strategic Group, of which the Education department are members have now been asked to implement a PSHE lesson within schools and this is now under development and is expected to come on line in the near future.

During the three year period 2005 – 2007 60 children were identified as being at risk to CSE an average of 20 per year. Through these sessions and the raising of public awareness through the media we have significantly increased the number of referrals to the team. On average we now have a referral every other day with a total of 180 children brought to our attention (*Appendix 3, chart 1*).

### **Prosecution:**

During the three year period 2005 – 2007 only 6 cases exhibiting child sexual exploitation features were investigated, an average of 2 per year, with only one progressing through to charges being brought against the perpetrator.

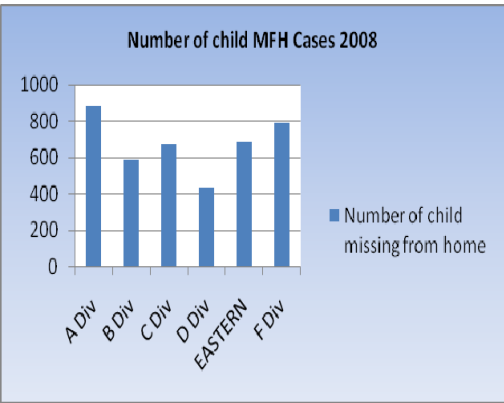
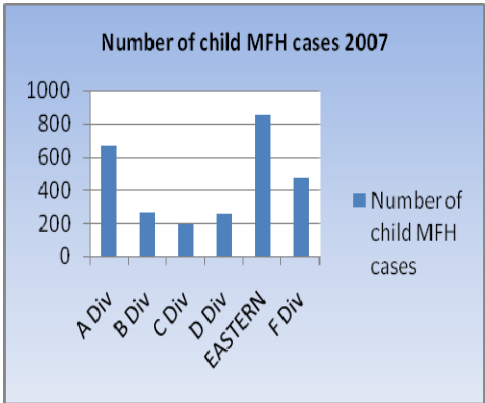
We have made dramatic inroads into the successful prosecution of offenders. In the past twelve months and following the formation of the team we have investigated 30 potential cases of child sexual exploitation and prosecuted 23. This has resulted in 63 charges being brought against 25 perpetrators, an average of almost 2 successful cases per month (*Appendix 3. chart 2*).

**Protection:**

The new National indicator set, particularly NI71 fits ownership of young persons going missing from home firmly into a multi agency setting with emphasis and assessment in five key areas:

- Information gathered
- Information analysis
- Children’s needs being met
- Provision of an out of hours service
- Support for the child both in prevention and intervention work.

The team has been consulted in the formation of the revised national guidance into MFH cases due to be published in April 2009. The teams work means that Lancashire Constabulary and its partners are well placed to meet the challenges this indicator sets.



Eastern Division has by tradition been the area most likely to have the highest number of missing from home reports in Lancashire. This is consistently true over the period 2005 – 2007. In the areas within the division where the Engage team currently operate dealing with childrens risk taking behaviour the above graphs show that for the first time Eastern Division has been able to break with tradition by recording a 24% overall drop in MFH cases.

In the areas within the division where the Engage ethos and work streams are not currently employed the MFH rate has not only remained high but increased by 8% in 2008 over figures recorded in 2007 (*Appendix 4*).

Perhaps the most obvious indicator of success is the reduction of the number of times the most at risk child goes missing from home. Eastern has traditionally always seen the highest number of times a single child has been reported as missing. Following the formation of the team we have seen a 48% decrease in the number of times the most often reported missing children actually go missing and have thereby dramatically reduced the risks posed to them.

The team has, by gaining the trust of the children through its individual work with them and by acting as conduit for information, improved their awareness of to what constitutes risk taking behaviour. The impact of this strategy is demonstrated by the reduction exhibited within the reported missing from home figures.

## **Independent Evaluation**

During September 2008, OFSTED visited Blackburn with Darwen Council to conduct a JAR inspection. As part of this inspection they conducted interviews within the team to evaluate the effectiveness of the processes and to assess if the aims and objectives of the team were being realised. Within their report they have stated that the “Engage Team and the model they follow is an exemplary one” the highest accolade they are able to provide.

In January 2009 the team presented at the annual Divisional Problem Oriented Partnerships competition. We were announced as overall competition winners and commended for the excellent work conducted in working towards a solution for what was a previously under reported problem.

Also in January 2009 the team was nominated for the Borough’s annual ‘Pat on the Back’ Awards. In a ceremony held at Ewood Park Football ground they were awarded the Best Partnership Award 2008.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The work of the team has proved very effective in reducing the numbers of children being reported as MFH and identifying the underlying cause as sexual exploitation. Although the actual makeup of a team should be bespoke to the locality, the ethos, work streams and definition of the Engage Team are now in the process of being rolled out across Lancashire.

The Engage team is a groundbreaking multi agency team that deals direct with child sexual exploitation in an innovative and proactive manner. Utilising the different skills of individual organisations, in a complimentary fashion it provides real changes to children's lives.



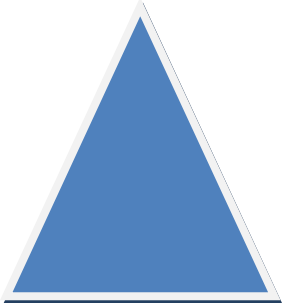
**Appendix 1 – Missing from home cases in Lancashire 2005**

<i>Division</i>	<i>Number of child MFH cases</i>	<i>Highest incidence of MFH Report for a single child</i>
<b>A</b>	668	27
<b>B</b>	267	21
<b>C</b>	197	21
<b>D</b>	259	19
<b>EASTERN</b>	<b>851</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>F</b>	471	27

**Appendix 2 – Perceptions of child relationships**

**Childs View**

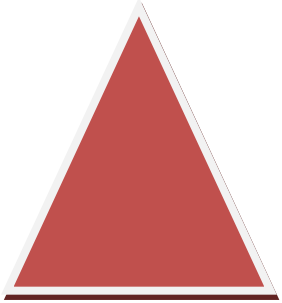
Girlfriend



Boyfriend His friends

**Sex Industry**

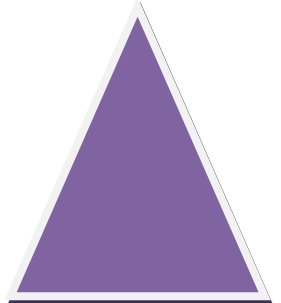
Prostitute



Pimp Punter

**Reality**

Child

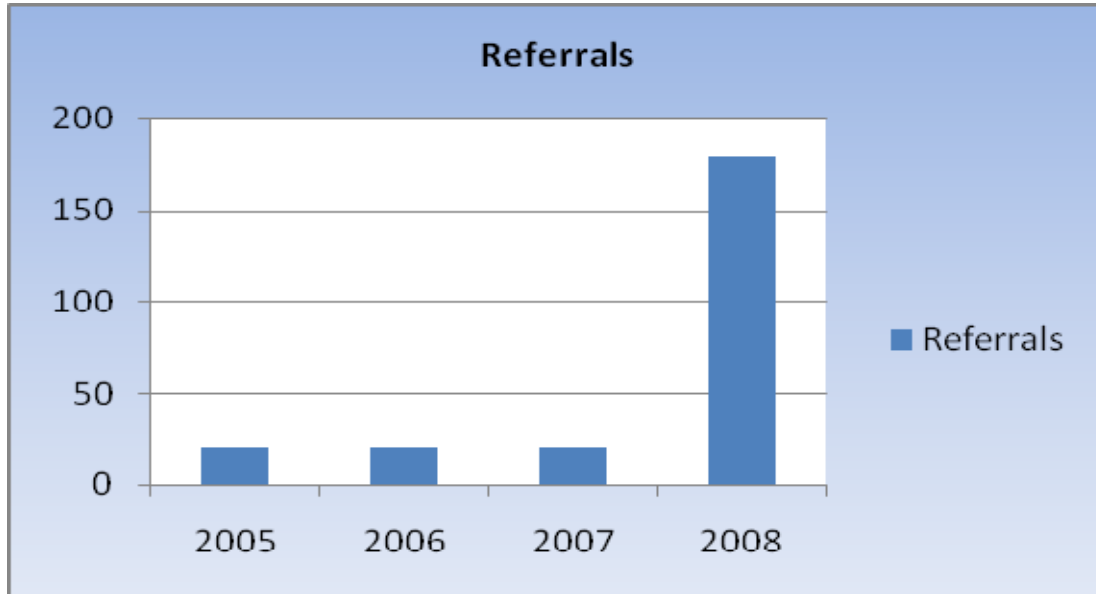


Abuser Paedophile

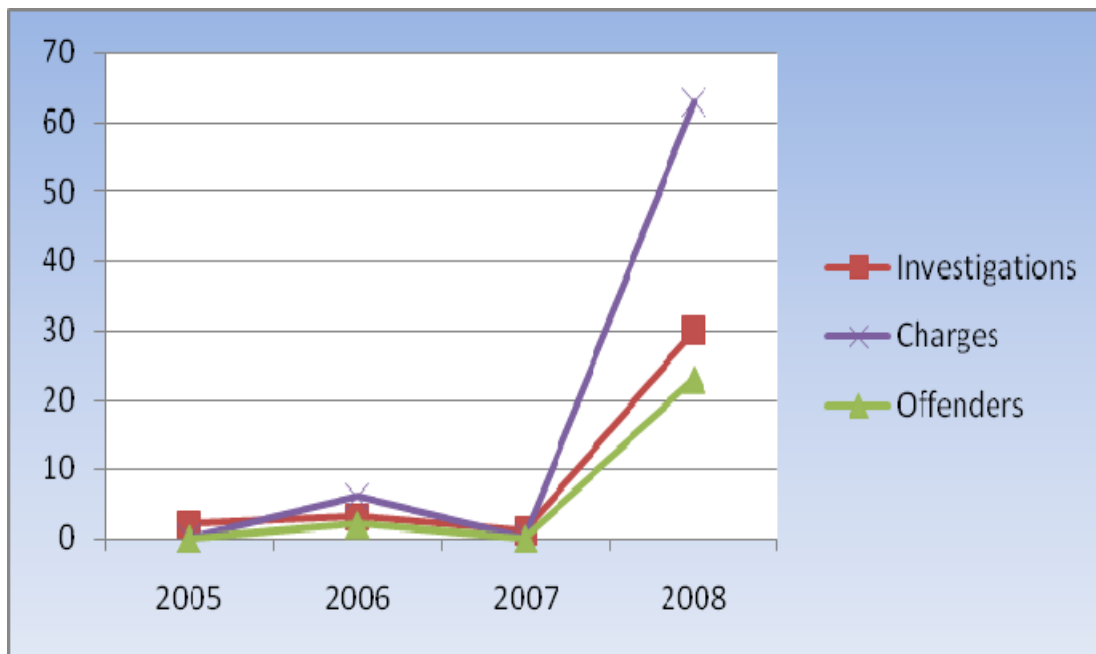
*Sara Swann MBE*

### Appendix 3

#### Child Sexual Exploitation Referrals (chart 1)



#### Child Sexual Exploitation Prosecutions (chart 2)



**Appendix 4 – Missing From Home Reports in Lancashire 2007/2008**

