

## **A model of multi agency practice from the UK: An NSPCC perspective on the role of embedded NSPCC's staff within the Child Protection and Online Protection Centre**

### **The CEOP model**

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre is the UK's dedicated policing unit geared towards tackling the sexual abuse of children. The CEOP centre offers a holistic model of practice through the secondment of staff from a variety of disciplines, including NSPCC's social work staff into the Centre. All areas of CEOP's work overlap and many are complex and specialist. The CEOP model ensures that each area of knowledge about the abuse of children, including online abuse, child abuse images, child trafficking or travelling sex offenders has dedicated specialists. Within CEOP a case is worked using all necessary resources and with the welfare of the child sitting at the heart of it, overseen by a Head of Safeguarding and Child Protection and embedded NSPCC staff. This short summary offers an overview of kinds of work that the NSPCC's embedded CEOP staff undertake in order to support this child protection based police work.

#### ***Victim ID – assessment of children at risk***

Two NSPCC embedded staff members are solely dedicated to the Victim Identification Team working to identify, locate and protect children from child abuse images seized as a result of police investigations. Specifically they are involved in helping to make an assessment of child abuse images. The purpose of the assessment is both to prioritise the timing and necessity of intervention as well as to analyse the information available to determine any issues which may be relevant to the child and their circumstances. This helps to prioritise, as does assessment in any other area of child abuse, by assisting in the identification of those children at the highest levels of risk. The NSPCC's embedded staff within CEOP are in the process of developing an assessment tool which will allow them to identify which children need an intervention immediately or need to be found immediately. They use social work expertise to find those most at risk of serious harm and to prioritise them (which is necessary in terms of volume) in relation to serious risk of harm. Some issues are more serious in relation to sentencing than in relation to levels of future risk and danger. The core specific issue NSPCC/CEOP staff look at is the concern about the future risk to the child.

#### ***Child Protection proofing and follow up support***

In relation to covert operations the role of the NSPCC is to provide an overarching child protection strategy for the operation as a whole – and focussed assessments and/or strategies on individual children on all of the different issues that there may be for children - offering a potential specialist response for each child. If a child is identified and 'recovered' then they are referred on to a local authority – but the NSPCC workers (as embedded CEOP staff) will work with and support the local force around their engagement with the local authority and help them to access services. The

NSPCC will (where requested, or where it is assessed as necessary) give the local police forces a package of information about the specific child so that the forces can give this to the local authority providing the care and protection. Typically this will include information about what has happened to the child, what their specific needs and issues are i.e. filmed during their own abuse – this is important because it avoids the necessity of that child being assessed again by various different professionals which can be very traumatising. The package of information they develop contains information and recommendations about the child's care needs.

On occasion with complex cases – NSPCC/ CEOP staff will be hands on involved in following up and ensuring that the children get services – they will also support children in the process of gathering sensitive evidence.

### ***Identifying new children***

In relation to the operation itself the NSPCC (as embedded CEOP staff) will be involved in scrutinising every aspect of the operation from a child protection point of view and making sure it is sensitive to the needs of children. The NSPCC staff within CEOP will identify the impact on a child – every time there is a child involved in order to ensure that police operations are carried out sensitively. The NSPCC will also scrutinise operational and surveillance work in terms of identifying other children at risk and ways in which individuals may have contact with children.

### ***Interviews and debriefing of offenders to identify other victims***

One member of the NSPCC team at CEOP is also involved in the downstream interviewing of offenders in order to identify risk to a child. NSPCC staff will observe the sex offender interviews and will often pick up different issues from the police/ and look for different clues about potential risk to children – that will then inform the interviewer who will ask specific questions identified by the NSPCC observers. They are listening out for the kinds of previous contact the offender may have had with children before their offence took place and other children that have been abused. The NSPCC staff will often start from the assumption that an offender is likely to be in contact with other children (or have been in contact with other children). Whereas law enforcement focus on what has happened and how they can effectively gather evidence for it, NSPCC staff work as embedded staff within CEOP to also focus on issues of potential future risk of harm to children and the ways that they might potentially prevent it. The threshold for the NSPCC embedded staff is a social work one of significant harm or likelihood of significant harm.

## **The challenges of multi agency working**

### ***Tensions over priorities – putting children at the heart of an operation***

Within CEOP the power of veto is given to child protection staff. This can potentially cause some tensions in relation to active operations and the need to carefully plan operations in order to make children safe. NSPCC workers

acting as CEOP's child protection staff and CEOP's own Head of Safeguarding and Child Protection will not allow operations to commence unless there is a plan in place for the children. This is core to CEOP's recognition that the welfare of the child must be prioritised. Sometimes in relation to travelling sex offenders this can be complex as the cases are essentially held in other jurisdictions. There is a need to understand the needs of the child, and that they may be an ongoing target, and there needs to be a plan to make them safe. CEOP's child protection staff help to ensure that operations do not commence without an in-country strategy for the protection of the children, and that there is never an operation that potentially leaves a child at risk.

### ***Understanding each others practice and perspectives***

There is sometimes an assumption on the part of law enforcement that a limited amount of information about a child is all that is relevant or necessary for social workers to make an assessment or judgement of a situation. The principles of social work dictate that a proper understanding of a child depends on a holistic assessment of their needs and vulnerabilities – and there is a need to understand the whole environment around these children to develop the right response. This is about identifying to the police where issues meet the safeguarding criteria – and using social work expertise to make recommendations. Within the CEOP model this has been overcome by the development of trust borne out of close and strong collaborative working relationships enabled by day to day co-location. Co-location has been essential in allowing a proper overview and understanding of each others work and has allowed NSPCC acting as CEOP's child protection staff to get the right information, look at the work, sites, overall approach and then understand the risks in an operation and advise from a child-centred perspective.

### ***What makes the model work effectively?***

The key aspect of success has been CEOP's organisational support and vision and commitment to putting children at the heart of what they do. There is within CEOP a high level commitment to the principle and the model of multi-agency working and the active authority offered to social workers within CEOP. There is also a high level of skills and experience on the part of staff in order to police these issues with maximum effectiveness.

The NSPCC's strongly support a child centred model of practice which is why we have been provided active support by embedding staff. We consider that it is not right to separate child protection, children's rights and law enforcement and that the CEOP model brings these together in terms of children's rights to justice and to protection.