



REPORT 2025

5 YEARS LATER....

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The past 5 years...



The Community Futures Project was launched five years ago with the support of The National Lottery, with a clear and ambitious aim: to work alongside local communities in Walsall to raise awareness of exploitation, what it looks like, and how together we can take steps to end it. From the outset, the project has been about partnership – bringing people and places together in a united response to protect children and young people from harm.

Over the course of the programme, Community Futures has reached into schools, places of welcome and worship, shops and the night-time economy, community groups, neighbourhood policing teams, and health services. Each of these settings has played a vital role in helping us spread awareness and open up conversations about exploitation. By embedding education and prevention in the everyday spaces where people live, learn, and socialise, we have made safeguarding a shared responsibility.

Alongside this community-wide work, the project has also focused on early intervention through one-to-one support with young people. These interventions have been crucial in raising awareness on an individual level, equipping children and young people with the understanding and confidence they need to recognise risks, ask questions, and seek help. For many, this timely support has made a real difference in reducing vulnerability and preventing harm.

Delivering this work was not without challenge. Recruiting and training Community Champions proved difficult, particularly due to the disruption of COVID-19 and the tensions that arose in Walsall during this time, including incidents of serious violence and rival gang activity. These events understandably created fear and division, making it harder for residents to step into community leadership roles. Despite this, we were able to engage professionals such as teachers and community workers, who acted as trusted champions in their communities and sustained the project's reach. Alongside this, we continued to educate parents and community members through coffee mornings and training sessions, creating spaces where conversations about exploitation could still take place and awareness could grow, even during difficult times





Our work...

Since our last report we have continued our work in Birchills. In this area we supported local schools and community groups, engaged with other statutory services to do joined up outreach, coffee mornings, parent workshops, holiday clubs and awareness raising sessions.

This area presented significant challenges from the outset. Initially, there was reluctance from some community members to display our information, to be seen engaging with us, or to openly connect, due to concerns about how this might be perceived within the community.

By taking time to understand the contextual factors the community may have faced, including experiences of oppression, discrimination, stigma from services and wider marginalisation, we began to see why there could be fear or hesitation around our involvement. This understanding helped us to approach engagement with greater empathy, patience and respect.

Over time, positive relationships began to develop, particularly with women from the local Muslim community. We recognised that the most appropriate way to engage was through awareness-raising and education, delivered in ways that respected community dynamics and boundaries.

We also noted that many community members had limited opportunities to access information about certain risks affecting young people. Our role was therefore to provide safe, accessible spaces for conversations and to share knowledge in ways that empowered families and communities.

In schools, we adopted a culturally sensitive and holistic approach to education. We raised awareness through age-appropriate assemblies, adapting content to reflect current trends and ensuring relevance and inclusivity for all pupils.



Education



Training



1:1 children and young people work



Our work cont...

Towards the end of the project we revisited all areas that we had engaged with over the past five years. As we had stayed in regular contact with each area and continued to offer education sessions this was a perfect opportunity recap on how to help keep their communities safe from outside harm and exploitation.

It was also an opportunity to establish the need going forwards for the support that we had been offering.

Fun Days & Training

to celebrate the achievements of the project we arranged four community fun days. These were well advertised and extremely well supported by the local community. We saw communities that normally exist in silo to one-another, come together and celebrate safe communities together. Postcode wars are commonplace and yet feedback from community members was that these differences were put aside and they felt safe together which left them hopeful for the future.

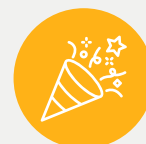
Professionals and community training was offered through four events in the areas also and were so popular that they were oversubscribed and alternative arrangements made to accommodate the numbers. The use of key note speakers with lived experience was the most hard-hitting and people were visibly moved. Again, to see all the communities holding round table discussions about how to play their part in keeping their communities safe was overwhelming to staff, volunteers and those attending themselves.



shared learning



empathy



celebration



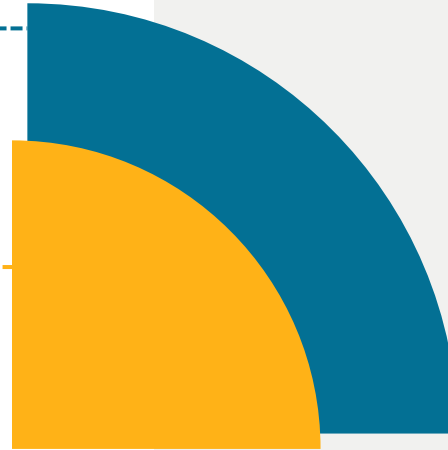
The year in numbers...

3,219 ADULTS

Interactions with adults to raise awareness and educate

2,585 CHILDREN

Interactions with children to inform, educate, raise awareness and support



Stats

2526

We have educated 2,526 children and young people. This has been in a mix of primary, secondary, alternative provisions and college. All sessions were made age appropriate and covered both child criminal and child sexual exploitation along with raising awareness about financial exploitation. We also spoke to the young people about online safety and healthy relationships.

59

Community Futures has supported 59 children and young people on a one to one basis. These were young people who had been referred to the service through the awareness raising and professionals training that had equipped adults with the knowledge of how to refer a person they believed was vulnerable to exploitation. A variety of topics were explored, from grooming, types of exploitation to relationships, each young person had support that was adapted to them and we worked in a way that built up trust and ensured they knew we listened to them, believed them and were there to support in a non-time limited way.





The year in numbers cont...

143

We have held events to train professionals around the subject of exploitation. This work has been key to ensuring that people working in and around Walsall know how to spot the signs and where to refer as well as how to along with signposting to other agencies also.

The feedback received from professionals was that the personal element of someone with lived experience sharing their story was so hard hitting and brought the reality home of what we were talking to them about.



2,964

Out in the community, delivering sessions, talking to community members, businesses, shops owners, local services, faith groups, clubs and places of welcome is where be built links right into the heart of the community and built upon the trust that we knew was pivotal to the success of the work.

Networking, dropping by regularly, speaking at coffee morning, scout groups, football clubs and Sexual Health drop in sessions are just come of the ways we engaged with the communities and ensured that they left our conversations with more knowledge about what exploitation looks like and how to get help.





Key achievements this year...



Reach

We are so proud of the volume of people we have reached in our local communities.

Revisiting, arranging and holding fun days was an emotional journey to see how many people Community Futures Project has engaged with and had an impact.

Recognition

Through our one to one work, one young person recognised that her friend was being groomed online. Her learning was applied and she had a conversation with her friend and then with her friend's mom.

This resulted in her mom contacting police and an investigation as a result.

Perseverance

Throughout the past four years we have reflected on how difficult it has been to recruit volunteers. Our achievement this year has been the pay off of our perseverance. Volunteers have come forward to not only support us at events, but through fundraising and donating equipment, time and gifts for young people at Christmas, vouchers for food, gift cards for sports equipment and publicising our work through social media.





Gallery...





COMMUNITY FUTURES

Feedback...



"I have learnt so much from my sessions, things I didn't even think was exploitation. She spoke to me like I was a normal person not a kid!"



"They used to come to see me at school and ask me what was going on with me And actually listened without judging me"



"Lisa's safe man, she would take me out and stuff get me off the estate, she would tell me as it is and we would have a laugh"



"I didn't know that some of the apps and games on my phone was used to groomed kids and if I sent a picture to my boyfriend it was against the law"



5 years in numbers...

12,119

Children & young people educated

Universal prevention education reduces risks and increases early disclosure. According to the Early Intervention Foundation, every £1 spent on early intervention can save £7–£10 in later crisis costs.

Community members engaged with through outreach

Wider community understanding of signs of grooming, exploitation and online safety helps prevent harm, increases reporting and reduces the burden on police and social services. While it's harder to attach a direct unit cost here, wider community resilience and bystander intervention can lead to earlier safeguarding actions that prevent major exploitation costs. Even preventing just two major exploitation cases saves over £660,000.

7,542

208

Children and young people supported through one to one sessions

Targeted intervention for young people at high risk prevents further harm, criminal justice involvement, long-term trauma and costly interventions later. The Home Office estimates the average lifetime cost of a young person involved in serious youth violence is £1.4 million.

Awareness sessions with parents

Research shows that early awareness and parental vigilance significantly reduce the risk of child exploitation. Preventing just one young person from entering exploitative situations like County Lines can save public services £330,000–£500,000 per child (source: Children's Society, NCA).

570

714

Professionals trained and raised awareness

Well-trained professionals spot signs earlier, intervene sooner and prevent cases from escalating. Safeguarding training is proven to increase referrals and reduce long-term harm.



Key learning from last 5 years...

01. Vulnerability

The children and young people in our communities are so vulnerable. From the onset of Covid restriction, they became more reliant upon internet and devices and those wishing to exploit them became more creative in their ways. The sudden change in everyday life meant that parents did not always keep up with new apps and age appropriate games which were used by groomers

Trust is key 02.

Whether building relationships with young people, schools, volunteers or local economy, we have found that trust is foundational to the relationship being build and co-operation. Too many times, communities have received broken promises, felt let down by statutory services or felt overlooked entirely. The model of this project has meant that we have well established trusted relationships which we have continued to build upon

03. Roll with the changes

From day one really, this project has had to flex and adapt. Whether that has been ways to engage, which areas to target, key people and staff. We are proud that staff on this project were able to continue to work throughout covid. We know that changing plans to target an area that had seen a violent murder and conflict that resulted was a strength of the project.

04. So much good out there

Good news doesnt sell or travel as fast. However, the community and business support has been endearing. Everything from fundraising and raffles, Easter eggs, offering workspaces, promotion. The community got behind the vision and mission and showed their support.



Future Goals & Strategy...

As we look to the future, we want to ensure that our early intervention goes even further, reducing the likelihood of all outside harms such as anti-social behaviour, youth violence, bullying, and the wider pressures that affect adolescents today. To achieve this, we will continue to remove barriers to access and make our work available to more children, young people, and adults. One of the strongest lessons we have learned is that positive activities are a powerful tool for building community awareness, fostering togetherness, and creating spaces where people feel safe to learn and grow.

With this in mind, the next phase of Community Futures will place wellbeing at its core. We will deliver positive activity groups for both children and adults, using gardening, sports, fishing, and crafts as engaging ways to increase wellbeing while also educating participants about outside harms. By combining positive experiences with meaningful safeguarding education, we will strengthen resilience, reduce risks, and empower communities to stand together against harm. To achieve this, we will continue to remove barriers to access and make our work available to more children, young people, and adults.

Although the Lottery-funded phase of Community Futures has come to an end, our commitment to the work is unwavering. We have allocated designated funds to ensure the project continues and are seeking additional resources to be able to sustain it. The next chapter is about taking what we have learned and applying it in new, innovative ways, creating a safer, more resilient Walsall where exploitation, violence, and harm cannot take root.

The past five years have shown us that change is possible when communities unite. Thanks to The National Lottery, Community Futures has built a foundation of awareness, early intervention, and partnership that we are determined to carry forward into a safer future for all.





Executive Summary...



A message from our CEO

The support of the National Lottery over the past five years has created a lasting legacy.

Our communities are better supported, able to share their experiences and learning to encourage cooperation in protecting our children and young people against outside harms and exploitation.

We are so proud to have facilitated this within our surrounding areas and look forward with optimism what Community Futures Project holds in the months and years to come.

Thank you National Lottery!

