

News story: Government Launches Trusted Relationships Fund

The Home Office has today (25 February) launched a £13 million fund to help youth workers, police, nurses and other professionals form close, protective relationships with children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation, county lines gang crime or relationship abuse.

The Trusted Relationships Fund will invite local authorities to apply for funding to run projects aimed at fostering relationships between frontline staff and at-risk children. Through the fund, local authorities are encouraged to work with local partners to improve the way professionals, including social workers, youth workers, police and voluntary sector practitioners, work together to support vulnerable young people.

Local authorities will be asked to design projects that fit their needs. But the projects could see frontline workers organising or becoming involved with:

- establishing a safe space where young people can share their concerns with professionals who will listen to them
- providing specialist counselling services
- delivering positive activities including sport, music, arts and volunteering
- improving the way local organisations work together to support the most vulnerable young people
- working with children who repeatedly go missing to ensure that they are kept safe and well

Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability, Victoria Atkins, said:

This government is working to keep all our children and young people safe and protect them from those who would exploit them or try to pull them into a life of violence and crime.

We all know how valuable it can be for a child to have an adult in their life who they can trust, who they can confide in, who has their best interests at heart and who is in a position to act when they are in trouble.

Through the Trusted Relationships Fund we want to ensure that those most at risk of abuse and exploitation, such as child sexual exploitation or gang-related exploitation have such a person in their lives.

A review carried out by the Early Intervention Foundation, commissioned by the Home Office last year, found that a trusted relationship with an adult is an essential part of programmes to support vulnerable children, and that the

lack of trusted relationships is consistently cited in reviews of failures around child sexual abuse and exploitation. It found that this kind of social support can help children avoid risky situations, as well as help them overcome adverse circumstances in their lives, and that a trusted relationship can make young people significantly more likely to disclose when abuse is happening to them.

The projects will be targeted towards young people aged 10 to 17 who have been identified by local partners as vulnerable to being sexually exploited, victims of county lines or peer or relationship abuse.

Local authorities in England will shortly be able to submit expressions of interest and proposals must be able to demonstrate how they will:

- improve wellbeing, self esteem, self efficacy, resilience and critical thinking skills in vulnerable young people
- facilitate higher quantity and quality of trusted relationships between young people and adults who are there to support them, as reported by both young people and professionals
- reduce incidents of children and young people going missing, being exploited and abused, and entering the criminal justice system

The fund will also strengthen the evidence base on what works to protect young people from exploitation and abuse to improve services over the course of the programme and beyond.

Donna Molloy, Director of Dissemination at the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), said:

In early intervention services, the trust that develops between a skilled practitioner and a parent, child or young person can motivate and equip people to change their lives. The evidence shows that positive relationships can support the development of skills, coping strategies, confidence and behaviour change for children and young people.

We do need a better understanding of the potential of trusted relationships between practitioners and young people to protect vulnerable young people from sexual abuse and exploitation. The new funding provides a great opportunity to build the evidence about which specific aspects of workforce practice are more or less effective in building trusting relationships with vulnerable children. We still know far too little about what makes a good practitioner able to deliver effective early intervention and how to support the different groups of practitioners that collectively make up the early intervention workforce.

There will be a two-stage application process for the fund. Local authorities in England are eligible to be lead bidders and are encouraged to work with local partners in developing and delivering projects, which could include other statutory organisations, the voluntary and community sector and the

private sector.