



## Knowledge Exchange Network (July 2022): Women and policing

This session focused on the policing of women, exploring innovative initiatives and best practice to prevent and counter Violence Against Women and Girls, and how to centre young women and their needs across policing.

### Lived experience member, Revolving Door's Women Forum

We heard from one of Revolving Door's lived experience members, who joined the organisation as part of New Gen, a project focused on improving policing approaches to better meet the needs of young adults. Despite coming into contact with the police repeatedly at a young age and for offences relating directly to her experiencing modern slavery, she was routinely criminalised. Not being diverted into support at her first point and officers not recognising her vulnerabilities significantly delayed her referral into the National Referral Mechanism, and her recovery. She highlighted the need for better consistency when policing young women and girls, for instance with a check-list for the police to run through how vulnerabilities might present.

“The first time I was arrested, I was labelled as criminal. The last time, as victim. That was over the course of 10 years. Depending on the police officer I was speaking to, I was either a victim or a criminal. (...) I was the lucky one. It makes me very sad to think that many other women went down for the same crimes I committed and their exploitation.”

### Chief Inspector Charlotte Irlam, Merseyside Police

Chief Inspector Charlotte Irlam outlined the aim of Operation Empower, a proactive policing response to preventing sexual violence within the night time economy. This was a

## Together, we can put an end to the revolving door.

preventative approach by Merseyside Police where officers were tasked to identify potential perpetrators, and those individuals presenting as vulnerable, to ensure any safeguarding concerns are met. Chief Inspector Irlam discussed the use of officers in plain clothes and the roll-out of bystander training to local businesses, such as bar and hotel staff. The collaborative approach to the Operation was essential to its success, including the close working with City Watch, as well as the local university. A joint agency working group that comprised of academics and representatives from local community organisations. Some of the learning included using both male officers, and that behaviour is being described accurately in order for appropriate risk assessments to be completed and correct categorisation. Operation Empower was currently undergoing evaluation and the hope is for future funding to enhance deployment of Street Guardians.

Chief Inspector Irlam also spoke to Operation Ashville, which was set up to identify and minimise potential crime trends within the hotel environment, and to better understand where vulnerabilities in these settings are. The range of criminal situations in these settings include Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) but also drug related crime and trafficking related to county lines. The Operation started with an awareness raising of the CSE, and was followed by test purchasing of hotel rooms, often a younger female (Police Cadet) with an older male (officer). Out of the 102 hotels visited, 26 did not allow bookings until ID was provided – it was clear there was too much of a focus on ID, rather than the relationship status and vulnerability. Following this test phase, further CSE awareness training was developed and delivered by Liverpool City Council, and hotels were revisited. Since the initiation of the project, hotels have begun to call the Police where they have concerns.

## Jessica Southgate, Deputy Chief Executive, Agenda

Jessica presented on the report they recently launched, We've Not Given Up, on young women in contact with the criminal justice system, with a focus on the over-representation of care-experienced young women and those from racially minoritized communities. The Project looked at making the case for the unique needs for young adult women in contact with the criminal justice system. Agenda sought to do this by empowering those with lived experience to safely share their experiences, as part of building the evidence base. Jessica outlined up to 90% of young women in the CJS may have experience abuse from someone they trusted, and 2/3 of these women will have grown up in care compared to 1/2 of young men. 32% of the women's prison population are from BAME backgrounds, including those from Gypsy and Roma communities. The experiences of inequality and discrimination mean a lot of the young women and girls had deep mistrust of authorities and reporting further abuse or issues when in the system, which resulting in a real risk of re-traumatisation and further harm. A lot of the young women and girls spoke about the assumptions that were made of them, and a lack of understanding that those being exploited may present as 'perpetrators'. These experiences highlight the need to recognise the realities of young women's lives, rebuilding the trust in systems and services prioritising an intersectional approach.