



Spotlight 3: Episode 7

Podcast Transcript

Spotlights is a series of online events and publications, focusing on a particular group of victim/survivors who are often hidden from services. As a part of SafeLives Spotlight on domestic abuse and young people, this week my colleague Deidre has met with Hollie, a Ypva working with 13-17 year olds in South Tyneside. Hollie talks about the role of the Ypva, the work they do and offers some insight into how to engage young people. We hope you find this interview as helpful and enlightening as we did.

D: Hello. I am Deidre and today I am here with Hollie Pearson who is a YPVA with the South Tyneside Young Person's Violence Adviser Service. Hello Hollie.

H: Hello.

D: Thanks for joining me today.

H: You're very welcome.

D: Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

H: Yes, obviously I'm Hollie Pearson. I've worked for the Young Person's Violence Adviser Service now for about two years. Prior to that I worked for the Youth Justice Service, so I've worked with young people for around nine years I think, so quite a long time.

D: Can you tell me a bit about the YPVA role?

H: Yes. It's quite new in our borough, for about three years it's been running, and my main job is working with young people aged 13 to 17 in South Tyneside who are at risk of domestic abuse, either internet relationships or inter-personal relationships.

D: And how are they normally referred to you?

H: It is either via professionals, so either social worker, police, schools and education establishments, health as well. So they would complete a Dash Ric and if that meets our threshold to referring they will do that.

D: And what is your threshold?

H: At the moment because there's only three people who do my job and my boss, Clare, who I know you're going to speak to later, high risk, real high risk people.

D: And can you kind of give me an idea of the sort of work that you do with a young person on a regular basis, maybe an example?

H: Yes. Predominantly obviously we do a lot of safety planning with our young people, make sure they're safe if they're women in their relationships if they're going to stay in that relationship. But also education and awareness around their relationships, so what's healthy, what's not, but offer a lot of different interventions. So depending on what the risks are and what the issues are we do things like child sex exploitation work and awareness. We do honour based violence work, forced marriage, FGM awareness, things like that as well. Internet safety; our young people, everybody is on social media and all that sort of thing, so that's really important to us as well. We have really close links with the police so our clients as well we get them linked up to their local neighbourhood police officer. We have two police officers based here as well so they offer interventions around what is domestic abuse, the law in relation and different criminal offence attached to that. Legal order, so what they can do to protect, what the police can do to protect them. And our job is sometimes to support them through that, any disclosures, police process and court process as well, and solicitors.

D: So when I was talking to young people, a lot of them were saying that the abusive relationships that they were in, it was their first relationship and they didn't know that it was abusive because they didn't know any different. And they talked a lot about the sort of education and awareness raising that you did for them. Can you talk a bit about why you do that and why it's important for young people?

H: Yeah, I think what you said as well and what the young people are saying, it's their first relationship. Sometimes it's what the peer group as well see as normal behaviour, like also they check your phone, they do this and that's where it's all escalating and they don't realise where that line is actually, that this is not acceptable, and it's unhealthy and abusive. So we deliver intervention around that. It's quite an intensive programme to look at different elements of abusive relationship but also healthy relationship as well. Because it's not just the absence of unhealthy behaviours; you want to have those healthy behaviours as well.

D: So it's about them understanding what is abuse but then what is a healthy relationship.

H: Yeah, and what they should be having as well.

D: A lot of the young people I talked to spoke a lot about quite coercive and controlling behaviour, a lack of trust, a lot of jealousy and monitoring quite heavily. Is that something that you notice or do you notice other common threads of abuse amongst young people that's particular to young people?

H: It's definitely I think controlling phone, social media now, it's a monitoring tool for partners especially. So we look at how to manage that, do it safely, in terms of location trackers, things like that, just being a bit more mindful about what you put online. Other themes I would possibly say is, it's not necessarily always about he violence, and I think when people use the term domestic violence, a lot of people say it's not violent, so.

D: As in physical?

H: Yeah, because I think a lot of people think domestic violence is violence and it's not. So obviously from my point of view it's about kind of reminding people it's not the absence of violence, it's the controlling, coercive behaviour and the manipulation I think and intent behind something. So we obviously look at that around someone gives you flowers, it's a normal nice gesture, but what is the intent behind it for example.

D: So it's working with them to understand that and unpick it. Okay. So a lot of people, their experience might be working with adult victims of domestic abuse, and as a part of their response to adults they also might be supporting those 16 and over, how would you say their approach to young people needs to be different to an adult? What is it specifically that a young person needs?

H: Obviously we work with 13 to 17 year olds so even in that transition period into adulthood, that's a difficulty as well because obviously from Children's Services to Adult Services. So for us it's to take the time I think to build relationships with young people. We do a lot of outreach work. I know sometimes that's not possible in Adult Services because of capacity and things, but we do home visits, we do work in the community, so out in the core. And we're quite flexible as well. Everybody's circumstances are different so we sort of tailor that to their needs. We offer lots of different interventions. We do like learning styles questionnaire with our clients as well to see how they best learn and we tailor our intervention to how they best learn.

Some of our clients have children as well or are pregnant, so we have to try and fit in that element as well, so crèche facilities. Illness as well if they're poorly, that's why we do home visits, if you're pregnant and not feeling very well and can't be bothered to get out, still see you if you go to them. And I think it's just that taking the time and I think they then see actually this person cares and wants to help me and I'm going to give the time back, because it's voluntary, they don't have to see us. So we try and make it fun as well and creative and do different things. Like we have a kitchen here and we can cook and do sessions like that, and do it more informally as well rather than just sitting down side by side with a pen and a book. But getting the colours out, getting them to draw things. So sort of bringing in things like that.

I know with one of my clients I've used sort of like stickers for their safety plan rather than writing we put stickers and looked at what for them, how they would visually see what going in on time meant, for argument's sake, which we plot and things like that. That really worked for them, so.

D: That sounds great, yeah. And lots of the young people I talked to talked about the way that you worked around what they needed. So a lot of it was about going to get a milkshake in the car, or just having small conversations that built the relationship up. So one of the young persons I talked to said, I was afraid to engage in the first place because I was afraid she'd just want to get to the meat of it really, ask all the hard questions right away, fill out the form, and I didn't want to do that. But then she found out actually you just had a conversation and it was sort of like a friend I guess.

H: I think if you see it as a person, they're more likely to think, oh hang on a second, this isn't just a job and it's not just, you know, they're here to talk about these really distress things. At the end of the day they're still suffering a trauma or have suffered a trauma; their self esteem's low, confidence, and they're going to think, you know, hang on, do I trust this person, are they going to help me because people don't believe me. Are they going to think it's normal? Is it normal? And they've got all those questions and fears and anxieties as well, you know, with young people. Some people haven't worked with professionals before so it's somebody coming in who they don't know, they don't know what they look like, are they going to judge me, are they going to tell me to end this

relationship that I love. And I think when you come in and be quite fun, and they judge you as soon as you go in, what you look like, how you speak. So it's about trying to build that first and then start looking at, okay, what's the priority for you, because for some young people it could be their emotional wellbeing that they need to prioritise, over looking at their relationship. Or it could be an accommodation issue, things like that. So it's looking at prioritising for the young people as well as I guess our agenda, which is obviously wanting to keep them safe.

D: So it's getting an idea of what they need and what they want, and kind of it seems like a more holistic...

H: Definitely.

D: ...approach.

H: Yeah, and activities, things that they enjoy doing. So yeah, looking at everything, school, family relationships. We do genograms as well with young people to look at what support they have. So yeah.

D: So I had quite a few conversations with not only young people but parents and their experience of abuse, but also dealing with the fact that their children were going through quite severe abusive relationships and how that affected them and what they felt they couldn't and could do. What is some of the work that you do with parents if you even do work with parents at all?

H: Yeah, we definitely do because at the end of the day they feel quite powerless and quite helpless to. They want to help their child but they don't know how to do that. So I think when we become involved they're like, thank God, there's somebody here who knows what they're going through. And maybe somebody who they're just reassured and they're talking about it, and that somebody who knows what they're doing is doing the work with them. So we pick them up from home or do home visits to obviously like have a catch up and see what's been going on. Have they got any concerns because sometimes young people don't tell you everything, so we get updates from them as well?

In terms of our safety plan we always ask the young people who's going to get a copy of this because ultimately parents have parental responsibility. They need to know what their child's doing and how they can help protect them in certain situations, what their responsibility is. So we have safety words they have if they feel unsafe in certain situations, what are they going to do. So again parents can be reassured that we talked about this, so that maybe they think actually I know what so and so is going to do because if somebody comes to the house because they're going to talk about in the safety plan they're going to do this.

We have regular meetings as well with parents and carers. But it's getting that balance right of confidentiality and consent to share information and things like that as well. We also do interventions with parents as well if needed, so around internet safety, CSA, child sexual exploitation, as well, even come on sessions. I'm doing a healthy relationship programme if that's appropriate as well.

D: [unclear 00:02:01] I spoke to they all said that when their child was going through these abusive situations, and obviously young people you're working with are high risk, they felt extremely helpless, and that anything they said to them about the relationship being abusive or controlling or unhealthy, they felt like they couldn't get across to the young person. Where do you then come into that? How do you help that kind of situation where they feel quite helpless?

H: We kind of... obviously [*unclear*] we've got that. We have like a domestic abuse action plan so parents can obviously look at this is what we're going to cover, and we give a certificate for young people who've completed the healthy relationship programme. And I think a lot of them are quite proud of what they've done. So quite happy like, mum, dad, this is what I've done, or nana even or the foster carer, they kind of want to show them. And so I think they're quite relieved knowing that if they're not talking to them, that their child is talking to somebody at least who knows what's going on.

D: Yeah, and it sounds like they take more on board when it's coming from someone other than their parent...

H: Yes.

D: ...which is normal for a young person.

H: Yes. It's just more nagging, isn't it, I think. Because they care and obviously I think that for us it's about seeing that this is because this person cares about you and they love you and they want you to be safe. So sometimes they'll acknowledge that but most of the time they're like, oh no, no.

D: And if there's a parent listening right now who might be going through a similar situation, what's your advice to them?

H: In terms of support for them, obviously I'd ring the police, get some advice for their child, see what's out there in their local area. But also speak to workers. We can, in terms of our job anyway, there is support service out there for you, whether it's not directly in regards to a domestic abuse support service, but other services who are aware of it. We've got some excellent ones in South Tyneside to help with them.

D: And what's your advice to maybe a young person who's listening who hasn't told anybody about what they're experiencing?

H: I think I can say, but I know obviously some of our young people have also said it, but just to speak out. It's very, very common, I think that's the thing as well. It's more common than what people think. Just tell someone that you trust, adult, safeguarding lead in school, health, police, anybody, just to get the right support because it is out there.

D: Great. Well it sounds like you're doing a lot of great work.

H: Thanks.

D: And thanks for speaking with me.

H: You're very welcome and I hope you can get this message out there for people.

D: Yeah, I hope so too. Cool, okay, thank you.

Thank you for listening. If you'd like to find out more about SafeLives Spotlight on young people and domestic abuse, please go to our website [SafeLives.org.uk](https://www.SafeLives.org.uk), where we will be uploading new content every week - each exploring a different aspect of young people and domestic abuse. Following on from this podcast specifically, we will be speaking with young people who have been supported by Hollie's service, so keep checking in for new content.

If you'd like to participate in the discussion, you can go to our website to sign up for the webinar on March 3 between 1pm-2pm, and also join in the Twitter Q&A conversation on March 15th between 1pm-2pm-just go to #SafeYoungLives.