

MENTAL HEALTH AND POLICING

Effective Commissioning, Preventing Criminalisation Conference **Chester – September 23rd /24th 2019**

I was very pleased as the Panel lead on Mental Health, to be able to attend this fourth annual conference on mental health and policing. Among the 180 delegates were representatives from 36 forces and 78 from various organisations. This year there was a focus on the mental health of children and young people.

In his introduction our Chief Constable Mark Collins, NPCC Head for Mental Health and Policing, stated that 75% of adults who experience mental ill health began to have these problems during childhood. Police services experience particular challenges in responding to demand involving younger people because of the particular ways specialist services are commissioned and provided. Accessing specialist beds can be a particular challenge for those who need them. Ensuring early intervention is a considerable challenge too, plus our emergency systems also ensuring the safety, dignity and the rights of those who are doubly vulnerable by virtue of age and mental illness.

Forces need to recognise in their approach what impacts upon the mental health of children and young people e.g. violent crime, domestic abuse, human trafficking, county lines.

The Chief Constable pointed out that despite new challenges emerging, as the policing landscape continues to change, mental health will remain a significant challenge for the service in the coming years. Therefore, it is imperative that partnership work is driven forward and is crucial to achieving parity and fairness for society's most vulnerable people: mentally ill children.

There were a range of interesting speakers and workshops and William and I will both outline some information from a selection of them:-

Matthew Scott, APCC National Lead for Mental Health, Police and Crime Commissioner for Kent

The theme of his address was "Who's Accountable – the role of Police and Crime Commissioners".

He stated that PCC's play a crucial role regarding mental health and the Police. There has to be a focus on the situation nowadays, encouraging various initiatives and interventions and an awareness that missing people issues are usually connected to mental health.

He considered 'capacity' was the main issue and 'radical' solutions were needed.

Mr. Scott added the PCC was the voice of the vulnerable and they were trying to make a difference. PCC's through their position can help to ensure the right agencies are accountable. At his PAB he had a regular question for the Chief Constable re: the numbers connected to Section 136.

Nadine Dorries MP – Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health

Via video link she pointed out that detentions were increasing for those with mental health problems. More places of safety and specialist transport were planned to be provided in the next four years. There was a need also to modernise and improve the Mental Health Act.

In addition she emphasised the need to support Police Officers who deal with tragic events to ensure their wellbeing.

It was unfortunate she was not present to take questions because it would have been an opportunity to ask how changes would translate in Wales?

Martin Lennon – Head of Public Affairs, Children’s Commissioner for England

Martin Lennon drew on three major pieces of research which the Children’s Commissioner for England had published during the previous 12 months, on mental health, youth violence and the prevalence of childhood vulnerability. He demonstrated how understanding such vulnerability enables better identification and where possible prevention of a range of issues. He emphasised that marginalisation, criminalisation and gang membership are all key factors in triggering ‘risky behaviour.’ Equally importantly, he stressed that research indicated that one key, ‘trusted relationship’ is vital to de-escalating issues presented by vulnerable children.

Chris Hansen, Law Enforcement Outreach Manager, Northern & Eastern Europe, Uber

Ex MET officer, Chris Hansen provided an illuminating presentation on how the Uber 24/7 Law Enforcement Team assists UK and International anti crime agencies with investigations, involving both Uber Rides and Uber Eats. He emphasised Uber’s willingness to play a positive role in criminal justice across the jurisdictions.

We had the privilege on the evening before Conference to spend a few hours in the company of Ian Russell whom colleagues may have seen on news programmes.

Ian is the father of Molly Russell who took her own life in November 2017 aged 14. After her death the family found disturbing content on Molly’s social media accounts. They were shocked to discover how easy it was to find such harmful content and how difficult it was to get such content removed. Therefore, the Molly Rose Foundation was established with the aim of preventing young people’s suicide by better connecting them to the help and support they need. The charity also prioritises raising awareness of online harms and plans to help young people’s voices to be better heard.

Mr. Russell in his brave address said mental health crosses all boundaries and no one is immune. Statistics show an increase in female suicides aged 10-24 years. Tech companies look the other way he has discovered.

For families like his he considered the support of Police Family Liaison Officers would be helpful in the aftermath when such tragedy struck. Ian Russell’s address brought everyone in the Conference to their feet as a demonstration of respect.

Olivia Pinkney, Chief Constable, Hampshire Constabulary – NPCC Children & Young People Lead

Chief Constable Pinkney spoke in her presentation of the importance of adopting a child centred approach, which places children's and young people's rights at the heart of police decision making and policy. This is vital, in order to adhere to UNHCR principles.

A couple of key statistics that jumped out of Olivia Pinkney's presentation:

- Of the 12,000,000 young people in the UK, 1,000,000 are believed to be in need of mental health support
- 30,000 young people in the UK are believed to be caught up in gang culture
- 66% of the children of those in prison will go on to offend themselves

She also emphasised that exclusion from schools and alienation on the part of young people are at record levels. In this context, 'policing policies should not place additional pressure on the most vulnerable.'

Kathryn Pugh MBE, Deputy Head of Mental Health, Children & Young People's Mental Health Programme, NHS England and NHS Improvement

Whilst we need to understand the distinction between strategies in NHS England & the Welsh context, Kathryn Pugh's presentation nevertheless had a number of cross cutting themes. Whilst emphasising the importance of making improvement in Mental Health services a central objective of policy, she also reminded us that many young people found the term CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health services) demeaning – and that it is best avoided.

Another issue flagged up by Kathryn Pugh was the high correlation between both young people with eating disorders or involvement in the criminal justice system who are on the autistic spectrum, whether diagnosed or awaiting formal diagnosis. A refocusing of resources in this area is urgently needed - a debate that also took place vigorously in the Senedd, in the context of the Individual Members Bill on Autism in the last Assembly session, sponsored by Paul Davies AM.

Alyas Karmani a Psychologist, Counsellor and Community worker based in Bradford also gave an inspiring address. He talked about the failure of our current criminal justice approach in preventing violence and criminality. He advocated the issues should be under a 'public health' umbrella – a social emotional and development issue, where the Police had a role to play in relationship building and partnership work. There needed to be early intervention to deal with adverse childhood experiences and young peoples mental health problems. His talk was preceded by contributions by colleagues from within his team, Faisal Tariq and Sarah Moghul. Both spoke movingly and candidly about their own experiences of mental ill health and of taboos and norms amongst young people and families within particular urban communities

Dr Virginia Davies, Consultant in Under 18's Emergency Psychiatry commented interestingly that a Police Officers calm presence and behaviour during a child and adolescent mental health crises, was powerful and valuable. It had the potential to offer a different mental model of 'those in charge'.

Andrew Dickinson, Governor, Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution, Wetherby

Building on the theme of Dr Davies's talk, but from a different perspective, Mr Dickinson gave a candid profile of young people in custody and the challenges he and his colleagues face on a daily basis in running a large youth custodial establishment. A couple of standout facts to take away included:

- 90% of residents at Wetherby have a persistent record of absenteeism from school
- substance abuse is relatively uncommon at the institution, contrary to widespread assumptions, due to the regime

Mr Dickinson concluded: 'When I see a young man smile again, I know we're getting somewhere.'

A common thread through the presentations and the breakout workshops was the fact that trauma, poverty, drugs, neglect, abuse, household disfunction, racial issues and community violence plus social media contributed to the problems being focussed on at the Conference. It was important Police practice was appropriate to cope with the challenges with the right partnership support.

Good practice in Dyfed Powys was highlighted at a workshop presented by Emma Picton Jones from Pembrokeshire, the founder of the DPJ Foundation, which focuses on providing mental health support for the rural/agicultural communities. Emma bravely set up the foundation following the suicide of her husband. The role of the Force's Rural Crime Team she explained was vital in helping our communities and the Foundation.

Following the workshop representatives from Police Forces across the UK were queuing up to talk to Emma and gain her help and to draw upon her experience.

The Conference was both informative and inspirational and very appropriate for us to attend. Thanks to the Panel for your support and to Mr Robert Edgecombe for making suitable arrangements. We hope that this synopsis will assist in sharing the important learning points.

HELEN THOMAS

WILLIAM POWELL