

The BLAST Project AGM Speech 2007

My name is Emma Holmes and I am the Coordinator for the BLAST Project. The BLAST Project works with young men and boys involved in, exploited through or who are at risk of sexual exploitation through prostitution.

We have been operational for 4 years and are very proud to be part of the Yorkshire MESMAC group of services.

Tonight we are very honoured to have the chance to listen to 4 very different stories from 4 very different young men and boys that have been supported by the BLAST Project. What these stories share with us is the varied reasons, circumstances and situations that can lead these young men and boys to being drawn into this exploitative lifestyle. These stories highlight the impact that homophobia can have on the vulnerability of a young person as well as the increased vulnerability caused by homelessness.

Stories

As you can see, the needs of the service users are extremely varied and require us to be as flexible in working as possible. We pride ourselves in being able to offer a package of support that is catered for each young person's individual needs rather than fitting them into an already devised package. We are a team of two working with some of the most vulnerable and marginalised group of young people in our society as well as raising awareness to hundreds of young men and boys each year. The young men who become exploited through this abusive lifestyle not only suffer at the hands of the men that look to abuse and exploit them, but also at the lack of understanding demonstrated by many main stream services. I feel that this lack of understanding is also demonstrated by the lack of statutory funding that the BLAST Project receives.

Because we are a team of two we value greatly the productive working relationships we have developed with some services, Branardos Turnaround Service in Bradford and Bradford Working Women's Service are two services where we work together delivering joint outreach and preventative work. In Leeds which is the newest strand to the project, just twelve months old we are working closely with Shelter and BARCA to deliver a varied and targeted street based outreach service.

It has taken 4 years for the BLAST Project to expand to Leeds and to become a team of 2 lets hope that it doesn't take another 4 years for the project to access sustained statutory funding, because as you have heard from the young men, the service and support we offer is vital to these young men.

Thank you,