

In Britain, 40% of all sex crimes are against children, and at least 35,000 attempts to access child-abuse images are blocked every day. Caroline Scott and Michael Bilton spent six months talking to the men and women fighting to bring the perpetrators to justice and to the young victims they are trying to save

# THE CAMERA DOESN'T LIE



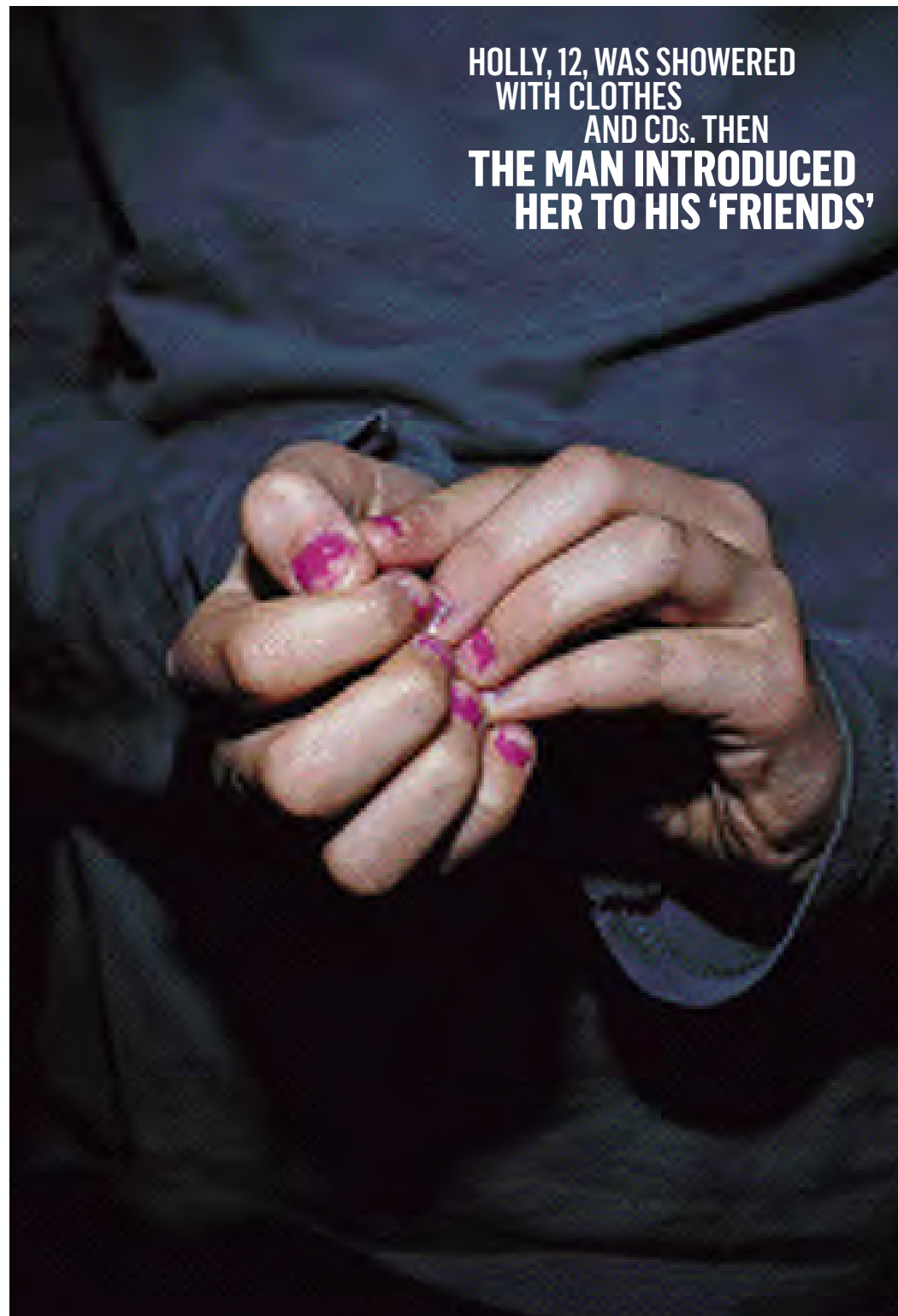
Adele has agreed to see me in the hope that by talking about what happened to her, other children might not go through it. We meet at the terraced house she shares with her boyfriend and their one-year-old baby, but we don't go in. She doesn't want what she has to say to cross the threshold. So instead, we drive around the adjacent streets and she points out the places where she was serially abused as a child. Adele is bright and articulate, but the words don't come easily. Only 18 now, she talks about her younger self with practised detachment and a kind of stunned incredulity. Clearly, what happened to Adele was not her fault, but the child inside her still thinks it was; that somehow, she let these things happen.

Adele started bunking off school at 12 or 13. "I thought my parents were too strict and didn't take enough interest in me. Usual teenage stuff," she shrugs. The men she met in the park seemed exciting. She'd go back to their houses where they plied her with food and presents. Before long they were giving her drugs, having sex with her, filming it and charging others. "I was so drugged most of the time they could have done anything." How many men? "Loads." And were there other children like you? She rolls her eyes. "Loads."

Adele is wearing jeans and a T-shirt, her hair tied back, her face scrubbed of make-up. "I wasn't even a sophisticated teenager," she says. Why were they interested? "At 13, I was a tiny little thing." When I ask if she tried to leave, she shoots me a weary look. "Are you joking? He, the main one, he came after me. Everywhere I went, he'd find me." She recalls once waking up in the bath naked from the waist down, having blacked out.

Spending time with Adele, you realise you should never try to use adult reasoning to surmise how an abused child thinks and feels. "It wasn't as if I could walk out of the door and go back to school and everything would be okay. I didn't know what was going to happen to me." Abandoned by her family, who moved away when she was 14, Adele's relationship with these men was now one of dependency — they fed her and gave her a roof over her head — and the abuse carried on until they gave up and they moved on, presumably to target different children.

The case of Vanessa George, the nursery worker accused of seven charges of child abuse and six of taking indecent images of children, has alerted us to the scale of abuse and the appetite for the images that often accompany it. George, who had two accomplices, Angela Allen and Colin Blanchard, refuses to reveal which children she abused at Little Ted's nursery in Plymouth; as her victims cannot tell us, it's likely we will never know the numbers. Now imagine trying to calculate the number of children across the UK who are subjected to abuse, and whose images are traded on the internet; or the numbers of children who, like Adele, are groomed for prostitution. A small army of social workers, police, intelligence and voluntary groups have this task. In a complex policy



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patchwork, they battle to help these children and bring their abusers to justice.

At the centre of this web sits Ceop, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, the central intelligence service, with a staff of around 100 investigators responsible for tracking down the men and women who trade child-abuse imag-

es or groom children for sex on the internet. As a result of their work, between 2006 and 2009, the service "safeguarded" 346 British children; 130 in the past year. They also disrupted or dismantled 166 high-risk sex-offender networks and 700 people were arrested. But the problem is growing. In 1995, just 12 indecent images of children

## ON THE FRONT LINE: CATCHING THE CRIMINALS

Michael Bilton enters the undercover world of Ceop, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre fighting to rescue Britain's sexually abused and exploited children

In a basement room in Pimlico, a police officer and a social worker are watching a home video. Such is the horrific nature of what they see that they have counselling four times a year. The men and women at Ceop are the foot soldiers in a global war against the hundreds of thousands of men and women making, trading and downloading images of children being sexually abused.

The 'enemy' operate covertly, in cells, using encryption and codes to communicate. 'There are days when you cannot eat your breakfast, lunch or dinner because of what you have seen,' says Ceop's chief executive, Jim Gamble, 49, who used to be head of the Special Branch in Belfast running counterterrorism operations. 'Children are being criminally abused in horrific ways which cause them severe, lasting damage.'

The internet provides a means of sending and receiving pictures and videos fast. When a network is smashed, clues to the subscribers' identities are sent to Ceop (at work, below right), which contacts internet service providers and telecom firms to obtain names and addresses. The information is then checked against various databases and passed to local police forces, who raid homes, make arrests and seize hard drives. In this struggle, Ceop works with law-enforcement agencies around the world, including in the US, Canada and Australia. They regularly exchange data, staff and intelligence.

Operation Sirdar investigated 1,600 suspects who had been accessing 24 US-based websites. One data thread pointed to Alan Webster, 40, a postal worker from Hertfordshire, who had taken out a 30-day pay-per-view subscription using a credit card. When his home was raided in 2006, a nightmare scenario was uncovered. Webster and his girlfriend, Tanya French, 19, had been using his mobile phone to film the persistent rape and indecent assault of an eight-week-old girl they had been babysitting. Webster pleaded guilty to four charges of rape and five indecent assaults, and was given a life sentence, with a minimum of 12 years. French was sentenced to five years. Police found 7,373 indecent images on Webster's computer, 918 involving penetrative sexual activity between children and adults.

The rings use sophisticated security systems. Images and videos are traded through networks like Kazaa and LimeWire, file-swapping programmes that allow computers to connect without a central server. Members communicate via chatrooms and newsgroups, often switching

newsgroups to avoid detection. Pseudonyms are also changed regularly. New members might have to pass a detailed test of their knowledge of paedophile images, or provide new pictures, to gain access to a group.

Evidence shown to a grand jury in the US last year provided an insight into how the networks operate. A paedophile had given the FBI details of a newsgroup called 'alt.anonymous.message'. Investigators watched the newsgroup location change a few times. A message at the new newsgroup would indicate the locations where images could now be found. Directions would be given about new codes and passwords, to ensure files could be downloaded in secret.

The breakthrough came when the paedophile under arrest handed over his own encryption keys. The FBI then infiltrated what the paedophile members believed was a secret sanctuary in which they conducted their sordid activity. In 18 months of monitoring, agents saw over 403,000 images and 1,128 videos advertised and distributed. There were 45 members in the cell. They

**'CHILDREN ARE BEING ABUSED IN HORRIFIC WAYS WHICH CAUSE SEVERE DAMAGE'**



had to obey strict security instructions or be expelled. They were told never to give their true identity or use traditional messaging systems like e-mail, chat, or the telephone. Communications could only go through the internet, so if one member was arrested they could not give away the identity of others. Every time they moved from one newsgroup location to another, all 45 members had to change their encryption keys and nicknames to mask the trail. Their messages were chilling. 'My thanks to you and all the others that together make this the greatest group of pedos ever to gather in one place,' wrote one. 'I'm honoured just to be part of it.'



Ceop undercover investigators use hard-nosed tactics. Governments worldwide have passed new laws sanctioning the planting of bugs, intercepts and covert entry. 'We have the ability to infiltrate an online predator's community, and to arrest that person without anyone knowing they have gone,' says Gamble. 'Then we sit in their seat and having watched them for sufficiently long enough that we can speak like them and look like them, before anyone catches on, we have captured their identities and policemen are knocking on their door to arrest them. There is not a single lawful tactic we won't fully employ.'

Ceop will not comment on its tactics, but paedophile computers can be attacked and modified remotely to obtain encryption keys. Agencies can also be authorised to trade images in order to trap a paedophile gang. Fake sites have been set up that appear to be operating from Russia, quickly snaring users. Ceop's tactics are strictly controlled by Britain's Office of Surveillance Commissioners. But providing they get a warrant, they can tap telephones, the internet, look at subscriber records, scan messages, mobile phone calls, and even track users' movements via their mobile phones. If they have to make a covert entry into someone's home to plant a bug in a computer, they can get authorisation providing the case is serious enough.

Ceop's victim ID database contains 1.5m images of children being sexually abused. Ceop tried to identify the children at Little Ted's nursery who were abused by Vanessa George (above) using specialist software that scans photographs looking for matching computer code known as hash keys. They examine children's faces and background images. However, George had cropped the photos and Ceop was unable to identify any of the children ■



were seized in Manchester. Last year, the city's police found 1m digitised pictures, mostly on home computers. BT alone blocks more than 35,000 attempts to access child-abuse images every day. Data from 2009 suggests 69% of the children on child-sex domains are under 10 years old.

Ceop's work is focused on cyberspace, but we know that the same predators scan the schools and streets of the real world for their victims. Home Office figures for 2007-8 show that 40% of recorded sexual offences in the UK in that period were against children under 18: a quarter were under 10. In more than 800 cases, the victim was under four. And Ministry of Justice statistics reveal that in 2007, 1,178 people were found guilty of sexual offences against children.

Barnardo's first identified children being abused through prostitution through work in its Streets and Lanes project in Bradford in 1995. It now believes that boys and girls are being exploited in every town and rural area in Britain. The internet and use of mobile phones has simply made procuring and controlling them far easier.

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Last year, the charity worked with 2,000 sexually exploited children in 19 centres in the UK, while a handful of independent projects scabble for funding from business sponsors and switched-on local authorities. A thousand children have been identified in inner London alone, but it's an area so covert, and abusers so skilled at both coercion and evasion, it's almost impossible to gather national figures. Julie Harris, assistant policy director for Barnardo's, who is preparing a new report: *Whose Daughter Now?* believes these figures present a fragment of the true picture. "Children tend to be identified only where there is a specialist service available to refer them to. Given that there are 172 local authorities in England and Wales, and only a few of those include awareness of sexual exploitation in their children's plans, we know the problem is far more deeply entrenched than our figures suggest."

The government published "Safeguarding Children from Prostitution" in 2000. In June this year, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) circulated new guidance to help local authorities protect children from sexual exploitation. But will more paperwork make a difference? Wendy Shepherd, programme director for Barnardo's North East, thinks not. "Sexual exploitation should sit in every local authority's Children and Young People's Plan, with a clear strategy for tackling it. Until this becomes statutory, rather than guidance, the problem will get worse."

Police forces have varying levels of resources to deal with this problem through their public-protection and child-abuse units. Shepherd argues

that this structure isn't effective: child prostitution does not appear in social-service or police performance indicators. "The police don't have the time to tackle it," says Shepherd. "I go to the child-protection police and say, 'I've got a child who's being exploited,' but they may only be dealing with intra-familial abuse. So I have a fight to find out who, in my area's five police districts, is dealing with this, then find his superior and so on, when I still don't get any action. It's frustrating. Though there are pockets of good work — Blackpool, Nottingham, Oldham. If we're going to tackle this problem, there must be a child-protection officer trained in sexual exploitation in every force in the country."

Until as recently as 2003, children forced into prostitution were routinely treated as offenders and locked away in secure accommodation. Following lobbying by children's charities, the government introduced a series of new offences: paying for the sexual services of a child; causing or inciting child prostitution or pornography; and trafficking within the UK for sexual exploitation.

The new Sex Offences Act recognises that a child cannot consent to his or her own abuse and should be treated as a Child in Need, but the criminal justice system still fails to recognise that children who have been groomed do not disclose. Few are able to testify against their abusers. Consequently, conviction rates for these crimes remain abysmally, unforgivably low. Between 2007 and 2008, 110 prosecutions for "abuse of children through prostitution" resulted in only three convictions.

All this makes the pimping networks that control children increasingly powerful. In some cases they are able to move children from city to city with impunity. The leader of an independent project based in the Midlands told me flatly: "If you mention our work, you will be putting lives in danger." This same project regularly sees children of eight and nine. "We've no national mapping, so we have no idea what the real picture is out there. But we know it's serious, and it's expanding. I'm talking not just about vulnerable and cared-for children, but children from ordinary families across the board. If police say this isn't happening in their area, it just means they haven't turned over a stone to find it."

Nick Kinsella is head of the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC), whose 35 staff include police officers, social workers and barristers. From April to September, 22 individuals were moved around the UK against their will (internal trafficking). Eighteen of these were children. "Our priority is getting the child away from the offender. Invariably, children are put in the care of local authorities and given whatever ►►►

## ON THE FRONT LINE

### KELLY MURRAY

**Kelly (right) is a 33-year-old NSPCC social worker, and mother, seconded to Ceop**

"My initial perception of sexual child abuse was males touching girls, teenagers. I realised later it was so much more than that. It was awful. What we see is children being socialised into sexual abuse at a very young age, and they think it is normal. They are being groomed and believe this is what happens to other children.

I was drawn to Ceop because I had always thought police officers need to have child-protection social workers and I wanted to be more victim-focused. In the victim ID team, if there is stuff I find hard to deal with, we talk it through. If I want to walk out because I cannot handle any more of it today, it's okay.

I am working on cases where teenage girls have exposed themselves on a webcam. They have met this guy online, who has pretended to be much younger. He has hundreds of images.

We started seeing footage of one girl aged about nine, a video clip, which had been taken several years previously. She was now 13. We could date it because there was a competition playing on a radio in the background. She was being raped and you could tell it was not the first time. She was quite at ease with the camera, smiling for it. This material was being traded round a newsgroup. The guy was producing it for other people. This nine-year-old who was being abused was telling him where to put the camera. They were using her first name and even mentioned a town in the UK. Our biggest clue was a settee and a recliner. We were able to identify the manufacturer, who told us how many of that colour had been sold. Out of 20m households, only 156 had been sold. Only four had been sold in the area they mentioned. It was a huge team effort, but we cracked it.

She is psychologically damaged. She is now in a therapeutic centre, but when we first identified her she had a terrible time, with five foster placements because of her behaviour, which was highly sexualised with very poor attachment to male carers. She is gradually opening up, but she is also self-harming. There have been suicide attempts, absconding and she has been found at sex offenders' houses.

Her behaviour was typical of a child who had been sexually abused over a long time. My fear is this girl will move into prostitution. We also found video material of her when she was four. They were trying to get her to say swear words. She was so shy and would not say the F-word. The innocence was there. Then you think she has gone from that to where she is now, poor thing. Finding her was one of the most rewarding things I've ever done.



As a mother it can be very tough. You watch material where babies are screaming with pain. There are times when it gets to me and I just want to go home and cuddle my children.

We have a psychologist that we see every three months, but we can ring up and get an appointment any time. I would be lying if I said that I do not wake in the night and think about what I have seen. Sometimes when the kids are that young, when there are no clues and there is nothing we can do, you wake up with a sense of helplessness that you cannot rescue them."



### TOM SIMMONS

**A detective at Ceop, Tom (above) has worked on child-sexual-abuse cases for 10 years**

"Learning about child abuse is hard. What is particularly disturbing is when you find it is not just children being abused by their parents — the abuse sometimes continues into adulthood.

On a murder inquiry you cannot give a family's loved one back. In a child-abuse inquiry, we are either preventing the abuse by removing the offender before they have offended, or we are

actually getting an offender out of the family, and giving the child a better life.

We are dealing with this material day in and day out. It is horrific. It is as if you are going to a horrendous murder scene sometimes, and you see those images when you are there. It gets lodged in your memory. If there is film of a child being abused, and there is sound, it is not just the sound of a child screaming that haunts you. I remember once there was a video and there was a Christmas carol playing. I cannot hear that music and not associate it with the image of that child being abused.

We have got a young team here, mostly in their late twenties and early thirties, nice people, and we have a good team spirit. We work closely together on very difficult material to identify the suspect and get the intelligence out to the local police who will do the arrest. That is a job done, a good day. Sometimes we can do it very quickly. This is usually when the abuse is still current. We have on occasions identified someone within an hour.

Having a family of your own brings you back to reality — not everybody is bad. My worry is that there are people in this field who do not have a home life and have to go home with this crap. I don't take it home. Everyone has their survival mechanisms; mine is when I go home. It is hard when you see something distressing. We keep an eye on our staff. Even reading the logs in chatrooms can be distressing when you see what these people say they want to do to a child. It becomes dehumanising when you are seeing children being tortured. I will not do this for much longer. You have to say to yourself, 'I have done my bit, I need to move on.' ■

**Interviews by Michael Bilton**

help they need, but the control the abuser has over the victim remains. We often have to try for a conviction on lesser charges."

On the wall of a Barnardo's office in a north-eastern town is a map highlighting the city's red-light district. It is an area of no more than two miles, a cluster of residential streets lined with terraced houses that are home to scores of men who prey on vulnerable children. Barnardo's staff spend nights driving round on the lookout for children, mostly aged 12 to 14, who may not even see what is happening to them as abuse. The information the project now has on these children and the men who exploit them couldn't be clearer. Clusters of yellow pins mark the areas from which men are known to operate. A tangle of lines link the names of abused children with known abusers. Several children, aged 11 to 16, from the same family are linked with four different houses, a hop, skip and a jump away from each other in three adjacent streets. It's a kind of insane mind map. Take one child; Kerry is 12. You can trace with your finger her grim trajectory. Kerry has been meticulously groomed over the past year or more. She has been bought a mobile phone and clothes, plied with food, alcohol and affection.

Follow the lines and you see that now isolated and unable to extract herself, she has been serially abused by a dozen men in five different locations. The names of the men are all here on the map, phone numbers even, yet in the past year there have been no convictions. Barnardo's does what it can. Its staff create a warm and safe environment, children can shower, there is a cupboard with clean clothes and the kitchen is stocked with food and drinks. Most importantly, staff work hard to build up trust, knowing that girls like Kerry are not in control of what is happening to them.

**I**n the towns and valleys of South Wales, poverty is rife. It isn't a prerequisite for sexual exploitation, but not having engaged parents to listen and protect you makes it a lot easier. Jan Coles, head of Barnardo's here, knows a dozen girls who've been lifted in broad daylight from children's homes and bundled into cars, and I hear similar stories all over the country. As a journalist, it's taken months to get to the children. The practitioners working with them are incredibly protective; privacy and trust are sacrosanct, but critically, they must also guard them from exposure to further exploitation and there is a question mark over whether reporting of this kind doesn't make the situation worse. If I include the names of the places I've visited, I might inadvertently create a paedophile's map of Britain. One project worker said that when a local paper carried a story about children being sold on the street for a pound, punters flocked to the area.

I meet Holly from school, a rural comprehensive where she says she is bullied because she's mixed-race. We go to McDonald's and she sits, mostly in silence, a hoodie pulled low over ►►►



her face. She calls what happened to her “sexual intercourse”. She doesn’t mind being cuddled, but she hates it when men stick things up her bottom. She is 11. She has tiny fingernails covered with chipped pink varnish and she turns a plastic ring round on her finger, staring at the back of her Happy Meal box as she talks. It was months before Holly revealed this information, and she still resists the idea that she has been sexually exploited. It’s a means of survival, because the effect on a child of owning all this horror is disastrous. Her abuser befriended her mother, whose trust eventually gave him unfettered access to her child. For a year or so, Holly was treated like “a princess”, showered with clothes, CDs, a mobile phone. Then the man introduced her to his “friends”. He played on her dependence, her trust. He’d say: “Look at all I’ve done for you. I’ll be so sad if you upset my friend.” He was able to slip into her bedroom at night, pick her up, mattress and all, put her in his van and drive all over the southeast, charging men to have sex with her.

Holly’s mum works with social services to try to help, but Holly, whose rage is evident in the way she harms herself, provides few clues. The man who raped and pimped her is still free.

**I**n 2006, Operation Glover, a joint effort between Sheffield’s Sexual Exploitation Service, UKHTC and South Yorkshire police, led to the arrest of six men, primarily because one of their victims, a 15-year-old who had been hideously sexually abused from the age of 12, felt able to make a formal complaint. But it’s hard, time-consuming work, and police response to this kind of abuse is patchy. An officer with nine years’ experience explained the problems in securing a prosecution. “It’s horrendous, the things that are done to children. Words don’t begin to describe it. But to get enough evidence to put in front of the CPS [Crown Prosecution Service] you’re talking intensive, intrusive levels of surveillance. If I wanted to put a camera in a suspect’s home, I would have to show to my chief constable a level of evidence that would justify the infringement of the occupant’s human rights. Most of the time, we don’t have it.”

In rural areas, the problem is often even more entrenched. The Rhondda Valley is paralysed by unemployment and poverty; mile upon mile of grey houses cling to the mountainside, giving them a kind of ghostly beauty. It is here that Carys was abducted, at 10, by a family friend, who plied her with alcohol and sexually abused her for five years. Her mother had died and her father, an alcoholic, didn’t come looking. By 12, she’d stopped going to school and, after a flurry of letters, the authorities gave up on her. In all senses of the word, she was lost. Her abuser could move her all over the valleys without anyone intervening.

Carys is now 17, small, quiet, purposeful, her face hidden under a huge baseball cap. What she really wants to do is go go-carting, so we screech



## COULD THIS HAPPEN TO YOUR CHILD?

Some of the vital ways you can protect your child from online exploitation

- Visit [www.ceop.police.uk/parents](http://www.ceop.police.uk/parents) to learn how to protect your children online
- Know what your children are doing online and who they are talking to. Ask them to teach you to use any applications you have never used, such as chatrooms
- Help your children to understand that they should never give out personal details to online friends, including their e-mail address, phone number and any pictures of themselves, family or friends
- Help your child to understand that some people may not tell the truth online, and therefore internet friends should remain online. They should not meet up with strangers without a trusted adult present
- Make sure your child feels comfortable about coming to you if they are worried about anything online. Teach them how to block someone online and to report that person if they feel uncomfortable. Any reports can be made directly to Ceop
- Encourage them not to open files from people they don’t know. They could contain a virus or inappropriate content
- If your child receives spam or junk e-mail and texts, remind them never to believe them, reply to them or use them

## ‘WE NEED SURVEILLANCE, WHICH IS COSTLY, BUT BY DOING NOTHING WE’RE ALLOWING THESE MEN TO GET AWAY WITH IT AND, WORSE, SAYING TO A CHILD: “THERE’S NOTHING WE CAN DO”’

round a track and afterwards talk about what she might do next. “I’d just like a nice place to live,” she says simply. “Some things of my own.”

The government has tried hard to improve the delivery of services to vulnerable children. Sure Start is an early-intervention programme



A sketch drawn by a young victim of sexual abuse. Left: a poster of dos and don’ts for children and teens using the internet

designed to capture at-risk children at a young age; the Common Assessment Framework is an ambitious toolkit for identifying children’s needs sooner. Yet it is meaningless unless the extra paperwork translates into direct intervention, and there aren’t the resources. I put this to a senior social worker. “We don’t intentionally lose children,” she said through gritted teeth. “We do our best.” The subtext was: “But it’s not enough.”

Wendy Shepherd believes that police could do far more to interrupt the activities of sexual predators. “What we need is creative policing. We’ve got to stop focusing on the child to tell us what is happening and use the new legislation – abduction orders, harbouring orders – to disrupt the perpetrators. It means that everybody; enforcement wardens, the police, the CPS, will have to be involved. There’ll need to be surveillance, which is costly and time-consuming, but by doing nothing, we’re allowing these men to get away with it and, worse, saying to a child: “There’s nothing we can do.”

Sarah Booth, a senior Barnardo’s practitioner, points out a wall at the end of a street. “Children sit on that wall and men come along and literally pick

exploited 14-year-old. Feelings too painful to put into words are channelled into art projects. A 13-year-old boy has made a house with a sunflower in the garden, and the words “Keep all the bad out of my dream house” are written on the roof.

Chloe was groomed from the age of 10 by a man who, by the time she was 11, was locking her in his house and pimping her out to other people. At 14, he kidnapped her at gunpoint and took her all over London, stubbing out cigarettes on her body and beating the soles of her feet when she tried to run away. Yet the police could not get a witness statement from her. Cared for, in a way, by this man since she was 10, she really believed he loved her. Estranged from her family, he was all she had.

I met Chloe at the methadone clinic. Now 18, she doesn’t talk much, and Sarah, worried she won’t return, doesn’t press her. She gets her prescription and some clean clothes and goes back out to meet the “boyfriend” currently exploiting her.

The project has been going for 10 years. In that time it’s seen a decrease in adult prostitution and an increase in the organised sexual exploitation of children. As they get older, the girls keep working to support their drug habits or those of their pimps and their hideous boyfriends. On a freezing Tuesday night, Sarah drives around doling out hot chocolate, sandwiches and condoms, always on the lookout for under-18s. “Alright lovely, do you need anything? How old are you, sweetheart?”

On Western Road we meet a girl who says she’s 19 but looks 12. If she’s under 18, Sarah needs to make a child protection referral, but she won’t give her name. She’s thin, shivering with cold. She has plaits and she’s sucking a sweet: the younger she looks, the more likely it is a man will stop. A young girl, Sarah-Jane Coughlan, was killed here a few



## THE PERPETRATORS

Nearly 1,000 people from all walks of life were found guilty of child-image abuses in 2007. We name some from the past five years

### VANESSA GEORGE, 39: NURSERY-SCHOOL WORKER

Sexually abused young children in her care and took indecent images of them. Recently described her crimes as “vile and disgusting”. Vanessa and her accomplices, Angela Allen and Colin Blanchard, are awaiting sentence on 37 charges of child sexual abuse

### DAVID SELWOOD, 70: CROWN COURT JUDGE

From Winchester; admitted 12 counts of possessing indecent images of semi-naked boys aged 8-14 on his computer. Given a 12-month community rehabilitation order

### RICHARD HART, 59: VICAR; SCHOOL GOVERNOR

Had 56,000 indecent images of children on his computer at his home in Wales. Jailed for 3½ years. Some of the images, described as “stomach-churning”, featured a four-year-old. He and his wife viewed them before having sex

### IAIN DUNCAN, 28: POLICE OFFICER

From Scotland; had 3,000 child-abuse images, including of babies. He had been seconded to the family-protection unit a week before his arrest. Sentenced to four years, four months

### NICHOLAS HAMMOND, 45: CAMBRIDGE LECTURER

Found guilty of possessing 1,100 images of child abuse. Admitted making, possessing and distributing images, some of babies. Given a 12-month suspended sentence, a two-year supervision order and fined £1,000

### ROSEMARY FOXALL, 49 – TEACHING ASSISTANT

Helped her husband secretly film young girls in the bath at their home in the West Midlands over an eight-year period. Jailed for 2½ years in July; her husband committed suicide

### IAN McAUSLAN, 58 – TEACHER AT ETON

Admitted two counts of possessing indecent images, and 14 of making them. Caught after his school computer was sent in for an upgrade. Given a suspended prison sentence

years ago, tortured to death and left in a cupboard. “She was really special,” says Sarah. And she reels off the names of other girls murdered: Kellie Mallinson, Donna Keogh, Rachel Wilson and Vicky Glass. There are some places even Sarah won’t go. We draw up outside a house where a 16-year-old boy is living with an older woman who pimps him out to men. “It’s full of paedophiles, there are needles everywhere, it’s a violent place. I’m not scared of much, but I will not go in there.”

Crop (Coalition for the Removal of Pimping) was set up by Irene Ivison, whose 17-year-old daughter, Fiona, was killed in 1993. Despite desperate attempts to bring her daughter home – Irene called in social workers and police – Fiona slipped through this safe, middle-class net and ended up in the hands of pimps and drug dealers. Crop has long campaigned to raise awareness of this dark underworld. It wants specialist police officers in every force to have statutory powers to enable them to gather information, performance targets for police and social services, and a national standard for recording cases of sexual exploitation. Slowly the message is seeping through. This year, the Home Office’s revised Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking made a number of recommendations concerning child victims, including the development of a best practice guide for police officers.

The Awaken Project, an initiative involving social services, education and police, was formed in 2004 in Blackpool in response to the murder of Charlene Downes, 14, who kissed her mother goodbye on the evening of November 1, 2003 and hasn’t been seen since. Awaken’s pre-emptive work resulted in a spate of arrests, for grooming, for distributing pornographic literature, and for sexual assaults on children. It also established a link between two other towns within a 50-mile radius. In every way it is a success story, but understandably, the Blackpool press office is keen to play it down, pointing out that if there is an unfavourable weather report or a pile-up on the M1, tourism suffers. It has no desire to be seen as the UK’s child sex capital, and it is not alone in its instinct to keep the truth hidden.

Charlene’s disappearance was barely noted outside her home town. Much was made in the papers of her “chaotic” family background and her tendency to run away from home. As if this made her less vulnerable, rather than more. The tone and language used in the reporting gave the impression that Charlene, a tiny girl, with brown hair and blue eyes, had somehow got herself involved with these men, not the other way round. Nearly 2½ years after she was last seen, two men were arrested for her murder; they stood trial in May 2007, but the jury failed to reach a verdict. A retrial was ordered, but in April last year the prosecution decided not to proceed with the case due to insufficient evidence. The two men have subsequently been released ■

Report by Caroline Scott