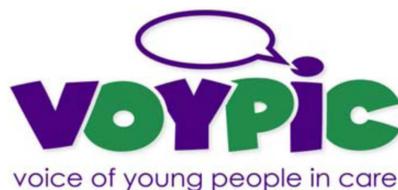


PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Eithne Gilligan
Date: 9 January 2014
Ph: 028 9024 4888 (office hours)
Mobile: 078 0877 7970
Email: eithne.gilligan@voypic.org



VOYPIC calls for focus on young people leaving care

VOYPIC has responded to today's news of the prosecution of a man for the abuse of a vulnerable young woman who had lived in care. Vivian McConvey, Chief Executive of VOYPIC said:

"This report makes for very distressing and disturbing reading. We have to make support of children and young people in care better. A critical point is when a young person is preparing to leave care to live independently. We know that this is a particularly vulnerable time in their life and the system is still failing some young people."

She continued:

"This case brings our attention, once again, to the serious issue of the sexual exploitation and abuse of children and young people. Protecting them is everyone's responsibility and is the focus of the current inquiry being led by Kathleen Marshall. While we know of good and improved policy and practice, we believe that this inquiry is our shared opportunity to learn from what has happened in the past and to develop and improve systems and supports to prevent the terrible mistreatment and abuse of young people."

This case highlights the need to recognise and understand child exploitation and abuse and to focus on abusers who are responsible for targeting, grooming and abusing children and young people most at risk. Vivian McConvey sees a chance to learn from it:

"As distressing as this case is, reviewing it will offer real insight into what has failed young people leaving care in the past. The inquiry team should consider what they can learn from this case about particular vulnerabilities for young people leaving care and what is needed to protect those who are most at risk."

Young people can help keep themselves safe by telling someone they trust about anything they are afraid about and want to stop. If you have specific concerns about child abuse call 0800 389 1701. This is a helpline run by the NSPCC providing 24 hour confidential advice and support.

-ENDS-

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

1. Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) is an independent, Northern Ireland charity that aims to improve the life chances of children and young people in care.
2. We aim to improve the life chances of care experienced children and young people by listening and learning from what they tell us about their experience to facilitate positive change in legislation, policy and practice.
3. We work in partnership with children, young people, staff, managers, agencies and government. We have four main services: advocacy, mentoring, participation and policy.
4. Numbers of looked after children and young people in Northern Ireland by placement type at 31 March 2013:

Foster care 2112

Placed with family 331

Residential care 217

Other 147

Total 2807

[Source:Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2012/13]