

PRESS RELEASE

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VOYPIC's response to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), led by Professor Kathleen Marshall

VOYPIC welcomes today's publication of the report from the independent inquiry on child sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland. Vivian McConvey, CEO of VOYPIC responded to the report by Professor Kathleen Marshall saying:

"The Inquiry's report is a first step to tackling this complex, distressing and often hidden issue. What's critical is what happens next – that we work together to stop the abuse of vulnerable children in all of our communities.

I agree with Professor Marshall's conclusion that part of the strategy, particularly for children in care, is to ensure that they have supportive, steady relationships with those who are responsible for caring for them. I also believe that education should be an essential part of all strategies and plans."

We need a radical and robust approach to prevent sexual abuse, protect young people who are vulnerable and prosecute those who would perpetrate it. We believe it's time to commit to a full and active engagement and partnership with young people who can help lead the way to the best response and approach. In our experience, young people often hold the key to what works best to keep them safe.

As well as a sharp focus on perpetrators, health and social care professionals must continue to work with the police and others to prevent child sexual exploitation, protect young people affected by it and prosecute offenders.

Protecting children and young people and keeping them safe is everyone's business. VOYPIC urges children and young people who may be experiencing abuse to talk to someone they trust about it. Children and young people are not to blame for what are crimes but they can help by telling someone they trust about anything they are afraid about and want to stop.

If you have specific concerns about child sexual exploitation or want further information about his 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. VOYPIC (Voice of Young People In Care) is a charity working across Northern Ireland promoting the rights and improving the lives of children and young people cared for away from home. They may be living at home in care; with foster or kinship carers; in children's homes; in secure settings; or in supported accommodation. They may be preparing to leave care or be care leavers
2. We work in partnership with children, young people, staff, managers, agencies and government. We have four main services: advocacy, mentoring, participation and policy.
3. At 31 March 2014, there were 2858 looked after children in Northern Ireland:-
 - In foster care - 2156 (75%)
 - Placed at home with parents - 357 (13%)
 - Residential care (children's homes) - 195 (7%)
 - Other care (hospital, secure, intensive support) - 150 (5%)

(Delegated Statutory Functions, including Corporate Parenting Report, Statistical Report 31 March 2014, Health & Social Care Board)