

Joe's Story



Joe's story is an example of how services can tend to focus on the offending behaviour of a child rather than wider concerns. In Joe's case, despite displaying many of the vulnerability factors associated with CSE including being in care and having a disability, he was not recognised as a victim. Instead, the focus of intervention was placed on his offending and anti-social behaviour.

Concerns about Joe and service involvement were centered on his offending and antisocial behaviour. There was less attention paid to where he is and what's happening to him when he goes missing, how he obtained a new mobile phone and drugs, and who his 'friends' are.

Joe is now 16 and has autism. His CSO was made when he was 12 due to his parents' alcohol misuse, their lack of engagement with services and their use of inappropriate methods to manage Joe's behaviour. Despite attempts to keep Joe at home, he's moved to a residential unit when he's 14.

After moving to the unit, Joe becomes involved in offending including shoplifting, housebreaking, vandalism and threatening and abusive behaviour. At 15, he's referred to the Children's Reporter on offence grounds. Unit staff notice that he is more frequently returning under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs.

Joe consistently denies taking drugs despite staff smelling cannabis on his clothes and twice finding cannabis in his room. Joe has also been engaging in sexually inappropriate interactions with other children in the unit and has exposed himself to others a number of times. These concerns are discussed between unit staff and social work.

One evening a local shop is set on fire causing a significant amount of damage, and CCTV footage clearly shows Joe setting fire to the building. It also shows a number of individuals close by appearing to encourage his behaviour, although they cannot be identified from the footage. Joe is arrested and charged with wilful fire-raising and a joint report is submitted to the Procurator Fiscal and the Reporter due to the seriousness of the offence.

Whilst the case was originally retained by the Procurator Fiscal, the Sheriff remits the case to a Children's Hearing. The Hearing decides that Joe's placement is suitable and additional supports will be put in place for him. However, Joe's criminal behaviour continues to escalate in frequency and severity. He regularly comes to the attention of the police for antisocial, abusive and violent behaviour and has been charged for assaults and exposing himself in public. He completely disengages from education, and refuses to meet with his criminal justice youth worker.

His dad tries to intervene but often arrives at meetings under the influence. His maternal grandmother and Joe share a close relationship but she has recently been diagnosed with a significant health issue so can no longer visit Joe or attend meetings.

Because of his deteriorating behaviour, a Children's Hearing agrees that Joe meets the requirements for secure authorisation and he is placed in a secure unit. In the secure unit Joe engages well and staff are pleased with his progress.

After 4 months he is moved from the secure unit to his previous residential unit. He initially settles back quickly.

However, Joe's behaviour again deteriorates and within a few weeks he is regularly absconding, often for days at a time, saying only that he's been with friends. Unit staff find cannabis and a new mobile phone in Joe's room and he refuses to say where he got them from.

He is again regularly coming to the attention of the police, and is referred to the Reporter for offences including assault and threatening and abusive behaviour. Despite previously having a good relationship with his key worker in the unit, Joe has stopped talking to him.

It is explained to Joe that should he commit a serious offence again then it would likely be dealt with through the criminal justice system which could result in him being placed in a Young Offenders Institution. Joe says he doesn't care as his friends are the only people who care about him.

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