But What About the Parents?!

A few months ago, I had a brief conversation with a social worker concerning children caught up in the State 'care' system, the Rotherham *et al* rape gangs, the respective roles of Social Services and parents, and various other aspects of the State's assistance (at least, as the State sees it) of families in recent decades. Because our chat was necessarily very brief, I subsequently revisited in a little more depth some of topics we'd touched upon, collating them into a letter to the social worker concerned, of which this short document is just one part.

Social Worker: ***"It's about keeping children safe."***

Elizabeth: ***"The State has the worst possible outcomes for keeping children 'safe' … And what about Rotherham, Rochdale, Oxford, etc – you know what I'm referring to; police and Social Services failed – and still are failing - to keep all those young girls 'safe'…"***

Social Worker: ***"But what about the parents?!"***

Elizabeth: ***"Many of the parents tried to protect their daughters; eg the father who himself was arrested by the police when he went to the house where his daughter was being held and gang-raped by rapists."***

I admit I was somewhat taken aback at your response to my remark about Social Services' part in failing to keep safe the children raped and trafficked in Rotherham and elsewhere. At the very least I would have thought some pity or concern for the abused girls would have been appropriate? Perhaps something to the effect of:

"I know, and I am deeply ashamed of the role of my profession in all this. Those poor, poor children. Please let me reassure you: if I were a social worker in any of the affected areas and those children had come under my remit, I would NEVER have betrayed them like that. I would have done everything in my power to keep them safe from those rape gangs. It was an absolute disgrace."

But no. Nothing. Not one ounce of compassion for the appalling physical, sexual, and emotional damage done to thousands of young girls – some now never able to have children of their own, some even murdered by their abusers. Not one shred of sorrow for the utter devastation your so-called 'social care' profession allowed to be wrought in the lives of these girls due to disinterest and inaction.

Instead (and in precisely the same self-protective vein as the numerous Social Services personnel quoted in the Casey Report), like a child reprimanded by his parents for hitting a sibling who wails "But what about *him*?" you honestly thought it was acceptable to project *your* profession's failings back onto the parents!

I had not ignored the parents, but the issue under discussion in this part of our conversation in the car concerned the *State*, so for you to deflect it on to the parents was disingenuous to say the least.

> "One key partner in tackling CSE … is often underutilised or even rejected … the crucial role parents play in safeguarding a child at risk of sexual abuse and violence outside the home is still largely ignored in our national approach to CSE. Parents are not the sexual abusers of their exploited child but they go through a statutory system where they are treated as such. The term Child Sexual Exploitation refers specifically to extra-familial abuse. It is *different* from intra-familial abuse. The risks and abusers are located outside the child's home although the impact of the abuse will be felt within it. CSE has specific characteristics including internal trafficking and offenders who can be involved in other criminal activity. These differences are still not acknowledged in the current child protection framework. The effect is often that parents are blamed for the abuse rather than the perpetrators and so a valuable resource in opposing CSE is disempowered" [*Parents Speak Out*, p.2, (emphasis in original)].

> "The common stereotype that sees inadequate parenting as the cause of a child's exploitation by extra-familial abuses predisposes observers (professionals, journalists, politicians, lawyers and others) to blame parents at first sight" [*Parents Speak Out*, p.25].
>
> "Too much blame is apportioned to parents and not enough action by Social Services to support families effectively" [*Parents Speak Out*, p.25].

Even more despicable is that, unlike Social Services, parents do not try to claim the moral high-ground by taking other people's children away from them on the dubious pretext that they can keep children safer than those others can. Yet here we have the grotesque situation in which the self-proclaimed 'four legs good' are effectively facilitating, and thus complicit in, the vile gang-rapes of the very children of the supposed 'two legs bad' accused by Social Services of being incapable of keeping their children 'safe'.

And you *seriously* don't know why the public has a "negative" view of the Social Services? Where is some humility? Well has it been said that the hubris and hypocrisy of the Social Services knows no bounds!

Paula's Father

This is the father of whom I spoke, who tried to retrieve his daughter from her rapists:

> "Paula's parents, David and June … [would] ask her where she got [the gifts she showed them] and when she wouldn't tell them they grounded her … [Paula's] school told [her] parents that they had to do something about their daughter's behaviour … But the school knew about the gangs of young Asian [sic] men who were grooming young girls … They knew but said nothing. The problem was too big, too complex. Four months later, June and David did not know their own daughter anymore. Paula stayed out nights and came home filthy and covered in bruises. They reported her missing and tried to lock her in her room but she broke the lock to get out. They called the police more than a hundred times and would wait up all night, then go to work the next morning, after the police brought her home …
>
> "Then [Paula] vanished for three nights in a row. David went looking for her … [he had] found the address by calling one of the men on her phone and asking where Paula was. The man thought he wanted to have sex and gave him the address. The police arrived. Paula was bruised, screaming. Several Asian [sic] men were inside the house. Other girls were there. The police saw a white man beating an Asian [sic] man in the hall. They restrained the white man, who fought against them … Paula's father fought to get free. The police arrested him for racial harassment and assault. Then they left, leaving the men at the house with the other two girls …
>
> "A week later two police officers found Paula lying on the tarmac. She was semi-conscious. It was after midnight. She had been thrown from a car. They took her to A&E to get cleaned up and have stitches put in, and then brought her home. The police were prepared to fine David and June. David made them look at Paula's phone. There were hundreds of explicit texts. He said if they didn't do something this time, he would go to the papers. Hours later, June and David were talking to two city detectives, one of whom said that their case was not unique. There were others, lots of others" [*Unthinkable*, pp.141-143].

Parents Are Not the Enemy

Before we go any further, please do not make the mistake of thinking that I believe all parents to be perfect parents. I do not.

But in all the many reports, articles, books, and accounts I have read, and videos I have seen, concerning the rape gangs, I have, to date, come across only one situation in which the parents of the abused girl seemed not to grasp what was happening – or not to care, if they did understand. This situation is even more heartbreaking as this poor girl's story is a particularly horrifying and distressing one, and she desperately wanted her parents' love and their protection from the hell she was going through. She writes:

> "Mum didn't seem to notice anything; if she did, she certainly didn't say anything to me. I never went downstairs to use the computer anymore… I didn't have meals with them… I thought she would sense something and I'd get in trouble, but she didn't" [*Please, Let Me Go*, p.47].

> "My boss [at the cattery in which she worked on Saturdays] saw a lot of the bruises … and started asking too many questions … I find it odd now to think a total stranger could pick up on it so quickly and yet my parents turned a blind eye. Why did they not notice? I struggle with this a lot, to this day" [*Please, Let Me Go*, pp.56-57].

> "Pakistani men would come and knock at my door … They'd ask for me, and my parents would just call me down as if it was the most natural thing in the world. These would be Muslim men in their forties and my parents never once told them where to go, they never once said, 'F*** off and leave our little girl alone.' I want to go back in time. I want to say, *why not? Why was I not worth protecting? …* It feels like the natural way of things – maybe you want your dad to beat the s*** out of someone, but you want your mum to sweep you up in her arms, hold you tight, and say everything will be OK. *Fat chance. Mine just opened the door and told me someone was waiting for me*. I've asked her, of course I have, but she tells me that they just thought it was a taxi. So I leave it there – it's too big to unpack, it would cause too much pain … But I do wonder … grown men asking for a young girl to come out – really? A taxi? *Ask some questions, Mum*, I say, when I fall back into time. *Please – ask anything, something, just don't accept it all. Save me*" [*Please, Let Me Go*, pp.77-79].

> "How could my parents have left me in the middle of it all? … Dad told me not to cause Mum any worry. Mum said she didn't want Dad to know the truth of it all as he would go after them … And what if Dad had gone after them? Would that have been so bad?" [*Please, Let Me Go*, pp.260-1].

For the record, of the few people this girl cites who did try to help her, one was a social worker:

> "One of the few people who has ever tried to help me was a social worker assigned to me around this time. She even tried to tell the police what was happening too, but I was just one of many on her list, another messed-up girl who they ignored" [*Please, Let Me Go*, p.97].

Another was Baroness Caroline Cox, who has long defended British Muslim women against Sharia law:

> "Baroness Cox of Queensbury … was a well-known human rights campaigner … she just fought wherever she saw a battle that needed her. At one point, she called herself *the voice of the voiceless* and I needed her now. … After I was put in touch with her through The Medaille Trust, I read so many things she had been quoted on, and soon believed that this was someone who I would love to have on my side. … after meeting with her for the first time in early 2015 and finally finding the courage to tell her my story, she invited me to come to the House of Lords to speak about my life so it could all finally be put on record. … Although I was terrified, I did it. I had to – not just for me, but for all the other girls out there, the ones who no one was listening to … It showed I was a survivor, and I did feel stronger now, I truly did. With Caroline by my side, I felt as if I couldn't be ignored" [*Please, Let Me Go*, pp.245-255].

Yes, there are indeed some 'bad' parents - but they are far rarer than Social Services like to believe they are…

> "The vast majority of parents who struggle are sad rather than bad" [*Care for our Children is in Crisis*].

…and they do not mean that *all* parents are the 'enemy':

> "The Cleveland child abuse scandal was a watershed moment in modern British society. Firstly, it revealed a disturbing, unhealthy obsession among state officials with seeing child abuse everywhere. And secondly, strikingly the panic was promoted, directed and sustained largely by those who describe themselves as left-wing or liberal, rather than by authoritarian conservatives. By this time in the twentieth century, many on the British left had started to view ordinary working people as a dangerous scourge that the state must control and reprimand.
>
> "Despite the original child-abuse claims being thrown out of court, the Cleveland scandal still established a precedent for how the state … viewed working-class families. The new emerging idea was that parents could not be trusted to bring up their children responsibly, and that children everywhere were under threat from the adults they knew. Of course, after the Cleveland scandal, the hysterical language used by social workers and their supporters was toned down; but that powerful sense of institutionalised distrust of ordinary parents which exploded around Cleveland remains intact" [*Don't Let Them Rewrite the Cleveland Debacle*].

So, as you've decided to play the 'whataboutism' game, let's look at some of the parents of the raped girls…

The Parents Respond

"There's no support for parents out there" [YouTube: *Rotherham Whistleblower 'Proved Right'*].

"[I]nsufficient understanding of parental reaction to their children's behaviour and going missing, so [that] distraught, desperate and terrified parents were sometimes seen as part of the problem" [*Bullfinch Grooming Scandal*].

"Parents also have ceased to make missing person reports, a precursor to any child abduction investigation, as the police response is often so inappropriate" [Adele Weir, Home Office Researcher, quoted in: *Broken and Betrayed*, pp.103-4].

"Families of some of the abused girls related that they had tried consistently to raise the alarm over what was happening to their daughters but that every door of the state was closed in their faces" [*Rape Gangs: A Story Set in Leafy Oxfordshire*].

"Parents and grandparents are increasingly worried about the safety of their children, but there's hope for them in the growing grassroots movement here in Rochdale and across the country" [Rob Mudd, UKIP, quoted at: *Another Night in Rochdale*].

"It did involve a lot of kids who were actually with their parents; the parents couldn't do anything about it, even when they tried to" ... "[the parents] were arrested when they complained" [YouTube: *UKIP's Mark Reckless and Andrew Neil on the Rotherham Child Abuse Issue*].

"Parents had been trying really hard to get help for their kids; they were going and knocking on doors, they were *pleading* with the Social Services, with the Police, to do something, and nothing was happening" [YouTube: *Times Journalist Andrew Norfolk on Rotherham Grooming Gangs*].

"It wasn't just that the children were being viewed at times as authors of their own downfall; some of their own parents too were seen as partly responsible for the mayhem – mayhem created by the men abusing their children. At one point, remarkably, a social worker dismissed to colleagues the father of one child as 'obsessed with finding her when she goes missing'" [YouTube: *Oxford Child Abuse Inquiry*].

"One of the victims says her mother asked for support repeatedly, from social workers, schools, and police, but no-one would help get to the root of the problem. 'It's just scary now to think that she was alone doing that and the people that were supposed to be helping, wouldn't help her. But she never gave up and that's why I'm still here now'" [YouTube: *Oxford Child Abuse: The Disgrace and Dishonour of Joanna Simons and Sara Thornton*].

In Keighley

"In 2009, in Keighley, near Bradford, a mother and father tell police and social services that their daughter, Charlotte, is being sexually exploited. No one is prosecuted. Charlotte continues to go missing for days at a time…" [*The Times*, quoted in *Unthinkable*, p.204, endnote 84].

In Greater Manchester

"One young girl … was introduced by a friend to a 44-year-old man … He sexually assaulted her and she eventually reported him, but the police and social workers were not helpful at first. He dad had to push for them to take the allegation seriously … he had to fight 'tooth and nail' to get the police to take her complaints seriously. He believes they only proceeded because his daughter had kept evidence of more than 100 texts sent by the offender, which the father gave to the local child sexual exploitation team. There was a complete lack of information and the victim and her father were not even told when her accused pleaded guilty" [*Real Voices*, p.29].

In London

"All of [Gloria's mother's] efforts were directed at saving her daughter. She had to leave her job; it was impossible for her to focus. She says: 'When the police and social services couldn't help, I tried everything else I could, advice groups, church, charities, outreach'" [*Unthinkable*, p.28].

In Oxford

"A victim of a gang of men who enslaved young girls for sex on the backstreets of Oxford has told how she and her mother repeatedly begged social services staff to rescue her from their clutches … Girl C accused Oxfordshire county council of continuing to lie about the support it has offered to the victims of the gang … [she] said her adoptive mother went to social services in 2004 to beg for help. She said, 'Mum wrote to all the key people in social services, called her own case conferences, invited agencies and got them sitting around the table, but they just passed the parcel between them' … Two years later the council agreed to put the girl in a temporary care home but by then, Girl C said, 'It was too late: the grooming process had run its course. I was completely under their [the gang's] control. Shortly after she was trafficked from Oxford to London for the first time … she had tried to talk to staff at the care home but was told the conversation was 'inappropriate'" [*Oxford Child Sex Abuse Ring: Social Services Failed Me, Says Victim*].

"The mother of Girl 3 said ... '[OCC] haven't grasped how badly the individual victims were treated by social services. They only now seem able to see this … and they are saying we didn't know about grooming back then. But they did know that there were individual girls who were in great danger. And it [is] not really relevant whether they were connected through a gang. Each girl was extremely vulnerable and was being abused and exploited. They failed to respond to the needs of each girl and there was wilful neglect. They were told, firstly by me, time and time again, that my daughter was being exploited'" [*Bullfinch Grooming Scandal*].

In Rochdale

"When [Billy Howarth] discovered that his young daughter was being groomed and the authorities failed to act, he went ballistic. If they wouldn't do something to protect his daughter and girls like her, he would; he promptly set up Parents Against Grooming UK. One of PAGUK's activities is to run parent patrols around the town to warn children and young teenagers about the sexual abusers that inhabit public places like the bus station … he knows everyone in the town, has a good relationship with the youngsters, and on their behalf has become a sharp thorn in the side of authorities and perpetrators alike" [*Another Night in Rochdale*].

In Rotherham

"[T]he authorities … came down heavily on the Sikh men when they tried to intervene in the absence of any state intervention. Three of the Sikh men in this case received criminal convictions for trying to stop the Muslim grooming gangs … there is no sign that the police, the media or the child-care professionals took any notice of the Sikhs' allegations of 'sex slavery'" [*Easy Meat*, p.64].

"[My mum] tried her hardest … at the beginning she didn't know what was going on … but from 2003 she fought hard to … get me away from it, but the police and social services just weren't interested … I could never imagine what my mum went through … I was turned against her … Now me and my mum are best friends - she's my rock" [YouTube: *Rotherham Child Grooming Scandal – Witness Account*].

"Emma Jackson's father, who had previously been a lay member on the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children's Board … told us that although a child sexual exploitation sub-group had been set up, it had not met for nine months. In fact, Mr Jackson was so disheartened by the lack of work being done on [CSE] that he had approached the Mayor to complain about the lack of action being taken" [HofC, *Child Sexual Exploitation*, pp.20-21].

"Vanessa's daughter, Claire, was just twelve when she began being abused by a group of Asian [sic] men. Vanessa put her into local authority care, but it just got worse. [Interviewer:] 'But when you went to the Social Services, presumably, and said to them, "Look, this is what's happening", what was their response to you?' [Vanessa:] 'They were looking at *me*. They were not looking at what I was telling them. They were looking at it as if it were me being bad parenting.' [Interviewer:] 'How many times did you go for help?' [Vanessa:] 'Loads of times. Loads. And phone calls – hundreds'" [YouTube: *Rotherham Child Abuse Scandal: 'They Thought They Were Dirty Little Slags'*].

In Telford

"In 2002, 13-year-old Becky Watson died in a car accident that was reported at the time as a 'prank' ... she suffered two years of abuse by an Asian [sic] grooming gang which began when she was just 11 ... Her mum Torron Watson said she repeatedly told police that Becky was being abused - and even gave them a list of suspects ... 'Girls like Becky were treated like criminals. I was crying out for help but it felt like I had nowhere

to turn. If Becky's abuse had been properly investigated by the authorities more girls could have been saved from going through this hell'" [*Britain's 'Worst Ever' Child Grooming Scandal Exposed*].

Mothers of Prevention (Julie Bindel, *Sunday Times*, 2007) (£)

"The authorities, in the shape of politicians and the police, seemed reluctant to acknowledge this aspect of the crimes; it has been left to the mothers of the victims to speak out"

"As many as 200 families have gone to [Coalition for the Removal of Pimping (CROP)] for advice ... CROP researchers have been tracking the pimping gangs for over a decade, and have built up a valuable database of knowledge about the pimping gangs, based on hundreds of stories from parents and victims"

"Many affected parents are unhappy with the police response ... the families are meeting lawyers to discuss possible action against the police ... for failing to protect children from sexual predators"

"'We parents are doing more to investigate these criminals than the police' says Jean. 'My husband and I have sat for hours outside hot spots, taking down car-registration numbers. I have given the police dozens of names from my daughter's mobile phone, but they have done nothing'"

"Jean's daughter Sally is in foster care, but is still being picked up regularly by pimps and raped by men who do not even know her name … 'I keep having nightmares about what they have done to her' says Jean, 'and about what her life has become. I want to kill them. I have told police to go and do something, or I might lose control and do something myself'"

"Maureen's daughter Jo was one of [Zulfqar] Hussain and [Qaiser] Naveed's victims ... [She said] 'I was told by one police officer that he did not "want to start a race riot" by arresting Pakistani men for sexual offences'"

"Gemma cannot remember ever being happy, although her mother, Anni, says she was a contented child until she reached the age of 13 ... the day that Amir, her 24-year-old boyfriend, chose to brutally rape her ... 'If we had not pushed and pushed about this issue,' says Anni, 'I believe that Hussain and Naveed would still be out there, just like my child's abusers are.' Anni, along with other affected mothers, has put pressure on the police to respond by using the local press to back their campaign for justice"

"[M]any parents I spoke to are feeling cautiously optimistic after the convictions of Hussain and Naveed. 'This is just the beginning' says Maureen, 'but I think it will have sent a message to other abusers that the net is closing in on them and they can no longer get away [with] it'"

"Blackburn is Jack Straw's constituency, and both Anni and Maureen have visited him to beg for help"

Unthinkable (Kris Hollington, 2013)

"Parents are the forgotten victims of CSE … The authorities put all their focus on the girl, who is often anti-social, uncooperative and aggressive, making any investigation difficult. Parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, seen as part of the problem, not part of the solution, are ignored. They are neither listened to, not included in plans made by agencies for the welfare of their child, nor are they seen as useful in terms of evidence gathering and providing witness testimony to help win prosecution cases" [pp.249-250].

"Dealing with the actual horror of what has happened to their child is only half the story. Reporting it to the police often unleashes more trauma … they will take no notice of parents who can provide descriptions, phone numbers, texts relating to the supply of drugs and sex, and car number plates – all great evidence for an investigating team. Some police services are changing but still, too often, officers don't take the parents seriously … they don't talk to the parents" [pp.250-251].

"Schools aren't always much better than the police … Some schools know what's going on but don't warn parents. They prefer to blame the girls (and thereby the parents) for making bad choices. And caring, intelligent parents … have been forced to attend parenting classes by their local authority because of their child's 'disruptive behaviour'" [p.251].

"Hit with this double whammy, losing their child to the pimp and no one willing to do anything to help them, parents suffer enormously … The stress of trying to cope with what's happened to their child and trying to protect them – often without the help of the police – comes with tremendous costs. Parents fall behind at work,

miss meetings and miss out on what should have been straightforward promotions. In some cases they end up losing their job. Mortgage payments are missed; depression hits and this combined stress sometimes leads to marital breakdown, affecting the wider family. Siblings often develop behavioural problems" [p.252].

"A mother wrote her own unofficial report and sent it to police officers and social workers. She told them that her daughter was taking drugs and having sex with older men. Both police and social services already knew more than the mother, that her daughter had been trafficked across the north-west. They did nothing. Leaving the mother with the impression that they had decided her daughter was a 'bad kid'" [*Unthinkable*, p.249].

"[A] mother reported her daughter's rape to a police station. She was told: We don't do rape here. You have to go to another station" [*Unthinkable*, p.250].

"[A] father … called [the police] to report his child missing at 8pm. [They]called him back at 1.30 a.m. to say they didn't have anyone available at that time but someone would be around later that day" [*Unthinkable*, p.250].

"In one case an officer kept describing the rapist as her daughter's 'boyfriend', as if it was the parents' fault for letting [her] see him, that they were wasting his time with this 'silly' case" [*Unthinkable*, p.251].

"As one mother said, 'The worst thing is not being able to control or protect your own daughter. It was so hard to sleep at night. How do you sleep when your thirteen-year-old is out on the street somewhere, and you're not able to protect her? You go over and over it in your mind. Is it something I've done? Have I treated her any differently to my other children?'" [*Unthinkable*, pp.251-2].

"Some parents become suicidal. One mother thought she had freed her daughter from her abuser, but later found out that her daughter had gone back to him. She gave up and took an overdose of sleeping pills. She survived. Social services saw this attempt as reason enough to take her daughter into care, without exploring the reasons why, making it even easier for her abuser to reach her" [*Unthinkable*, p.252].

"Irene [Ivison] attended a case conference for her daughter [Fiona] with two members of the police child abuse unit and four social workers. She prepared a briefing document for them. They told her there was nothing they could do … There seemed no sense in putting Fiona on the **child protection register, they said, because this was used to protect children abused by their own families** [Really??]. The only other option was to put Fiona into care, but both police and social services warned: 'Don't put her into care. This is far worse. They can't keep an eye on them and she'll get into all sorts of bad company. She'll be ruined completely if she moves to a children's home" [pp.209-210, my emphasis].

Irene "also dealt with accusations of inadequate parenting, a very popular perception of what had 'gone wrong'. 'It is very easy to judge parents in our circumstances. Nobody tried harder than I did. I locked Fiona in her bedroom. I hid her trainers in my car. I attacked [her abuser]" [pp.221-2].

"Tired and disheartened, Irene believed that none of the sensible and obvious points she had been raising were being taken seriously. She became depressed but never stopped, never gave up … she was looking forward to a time when people understood what she was trying to tell them and campaigning was no longer necessary. She worked up to the last hours of her life … Irene Ivison struggled to be heard in a society … that didn't think what was happening to these young women across the UK was an important enough issue. There remains a serious and terrifying lack of interest in these men who groom and exploit young women. Even worse … are those who were supposed to care, knew there was a problem, knew everything that Irene did, and did nothing. Twenty years after Fiona's murder, teenage girls are still paying the price" [pp.222-223].

"A mother got hold of her thirteen-year-old daughter's phone and wrote down the names, numbers and texts of more than 150 Asian [sic] men (one of whom turned out to be a police officer). When she told the police that her daughter had just returned home after having gone missing for five days, and that these men had been abusing her, the police replied that if they took this information they'd be violating the girl's – and the men's – human rights" [*Unthinkable*, p.248].

Girl A: My Story (Girl A, 2013)

"Social Services … didn't tell my parents any of what Sara [Rochdale Crisis Intervention] had told them in her letter – Dad was on to Social Services by this time, telling them he and Mum needed help because they'd lost control of me and were worried. [Social Services] said that for all that I might be unruly, they couldn't do

anything because I was fifteen, nearly sixteen, and therefore nearly an adult. In their minds, it was up to me if I was off with men – nothing to do with abuse, just me making a 'lifestyle' choice" [p.135].

"I'd convinced myself that Mum and Dad didn't care … In fact, it had begun to dawn on them that Harry's place was evil and they were beginning to get frantic … Dad would go to Harry's house himself to look for me sometimes, though more often than not it would be left to Mum to reclaim her 'lost' daughter because he didn't trust himself not to hit someone. She'd drive up and then wait outside in the car for a glimpse of me, because they'd always deny I was there. One time she called at the front door to be told I'd left, but with the door ajar she could see me … and managed to grab me and bundle me into the car" [pp.135-6].

"All these years later, [Mum and Dad] say they'll never forgive themselves for not trying harder. But there was only so much they could do … when Mum and Dad would ask the police or Social Services to get me away from Harry's place, the police might turn up, but they'd just put me in a van and dump me back at home" [p.136].

"For all that Mum and Dad tried their best to reach out to me, I was still a mess. I'd hit rock bottom by then, a feral creature living a half-life, abused by the gang, abandoned by both the police and Social Services. My parents had also been let down, and they were both confused and incredibly angry" [p.223].

"Mum and Dad, for so long bewildered and out of their depth, came through for me and are even now fighting desperately hard to help save kids like the one they almost lost" [p.339].

Jay Report (2014)

"Child C (2002) was 14 when sexual exploitation was identified. … Her mother voiced her concerns … Several initial assessments were carried out and some family support was offered. The case was then closed. The social worker's assessment was that Child C's mother was not able to accept her growing up" [p.39].

"Child D (2003) was 13 when she was groomed by a violent sexual predator who raped and trafficked her. Her parents, Risky Business and Child D herself all understood the seriousness of the abuse, violence and intimidation she suffered. Police and children's social care were ineffective and seemed to blame the child … An initial assessment accurately described the risks to Child D but appeared to blame her for 'placing herself at risk of sexual exploitation and danger.' Other than Risky Business, agencies showed no comprehension that she had been groomed at 13, that she was terrified of the perpetrators, and that her attempts to placate them were themselves a symptom of the serious emotional harm that CSE had caused her. Risky Business worked very hard with Child D and her parents. None of the other agencies intervened effectively to protect her, and she and her parents understandably had no confidence in them" [p.39].

"Child H (2008) was 11 years old when she … disclosed that she and another child had been sexually assaulted by adult males. … Her father provided Risky Business with all the information he had been able to obtain about the details of how and where his daughter had been exploited and abused, and who the perpetrators were. The information was passed on to the authorities" [p.41].

"In one incident, a [taxi] driver accosted a 13-year-old girl. She refused to do what he asked and reported him to her parents who followed the taxi through the town, where they managed to identify the driver and dialled 999 for assistance. According to the Licensing Enforcement Officer, the Police did not attend until later and took no action … parents and partners strongly discouraged, even forbade, [the 24 children] from being on their own at night in a taxi, unless it was a company they personally knew" [pp.72-3].

"In the course of reading files, we had sight of internal correspondence identifying children who had been sexually abused, and the concerns their parents had expressed. We read correspondence in the files where parents had detailed their children's experiences and their concerns about inadequate responses by the statutory agencies. We were also contacted by several parents via the confidential email and Freepost addresses" [pp.125].

"'It is hard to describe the appalling nature of the abuse the child victims suffered,' [Professor Jay] said [during a TV news programme]. 'They were trafficked to other towns and cities in the north of England. They were abducted, beaten and intimidated. Girls as young as eleven were raped by huge numbers of male perpetrators. The authorities have a very great deal to answer for. Their parents are rightfully very angry. The authorities should consider very carefully what their response to these parents is'" [Professor Jay, quoted in *Violated*, p.327].

Casey Report (2015)

"It was clear from [K's care files] that there were repeated attempts by the family to get protection and support for their daughter. Yet the documentation shows that the social worker assessed that there was no statutory role for social services. Between September 2003 and May 2004 the social worker made five home visits. No support was offered … her family ended up moving overseas to escape the perpetrators" [pp.57-8].

"G's parents … inform agencies of the circumstances, which include allegations of multiple rapes and threats of violence. They desperately want support and advice. They are told by social care that there [is] nothing they [can] do and that she [has] consented to sexual activity. G is 14" [p.58].

Violated (Sarah Wilson, 2015)

"Mum heard on the grapevine that [my friend] and I were hanging around with guys twice our age. One night, not long after my twelfth birthday, we were standing with Amir and Rahim at the bottom of Psalters Lane when I saw her tearing down the hill like a woman possessed. She went straight for Amir … Mum screamed abuse at Amir and Rahim for a few minutes, but they both laughed in her face" [pp.70-71].

"Amir told [my mum] he'd kill us on the spot if she called the police, so she organised a huge search party of her own. Loads of her friends were trawling South Yorkshire in their cars, desperate for some clues as to where we might be" [p.73].

"I was referred to social services. I was assigned two social workers, Phil and Kate, but I thought they were horrible … I hated how they talked to Mum like she was stupid" [pp.96-97].

"When Mum confiscated my phone to try to keep me away from the gangs, she found the phone numbers of 177 Asian [sic] men. She wrote them all down and gave them to the coppers, but they said they couldn't do anything and palmed her off with some rubbish about the Data Protection Act" [p.108].

"Mum had now taken to locking all of the windows as well as the doors because as soon as my phone went I had to find a way out. I thought these men were my mates, but I'd heard all sorts of horror stories about what they did to girls who disobeyed them … As usual, Mum phoned the coppers and told them I'd vanished … The copper didn't seem unduly worried about my safety but Mum was frantic. She tried to talk to the social workers, but all she got was a lecture about her parenting. Phil [one of the social workers] even suggested that Mum give me a curfew, as if it were that simple! It was like they couldn't accept that so many girls were being abused under their noses, so they buried their heads deep in the sand" [p.114].

"There is a paper in Sheffield called *The Star* and it had an office in Rotherham, so while I was imprisoned in the dosshouse, Mum decided to go down there, armed with a recent picture of me. No one had really heard of Facebook back then, so this was the only way she could get the word out quickly that I was missing. Of course, there was no way of her sharing a digital picture either, so she'd had to get my photo developed in the old-fashioned way and take a print of it with her" [pp.116-118].

"Mum was crying out for help, but her pleas were falling on deaf ears. She was really scared for the rest of the family, so she even asked Phil and Kate [the social workers] if I could be taken away from the house for a while so my abusers couldn't find me. It was very much a last resort. The idea of me being taken into care broke Mum's heart, but she felt it was the only way she could keep me – not to mention my siblings – safe. … Phil and Kate should have done everything in their power to remove me from the situation. Instead, they told Mum in no uncertain terms that they'd have her charged with neglect if she tried to move me away from the family home. Their indifference was truly staggering" [p.121].

"Mum was at the end of her tether. She was so stressed she had to give up work and she never got a wink of sleep. She'd tried as hard as she could for as long as she could, but every time my phone sounded … she'd be on the verge of a breakdown, wondering if this would be the time I wouldn't come home at all. Sarah [from Risky Business] and her colleagues would never have said this publicly but they were convinced it was only a matter of time before one of the girls caught up in this twisted web of depravity was murdered. Mum was thinking exactly the same thing, and she was terrified that that girl would be me" [pp.122-3].

"Mum asked if I could be locked up in some kind of juvenile detention centre, not because she wanted to punish me but because she wanted me under lock and key so I would be safe, so that none of my abusers could reach me. She also thought it would help me break the horrible cycle of alcohol and drug dependency which had

become my life. Instead, my social workers found me a place at a local children's home … I had all the freedom I wanted. For a girl in my situation, this was lethal … They hadn't made it harder for these disgusting paedophiles to reach me; they had made it much, much easier. Mum had at least done everything in her power to stop me leaving the house, but now I could come and go completely as I pleased" [pp.128-9].

"Social services had decided it was too dangerous for me to see my family in case I did anything to hurt them, but Mum couldn't bear this. We'd meet up in town in secret, so she could check up on me. I tried to pretend that everything was fine, but, of course, she knew it wasn't" [p.131].

"[E]very time Mum tried to reason with [my social workers] they didn't want to know. I was far more at risk from paedophiles while I was in [the] care [home], but it was like they couldn't and wouldn't accept this" [p.150].

"[My mum] has been through so much because of what I suffered, but she never turned her back on me, and I love her with all my heart" [p.357].

You Can't Have My Daughter (Elizabeth McDonnell, 2015)

"I had come to realize that with social workers the process was all, and there was little, if any, scope for judgment" [p.52].

"What was becoming shockingly apparent in all my dealings with Oxfordshire's education, social services and mental health agencies was firstly how administratively flaky they were: letters never answered, phone calls not returned. Secondly they were not in the least robust in their professional practices. Despite all being there to help children in need … They took any opportunity to find an excuse not to help" [p.113].

"Blinkered by their training and hobbled by the procedures, most of the social workers we encountered operated purely like robots running on tracks … Social services' inability to understand real life, make informed judgments about situations and exercise discretion was to dog us for years" [p.150].

"[My daughter] had now been missing on and off for most of two weeks … During all that time I had no contact from Oxfordshire Social Services, from whose care she had disappeared. They were supposed to be able to keep her safe; they were supposed to be the experts and were paying a small fortune for Lauren's place in Meadowside. They hardly seemed to know or care that she wasn't there" [p.157].

"I suddenly knew for certain that [my daughter] was being trafficked as a child prostitute. I was to raise this many times with both social services and the police but they did not see it as something that was being done to Lauren, rather it was a conscious, if poor, choice on her part" [p.159].

"I had worked in and around social care services all my life; I had friends and colleagues who were social workers. I had always instinctively taken the side of social workers in debates in the media on failings in child abuse cases. I simply couldn't believe the downright heartless incompetence with which [my daughter] was being treated by [them] … that day … knowing how hard they were still fighting not to have to provide her with any support or help at home, any last vestige of trust or respect I had had for social services died" [pp.160,162].

"The theory was all that mattered … [My daughter] was stuck in an aimless, ineffectual, procedure-driven regime that was the 'looked after child/young person' system" [p.165].

"Another desultory meeting took place … As ever, [the police and social worker] did a lot of tut-tutting at [my daughter]'s risk-taking behaviour, which they saw as purely wilful and delinquent. They frowned at me for failing to control it and then completely backed off when I asked them what they were going to do to help us … Quick to judge the inadequacies in others, they repeatedly turned a blind eye to their own shortcomings … It was very much 'Do as we say, not as we do'" [p.244].

"[M]y daughter] was in danger, but I knew she would be at even greater risk if social services took her into care again … Although I knew I was not able to protect her properly, even in the darkest hours of self-doubt I knew I was doing a better job of it than social services ever could" [p.244].

"Cruel, stupid, costly. Three words that seemed to sum up every aspect of the childcare system as we experienced it" [p.273].

"More or less everything the Attach Team did was predicated on the importance of the relationship between [my daughter] and me, something I had always felt was fundamental but which seemed to be dismissed or denied by other parts of social services" [p.304].

"I have spent a long time thinking about all those dreadful years … I had thought social services would have the knowledge and experience to help a twelve-year-old child going into meltdown after years of abuse. Instead they blamed the victim, which facilitated further abuse, and in the end I discovered that a couple of serious offenders just out of jail had more instinct about how to offer care and protection to a vulnerable girl than costly children's homes and any number of professionals … I hadn't realized just what a chocolate teapot our public sector is. It is simply not fit for purpose; it does not do what it says on the tin" [pp.368-369].

"We did encounter some good committed individuals … but they were overwhelmed by organizations that stifle individual initiative and are founded on inertia, procedural rules and looking the other way. I will … encourage my grandchildren to respect the law and our public services, but I would say to them never, ever trust or rely on any of them. If you can cope without them, do, for they are very likely to make the situation worse" [p.370].

Easy Meat: Inside Britain's Grooming Gang Scandal (Peter McLoughlin, 2016)

"What should have been of interest to the authorities? ... parents contacting police and social services with their fears and accumulated evidence" [p.16].

"[T]he gang will use techniques to drive a wedge between the girl and her parents ... If none of this works, and the parents' intervention looks like it will threaten the gang's activities, then the parents too may be subject to blackmail, intimidation or violence" [p.30].

"In 2012, the mother of one of the victims testified at the trial of Rochdale men accused of grooming offences, and she said that the council social services team knew of the problems as far back as 2002. She went on to say: 'I wanted the three of them [my daughters] to be put into child protection but they wouldn't do it. I must have called in to social services eight or nine times and phoned them lots of times'" [pp.122-123].

"Parents across the country were trying in vain to get the councils and the police to take action" [p.123].

"[G]rooming gang cases have gone to trial as far afield as Oxford, Bristol, Newcastle, and Ipswich. And in some of these cases, the victims and their families have claimed that they notified the child-care services in their area, but nothing was done" [p.125].

"[M]others were gathering evidence that the police would then dismiss" [p.134].

Broken and Betrayed (Jayne Senior, 2016)

"Irene [Ivison] fought and fought to claw back her daughter from the clutches of her so-called 'boyfriend' - a man in his mid to late twenties - battling with the police and social services to get something done. ... Fiona was murdered ... in December 1993. By campaigning to alert people to child sexual exploitation Irene had found a way to go on ... A young girl that no one in authority seemed to be able to help, even though her mother had reported her truanting from school, hanging around with older men, and becoming involved in drugs ... I was angry not only at the abusers, but the system too'" [pp.37-8].

"[Paula's] parents were extremely concerned, attending meetings with us, the police, social services and education ... doing everything they could to stop her from becoming more deeply involved. Her poor, desperate father even accosted one of the men she was hanging about with when he saw him in Asda ... He related this story in a meeting at which police officers were present. They tore a strip off him, but still did nothing about his daughter's abusers" [pp.76-7].

"...after a concerted attempt by her mother, who was forever going out looking for her at night, Katrin decided that she wanted no more to do with her abuser and his friends ... backed by her mum, she decided she would make a statement to police" [pp.100-101].

"Danielle's ... parents reported her missing on every occasion. However, they were actually told they were wasting police time as eventually she would come back" [p.121].

"[Karen] is missing from home frequently ... returned with a suspected broken nose, two black eyes, bruises and scratching. Her mum was told by police not to report her missing due to the frequency of this" [p.125].

"[M]y husband Paul, our [sons] and two of my brothers-in-law went out for a Christmas drink. At about 11.30 p.m. they came out of the pub at the end of the road and saw a young girl walking up the street ahead of them. Then a van screeched to a halt and the Asian [sic] driver shouted, 'Get in, you b****!' Paul approached the van and told him to 'do one'. They then walked the young girl home … I knew who the girl was, and on the Monday I rang her social worker … she said, 'What were your husband and sons doing approaching a young female late at night?' The 'young female' was an extremely vulnerable child who went on to be raped with a broken bottle and will never have a baby due to the damage caused. She … told me recently that the night Paul intervened she had just been gang-raped and had run off, wanting to get home to where she knew she would be safe and her mother would give her a hug and make everything better" [pp.210-211].

Fenestra Serious Case Review into Child Sexual Exploitation (2017)

"A serious case review found social workers focused on parenting deficits rather than take parental concerns seriously" [*Social Workers Did Not Take Parent's Concerns Seriously in Child Sexual Exploitation Case, Review Finds*].

"Social workers have been criticised for not taking a parent's concerns seriously in a case involving the sexual exploitation of teenage girls. A serious case review, published by the Somerset Safeguarding Children's Board, said practitioners focused on 'short-term intervention for perceived parenting deficits' when dealing with parents struggling to manage their children's behaviour while they were being sexually exploited" [*Social Workers Did Not Take Parent's Concerns Seriously*].

"One parent repeatedly told children's social care of their concerns about their daughter being engaged in a sexual relationship with an older man, but the response from services was often about how the children were being parented. 'Her father identified that she was being sexually, physically, and emotionally abused by an older man, but this was not investigated at all … the focus instead was in relation to allegedly punitive parental responses to [the child's] increasingly out of control behaviour. Social workers do not appear to have taken the father's concerns about a much older boyfriend seriously, as reflected by the comment that the father's concerns "cannot be assumed to be correct".' … [T]he review author said the common model of social work services is … to assume that the root of the problem is within the family" [*Social Workers Did Not Take Parent's Concerns Seriously*]

"This model [of social work] … is driven fundamentally by a belief that if you have need of services, you are the problem. It is hugely damaging for … families" [comment at: *Social Workers Did Not Take Parent's Concerns Seriously*].

"I've had very similar experiences recently as an ISW, having to explain to an LA that if a child is being sexually exploited this does not inherently mean their parents are abusive or negligent. I was horrified to find social workers looking for non existent evidence to pin on the parents to portray them as the 'cause' of the abuse the child had suffered" [comment at: *Social Workers Did Not Take Parent's Concerns Seriously*].

"[F]ar too often professionals pin the blame on parents and say it is the fault of parents. All professionals should first look at their own attitudes to parents" [comment at: *Social Workers Did Not Take Parent's Concerns Seriously*].

Just A Child (Sammy Woodhouse, 2018)

"Dad … [had] been doing a lot of talking and asking around, trying to find out why I was suddenly coming in late, as I'd never done that before. Someone had mentioned to Dad that they had seen me going into the Clough Road flat the very first time Ash took me there, and when [Dad had] called the police to report me missing, [he] had told them he was very concerned about the people I was associating with … He'd heard rumours that the guys I was hanging around with were older than me, and involved in drugs and crime" [p.52].

"Dad wrote out details of every bit of information he'd picked up locally, and he gave the police everything. The police told Dad that in order for them to get involved further I would have to make a complaint myself about the people or person I was involved with. As it stood, this was just a family dispute between an errant teenage girl and her parents, and there was no evidence of any wrong-doing. My dad was spitting tacks and couldn't understand how the onus was on me, a naïve and impressionable 14-year-old schoolgirl, to complain about the company I was keeping. His gut was telling him something wasn't right and I was in danger, but a father's instinct and some hearsay evidence wasn't enough for the police. They left us to sort out our family dispute among ourselves" [p.52].

"Dad was keeping his ear very close to the ground, as was [my older sister], and they were hearing all kinds of stories … All Mum and Dad could do was ground me, and even then they couldn't lock me in the house 24 hours a day, could they? … Calling the police was no use to Mum and Dad either; that had been proved on countless occasions by now" [pp.58,69].

"One night I was lying in bed at home … asleep. Dad came in to check on me, found [my] phone and took it away. When Ash phoned, Dad saw his name flash up and answered the call. He went absolutely mental with Ash, telling him to leave me alone once and for all. He told Ash never to contact me again, but Ash simply listened silently and hung up. Dad called the police immediately, but they told him what they always did: that if I wasn't making a complaint against Ash there was nothing they could do" [p.70].

"Dad watched me like a hawk. I guess he thought he'd scuppered my chances of linking up with Ash because I had no way of contacting him without the phone – Dad never returned it to me – and I was stuck in the house. What he didn't know was that Ash had met me at dinner time from school, laughed about the telling-off he'd had from my dad, and given me a brand new phone … Dad had started securing the windows in the house and being extra vigilant about bolting and locking the doors too, to stop me escaping without him noticing" [pp.70-71].

"Mum and Dad said they were going to get a DNA test on the baby … [so that] they could press charges without me making a complaint myself. … I was moved in with [my eldest sister] Kate for a while. Mum and Dad were prepared to try anything that might help the situation. They were struggling to cope" [pp.96,98].

"[A]s advised in my [Social Services] file, my parents were kept in the dark about the further details that were known to Social Services about Ash but not shared. To this day, I do not know exactly what the social workers knew at this point in time, because when I got hold of my file many years later a large section from this particular entry, dated March 2000, was marked with an asterisk, completely blacked out and had these words written in the margin: 'CONFIDENTIAL DO NOT DIVULGE OUTSIDE OF TEAM'" [p.104].

"Dad had gone round to Ash's house and Ash had battered him … Dad had tried to warn Ash off seeing me, and he accused him of having a wife and kids in the house … I didn't want my dad to be hurt … I scarcely recognised him. He'd clearly been given a right good hiding. His lips were swollen and split, and one side of his mouth looked like it had been turned inside out and was stuck up on the side of his face … I found out later that Ash had charged at Dad when his back was turned, as Dad was shouting to members of Ash's family, telling them what Ash was up to … Dad looked like a defeated man … I was used to him being my hero, the kind of bloke who defended his family and always came out on top" [pp.109-111].

"[My older sister] Lisa now says it felt like our house went through three phases during our childhood. In the beginning, it was like a youth club, full of laughter and fun and kids, with Mum as the Pied Piper, always the life and soul of the party. Then the shouting and screaming came. Mum got hysterical and emotional; Dad came out fighting and flexing his muscles. After that there was this terrible sadness and silence. Dad looked cowed and kept very quiet, for what seemed like a very long time. Mum started drinking more, and became a crumbling, emotional wreck" [p.111].

"[My parents] were on the phone to the police all the time, reporting that I was missing or out with Ash, but getting the same feedback every time … My mum and dad were living on their nerves, filled with fear all the time. In desperation, they decided to take me and our Lisa on holiday to Spain for a week, hoping time away would make me see sense, and sever the ties with Ash once and for all" [pp.111-112].

"My dad was still on the phone all the time to the police. He'd gathered so much evidence about Ash by now that he handed them an 11-page statement, detailing registration plates, names of hotels he suspected I'd been in with Ash, and specific dates when I'd failed to come home. He also gave the police my diary, which he found in my bedroom and contained loads of detail about my sexual relationship with Ash. Dad had torn the room apart looking for it when I was out" [p.118].

"Mum … felt guilty for having to go out to work, but she didn't have any choice, as the family needed the money. It was the same for Dad. They couldn't afford to give up their jobs to guard me full-time … Foster care was mentioned and my parents agreed that it might be worth considering, if it was a way of keeping me safe" [p.120].

"My parents got a call from Social Services, and at this point they reluctantly agreed it was best I went into care; they felt they had no choice … the fears they had been passing on to Social Services for so long had proved to be alarmingly accurate. They couldn't keep me in the house, they couldn't keep me out of trouble, and, most

importantly, they couldn't keep me safe. … Putting me in care was a desperate measure and a decision Mum and Dad didn't take lightly at all" [p.135].

"When I was missing, [my parents] had been terrified that I was going to be found dead. They were searching for me every day, quizzing all my friends and hoping to catch one little glimpse of me or hear one word that would put their minds at rest. Instead, they were met with a wall of silence every way they turned, because all the friends who would have been able to help were involved with Ash and his brothers and associated too in some way, and they kept quiet" [p.135].

"Dad had reported that he had heard locally that Ash had got several other teenage girls pregnant … My parents were now so worried about me that they had talked to some relatives in Ireland and were seriously considering moving me there, to get me away from Ash" [p.138].

"[At the trial of Ash, my dad] described how he called the police and drove round looking for me when I didn't come home, how he'd fought with Ash, how I'd skip school and run away, and how Ash would climb in my bedroom window. [My sister] Lisa … said … 'My dad used to drive round every night, go to hotels giving her picture out, saying, had they seen her? He used to do it until the early hours while my mum were in bed crying. It was every night for two years'" [p.293].

Parents' Action Groups

Parents Against Grooming UK

"Parents Against Grooming UK was formed in 2012, because our founders have had direct dealings or know parents whose children have been either directly involved with grooming and/or have been approached by men in the Rochdale area. ... We must all be made aware of this and know the signs. If you're in doubt then please speak out! We have long believed the people that make the decisions, the suits high up in Greater Manchester Police, Crown Prosecution Services, Rochdale Council and Rochdale town hall bosses have covered up crucial evidence in the Rochdale grooming scandals 2007-2012. There are victim reports of having to sign gagging orders, bullying of victims and victim-blaming during the scandals. We are demanding a full transparent independent inquiry with all those to blame to be held accountable for their actions. We will continue to raise awareness into CSE and supporting other cases similar to that of Rochdale's. ... We ... will push and demand justice and accountability [from] ALL those who make decisions..." [*Parents Against Grooming*].

Sikh Awareness Society

"Are you concerned a friend or family member may have been groomed? Are you concerned about the safety of your child? Do you know a victim who needs support? The Sikh Awareness Society …. aims to protect and educate young people about sexual grooming through awareness and support by holding a wide range of talks, seminars and events across the UK" [*Sikh Awareness Society*].

PACE - Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation (formerly CROP)

"PACE was founded by Irene Ivison and a number of supporting parents in 1996 following the murder of her 17 year old daughter Fiona, who was groomed, sexually exploited and then coerced into prostitution by a known perpetrator [and] murdered by a client. Irene had spent three years asking social services to help remove Fiona from her groomer's clutches. But social care did not deem Fiona to be at risk ... The man who killed her received a life sentence, but the groomer who pimped her remains free today. It was these twin agency failures - the inability of the social services to intervene and the refusal of the criminal justice system to recognise the groomer's role in Fiona's death - which propelled Irene to set up CROP [Coalition for Removal of Pimping] alongside other affected parents. Right from the start, CROP was run by parents for parents, offering individual telephone support and running self-help groups. When the parents organised the inaugural CROP conference in 1998, they ensured that police officers, social services, health authorities and children's charities attended to hear their voices for the first time. ... We help parents fight to keep their children safe..." [*PACE*].

"We will never blame you for what is happening to your children and aim to help **you** find the best solution for **your** family" [*PACE: Info for Parents*, (emphasis in original)].

"It was only when I finally got in touch with PACE that I realised nobody had been supporting us through this darkest of journeys" [Faye, quoted at: *PACE: Info for Parents*].

"Whether you work in the police, social care or voluntary sectors, working with PACE can help your agency implement parent-friendly practices which can increase the chances of keeping affected children safe and exiting exploitative relationships" [*PACE: Info for Professionals*].

In 2013 "PACE, which [was] based in an office building on the outskirts of Leeds, was working with 128 families, mainly in the north-west, but they receive calls from all over – even from abroad. 'So many parents think they're the only ones going through this but they're not alone' said Hilary Willmer, the redoubtable seventy-something pioneer and chairperson, who has been with PACE since the beginning" [*Unthinkable*, p.250].

"PACE has spent the last [twenty] years doing amazing work, supporting parents and trying to make the police and social services understand what's really going on. They've not only helped kickstart investigations, they've driven them forwards" [*Unthinkable*, p.252].

PACE Report: *Parents Speak Out* (2016)

"The unique gift of love and commitment by the parent to the child is crucial and distinctive. For parents the word love and all the difficult emotions it encompasses are normally key to the relationship with their child. This is a critical difference between parents and practitioners. Relationship with the child is a matter of practical daily life together, rooted in the past, and looking to the future. Practitioners care for a child who is a victim of abuse but their interaction starts when the abuse becomes apparent and ends when it passes or the child becomes an adult. Parents' knowledge of the child and commitment is holistically rooted in a relation starting long before the exploitation is on the horizon; it grows and adapts with the child over years and it is still there when the exploitation has been removed. Parents are inventively, energetically proactive in protecting their child" [p.4].

"Parents in this survey evidenced their role in proactively providing information and intelligence about perpetrators to the police. This has in many instances been a contributing factor to the recent increase in successful prosecutions of CSE perpetrators" [p.4].

Q1: Unique Parental (As Against Professional) Contribution to Safeguarding Their Children

"We love our child unconditionally. We are always available and willing to support her and fight for her. We have a lifelong commitment to her that no professional could ever match" [p.8].

"Know them best and their welfare. Not just a paid job" / "I know her best and the longest relationship with her – and basically she trusts me" / "Never gave up and will always be there for her" [p.8].

"I know my child inside and out and live with her 24 hours a day. I know her vulnerabilities and know how she responds to fear and anger. I love my child and would put her first above everything else" [p.8].

Q3: Specific Action Taken to Protect Their Children

"As a parent I try my best to safeguard my child by disclosing any information I can regarding my daughter and her chosen group of friends to the police, Social Care and FIT worker. I have also gone looking for her myself on many occasions" [p.9].

"Been to just about everyone over it – MP, safeguarding, police etc" / "Stopped her going out, seeing him. Took her/picked her up from school. Took her to stay with her grandmother at another time" [p.9].

"Monitored social media, found counsellors, persuaded daughter and friends to give evidence, reported hotel address to Social Services and the police. Found out man's mobile, provided photos, place of work (all before the police did), provided text messages and images. Demanded CSE unit get involved. Educated the school. Provided love and support to daughter. Took out 2 warning abduction notices" [p.9].

"As parents we have physically restrained our daughter from leaving the house and many times we have gone to bed with all the house, car and window keys under our pillow to prevent our daughter getting out through the night. We have called the police on several occasions to find our daughter. I have spoken to these men on my daughter's phone to warn them to leave my daughter alone and that she has a family who love her" [p.9].

"Talking, parental control, checking with other parents when arranging events for child to attend. Boundaries, times to check home. Drop off and pick up. Check child has arrived at school" [p.9].

Q4.1: Searching for, Finding, Rescuing Their Children Before the Authorities

"Every occasion I went out to look for [her] … I would look in the red light areas … 5 hours at a time" [p.10]. "Several times found her by going out actively searching, using clues she had left and working out what they meant when professionals had given up. Used info passed on by her friends from school" [p.10].

"Patrolled the streets and found daughter before police and warned authorities of public transport" [p.10].

"I have found her first loads of times when she was abandoned in other towns. She phoned us and we went to collect her, driving everywhere until eventually we found her" [p.10].

"Followed her and brought her home. Drove to other towns after calls for street angels to bring her home" [p.10].

"Followed her and made notes; passed information quickly; collected evidence and put in plastic bags" [p.10].

"Found and rescued her many times. Spoke to authorities. Reasoned, indulged, cajoled, cried, shouted and threatened her. Asked family and friends for help. Locked her up; locked her out. Tried everything I could think of" [p.10].

"Go looking, check for bus tickets. Talk to friends and friends' parents. Father would take bike in back of car and then cycle – check with pubs and clubs, show photos" [p.10].

"I have walked the streets and sometimes found my daughter myself" / "Did everything we could to monitor, track, follow and support her throughout" / "Actively searched and located her" [p.11].

Q4.2: Mobile Phones and Internet Access

"Blocked certain individuals; put tracker in phone (restrict internet and phone etc)" / "Disabled Facebook and removed computers and phones" [p.11].

"Yes, prevented access to both computer and phone and were actively opposed by Social Services who were highly critical of our actions in so doing, accusing us of being 'rigid and draconian' in our parenting style" [p.11].

"Removed her mobile phone and gave her access to a laptop computer to do homework only, while working with me in the room" [p.11].

We have taken our daughter's phone away form her on many occasions and would routinely take her phone at night. We have switched off and taken the router upstairs to bed with us to prevent her getting on the internet at night on the family computer which was downstairs" [p.11-12].

"Her phone and internet access was removed and even school monitored internet/email usage" [p.12].

Q5: Information Passed on to Authorities

"Names" / "Mobile numbers" / "Locations" / "Car registrations" / "Other" [p.13].

"Pictures on internet" / "Social media on boxes and direct messages printed out" / "NI number" / "Drug supplies and use" / "Email details" / "Account names, photos" / "Descriptions of perpetrators and addresses" [p.13].

"Diaries and notes she had written; soiled underwear led to successful prosecution which was later overturned on appeal" [p.13].

Q6: Any Police Action

"The police said she was making it up" / "Just a caution for approaching a 13-year-old" / "Sometimes parents and police are successful together" / "Alerted Social Services, police and school; got the man arrested – i.e. I'm the safeguarder" [p.14].

"No investigation for my child but the perpetrators raped a boy for 3 days on a complete other case and one was imprisoned. I had repeatedly put in complaints. This man still continues to this day with new victims and is above the law. I rang the police saying he will in time be headline news and people/police/social workers will say we had no idea. I will then say YES YOU ALL DID!" [p.14].

Qs7/8: Support by Authorities, Agencies, Professional Support Services

"In the first court case, very unsupported by all. In the second court case all the agencies were involved. I wonder if Social Care was better because a child was born out of the rape. The police now have a dedicated unit for children which we accessed in the second case, school got more involved" [p.15].

"Things are different now … The police this time round are totally supportive and we feel we are being listened to. Social Care was useless the first time around and with the ongoing investigation has not been in touch" [p.15].

The Sole Transitory Good Worker

"[O]ne social worker was very good, wise (CSE specialist). Info, but lack of action and so impact very limited … Some social workers were well meaning but they 'didn't get it' and ultimately failed us all" [p.16].

"One social worker was amazing – listened and asked police to make checks etc. At this time, we as a family were being taken seriously. She then left and it reverted back to continued serious mistakes being made" [p.16].

"We had an amazing social worker in our second case, who I felt listened to my daughter and to me" [p.16].

"Some individuals in all organizations were helpful – but they were the exception rather than the rule" [p.17].

"Pace – support and information, empowerment rather than criticism and blame" / "At the beginning of our nightmare the police seemed helpful and concerned. Social Care did not care and let us down. Pace again has been the only support we've received that has been consistent throughout" [p.17].

"My parent support worker from Safe and Sound is the reason I am here today. She restored my sanity and I will be for ever grateful" [p.17].

Qs9/10: Overriding Parental Authority, Preventing Contact, Breaking Parent/Child Bond

"Dissuaded from seeing her when accommodated in a private children's home, as we were seen as causing her 'stress' due to our insistence on reminding everyone she was being exploited – a key fact which was usually played down in favour of a focus on her behaviour or our parenting" [p.19].

"[A]t TAC meeting I was told that if I contacted my daughter or person she was staying with I would be arrested" [p.19].

"A harbouring notice was served on me at the same time as one on the perpetrators. I was told that I was preventing Social Care from doing what was needed – but they did nothing" [p.20].

"Social worker told us to let her see these people [perpetrators] as they are her 'friends' and we were being too strict" [p.20].

"No contact as [Social Services] lack of understanding/training re disruption and breaking of parent/child bond … they did not encourage contact and kept us apart" [p.20].

"Social Care … issued her a basic mobile but did not give me the number … no contact … No understanding of disruption and breaking child/parent bond" [p.21].

Q11: Meetings

"On a few occasions we were not told that the meetings were happening" / "I was just not told about meetings and not informed that the time had been changed" [p.22].

"There was a meeting at school between some professionals that we were not able to attend. We were seen as part of the problem" / "Some information (when Social Services remember) is now shared as a result of a complaint process" [p.22].

Listen to the Parents

"This [*Parents Speak Out*] report demonstrates how vital a role parents play in seeking to safeguard their child from CSE. But parents know they cannot do it alone and need support both from statutory agencies and also from specialist organisations; all need to be open to the positive potential of parents, whatever their background, and to listen, understand, respect and value their knowledge and specific contribution. Sadly, for many parents, this report show that this non-judgemental support is not forthcoming … Too much blame is apportioned to parents and not enough action by Social Services to support families effectively" [*Parents Speak Out*, pp.4,25].

"Too many parents are still excluded from playing the full part that they want in relation to safeguarding their child. This happens in 4 specific ways:

- Refusing parents contact with their child in residential care. Parents who care should be empowered and supported, not discouraged, in maintaining relationships with their children when they go into care. It is especially odd to obstruct this relationship when the parent has taken the initiative in asking for their child to be taken into care, because, after careful and desperate thought, the parent decides it is the safest course for their child;
- Some practitioners are still barring parents from safeguarding meetings that they are entitled to attend, even when in some instances the parents have themselves asked for the meeting;
- Once a child reaches 16 it often proves difficult to get ongoing support from statutory agencies …;
- For sexually exploited children who are groomed, manipulated, coerced and fed lies by abusers, the likelihood of their not always telling the truth about their parents or home life increases. It is a common tactic of the exploiters to coach that young person to allege that their parents were abusive. This makes it very hard for practitioners to work out what the truth is and for parents to potentially defend themselves against unfounded accusations. This aspect of CSE needs to be acknowledged. It is *not* to blame children. Nor is it to suggest that we should not listen to children. It is simply to acknowledge that under immense psychological pressure some exploited children will speak with the voice of the perpetrator rather than their own and so tell untruths about their parents in order to protect and distract focus away from perpetrators" [*Parents Speak Out*, p.5].

"Parents are the first line of defence against these predators. We are the ones who care for and love our children unconditionally. For the most part we know what is best for our children, but when we are out of our depth we need support to make the right decisions … we need to be listened to by professionals as we know our children best" [*Parents Speak Out*, p.25].

"We as parents need to make the professionals listen and help us. Social Care and the police really need to change and work together and parents attend meetings; after all we know our daughters and sons better than any of them" [*Parents Speak Out*, p.26].

"The remarkable contribution that parents make to safeguarding needs to be more generally recognised, respected and valued by all other agencies. The focus on the cause of CSE should always be on the perpetrators and not diverted to families" [*Parents Speak Out*, p.27].

"When social workers are open to respecting and seeing the potential of parents this can lead to far better outcomes in tackling CSE together. Because parents are often distraught, they may on occasion be awkward and disagreeable and that can be challenging, but more effective outcomes will be secured if a relational model of working is adopted" [*Parents Speak Out*, p.27].

"Remember to listen to the parents; they are there to pick up the pieces when everyone else has walked away" [A CSE survivor speaking to policy makers and professionals at a government advisory group in London, quoted in: *Parents Speak Out*, p.3].

> "Parent blaming is victim blaming … By blaming parents, you're just adding to the distress already caused by CSE. Parents should be worked *with*, not *against*. They are the key to safeguarding. Are *you* doing all you can to work in partnership with parents?" [YouTube: *Parent Blaming is Victim Blaming*, (emphasis in original)].

This, Christina, is what the parents have been doing.

To paraphrase your own recent comment concerning my opinion of Social Services:

> ***"I am worried that [you have] a negative view of [parents]."***

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Please note that the inclusion in this document of any quotations from or references to any report, article, book, video, or other, listed below does *not* necessarily imply endorsement of that item; neither can I vouch for any other materials by the same authors, nor any groups or websites with which they may be associated, nor any periodicals to which they may contribute, nor the beliefs of whatever kind they may hold, nor any other aspect of their work or position.

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Elizabeth McDonald,
30 June 2018