LUCY FAITHFULL FOUNDATION
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Protecting children. Preventing child sexual abuse.

12th November 2026

SCOTTISH CHILD ABUSE INQUIRY- Phase 11
Lucy Faithfull Foundation Response – Child on Child Abuse

Dear Sir / Madam

Thank you for your letter to Lucy Faithfull Foundation of 6th October in relation to Phase 11 of SCAI's inquiry and your questions about child on child sexual abuse. Evidence from Lucy Faithfull Foundation is outlined below. Please get back to us if any of the information provided needs clarified.

1. Describe the origins of your organisation, key drivers for its establishment and a brief overview of how it has evolved from inception to present day.

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation is a UK-wide child protection charity that is committed to preventing child sexual abuse and exploitation. We are one of only a few organisations tackling the problem at source by working with those perpetrating abuse or at risk of doing so. We run the Stop It Now UK helpline, the largest helpline of its kind in the world for people concerned about their own sexual thoughts and behaviour towards children and anyone concerned about child sexual abuse, and we support more than 8,400 callers who make more than 19,000 calls each year. We also operate Get Help, an online self-help programme for those concerned about their online or offline sexual behaviour towards children, which is accessed by tens of thousands of people each year.

Annually across the UK, we assess risk in hundreds of adults and adolescents and provide group work interventions to several hundred more. Where abuse has occurred, our teams advise statutory agencies on case management and provide intervention programmes to rebuild family safety. Our preventative work includes early intervention programmes for families considered at risk of harm and public education. We also deliver training across the UK and the sector, reaching more than 2,000 frontline workers a year, including those in law enforcement, education and social care.

We also work to prevent harmful sexual behaviour amongst young people through our work in schools and our programmes designed for young people themselves. This includes our website and live chat service 'Shore', a safe space for young people with concerns about sexual behaviour.

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Our ground-breaking Project Intercept works with tech companies to deploy simple and effective warning interventions to disrupt, deter and redirect people at risk of offending online. Within Project Intercept sits our chatbot, a world-first tech tool that engages those seeking child sexual abuse material online and attempts to deter and redirect them.

In addition to direct service delivery, we conduct research which ensures that our services are grounded in high-quality evidence. By sharing our insights, we contribute to improved knowledge and practice across the sector. Further, through our advocacy work, we use our unique expertise to influence decision-makers, pushing for the system changes that are needed to enable a greater focus to be placed on the prevention of child sexual abuse *before* it happens.

LFF Services in Scotland were established with funding from the Scottish Government in 2008. Accordingly, we have specific OSCR registration in Scotland (SCO398888). In Scotland we have an Edinburgh based team of 13 staff providing direct services to adults and young people who present a sexual risk of harm to children and the adults who supports those individuals. We then translate the learning from this direct practice into resources and projects which tackle sexual abuse before it happens. This includes our award winning ROSA project (Reducing Online Sexual Abuse) that focused on peer-on-peer online harm amongst young people in Glasgow, annual deterrence campaign work delivered in partnership with Police Scotland targeting online offenders and our autism project currently exploring prevention of child sexual abuse with neurodivergent adults.

Our mission is simple – to prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation. It is this mission that draws all of our varied services together because child sexual abuse is preventable, not inevitable. Although the investigation of Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry relates to the abuse of children in care settings, our expertise in preventing child sexual abuse encompasses child sexual abuse in all its forms.

2. Describe how your agency has influenced policy and practice in tackling and preventing harmful sexual behaviour in Scotland.

Up until 2018 LFF Scotland, although we had worked with under 18s who had been involved with online sexual offending and their families as part of our general remit, we had not undertaken specific work in relation to young people. In that year we received funding from the RS Macdonald to launch a significant action research project in this area and to employ our first young people's manager.

This project was the action research project was ROSA (Risk of Online Sexual Abuse), described below. Since then, our expertise and research around young people and harmful sexual behaviour has led to the following policy outcomes:

- From 2018 onwards we were active members of the Scottish Government's expert working group on preventing harmful sexual behaviour. We chaired the working group Statutory Authorities Knowledge and Responses on harmful sexual behaviour. The group reported in January 2020.

- In 2020 Education Scotland commissioned us to develop a resource for teachers on peer-on-peer technology assisted harmful sexual behaviour. This resource is currently being refreshed in partnership with Rape Crises Scotland.
- 2020 we were commissioned by NSPCC to write a literature review on key research since the publication of NICE guidance on HSB in 2016. This was to help steer future direction in their UK clinical work with this client group. We also undertook a study of key resources and intervention models used across the UK by practitioners specialising in harmful sexual behaviour work.
- In 2021 we contributed to a book chapter titled ' How Could a Gender-Sensitive Approach Help Us to Identify and Respond to Children Who Have Displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour?'. We have a further book chapter looking at gender sensitive approaches to tackling harmful sexual behaviour in schools that is due for publication in 2027.
- In 2019 and 2021 we co-authored guidance for the Centre for expertise in CSA for practitioners working with cases involving sibling sexual abuse
- In December 2020 we joined the Scottish Government's delivery group looking at recommendations from the expert working group. We chaired the working group on assessment and interventions which led to the publication of the Scottish Government's 2024 guidance for practitioners on harmful sexual behaviour.
- In 2023 we contributed to an event at the Scottish Parliament on sibling sexual abuse, facilitated by the Cross-party Group for Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse. We then chaired a short life working group of adults with lived experience in this area, outlining to the Scottish government better responses to intrafamilial peer on peer sexual abuse.
- In 2023 we were members of the Scottish Government's Preventing and responding to gender based violence: a whole school framework working group.
- In 2024 we started the Harmful Sexual Behaviour Practitioner Forum to support the implementation of new Scottish guidance in partnership with the CYCJ. This provides four training events each year (2 in person) and an opportunity for around 100 practitioners from across Scotland to engage and share learning about good practice with this client group.
- In 2026 we contributed to a text book on harmful sexual behaviour and autism. We also started some group work delivery with autistic young adults.
- We have quarterly meetings with child protection team to explore emerging issues and evidence in relation to harmful sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people.
- In 2026 we co-authored a literature review from the HMI Probation Insights Series on harmful sexual behaviour.
- We are sponsoring a Glasgow University / SGSSS scholarship on assessment of young people who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour, looking at developing assessment resources with children with lived experience of justice processes.

3. How have you worked with local authorities in relation to tackling and preventing harmful sexual behaviour?

We currently deliver The Inform Young People Programme Scotland. This is a free, psycho educative programme designed for young people aged 13 to 21 who are in trouble with the police or their school or college for unsafe or harmful sexual behaviour online, including:

- Having, sharing or making indecent images of children
- Sexual messages or contact with children
- Risky online behaviour, such as viewing pornography

The programme helps young people learn how to use the internet safely, understand healthy online sexual behaviour, and reduce the risk of the behaviour happening again or escalating. Local authorities often look for us to deliver this in tandem with statutory interventions. In 2024/2025 we worked with 33 young people using this model in Scotland. We have also offered direct training in the model to practitioners in Edinburgh as well as

We have also delivered spot purchased training to numerous local authorities across Scotland to support greater confidence in recognising and responding to harmful sexual behaviour in young people. These courses are often tailored to the local authorities needs but as standard cover key messages from research, sexual development in childhood, understanding and identifying harmful sexual behaviour in children, managing and responding to HSB, including safety planning. In the first 9 months of this financial year we have delivered 8 sessions to local council social work teams/ schools related to HSB.

We have undertaken two specific notable local authority specific projects to tackle and prevent harmful sexual behaviour:

a.) Between 2020 and 2022 The ROSA (Risk of Online Sexual Abuse) Project worked in partnership with local authority social work, education, child protection and youth justice services to identify, assess and support children and young people displaying technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour (TA-HSB). Based within Glasgow's statutory harmful sexual behaviour service and overseen by a multi-agency advisory group chaired by Glasgow City Council's Principal Officer for Child Protection, the project provided early intervention, specialist psychoeducational support and diversion from prosecution opportunities where appropriate. It also informed wider prevention activity by helping schools, parents and professionals improve their understanding of online sexual harms and develop whole-school approaches to preventing peer-on-peer harmful sexual behaviour. The project was independently evaluated by Strathclyde University.

b.) Between 2023 and 2026 The Everyone's Safer project worked in partnership with City of Edinburgh Council secondary schools to prevent and respond to harmful sexual

behaviour through a flexible consultation, training and early intervention model. The project provided schools with specialist advice on managing incidents, supported staff to develop safety plans and strengths-based interventions, delivered training on recognising and responding to harmful sexual behaviour, and increased young people's access to education and anonymous support through our website for teenagers 'Shore'. It also worked alongside parents, carers, educational psychologists and other professionals to build long-term capacity, improve confidence, and embed practical tools and whole-school approaches that enable earlier identification, prevention and proportionate responses to harmful sexual behaviour.

4. How have you worked with care settings (residential care, foster care, secure care and boarding schools) in relation to tackling and preventing harmful sexual behaviour?

Our tailored training offer has been taken up by multiple care settings and tailored to their needs. We ran a project with a grant-aided special school and residential care provider in 2024 which aimed to prevent harmful sexual behaviour through a 10-week psychoeducational programme for young people aged 13-14. Alongside direct work with pupils on topics such as consent, online safety, pornography, healthy relationships and the law, the project built the capacity of school staff through training, co-facilitation and resource sharing to enable future in-house delivery. The programme increased young people's confidence, knowledge and ability to identify and respond to harmful sexual behaviour, while also helping create a safer school culture through student-led safety campaigns, school codes of conduct and improved staff confidence in addressing sensitive issues.

Since 2025 we have offered spot purchased assessments and intervention in respect of harmful sexual behaviour. At the time of writing, we have completed one assessment in respect of a child in a care setting in Scotland showing harmful sexual behaviour. This was an AIM3 assessment, a structured, evidence-informed assessment for children and young people who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour. The assessment produced a detailed formulation and recommendations to support care planning, risk management and intervention for residential staff and partner agencies to develop proportionate strategies that reduce harmful behaviour, enhance safety for all children, and promote the young person's healthy development and wellbeing.

5. What evidence do you have about effectiveness of your work with this client group?

Evaluating the effectiveness of harmful sexual behaviour interventions is challenging because successful outcomes often involve the absence of future incidents, changes in attitudes, relationships and wellbeing that are difficult to measure, and the influence of wider factors such as family, school and social circumstances, making it hard to attribute long-term change

solely to the intervention. Evaluations focus on risk to the detriment of other factors; however, there is some evidence to suggest that although interventions may be effective in reducing risk of further sexual reoffending, they may impact more general wellbeing outcomes in adulthood.

Nonetheless, our Inform Young People intervention has recently been independently evaluated by Dr Emily Setty and Dr Sophie King-Hill. This evaluation is based on cases from our England and Wales service but should read across for its impact in Scotland. The evaluation used a qualitative process evaluation design to explore how the programme was delivered, experienced and perceived, rather than measuring reoffending or comparing outcomes against a control group. Researchers collected data from 14 young people aged 15-21 who had completed the programme within the previous two years, 7 parents/carers, and 16 professionals (9 from the Lucy Faithfull Foundation and 7 external practitioners trained to deliver the intervention). The study used interviews and triangulated perspectives across these groups to identify common themes and assess programme delivery and perceived impact. The evaluation found that the Inform Young People programme is an effective early intervention for young people who have engaged in technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour (TA-HSB), with evidence of improved self-awareness, emotional regulation, confidence and understanding of the consequences of their behaviour. Young people described the programme as transformative and empowering, parents reported improvements in communication and wellbeing, and practitioners highlighted the value of its relational, non-judgemental and trauma-informed approach. A key strength was helping young people separate their behaviour from their identity, reducing shame and increasing personal agency, while also supporting healthier relationships and social connection. The findings suggest the programme successfully promotes reflection, accountability, emotional resilience and safer online behaviours.

Our ROSA (Risk of Online Sexual Abuse) project was also independently evaluated by the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) at the University of Strathclyde. They examined the experiences and outcomes of children and young people referred for technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour, alongside the views of professionals involved in delivery. The evaluation found that ROSA filled an important gap in statutory provision by offering a specialist, early intervention response to online harmful sexual behaviour. Young people demonstrated increased understanding of the consequences of their online behaviour, improved awareness of healthy relationships and online safety, and greater engagement with support. Professionals reported increased confidence in recognising and responding to technology-assisted harmful sexual behaviour, while the project's integration within the HALT service supported multi-agency working and diversion from prosecution where appropriate. The evaluation was primarily a service evaluation and process evaluation, focusing on referral patterns, outcomes, stakeholder experiences and service implementation rather than measuring long-term recidivism. Evidence was drawn from case data, referral information, practitioner feedback and examples of direct work with children and young people. The evaluation concluded that ROSA's greatest strengths were its specialist focus, early intervention approach and ability to engage young people before behaviours became more

entrenched. However, as with many harmful sexual behaviour interventions, attributing long-term behavioural change solely to the intervention is challenging because outcomes are influenced by multiple factors as noted above and the evaluation did not include a control group or long-term reoffending analysis.

Evidence of effectiveness for the Everyone's Safer project comes from an internal evaluation and feedback gathered from participating schools, education staff and partner agencies involved in the programme. The project demonstrated positive outcomes in increasing staff knowledge, confidence and capacity to recognise and respond to harmful sexual behaviour, while providing practical consultation and case support that helped schools manage concerns more effectively. Schools reported that access to specialist expertise improved decision-making, strengthened safeguarding responses and enabled earlier intervention with children and young people. The project also increased awareness of support services, including our website for teenagers 'Shore', helping young people and families access advice and support before behaviours potentially escalated.

Similar to ROSA, the evaluation was again primarily a service and implementation evaluation, examining how the model was delivered, the experiences of participating schools and professionals, and its contribution to building safeguarding capacity within education settings. Evidence was drawn from training feedback, consultation activity, stakeholder experiences and examples of practice development within schools. The findings suggested that the project's greatest strengths were its flexible, responsive approach and its ability to build sustainable knowledge and confidence within school communities.

The effectiveness of our UK wide Shore services has also been internally evaluated. a qualitative evaluation of anonymous chats and emails submitted by young people during the service's first seven months of operation between 2023 and 2024 analysed 123 conversations (79 chats from 41 individuals and 44 emails from 34 individuals) alongside demographic data from users of the service. We used an inductive thematic analysis of anonymised transcripts, with independent coding and inter-rater reliability checks, to understand young people's experiences, needs and perceptions of support.

The findings suggest that Shore is successfully engaging young people who might not otherwise seek help, with 75% of young people reporting they had not disclosed their concerns or behaviour to any other professional before contacting the service. Many described Shore as the first place they felt able to talk openly about harmful sexual behaviour, sexual thoughts or online behaviour concerns. The evaluation found that anonymity was a key mechanism of engagement, enabling young people to seek support, reflect on their behaviour and discuss difficult issues without fear of judgement or immediate consequences.

The analysis identified evidence that Shore helps young people better understand their behaviour, explore support options, develop positive coping strategies and increase motivation for change. Many users discussed moving from feelings of shame, anxiety and hopelessness

towards greater self-understanding and help-seeking. The findings also highlighted Shore's preventative potential, with some young people reporting they believed they would have sought help earlier, and possibly avoided further escalation, had a service like Shore been available sooner.

6. *Scottish specific data was published in 2020 by the Expert Working Group on Preventing Sexual Offending in Children and Young People. What data about demographics. characteristics and pathways into offending do you have about this client group over and beyond what was included in this report.*

One of the recommendations of the 2020 Expert Working Group was '*Data about children and young people who display inappropriate, problematic or abusive sexual behaviour in schools or the community should be systematically collected for consideration by CPCs and reported on, together with information about outcomes for the children and young people involved.*' We are not aware of this data being systematically gathered in Scotland, although recorded sexual crime data is now published annually in England and Wales that shows proportions (and nature / dynamics) of sexual offending perpetrated by youth. There has been specific research published on sexual harassment and violence in Scottish schools, but it tells us little about demographics of those who perpetrate abuse or pathways into offending.

There have been some useful findings from the IVY project, a specialist consultation service in relation to young people who display harmful sexual behaviour (as well as other forms of significant harm) at Kibble in Paisley published over the last year[1]. This found that most young people known to their service who displayed HSB, had experiences of insecure (disrupted) attachment, previous school behavioural issues, use of online pornographic material, and previous histories of demonstrating non-sexual violence. Each of these characteristics were also found to have significantly contributed toward HSB escalating from non-contact to contact offenses. Dr Lynne Cairns has also published research over the last year drawn from interviews with young people known to services in Scotland who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour[2]. That research concludes that the context of harm and adversity experienced by many children who display harmful sexual behaviour means that we should consider this phenomenon a form of 'disrupted childhood'. She argues for a child rights perspective for working with this client group in light of her research.

7. Are there gaps and potential improvement in Scotland in relation to
a. Policy, guidance, regulation, training and resources
b. Identification, reporting and prevention of harmful sexual behaviours; and
c. Support for children who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour,

[1] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10538712.2026.2673342#abstract
[2] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13552600.2026.2673343

specifically refer to developments to better protect children from peer perpetrated harm in care settings in your response, along with responses to HSB more generally.

Based on the evidence from our work over the past 6 years alongside wider Scottish policy developments, we recognise several gaps and opportunities for improvement in Scotland's response to harmful sexual behaviour in general, including within residential and care settings.

a). Training and resources

Evidence from our Everyone's Safer and ROSA projects suggests that professionals continue to value specialist consultation and training, indicating ongoing gaps in workforce knowledge and confidence and the need for more embedded training for professionals on HSB or extension of accessibility to specialist support. The success of workforce development models demonstrated through our Everyone's Safer project and the staff capacity-building elements of our work with a residential school suggest that investment in sustainable training models could have significant preventative benefits.

b). anonymous help seeking to support prevention

Our evaluations consistently suggest that harmful sexual behaviour is often identified late, or not at all with opportunities for early intervention missed due to stigma, uncertainty of where to seek help or fear of punitive responses. We our starting to evidence, through influencing recognised mechanisms associated with behaviour change, that improved access to anonymous advice and support, such as through our SHORE chat service or Stop It Now helpline, go some way to both address this barrier and reduce harmful sexual behaviour. Improving access and awareness of these services would increase our opportunities for early intervention.

c). Support for children who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour

Our evaluations demonstrate positive outcomes from HSB intervention programmes such as Inform Young People, including improved self-awareness, emotional regulation, accountability and understanding of online behaviour. However, access to these interventions remains limited and is not consistently available across Scotland.

There is a need for equitable access to:

- specialist assessments such as AIM3
- specialist consultation for residential providers
- dedicated interventions for children displaying HSB and TA-HSB (e.g. Inform Young people)

Thank you for the opportunity to share our experiences and research. We will be happy to expand on any of these points with the Inquiry in December.

Best wishes



Stuart Allardyce

Director, Lucy Faithfull Foundation