



Impact Report

2022



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 INFO@LINKTOCHANGE.ORG.UK

 (01480) 474974

 WWW.LINKTOCHANGE.ORG.UK





Letter From Our CEO

Choice, Challenge and Change is the philosophy that underpins all that we do. 2022 saw the world we live in, continue to change. We looked to understand our work in a post-pandemic world and entered a cost-of-living crisis.

Between 2020 to 2022 our monthly referrals and waiting lists have tripled. Whilst we strive to have reduced wait times to receive support, the complexities that face our children and young people continues to escalate. The support we provide is in high demand and overstretched. Children and young people are presenting with increased mental health concerns, an increase in the violence used to coerce and groom, an increase in the signs of psychological and physical dependency to substances and children as young as 7 years being groomed and exploited. Sadly, with the cost of living continuing to rise leading to increased poverty and vulnerabilities, we are faced with worries that these concerns become even more problematic.

As we enter 2023, Link To Change and the voluntary sector as a whole face the impact of the cost of living rises.

As many of our core costs continue to rise and reduced funding available, Link to Change strives to sustain our current service provisions with increasing demand and greater complexities. As a charity that is solely funded by grants, trusts, foundations and the fundraising efforts of the community we extend our sincerest thank you to all who have supported and provided us with the funding and means to be able to deliver our highly regarded and highly demanded services to our vulnerable children and young people. We are truly grateful.

Most importantly I would like to thank our Link to Change family. Every single employee, trustee and volunteer plays a vital part in ensuring we can provide our children and young people with the support they so desperately require and create a safe space where they are listened to. They are the most dedicated and passionate individuals, and I am so appreciative of all that you do. You are all truly amazing!!

Hayley Brown
CEO at Link To Change

Emerging Issues

INCREASE IN MENTAL
HEALTH CONCERNS

Over the past year we have seen an increase in the mental health concerns of the children and young people we work with.

92%

of our children and young people self-harm and have a variety of different mental health concerns. These concerns include;

DEPRESSION

**EATING
DISORDERS**

**BIPOLAR
DISORDER**

**POST-TRAUMATIC
STRESS DISORDER**

ADHD

**GENERALISED
ANXIETY
DISORDER**

During 2022 we have seen an emerging relationship between mental health and substance misuse. Our children and young people are in a vicious cycle, often related to their exploitation and trauma, of using substances to self-medicate their mental health which is then triggering their mental health. This has escalated their depression, anxiety and other related concerns.

CASE STUDY:

One young person who has been referred to us is borderline schizophrenic and has "low-level" exploitation (they have been referred to our early-intervention service). She suffers from graphic images and visions of harming others. She has tried to strangle both a dog and sibling.

Emerging Issues

INCREASE IN MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

NEW ROLE

The
UK YOUTH
Fund
Thriving Minds

In response to this we have been awarded funding from UK youth for a wellbeing specialist exploitation coordinator. The aim of this role is to develop a mental health and wellbeing wraparound support package and provision for children and young people accessing our services.

Our strategy into action for 2021-2023 aims to improve support for our children and young people. The strategy includes;

Understanding that early intervention is key in the prevention of escalating concerns of children and young people, their exploitation and mental health.

Developing a wraparound support package for those exploited children and young people with mental health needs by providing additional support groups and workshops such as self-harm, anxiety management and substance misuse awareness.

TRAINING

We were awarded funding from The Leathersellers Company's Jubilee Fund to enable our whole staff team to undertake First Aid Mental Health Training from St. Johns Ambulance and refresh our Trauma Training with Zoe Lodrick.



2022 In Numbers

90

NEW CLIENTS ALLOCATED

91%

REPORTED IMPROVED
LEVELS OF WELLBEING

98%

EXITED A LIFE FROM
EXPLOITATION

67

CLIENTS
CLOSED

604

CHILDREN & YOUNG
PEOPLE SUPPORTED
OVERALL

928

STRUCTURED 1-2-1
SESSIONS
COMPLETED

139

GROUPWORK
SESSIONS
COMPLETED

94%

ENGAGEMENT RATE

90%

RETENTION RATE FOR
SERVICES

On average we received 17
referrals per month

Our Work

We aim to provide a service for children and young people, to ensure they get the most out of our support. Our service pathways follow our philosophy of Choice, Challenge and Change.



CHOICE

Supporting children and young people as part of an early intervention service. We work with those who are at risk of exploitation. This exploitation can be through friendships, behavioural changes or family members such as siblings involved in gangs or exploitation.



OUR CHOICE FUNDERS FOR 2022 WERE:



WHAT DOES EARLY INTERVENTION LOOK LIKE?

Our service provides solutions focussed 1-2-1 support, information workshops, community outreach and targeted groupwork. This support allows our children and young people to increase the knowledge, critical thinking and protective behaviours within the community and online.

This year we have provided group work to several schools in Pan-Bedfordshire. We have also provided drop-in sessions in local schools and monthly workshops in local youth club's like Grove Corner.

371

1-2-1 sessions in 2022

3,460

children and young people involved in group work under the choice project in 2022

WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT OUR GROUPWORK...

"The learning was made fun and the situations were relatable and realistic, which made me more interested. I didn't realise that some of the situations I had experienced were grooming. I've made changes since and encourage my friends to be more safe. I deleted my snapchat that I'd use for quick adds and now I only have people on there that I know."

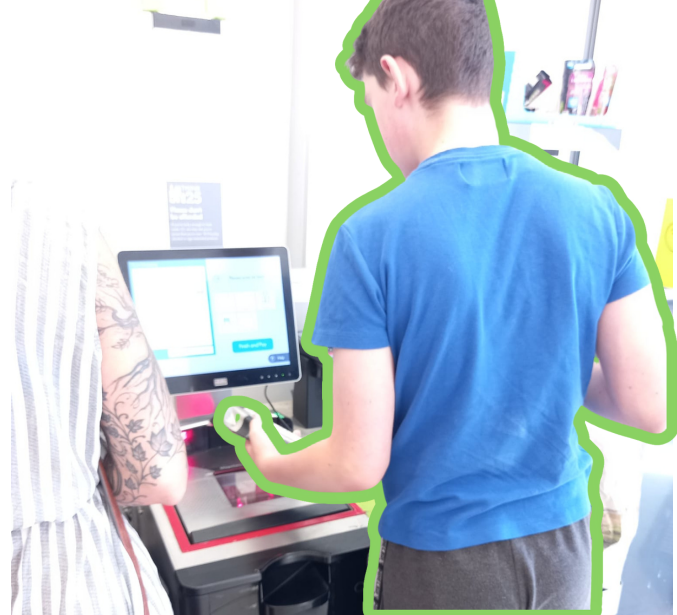
FOLLOWING ON FROM GROUPWORK THE YOUNG PERSON WAS REFERRED TO OUR EARLY HELP SERVICE WHERE HE HAS RECEIVED TARGETED 1-2-1 SUPPORT.



Our Work

CHALLENGE

Our 1-2-1 intensive trauma-informed support is long-term, meaning we do not finish their support until our children and young people feel ready. This is important in ensuring we provide the best possible support and helps to make the child or young person feel like they're heard and fully supported. Our support often continues after all other services involved with them have finished.



EXTRA ACTIVITIES

456 1-2-1 SESSIONS

This year we have wanted to provide more support outside our projects that enables our children and young people to gain useful life skills. The summer saw the first ever 'Link To Chef', a 4-week programme designed to teach our children and young people how to cook essential recipes, budgeting and an interactive exploitation awareness session. The children and young people chose what recipe they wanted to cook, we budgeted them £7 to spend each then took them to the local supermarket to get their ingredients. They would then come back and get cooking!



OUR CHALLENGE FUNDERS ARE:



The Pilgrim Trust

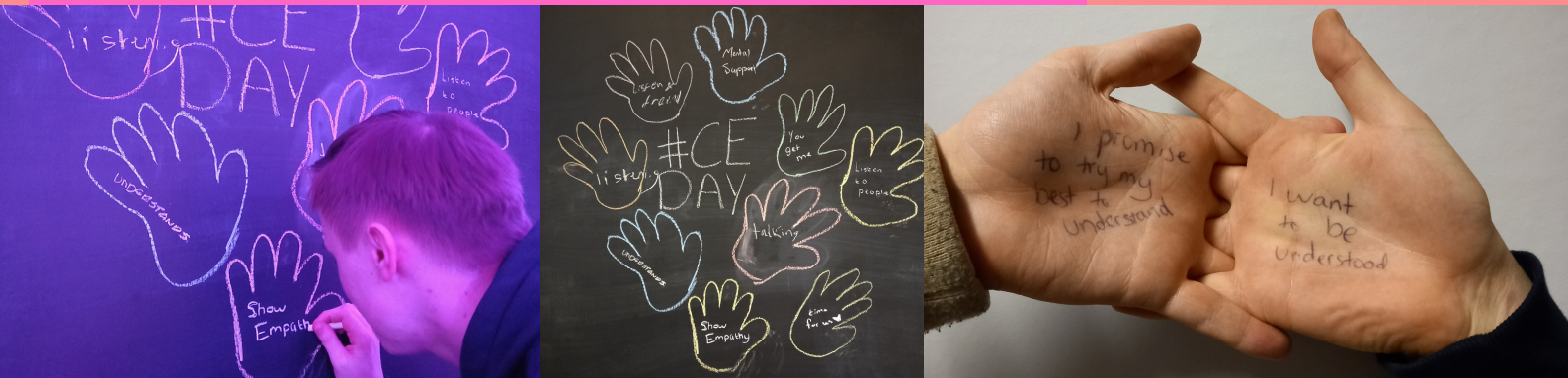


Our Work

CHANGE

With the world returning to normal following the pandemic, we've been in a position to start running more activities for our youth participation group.

In March our participation group was involved in our campaign for Exploitation Awareness Day where they discussed what their hope is for our support.



April saw the creation of our promotional video with videographer Joe Newman. You can find the full video on our website at www.linktochange.org.uk.



Our participation group ensures we have a 'true voice' to all of our work, whilst developing their own campaigns and projects. 2023 will see the exciting development and new ventures of our youth participation.

Our Work

COLLABORATIVE WORK

Link To Change were fortunate enough to work alongside Luton Youth Offending, the Police and TOKKO Youth to develop the TREE Project (Tackling, Reducing and Ending Exploitation) - named by our very own CEO! This provides outreach services within the 'hotspot' areas of Luton. As a result of it's success the project has been replicated in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire.



14 TREE PROJECT MEETINGS ATTENDED

1750 CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGED

We worked closely alongside the 'Is This OK?' initiative with Missing People and Childline, co-ordinated by Sara Rowanbotham MBE (Rochdale Exploitation). The initiative was launched in Bedfordshire as a part of the phased pilots, with Link To Change as the main referral pathway for all provided services.

ISTHISOK?

TRAINING



This year we have been awarded further CPD Accreditations for our training academy. We continued to provide bespoke training and consultancy to local authority, the community, schools and other key partners, as well as our partners at PACE for their ACSEP course (Advanced Child Sexual Exploitation Practitioner Level 4).

Our training packages include:

AWARENESS OF ONLINE EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AROUND EXPLOITATION

EXPLOITATION OF BOYS AND YOUNG MEN

AWARENESS OF EXPLOITATION IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



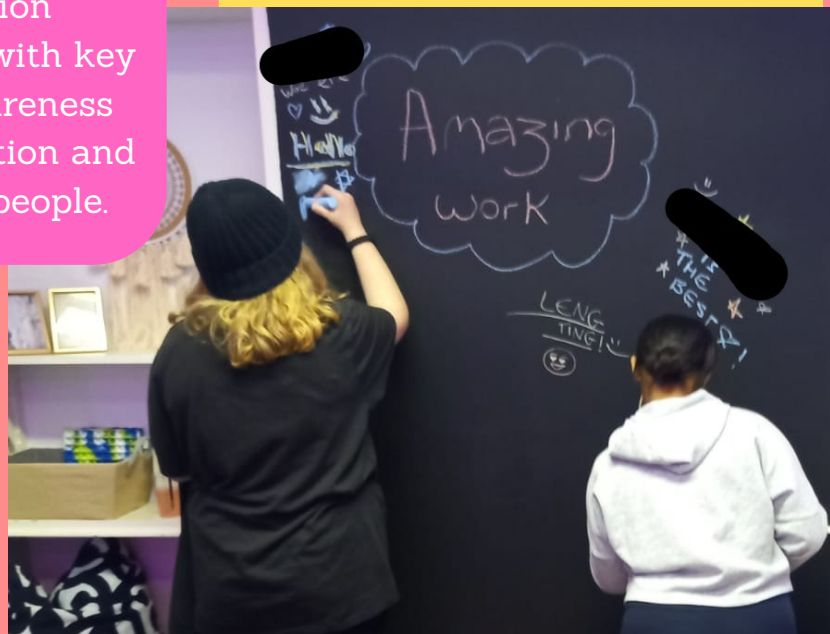
Project Spotlight

CHOICE PROJECT - RELOAD

The Choice – Reload project supports children and young people aged 7-24 years who are at risk of exploitation. The activities aim to do this through providing critical thinking skills to enable children and young people to make an informed decision.

The 1-2-1 sessions are solution focused, as well as delivering targeted groupwork to children and young people at risk of exploitation and parent workshops to improve their knowledge of exploitation. Our Early-Intervention Exploitation Practitioner works closely with key partners and local schools to raise awareness and eradicate the risks of child exploitation and gang affiliation in children and young people.

In 2021 we ran a pilot which developed the Early Intervention projects and values.



CHOICE RELOAD IN NUMBERS:

27 new clients taken on

150 1-2-1 sessions completed

50 groupwork sessions completed

714 children & young people involved in groupwork

Through the drop-in sessions and facilities, children and young people who accessed the support were:

PROVIDED WITH A SAFE SPACE

PROVIDED WITH APPROPRIATE SUPPORT AND KNOWLEDGE AROUND CHILD EXPLOITATION

WERE SIGNPOSTED TO RELEVANT SUPPORT AND SERVICES, EITHER WITHIN LINK TO CHANGE OR WITH THE OTHER RELEVANT ORGANISATION/PROFESSIONALS



Naomi's Story

*NAME AND SOME DETAILS
CHANGED TO PROTECT YOUNG
PERSONS IDENTITY

Naomi was referred to Link to Change because of exploitation and an ordeal of sexual assault. Due to the trauma of her sexual assault and a history of bullying within school, she had struggled to settle into a new education setting. As a result of the sexual assault, Naomi began to associate with a few unknown others to help cope with her trauma. Naomi felt that she had no confidence, self-belief or value and began using substances and alcohol to help cope with these feelings. During this time Naomi was exploited.

Working alongside her social worker, education provision and family safety plans were implemented to provide reassurance and support. Key to our engagement was building a strong rapport with Naomi, ensuring she felt as though she was safe, listened to and supported. As our support continued Naomi began to share her experience of the sexual trauma, sharing details of the perpetrator, the incident itself and her thoughts, feelings and impact of the horrific incident. These details later enabled the perpetrator to be identified by the authorities and police.

During her support her trauma, trauma responses and over-sexualised behaviours were processed and understood. Time was also spent with Naomi to build her knowledge on healthy relationships, protective behaviours and re-build her confidence and self-esteem. Naomi began to understand her wellbeing and strengths to become the person she wanted to be. Naomi's relationship and engagement with her practitioner was key to this work.

Naomi's family reduced their working hours to be able to support her effectively. Sadly, as a result of this the family saw increased levels of poverty and lack of opportunities. The practitioner worked with the family and a national grant making charity to help create a safe space for the children in the family, resources for education and experiences to prevent any further exploitation risks. The practitioner additionally provided support through the local foodbank. Naomi is settling in to a new education provision and forming new friendships. She is happy with who she is.

Letting Young People Be Young People

37 DIFFERENT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ATTENDED VARIOUS ACTIVITIES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Many of our children and young people come from vulnerable backgrounds and have never experienced positive and fun activities. We prioritise this for them to gain the experiences and build their self-esteem.

GO-KARTING



THORPE PARK

We took 20 children and young people on this trip!



THANK YOU TO CHILDREN IN NEED FOR FUNDING THIS TRIP!

CHRISTMAS ACTIVITY DAY



Helping The Community

This year we haven't just been supporting our children and young people, we have also been supporting those within our communities. During the summer holidays we held our free packed lunch campaign. We were overwhelmed with donations from local organisations, companies and the community.

WE WERE ABLE TO GIVE OVER 160 LUNCHES TO FAMILIES OVER THE TWO WEEKS!

THANK YOU TO TESCO, MORRISONS, COME DINE WITH US FOODBANK AND THE ST VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY



Christmas Gift Appeal

In October we launched our Christmas Gift Appeal Campaign. We appealed for gifts from local businesses, groups and people in the community to give to our children, young people and their families. We were blown away by the support and gifts we received and are fortunate to say we have been able to give something to all of our clients seen in December.

THANK YOU TO BEDFORD KINDNESS COMMUNITY PAGE, LOVE IN A BAG BEDFORD AND LUSH



Open Day

LINK TO CHANGE

In June we held our official open day to showcase our new offices and safe spaces for children and young people.



We had a great turn out with many key professionals and partners attending!



**FESTUS AKINBUSOYE,
THE PCC FOR
BEDFORDSHIRE CUT
THE RIBBON**



In The Media



Smiley Charity Film Awards Finalist

In October we submitted our film in the Smiley Charity Film Awards and are pleased to announce that after the first round of public voting closed in January 2023 we had been shortlisted to the final 10 in our category.

OUR CEO HAS FEATURED ON MULTIPLE RADIO SHOWS SPEAKING ABOUT OUR VIDEO INCLUDING BBC THREE COUNTIES, BBC NORTHAMPTONSHIRE AND GREATEST HITS RADIO!

We are due to find out whether we have won by the end of March 2023.

Bedfordshire Police Comms Support

WE WORK CLOSELY WITH THE COMMUNICATIONS TEAM AT BEDFORDSHIRE POLICE, SUPPORTING THEIR CAMPAIGNS.



BBC Coverage



STEVE HUBBARD/BBC

Link to Change CEO Hayley Brown said it was "soul destroying" that so many young people were at risk of being exploited

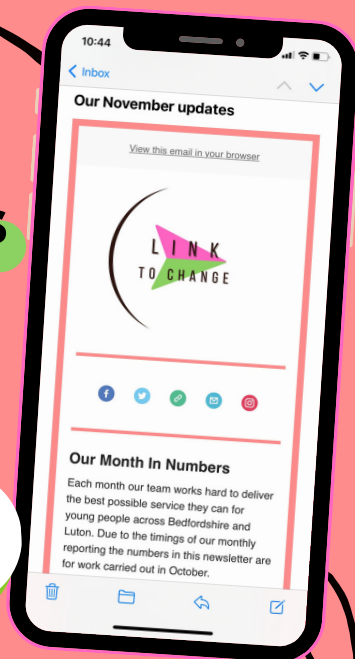
Link to Change's CEO Hayley Brown believes the pandemic and lockdowns are behind a large rise in the number of young people referred to the charity, which offers one-to-one support, group sessions and information workshops.

"The need is absolutely crazy," she says.

Monthly Newsletters

At the beginning of every month we send a newsletter with our service, communications and development updates.

YOU CAN SIGN UP TO RECEIVE OUR NEWSLETTERS ON OUR WEBSITE



OPCC Youth Conference

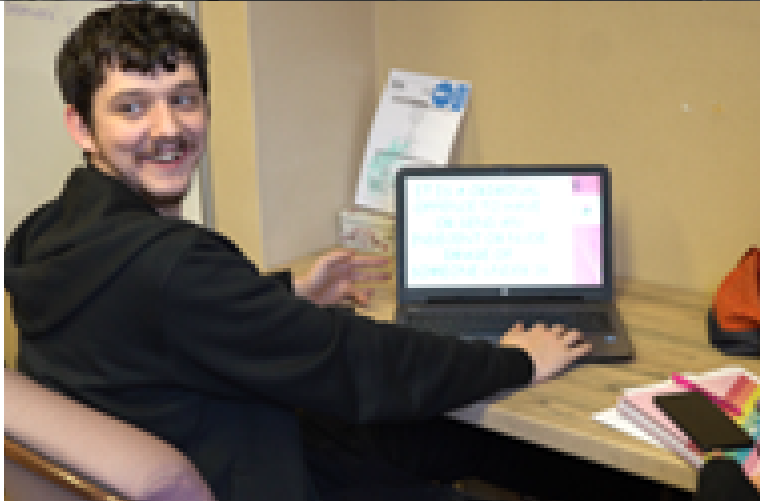
In March we ran workshops at the OPCC Youth Conference, which was publicised in the local ITV news.



FOLLOWING THIS OUR CHAIR OF TRUSTEES, FELICITY MALLAM, SPOKE ON BBC THREE COUNTIES RADIO ABOUT THE ARTICLE AND THE INCREASING NEED FOR OUR SERVICES.



Our Outcomes



100% of children and young people stated that the support made a difference in their life



94% of children and young people showed a reduction in their periods of missing



92% of children and young people have shown a reduction in risk taking behaviours

92% of children and young people have demonstrated increased understanding of safe relationships

93% of children and young people showed an improvement in making positive decisions about their future by ending contact with perpetrators or inappropriate friends

Our Supporters



This year we have been blown away by the support we've received from trusts, foundations, companies and extraordinary people in the community. It's because of the support we've received that we've been able to continue supporting our children and young people throughout 2022.

OUR FUNDERS INCLUDE:

The
Steel
Charitable Trust



The Pilgrim Trust

**CHARLES
HAYWARD**
FOUNDATION



Office of the
Bedfordshire
Police & Crime
Commissioner

FBCT
Frank Branston Charitable Trust



THE LEATHERSELLERS'
FOUNDATION

The
UK YOUTH
Fund
Thriving Minds



**HARPUR
TRUST**

Supported by
BBC
Children
in Need



**COMMUNITY
FUND**

**BL
CF**
Bedfordshire & Luton
Community Foundation



The Panacea
Charitable Trust



THANK YOU FOR
YOUR SUPPORT!

OTHER SUPPORTERS INCLUDE:

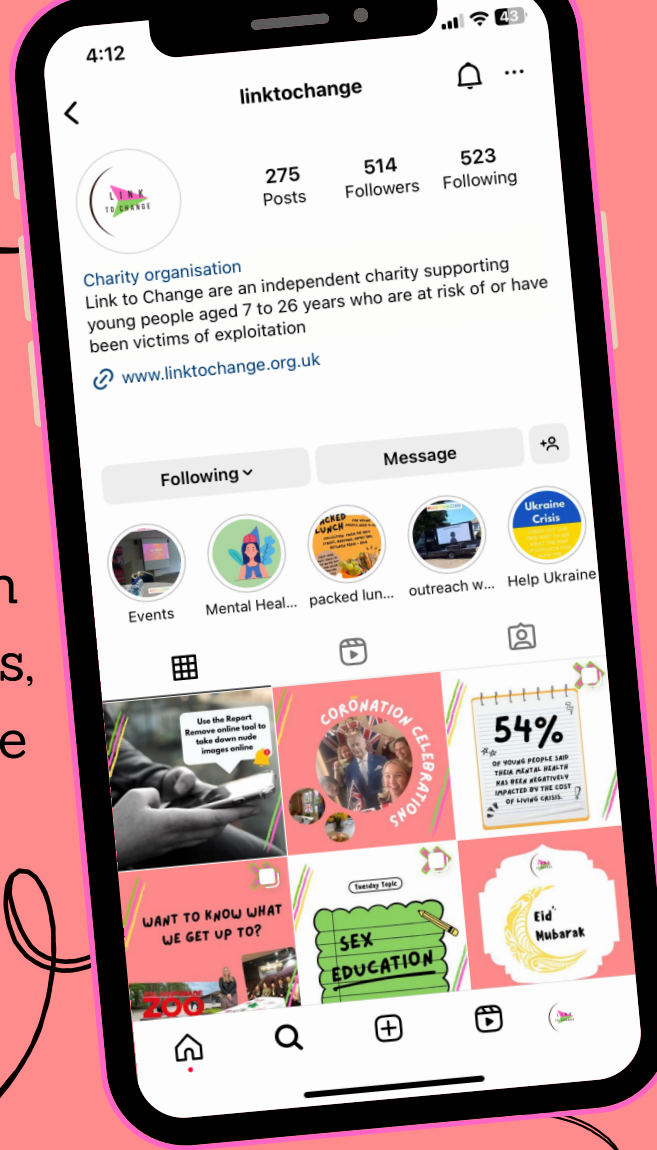
LUSH FRESH
HANDMADE
COSMETICS

Morrisons
Since 1899

TESCO
Community Grants

Social Media

Keep up to date with all our latest activities, support work and the team!



Our Handles:



@LINKTOCHANGE



@LINKTOCHANGE



@LINKTOCHANGE.EXPLOITATION



@LINKTOCHANGE



OUR VISION IS OF A
WORLD WHERE
EVERYONE CAN LIVE
FREE FROM
EXPLOITATION.