



# 2023

# IMPACT REPORT

Join our online community



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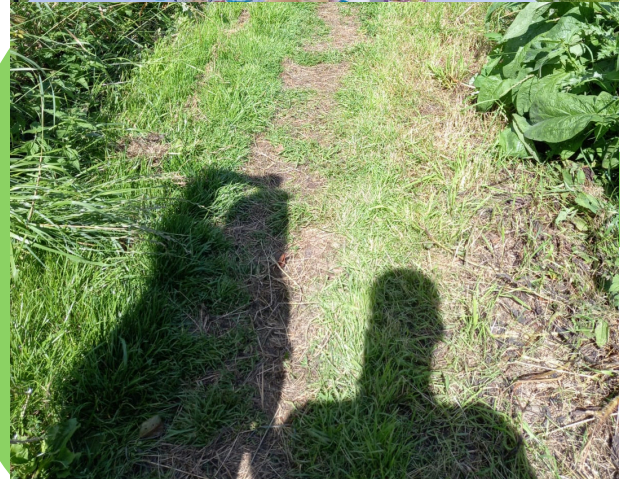
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## A letter from our CEO

I am delighted to present to you our Impact Report for the year 2023, a reflection of our collective efforts, achievements, and the strides we've taken in our mission to protect and empower children and young people against exploitation.

At Link to Change, we are committed in our dedication to championing change and breaking the cycle of exploitation to enable the positive futures of children and young people across Bedfordshire and Luton. In the face of adversity, we stand as advocates for transformation, empowering individuals and communities with the knowledge, skills, and resilience that is desperately needed.

We continue to make a real impact through our services, initiatives, and partnerships to bring about positive change. We believe that by fostering a culture of awareness, critical thinking, education and collaboration, we can effect lasting change - creating a world where every child and young person is free to pursue their dreams without the shadows of exploitation.

To my amazing team, thank you. Your dedication and support have fuelled our mission.

Thank you to our amazing funders, supporters and Board of Directors for your kindness and generosity and most of all in believing in our vision and our services in order to help us to enable change.

As we celebrate our achievements, we are also mindful of the challenges that lie ahead. The fight against exploitation is ongoing and we continue to see an increase in complexities and referrals, and with that, we renew our commitment to stand at the forefront, advocating for the rights of the most vulnerable among us.

In closing, I want to express my deepest gratitude for your unwavering support. Together, we are writing a story of hope, resilience, and empowerment.

Hayley Brown  
Chief Executive Officer



# Our Year in Numbers




122  
beneficiaries  
allocated and  
supported

1,029  
structured  
sessions   
completed

89  
beneficiaries  
successfully  
closed

13  
groupwork  
programmes  
completed

78  
groupwork  
sessions  
completed

  
583  
children and  
young  
people  
attended  
information  
workshops

## PRESENTING ISSUES

21% child  
criminal  
exploitation

42%  
online  
exploitation  
concerns  


37% child  
sexual  
exploitation

# Our Outcomes

**100%  
STATED THAT  
THE SUPPORT  
MADE A  
DIFFERENCE  
TO  
THEIR LIFE**

**97%  
EXITED A  
LIFE OF  
EXPLOITATION**

**97%  
REDUCTION  
IN RISKS AND  
VULNERABILITIES**

**99%  
ENDED CONTACT  
WITH  
PERPETRATORS  
AND  
INAPPROPRIATE  
FRIENDS**

**100%  
INCREASED  
UNDERSTANDING  
IN SAFE  
RELATIONSHIPS**

**96%  
REDUCTION  
IN PERIODS  
OF MISSING**



# Emerging Issues -

## Cost of Living

### Crisis

**COST OF SUPPORT SESSIONS  
INCREASE: 32%** 

**COST OF RESOURCES  
INCREASE: 47%** 

The cost of living crisis has significantly influenced children and young people's outlook on their futures. As a charity dedicated to serving our community, we are all navigating through challenging times exacerbated by a relentless rise in the cost of living. Over the past year it has become even more apparent that the cost-of-living crisis is causing long-term effects on the wellbeing of children and young people. These increased vulnerabilities have created stronger push and pull factors to exploitation.

**REFERRALS INCREASED:  
183%** 

### CASE STUDY:

Craig resides with his mother and 3 younger siblings in a one-bedroom flat. Craig has been on the edge of exploitation for over a year, having transported and sold cannabis within the local counties. Due to the lack of financial stability within his home, his exploitation has increased to transporting and selling class A drugs, such as heroin. Craig feels responsible in providing support to his family due to the struggles he sees his mother facing.





## CASE STUDY:

After the pandemic Fran became a non-school attender due to anxiety and pressures within the home. Fran was groomed and exploited, resulting in being trafficked across the counties. Fran has desperately tried to 'get out' and has engaged well with our support services, however, she is scared and has been threatened that harm will come to her home. She worries as her family are already struggling with being in debt and managing to cope with daily life.

**34% OF 16 -25  
YEAR-OLDS SAY THE  
COST OF LIVING  
CRISIS HAS MADE  
THEIR MENTAL  
HEALTH MUCH  
WORSE**

**36% SAY THEY  
ARE MORE  
LONELY AS THEY  
REDUCE THEIR  
SOCIAL LIFE TO  
SAVE MONEY**

**49% OF 16-25  
YEAR-OLDS IN THE UK  
THINK THE COST OF  
LIVING CRISIS HAS  
HAD A WORSE IMPACT  
ON THEIR LIFE THAN  
THE PANDEMIC**

The families of our children and young people are struggling to provide food, childcare and clothing. Families are struggling to live and eat due to the increase in prices of food, utilities and a reduction in income.

As we aim to confront these escalating challenges, we remain committed to supporting the most vulnerable members of our community. Through collaboration, innovation, and unwavering dedication, we strive to lighten the burdens placed on families and safeguard the futures of our children and young people.





# OUR WORK

## CHOICE

PREVENTATIVE

Our early intervention initiatives work with children and young people at risk of exploitation. Supporting those with problematic friendships, or family entanglements with gangs or exploitation networks, behaviour changes with gangs or exploitation networks, behaviour changes or vulnerabilities.

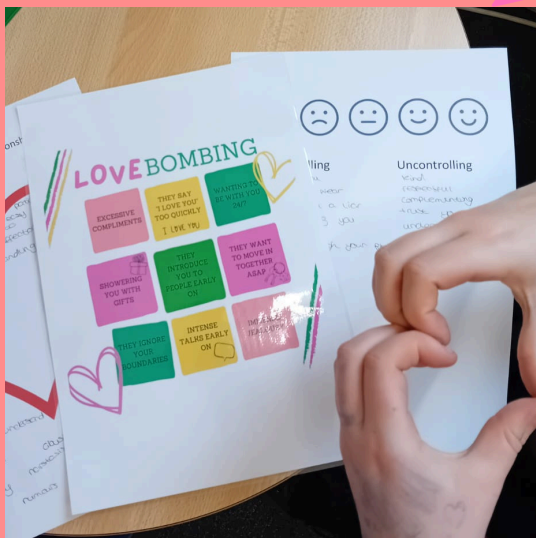
Through Choice, we empower young people with educational resources and critical thinking abilities, equipping them to make healthy, safe, and well-informed choices.

- 121 solutions focussed support.
- Targeted groupwork programmes.
- Information workshops.
- Community outreach.
- Drop-in's.

"I'M HAPPY TO WORK WITH THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT WHAT THEY DO. YOU SEE ME EVERY WEEK SO YOU OBVIOUSLY DO"

"I'VE ENJOYED YOU COMING IN TO TEACH US THINGS NO ONE ELSE DOES"

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE RECEIVED 121 SUPPORT



407

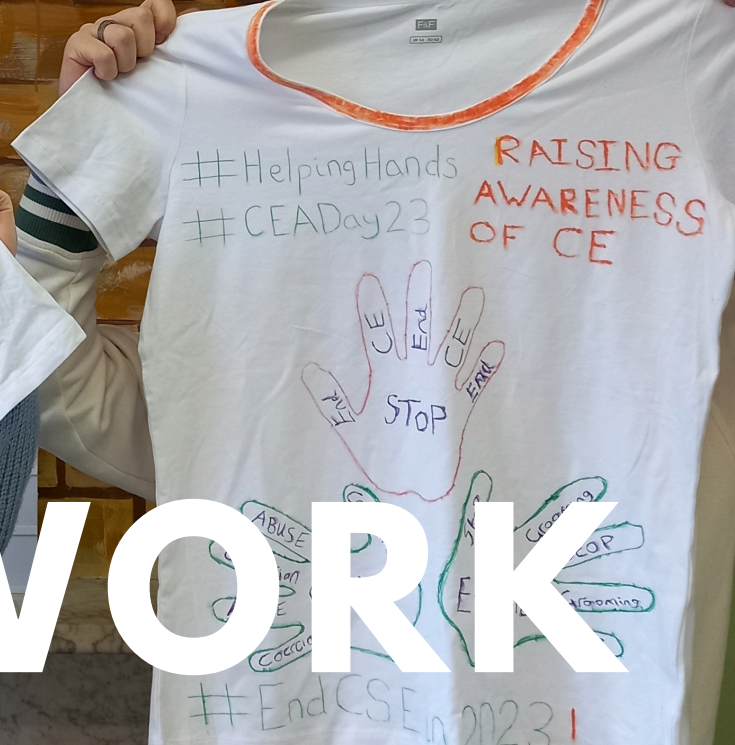
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WERE INVOLVED IN TARGETED GROUPWORK

78 COMPLETED GROUPWORK SESSIONS

OUR CHOICE FUNDERS FOR 2023 WERE:







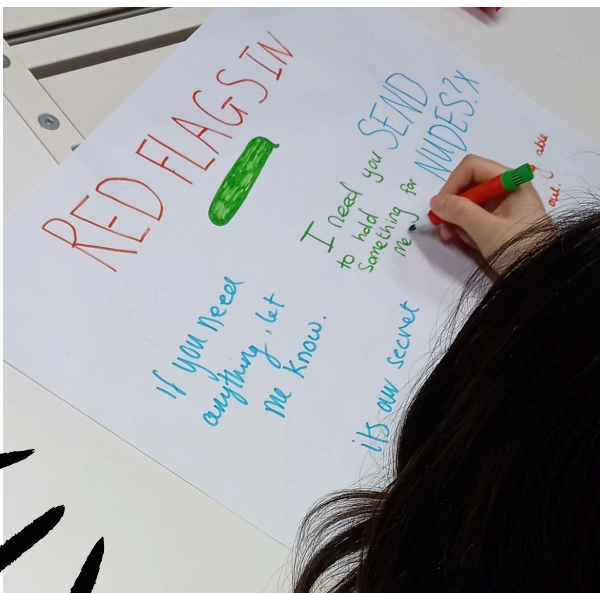
# OUR WORK

## CHALLENGE

Our individualised, trauma-informed support operates on a long-term basis, allowing children and young people the time to build a trusted relationship with their practitioner. This is important in ensuring we provide the best possible support, to allow the child or young person to feel heard, seen and fully supported. Our support often continues after all other services involved with them have finished.

We Challenge the cycle of exploitation by providing long-term support to build the wellbeing and resilience of children and young people who have suffered exploitation.

### CYCLE OF EXPLOITATION



"I CAN SPEAK IN MY OWN WORDS AND BE UNDERSTOOD"

**407**  
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WERE INVOLVED IN TARGETED GROUPWORK

"I DON'T KNOW WHERE I WOULD BE TODAY WITHOUT YOUR SUPPORT"

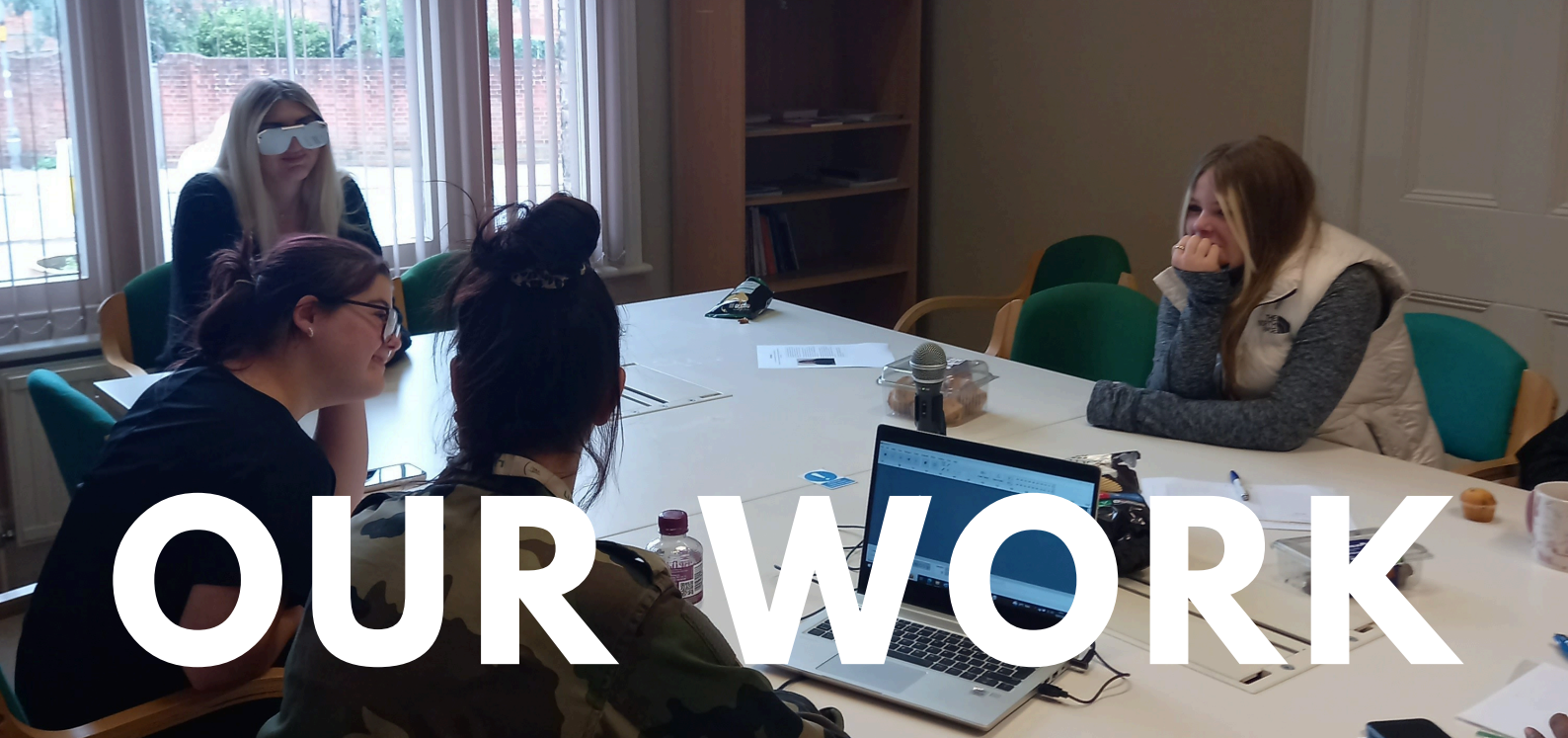
"YOU HAVE LITERALLY SAVED MY LIFE"

**126**  
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE RECEIVED 121 SUPPORT

**78**  
COMPLETED GROUPWORK SESSIONS

**OUR CHALLENGE FUNDERS FOR 2023 WERE:**





# OUR WORK

## CHANGE

## PARTICIPATION

Our participation mission is clear- encourage young minds to express themselves, stand up, and be heard.

We Change the lives of children and young people who have been exploited, returning power to them by working with and supporting them to rebuild their sense of self, heal from the abuse they have suffered and educate them to use their experience to support others and make change.



**"We need others to learn from our experiences so the same doesn't happen to them."**

**OUR CHANGE FUNDERS FOR 2023 WERE:**





This year our participation group started their podcast "Learning through Communication." From designing their logo, to producing content and writing scripts, the group set out to interview their first guest Mia Tomlinson from Central Bedfordshire Local Authority.

Other activities included:

- Consultation on the Bedfordshire Child Exploitation Toolkit.
- Meeting with the Board of Trustees.
- Co-delivering on Power to Parents Workshop.
- Attending Conferences.
- Samworth Foundation Young Voices Event.



13.09.23

Learning through communication podcast with special guest, Mia Tomlinson.

## Hayley Brown, CEO

We are keen to be the drivers of positive change, to provide lasting and systemic change for a better community and beyond. We firmly believe that this is only possible when we listen to the voice of our youth, which is why the input of our children and young people remains at the heart of all that we do.



LTC's Youth Empowerment Project with special guest, JP from Boxing Saves Lives. 27.10.23





# OUR WORK

## CHANGE

### PARTICIPATION

In October we held our first ever two day **Youth Empowerment Event**, which allowed us to witness the incredible power of **young voices** and the spark of **creativity**. From music production to arts and crafts to sharing input on current **issues**, our children and young people were able to use their **voices** to participate freely **without judgement**.

Thank you to The Skill Lab and Boxing Saves Lives for their support at the event.



As part of March's National Exploitation Awareness Day the group created a helping hands canvas. The canvas served as a platform for team members to express their commitments to safeguarding young people from exploitation.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TAKING PART IN PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES: **22**

NUMBER OF CAMPAIGNS: **4**

NUMBER OF AWARENESS RAISING WORKSHOPS: **38**



# Katie's

# Story\*

\*NAME AND SOME DETAILS  
CHANGED TO PROTECT YOUNG  
PERSON'S IDENTITY

Katie was referred to Link to Change by social care, as there were substantial concerns around the risk of CSE. At the age of 14, Katie was found in a trap house with drugs, firearms and older men.

On the initial visit with Link to Change the practitioner explained their role in detail and talked about confidentiality and consent.

At the beginning of 121 sessions Katie was reluctant to engage and it took time to build a rapport and trust.

Katie had little understanding of exploitation and the risks around her. She spent time talking with her practitioner about topics including: self-esteem, consent and healthy relationships. Katie continues to engage positively with Link to Change, and in the last six months has shown huge improvements across a range of aspects, including home, life, education and behaviour.

Katie has been closed by social care and is to be reviewed in three months by her allocated social worker. There has been no further missing episodes or sightings since being referred to Link to Change, and Katie continues to engage very well with both social care and Link to Change.



# Project

# Spotlight

Our BBC Children in Need Boys and Young Men project, focuses on supporting those who are victims of Child Exploitation.

The project is designed to help boys and young men develop the awareness, skills and confidence, to empower them to make safe and healthy choices.

The primary service delivered is 121 support, in which we offer holistic open-ended support tailored to the needs of the children and young people. We also deliver targeted group work, in the form of a co-produced 6 week programme.

We engage the boys and young men in positive diversion activities to increase their wellbeing and assist them in living a life free from exploitation.

**87** BOYS & YOUNG MEN  
SUPPORTED OVERALL

## CASE STUDY:

Lewis was a frequently missing young person with a history of self-harm and substance misuse. It was feared that due to his vulnerabilities that he was being sexually exploited by older men and that his friendship circle was toxic.

At the time of closure, Lewis was no longer going missing, was receiving support from CAMHS and the local substance misuse team. Lewis also enrolled in college, and is living semi-independently. We continue to have regular contact with Lewis as an active member of our participation group.

# Project

# Spotlight

Many of the boys and young men we support through this project are not in full time education and are experiencing concerns around their mental wellbeing. They have been disadvantaged due to their social environment, economic background, family dynamics and/or other influencing factors.

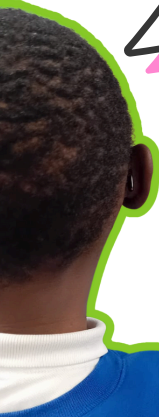
Despite this we have seen positive behaviour changes, increased engagement with other services and increased educational aspirations, improved family relations, reduced missing episodes and offending behaviour. Many of the boys and young men we support have worked to actively withdraw from negative peer influences and sought pathways to change their environment for the better.



AS MY EMOTIONS AFFECT ME FROM THE PAST,

I DO MY BEST TO DO THE RIGHT THING AND LIVE LIFE AND GET THE DREAMS THAT I WANT. WITH THE BAD DECISIONS I AM NOT PROUD OF,

I WOULD NOW LIKE TO CHANGE MY LIFE AROUND AND DON'T WANT TO BE INVOLVED IN MAKING NEGATIVE DECISIONS.




Never feel two friends at a time

**39**

**BOYS & YOUNG MEN  
RECEIVED 121  
SUPPORT**

**48**  
**BOYS & YOUNG MEN  
TOOK PART IN  
TARGETED GROUPWORK  
PROGRAMMES**



SINCE COMING TO THESE SESSIONS, I UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS.

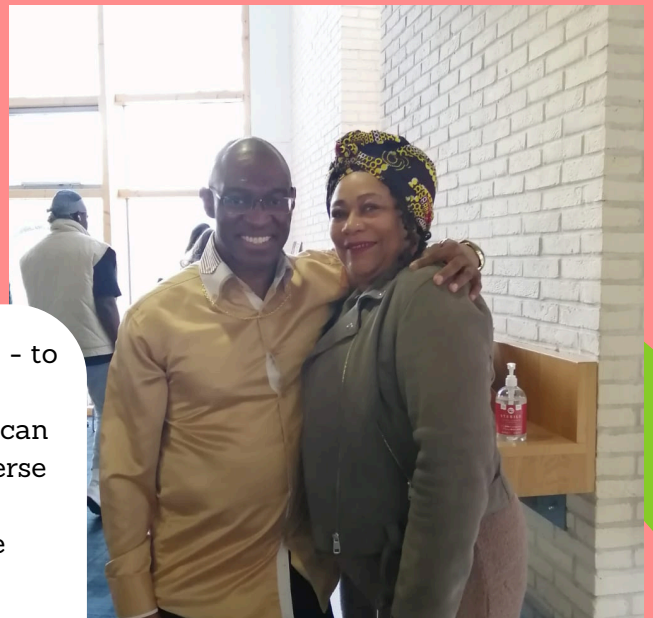




# Collaborative working

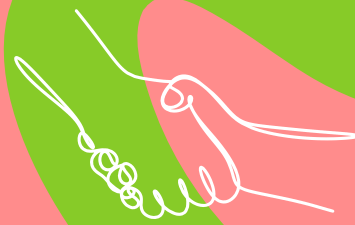
Collaboration is a crucial part of Link to Change's mission - to combat exploitation. Given the complex and multifaceted nature of exploitation, no single organisation or approach can address it comprehensively. By collaborating with our diverse range of partners including: voluntary services, CIC's, community leaders and statutory services, Link to Change can leverage a broad range of expertise, resources, and perspectives.

Our collaborative effort not only enhances the effectiveness of our interventions but also ensures that our approaches are holistic, sustainable, and tailored to the specific needs of communities. Furthermore, collaboration fosters information sharing, coordination of services, and the development of best practices, enabling Link to Change to stay responsive in the face of evolving challenges and create lasting change in the fight against exploitation.



## WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL OF OUR PARTNERS WE HAVE WORKED WITH THIS YEAR, INCLUDING:

- UNIVERSITY OF BEDFORDSHIRE
- BEDFORD COLLEGE GROUP
- NWG NETWORK
- JUNIOR SMART, OBE
- FACES, BEDFORD
- THE SKILL LAB
- BOXING SAVES LIVES
- BEDFORDSHIRE MENTAL HEALTH ALLIANCE
- DISCOVERY COLLEGE
- TOKKO
- LUTON YOUTH PARTNERSHIP
- TARGETED YOUTH SERVICE



AS WELL AS OUR STATUTORY PARTNERS WITHIN THE LOCAL AUTHORITY AND POLICE.







**38 DIFFERENT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ATTENDED VARIOUS ACTIVITIES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR**



# Activities

We place a high priority on providing young people with these fun experiences, as they not only cultivate positive memories but also foster the development of self-esteem.



**WE ALSO HELD OUR FIRST TWO DAY YOUTH EVENT WITH OUR PARTICIPATION GROUP WHICH INCLUDED DJ'ING, SINGING, DANCING AND ARTS AND CRAFTS!**

**YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE LOVED ATTENDING THIS YEARS ACTIVITIES WHICH HAVE INCLUDED: BOWLING, NINJA WARRIOR, CINEMA AND LINK TO CHEF**





# In the Media

## BSIFF Charity Film Awards Finalist



In October Link to Change were nominated as a finalist for the 2023 Big Syn International Film Festival, the world's biggest sustainability film festival. In November Services Manager, Amy Archer attended along with Broné Kenningham, Communications and Fundraising Co-Ordinator. It was a great opportunity to watch the vital work carried out by a range of charities, whilst finding out more about the extraordinary impact they continue to make.

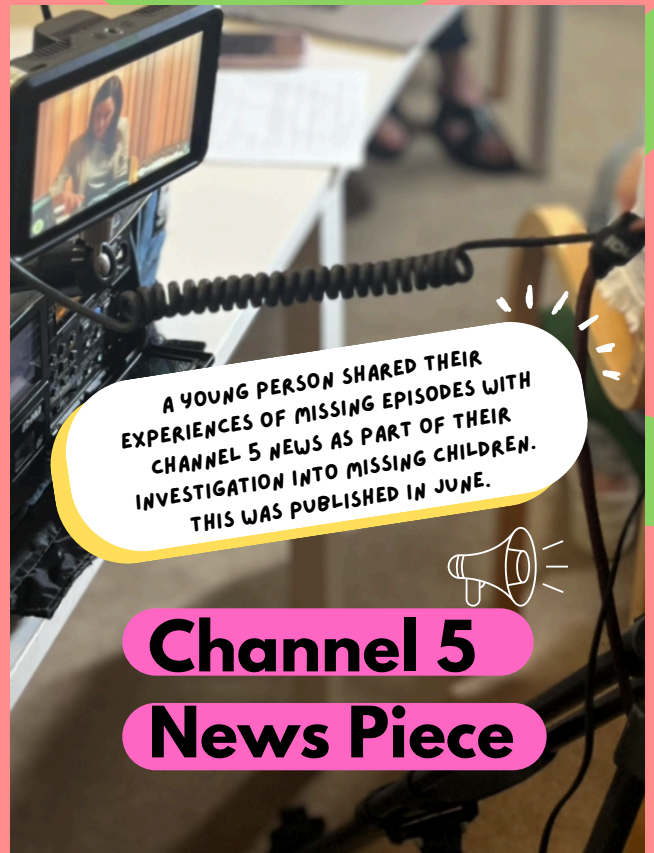


Channel 5 News    
@5\_News

Our #5news investigation into missing children.

We found authorities failed to conduct Return Home Interviews in nearly half of runaway cases last year. And charities say this is putting children at risk.

[@tessa5news](#) | [@childrensociety](#)  
[@SynergyFosterin](#) | [@LinkToChange](#)



A YOUNG PERSON SHARED THEIR EXPERIENCES OF MISSING EPISODES WITH CHANNEL 5 NEWS AS PART OF THEIR INVESTIGATION INTO MISSING CHILDREN. THIS WAS PUBLISHED IN JUNE.

**Channel 5  
News Piece**



HAYLEY STARTED HER PODCAST JOURNEY THIS YEAR - BUMBLEEBEES AND CUPS OF TEA! THE EPISODES ARE FULL OF WHIMSY, PASSION AND UNIQUE STORIES.



**Bumblebees  
& Cups of Tea**



# Achievements



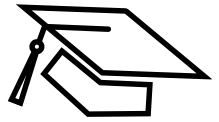
BEKKI FENSOME, SPECIALIST EXPLOITATION PRACTITIONER IS DUE TO COMPLETE HER LEVEL 4 DIPLOMA IN ISVA TRAINING. ISVAS ARE TRAINED TO WORK WITH SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE, AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE TO ENSURE THAT THEY RECEIVE CARE AND UNDERSTANDING.

IN 2023, WE'VE CELEBRATED NUMEROUS ACHIEVEMENTS, HERE ARE SOME OF OUR HIGHLIGHTS...



Link to Change became members of the Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce - allowing us to: connect with other local charities and businesses, build on our network, and expand our reach across the community.

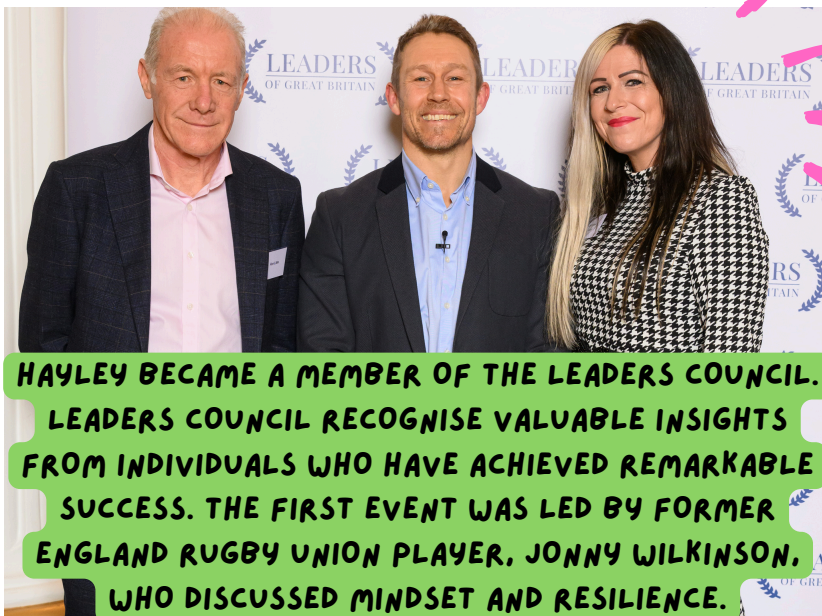
HAYLEY ACHIEVED A DISTINCTION FOR HER MBA, FURTHER DEMONSTRATING HER EXPERTISE IN LEADERSHIP IN THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR, STRATEGIC PLANNING, CONSULTANCY, FUNDRAISING, AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT.



WE BECAME PARTNERS OF THE BEDFORDSHIRE MENTAL HEALTH ALLIANCE, WHICH RECOGNISES THE VALUE OF THE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT OFFERED TO LOCAL PEOPLE IN BEDFORD AND CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE.



In May we were awarded with Level 1 accreditation for NCVO, gaining the Trusted Charity Mark.



HAYLEY BECAME A MEMBER OF THE LEADERS COUNCIL. LEADERS COUNCIL RECOGNISE VALUABLE INSIGHTS FROM INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE ACHIEVED REMARKABLE SUCCESS. THE FIRST EVENT WAS LED BY FORMER ENGLAND RUGBY UNION PLAYER, JONNY WILKINSON, WHO DISCUSSED MINDSET AND RESILIENCE.

## TRUSTED STANDARD

# LEVEL 1



Awarded 2023



# Our Supporters

At Link to Change we rely on the generosity of charitable bodies, trusts and grants to help us combat exploitation against children and young people. Thank you to all our supporters who empower us to create lasting change and protect those most vulnerable.

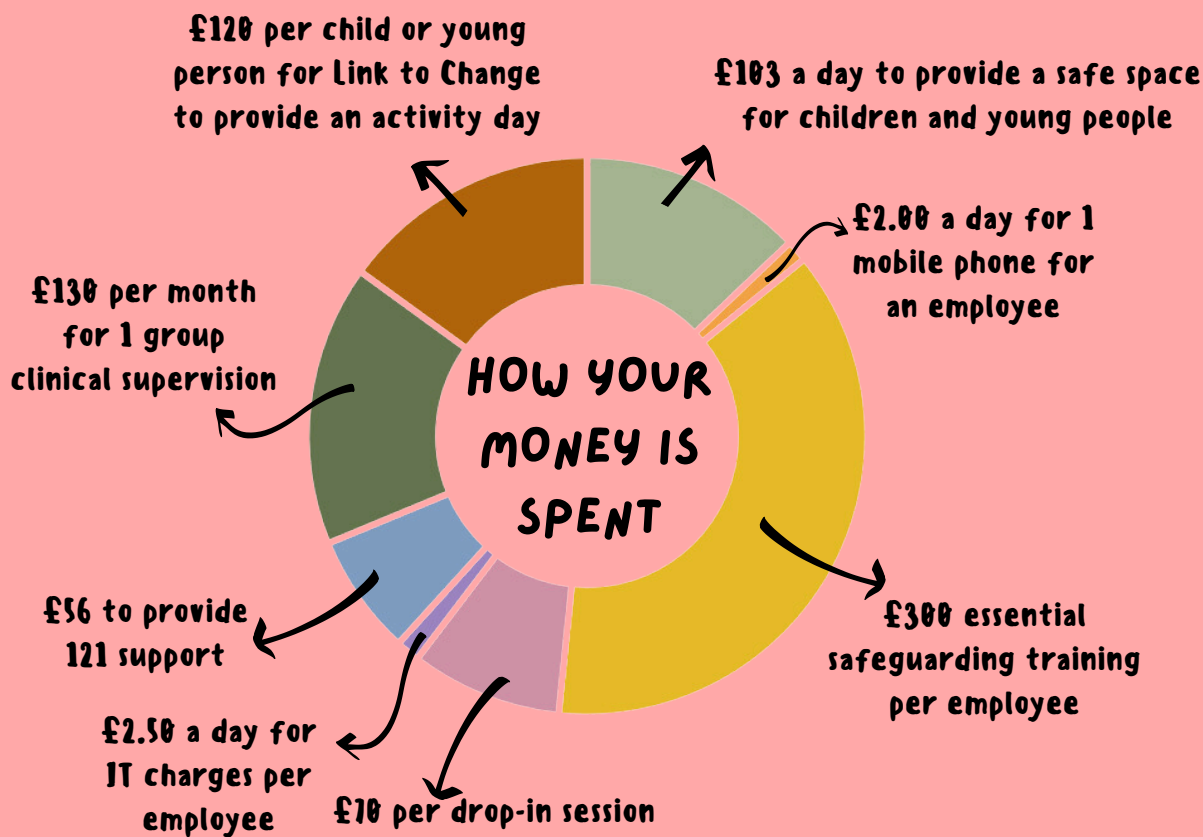
Your generosity is the driving force behind our mission.

OUR THANKS TO...



# Support our work

Each year, we require **£450,000** to sustain our operations and maintain the essential services we offer. These funds are crucial for us to keep our doors open, reach those in need, and make a meaningful difference to the lives of children and young people.



With **your support** we become one step closer to breaking the cycle of exploitation for children and young people. You can help us to continue to provide **vital work** by donating through:



Just Giving



Give as you Live



Fundraising



Gifts



Corporate Funding

Donate here



Scan our QR code to donate today; your support, no matter how big or small allows us to make positive, impactful and lasting change.





**LINK  
TO CHANGE**

**Choice. Challenge. Change.**

Supporting Children and Young People affected by Child Exploitation in Bedfordshire & Luton

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www.linktochange.org.uk



**Link to Change is not just a charity:  
we are agents of hope, resilience, and impactful change, dedicated to building a brighter, more equitable future for our children and young people.**



**OUR VISION IS  
CLEAR: A WORLD  
WHERE EVERYONE  
CAN LIVE FREE FROM  
EXPLOITATION**

*Check out our socials*



[www.linktochange.org.uk](http://www.linktochange.org.uk)