# Human Trafficking and Exploitation Case Studies for Local Authorities

These case studies are adapted from the Scottish Government’s consultation on the Strategy to tackle trafficking and exploitation.[[1]](#footnote-2)

We’ve annotated the case studies to highlight the complex and multi-faceted nature of trafficking and exploitation in Scotland today, with particular attention to the role of the local authority or local authorities involved.

Annotations are colour coded in reference to the following questions:

What were the signs?

What form of trafficking or exploitation took place?

What did the local authority do?

What partnerships were in operation?

If you are running an awareness raising session for staff, these questions might be useful to consider when looking at case studies to help participants contextualise and apply their learning.

All of the cases are real life examples, with identifying details and names changed.

## Precious, aged 19

Precious, 19, is from West Africa and was trafficked for domestic servitude and prostitution (…) Precious was trafficked for domestic servitude twice before she was ten and after trying to escape on several occasions she was groomed by a woman who eventually would traffick her to the UK. Precious said:

Every aspect of victims’ life can be controlled by perpetrators – even their appearance. Tattoos, for example, can be used to ‘mark’ victims.

“The woman who sent me to the UK made me get my eyebrows and a beauty spot tattooed on my face to make me look older. I was then escorted to the airport and then travelled alone to the UK…

“I was told I would need to do prostitution for three years in order to pay off my debt so after this I was taken by the traffickers to parties and clubs across the UK including London, Manchester and Glasgow…

“One day I managed to escape the house in Glasgow and get help from the police where I disclosed my real age. The police put me in touch with TARA who provided me with a place of safety and also helped me get access to (support) and social services. Thankfully I now live independently with my children (and) I’m in a healthy relationship and I hope one day to be able to return to education.”

## Operation Heathyard – West Lothian 2nd December 2016

Led by officers in West Lothian and supported by partners including West Lothian Council, National Crime Agency and Greater Manchester Police. The operation involved males from Slovenia being trafficked for the purposes of labour exploitation and forced criminality.

Effective inter-agency partnership working.

Traffickers may move their victims frequently to avoid being caught. There is no need for movement or travel to have occurred for human trafficking or exploitation to have taken place.

Four Slovenian nationals were arrested at addresses in Livingston, Bathgate and Salford and were charged with human trafficking offences. A reception centre was established by the National Human Trafficking Unit, Migrant Help and NCA Victim Team.

## Operation Acervose – Monday 15th May 2017

A further multi-agency action day to raise awareness of human trafficking and to identify and recover potential trafficking victims was conducted. Around 500 officers including 50 from partner agencies visited 80 premises and locations in all 13 geographical divisions of Scotland including fisheries, car washes and nail bars. This formed part of a National Crime Agency coordinated, ongoing response to the threat of modern slavery and human trafficking across the UK. During the multiagency operation a child aged 15, who displayed indicators of trafficking, was found working in a nail bar. Police Scotland officers were supported by colleagues from HM Revenue and Customs, Immigration Enforcement, British Transport Police and the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority.

These crimes took place in plain sight in many of the services we use daily.

An example of the value of local authorities’ investigatory and enforcement powers to identify victims disrupt criminal activity

## Multi Agency Working: Police & TARA in Aberdeenshire and surrounding local authorities

Engagement by Police and TARA with the local authorities during February 2018 has heightened the awareness of partners locally, in terms of the requirements to identify instances of Human Trafficking and provide support to victims. This interaction resulted in front page local press coverage of the efforts being directed at tackling Human Trafficking (Press and Journal - Feb 20th 2018), which in turn has increased public awareness of the issues. The article referred to the safeguarding of a victim and appearance at court of 2 males, as a result of a Police investigation in Elgin.

Human Trafficking frequently occurs across local authority boundaries, therefore regional partnership working is vital.

## Multi Agency Working: Police, Modern Slavery Helpline & Social Work in Glasgow

The Modern Slavery team received a call at their HQ to state that a female possibly under 18 was being sexually exploited within a flat in Glasgow and there was concerns about her. As per protocol arrangements with the Modern Slavery helpline they contacted Police Scotland who were able to task this out to the division and identify the block of flats and thereafter the flat position with some good investigative police work. Police attended and rescued an 18 year old female in a flat who was being sexually exploited, she provided a statement to the police, she was also babysitting and looking after a five year old child who was the traffickers child who subsequently arrived at the flat a short time later and were arrested. (…) Care packages were provided to the 18 year old female victim by TARA and local services provided by Glasgow Social work provided a care package to the child of the traffickers. A great example of multiagency partnership working that rescued two victims.

This crime took place behind closed doors. In this case study the police undertook the investigations, but local authority housing staff who do home visits may also spot the signs of human trafficking and exploitation by spotting environmental and physical signs.

Local authority safeguarding services were crucial in providing support in tandem with NRM provision.

## Multiagency Working—Aberdeen

On 26 June 2018, Police Scotland's Human Trafficking Champion in A Division took part in a multi-agency conference in Aberdeen, aimed at improving the identification and support for victims in the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire area. The event was organised by a solicitor within the Civil Legal Assistance Office in Aberdeen and involved inputs from Police Scotland, COSLA, JustRight Scotland, TARA and Migrant Help. The event provided a platform for discussing various issues in relation to Action Area 1 of the Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy, resulting in an increased awareness of key issues amongst partners and an opportunity to enhance local practices to ensure that victims of Human Trafficking are appropriately protected.

A regional multi-agency approach was one of the keys to the success of this event. You might consider putting on a similar event in your region.

## Suzanne, aged 14

Suzanne is 14 years old and is from a country in Africa. She first came to the attention of social work when she tried to enrol in a local school. She was accompanied by her uncle who told teachers that she had come to live with him and his wife. School staff alerted social work as Suzanne was poorly dressed, spoke very little English and did not have any documents with her proving her identity.

These are very commonly reported signs of human trafficking and exploitation.

Here, local authority school staff first raised concerns.

In this case study, local authority services led on identifying the victim, referring to the NRM and providing the necessary support.

During an initial meeting with a social worker, Suzanne was accompanied by her uncle and aunt who spoke very good English and helped her to explain her story. She tells her social worker that she had been brought to the UK by an older man from her village. He had kept her in a house somewhere in England for several weeks and was 'bad' to her. She became upset and did not say much more. Her aunt explained that her family had paid for Suzanne to come to the UK to get a better life and that she could now live with her and her three young children. Her main priority is Suzanne getting enrolled in a local school so that she can learn English.

Social work paid a home visit and find that the home is clean although overcrowded but Suzanne's cousins seem well and happy. However Suzanne was sharing a room with two younger children and still appeared withdrawn. She once again became upset when the social worker asked her about her time in England. Suzanne did not appear to have any immigration paperwork and seemed uncertain about her current immigration status. She voiced concerns that she did not know for sure if the people she was living with were actually her relatives as the last time she saw her uncle was when she was only 5 years old.

Local authority staff were able to spot the potential signs of trafficking when they made a home visit.

Spot the signs – the child was emotional and withdrawn, and the house was overcrowded. She was also unsure about her immigration status and the identify of who she was living with.

Several months later, Suzanne presented to social work and told them that her relationship with her uncle and aunt had broken down and that she was afraid to go back to the house. Suzanne was accommodated in a children's unit where she disclosed that the man who originally brought her to the UK was someone she met in her home country and he had promised to help her. When she arrived in the UK he had sexually abused her while she was staying with him.

Suzanne was identified as a victim of trafficking and was granted Refugee Status. Despite now having refugee status, Suzanne remains vulnerable to exploitation particularly as the circumstances of her arrival in Scotland, and the extent or otherwise to which her 'family' were aware of the trafficking, remain unclear.

Suzanne is currently living with a foster carer and is benefitting from having a nurturing and safe environment. She is attending school and is progressing well.

## Sam, aged 17

Sam is from Asia and has recently been detained in a Young Offenders' Institution (YOI) and charged with crimes relating to cannabis cultivation. As Sam is seventeen years old and is subject to immigration control, the Police also made a child protection referral to the local Social Work team.

Victims may be forced to commit crimes by their perpetrators, but if there is a conclusive decision that human trafficking and exploitation took place the victim benefits from presumption against prosecution.

Sam was apprehended during a raid on a cannabis factory in a small rural community where he had been living in cramped and unsanitary conditions. When he was found, Sam told the Police that he hadn't eaten that day and that he had been beaten by his employer the previous week after he tried to leave the house.

During a police interview, Sam explained that he was watering cannabis plants in order to repay a debt to the people who had brought him to the UK. He told them that he cannot return to his home country as he still owes those people money and would not be safe in his home village. Sam stated that he was seventeen but seems unsure of his birth date and does not have any identity documents. He spoke limited English but YOI staff sourced a local interpreter.

There are some commonly reported signs here.

Sam was later released on bail pending trial to an address provided by social work. The address was in a homeless hostel in a small rural town near to where he had been working.

Hostel staff subsequently told Sam's social worker that he had an expensive new mobile phone and had recently bought some new clothes. He said that a friend had lent him some money for these purchases but when he was questioned further about his 'friend' he became agitated and used his lack of English to avoid answering the question stating that 'I do not understand'.

It’s a commonly held myth that victims will actively engage with agencies who are trying to help them. The impact of cumulative trauma and coercive control can lead to people believing they cannot escape, they may fear reprisals, them may have ‘trauma’ bonded to the perpetrators or the fear of the unknown may prevent attempts.

Four days after his release from the YOI, Sam was seen in the morning leaving the hostel and he did not return. The police were contacted and he was reported as a missing child but his whereabouts remain unknown.

## Jaroslava

Jaroslava is Roma and comes from Eastern Europe. She came to the UK to work and find a better life for herself. However, on arrival she was exploited in prostitution by her traffickers.

She eventually managed to escape and travelled to Glasgow where she went to the Hamish Allan Centre – Glasgow City Council’s homeless services reception centre. There she was able to rest for the night and the next day she met with one of their staff who suspected Jaroslava was a victim of trafficking and exploitation, and referred her to TARA. TARA found her a safe place to stay, took her to the doctor and gave her money to buy food and a phone. They also helped her find some work experience and attend an ESOL class to learn English as a second language. Eventually, they helped her make preparations to return to her home country.

A local authority staff member knew the signs of human trafficking and exploitation, and made the referral that led to Jaroslava receiving the support she needed. Local authority services such as ESOL were also a key part in helping her rebuild her life.

1. <https://consult.gov.scot/human-trafficking-team/a-human-trafficking-and-exploitation-strategy/supporting_documents/683633_v2_20161007.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)