

# Safety Net

– because sometimes friends may  
not be what they seem

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decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.



# Background



- In 2006 Steven Hoskin was abused, tortured and finally killed by people who he thought were his friends.
- ‘The term ‘disability hate crime’ fails to recognise the duration of Steven’s contact with his persecutors; the counterfeit friendship’
- *Steven Hoskin Serious Care Review* (2007)

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# Introduction



‘Steven wanted friends. He did not see that the friendship he had so prized was starkly exploitative, devoid of reciprocity and instrumental in obstructing his relationships with those who would have safeguarded him.’

- *Steven Hoskin Serious Care Review (2007)*



# What is 'mate crime'?

- Mate Crime happens when a person with a learning disability is 'befriended' by someone who goes on to abuse or exploit that relationship. This has led to people with learning disabilities being ripped off, sexually abused, groomed for criminal offences, even murdered.
- When we look at the high profile cases [of disability hate crime], there is an element of befriending or knowing the offenders who abuse the friendship, which is an extra dimension which doesn't often occur with other types of hate crime.”

(ACPO) Scope website Feb 2009

Inspector Paul Gianassi

# What sort of abuse does 'mate crime' involve?



- Mate crime does not start with abuse or bullying, it starts with someone 'making friends' with a person with a learning disability.
- However, it can go on to include most of the categories of abuse detailed in 'No Secrets' (Dept of Health 2000)

# Examples of 'mate crime'



- Someone with autism was befriended by a man at a football club in the Midlands at which they were both volunteers.
- The man persuaded him to take out a loan for £3,000 which he then stole

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# Examples of 'mate crime'



- A woman with learning disabilities has been 'pimped out' (sent to work as a prostitute) by her boyfriend
- A man was invited to go for a drive with some 'friends' who then charged him an excessive amount for petrol money
- A man with learning disabilities was befriended by a local alcoholic and has now made him the sole beneficiary of his will

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# Examples of 'mate crime'



- A man proposing marriage to a woman with learning disabilities and asking her for money to save for their wedding.
- It was found that the man had proposed to a number of women and was making a good living from these 'savings'

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# What makes mate crime different?

## Duration of contact



- Most hate crimes are thought of as being perpetrated by strangers on a one-off basis, often in a public situation (for example, name calling or throwing objects on a bus)
- Mate crimes take place within established relationships. Steven Hoskin had known his murderers for 18 months prior to his murder.

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# What makes mate crime different?



## It may appear consensual

- The relationship, and even the abuse, might have been invited by the person with a learning disability, raising issues of mental capacity, consent and (informed) choice

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# What makes mate crime different?

It is often not recognised by

victim

**BEST BUDDIES**



- People may well not realise that they are being abused or exploited, and even if they do the relationship may be more important to them than any abuse that takes place within it. The abuser may be the victim's only 'friend'

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# What makes 'mate crime' different?

## May not be illegal



- We have many examples of people with learning disabilities regularly meeting a group of friends for a few beers. This sounds fine, but it's always at the expense of the person with a learning disability - always their flat, their beer, their food, etc.. This is clearly abusive, but not illegal.

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# What makes mate crime different?

## It largely affects people not in the system



- It is worth remembering that 9 out of 10 people with a learning disability do not receive services from the state. These people are often living in vulnerable situations with little support. These are the people who are most likely to be targeted for mate crime.

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# Why do you think people with learning disabilities are especially vulnerable to incidents of 'mate crime'?

Spend 5 minutes thinking of some reasons before clicking on the next

slide





# Need for friendships

- Everyone needs friends and to find a place in a community or communities. People with learning disabilities, for a variety of reasons, often struggle to make friendships, and to be accepted in their communities.
- This makes it more likely that any offer of 'friendship' will be accepted, and that people will be far less likely to end a friendship, even when it seems as though it has become dysfunctional. Any friend is better than no friend at all.

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# Learned compliance

- People with learning disabilities have been ‘trained’ to do what they are told to do or what is expected of them, and to give the answer that a questioner wants. This is the result of life experience in which people have been ‘punished’ in a variety of ways for not doing what a service or society expects of them.
- This is called ‘learned compliance’

# Lack of experience

- People with learning disabilities have often been very sheltered from normal community life and are, therefore, lacking in experience and often naive.
- This can include a limited understanding of what real friendship is, and what it involves (for example reciprocity).



# Vulnerable situations

- Increasingly, and for very good reasons, people with learning disabilities are living independently in the community with reduced support from services.
- This can lead to isolation and make people more vulnerable to offers of ‘counterfeit friendship’.
- This is ‘situational vulnerability’ not personal

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# Attitude of society

- Historical social attitudes towards disability have left people feeling worthless, despised and without human rights.
- This has two effects:
  - i) it makes it easier for perpetrators to justify what they do, to themselves and others, as their victim doesn't really matter
  - ii) the legacy of the historical attitude has left a subconscious attitude with carers - that such treatment of disabled people is inevitable, perhaps even deserved. This often means that no action is taken or the victim themselves blamed
- (Typical phrases are 'Just ignore it.' or 'Don't go into that shop then.')

# How can you tell when a mate crime is happening?

- It is important to identify when it is happening early, as if not stopped the abuse is likely to be repeated and to become more serious. As we have seen, this can even lead to murder if the warning signs are not reported, shared and acted upon.
- There will often be the same indicators as for other kinds of abuse.
- Some examples are on the next slide.

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# Examples of indicators

- Unexplained injuries.
- Being involved in sexual acts to which they cannot consent.
- Weight loss.
- Bills not being paid.
- An overly critical or disrespectful friend who may bully or undermine.
- Sudden loss of assets, or change of will.
- Deference or submission to a suspected abuser
- Change in behaviour or mood
- Isolation from usual network of friends/family/community
- Accumulation of goods/services bought from sales' staff, including telesales.
- Post party debris on a regular basis.

# More on indicators

- ARC is hosting a meeting to further discuss indicators of Mate Crime in late November 2010. The results will be posted on the Safety Net website when they are ready:

[www.arcsafety.net](http://www.arcsafety.net)

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# Stopping mate crime - prevention

- ***Risk assessment.*** Failure to take steps to safeguard people from abuse or life-threatening events is in breach of the **European Convention on Human Rights**.
- Safeguarding processes must be triggered when someone is believed to be at risk of harm and not only when evidence of harm has become obvious.
- Agencies have to be proactive in undertaking risk assessments to ensure that preventive action is taken.

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# Stopping mate crime - prevention

- ***Be a detective.*** People with learning disabilities, at present, are very unlikely to disclose mate crime. It is up to their peers, family, friends, neighbours, carers and the community to watch for it and to take action, or support the person to do so.



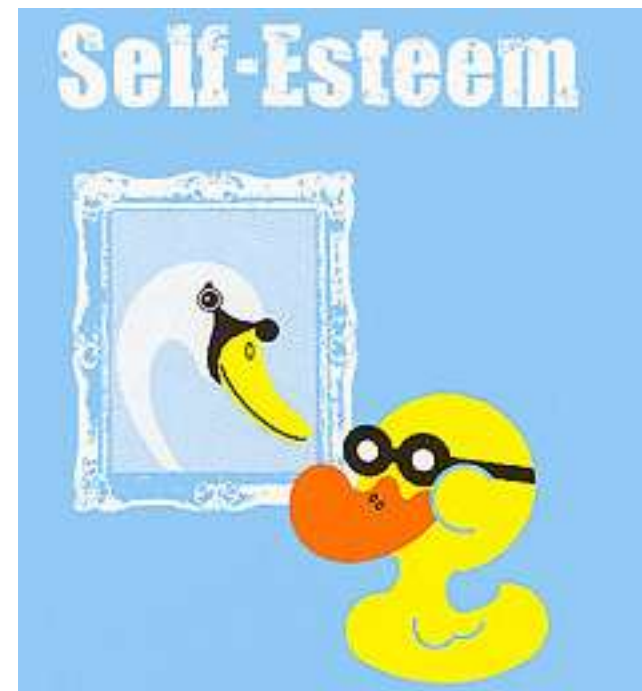
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# Stopping mate crime - prevention

- ***Act on beliefs not evidence.*** Many reviews and inquiries concerning the abuse of people with learning disabilities have concluded that people strongly suspected that abuse was taking place, but were waiting for a last piece of undeniable evidence that never comes.

# Stopping mate crime - prevention

- ***Enhanced self-esteem and relationship skills; creating and supporting social opportunities.***
- These are longer term issues, but the closer people really do get to an ordinary life the more abuse will diminish.



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# Stopping mate crime - prevention

- ***Being part of the neighbourhood.*** People need to reach out to, become a vital part of, and strengthen, their local communities. People who are valued in their communities are less likely to be abused, and abuse is less likely to take place in strong communities.
- Neighbourhood Management Programmes may be able to help.
- Are people in contact with their Neighbourhood Warden (if any)?





# Stopping mate crime - prevention

- ***Tenancy Support Packages.*** If people are in housing provided by Registered Social Landlords can they get a Tenancy Support Package which sees them linking with the third sector, and getting access to outside agencies, support and activities?

# Stopping mate crime - prevention

- **Campaigning.** It's a two way process with the Police. The Police do need to get better at working with people with learning disabilities. However, people with learning disabilities need to help them.
- People need to attend Police surgeries, influencing PACT (Police & Communities Together) priorities, and inviting neighbourhood officers in for a coffee.
- People should let the Police know, for example, that they cannot get on a particular bus without suffering verbal abuse.
- *Campaigning tools (e.g. model PACT letter) are available on the Safety Net website.*

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# Stopping mate crime

- ***Awareness of the Mental Capacity Act 2005***
- Everybody needs to be aware that mental capacity decisions are situation-specific and time-specific.
- Just because someone has capacity in some areas of their life, this does not mean they have capacity in all areas and at all times.



# Stopping mate crime



**STOP HATE CRIME**  
**0800 138 1625**  
**24 HOUR HELP LINE**

- **Reporting** - We need to encourage reporting to ensure that it is given sufficient priority, as well as to ensure that people are protected.
- Tell the Police, tell the Safeguarding Team, Stop Hate if they work in your area, tell lots of people, or support the individual to do so.

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# Stopping mate cr



- **Training.** People with learning disabilities need training in what makes a real friend, how to recognise when someone is taking advantage of them, and what to do about it.
- Safety Net is developing training materials for people with learning disabilities and these will appear on the website in 2011.

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# Safety Net



Find out more at:

[www.arcsafety.net](http://www.arcsafety.net)

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