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**Chief Executive
Brook**

The leading provider of sexual health services, education and outreach for young people under 25 since 1964

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Tommy's plea

- *Don't try and make me better – you can't.*
- *I need help to be able to put myself back together again, you cannot do it for me. Help me do it, or you keep me helpless.*
- *I feel helpless anyway so I really don't need that.*
- *Build me up, make me strong, tell me I can do it. Help me that way.*

About Brook – the young people's sexual health charity

- Sign up to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and involve young people in all we do
- Sexual health specialists – working with vulnerable young people is our skill – we are interested in their talent and creativity
- See 200,000 young people each year - 1500 every day
- Three strands of activity – all inter-related;
 - Sexual health services
 - Education and outreach
 - Campaigning, advocacy and influencing

Young people, sexuality & sexual health in the UK

- Most young people under 16 don't have sex
- Most young people do not get pregnant
- Most want to be good at relationships and sex
- However;
 - Those in public care are more likely to have sex earlier than their peers
 - They are more likely to become pregnant and have the baby, and more likely to have a STI
 - They are more likely to have unsatisfactory and abusive relationships and to be sexually exploited through prostitution

Abby's tale

- *Thrown out by mother who was substance misusing*
- *Wanted to stay in contact, but foster carers decided it was too distressing for her and blocked access*
- *She ran away and lived on streets - sexually exploited*
- *When receiving help she became violent when told she was not to see her pimp*
- *Later established she felt out of control and wanted some agency – her ability to make her decisions*

A summary of the evidence

- Children and young people are often in care because there are issues with relationship, with attachment and intimacy. This is the backdrop to our work
 - Some already vulnerable before being in care
- School is cited as the main source of education about sex – those in care likely to have missed their SRE
- More likely to become pregnant or become a young father – less likely to have the support of their family, and some are fearful of accessing services to get support
- Increased likelihood of sexual exploitation
- Increased likelihood of 'sex as love'

Brain research - attachment

- Early developmental interruptions as a result of poor attachment impact on brain development and relationship with self and others
- Core developmental tasks which we all have to go through to enable us to be functioning competent human beings must be revisited, and needs met if there have been blocks already.

Effective work

- A clear policy framework
- Support and training for foster carers and professionals
- Love, care and lots of attention – understanding of emotional and social development – get the building blocks in place
- Involvement, participation and peer support
- A focus on strengths, good things, the achievements and the resilience
- Opportunities, challenge and new experiences – be brain growers

Have high expectations

- Good quality SRE
 - Information – clear, relevant, which is relevant to their age, maturity and experience
 - Skills – learning and practising key life skills which include self management, regulation and soothing, as well as decision making, negotiating and active citizenship
 - Attitudes and values – exploring, understanding and challenging their own and others values

Philosophy and methodology

- Empowerment and control at the heart of any work – do not strip their agency
- Rights, choices and decisions have to be learnt through boundaried relationships
- Old patterns die hard - prepare young people for this
- Emotional release and management must be part of effective education, development and repair – a combination of educational and therapeutic approaches
- Be careful of the tools you use and be aware of triggers

Rob's tale

- *Had been sexually abused and the abuse had been filmed and then played to the circle involved in the abuse*
- *He was in secure therapeutic unit and making good progress*
- *A sex education video was used as it was not known his abuse involved films – this was a breakthrough in understanding a core issue, but was challenging immediately*

Confidentiality

- Is a big issue for young people whose lives are often talked about publicly, or semi publicly, and they can feel as though they, and their lives are public property.
- They can therefore be mistrusting of services, and of adults and confidentiality needs to be emphasised, over and over and over.

Brook has learnt

- Sex is a key area of young people's lives where vulnerability and damage manifests and is perpetuated
- Young people are confused and ill informed about contraception, and contraceptive use and failure is intrinsically connected with their understanding and attitude towards sex
- Everyone needs help sometimes, and our cultural mores can make it difficult to access it
- Whatever young people's intention, they sometimes get it wrong and make mistakes

Brook has learnt/cont

- Sometimes sex is regretted, sometimes enjoyed. Sometimes disastrous, sometimes fabulous
- We cannot and should not separate sex or relationships from the rest of young lives
- Love and care is a core part of good services - Loving, caring adults are hugely significant in young lives – particularly for young people in care, and we must be proud of, quantify and report on the importance of relationship
- We must reach out to young people, go where they are and see this as our job.

Brook has learnt/cont

- Young people's hopes for the future determine how they manage their health, the decisions they make and the control they take – young people in care think less about the future and more about now – no-one sets high expectations for them
- We must remember how it *feels* to be young and stay connected to the curiosity, excitement and fear – unless we do, we risk losing our way
- Partnerships and alliances are the only way to ensure social justice and effective progress

Some challenges

- Help young people in care feel worth it
- Create a positive culture around sex so the sex young people *choose* they enjoy and take responsibility for
- Ensure young people know about services and understand they are free and confidential for all including under 16s and under 13s
- View teenage relationships, health and pregnancy in the context of young lives
- Strive for innovation and excellence – break the 'rules' sometimes – keep it simple
- *Never* settle for anything less than the best for young people and encourage them not to either

The importance of relationship

'as long as you are good to young people, they are good to you. The trouble is, if you bring someone who doesn't like young people into the room, they smell it and the mood changes so it wouldn't really work'.

Brook receptionist, April 2007

If you would like to;

- Find out more about what we do and join in the dialogue at;
 - www.brookcentres.blogspot.com
 - www.brook.org.uk
- or email simonb@brookcentres.org.uk or phone 020 7284 6065