

Why Ben's Place?



ben's place

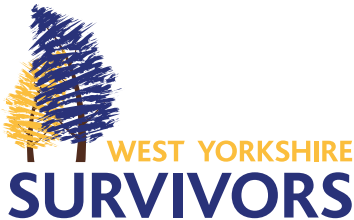
SPECIALIST SUPPORT
FOR MALE SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVORS

Introduction

In early 2017, following extensive research and consultation, Survivors West Yorkshire launched Ben's Place as a free, confidential service providing support to male victim-survivors of sexual abuse/violence from any community in West Yorkshire.

Many people have asked us 'Why have you called it Ben's Place?'

Ben was born in Leeds, and his childhood sexual abuse (CSA) story mirrors those of many boys and young men from across West Yorkshire. It's a story that can be tough to read, especially – if it echoes experiences of your own. But we want you to know why we thought it was so vital to provide a service like this. And we want you to know about Ben.



survivorswestyorkshire.org.uk



"Boots and all..."

Ben's story

Ben's grooming and sexual abuse happened from the age of 11 to 14. As part of the initial grooming process, he was encouraged to perform sexual acts with other young people – male and female. The abuse occurred both one-to-one and in groups. It's suspected the abuse was filmed and sold on the Internet.

This was all for the entertainment of Ben's groomer, who rarely had sexual contact with the young people himself during the entire period of exploitation. The groomer supplied drugs and alcohol and encouraged a sense of rebellion in the young people who took part in the sexually exploitative activities.

During this time, Ben demonstrated a number of difficult behaviours including truanting and theft and also attempted suicide several times.



Did anyone try to help Ben?

Ben's parents became aware of the grooming and sought help from the authorities. Social services declined to intervene because Ben told them the groomer was his friend and denied any exploitation was taking place. As a result, social services decided that Ben, who was by then aged 12/13, was exploring his sexuality, and they logged the contact between Ben and the groomer as consenting. His parents were labelled as challenging and they were ignored. The more they challenged social services, the more the label was reinforced. The police declined to intervene as Ben would not make a statement (this occurred prior to 2004, when the relevant legislation on grooming contained in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 took effect).

Subsequently, Ben's groomer took the step of handing Ben over to a contact of his in exchange for payment. This contact sold Ben's sexual services to a large number of abusers up and down the country, threatening Ben and keeping him drugged to ensure that he complied. Ben was missing from home for a week before police found him at an address in Manchester and rescued him. At first, Ben denied to the police that he been forced into these encounters, but he later told the police the truth and explained that his abusers had threatened to find and punish him if he didn't 'stick up for them'.



"The silence is breaking and the nightmare is ending due to the courage and determination of all survivors – they are bringing themselves home."

Bob Balfour

What happened to Ben after that?

Ben received little emotional support, and in the following years he became addicted to street and prescription drugs and also made further attempts at suicide. He engaged in lots of sexual activity with both males and females, sometimes for payment. He contracted HIV via one of his longer-term relationships. He refused to discuss the abuse with anybody and was seen as challenging by most agencies that attempted to engage with him.

However, with support he did lodge a claim with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA). A compensation payment of over £100k was agreed. However, the final amount was reduced by 25% because Ben disclosed in his statement that he had used drugs to numb himself during the group 'orgies' in which he was raped by large numbers of men; this was seen as a criminal act by CICA, who applied the associated 25% penalty to his tariff.

The compensation Ben received from CICA was mostly spent on other young people in his peer groups – buying them drugs and expensive designer clothes, for example.

Ben's mother challenged the CICA reduction and also went on to successfully sue four of the abusers convicted in the case for damages, with the goal of making it clear how devastating their crimes had been.

What contact did Ben have with statutory services?

Ben was unable to secure long-term employment and cycled through a range of mental health services, collecting a variety of diagnoses. On occasion, he was sectioned. However, he still found it hard to explore his victimisation and was reluctant to even use the words 'sexual abuse'.

Shortly after his 23rd birthday, after one of his abusers had been released from prison and had got in touch with him, Ben became extremely distressed. He entered a mental health unit – at first voluntarily, but he was sectioned after attempting to hang himself there. During this period, there was a change in Ben's presentation. Whilst still challenging in his behaviours, Ben now spent his days telling anybody he could about his experiences of being sexually exploited, asking 'How would you feel if that happened to you?' He lobbied his psychiatrist to place the media cuttings from the trial of his abusers on the front page of his file – 'so everybody would know why he was distressed,' he told staff.

On the day following this request to the psychiatrist, Ben took his own life. His request for the media cuttings to be placed on the front page of his file hadn't been supported. During his inquest it was disclosed that none of the staff had received any training in responding to sexual violence survivors' disclosures. Ben's psychiatrist stated that he didn't believe it was necessary as they were trained to deal with mental illness. However, he did acknowledge that patients with histories of sexual exploitation required specialist support and that Ben had been seen by a borderline personality disorder service the day before he took his own life.

So – why Ben's Place?

Survivors West Yorkshire believes that Ben would support the development of a specialist support service for West Yorkshire's male survivors of sexual violence and abuse. Ben's mother supports his name being honoured in this way and we are humbled by her courage in fighting so hard for Ben for so many years.

We can't bring Ben back, but we can create a positive legacy from his loss. We hope you will help us make sure there are fewer and fewer cases like Ben's in West Yorkshire.

Yours in solidarity with all Bens,

The Board of Survivors West Yorkshire



ben's place

SPECIALIST SUPPORT
FOR MALE SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVORS

survivorswestyorkshire.org.uk

Charity No: 1168928