

Young survivors of sexual violence and abuse win accolade for campaign to change attitudes of professionals.

As a specialist sexual violence and abuse service, SERICC's Young People's Group – REAL. has won a prestigious national campaigning award.

Last night (30 September 2020), SERICC's REAL. Group was named joint winners of the Young Person's Award at the Sheila McKechnie National Campaigner Awards. The judges awarded the REAL. Group the top prize.

The SERICC REAL. Group organised a Thurrock conference in April 2019 after attending a previous event where the young survivors of sexual abuse felt their voices were not properly represented.

By organising their own conference, it gave the young victims/survivors the opportunity to meet a range of professionals and voice the changes they felt necessary to make processes much better for survivors of sexual violence/abuse.

Zino Onokaye, one of this year's Sheila McKechnie foundation judges, said:

"I have a special place in my heart for the children and young people who are fighting to make their communities better and more inclusive. It's a gentle reminder that it's never too early, or too late, to advocate for change, and that if other young people are even a little like the ones in this year's category then our society is likely to look 10 times better in the future."

Young people who took part in the Thurrock REAL. conference, said:

'I really enjoyed every part of it, creating the tasks and being listened to, talking through what we could do that can impact the people who will be attending, what's the message we want to get to them, what do we want to be heard the most. The feedback after the conference confirmed we achieved our goal. I loved helping to open people's minds to what we go through every day. Helping people understand us, help us, and if we can teach more teachers, doctors and nurses and police officers about this message, I believe it would change how we survivors of sexual violence/abuse are treated when we need the support most. I'm proud of what we did, and I would do it again.' - Yasemin

'It was an amazing achievement for us to open up with other people that have experienced the same traumatic things. It has also made us feel more confident and made us feel like we have encouraged adults of all ages and job status' to have a different mindset on these sensitive subjects'- Katie W

'For me I do feel that our campaign can be used to talk more about how we could encourage male victims of sexual abuse to open up about their troubles and how social services could be improved to help that. Also, our campaign was really only based around Essex - this is a national problem and the message needs to spread across the UK.'- Mitchell

*We would like the rest of the group who delivered the sessions, **Mitchell, Shinara, Katie W, Olivia, Millie, Katie H, Emily, Yasemin, Beth, Skylar and Toni**. We would also like to thank our funders, **Ian Wake**, Director of Public Health Thurrock and **Mark Livermore**, Children's Commissioning Manager Thurrock Council. Thanks all the staff at **SERICC** - Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre who supported us on the day and with the development of the REAL. project.*

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Background information

The SMK National Campaigner Awards celebrate the best campaigns and campaigners – whether working locally or nationally, and from individuals and community groups to people working in large organisations. Our interest is in finding those who have made change happen – most effectively, creatively and courageously.

The awards are where we bring the campaign community together to champion and celebrate campaigning, demonstrating its value and acknowledging success.

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