



Hanging out, or
being targeted?

Zara

We always used to hang around at the bus shelter after school. That's where I met Josh. He was my friend's older cousin – he regularly bought us alcohol, it felt like he was a good guy, doing us favours because we couldn't get served.

One day, he asked me to drop a bag off at his mate's house. I didn't know there were drugs inside. When my mum found the bag and got rid of everything, Josh said I owed him for what she had flushed.

After that, things changed. He hurt me and told me I had to "work off" the debt. I stopped arguing and just did what I was told because I was scared of what would happen if I didn't. The assaults became regular, sometimes involving his friends.

I became withdrawn, angry and got into more trouble. Looking back, people probably just saw a teenager drinking, hanging around and causing problems. What they didn't see was how scared, trapped and alone I felt.

Beyond the behaviour

Zara was targeted by an exploiter while she was at a bus shelter in her town. She was groomed with what she was told was free alcohol. She was then coerced into carrying drugs, after being tricked into believing she had a debt to repay, and threatened with violence. **Members of the public had opportunities to recognise she was at risk of exploitation.** Scan the QR code to learn about how children are being harmed in your local community, and how you could help.

