

## **Hans Solo of Bexley**

In February 2018, Bexley saw its first modern day slavery conference take place. As the manager of Bexley's Safeguarding Adults Board, I organised the conference with important keynote speakers and invited a range of key partners.

So when I looked out my window the morning of the conference and saw nothing but snow, my heart sunk.

Ok so it may not have been the deserted snow plains of Tauntaun where Hans Solo bravely saved the hero, Luke Skywalker, but it was still slippery and windy with limited visibility as the blizzard hailed down.

I wrapped up and braved the elements, slowly making my way to the Marriott Hotel. As I got closer, I saw my colleagues also making their way in and started to feel more elated. Amazingly, 93 attendees from partner and community organisations across Bexley and our neighbouring boroughs had lumbered through the snow to attend.

We had a straightforward agenda. We wanted to communicate the importance of recognising modern day slavery, a rather taboo phenomenon that isn't often talked about or made visible in the public eye, but we received more referrals last year than ever before. Sadly, it very much exists in the lives of some of our residents through trafficking and forced marriages.

By informing our key partners of the warning signs, reporting procedures and simply providing a space to discuss this important issue, we're raising knowledge and awareness in order to take action. You can now see posters about modern day slavery around the borough. I am glad that the snow did not hinder the first of many steps we and our partners will take to tackle this issue.