Evaulation of the Kent SErious Youth Violence Project

This report summarises the findings in relation to the effectiveness and cost effectives over a period of two years and began in September 2020

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Executive Summary

The Serious Youth Violence & Prevention Project (SYVP) and its evaluation was funded by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The project targeted children and young people (CYP) aged between 10-17 years of age who were residents, in North Kent and Medway. Two strands were evaluated, the Protect strand for CYP thought to be involved in violence and who were assessed as needing intensive support and the Prevent strand which focussed on preventing the exploitation of CYP believed to be vulnerable.

Ethical approval was obtained from London South Bank University’s ethics committee to conduct the evaluation using a multi-methods approach. The involvement of those with lived experience, as well as professionals involved in the delivery of the project was central to the research. Views were sought through advisory groups, focus groups, documentary analysis and individual online interviews with CYP who were or had received the intervention. The qualitative aspect of the data collection occurred in two phases, the first was after ethical approval was obtained and the second at the midway stage, approximately 12 months after the start of the evaluation. Over the same period the number of police call outs, police arrests, school exclusions and the number of incidents detailing missing young people was collected by KCC staff. These events were analysed as part of a before and after comparison of the intervention by the evaluation team. A change in the occurrence was reported alongside their cost implications and cost savings as part of an economic evaluation. Quality of life data at a CYP participant level was also collected.

Findings from the evaluation were extremely positive and not one criticism or negative comment expressed by either CYP or the parent/carer. Smaller caseloads and the offer of support for 12 months provided the time for staff to build strong relationships with young people and their families. This opportunity to build trust meant practitioners understood the challenges faced by CYP and were able to tailor their intervention to meet individual need This included the ability to work effectively in partnership with other agencies.

The outcomes for CYP were also very positive. Faced with options and an understanding of the consequences of their actions, CYP were able to make safer choice and in some instances exit gang life. CYP spoke of improved mental health, a sense of direction and the need/ability to plan for their future. The child centred approach adopted by practitioners resulted in reduced reoffending. Overall, the intervention showed the ability to make cost savings within the criminal justice system and the education system alongside improvements in quality of life for the CYP participants.

The relationship between staff appointed to the SYVP was broadly speaking very positive. Communication, leadership, and problem focus were shared and drew on the extensive experience of those employed in the intervention. The police’s tendency to see the CYP as an offender first (and child second) was contrary to the other organisations and their perceived reluctance to share information with partners was difficult for many of the participants. This included those with lived experience and professionals. Schools play an important role in the safety and reintegration of CYP, but their responses to the needs of those involved in the intervention were inconsistent. Some CYP found schools to be safe spaces, others as places of danger. The authority of the police within the schools was also viewed as unhelpful by some.

The report ends with suggestions for further research and with recommendations for commissioners/policy makers, staff and partner organisations engaged in the programme. The report concludes by recognising that the commitment of staff to offer a child centred approach is fundamental to the success of the project and that further integration of those with lived experience into design and development of future interventions as their knowledge could be used to great effect.

Introduction

In October 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) launched Supporting Families Against Youth Crime Fund to support the delivery of the Government’s Serious Violence Strategy (MHCLG, 2018). This emphasised early intervention and prevention, aiming to tackle the root causes of violence and prevent Children and Young People (CYP) from becoming involved in crime.

Kent County Council (KCC) in partnership with Kent and Medway Council, successfully bid for funding and used it to target CYP aged between 10-17 years of age who were residents, in North Kent and Medway and who were at risk of being, or were already, involved in serious youth violence.

This Serious Youth Violence & Prevention project (SYVP) defined serious youth violence as acts which could cause serious harm to individuals. It recognised that CYP may already be involved in, or on the periphery of activities which could lead to them witnessing, perpetrating or being the victims of serious youth violence, eg County Lines drug supply is linked with serious youth violence. These behaviours place other CYP at risk of violence and exploitation who may carry knives, or other weapons, because of their perceptions of being at risk of violence in their schools and communities. This fear can have a corrosive impact on a CYP’s wellbeing as well as placing them and others at risk of physical harm and criminalisation.

This evaluation aims to assist the SYVP project and the delivery partners to assess the effectiveness (including cost effectiveness) of the interventions in reducing serious youth violence and risk, and in preventing CYP from becoming involved in serious youth violence. The evaluation focussed on two strands of intervention.

1. The **Protect** strand which offered intensive support to CYP thought to be involved in violence. Typically, this involved intensive support, namely meeting with the CYP 3+ times per week, over a period of 12-month, whole family support and engaging CYP in meaningful activity.
2. The **Prevent** strand focused on those vulnerable to exploitation, e.g. siblings and peers of the above cohort. Intervention focussed on preventing CYP from being criminally exploited and becoming involved in youth violence by providing targeted support and diversionary activities.

Whilst not designed exclusively for CYP involved in gangs, one staff member explained that in the project

*absolutely all the young men without doubt were always referred to as belonging to a gang, mostly form Police Intel, but this is not the case for young women.* Staff[[1]](#footnote-1) Email

The research and evaluation team were aware that not all participants in this evaluation were involved with gangs or county lines. We were also conscious that the term “gang” is used inconsistently, often in a negative or derogatory way (Havard 2021), For these reasons the report will use the term Young Street Groups. The term gang will only be used when the participants themselves refer to gang involvement or influence.

Methodology

The evaluation adopted a multi-methods approach incorporating interviews, focus groups (FG) and documentary analysis. Quantitative analysis was also collected to provide an economic evaluation. Before data was collected, ethical approval was obtained from London South Bank University’s ethics committee.

Qualitative data

Qualitative data was collected in two distinct phases, once at the start of the evaluation (phase 1) and then again approximately 12 months later (phase 2). Focus groups and interviews were conducted on-line via Teams.

Phase 1 began with an Advisory Group consisting of nine participants, including professionals and those with lived experience (parent/carer and CYP). This data was analysed to identify participants perceptions of the priorities of the project and how success could be measured.

Interviews were then conducted with key partners involved in the project, namely staff from the Violence Reduction Unit (Kent & Medway), Medway’s Task Force and the SYV. The purpose of these interviews was to monitor the effectiveness of collaborative relationships between partners.

Two focus groups were also convened, one with professionals (five participants) and another with parents/carers (three participants) of CYP involved in the project. Focus groups were chosen to support open channels of communication, allow participants to learn from the experiences of others, and to inform change during the period of evaluation. The focus groups consisting of professionals allowed them to share their organisational and professional perspectives and provide opportunities to understand and overcome barriers to partnership working. The focus group with parents/carers provided opportunities for them to speak openly in a safe space about their opinions and experiences.

As part of the evaluation, we also conducted one-to-one interviews with eight CYP engaging in the project. Individual interviews (as opposed to focus groups) were chosen so that the children and young people could express themselves honestly in a confidential and anonymous environment, without fear of reprisals. The interviews provided us with important insights into their views and experiences of the project. Vouchers were provided as an incentive for CYP to participate in the interviews and in recognition of their time and expertise.

The resilience and wellbeing of the CYP were prioritised and considered throughout the process thus the interviews were conducted online. These arrangements served to both further safeguard the CYP and increase the flexibility and availability of the interviewers as all interviews were conducted at a time (and place) that was safe for them. Mentors from the SYVP were also available to offer support in the interviews if this was requested by the CYP, many of these joined in the discussion and their contributions have been included in the analysis and are reflected in our findings.

At the end of phase 1, the data was analysed and presented to the Advisory Group and discussions that grew from this presentation were also included in the analysis. Further information relating to the Advisory Group is presented in outcome 1. The focus groups and interviews conducted in phase 1 were then repeated in phase 2. A total of 33 professionals, CYP parents/carers participated in this research.

All qualitative data was recorded and transcribed using a professional transcription agency known to the research and evaluation team. Qualitative data was analysed using a thematic analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) as this is an established process to analyse interviews, focus groups, and documentary data. After familiarization with the data, initial coding was used across the qualitative data set, focusing on what a participant explicitly said and/or what was written. Initial codes were then reviewed to identify latent themes, the underlying ideas, and assumptions that shape and inform the content of the data, and to explore the relationship between themes. These themes were then reviewed by the evaluation team to ensure consistency within each theme, and across the whole dataset.

Economic evaluation

Early in the design stages of the evaluation the idea of incorporating a dashboard into the project plan was discussed and agreed with senior KCC staff. The overall aim of this would be to inform the evaluation of the resources used and thereafter the cost impact of the SYVP on services. The approach taken would also assist KCC service managers and senior commissioners in assessing the impact of the SYVP on service use and costs longer term beyond the evaluation period itself.

The main variables of interest around service use to include in the dashboard were defined and agreed as police call outs: managing missing (young) persons: school exclusions and police arrests. Input and advice was provided from Helen Cook, Senior Commissioner, Chris Wimhurst, Commissioning Standards Manager, Paula Desai, Strategic Development Manager, Frances Jones, Project and Support Co-Ordinator and the LSBU researchers, as well as senior figures within the Police Force.

A dashboard approach can be a useful tool to help decision makers and budget holders understand patterns of resource use. This could be to identify where resource use is greatest within a certain sector (i.e. ambulance call outs in the health care sector). Equally dashboards can help to quantify other beneficial changes such as reduced exclusions within the education system, and if identified savings are being sustained. The dashboard approach is flexible enough to allow for other variables to be added at a later stage.

Evaluating resource use data in this way provides information on the cost impact of the SYVP on the main areas identified; namely the costs associated with police call outs; managing missing persons; dealing with school exclusions and police arrests.

In practice this was achieved by measuring all contacts all the CYP participants in the project had with the services mentioned above. This measurement was conducted for all participants pre and post project intervention to establish any changes in the resources used for each variable. Once pre and post differences in the resource use totals had been established and averages per variable established, unit costs were applied and multiplied against the totals for the resources used to calculate overall costs. The Unit Costs were derived either from the wider literature or from expert opinion such as senior police officers.

Relevant Unit costs were derived from different published sources including but not limited to;

* [The National Audit Office. Ministry of Justice. The cost of a cohort of young offenders to the criminal justice system. Technical Paper. (2011).](https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/1011663_technical_paper.pdf)
* [Heslin M,Callaghan L, Packwood M, et al. Decision analytic model exploring the cost and cost offset implications of street triage. BMJ Open 2016;6:e009670. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2015-009670](https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/6/2/e009670.full.pdf)
* [Shalev Greene, K & Pakes, F 2012, Establishing the cost of missing person investigations. University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth.](https://researchportal.port.ac.uk/en/publications/establishing-the-cost-of-missing-person-investigations)
* [Greater Manchester Unit Costs Database.](file:///C:\Users\havardt\Downloads\unit-cost-database-v20.xlsx%20(live.com))

Unit Costs derived from these sources were used as the basis for discussion with commissioners to establish baseline unit cost estimates. Where unit costs could not be established for the most relevant years of the project (but rather only from older published literature sources), these costs where standardized using the [Bank of England](https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator) inflation calculator to bring costs in line with current costs and to reflect more accurately the current time-period for the delivery of the intervention.

Resource use and cost data were also analyzed alongside changes in collected quality-of-life data for the CYP. As with the cost data the quality-of-life data was measured at a pre (baseline) project stage and at a later stage (post) after CYP participants had been receiving the project intervention. Average changes in quality of life scores were obtained using the [7 item Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/about/); a scale originally ‘*developed to enable the monitoring of mental wellbeing in the general population as well as the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing.’* This approach allowed for the average change in cost and the average change in quality of life to be calculated and reported for each variable of interest.

Longer term, the evaluation team suggest that there may be some organizational value in KCC identifying a person internally to become the owner of the dashboard so that it could be updated regularly and maintained and used for future assessment and planning. Maintaining the data in this way could assist in making a case for future funding by demonstrating the ongoing cost effectiveness of the SYVP. Alternatively, it could provide intelligence on favorable changes in patterns of resource use, (such as an increase in health seeking behaviours i.e., an increased use of mental health services). Given the strong recent policy drive to reduce health inequalities, an increased use of certain health care resources may still be considered an effective use of resources for CYP where a clearly identified need is being met.

Findings

The evaluation is intended to support continuous service improvement and offer guidance on the most appropriate tools, policies and practice that will support CYP, families, and communities to develop resilience and manage risk once the project has ended. The findings have been structured so that the main headings broadly address the desired outcomes as indicated in the original quote request. The subheadings unpack these and present themes that were identified in the analysis.

Data collection was completed before the cost-of-living crisis had impacted on the participants. It is reasonable to assume that CYP and their families are in more financial difficulty at the time of writing this report than they were at the time of data collection.

Outcome 1: INVOLVEMENT of CYP, families, communities, and relevant professionals in the evaluation from planning to completion

As outlined above, an Advisory Group was formed at the outset of the evaluation. This Group was key to supporting the involvement of key stakeholders e.g., CYP involved in the project, parents/carers of CYP receiving the intervention and professionals from statutory and voluntary organisations (for example, police, schools).

The Advisory Group also served to support the project to be accountable to the wider community. It functioned to facilitate stakeholders’ continuous input into the planning and delivery of the project as it developed. The Group actively engaged stakeholders in defining the evaluation questions and ensuring that the interventions were doing what those with lived experience, stakeholders and communities needed them to do.

The first Advisory Group meeting was conducted in March 2021 and the following themes were identified as aspirational indicators of success.

1. Willingness to engage with professional and quality of that relationship (trust)
2. Frequency of contact with professionals
3. Children and young people’s ability to reach out to professionals.
4. Engagement of children and young people in something meaningful, e.g., sports clubs
5. Better communication between families and child e.g., knowing where they are/what they are doing.
6. Fewer violent incidents.
7. Number of multi-agency meetings. Reduction in frequency, risk, discharge for good progress.

Points 1-5 have been considered within this report, but the final two indicators were beyond the scope of this evaluation. In consultation with commissioners at the design stage it was agreed to prioritise ‘high cost’ indicators e.g., police call outs, arrests, missing persons, and school exclusions in the quantitative data analysis.

The second Advisory Group was conducted in November 2021, approximately 12 months after the start of the evaluation. Here themes identified at the midway point of the research were shared via a formal presentation. This then evolved into a focus group designed to deepen the findings and ensure that the research and evaluation team did not impose external interpretations. The aim was to strengthen the credibility and confirmability of the study by allowing opportunities for the emerging themes to be challenged and for the findings to be made more robust. Quotes from the second meeting/focus group are included in this final report.

Outcome 2:  REASONS FOR JOINING: An understanding of why CYP in Kent become involved in Serious Youth Violence?

The research showed that a pull-push dynamic existed that encouraged or forced CYP into young street groups. This means that they were often trying to get away from difficult situations and/or trying to fill gaps that these situations created.

Financial

Push factors included poverty linked to a financial need.

*when money is involved, everyone is always going to say yes.* Interview CYP7

*I think there’s a lot of hardship with the haves and have nots and you see the emerging food banks and having to support families to go and collect food from food banks with them and things like that.* Professional FG phase 2

*Money is another thing that can draw them in and obviously not wanting to lose that money or gifts or whatever.* Parent/Carer FG phase 1*.*

Problems at home

Other push factors related to difficult circumstances at home. This included drugs, alcohol, domestic abuse, a parent in prison as well as other Adverse Childhood Experiences (Bush 2018).

*a lot of the young people that I’m working with, a lot is acceptance, a lot is escapism and getting away from the trauma within their families, getting away from domestic violence, poverty, trying to get out there and earn quick, easy money and getting wrapped up into it that is long term which can end up in custody or someone getting hurt.* Professional FG phase 1

*sometimes it’s an unhappy home life, and then I think they’re looking for something, some recognition, or some love – not love that’s the wrong word to use, but appreciation.* Parent/Carer FG phase 2.

Meeting these needs

Participants explained how young street groups are adept at identifying these vulnerabilities and provided an escape route for many CYPs referred to this project. They promise to fill these gaps by providing opportunities to make money quickly, bring kudos, and provide a sense of belonging. The attraction of these pull-factors was too much for the CYP in this study.

*They might be having arguments at home, abusive, abuse and that. So they go to a person with loads of money, girls and opportunity there for money and then they treat them good and they treat them so the person who’s joined a gang don’t look back, they stay under his wing.* Interview CYP3*.*

## Security and Belonging

*The* young streetgroup*s can offer security* and safety within the fold and kudos outside.

*if they’ve got issues going on and they’ve got nobody to like talk to or anything, that [being in a young street group] can sort of like help, because they feel like safer because everybody when you’re in that situation everybody looks after everybody.* Interview CYP2

*the leader of the gang could treat them better than what they get treated at home… they treat them good and they treat them so the person who’s joined a gang don’t look back, they stay under his wing.* Interview CYP3.

*… ‘look up to them’ [the CYP in youth street groups] and all that. Yes.* Interview CYP1

*. I think it’s just to sort of get a better reputation of themselves, because obviously I’ve been in a situation similar. I think, to be honest, I think it’s just about to get a higher reputation,* Interview CYP2

Easy Money

The participants in this research recognised that young street groups took advantage of a desire or need amongst CYPs to make money quickly.

*they shouldn’t be doing it, but it’s quick money for them and we always have that battle of they want to be on the right road, but it just doesn’t come quick enough for them…..They need it here, they need it now; we live in a society, an age where for young people it has to happen now and I think we really struggle with that, everything needs to be happening now…they need to get a job within a day or they need to have money within the day; there is no forward planning really for them and that’s our battle*. Professional FG phase 1

*…that child can make a few easy bucks by running a few errands for the county lines and then all of a sudden, he’s got money, that would be a quick fix for him. So, you can see how these criminal gangs exploit those factors that are affecting children and they hone in on their vulnerabilities.*  Professional FG phase 2

*They [CYP] live day to day and they don’t think right, I’m going to work for the next week and then I’ll get paid next Friday, and I can pay my bills and stuff.* Professional FG phase *1*

Young street groups responded creatively to the poverty experienced by some CYP in Kent whilst simultaneously exploiting their naivety to lure them into criminal activity. This professional explained how easy it is to become entrapped in gang life. Take this example of a 12-year-old child.

*I’m working with a young person and literally he got involved because his mates said do you want to go to Southend for the day, ……he said yes, let’s go, thinking he was going to Southend, to Adventure Island, but actually he was going on a county line run …..he’d never had a holiday, so a day in Southend was like everything to him, and now six years’ later he’s still caught up in it.* Professional FG phase 1

Although attracted to young street groups because of a sense of belonging, these feelings of safety are misplaced. Involvement with young street groups brings its own risks. Once enticed into these young street groups CYPs became increasingly entrapped and leaving becomes difficult and a risk in itself (see case study 1 and 2).

*Most people can’t leave the lifestyle; once you’re in it, it’s like a trap...people get addicted to the money and then they don’t leave, they just stay and it’s like a cycle, once a person gets trapped in the system, then it keeps going round and round and round*. Interview CYP3.

*there’s entrapment, we’re talking about debts building up, threats, the threat of violence for themselves or their families, maybe the embarrassment and the shame of realising that they’ve been involved in something. There’s also a stigma about actually talking to the police and trying to get the police on board.* Professional FG phase 2

*People are bullied, be like oh no, I don’t want to leave because obviously something can happen against them, their family, but it’s harder than it is just to leave.* Interview CYP7.

when you’re in that situation there’s always somebody that’s higher up, and they could be like... they’re probably scared of them, to be honest. It’s like quite a scary situation to be in, because if they leave, they know that all these people are going to be after them and they’re going to [follow] them, like they’re going to want to hurt them.Interview CYP 2

Outcome 3: INTERVENTIONS: An understanding of the effectiveness of the different interventions used.

Having identified the factors that influenced CYP to become involved in serious violence, the research and evaluation team then analysed the data to identify important and effective elements of the interventions.

Smaller caseloads

Policy decisions were identified regarding the allocation of work that were fundamental to the success of the project. This included smaller caseloads for mentors which provided time for intense intervention and resulted in opportunities to work with CYP to overcome their resistance.

because we’ve got a smaller caseload and we can go out more and see them whereas I know YOT [Youth Offending Teams] might have a two-month order and they have to fulfil certain parts of the order, the young person has to, so it’s flexible for what they need at that time. A lot of it is responding to crisis as well. Professional FG phase 1.

*as a [professional with high caseloads] it’s impossible for me to see every child every week, so having a mentor is having an ear to the floor if you like, they will email me, they will call me, they will update me, pass on concerns, so I’ve just had a really positive experience.* Professional FG phase 1

Consistency and longevity

The need for long-term planning and support where children have known risks, vulnerabilities or have suffered trauma is well documented (Sidebotham 2016). This offer to support CYP and their families for extended periods of time was an important aspect of this intervention. Nearly every research participant mentioned this. It gave practitioners opportunities to build a clearer picture of the CYP, the struggles they faced and the most effective way to engage them as an individual.

*I think that is the beauty of the Serious Youth Violence Project because we can work with them for up to a year …… there aren’t any other voluntary projects where you can work with them for so long, and to have that continued person in their life for these young people can be priceless for them because they haven’t had that, people are coming in and out of their lives.* Professional FG phase 1

*…it just gives you that time to build up that relationship with a young person and their family which I know …. has been really invaluable in terms of helping to safeguard, sharing information and working with the young person.* Professional FG phase 1

*They’ll come and see you regularly, it’s a familiar face, you can speak to them about your issues.* Interview CYP2

The extended period of intervention was useful for the staff who worked together to protect the CYP.

*It’s the length of time and the communication stuff, working with young professionals, it’s not about us standing on our own and trying to support each other, it’s about us joining in with the other professionals.* Professional FG phase 1

Responsive to individual need

Staff were aware of the importance of engaging with the CYP at their level. They showed flexibility, patience, and an eagerness to adapt their work to meet the needs of each individual child and build positive relationships.

*it worked really well and flexibly for my son and I think it was good that he had a good rapport with his worker, who adapted whatever she had, depending on if there was a situation where he may have been arrested or there was an assault or something that she needed to work more around,* Parent/carer FG phase 1

*..sometimes, even if I didn't want to talk and I’m just having a bad time, we’ll just go in McDonald’s to cheer me up or something.* Interview CYP2.

*we’ll go step-by-step: we won’t just go straight onto it. We’ll do it slowly so then it’s easier.* Interview CYP1.

*often I have to drive him [CYP] out in a car and he can’t sit with me face to face, so I’ve done the driving and the mentors brought a dog along or sat outside in the garden and we’ve stuck to that routine and that really works, and they just feel really comfortable which is the most important thing.* Professional FG phase 1

*we bespoke all the intervention to that individual young person. There’s no point in any of our staff working with one young person the way they’re going to work with another young person. We literally make the plans for that young person; we engage with that young person on an individual basis to accommodate their needs.* Advisory Group member phase 2*.*

Professionals recognised the difficulties CYP might have in sharing personal information and working with this.

*… young people are very hesitant to disclose too much information around these things and these issues and their involvement, and that is a real barrier, and again through fear a lot of the time of reprisal and negative consequences if they do disclose information* Professional FG phase 1

Engaging families

Whilst focussed on the individual needs of the CYP, practitioners in this project recognised family members as central to bringing about positive change.

*So it’s not just thinking about the child, there’s obviously that thinking about the parents and the family which again is not there in terms of the KPIs, they don’t have to do it to meet the contract requirements, which I think speaks volumes in terms of their thinking about how do we achieve stronger outcomes. You’ve got to think about those that are around the child, not just the child themselves.* Professional Interview phase 2*.*

*I feel that’s been the change, just keeping those lines of communication open because it’s a very difficult position for any family to be in. So just keeping that parental presence in my child’s life, I think they’ve helped to do that*. Parent /Carer FG phase 1

Flexibility

This child centred approach was supported by flexible ways of working. Professionals recognised that factors beyond the CYPs control might impact on their needs, risks, and ability to cope.

*his father’s been released from prison recently. It didn't make sense for his father to then come into his life and me to come out of his life. So, what we’ve done is, we extend the project, just until that young person’s ready for me to step down my involvement with him.* Professional FG phase 2

Practitioners were aware when projects were coming to an end and adjusted their intervention to support this:

*….I’ve had to pull back a bit so he does something by himself, and he’s 18 now so I should be closing him soon, but I just need to see him to the end of his journey, and I’ve had to pull back a bit to give him that space for him to be able to take responsibility again.* Professional FG phase 1*.*

*instead of just the programme coming off a cliff edge, what we’ve done is step them down to a Prevent case. So we’re making less contact, … we’re kind of weaning young people off our support. It’s about the usual exit strategies of working with the young person, telling them that our work is coming to an end, however, ‘This is now in place’, ‘That’s now in place’ and making sure that they’re resilient to us leaving them, for them to create their own path.* Advisory Group member, phase 2*.*

*So we’ve kind of gone full circle because I was fighting for him to work with me in the beginning, then I was doing everything so he’d carry on working with me and now I’m pulling back a bit to let him do things, and it’s just been really nice.* Professional FG phase 1

It is to the credit of the commissioners and the steering group that when the MHCLG grant funding ended, intervention was allowed to continue beyond the timescales for the more vulnerable CYPs.

Trust

Over time, these flexible approaches enabled practitioners to build trusting and meaningful relationships with the CYP and their families. This meant they opened up to their mentors, shared their burdens and slowly were open to engaging in change.

*Yes, definitely think that trust is the main thing, because if you don’t trust the person you’re working with you’re not really going to want to speak to them, are you? … if you can’t tell your parents because you’re too worried that they are going to like be angry or upset, then you’ve always got that somebody else to speak to about it.* Interview CYP2

*And I do get on well with the worker and able to talk to her about situations that maybe I want her to help with or maybe talk to my son within a different way than I may address it.* Parent/carer FG phase 1*.*

*Knowing that someone other than my own family was there for me. She [mentor] proved to me all the time that she was there if I ever needed to talk to her...When I was in a bad situation I called and she picked up and that’s how I managed to build my trust over the times.* Advisory Group member, phase 2.

*Initially, my son wasn’t keen to engage but the worker, they do have a rapport…I think sometimes with kids, they like to take advice from other people. So, I think it worked well in that sense.* Parent/carer focus group phase 1

The importance of trust and its impact on the project was recognised, by a professional partner.

*where we’ve got, the professionals are on the same page, … those issues in terms of responsivity, in terms of trust. It’s the fact that [name of organisation] can get young people to talk to professionals such as you and I is testament to the trust those young people have got.* Professional Interview phase 2

Plugging the gaps

The trusting long lasting relationships that staff build with CYP and their families meant that they were able to plug the gaps. They offered support outside of the statutory systems where, for whatever reason, relationships had broken down.

*Unfortunately, Early Help wouldn’t take us because it was too bad and then Adolescent Social Services wouldn’t take it because it wasn’t bad enough… So the social worker referred us onto [name of organisation] [my daughter] had the support worker.* Parent carer FG phase 1

*And for me, it’s to have that outlet for him to be able to talk to somebody and sometimes I could join and have some input but most of the time I let them get on with it.* Parent /Carer FG phase1

Relationships between professionals also grew as the project progressed and trust seemed to develop between practitioners working directly with CYP. In some instances, professionals were able to assist each other with suitable intervention, filling gaps left by structures and organisations that demanded too much of their staff.

*I think we’ve built up really good partnership working with a lot of professionals in the different areas we’ve worked with. We’ve been like a lifesaver for the youth justice workers because we do a lot of the groundwork* ..*we’ve worked with a lot of social workers as well, so we’ve done a lot of that work for them, so we’ve worked hand in hand in a really good partnership to try to support that young person as best we can, and for that young person to get everything they need out of it as well.* Professional FG phase 2

Choices and consequences

The faith stored in the mentors meant that professionals could work together to help CYP understand that they had choices in life, a difficult balance for young people involved in violence (Samanani 2022).

*everything that was going on, then she [mentor] would sit and she would explain each situation. She’d go, “Right, this situation you’re in right now, what would you say is the answer?” Then I’d say what I thought was best, and she’d be like, “Well why do you think that?” Then she would say, “Well why don’t you look at it this way?” and show me, you know, show me that there actually is another way sometimes, it’s not always a bad way.* Interview CYP4.

*They [mentor] told me the worst that could happen and then obviously I just didn't want to go in that direction so I went to the complete opposite direction and then just chose the good…the best bit is you can talk about life more, you learn more than you do in school really. They will guide you in the right direction into life, rather than death or prison.* Interview CYP3

and that the decisions they made would have consequences for both them and their families.

*they do sort of speak to you about how you’re affecting other people, and it sort of just makes you think, like, “Why am I actually doing this?” because it’s not just affecting me, it’s affecting everybody else around you. I think you don’t really become aware about how much you’re affecting other people when somebody actually says to you, actually sits there and speaks to you about it.* Interview CYP2.

*I think he’s fearful because of what’s happened to his brother and friends, and work through myself and that mentor he is realising how dangerous it is.* Professional FG phase 1

*this child would see a motor bike and all he’d see was how fun it would be to ride it, he wouldn’t see the fact that he would get arrested for taking it, and then if he was arrested, he wouldn’t see further, he wouldn’t see that he would have to go to court, and then that could lead to a prison sentence.* Professional FG phase 2

*I thought I deal with everyone: I could deal with it myself. And then, it was only recently that there was a certain thing happened and I thought, ‘My family’s more important than my morals and the lifestyle I was living.* Advisory Group Member phase 2.

Case study 1[[2]](#footnote-2)

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| --- |
| Case study 1 |
| One mother explained that her son, who is on the autistic spectrum, became involved in drugs and young street groups. He would regularly go missing for four or five consecutive nights. Six months before the start of the intervention she explained her waiting for a knock on the door to say that he was seriously hurt. But the work undertaken as part of the SYVP helped her son understand that there are different ways to look at things and to look at his life. Despite his fear of repercussions, (specifically arson attacks on his family home) with the help of his mentor, he found the courage to leave the young street group. Threats were made to his life, (being stabbed with a machete) from known young street gang members in the community and within the school. This clearly had implications for his education, and he was allowed to learn from home, but unfortunately, the school were less than conscientious in following this up. His mother proudly described his resilience that when he was approached by his former associates, her son asserts his intention to never return to that life and repeat his old mistakes. As a result of the relationship her son built with his mentor, his outlook is different, he is home at a reasonable hour, he thinks about dangers and how it will affect other people and he is determined to succeed. At the time of data collection this CYP was attending a construction course. |

Outcome 4: POSITIVE OUTCOMES: achieved by CYP and their families.

The SYVP had significant positive outcomes on those they worked with. Whilst this was largely in relation to the CYP, there was optimism at the impact of the intervention with families. Staff across the project worked in partnership to meet the needs of individual CYP as outlined in outcome 6 of this report.

Mental health

Professionals responded positively to stress, anxiety and other mental health issues experienced by CYP. Take this CYP who had a long history of self-harm. Her relationship with her mentor turned this around and brought positive outcomes for her.

*it was just having someone to listen to her that improved her mental health and made her feel better. And when they’ve got purpose as well, the purpose to do something, so she was going back to college and she was engaging with stuff outside in the community, so everything seemed better, and her wellbeing was better because she had a purpose to do stuff.* Professional FG phase 2

*I’ve left school now, but before I met [Mentor] I found school very difficult because of the amount of people that were going to the school, I’ve got anxiety and I didn’t really know how to cope like very well with people… I can definitely cope a lot more now than I could a year ago.* Interview CYP2.

*I’ve been more like in a good mood, because before I met [mentor], I was kind of an angry person, like I was really angry, I was always stressed out, and I’d probably do a lot of bad things, but whilst knowing her I’ve been more relaxed, I’m calm and I’m not stressing about school, I’m not being an angry person or horrible to anyone, I’m nice, well I class myself as nice and I hope I am*. Interview CYP6

Confidence and Self-esteem.

The change in confidence this brought to the CYP was palpable. They were more comfortable in social situations:

*Yes, it’s given me a lot of confidence in myself and that: talking to others about things instead of just keeping it to myself and all that.* Interview CYP1

*the mentor has done an amazing job to try and bring them out their shell, look at different hobbies, try and build up confidence*. Professional FG phase 1.

*I feel more confident when I speak to people now than I did about a year ago.* Interview CYP2*.*

Direction

This newfound confidence enabled CYP to find a focus and direction.

*It’s helped me figure out what I want to do in life.* Interview CYP3.

*And I think for my son it was just to have a focus about the direction his life* Parent/carer focus group phase 1

*before I met her [mentor] I didn’t really know what I wanted, I didn’t really know what I was focused on, because my mind was just like all jumbled up, but she sort of just helped me like focus on my goals and she helped me achieve them, like basically she helped me change my mindset to want to do well for myself.* Interview CYP2*.*

*... I like going out, like walking on my own and stuff like that but before I knew her [mentor], I was too scared to do that, I was like no, I’ll stay home, I’m good.* Interview CYP6

*when I first met [mentor], oh I was not knowing what to do with myself. I was all over the place, things were going wrong, you know, I could have easily slipped down the wrong path, easily, without a doubt.* Interview CYP4.

Planning for the future

With time many CYP started to think more longer term and plan for their future. Despite limited attendance at school, after intervention with the SYVP and gaining a sense of direction, this CYP was optimistic about her future. (see also Case Study 1)

I mean, obviously I’ve wanted to get a job for ages, and obviously I want to eventually, my main goal, is to work with children… *I left school with no GCSEs and everything, so it’s going to be a hard goal to get to, but I’m going to get there.* Interview CYP2*.*

*In school they learn you how to pass your GCSEs but in the programme they’ll learn you life skills and that. They will learn you how to get a job, the best income for you, the best path for you, like college, sixth form. They give you more options rather than school, they’re there to learn you.* Interview CYP4

Indeed, professionals found that some young people were offering face-to-face compliments. A true measure of the value they placed in the relationships.

*And recently this person had actually started saying to my face and the mentors, giving us compliments and I couldn’t believe it, I nearly fell off my chair, which is really nice and he just seems happier which is lovely and he’s comfortable so that is really nice.* Professional FG phase 1*.*

*‘if [mentor] hadn’t been brought in, I don’t think [son] would have changed, I think he would have stayed the same I owe a large part of his change to the man sitting right next to me.* Parent/Carer FG phase 2

Building family bonds

The communication between the mentors and the children was particularly impressive and undoubtably contributed to the positive relationships outlined in Outcome 3. But the SYVP also had very positive impacts on the communication between parents/carers and their children. It enabled deeper connections between them, and familial bonds strengthened.

*it’s been just having that connection between my child and the rest of the family. There’s been a breakdown in communication, so I think the worker sometimes works at just trying to bridge that.* Parent/Carer FG phase 1

*we didn’t really have like a very good bond, but then obviously we met [Mentor] and that, and me and my mom seem to get along like a lot better.* Interview CYP2

*when you speak to [my granddaughter] she’s not as aggressive as she was before, she can see that it can be worked out other ways, so I definitely think that it’s changed her persona, most definitely...she doesn’t stay behind at school, she keeps in touch with her phone, she is just a different girl altogether.* Parent/Carer FG phase 2

Indeed, their ability to advocate for these relationships meant that the mentors themselves were viewed almost as extended family members:

*it’s just like a family? Yes, it’s lovely...... if I text her [mentor] and I have a problem, she straight away is ready to call me back, talk to me. If I text her she answers,* Interview CYP4

One participant explained how the intervention had changed his relationship with his family.

*I used to lie about where I was, but I don’t lie any more. I know what I’m going to do all the time. Normal things that I should have done when I was younger but I’m doing it now.* Interview CYP 3

When questioned about the reasons for his dishonesty, CYP3’s response demonstrates his ability to compromise and make choices (an effective intervention as outlined in Outcome 3). By bringing him closer to his family the SYVP reduced his isolation, a tactic commonly used by young street groups operating a ruthless business model such as the running of county lines (Havard et al 2021; Whittaker and Havard 2023)

*Because I used to go places and if I told them where I was, they would tell me to come home and I didn't want to do that, but when I realised if I just told them I’m going and if they say yes, they’re more likely to say yes if I call them and ask, rather than just going there.* Interview CYP3

Practitioners recognised there was little sense of achievement for the CYP, and they worked with families to develop this.

*A lot of these children haven’t had much sense of achievement, so making their parents feel proud of them through lack of opportunity or whatever, and that links into that resilience. Once you’ve made your mum proud you like that feeling, you want to make them proud again and that gives you that resilience, like my mum is proud of me, I want to make my mum proud of me again.* Professional FG phase 2

The success of this was evident during the evaluation. When asked why it was so difficult for CYPs to leave young street groups, this parent/carer said;

*we’re always telling her [granddaughter] how proud we are of her, how much we love her and give her a bit of freedom, and like I said to you before, it’s 100% [change in behaviour and attitude].* Parent/Carer FG phase 2

Safeguarding

The more formal aspects of partnership working are considered in Outcome 6, but it is worth mentioning the effectiveness of these in safeguarding CYP here. Mentors clearly impressed professionals from statutory organisations with the speed at which they responded to requests and their willingness to share information.

*…they are very good because they tell me everything pretty much so they’re pretty open and it’s been really good for our professional meetings where we did mapping and safeguarding, because a lot of their friends have been involved, and it just helps us safeguard with all the multi agencies.* Professional FG phase 1.

*If I've got a question, I’ll get it answered pretty quickly and in a lot of the meetings that I go to they are there and if they’re not there, and I think they should be, then I will suggest it at the meeting for them to come the next time.* Professional Interview phase 1

Outcome 5: RESILIENCE: An outline of the most appropriate tools, policies and practice to use to improve resilience in CYP, families and communities

This evaluation showed that the intervention made CYPs more resilient and autonomous. Important aspects of the intervention are discussed in this section.

Child first

The SYVP’s ability to build positive, trusting relationships was birthed by practitioners skills and commitment to identifying and meeting CYPs needs and putting them first. (See also Outcome 6)

*The child is the most important person, not a tick box*. Advisory Group member phase 2.

Professionals recognised that many of the CYPs they worked with were traumatised, isolated, and lacked self-confidence and self-belief. Because of practitioners ability to build this trust, CYPs felt able to talk to them about their worries and share the burden:

*…they (children and young people) hide behind, because a lot of their own mental health, they appear very angry and argumentative, but actually they are very endearing and nice and they’ve just had a lot of trauma, they’ve not had the right support.* Professional FG phase 1.

*you’re stressed, because you’ve got a lot going in your head and you’ve got nobody to sort of speak through it about.* Interview CYP3

Practitioners focussed on CYPs self-esteem, building confidence, and re-integrating them into society. Take this young person who wouldn’t shower and took no interest in his appearance;

*…I think that comes from a lack of self-esteem and a lack of caring about how he presented to other people... He had his teeth knocked out from a fight and he just left them, the first year he wasn’t bothered... Then one day he said , I think I want to get my teeth done now,...so we went to the dentist and we got his teeth sorted out, and he literally got his smile back, and it goes to show that he started to take a bit more care in his appearance and his self-esteem has risen.*  Professional FG phase 2.

That is the Number One thing: I feel so much better about myself. I used to have really low self-esteem. Interview CYP1.

Intervention was done in a staged way, to reflect the CYPs willingness and readiness to move forward.

*I can open up to people a lot more easier. And, where I’m doing these steps and all that, it makes you feel like, ‘Oh, I’m a different person to how I was before.’* Interview CYP1.

A child centred approach helped establish trust with the CYP and proved a highly effective way to build resilience.

*I find it hard to trust people so, when people get my trust, yes, it’s a good thing. It’s hard to get my trust. And, yes, [my mentor]’s managed to do [that].* Advisory Group Member phase 2.

*I don’t just give up now, half the time, if it went wrong, I went, “Right, I’m done, I’ll just give up, I’m not going to bother,” and then professional would be like, “Come on, [CYP4], think about it,” and she would just lead me the right way. Now I just know, like with the skills she’s taught me and everything she does, now I know what to do now in a lot of ways.* Interview CYP 4

Reduce offending.

Practitioners recognised that a main aim of this intervention was to reduce offending and thus they worked with CYP around strategies of resilience to enable them to leave the young street group (See case study 1)

*pulling themselves away from negative influences of criminal associates and recognising the traits of what a healthy relationship is and making new friends with people who have a positive influence on them.* Professional FG phase 2*.*

*I would probably be on a bad page if I didn’t meet [mentor] right now, I’d probably be going to court but because she’s come in and saved me a hundred times I’m not going to court, and I don’t think I will be any more gladly.* Interview CYP6

*I’ve been arrested about three times this year but, last year, it was fifteen times. There’s a lot of difference. When you have a professional who understands everything that’s going on in your life and tries to make it right, a lot of stuff changes. And, yes, I appreciate [name of organisation] have helped because, otherwise, without them, I probably would be banged up right now.* Advisory Group member, phase 2*.*

Disruption

Nevertheless, the nature of this work and the lives of the people involved means that the intervention is often disrupted. This could be due to several reasons as outlined by this professional.

*I think arrests, changes of placement, is there a looked after child or going into custody, getting kicked out of school, any of those things can disrupt what’s happening or what all services and professionals are doing with that young person, it can disrupt things for a period of time.* Professional, FG phase 1.

That progress is not a linear process was recognised in the Advisory Group at the very start of data collection. This was also acknowledged by other professionals at different stages in the data collection.

*….if there’s an offence committed or something that can disrupt it [the intervention], so we could have everything in place for a young person and they could have funding, they could have a job lined up, and they’ve gone out with their friends on a Friday and they get arrested, so everything else goes onto the backburner.* Professional FG phase 1*.*

he finally got a job interview, and then he had a row with his dad and dad said he couldn’t come back home, so that was it, everything else stopped in the world. So I said let’s see if we can get to the job interview, we can sort that out later, but that was it, it was like everything had stopped in his world because his dad had said you can’t come home tonight. So that resilience is really hard at times, but I think they are more resilient and it’s having that person that is advocating for you. Professional FG phase 2.

*everything is in place, but that one thing and they haven’t got the resilience to pick themselves up and get on with it or get back on the horse and start again, it takes a long time to go through that process with them to start building some of that resilience.* Professional FG phase 1

During the Advisory Group discussion at phase two of data collection, one participant suggested a potential solution to this

*..there’s an Outcome 22. It’s an out-of-court disposal; there’s no formal outcome but there is intervention.* Advisory Group participant phase 2.

[Outcome 22](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791082/count-general-apr-2019.pdf) is an outcome code that can be used by the police to defer prosecution until the accused has given the opportunity to engage with an activity (YJLC). Diversionary, educational or intervention activity, resulting from a crime can be undertaken if it is not in the public interest to take any further action (NPCC 2019). This out of court disposal could provide an incentive (and reward) for CYP who are making progress with the intervention.

Outcome 6: PARTNERSHIP: An understanding of how professionals work together.

The significance of multi-agency working was first recognised in law in s38 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. It was built on the premise that no single agency can deal with or be responsible for dealing with such issues. Since then, the need for greater collaboration and improved interagency working has been a key policy priority (Sloper 2004). This evaluation defines a partnership to be a cooperative relationship between two or more organisations to achieve a common goal (Berry, et al, 2011) and therefore welcomed the participation from professionals representing a wide range of services. They were invited to join both the Advisory Group and the professional focus groups to share their experiences. Interviews were also conducted with individual representatives from the three partners namely the Violence Reduction Unit (Kent & Medway), Medway’s Task Force and the SYVP.

The evaluation has drawn on the five mechanisms identified by Berry et al (2011) as integral to successful partnership working. Each will be considered in turn with evidence provided from the evaluation. However, it is important to note that there are ‘fuzzy boundaries’ (Alexander and Enns, 1988) and overlaps will occur between these mechanisms.

Leadership

Leadership is described as having a shared vision, values, a strategic direction and buy-in from partners and managers. Leadership also involves a clear project brief with well-defined roles and responsibilities. At the start of the project there was duplication of work and revisiting old themes

*…[I was] going to meetings where people were trying to decide what the point of the project was and who were their target groups and all this stuff. I was like, “We know that, that’s been dealt with”* Professional Interview phase 1

This was largely due to a change in personnel and once the leadership was restored, there was a marked difference, resulting in a strong sense of leadership especially from project leads.

*‘…..it’s only with X coming in and then being able to recruit Y, that there’s been that real sense of clarity over what it is exactly they are trying to achieve”.* Professional Interview phase 1

Data sharing and problem focus

Expressed as clarifying the issues through focused analysis to ensure the problem is addressed, this evaluation found encouraging evidence about data sharing though there was room for improvement in some sectors. The original call to tender also indicated clarity around the problem(s) to be addressed and a staged approach to delivering intervention.

….*it’s the simplicity of having the two cohorts because that makes it easy for professionals to understand and to see where a young person fits and what’s the level of support and the type of support that they can expect to receive. So it really helps in allowing clarity and a clarity for frontline practitioners so that they can have that discussion with that young person and their family.* Professional Interview phase 2

There was evidence of data sharing across the partnerships that increased awareness of shared issues, and which encouraged a more focussed and integrated approach. One participant explained that a conversation with a colleague in a different area highlighted the need for intervention there;

*that’s given me intelligence …that we might not have found out about otherwise. ….having intelligence about where [the work] needs to be and where we’ve got gaps in the service is really helpful.* Professional Interview phase 1

At times there were concerns that not everyone had the same focus or took a child first approach. (Further information relating to the police is discussed in Outcome 9).

*sometimes they [police] treat them [CYP] as criminals first and young people second.* Professional FG phase 2

*one of my young person’s was missing and the police knew he was missing. He was a reported missing person. And the police approached him in the town centre and, instead of … This is a child, right? And a missing child … I’ve got videos on my phone of what was sent. The police have missing sort of jumped on top of him, handcuffed him and an arrest over something else. But this is a missing child that hasn’t been home for two days. It’s not how you treat children. And the police: that is just a very, I think, clear example of how I think the police … They see the criminal: they don’t see the child. It’s as simple as that.* Advisory Board member phase 2

Communication and co-location

Berry et al (2011) argue that regular face to face contact and communication between partners, including the co-location of agencies, partners and staff is an essential element to partnership working. Again, SYVP’s commitment to this was encouraging as documentary analysis showed regular and timely meetings. Teams also worked well to share their roles within the project

*“[staff member] came and did a really helpful presentation to our team that really clearly explained what the project was and what young people get out of it and who we should be referring, those sorts of things”* Professional Interview phase 1

These meetings proved highly valuable to professionals who understood the challenges faced by, or in relation to CYP within a wider context.

*….a monthly meeting where they look at interventions that have been put in place for some young people. I think, because of that sort of partnership work, again you talk about individuals in those meetings, but what’s starting to evolve is a better understanding of some of those contextual issues.* Professional interview phase 1

*I work quite closely with the Speech and Language Therapist around autism and how we can help him.* Professional FG 1

Communication between the police and other SYVP partners were the most fragile.

*as a team it’s [details of intervention with CYP] a little bit of an unknown... I don’t know whether the [SYVP] workers feel it’s a bit of a betrayal of the child’s trust by giving out information about how they’re getting on and what’s going on.* Professional interview phase 2

*we’re not always given a lot of information from these police operations or what conclusions they draw – obviously they do share intel if they think it’s relevant through our Violence Reduction Unit, but sometimes we’re not sure how involved our young people were…Unless someone is arrested and charged for an offence it’s not always easy to know what role they were playing or what it is connected to in a wider scheme*. Professional FG phase 1.

*Yes. I think I’ve had a number of examples in the project so far, where …Just bad communication, really, between the police and the project and other professionals*. Advisory Group member phase 2*.*

One professional offered an explanation for this:

I think with the police it’s a bit different because there are more legal frameworks around it. Our relationship with the police is fairly good, although saying that, maybe we don’t have very high expectations of what they’re going to share with us. Professional Interview phase 2.

Another professional suggested sharing a monthly report with relevant information, including when intervention ends. This might improve partnership working and enable continuing and positive relationships between the police and the CYP. This information might include,

*what they’ve [CYP] been doing, what they’re doing well, what their interests are, because as we work with them, because we often have to see a child who has been missing and we can have a little chat with them about that – I hear you’ve been to football this week, how nice.*

Structure

The literature (Berry et al 2011) believes that having a research partner as an active member of the partnership is of enormous benefit. The commissioning of the research and evaluation team to undertake this evaluation shows the commitment to this. In addition, as part of the evaluation the health economist academic supported the SYVP to create an excel database that acted as a live dashboard for staff to import relevant outcome data. The intention is that this would then be ready to combine with the cost data to determine potential cost savings and cost effectiveness of the SYVP. The effectiveness of this dashboard relied on periodic and regular uploading of the data by local authority staff, but due to other work demands, this was not always possible. The evaluation team are of the opinion that the commissioning of a dedicated person to update this on a weekly or monthly basis would be beneficial to keep an ongoing account of the impact of the interventions.

Berry et al (2011) also highlighted a need for clear monitoring, accountability and involving the most appropriate agencies. As mentioned above, partners in the intervention regularly participated in multi-agency meetings. These offered opportunities to share roles and responsibilities encouraging a system of accountability. The ways front line practitioners learnt to support each other to offer an excellent service to CYP is indicative of the ways they worked together and promoted the integrity of the project.

However, there were indications that more work could be done to build trusting relationships between the partners.

*I don’t know whether the [organisation] workers feel it’s a bit of a betrayal of the child’s trust by giving out information about how they’re getting on and what’s going on, but I would like to see some more coming back this way,* Professional interview phase2*.*

A different professional agreed that trust needs to be built within the partnership. S/he offered a possible explanation for this.

*I don’t think there’s necessarily that trust, and it’s the trust that underpins the confidence to take a risk and share information.…when you speak to people of a certain level, they will say I can see no reason why information is not shared, but again that doesn’t seem to be a widespread culture, so it’s more about having the relationships with the right people.* Professional interview phase 2

Experience

Prior experience of working together, including the secondment of skilled officers into joint teams and the joint training of team members is another important mechanism in this model of partnership working. This too was evident in the findings from the evaluation.

*“…Yes, we’ve got good relationships. I mean, some of those are pre-existing, so I don’t know that they necessarily depend particularly on the Serious Youth Violence Project necessarily.”* Professional interview phase 1

*“..in terms of these partnership projects, I think there is a need for consistency in who’s involved early on so that there is that clarity, if there is a clarity with a project that you kind of work with that.”* Professional interview phase 1

These quotes highlight the importance of experience both vertically and horizontally within the SYVP structure.

Lived Experience

This evaluation identified another element to the partnerships; namely the centrality and involvement of those with lived experience. Though related to the earlier point, we propose that this should be viewed as an additional, sixth mechanism adopted by the SYVP. The involvement of those with lived experience in the Advisory Group alongside practitioners and managers ensured the values and priorities of individuals and the project as a whole was grounded in the experiences of those engaged in or caught up in serious youth violence.

*[that] the programme is children and young people led is crucial and they must be given a voice and autonomy in the process. This includes being heard by commissioners.* Advisory Group member phase 2*.*

How all the mechanisms come together in this project is summarised (unknowingly) by this professional:

*….when you have that sense of a clear, shared purpose [data sharing/problem focus] and also there’s the personal relationships, that really helps in terms of building trust [experience including lived experience]. Yes, it is purpose, it is the relationship, I think it’s a clear understanding of each other’s roles [structures], an acknowledgment of the value that that role has [communication] and the fourth is coordination of different tasks [leadership], so I guess those are probably [pause] and I think you probably need all four if you are going to get to that place where there is trust and confidence.* Professional Interview phase 1.

Case study 2

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| Case study 2 |
| Child A, a young man involved with the SYVP following a long history of offending, including involvement in county lines spoke of his experiences with the police. He recounted an event when he was told by the school that the police wanted to talk with him and was surprised to be arrested in front of his peers. Child A explained how he lost trust in the school and the police and how it resulted in a negative change in his behaviour. As a result of this experience Child A was reluctant to attend school. However, the police, the school, the SYVP and Child A worked together and now, when the former attend school premises, Child A is informed.  Child A also described a time when at 6.30am the police came running into his bedroom carrying tasers and dragged him out of bed in handcuffs. He explained that this imposition puts him in a ‘bad mindset’ and he was motivated to return to his previous behaviour and reoffend. Finally, Child A recounted an incident when he was kidnapped by elder young street group members. He was held at knifepoint and threats were made to shoot his mother. Child A approached the police who s/he felt did nothing. Two days later the same young street group member tried to stab him in the throat. The police arrested both Child A and the young street group member for GBH.  Child A explained his dislike and distrust of the police because of their poor communication and lack of respect for younger people who have offended. The SYVP interventions changed Child A’s understanding and he now recognizes that the police have a job to do. He recalled bumping into a police officer who had previously arrested him and whom he had always ‘hated’. With his new attitude he approached the officer and they had chatted ‘*a normal, general conversation*’ for 45 minutes. |

Outcome 7: Modelling potential cost savings associated with the project

Salus confirmed 154 children were referred to the SYV project up until June 2022. Young people were supported to provide pre-evaluation information during the first 6 weeks of their support. Post-evaluation information was collected at the point of closure or within 6 weeks. This related to the use of the WEMWBS instrument used to measure quality of life in the evaluation. Additional data was collected by Kent County Council, for example (missing episodes, exclusions etc).

Each young person received between 6 months to 18 months support with the average amount of support being 10 months.

There was a change in the number of arrests from a total of 393 in the pre intervention period to a total of 164 arrests during the intervention period of the study. A reduction in the number of arrests from comparing pre SYVP intervention data to the period after shows overall total cost savings of approximately £118,224. This is based on the data of 67 CYP for whom there was complete data and represents an average saving per CYP of £1765.

There was a reduction in the number of incidents managing missing persons, comparing pre SYVP intervention data to the period after, (406 days and 287 days respectively). This shows an overall total cost savings of approximately £344,674. This is based on the data of 48 CYP for whom there was complete data and represents an average saving per CYP of £7181.

There was a change in the number of school exclusions from a total of 100 in the pre intervention period to a total of 74 school exclusions during the intervention period of the study. A reduction in managing school exclusions, again from comparing pre SYVP intervention data to the period after shows overall total cost savings ofapproximately £483,539. This is based on data for 46 CYP for whom there was complete data and represents an average saving per CYP of £10,512.

Finally, police call outs increased overall when comparing pre and post data. The number of call outs increased from 751 occasions to 867 (for a total of 106 CYP) and cost in total £67,383 or £636 on average per CYP.

These calculations all factored into their final totals an intervention cost of £54. This programme cost was based on the amount awarded to KCC for the project divided by 24 months for a cost per participant.

Forty nine CYP completed both pre and post Quality of Life data using the Short Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) allowing comparison around any change in quality of life to be measured alongside the service resource use and cost calculations.

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[The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) User guide – Version 2](https://s3.amazonaws.com/helpscout.net/docs/assets/5f97128852faff0016af3a34/attachments/5fe10a9eb624c71b7985b8f3/WEMWBS-Scale.pdf)

[May 2015](https://s3.amazonaws.com/helpscout.net/docs/assets/5f97128852faff0016af3a34/attachments/5fe10a9eb624c71b7985b8f3/WEMWBS-Scale.pdf) table 11 pages 39-40, shows that the raw scores for the short form version used in this evaluation range from between 7 to 35 points a range of 28. The scale developers state a change of three or more points has shown to be significant in other studies that examined score changes on their long-form WEMWBS scale. However as yet, the developers do not have sufficient data for anything greater than a 3 point improvement being clinically significant for the short form version of the scale used in this evaluation. That said an improved change in the quality of life score on average of 4.5 points was achieved over the duration of the intervention for each CYP. This represents an improvement on average of 16% and should be seen as a very welcome change in score for the young people in response to the intervention. This is especially so when considered alongside the aforementioned reductions in resources used and associated cost savings.

Outcome 8: INCLUSIVITY: An understanding of how the project might better address the needs of more CYP involved in serious violence.

As shown throughout this report, there was enormous support for the project throughout the evaluation. This was across the board from senior managers, a plethora of front-line staff from different disciplines to CYP and their families. There was no scope to speak with those who did not engage in the project and, it is to the interventions credit that those who did engage spoke highly of the interventions and how they had benefitted from it. When asked if there was anything they would change about the project these CYP said

*That’s quite a difficult one. If I had to change something, I’d probably say make it more available for people.* Interview CYP4

*I don’t think I would change anything, no.* Interview CYP5.

This section will therefore consider areas of the project where support might be extended or where participants felt something was missing;

Extending the intervention

Many of those involved in the evaluation were concerned about what happens when the intervention becomes unavailable.

I think for our kids, it’s 24/7, and things tend to kick off more in the evenings when I desperately need the support more, and the weekends, but you don’t have that sounding board with that person, and the only way you can go is contacting the police, which is not necessarily what you want. You don’t have that kind of out-of-hours contact with your worker in a desperate time, like five o'clock on a Friday evening or beyond. I had a situation where I wanted to talk to her last Friday when I found out about something and I didn't get to hear from her till Monday, so it’s things like that, that’s the only thing . it’s not really a criticism because I don’t expect them to be working 24 hours.Parent/Carer FG phase 1*.*

*And when they [professionals] all start dropping off because nothing is really badly happening, I know as a mother, something bad is going to happen at some point, I don’t know when, it’s a matter of when.* Parent/carer FG phase 1.

Others worried about the CYP when their intervention came to a natural end.

*my son just turned 18 last week so then there’s the issue of whether that service is going to continue for him, which I feel is really needed but I’m not sure whether that will be on offer for him.* Parent/Carer FG phase 1

*I think extension after twelve months is definitely a good idea for most people because, if you just drop out after twelve months, some kids might think that they’ve got no one else to turn to when times get rough.* Parent/Carer FG phase 1

*I guess one of the things for me is about what happens at the end, really…‘Is it ending at the right time when, actually, is there that independence there?’….I suspect it may be because the clock is ticking and people are expected to be offering more support to more young people.* Advisory Group member phase 2

*if they know they’ve got someone behind you, you are going to be more resilient, but then again, it’s one of those long-term things, what happens after we’re not there, who is going to be their resilient person, who is going to be the person making sure they’re more resilient.* Parent/Carer FG phase 1

There was a sense that a year was not long enough. One participant explained.

*… a year is not long enough for any support, it’s got to be there for years…Everyone walks away and that’s it, done and dusted, but it isn’t because we’re still there, we still have to live with the consequences and the aftermath of when things kick off again.* Parent/carer FG phase 2

*we are all very reactive, why can’t we be proactive.* Parent carer FG phase 1.

These concerns became more acute following the announcement that the funding for the project would not be extended.

*to have that go, especially with my son being autistic he doesn’t like that sort of change, so fingers crossed he’ll be alright,* Parent/Carer FG phase 2

*I don’t know why they did that [close the programme] because that was a bit stupid, because it was actually helping out a lot.... the kids are probably going to be like, well I don’t really have anyone to talk to anymore and they’re probably going to change or they’re going to do whatever, but I don’t think it’s good that they’re doing that because we all felt safer with them here, but now they’re going so I don’t know what we’re going to do now.* Interview CYP4

*I’m only sorry that in the next couple of weeks that [mentor] will be closing on [granddaughter] and I am a little tad concerned that that might have an adverse effect on her, but we’ll just have to wait and see. [mentor] has said I’m here 24/7, so I’ll just have to see how it goes, but I will be sorry.* Parent/Carer FG phase 2.

As outlined above a decision was made to extend the project to 17 CYP who were deemed too vulnerable/high risk to lose the support offered by the SYVP*.* This enabled staff to work more intensely with these CYP to prepare them for endings and avoid the feeling of being ‘dropped off the cliff edge’.

Activities

There was a recognition amongst practitioners that changes in the local area has made it less safe for CYP.

*we were trying to create a space where it is safe for young people to be out and play, because that’s a real problem. Previously young people would have been allowed out to play safely in the streets*. Interview Professional phase 1.

S/he proposed that engaging the community would provide safer spaces within the county making it a safer place for everyone.

*…I think there is a community safety aspect of just having more people about, more adults about, it has a positive impact in terms of general community safety.* Interview professional phase 1

Research has shown that sporting activities can offer social benefits and helps young people build positive life skills, physical fitness and psychological well-being. (Anderson-Butcher 2018; Terry et al 2014). It also helps alleviate social problems and can help young people improve their social capital eg using their sporting activities to gain qualification or employment in the field (Anderson-Butcher 2018; Spaaji 2009). The SYVP have had some success with finding suitable projects for CYP that reflected their interests.

*I’ve had one of the [mentors] who applied for funding to get a young person who had been out of education too for years onto a bicycle maintenance course because his love was bicycles.* Professional FG phase 1

They provided a basis that initially began as a diversionary scheme, but which had longer term positive impacts.

*he’s found a new interest of going to the driving range, just hitting the golf balls, he’s found that quite therapeutic. We’ve been supporting [this CYP] with looking towards employment, looking to get him on a CSCS [Construction Skills Certification Scheme] and I’ve also put him on a construction course, it’s for the Construction Youth Trust, to help [this CYP] to work towards employment before closing, because I’m due to close soon unfortunately.* Mentor, supporting Interview CYP7*.*

But there was concern about the lack of opportunities like these and the access CYP and their families had to them;

*I think there’s been a reduction in youth-based activities, youth-based centres like the youth clubs, they’re not as numerous as they used to be, and Covid has had a massive impact because everything was shut, but even before that we were seeing reductions in what was going on there.* Professional FG phase 1

*We do have a few of those [after school clubs] about, but not enough and sometimes it’s about location and area, so there are funding pots out there if a kid is specifically saying he wants to do something, but it’s hit and miss whether or not you get access to that funding and if it is, it’s for a short period of time so it would be nice to have more bits like that*. Professional FG phase 1.

But not all community projects are inclusive.

*Let’s face it, a lot of our kids come from backgrounds where parents are not well off and they can’t afford to send their kids to our school clubs or get them engaged in sport and activity.* Professional FGphase 2

Take this account by one practitioner who spoke of a CYP who was wearing a tag because of his involvement in criminal activity. As part of the intervention, he was taken to play football at a community event. This practitioner’s enthusiasm is palpable:

*he’s working with me, he’s engaging with me, he’s trying to better himself, trying to make better choices, and I’ve taken him to a football training session and he absolutely ripped it apart, he was brilliant, he was the best player on the pitch, and I know my football.* Advisory Group member phase 2.

The tag was visible when wearing the football kit and despite excelling at the sport and the clear advantages to the team and the CYPs confidence, psychological well-being (Terry et al 2014) and reintegration into the community, at the end of the match the coach approached the practitioner and explained that,

*yes, he’s a good player but I don’t really want him mixing with the other boys.* Advisory Group member phase 2.

A policy that emphasises the importance of inclusion in extra-curricular activities and promotes the proactive engagement of CYP in these interventions is important. When viewed within the context of the interventions discussed in Outcome 3 these policies would provide a foundation to build on the positive outcomes identified in Outcome 4.

Female children

There is a recognition in the UK that the presence of female children in young street groups is hidden and largely unknown (Havard 2022b, Whittaker 2019). This would also seem to be the case in Kent. When discussing referrals, one professional explained

*The gender bias was so evident that no one identified a gang but would always talk about how they [female children] were exploited but not think in that context.* Staff Email

*the signs were there and they [her daughter and female friend] were kind of hinting at* things *but not really telling us look, this is a situation. I suppose again, back then, it wasn’t really talked about,* Parent/Carer FG phase 1

This research showed that the presence of female children in young street groups enticed male children and were a reason to become involved;

*they [CYP] go to a person with loads of money, girls and opportunity there.* Interview CYP3

*They’re more likely to meet girls if they’re involved in the gang, gives them some credibility…that’s going to be an attraction for those young boys, that’s going to be something that overrides even some of the economic or social difficulties that that young person might be having.* Professional Interview, phase 2*.*

and a reason not to leave,

*they get attached to the money, the lifestyle, they start getting all the fashion, start getting all the girls, start getting attention, but they don’t want to leave it because if they leave it they’ll become a nobody again.* Interview CYP3

Practitioners spoke of their perception that female children were more ‘difficult’ to engage than male children.

*I think girls are a harder nut to crack, boys seem more willing, we can usually find a common ground or something whereas girls are a lot more difficult to crack. When we do it’s usually quite successful, but they can be quite hard to get on board*.Professional FG phase 1

*when you work with girls you need to connect almost on an emotional level first, whereas boys, if you can offer them something, if you can sort something specific out for them, they’re more likely to engage with you that way.* Professional FG phase 1

*Girls on our project are definitely harder to reach than the young men in our project …they need to be supported on an emotional level and they are ‘all or nothing’. So they are a failure every single day or they are not willing to speak to you at all. …[boys] they’re quite easy to work with …which we did for a few days. Girls are not like that at all: they’re a totally different kettle of fish in this project.* Advisory Group member phase 2.

This practitioner explained why.

*You can find a young boy who is heavily involved in gang crime, but still likes playing on his X-Box, and you can engage that young person about the thing they like, even though they’ve got all this other stuff going on, whereas with a lot of the young girls, it’s harder to find that thing that you can engage them on separate to what’s going on here..* Professional Interview Phase 2.

The need for gender informed practice has long been identified in the UK, with criticisms that female children are being shoehorned into programmes designed for male children (Auyong 2018; Jury-Dada 2018). It is likely that the SYVP’s commitment to meeting individual need (see outcome 3) circumvents some of this but an awareness of this tendency is important to ensure female children are not seen or labelled as more difficult than male children.

This research did identify that female children respond well to group work;

*I’ve been doing some group work in [location] and put a group of girls together and they’re brilliant, they will literally talk and talk and talk, and you will have the best session ever because they’re together, but getting them on an individual one to one basis and they’re just not as engaging at all, but put them in a group and they’re brilliant.* Professional FG phase 1

At the half-way stage, the research and evaluation team facilitated a discussion with the Advisory Group about the risks, benefits, and challenges of group work specifically for female children. Whist supportive of this idea, there were valid concerns around safeguarding.

*The idea is great: that we bring all the girls together but, like you said, our concern is always that the ones that are a lot lower risk, at a lower level would they be exploited by the ones that are more entrenched?’ … a lot of our Prevent kids are really vulnerable young people that have got caught up with, it could just be one incident; it could be just one group of young people.* Advisory Group member phase 2.

Female children clearly play a significant role in young street groups. Access to them is part of the attraction for many who are drawn into these criminal networks. Like the rest of the UK (Havard et al 2021; Whittaker 2018), the extent of female children’s involvement in these groups in Kent is largely unknown, work should be done to establish these statistics and identify safe and effective methods of intervention.

Outcome 9: LOCAL AREAS AND SERVICES. Learning how local services can and do work together in KCC.

Safe places

This research showed a collaboration between professionals, CYP and their families regarding unsafe areas within the county. This was in part related to (sometimes fatal) stabbings, but also young street group reputation. Town centres are identified as particular hotspots;

*town centre because a lot of the gang members, the Crew as they call themselves, hang about down there.* Parent/Carer FG phase2

*I know we’ve had some young people… causing a distraction so people could commit street robberies.* Professional FG phase 1

It is possible that the areas of potential danger and concern are changing,

seems to be happening more and more at the beaches, that can be quite a hotspot there and part of the county line involvement. Professional FG phase *1*

The fear these dangerous areas instilled in some CYP are clear,

*Yes, I stay in areas that’s not too far away from my house. I keep a 20 minute distance from my house when I go out.* Interview CYP3.

This CYP spoke of his concern in a city centre and how the SYVP had found him a place of safety. Note the extent of the security required to make this CYP feel safe.

*... [city centre] not that safe, not that safe, but where I live, in a, how do I put this place? A supported house, I feel very safe because I know there’s staff downstairs, nobody can get through the doors without having to go past the staff, there’s cameras everywhere.* Interview CYP4*.*

Schools

Like other areas in the UK (Whittaker et al 2018) the response of schools to serious youth violence is patchy and inconsistent (see case study 1,2 and 3). Some schools were areas of safety and were an important part of the positive change seen in CYPs:

*[my granddaughter], she was being quite naughty at school, and she would walk out of school, walk out of classes, and it was the school that got in touch,* Parent/Carer FG phase 2*.*

*I’m just trying to move schools....up the road to me so I can be in my own area and I can be safe with people I don’t know, so it won’t be people who don’t like me....I know some girls there, they are really nice to me, they hang out with me outside of school as well and they really want me to go to their school, they’re like if you come to my school then we can check an eye on you, we know where you are and then we can walk back from school etc, Interview CYP6*

*the school informed [mentor] and [mentor] saw herself, you know, that I needed help, pushing in the right direction. So, I’d go to [mentor] all the time and I’d explain to her all my problems,* Interview CYP4.

For others they were dangerous places filled with risk of violence and exploitation,

*Unfortunately, the school he’s at is next door to a PRU and there’s a lot of links in that school as well as where he is with older siblings that are in gangs. So, the trouble is, when you’re in a specialist environment with special needs, similar to my child’s, you will come across other children that have that link through their family network or friends.* Parent/Carer FG phase 1

*I don’t go to school...due to the threats.* Interview CYP7.

*I stopped going to school for eight months but I’m going in now, so I’m trying to move schools currently because in my school right now … some people that don’t like me go to that school, and they are really violent.* Interview CYP6

In some instances, there was concern that schools had washed their hands of the CYP

*I worked with a young girl and she’d been to every PRU in [named area] and because she got kicked out of the last PRU she had nowhere to go and they just literally struggle along because she was Year 11, and so she’s now not been in education for ten, twelve months and has no GCSEs or anything, but it was no one’s problem, we’ll just string it out because she’s Year 11.* Professional FG phase 2

Case study 3

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| Case study 3 |
| One practitioner spoke of a CYP who after a long period of absence from school had actively engaged in education for long periods of time. Because of poverty the family were unable to buy him school shoes. Realising he had choices, the CYP continued to attend the school wearing his trainers. The school continually reminded this pupil that trainers were not part of the uniform. Embarrassed by his financial situation and keen to protect his mother, this CYP kept making excuses, telling the teachers that he had forgotten the school rules. The school’s response was to internally suspend this CYP, remove him from the classroom and place him in social isolation because he did not have the correct uniform. When the mentor realised the problem s/he approached the school and advocated on behalf of the CYP and asking that he be returned to the classroom with his peers. The mentor explained that his mother would be paid within the month and would buy him school shoes then. The school’s decision was to uphold the rules and continue to suspend the pupil until the uniform was replaced. The SYVP then stepped in and bought this CYP new shoes, and he was able to continue with his education alongside his peers in the classroom. |

In addition to that shown in Case study 3. The SYVP was instrumental in giving CYP the tools required to navigate the difficulties they experience, often working in partnership with school staff.

*Through the school, I’ve noticed a big change in my daughter. Certain things she was doing at her old school, and she’d speak to her support worker about, and her support worker would advise her on ways to deal with situations and I can see her putting that to use at this new school that she’s at…I can see a big change.* Carer/Parents FG phase 1.

*they’re [mentor] doing a good job, I’m so confident about going to school. Like before I did not want to go, I didn’t even want to set foot in the place, I didn’t want to go near it, no one would convince me to go in, but she’d always buy me [a treat] in the morning, so that brought me into school.* Interview CYP6

Police

The police clearly play a crucial role in the intervention, but as outlined in Outcome 6, the partnership between the police and other agencies is not always consistent and may benefit from some focus in the future. A discussion around this was facilitated during phase 2 of the Advisory group.

*He’d just started a new school. He was doing really well there. It was a fresh start to him. And then the police turned up at school and it really threw this young person off because, now that school wasn’t a safe place for him anymore. He felt humiliated: … He ended up doing a runner. The police chased him. The police are wasting half a day chasing him around [name of a local area].* Advisory Group member phase 2

There was a consensus amongst participants that police held different attitudes to the children they worked with when compared with other agencies,

*what it comes down to is the police are viewing the children as criminals first and children second. Whereas, I think that the rest of the [pause] There’s been a shift, professionally: everyone else is seeing everyone as children. The police, I think, in general, are seeing them as criminals.* Advisory Group member phase 2

*I think that’s because, with the police, if our children – or my child – had done wrong, it was very black-and-white: ‘You’ve done wrong; you’re coming with us.’* Advisory Group member phase 2

That said, things appear to be improving:

*sometimes they [police]treat them [CYP] as criminals first and young people second. I do get that quite a lot with police offers but there have been some changes over the time with the police officers I’ve worked with.* FG Professional phase 2.

*it is being filtered down to them that they need to start looking at young people as children first and before they were looking at them as criminals. So I do know that this agenda is actually being pushed through the police* FG Professional phase 2

Efforts are also being made to integrate the police into local schools.

*I know the police are looking to recruit a number of officers who would work purely in schools, which, potentially, allows them that time and space to actually get to know young people, including young people who are probably currently being supported by [name of organisation].* Advisory Group member phase 2.

Recommendations

The SYVP was very well received by professionals, CYP and their families. The following recommendations are based on the information obtained as part of the evaluation informed by a wider context of academic literature and policy. The recommendations have been divided and directed at different stakeholders. Inevitably there are areas of overlap e.g. suggestions to develop policies and practice within and across organisations.

For policy makers

1. Co-ordinate future programme evaluations so they are available before projects are open to tender. These independent evidence-based reviews can offer objective assessments to inform decision making relating to future/further funding.
2. Consider the commissioning of a dedicated person to update the data on a regular basis to enable continuous monitoring of the impact (and cost effectiveness) of interventions.
3. Invest in community projects so that CYP have extracurricular activities to keep them occupied, build skills and improve/maintain self-esteem. Introduce policies to ensure continued prioritising (and funding) of these activities. Given the knowledge and communication skills of many of these young people, there may be an opportunity (subject to stringent safeguards) to train CYP to assist in delivering these.
4. Revisit policies and practice of local community projects involving CYPs so that they actively engage those with criminal convictions. These too should be subject to thorough risk assessments and safeguards (Streetgames 2022)
5. Ensure current policy and practice recognises and implements Outcome 22 when possible and appropriate.

SYVP

1. Continue to offer flexibility when approaching the end of the interventions so that CYPs are confident and ready to live without formal support. Keep caseloads smaller to assist with this.
2. Continue to build positive relationships with the families and carers of CYP and include these as priorities/KPIs within interventions.
3. Develop gender informed approaches specifically for female children involved in young street groups. The evaluation identified that group work was effective, but caution is required to ensure safeguarding of individuals (Havard et al 2021).

Partnerships

1. A child-first approach should be central to good practice for all agencies involved in the intervention.
2. Continue to build on the communication between the different teams, either through regular meetings or secondments. Investigate the possibility of taking advantage of hybrid working and using online spaces to increase the engagement and participation of individuals from across the partnerships.
3. All future projects should consider involving those with lived experience as an integral part of developing, delivering, and adapting interventions. It would also be wise to include the voices and opinions of those with lived experience into any training to ensure they are relevant and current.
4. Continue to develop relationships between all agencies, but especially the project, schools and the police.

Further research

Further research would be valuable to try and identify the reasons why some CYP did not engage in the project. It would be useful to understand if this was by free choice or whether it was due to other factors eg, if the demands of county lines kept them too busy, or the fear of retaliation was too strong. This could help KCC to strategize ways to try to engage with these ‘hard to reach’ CYP.

This evaluation identified how the partnership between the SYVP, and other professionals allowed for opportunities to work together to fill some gaps and better meet the needs of the CYP. The impact the SYVP had on the partners themselves (eg Youth Justice service, schools, Early Help and Children’s Social Work Teams) was beyond the scope of this project. Further research could focus on this, consider changes to workload, staff mental health/well-being and motivation as well as a potential cost effectiveness to the Local Authority Children’s services as a result of the (re) integration of CYPs into schools/communities.

The number of female children in young street groups in Kent is largely unknown as is the precise nature of their roles and the extent of their involvement. Given the attraction and kudos females bring to these networks, further research is required to understand these and to find ways to intervene to prevent their recruitment.

Further research could explore CYP experiences of safety (or otherwise) in Kent Schools. This includes an understanding of the circumstances surrounding school exclusion. Future research could also focus on the potential for wider intervention benefits, including the impact of the project on the utilisation of health care and the potential for better outcomes and cost savings across the education, health and criminal justice systems.

Conclusion

Staff commitment to using a child centred approach has been central to this project and the trusting relationships built between practitioners, CYPs and their families have been an integral part of its success. This should be nurtured to avoid the unnecessary criminalisation of children and to develop the positive relationships between partners. Indeed, promoting trusting relationships between the police and the public has already been identified as an essential aspect of addressing wider violent behaviour including those directed at female children (HM Government, 2021, HMICFRS 2021)

Work should continue to adopt a co-ordinated child focussed approach to interagency working and ensure that there is *“a specific focus on reinforcing the responsibilities of practitioners to advocate for and on behalf of the children they are working with / who are in their care.*” (Chscp 2022 p 22). This is particularly important given the recent negative publicity surrounding Child Q.

Many of the CYP were extremely articulate in the interviews and advisory groups and openly shared their notable expertise in Child Criminal Exploitation. This is also true of family members, who often reiterated the views of CYP albeit from a different perspective. The research and evaluation team would encourage the continued development of involving those with lived experience in future work as their knowledge and expertise could be used to great effect.

The before and after methodology used to follow up the CYP who participated in this project, highlighted a welcome improvement in their average quality of life scores. At the same time the evaluation findings report an overall reduction in some of the resources used within the education system and the criminal justice system showing the potential for longer term cost-effectiveness associated with this type of intervention to support CYP.

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1. The term staff is used to describe those involved in the project who do not typically have direct contact with the CYP their carers or parents. The term practitioner is used to describe the various front-line roles represented in this evaluation. When there is no risk of identifying the individual practitioner their precise role (eg mentor) is used. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Case studies are the perceptions of individuals who participated in the evaluation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)