

# YEF Youth Workers and Safeguarding Review

## Summary

- YEF is seeking a team to conduct a review of youth workers' role in safeguarding children at risk of or involved in violence in England and Wales.
- The study will inform YEF's recommendations for the youth sector on how to reduce serious youth violence (which will draw on a range of ongoing and completed research work).
- The deadline for the final report is May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The deadline for proposals is 10am, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2024. We intend to have appointed the successful team by 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024.

## Background

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is a charity with a mission that matters. We exist to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice.

Children and young people at risk of becoming involved in violence deserve services that give them the best chance of a positive future. To make sure that happens, we fund promising projects and then use the very best evaluation to find out what works. We also synthesise the best available evidence from across the world, and then aim to mobilise what we learn across various sectors to make a change to the lives of children.

It is also imperative that YEF fully understands the context in which children live, and in which services operate to support them. Only then can we make evidence-based recommendations on how best to reduce serious violence amongst children and young people. Alongside our [programme funding](#), and [evidence synthesis](#) work, we fund a wide range of research projects (including data analysis, youth understanding work, and practice reviews) to better understand young people's lives, and the systems and services that surround them.

The youth sector is one such system that supports children.

## YEF's youth sector work

In late 2025, YEF will publish a set of recommendations for how the youth sector across England and Wales can support the reduction of serious violence amongst children and young people. These recommendations will draw upon YEF's existing work in the youth sector, including:

- Projects YEF has funded and evaluated within the sector (such as multi-site trials of [mentoring](#) and [detached youth work](#))
- Relevant sections of the YEF [Toolkit](#) (e.g. sports programmes, arts programmes, mentoring, and A&E navigators).
- Our extensive work understanding the lives of young people with the [Peer Action Collective](#)
- Our annual [Children Violence and Vulnerability survey](#) of young people.

In addition, YEF is currently commissioning three other reviews of practice, covering youth clubs, A&E navigator programmes, and youth sector provision, commissioning, and funding. We are open to teams applying for more than one project, particularly if efficiencies can be achieved through combining methods or reporting.

## The aim of this project

We want to know more about the role that youth workers play in safeguarding children from violence, and about youth workers' interactions with the wider safeguarding system. Youth workers are critical trusted adults in the lives of many children who are vulnerable to violence and child criminal exploitation (CCE), but there is evidence that their role in safeguarding is being overlooked. Youth work organisations are not explicitly listed as 'relevant agencies' in safeguarding guidelines, and they may be overlooked by local safeguarding partnerships.<sup>1</sup>

This lack of collaboration may be a missed opportunity to support vulnerable children. The DFE overview of periodic reviews of serious case reports (SCRs) from 1998–2019 highlights that practitioners outside of social work, including youth workers, can provide effective relationships with vulnerable children and their families, especially against the backdrop of the episodic nature of much social work intervention and frequent staff changes and turnover.<sup>2</sup> It also cites the high number of SCR cases in some years involving children not classed as a 'child in need' or involved with child protection services, emphasising the crucial role that practitioners in wider services may play.<sup>3</sup>

Youth workers play a key role in safeguarding children who are involved in or vulnerable to violence, who may be disengaged from other services. By 'youth worker', we mean any adult who delivers youth work in practice, regardless of whether they possess recognised youth work qualifications. We would like to explore the different ways in which youth workers are working to safeguard children, both formally, through established policies, procedures, or legal frameworks (e.g. referrals to statutory services), and informally, through flexible, relational responses to individuals' needs, outside of formal protocols (e.g. informal mentoring, tackling disinformation, violence interruption). We also want to understand the tensions and challenges that youth workers face in doing so, and how youth workers' role in the broader safeguarding system might be improved.

## Race equity

There are significant racial disparities in children's experience of violence and youth justice. For instance, 26% of children in Youth Custody are Black, compared to 6% in the population in England and Wales aged 10–18.<sup>4</sup> Our 2023 survey of 7,500 children found that while the majority of violence was committed by White children (70%) and the majority of victims were White (72%), Black teenage children were, on average,

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<sup>1</sup> Youth work providers are not explicitly named in the [list](#) of 38 relevant agencies whose involvement is considered necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of local children, although they would fall into the final, miscellaneous category: 'any person or body involved in the provision, supervision or oversight of sport or leisure.' Similarly, youth workers are not specified in the [list](#) of the 18 groups that government guidance on safeguarding is directed at, despite it being subtitled 'a guide to multi-agency working'.

<sup>2</sup> <https://scr.researchinpractice.org.uk/media/1rdgqn43/scr-1998-2019-continuities-changes-and-challenges-2022.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The case of Child U, a 16-year-old Black British boy who was a victim of CCE and was killed by stabbing, highlights this. Child U had not been referred to social care or early help, but accessed support from a youth charity, XLP, for over four years. This included mentoring, weekly football sessions, and their community 'bus' programme focussed on diversion. XLP staff knew him and his family well. However, the report states that "it is unclear whether there was a mechanism for sharing their longstanding knowledge of U and his family with statutory partners." (Southwark Safeguarding Children Board, 2016, Serious Case Review, Child U).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2022-to-2023/youth-justice-statistics-2022-to-2023-accessible-version#children-in-youth-custody>

more likely to be vulnerable as both victims (21%) and perpetrators (22%) compared to White children (16% and 14%, respectively).<sup>5</sup>

The Youth Endowment Fund's mission is to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. We can't achieve this mission if we do not challenge this racial inequity. Addressing these disparities is an important aspect of our work, and race features in the research questions posed in this call for proposals.

## Research questions

These research questions are only indicative, and we encourage bidding teams to propose amendments to them and/or additional questions that they think could help meet the aims of the project. We would expect to finalise the detailed research questions and methods with the appointed team.

This project has 4 proposed research questions.

1. **Safeguarding system.** What role do youth workers and youth work organisations play in the violence and CCE safeguarding system across England and Wales? In addition:
  - a. What is the typical pathway for a child if risk of/involvement in violence is identified by youth workers?
  - b. What are the characteristics of children who receive safeguarding support from youth workers, and how might this vary across different demographic groups, including ethnicity?
  - c. What support and training do youth workers receive for their formal safeguarding role?
  - d. How do these aspects vary by nation, by type of youth worker (qualified employee, unqualified employee, volunteer), and by relationship to the local authority (working directly with the local authority, working for local authority commissioned-organisations, working for non-local authority commissioned-organisations)?
2. **Informal safeguarding.** Beyond participation in formal safeguarding procedures, how and to what extent do youth workers informally safeguard children who are vulnerable to violence and CCE? In addition:
  - a. To what extent do tensions arise between informal and formal safeguarding and how are these tensions navigated?
  - b. What support and training do youth workers receive for their informal safeguarding role?
3. **Collaboration.** Are current approaches to collaboration between youth workers and statutory services working effectively to safeguard children from violence and CCE?
  - a. To what extent are youth work organisations classed as 'relevant agencies' by local safeguarding partnerships?
  - b. To what extent do youth workers participate in formal safeguarding procedures (from referrals to multi-agency safeguarding conversations)?
  - c. What are the barriers and facilitators that to effective partnerships between youth workers and statutory services?
  - d. What would an effective partnership look like? Are there specific models/examples of best practice that could be adopted more widely?
  - e. How do these aspects vary by nation, by type of youth worker, and by relationship to the local authority?

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<sup>5</sup> <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2023/>

4. **Policy and practice changes.** What systemic changes could improve the role that youth workers play in safeguarding children from violence and CCE?

## **Required outputs and suggested methodology**

To answer the research questions, we would expect to see a detailed written discussion, that draws from:

- a. Desk based research.
- b. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups with a range of stakeholders (which may include youth workers, statutory safeguarding partners, safeguarding experts, parents, carers and young people).
- c. Serious case reviews.
- d. Any data analysis that the review team deem possible.
- e. Additional resources suggested by the research team.

Across all research questions, we encourage teams to consider how input from stakeholders can be combined with quantitative analysis (from existing or new research) to describe current practice and identify opportunities for change.

At the end of the study, we would expect all these outputs to be drawn together in a written report, comprising:

- a. An executive summary
- b. An introduction
- c. Methodology
- d. Findings (written discussion of each of the research questions in turn)
- e. Conclusion and recommendations for policy and practice

Upon sharing the final report with us, we would expect the research team to provide a short presentation to the YEF team on the study's findings. YEF will pay for the peer review of the report.

## **Timeline**

The deadline for proposals is 10am, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2024. We intend to have appointed the successful team by 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024. The deadline for the final report is 30<sup>th</sup> May 2025, after which a peer review process will take place.

## **Budget**

We expect the project to cost approximately c.£50-75k. However, we have some flexibility here, and will be judging bids on value for money rather than absolute cost. We would not expect VAT to be included in teams' budgets. Pass through VAT via sub-granting work to other organisations may in some circumstances be included. However, it is up to the bidding team to decide if they need to include VAT and any charges must be covered within the total grant amount.

We do not require budgets to use a specific template in proposals. Any approach that enables us to see total cost, the cost of project components, day rates, and number of days assigned to each team member is sufficient.

## How to apply

YEF will judge research applications using the following criteria:

- **Subject expertise (20%).** How much expertise does the team have relating to youth workers and to the safeguarding system across England and Wales?
- **Research experience (20%).** How much experience does the team have in delivering similar research projects? Does the team have expertise and experience in delivering research projects that aim to understand racial disparities?
- **Proposed methodological approach (40%).** What methodology has the team suggested, and does it match our needs?
- **Value for money (20%).** Does the bid represent value for money?

Where teams may be weak in any of the above areas, we encourage applicants to seek expert consultants and partnerships to supplement their bid.

Proposals should be no longer than 2,500 words, and should set out the team's expertise, experience, methodological approach, and budget. You may attach relevant documents to support your application – this will not be included in the word count.

As noted above, we are open to research teams suggesting their own research questions, and/or suggesting improvements and amendments to our own. Teams are welcome to apply for multiple projects, particularly if there are opportunities to streamline methods or reporting for greater efficiency.

**Please email your application to [chloe.lowry@youthendowmentfund.org.uk](mailto:chloe.lowry@youthendowmentfund.org.uk) by 10am on 4<sup>th</sup> November. If you have any questions regarding the project, please email these to [chloe.lowry@youthendowmentfund.org.uk](mailto:chloe.lowry@youthendowmentfund.org.uk) by 25<sup>th</sup> October.**