

YEF review of local safeguarding partnerships' response to child criminal exploitation and extra-familial harm

Summary

- YEF is seeking a team to conduct a review of local safeguarding partnerships' response to child criminal exploitation and extra-familial harm.
- The study will inform YEF's recommendations for the children's services sector on how to reduce violence amongst children and young people (which will draw on a range of ongoing and completed research work).
- The deadline for proposals is 5pm 22nd of May 2025. We intend to conduct interviews the weeks beginning 9th and 16th of June and to appoint the successful team by the end of June 2025.
- The deadline for the full draft report is 12th December 2025.

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 evaluations 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 children's services sector is one such system that supports children.

YEF's children services sector work

In 2026, YEF will publish a set of recommendations on how the children's services 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 children's services sector, including:

- Projects YEF has funded and evaluated in the sector (such as [Mentalisation-Based Therapy](#), [Parents Under Pressure](#), [Standard Teen Triple P](#), [Functional Family Therapy - Gangs](#), [RISE](#)

[Child/Adolescent to Parent Violence & Abuse \(RISE CAPVA\)](#), [Multisystemic Therapy – Child Abuse and Neglect](#), [Agency Collaboration Fund: A supportive home](#), and [Fostering Connection](#)).

- Relevant sections of the YEF [Toolkit](#) (e.g. parenting programmes, functional family therapy and multisystemic therapy).
- Our extensive work understanding the lives of young people with the [Peer Action Collective](#).
- Our annual [Children, Violence and Vulnerability survey](#) of young people.
- Our Area Leaders Programme (ALP) which aims to transform how local authority multi-agency partnerships identify and support children, young people and places most vulnerable to violence, collaborate effectively, and deliver impactful interventions to better protect children from being drawn into violence.
- The changemakers programme commissioned by Foundations, on behalf of the Department of Education, which aims to address the gap between what we know is effective from research, and the application of that knowledge, in sustained ways, to inform local service design and practice. The programme is working with four local authority Family Hubs to support local evidence leadership to introduce and sustain evidence-based parenting programmes.
- Our partnership with Durham University's Contextual Safeguarding Team supporting local authorities to apply insights from the Department for Education's Risk Outside the Home (ROTH) pilot to strengthen local responses to extra-familial harm and enhance our understanding of how different areas approach its management.

In addition, YEF is currently commissioning three other reviews of policy and practice, covering Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) panels, how the care system can protect children and young people from involvement in violence and a review of parenting programmes and family therapy provision. 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 contend that local safeguarding partnerships (LSPs) in England and Wales face challenges that may limit their ability to consistently safeguard children experiencing criminal exploitation (CCE) and extra-familial harm (EFH). Persistent underfunding for early help, a lack of specialist provision, and a child protection system primarily designed to respond to harm within the home¹ may contribute to failings in safeguarding children at risk of involvement in CCE and EFH. Numerous policies and competing priorities between agencies, may also have hampered co-ordination and hindered effective, joined-up responses.² Where activity does occur, it may be reactive, poorly coordinated, or overly reliant on criminal justice focused responses rather welfare-based approaches³ – and this may also disproportionately affect children and young people from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds.⁴ Taken together, these issues are leading to missed opportunities to identify and address CCE and EFH through timely and appropriate safeguarding responses – increasing children's likelihood of involvement in violence.

¹ Firmin, C. (2020). Contextual safeguarding and child protection: Rewriting the rules. Routledge.

² Ball, E. J., McElwee, J. D., & McManus, M. A. (2024). Multi-agency safeguarding: From everyone's responsibility to a collective responsibility. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 9(2), 104–110

³ [The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel – Annual Report 2023 to 2024](#)

⁴ https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/YEF_Racial_Disproportionality_FINAL.pdf; Wroe, L., Lloyd, J., & Manister, M. (2023). From peers and parks to patriarchy and poverty: inequalities in young people's experiences of extra-familial harm and the child protection system. In C. Firmin, & J. Lloyd (Eds.), *Contextual Safeguarding: The Next Chapter* (17–29). Policy Press.

This project aims to understand what LSPs across England and Wales are expected to do to protect children at risk of CCE and EFH – as set out in law, policy, and practice guidance – and to assess the extent to which these expectations are being met in practice. The project will also identify barriers and enablers to effective practice, examine how current responses affect racial equity, and highlight examples of promising local practice (“bright spots”) that can inform wider improvement. The review will also offer insights for practice and system change to ensure that LSPs are equipped to deliver effective safeguarding responses.

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 10–18.⁵ 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, more likely to be vulnerable as both victims (21%) and perpetrators (22%) compared to White children (16% and 14%, respectively).⁶

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.

Part 1: The current context

RQ1. What are local safeguarding partnerships currently expected to do to protect children at risk of involvement in CCE and EFH across England and Wales? (As set out in law and guidance).

This should include a description of the expectations on:

- The Local Authority (including Children’s Services)
- Integrated Care Boards
- The Police
- The collective LSP (including any other non-statutory partners)

RQ2. To what extent are local safeguarding partnerships meeting these expectations in practice? (This should assess the performance of each of the three main statutory partners, in addition to the collective partnership).

- a. Is safeguarding activity occurring in response to CCE and EFH (e.g. identification, referrals, planning, support)?
- b. Is activity appropriately tailored to the specific risks and needs associated with CCE and EFH (e.g. providing safety in contexts where harm occurs)?
- c. Is activity coordinated across statutory and non-statutory partners, with clear roles, responsibilities, and follow-through?

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2022-to-2023/youth-justice-statistics-2022-to-2023-accessible-version#children-in-youth-custody>

⁶ <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2023/>

- d. Are there examples of best practice where local safeguarding partnerships are effectively safeguarding children from CCE and EFH?

RQ3. What are the facilitators and barriers to meeting these expectations? (this could include resource, confusion around policy and guidance, competing priorities or other challenges or facilitators).

RQ4. Does current law, guidance and practice exacerbate or reduce racial disparities in support?

Part 2: System and practice changes that would improve safeguarding of children at risk of CCE and EFH

RQ1. What changes should be made in law, guidance, funding and inspection to improve the safeguarding of children from CCE and EFH by local safeguarding partnerships?

RQ2. What should Directors of Children's Services do to improve the work of local safeguarding partnerships in safeguarding children from CCE and EFH?

RQ3. How should the government implement the measures in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill to ensure LSPs are protecting children from CCE and EFH?

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 (e.g., a rapid review of existing evidence).
- b. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups with a range of stakeholders (that may include statutory safeguarding partners such as local authority children's services, police and integrated care boards; non-statutory partners such as voluntary sector organisations; education; youth workers; children and young people and parents or carers).
- c. Any data analysis that the review team deem possible.
- d. Additional methods suggested by the research team.

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 insights 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 the 22nd of May. We intend to have appointed the successful team by the end of June. Interviews will take place the weeks beginning 9th and 16th of June.

The deadline for the final report is 12th December 2025, after which a peer review process will take place.

Budget

We expect the project to cost somewhere in the range of £75–£110k. However, we have some flexibility here and will be judging bids on value for money rather than absolute cost. This range gives an indication of the scale of budgets we envisage – we will consistently prioritise proposals that give good value for money and strongly discourage evaluators using these figures as the sole driver of their costs.

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 multi-agency safeguarding responses for children at risk of extra-familial harm and child criminal exploitation, to what extent do they demonstrate a strong understanding of the safeguarding system, as well as race equity expertise.
- **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? Does the proposed approach demonstrate an understanding of how to embed race equity throughout the research design, data collection, analysis, and reporting?
- **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 freya.glendinning@youthendowmentfund.org.uk by 5pm 22nd of May. If you have any questions regarding the project, please email these to freya.glendinning@youthendowmentfund.org.uk by the 14th of May.