

# YEF review of Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Panels

## Summary

- YEF is seeking a team to conduct a review of MACE panel practice in England and Wales.
- 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 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2025. We intend to conduct interviews the weeks beginning 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of June and to appoint the successful team by the end of June 2025.
- The deadline for the full draft report is 12<sup>th</sup> 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 parenting and family therapy programmes, how the care system can protect children and young people from involvement in violence and local safeguarding partnerships' response to child criminal exploitation and extra-familial harm. 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**

Safeguarding responses to child criminal exploitation and extra-familial harm (including serious violence) are an increasing concern and priority for children's services. In 2023, 3,123 referrals were made to the Home Office for suspected child criminal exploitation and in the same year there were 14,420 social care referrals for child in need assessments in England recording criminal exploitation as a factor.<sup>1</sup>

We want to understand how multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) and equivalent panels operate across different local authorities in England and Wales and what factors influence their ability to assess and support children effectively. MACE panels are multi-agency child exploitation panels set up to assess and coordinate a response to sexual or criminal exploitation of children and, in many cases, other types of extra-familial harm and serious violence. Despite being widely used, there is no national guidance or standards for these panels. As a result, there is variation in how MACE panels are used across local authorities – including the criteria for referral, the processes for assessing exploitation and need, and the types and timeliness of support provided.

This review aims to understand where and how MACE and equivalent panels are operating and identify where local authorities are using different approaches. We also aim to examine how well panels identify and protect children, co-ordinate with other safeguarding structures, and consider race equity and cultural responsiveness. We also aim to identify good practice and limitations in current practice to inform clear, actionable insights for improving systems and practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Shattered lives, stolen futures: The Jay Review of criminally exploited children. Action for Children.  
[https://media.actionforchildren.org.uk/documents/Shattered\\_Lives\\_Stolen\\_Futures\\_Report\\_-\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://media.actionforchildren.org.uk/documents/Shattered_Lives_Stolen_Futures_Report_-_Full_Report.pdf)

## 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>2</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, more likely to be vulnerable as both victims (21%) and perpetrators (22%) compared to White children (16% and 14%, respectively).<sup>3</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.

### **RQ1. How prevalent are MACE and equivalent panels, how do they typically operate, and what other approaches are local authorities using in their stead?**

- a. Which local authorities are using MACE panels (or equivalent panels of a different name)?
- b. Are there areas not using MACE panels, and if so, why? Are these areas using alternative approaches?
- c. How do MACE panels typically operate and how does this vary across areas? (this should include a description of the threshold for referral, and which children MACE panels are serving)
- d. What are the options available to MACE panels to protect children?

### **RQ2. How effective are MACE panels?**

- a. Are MACE panels successfully coordinating with other safeguarding structures (e.g. MASH)?
- b. Are MACE panels successfully identifying and protecting children who are being exploited?
- c. Are the alternative approaches used in place of MACE panels in some areas performing better?
- d. Is the operation and delivery of MACE conducive to protecting all children (including children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities)? For instance, are racially and ethnically diverse perspectives represented and are they influencing decision-making?
- e. Are there examples of best practice delivery of MACE panels?

### **RQ3. How can MACE panels be improved?**

- a. What changes can be made at a local, practice level to support and improve the delivery of individual MACE panels?
- b. What system changes (e.g. to regulation, funding, inspection, guidance and training) can be made at a national level to improve the delivery of MACE panels across England and Wales?

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<sup>2</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>

<sup>3</sup> <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2023/>

## 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. Observations, surveys, interviews, and focus groups with a range of stakeholders (that may include MACE panel chairs, local authority exploitation leads, children's social care managers, police exploitation leads, health, education and youth justice representatives, voluntary and community sector providers, and children, young people, and families who have experience of the system).
- 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 5pm 22<sup>nd</sup> of May. We intend to have appointed the successful team by the end of June. Interviews will take place the weeks beginning 9<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of June.

The deadline for the full draft report is 12<sup>th</sup> 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 child exploitation, multi-agency safeguarding, familiarity with how panels like MACE operate and race equity.
- **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](mailto:freya.glendinning@youthendowmentfund.org.uk) by 5pm on 22<sup>nd</sup> of May. If you have any questions regarding the project, please email these to [freya.glendinning@youthendowmentfund.org.uk](mailto:freya.glendinning@youthendowmentfund.org.uk) by the 14<sup>th</sup> of May.**