REPORT

Review of youth workers' role in safeguarding children and young people at risk of or involved in violence

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Executive summary

The Youth Workers and Safeguarding Review was conducted by the National Youth Agency (NYA) in partnership with Professor Carlene Firmin and the Contextual Safeguarding research programme at Durham University. The review was commissioned by the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) and aims to explore the role that youth workers play in safeguarding children and young people at risk of or involved in violence in England and Wales.

The review explores the role that youth workers and youth work organisations play in safeguarding systems, the extent to which they informally safeguard children and young people and the extent to which collaboration with statutory services are effectively safeguarding children from violence and child criminal exploitation (CCE). The review also identifies systemic changes that could improve the role that youth workers can play in safeguarding children and young people from violence and CCE.

Our approach to the review

We adopted a mixed methods approach for this review. We gathered broad evidence on the national context via surveys with youth workers, youth work organisations and local authorities, reviewing literature and serious case reviews / learning reviews, and interviewing youth workers and the partners with whom they work. We added depth to this evidence base by collecting information from five case study sites across England and Wales: using observations of practice, pen portraits from social workers, reviews of young people's assessments and plans, focus groups with youth workers and workshops to map local systems with professionals. We brought together broad national evidence, and in-depth local evidence, to produce this report.

Our key questions and findings

What role do youth workers and youth work organisations play in the violence and CCE safeguarding system across England and Wales?

Youth workers play a variety of roles within, in partnership with, and independently of, safeguarding systems across England and Wales, in response to extra-familial violence and CCE. Youth workers that are involved tend to support safeguarding activity in multiple ways. In the last year 69% of local authority respondents received referrals about extra-familial harm from youth workers, 77% noted youth worker attendance at panels and 73% had youth workers attend child protection conferences (LAIN survey 2024). The extent of their involvement is influenced by their organisation type, its relationship with the local authority and the nature of work undertaken by the individual. Youth workers report an increase in demand for support for safeguarding services, and most organisations (66%) report being involved in safeguarding children and young people from violence, violence against women and girls (VAWG) or crime in some way (NYA Census 2024). Youth workers based in local authorities also report significant involvement in local safeguarding responses to extra-familial harm, including via street-based youth work, targeted youth work support and open access youth work.

What is the typical pathway for a child at risk of/involvement in violence identified by youth workers?

There is no typical pathway for a child at risk of/involvement in violence identified by youth workers. Statutory safeguarding guidance in both England and Wales, and the legislative underpinning, suggests that many children impacted by violence would be at risk of significant harm, and therefore should be referred through child protection (or care and support in Wales) pathways. However, case study data and the findings of SCRs and other case/learning review mechanisms illustrate that this is far from the case.

Our research evidences that in the absence of consistent government policy on this issue, different local areas have developed their own pathways and how, in turn, youth workers work across or within these when referring children and young people impacted by violence. These varying pathways have a profound impact on the nature of youth work provision and the young people who receive it

In some local areas, *children's services* will coordinate the response to young people impacted by violence, with safeguarding systems dominating local cultures and practices.. Here plans are focused on meeting children's needs and identifying situations in which they are at risk of harm. Youth workers contribute to this agenda but may be under-funded to do so and restricted by casework practice models. In other areas, *community safety partnerships* lead the coordination of local responses to youth violence, working with local partners including the police to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour and reduce re-offending. Here youth work is often better resourced, but approaches may be framed around responding to the risks of harm that children and young people pose to others rather than their own welfare and well-being.

In the absence of children's social care leadership, youth workers have sometimes stepped in to coordinate panels and plans for children at risk of significant harm beyond their families. We also identified variation in the extent to which youth work organisations operated as independent from, or integrated with statutory teams and organisations, such as social care and policing. In these moments, youth work - a consent-based profession – was found to interact with statutory organisations and processes (to differing degrees) without young people's consent being obtained, or without young people being informed.

What are the characteristics of children who receive safeguarding support from youth workers, and how might this vary across different demographic groups, including ethnicity?

Data collected for this study did not provide a sufficiently consistent evidence base for us to reach conclusions about the characteristics of children who receive safeguarding support from youth workers, or how this varied across different demographic groups.

Literature and case review reports analysed as part of this study indicate that, nationally, a disproportionate number of children and young people impacted by extra-familial harm are either Black, young men (in cases of serious violence and CCE), young women (in cases of CSE), neurodiverse or in care. All five case study sites in this study noted the same disproportionalities when prompted. In respect of youth work services in particular, a smaller number of sites commented on variation within these patterns in terms of gender (more young men and Black young people accessing open access provision, and young women and neurodiverse young people being referred into targeted support). However, this study did not quantify these patterns nationally across England and Wales, nor does the data collected offer sufficient explanation for such disproportionality in the first place. When asked, no case study site could provide an account of how their system would adapt when engaging with these groups, despite youth workers offering case-examples of where they challenged discriminatory practices within systems (or where we observed them). It is not clear whether any issues of disproportionality identified were a) a reflection of which young people were identified by services; b) a result of their actual experiences of violence; or c) the result of a referral pathway used by statutory services for some children and young people affected by violence and not for others. However, it was clear that youth work organisations, the wider safeguarding partnerships with whom they work, and the leadership organisations who support them need to meaningfully engage with the issue of disproportionality, and the implications for youth work provision, is a matter of urgency.

To what extent do youth workers participate in formal safeguarding procedures?

Youth workers are often involved in some form of formal safeguarding activity. Almost all youth worker survey respondents stated that they collaborate directly with statutory services to safeguard children and young people at risk of, or involved in, violence or crime. Most youth workers either refer to statutory services (82%) or share information to support statutory assessments (78% Youth Worker Survey)

There remains considerable variation in level of youth work involvement in formal safeguarding systems. While 11% of survey respondents are only rarely involved (few times a year), more than a third are regularly involved (weekly) and 27% are extensively involved (multiple times a week) (Youth Worker Survey).

Role type, organisation type and relationship with local authorities all have an impact on the extent and type of involvement in safeguarding procedures. Organisations directly funded or commissioned by LAs are approximately twice as likely to collaborate with statutory services compared with those that received no funding – suggesting that receipt of funding may be a key enabler for collaboration.

Youth workers embedded within 'exploitation' or equivalent teams or working within local authority (LA) social care are more likely to participate in formal safeguarding procedures than other types of youth worker. A range of youth workers refer children and young people into safeguarding systems, while a smaller cohort contribute to social care assessments, attend social-care chaired meetings and co-design safeguarding plans. Direct work with young people and support to build guardianship around groups and extra-familial contexts were also features of formal plans to safeguard children and young people impacted by violence.

Beyond participation in formal safeguarding procedures, how and to what extent do youth workers informally safeguard children who are vulnerable to violence and CCE?

Youth workers act in a range of ways to informally safeguard children and young people who are vulnerable to CCE and other forms of violence. They offer advice and support to young people impacted by violence, and to the wider professional network supporting them, outside of referral, assessment or planning processes. About three quarters of youth workers surveyed do this by supporting children and young people's peer relationships, informal mentoring and through informal collaboration with other professionals. However, a range of organisational and individual characteristics impact on the extent of support provided. Voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations funded or commissioned by the local authority that focus on offering open access provision are most likely to be informally supporting these young people. This wider set of informal work enables youth workers to play a semi-formal role in activities, such as providing advice to social workers and the police over the phone based on knowledge gathered in informal settings to influence formal processes.

To what extent do tensions arise between informal and formal safeguarding and how are these tensions navigated?

The extent of tensions between informal and formal safeguarding may be considerable. Nearly half of youth worker survey respondents point to tensions often arising between youth workers and other professionals when safeguarding children and young people. Tensions are most common across four themes:

- *Shared outcomes/goals*: where youth work values and practices are co-opted into systems where the primary goal is safeguarding or crime prevention.
- *Lead agency*; where the voluntary footing of youth work impacts the extent to which youth workers can coordinate the statutory safeguarding response to violence.
- *Information sharing:* where youth workers should share information about violence, and the children affected by it, into formal safeguarding processes.

- *Consent:* where youth workers who operate in consent-based relationships with young people are required to share information into non-consent-based systems.

Tensions are addressed inconsistently and in an ad-hoc fashion, rather than proactively and through a shared understanding.

What support and training do youth workers receive for their formal and informal safeguarding role?

Youth workers require a range of knowledge and skills to effectively safeguard children and young people and to engage with the wider systems that support them. While almost all youth workers have some form of safeguarding training, this without an understanding of local safeguarding systems, is insufficient for what is required in practice. A lack of opportunity to participate in multi-agency training that explores the local design of safeguarding systems is common. Furthermore, there are a range of personal and organisational characteristics that impact the extent of access to specialised safeguarding training and support.

To what extent are youth work organisations classed as 'relevant agencies' by local safeguarding partnerships?

Youth workers are involved in statutory safeguarding processes and participate in a range of key safeguarding functions. Youth workers would not be fulfilling these roles, or have such roles recognised by statutory partners, if they were not considered relevant agencies. Yet, the extent to which these contributions are recognised and recorded as such varies considerably and is impacted by the setting in which youth work is managed or commissioned. Other factors that influence this include organisation type, delivery type (targeted youth work) and relationship with the local authority.

What are the barriers and facilitators to effective partnerships between youth workers and statutory services?

Against a backdrop of disinvestment in youth services over the past 15 years, youth workers and safeguarding professionals highlighted a range of barriers and facilitators to effective partnership working. At times, these barriers – and, to a lesser extent, facilitators – were associated with the tensions between formal and informal safeguarding activities (referenced above). Barriers include: limited understanding of youth work; approaches organised on victim/perpetrator binaries; and staff turnover. Facilitators include: having a well-resourced and structured VCS open access offer; being able to demonstrate impact and youth work's contribution toward the impact; and opportunities to pilot collaborative approaches to supporting children and young people.

What would an effective partnership look like? Are there specific models/examples of best practice that could be adopted more widely?

This study has identified a spectrum of approaches to organising partnership responses to violence and other forms of extra-familial harm, and various ways in which youth workers are engaged in those partnerships. However, these are based on local factors. There are benefits and risks inherent to whether youth work is based in social care or community safety structures (and the spectrum between the two). In the best instances, youth workers operating within social care structures were able to focus on relational and contextual intervention and support without their role becoming blurred with statutory processes. Whereas in the best instances within community safety models, youth workers appear to hold a level of leadership not present within social care models.

Conclusions

Youth workers play a key role in safeguarding children and young people who experience or are impacted by violence, CCE and other forms of extra-familial harm. Their ability to be the adult that young people develop trusted relationships with is key to this. Moreover, the presence of youth workers in the places and spaces where extra-familial harm can/does occur often sets them apart from other professional responses to violence.

The nature of youth work contributions is significantly influenced by the way local areas have organised their system responses to violence. In systems where the response to violence is significantly coordinated by community safety partnerships, and/or those partnerships that commission youth work, youth work provision is often place-based, agile and naturally situated in extra-familial contexts, and youth workers have opportunity to take a leadership role. However, in these models, youth work contribution is often measured in respect of offending and anti-social behaviour, and may draw youth workers into sanction-based or criminalising practices such as the use of dispersal, mapping or surveillance of children and young people. In systems where the response to violence is significantly coordinated by children's social care, youth workers operate in systems more aligned to assessing and responding to children and young people's needs and promoting their welfare. However, case-management models and power dynamics between youth workers and social workers can curtail youth work leadership and compromise the flexibility of youth work support. Furthermore, organisation type, organisation relationship with the local authority and type of delivery all influence the level of involvement that youth workers have in safeguarding practices.

While most youth workers have accessed safeguarding training, little of this appears to engage with the practical challenges of working in the safeguarding children and community safety systems that exist. Consequently, while many know traditional safeguarding processes, few are given the space to grapple with existing system tensions and challenges.

Insights for policy and practice

- There is no typical safeguarding pathway for children and young people affected by violence. This should be resolved to ensure that the lead strategic body remains consistent, and a minimum operational standard is adopted. It is critical that the Department for Education and the Home Office collaborate with key practice associations that support children's services and community safety partnerships to address this. Accompanying statutory guidance should communicate the importance of a consistent lead strategic body and a minimum operational standard.

- National government should produce additional standardised guidance that highlights the value and limitations of youth work in contributing towards safer communities. The guidance should highlight the value of having a youth work presence in key multi-agency structures. This should be made available to safeguarding commissioners locally.

- Youth work is already heavily involved in safeguarding practice. However, the extent to which this is formally recorded is limited. This must change. Leading social work and youth work bodies should work together to create standardised mechanisms to better recognise the existing safeguarding contributions of youth workers within safeguarding functions. Government departments should review and endorse this approach.

- Existing mechanisms for safeguarding learning and development should be reviewed. Training should be multi-agency, involving all those involved in safeguarding practice, including youth workers, to better understand interagency engagement and address common tensions that can

be present. Recognition of difference in roles is critical. Safeguarding sector bodies should be encouraged to collaborate with national youth sector bodies on the design of training and support and local authorities should roll this out.

Contents

Contents

1.Introduction

1.1 Background

Youth workers' role in safeguarding

Youth workers play a key role in safeguarding children and young people who experience or are impacted by violence, child criminal exploitation (CCE) and other forms of extra-familial harm. Their ability to be the adult that young people develop trusted relationships with is key to this (Owens, et al. 2024). This in turn helps to facilitate a better understanding of young people's needs and vulnerabilities as part of preventative approaches and responses, while maintaining a welfare focus as opposed to more punitive youth justice approaches (Thompson, 2019). Moreover, the presence of youth workers in the places and spaces where extra-familial harm can/does occur often sets them apart from other professional responses to violence, giving them physical reach into peer groups, public spaces and schools (Fritz, 2016; Walker et al. 2025).

Given the contribution that youth workers make to young people's safety, and wider partnership approaches to safeguarding, cuts to youth work provision have been associated with insufficiencies in system responses to violence affecting young people. Research into the impact of austerity on youth services across England and Wales (Pinkney, et al. 2018) has in turn suggested an associated impact on systems/partnerships charged with protecting children and young people. The impact of closures of youth centres and a reduction of youth workers that followed has detrimentally impacted the availability of safe places for young people to spend time in their communities and removes a potential safety net for young people to meet outside of the home (Davies, 2024 and Wilson et al. 2022).

The nature of youth provision has also changed. Commissioners increasingly prioritise budgets for targeted youth work, and youth provision is now typically delivered by the voluntary and community sector (VCS) (NYA, 2024), with volunteers filling gaps left by fewer qualitied youth workers. The spaces in which youth work takes place are changing. Fewer local authority facilities are available and, consequently, some youth workers are working in a more 'detached' way to bring their activities to young people (SQW, 2024).

This creates a potentially complex landscape for youth workers in respect of their contribution to safeguarding young people. Local Safeguarding Partnerships (LSPs) are expected to consult and collaborate with 'relevant agencies' when developing safeguarding arrangements. However, currently, youth workers are not explicitly named as one of the 38 relevant agencies (HM Government, 2023).

In some respects, the relational and contextual nature of youth work means it is well designed/positioned to support children and young people affected by violence and create safety around them. However, the inconsistent recognition of this contribution, coupled with shrinking resources and greater alignment to targeted and casework models of intervention, has the potential to create conditions in which the role of youth work in safeguarding is commissioned/valued through a narrow lens: i.e. the extent to which a youth work intervention increases a young person's engagement with health or social care services and/or decreases their use of violence. Such a narrow lens risks obscuring, and therefore undermining, the wider contribution that youth workers make to young people's flourishing and personal development (beyond a reduction in violence or risk). It also overlooks their impact on the communities where young people live (through open and detached/group/place-based models of support, for example). These contributions are valuable both within and beyond safeguarding, but cannot be reduced to it. These system, service and practice

conditions warrant further examination, along with an account of the actual safeguarding roles played by youth workers (rather than solely their potential contribution), so that the youth work sector can be best supported and valued in the future.

Legal and policy framework

There are three areas of policy that inform local responses to violence affecting young people, and youth worker roles accordingly, each with their own underpinning legal frameworks. Understanding these are key to accurately situating youth work, and the system barriers the sector may encounter, within safeguarding systems.

In England, the Children Act 1989 (and legislative adaptations produced thereafter) provides the legislative underpinning for the work undertaken by local authority children's services to coordinate safeguarding responses to children in need of support and those at risk of significant harm, including children impacted by serious violence. This legislation is primarily interpreted through Working Together to Safeguard Children, which provides the statutory framework for interagency safeguarding practice, alongside practice principles and non-statutory guidance for different forms of extra-familial harm. Whereas in Wales, the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 provides the same legislative underpinning, interpreted through the Wales statutory safeguarding guidance Working Together to Safeguard People. This guidance sits alongside the Wales Safeguarding Procedures and supplementary All Wales Practice Guides on issues like Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation and Children Displaying Harmful Sexual Behaviour. Safeguarding responses are principally concerned with protecting and meeting the needs of children and young people; and are largely coordinated by children's social care, who work alongside a range of statutory and non-statutory plans to promote wellbeing, meet need and provide protection.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (and legislative adaptations produced thereafter such as Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022) provide the legislative underpinning for the work undertaken by community safety partnerships in England and Wales to coordinate council responses to crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour, including violence involving/impacting children. This legislative framework is interpreted through a range of statutory guidance documents, including Serious Violence Duty, Preventing and reducing serious violence Statutory Guidance for responsible authorities, 2022. Crime and disorder legislation guides the work of the police, youth justice services and community safety partnerships. These services are organised around the prevention and detection of crime, and a reduction in offending. For youth justice services, this relates specifically to children and young people's involvement in offending; for community safety partnerships and the police, this relates to children, young people and adults. Community safety partnerships also have a brief around civil order and anti-social behaviour, with a remit to reduce/prevent issues that do not always reach a 'criminal' threshold but are understood through a lens of disorder.

The statutory framework for the provision of youth services in England is provided by Section 507B of the Education Act 1996. The provision places a duty on local authorities 'so far as reasonably practicable' to secure leisure-time activities and facilities for young people aged 13 to 19 and those with learning difficulties or disabilities aged 20 to 24. In Wales the statutory framework is contained within Section 123 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. The provision requires all local authorities to produce a youth work strategic plan at five year intervals. Each plan must set out the local authority's objectives for youth work against which they will report on progress annually.

Historically, responses to extra-familial harm were situated far more within crime and disorder, community safety or youth justice frameworks, and responses to familial harm within child protection and wider safeguarding systems. Therefore, children and young people who were harmed within a familial context would be responded to under a safeguarding brief; children and young people who

were harmed in an extra-familial context were responded to under a youth justice and/or community safety brief. The latter may involve the use of an 'acceptable behaviour contract', dispersal orders to remove young people from specific areas, or offending-behaviour-focused interventions, which criminalise, sanction or punish young people in need of protection, and are not intended to assess young people's needs or prioritise their best interests. These are framed around responding to the risk of harm that children and young people pose to others.

Since the early 2000s, there has been a gradual shift to also frame harm that occurs in extra-familial relationships/contexts as child protection issues. This started when children's charities such as Barnardo's and The Children's Society, along with researchers, advocated for a safeguarding and child-welfare approach to these issues – initially through the lens of sexual exploitation (Barnardo's, 2011; Jago et al., 2011). This resulted in safeguarding guidance on sexual exploitation being published in 2001, which was updated in 2009, followed by an intensification of policy, advocacy and service delivery to create systems that protected rather than punished children and young people who had been sexually exploited (including high-profile inquiries and case reviews, i.e. Jay, 2014 and Bedford, 2015). There was also growing recognition that child protection and safeguarding systems were ill-equipped to a) support older children and young people (compared to under-tens) and b) respond effectively when children and young people were abused in extra-familial relationships and contexts (Gorin & Jobe, 2013; Hanson and Holmes, 2014; Firmin, 2017; Maxwel, 2022; Firmin et al. 2024).

Consequently, from 2009, this shift in policy positioning has been implemented (to varying degrees) for different harms that often occur more frequently during adolescence and/or in extra-familial contexts. These include serious violence between children and young people (JTAI, 2024), the criminal exploitation of children and young people (Welsh Government, 2022; JTAI, 2018, HM Government, 2023) and sexual abuse and harassment between peers, including in education settings (Ofsted, 2021; Welsh Government, 2024).

For the most part these developments did not remove these forms of harm from crime and disorder, youth justice or community systems. Instead, they offered a parallel safeguarding pathway for issues that might also be subject to a youth justice, community safety or wider criminal and disorder response. Serious case reviews, learning reviews and Ofsted thematic inspections have all surfaced evidence during this 15-year period that many children and young people impacted by extra-familial harm continue to be responded to primarily via community safety and/or youth justice systems, rather than child protection or wider safeguarding systems – particularly those impacted by serious violence or criminal exploitation (Hill, 2018; JTAI, 2024).

As a result, in England and Wales local responses to violence and other forms of extra-familial harm straddle both child protection/safeguarding and crime and disorder systems, along with the practice and policy frameworks common to those systems. When it comes to considering youth work involvement in safeguarding young people impacted by violence, therefore, we are examining how youth work works across two distinct, and sometimes conflicting, policy and practice frameworks (figure 1).

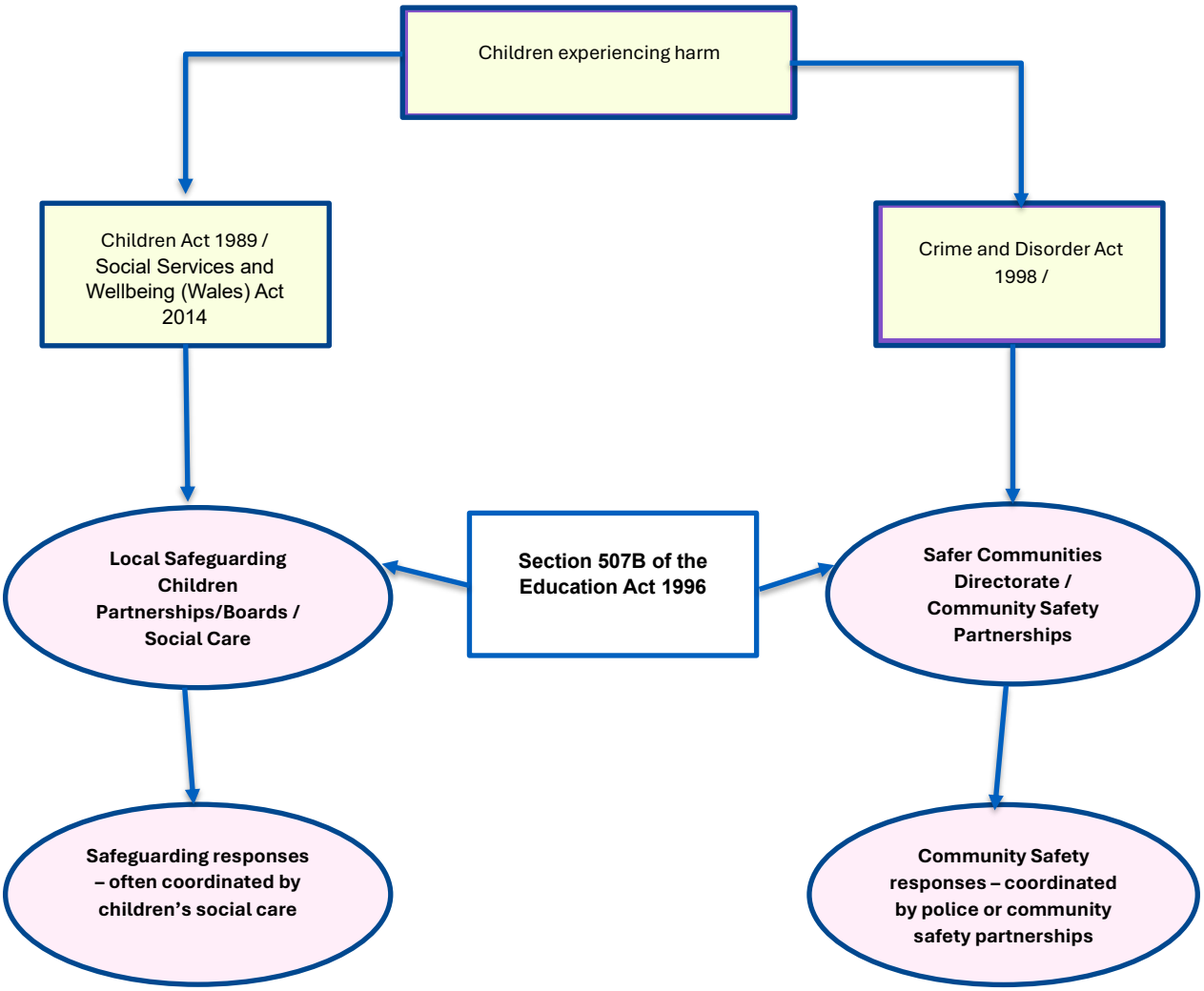


Figure 1 Legislative context for youth work, violence and safeguarding

Implications of legal and policy frameworks for youth work

The safeguarding responses outlined above are ethically and culturally aligned to youth work. They are guided by welfare-based principles, centred on young people's needs and hold their best interests as paramount. They have historically been implemented with a focus on parenting and young people's safety within their families. As such, both countries continue to reform and develop their safeguarding responses to work for adolescents as well as younger children, and children who come to harm beyond their family homes/relationships.

Community safety frameworks are more practically aligned to youth work with a focus on responding to groups, places and spaces, predominantly beyond family homes. However, ethically and culturally, this work is orientated around crime reduction, risk and offending, rather than the welfare, flourishing and wider needs of children and young people.

Conceptually, therefore, youth work engages with some of the practical benefits of community safety approaches, and the ethical and value bases of social work and safeguarding approaches, within local and national policy/practice frameworks that are yet to offer an integrated approach. We have approached this study with this context in the background, using the knowledge to inform how we interpret the data gathered on youth work's contribution to safeguarding *systems* as well as practices.

It is also worth noting that the above account clearly separates youth work and social work sectors, given that these professions are viewed as distinct from each other in England and Wales. It is important to note that such a separation does not exist in other countries in the same way. Much social work is delivered by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and social workers and youth workers often collaborate and share some roles and responsibilities; some social workers provide youth work and vice versa. We recognise that this is not the approach in England and Wales, with each profession having distinct codes of conduct, qualification mechanisms, government departments and legislative basis. We approach our discussion of the relationship between youth work and social work systems with this understanding.

1.2 Review objectives

The review was undertaken by the National Youth Agency (NYA) in partnership with Professor Carlene Firmin and the Contextual Safeguarding research programme at Durham University. The review aims to explore the role that youth workers play in safeguarding children and young people at risk of, or involved in, violence in England and Wales. The review will inform Youth Endowment Fund's (YEF) recommendations for the youth sector on how to reduce serious youth violence.

1.3 Research questions

This review explores the following research questions (RQs):

Overarching RQ1: What roles do youth workers and youth work organisations play in the violence and CCE safeguarding system across England and Wales?
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 these 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)?
Overarching RQ2: How and to what extent do youth workers informally safeguard children who are vulnerable to violence and CCE?
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?
Overarching RQ3: Are current approaches to collaboration between youth workers and statutory services working effectively to safeguard children from violence and CCE?
1. To what extent are youth work organisations classed as 'relevant agencies' by local safeguarding partnerships? 2. To what extent do youth workers participate in formal safeguarding procedures (from referrals to multi-agency safeguarding conversations)? 3. What are the barriers and facilitators to effective partnerships between youth workers and statutory services? 4. What would an effective partnership look like? Are there specific models/examples of best practice that could be adopted more widely?

5. How do these aspects vary by nation, by type of youth worker and by relationship to the local authority?
Overarching RQ4: What systemic changes could improve the role that youth workers play in safeguarding children from violence and CCE?

1.4 Report structure

The report is structured as follows:

Chapter 2: Methodology – describes methodological approach, data collection and analysis, and limitations

Chapter 3: Findings – drawing on the range of data sources described in chapter 2, and structured thematically under three headings to which the RQs are organised:

- An overview of safeguarding systems, the roles played by youth workers within them and the young people they support (RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ1d)
- The nature of formal and informal safeguarding activities undertaken by youth workers and the training and support they receive to deliver these (RQ2, RQ2a, RQ2b, RQ1c, RQ3c)
- Approaches to collaboration and partnerships between youth work and safeguarding partners, and what facilitates or undermines these (RQ3, RQ3a, RQ3c, RQ3d, RQ3e)

Chapter 4: Insights for the youth sector – summarises key findings and provides insights for YEF

Annexes: Includes research tools and supplementary data

2.Methodology

2.1 Overview of approach

We adopted a mixed methods approach to answering the RQs. It combined a case study approach to system modelling, a considerable range of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and extensive use of existing NYA datasets to supplement the research. To provide advice on the context of the work and interpretation of findings, we contracted four sector specialists to act as critical friends for the lifetime of the review. Sector specialists helped us to engage with wider stakeholders as well as provided feedback during the report drafting process. These were:

Luke Billingham	Youth Worker at Hackney Quest and Research Associate at the Open University
Laurelle Brown	Chief Executive Officer, Laurelle Brown Training and Consultancy
Jacob Diggle	Chief Impact Officer, UK Youth
Craig Pinkney	Chief Executive Officer, SOLVE: The Centre for Youth Violence and Conflict

Overview of research activities

Research activities fell into three broad categories: adopting a case study approach to system mapping; engaging with youth workers and safeguarding professionals; and analysis of secondary data sources. Due to the large number of data sources included in this review, we assigned data sources to answer specific research questions. The table below illustrates our approach.

Research questions	Site case studies	Youth sector survey	Youth worker interviews	Local Area Interest Network Survey	Serious Case Review analysis	Desk review
1a	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1b	✓		✓		✓	
1c	✓	✓	✓			
1d		✓	✓			✓
2a	✓				✓	✓
2b		✓	✓			
3a	✓	✓		✓		
3b	✓	✓		✓	✓	
3c	✓	✓	✓		✓	
3d	✓					✓
3e				✓		✓
4		✓	✓	✓		

Case study approach to system mapping

We generated five case studies to illustrate different models in which youth workers and youth work organisations interacted with local safeguarding systems. In order to access data at pace, case studies were selected by cross-referencing local areas with whom the research team had existing relationships and knowledge of their youth work interventions against a list of areas with the highest rates of recorded 'children's violent offending' in 2022/23, based on Youth Justice Board (YJB\) data on violent offences by 10-17- year-olds (YJB, 2024). A longlist of 12 areas was produced which

provided geographical variance (including areas across Northern and Southern regions of England and Wales) and a known variance of youth work models. These areas were invited to express an interest in participating by outlining the ways in which youth work was involved in local safeguarding systems and demonstrating readiness to participate in the study. The five selected were those that offered a range of youth work models in terms of the type of commissioned/funded services and their apparent position within local partnerships. One was in Wales, one in the North of England, one in the Midlands, one in London and one in the East of England.

To generate each case study, we sought four core pieces of data:

- 1 x system-mapping workshop with local site representatives, selected by the site single point of contact, to explain the local safeguarding structures and the role of youth workers within them. The same researcher facilitated all workshops, which were scribed on flipchart paper during the sessions to generate a shared visual of the account being provided, as well as being audio recorded and transcribed.
- 2 x observations of professional meetings (one focused on an individual child or young person, and one focused on multiple young people and/or local themes warranting a safeguarding response). All meetings took place online. An observing researcher completed an observation template of the meeting. The same researcher observed all meetings, and all observation logs were checked by a second member of the research team to check for clarity.
- 3 x social work assessments and associated plans for children and young people impacted by violence, where a youth worker had some involvement in the response.
- 1 x focus group with youth workers from the local area. Youth workers were typically working within the local authority (LA), either in targeted or detached youth work roles.

In three sites, these core datasets were supplemented by pen portraits provided by youth workers, who completed templates to document a day in their lives. A full account of data provided by each site is provided below.

Dataset	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E
System workshop	1	1	1	1	1
Observations	2	2	2	2	2
Case files	3	3	3	3	0
Focus groups	1	1	1	1	1
Pen portraits	0	2	1	3	0

The dataset for each case study site was organised initially using an institutional ethnography methodology to map the local system. The system review workshop provided a meso-level account of each system, the structures through which it organised services, and the points at which youth workers interacted with those services. Meeting observations, case file analysis, focus group data and pen portraits provided distinct micro-level accounts of that system; exploring the interactions, discourse, paperwork, and reflections through which professionals described and enacted that system. Both the meso and micro case study levels were considered within the macro policy landscape, case review analysis, national interviews, surveys, and literature reviewed for this study. In this way, macro data helped situate case study data, and case study data illuminated the intricacies, implications and contradictions in the macro dataset.

Each case study was converted into a visual system map and accompanying narrative, which was mapped against each of the research questions posed by this study. Case study sites were

anonymous to create conditions in which participants could freely discuss challenges, as well as successes, with interagency safeguarding practices.

Engaging with youth workers and safeguarding professionals

To engage with the youth work sector, we developed the youth worker survey and undertook a range of online interviews with youth workers and safeguarding professionals from the statutory sector. In addition, we added additional related questions to existing surveys undertaken by NYA (Youth Sector Census) and Durham University (LAIN survey). These questions are listed in Annex 2. Furthermore, analysis of the NYA's annual National Youth Workforce Survey provided additional information and context on youth worker training.

Youth Worker Survey

The youth worker survey was developed by NYA to support this review and YEF's Youth Clubs Review. It offers a high level overview of the degree of youth worker involvement in safeguarding activity. The online survey was disseminated via NYA's network and e-bulletin, with support from the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services, between March and April 2025. To encourage responses, survey reminders were issued regularly and we made considerable use of the review's critical friends and our wider networks. In total, 607 responses were received, including 304 complete responses, 265 partially complete responses and 38 that were disqualified. During data cleaning, a further 140 responses (23%) were removed having not met the required standards of comprehensiveness and relevance.

We undertook top-line/descriptive analysis of the survey results using Excel and Power BI. This identified frequencies and cross-tabulations to explore differences by respondent type (volunteer/paid) and level of qualification, organisation type (LA/VCS), and relationship towards the LA. The full version of the survey can be found in Annex 1.

Interviews

Interviews with stakeholders were included in our approach to explore and better understand the nuanced relationships between youth workers and other safeguarding professionals. We undertook online interviews with 47 stakeholders. All interviews took place online, lasted no longer than 60 minutes and followed a semi-structured format based on a topic guide. A thematic coding framework was developed and applied to the transcripts. The topic guides can be found in Annex 1.

Twenty interviews were undertaken with youth workers. All interviewees were in paid roles and represented organisations in a range of open access and targeted services

Individuals were primarily recruited through a recall question in the youth worker survey. Three interviews were sourced through existing relationships with individuals and/or organisations. Four interviews were undertaken with youth workers in Wales – the remaining interviewees represented a good geographic diversity.

Twenty-seven interviews were undertaken with safeguarding professionals. This included two instances in which two people were interviewed at the same time. Participants were identified and recruited via a range of approaches, including through the support of our wider project supporters, as well as NYA's own networks and social media platforms. Three interviews were undertaken with safeguarding professionals in Wales – the remaining interviews represented a good geographic diversity.

Interview type	
Social Work	12
Police and Youth Justice	4
Education	6

VCS	5

All interviews and focus groups were analysed thematically using Excel using a coding framework. The research team met regularly to quality assure the analysis and support the identification of themes.

National Youth Sector Census

Inclusion of National Youth Sector Census data provides further insight into the extent of youth sector engagement in safeguarding activities. The National Youth Sector Census by the NYA is now in its fourth year. It is an annual survey of youth sector provision across England to further understanding of where youth work takes place, how it is delivered and how it is funded. It is the largest dataset holding youth work organisational data. The current census has been revised to include a range of questions/sub questions designed to support the Home Office's Safer Streets Programme – which focuses on young people at risk of violence against women and girls (VAWG), antisocial behaviour and knife crime. The Census has been in field since February 2025, and we have included analysis from a data cut of 315 responses taken in May 2025 where it helps to answer our research questions.

National Youth Workforce Survey

This survey provided additional insight into the extent of training and support that youth workers undertake. The National Youth Workforce Survey is disseminated by the NYA and was first conducted in 2023. It is the largest annual survey of youth workers in England and allows us to understand who is delivering youth work, how it is being delivered, and the terms and conditions in which it is being delivered. The survey was open between November and December 2024, and received 1,303 responses from individuals in voluntary or paid roles.

Local Authority Information Network Survey (LAIN)

The LAIN survey helped us to triangulate data and corroborate findings from other research activities. The Contextual Safeguarding team support a network of local authorities across England, Wales and Scotland to develop their safeguarding responses to extra-familial harm. At the outset of this project, there were 79 local authorities in that network from England and Wales (out of a total of 152 upper tier local authorities). As part of the bi-annual survey of that network, we included four specific questions relevant to this study. Questions focused on the extent to which youth workers were involved in local safeguarding systems from the perspective of the LA representative, and the forms of youth work they had available or that had featured in that response (see Annex 2.7 for more information). Following data cleaning, including the removal of duplicates and incomplete responses, 68 local authorities from the network responded to these survey questions. Those same four questions were then circulated to other local authorities in England and Wales who were not in the LAIN, of which a further 18 responded, providing a total of 86 local authorities. Responses to the four questions were combined into one Excel spreadsheet to identify frequencies in response to the extent and nature of youth work across participating local authorities.

Secondary data sources

To better understand the extent that youth work may be involved in formal safeguarding activities, we undertook an analysis of Serious Case Reviews. A Rapid Evidence Review was also undertaken to supplement primary fieldwork activities when answering research questions.

Serious Case Review (SCR) analysis

An SCR is a review conducted when a child dies or is seriously harmed, and there are concerns about abuse or neglect. They aim to identify lessons from the case to improve how local organisations and professionals can improve the way they work together to safeguard children.

Using NSPCC's National Case Review Collection, the research team identified 144 SCRs that had been undertaken where extra-familial harm and/or violence experienced by adolescents was a feature. SCRs were identified using key word searches for 'youth work' and associated terms. Of these, 17 SCRs cited instances in which youth work directly contributed to the specific case in hand, and a further 38 cited instances in which youth work or a youth work organisation was mentioned (e.g. within recommendations) but was not actively involved in the case.

We adopted a framework analysis to surface themes across the SCRs relating to youth work/youth worker involvement. We used a three-tier system to code the level of involvement youth workers and youth work had in each SCR. These were:

Low	Indicates that one (or more) youth workers were involved in referring a child to another statutory body/professional, or received a referral from a statutory body/professional
Medium	Indicates multiple instances of involvement of one (or more) youth workers/youth work organisations, and the SCR explores the impact that this had
High	Indicates all the involvement at Low/Medium level, and where youth worker(s)/youth work organisation(s) were instrumental to the safeguarding process for a considerable length of time

Rapid Evidence Review

A Rapid Evidence Review was conducted as a pragmatic and swifter alternative to a systematic review to answer our research questions about the role of youth workers in safeguarding within a limited timeframe. A search strategy was used to identify relevant material from both peer-reviewed academic and grey literature. The search strategy outlines the research questions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, search terms, and the database, peer-reviewed academic journals that were consulted. This can be found in Annex 2. Combinations of search terms were trialled in three databases and eight journals. Snowballing and manual searches were used to identify further material. Title and abstracts of papers were initially screened according to inclusion/exclusion criteria. Publications retained after initial screening were read and analysed against the research questions. Some were further screened out if they were not relevant to the questions. At the end of this process, 39 peer-reviewed and 18 grey literature publications were retained.

2.2 Limitations

This review has the following limitations:

Limited scope of wider literature: We acknowledge that, due to its narrow scope in focus and timeframe for completion, the Rapid Evidence Review does not claim to be systematic nor to have identified all the relevant literature in this field.

Survey data: The survey was conducted with a non-random sample. As a consequence, results are indicative and not to be interpreted as statistically significant. Furthermore, lower base sizes for some cross tabulations means that care needs to be taken when considering some results. We received insufficient responses from youth workers in voluntary roles to explore any differences by role type. Analysis by nation was limited due to the low number of Welsh responses received. We only report by nation where we received 30 responses.

Case study selection: The five case study sites are variable in terms of operating models and geography, but they cannot be considered to be representative of all local authorities in England and Wales. The five selected were those that offered a range of youth work models in terms of the type of commissioned/funded services and their apparent position within local partnerships. This form of purposive sampling means case studies represent those areas with some form of youth work offer and that wanted researcher involvement. Areas with limited or no youth work resource did not express an interest in working on this study, and one area actively declined an invite for this reason. Furthermore, the final five areas had some form of involvement with the Contextual Safeguarding research programme prior to the study. Two had worked extensively with the team to develop their safeguarding approaches, albeit with a focus on social work not youth work, one had recently commenced work with the team on two new projects, and two were in a wider network of 70+ areas with an interest in the programme but had not worked with the team directly.

Fieldwork recruitment: Youth workers were recruited for interview through a recall question included in the youth worker survey. This may have had an impact on the nature and type of youth work organisation that was recruited, and may mean that views of more engaged youth workers are over-represented. Demographic data on interviewees was not collected. This may have supported greater nuance and contextualisation of findings.

3.Findings

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we explore the main findings of the review. We draw from the range of data sources described in Chapter 2. We have reordered and combined RQs to structure our findings as follows:

- **Section 3.2:** An overview of safeguarding systems, the roles played by youth work within them, and the young people they support (RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ1d)
- **Section 3.3**: The nature of formal and informal safeguarding activities undertaken by youth workers, and the training and support they receive to deliver these (RQ2, RQ2a, RQ2b, RQ1c, RQ3c)
- **Section 3.4:** Approaches to collaboration and partnerships between youth work and safeguarding partners, and what facilitates or undermines these (RQ3, RQ3a, RQ3c, RQ3d, RQ3e)

Across all three sections, we reflect on the extent to which our findings differed by type of youth work provided, the geographical location and other possible factors of variation.

3.2 Safeguarding systems and youth work

What roles do youth workers and youth work organisations play in the violence and CCE safeguarding system across England and Wales? (RQ1)

Youth workers play a variety of roles within, alongside and independently of, safeguarding systems across England and Wales, in response to extra-familial violence and CCE. Youth workers that are involved tend to support safeguarding activity in multiple ways. The extent of their involvement is influenced by their organisation type, its relationship with the local authority and the nature of work undertaken by the individual.

Some of these roles involved 'formal' safeguarding procedures and activities – such as completing 'return home interviews' with young people who have been missing from home, and visiting young people at school or at home with a social worker (sometimes referred to as a joint visit) as part of a safeguarding assessment. These were often logged in formal safeguarding systems. Other safeguarding roles were more 'informal', and were achieved through a broader commitment to consent-based relational practice and the provision of safe spaces for children and young people. In these instances, safeguarding occurred as a by-product rather than being the principle intention of the work. There was a third set of roles where informal activities (such as phone calls between social workers/police officers and youth workers to 'sense-check' possible courses of action) enabled ad-hoc youth work interactions with formal safeguarding systems to promote young people's welfare. We refer to these as 'semi-formal' roles: actions not recorded in formal safeguarding systems but that required interaction with those systems. The differing nature of these roles are summarised in this section and detailed in latter parts of this report.

Youth workers report an increase in demand for support for safeguarding services, and most organisations (66%) report being involved in safeguarding children from violence, VAWG or crime in some way (NYA Census 2024). The 2024 NYA Workforce Survey found that almost two thirds of respondents had seen an increased (or new) demand for support in addressing crime and anti-social behaviour (62%) and over half (55%) had seen an increase in exploitation from young people they engaged with. LA respondents surveyed for this study also reported significant youth work involvement in local safeguarding responses to extra-familial harm, including via street-based youth work (mobile, outreach or detached) (73%), targeted youth work support (71%) and open access youth work or youth clubs (49%).

For some youth workers, their delivery of such work requires them to play role(s) with or within formal safeguarding systems (explored in detail in 3.3), such as contributing to social care assessments for children impacted by violence and attending meetings where plans to support those children are being agreed. Across varying system models (discussed in interviews and explored in depth in case study sites), our dataset included evidence of youth workers in both statutory and voluntary settings, operating across targeted, open access and detached roles, and formally engaged with statutory systems to facilitate interagency violence prevention/response activities. Across all case study sites, youth workers were involved in referrals into statutory systems – namely via children's social care – whereas the extent to which they referred directly into policing or wider community safety systems varied. Many also contributed information to inform assessments, and attended meetings where those assessments were discussed and plans were agreed. LA survey respondents identified a similar set of activities as did youth worker survey respondents (detailed in section 3.3). Through these activities, a profession which is consent-based interacts with statutory frameworks that are not always consent-based, often (but not always) with the consent of young people.

When undertaking formal safeguarding activities, youth workers make unique contributions – including championing the views of young people and advocating for their rights to be respected, as well as offering perspectives not necessarily shared or understood by statutory partners. They were able to do so largely due to their informal safeguarding activities, i.e. those that took place outside of statutory safeguarding systems.

Pen portrait data also evidenced day-to-day activities that youth workers undertake which informally safeguard young people impacted by violence. These range from basic household/life tips to providing sexual violence support – many of which are not recorded on formal systems.

Pen Portrait 4: 9.30 am at home

Last week I took one of my young people to the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) after she made a disclosure. This has left the young person feeling frustrated and vulnerable, which has caused her behaviours in the community to escalate, and her mental health has deteriorated. I spent some time this morning responding to messages from her and reassuring her that her feelings are valid.

Pen portrait 2: 2.30 pm, youth centre

I was with two care experienced young people that were in the centre. Ate my lunch, whilst chatting with two care experienced young people about how to break down tasks to create 'good habits' to keep their homes clean and tidy and keep up to date with everything. Tasked them with first task to get a dirty laundry basket.

In addition to surfacing unrecorded activities, these pen portraits brought to life the amount of physical movement youth workers undertake. All documented time spent in cars, schools, on messaging apps, and walking to meet young people, their friends and families in public spaces. There was little about youth work activities that were computer-based; with this time spent largely to record specific work on data-management systems or attend safeguarding or criminal justice meetings to which they were a contributing partner.

In addition to informal, and unrecorded, targeted youth work activity, the contribution of open access youth work in safeguarding young people is considerable. Young people see youth clubs as safe spaces where they can be with their friends (Ritchie and Ord, 2017) where youth work provision is considered a 'protective factor' for young people (Wilson et al. 2022). This is explored in more detail in Section 3.3. Previous NYA research has identified that almost three quarters (73%) of youth work organisations (YWO) directly deliver open access services on a weekly basis[1]. And the same research found that open access youth provision is more than twice as likely to be delivered in the most deprived areas of England[2]. This is important as YEF's own research points to violence being geographically concentrated in the poorest areas and the high proportion of children and young people at risk of, or involved in, violence who attend open access youth clubs.[3]

[1] National Youth Sector Census Snapshot, Summer 2024

[2] As measured by the two most deprived quintiles (IMD1 and IMD2) compared to those in the two least deprived quintiles (IMD4 and IMD5).

[3] Youth Endowment Fund,. Beyond the Headlines Trends in violence affecting children (2024), and YEF., Report 5: Who has access to positive activities, youth clubs and trusted adults (2025)

Nearly half of youth worker survey respondents (45%) are *primarily* involved in open access youth provision, and a third are involved in provision that is targeted at vulnerable young people. There is little difference when considering Welsh and English responses.

Figure 2. Youth Worker Survey: Primary type of youth work provision [base 413]

Such work contributes to safeguarding through the provision of safe space and safe relationships; as well as providing contexts in which youth workers can de-escalate potentially violent situations and/or challenge ideas that normalise violence. Such 'informal' contributions to safeguarding are explored in section 3.3.

In order to fulfil both formal and informal safeguarding roles, almost all youth worker survey respondents stated that they engaged with statutory services when safeguarding children and young people at risk of, or involved in, violence or crime. The mean average number of services that respondents engage with is three**,** demonstrating the need for youth workers to feature in multi-agency approaches to safeguarding. This increases to four for Welsh respondents (albeit with a very small base size). LAs (83%), education services (80%) and police or youth justice services (74%) are most commonly cited by respondents (figure 3). There is considerably less engagement with health services (44%). Only six per cent of all respondents had no engagement with statutory services – the majority of which were respondents from VCS organisations that are not working with, or funded by, LAs. This pattern is repeated when considering Welsh responses. Youth worker type may also have an impact on the range of statutory services that youth worker survey respondents engage with. On average, nearly half (47%) of respondents with a Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) recognised qualification of Level 5, 6 or 7 engaged with the range of organisations, compared with a third (33%) of those with no JNC-recognised qualification.

Figure 3. Youth Worker Survey: Engagement with statutory services when safeguarding CYP [base 303]

In addition to collaborating with statutory partners, and the systems of which they are a part, nearly half (47%) of Census respondents indicate that their organisation delivers or commissions a programme of support towards 'violence, VAWG and crime'. A slightly smaller proportion (41%) of respondents deliver or commission programmes of support for those young people at risk of exploitation (CCE or CSE). Most respondents (87%) indicate that they provide referred services for young people at risk of anti-social behaviour, knife crime or VAWG. However, similar proportions of respondents (81%) are *also* indirectly supporting young people at risk of knife crime or VAWG (71%).

In some respects, the roles played by youth work and youth work organisations was recognised by various actors within safeguarding systems. As noted previously, and detailed in later sections, LAIN survey respondents described a range of ways in which youth workers contributed to safeguarding systems. Interview participants noted that:

> *They [Youth Workers] play a very important role. And have a lot of responsibility and are not just there for fun. They bring an informal and youth-centred approach that helps to counter top-down responses that may be adopted by statutory services.* – **Youth Work Manager**

> *Youth workers often help out with return home visits – accompanying a social worker. In some instances, we have found the young person, or their parent/carer has asked for the youth workers to be the lead, instead of a social worker as they already have a relationship with them* – **Social Work Manager**

Such recognition was particularly noted in respect of direct, relational, consent-based practice with young people. However, there is also a risk that the youth work contribution to safeguarding is viewed solely through a lens of direct practice with young people. Youth workers and YWOs contribute at various stages of safeguarding systems (as noted above). Below we detail how these contributions (and recognition of them) inform, are impacted by, and vary between different local systems/services.

RQ1a: What is the typical pathway for a child at risk of/involvement in violence identified by youth workers?

There is no typical pathway for a child at risk of/involvement in violence identified by youth workers. National analysis of case review documentation, and mapping of systems in the five case study sites, evidenced how different local areas have developed their own pathways and how, in turn, youth workers work across or within these when referring children and young people impacted by violence. In some local areas, children's services will coordinate the response to young people impacted by violence, while safeguarding systems dominated local cultures and practices. In other areas, community safety partnerships will retain a leadership role in coordinating local responses to violence, and will operate a pathway instead of, or in parallel to, any pathway led by children's services. In the absence of children's social care leadership, youth workers have sometimes stepped in to coordinate panels and plans for children at risk of significant harm beyond their families. These varying pathways have a profound impact on the nature of youth work provision and the young people who receive it. In areas where social care pathways dominate, plans are focused on meeting children's needs and identifying situations in which they are at risk of harm. Youth workers contribute to this agenda but may be under-funded to do so and restricted by casework practice models. In pathways led by community safety partnerships, youth work is often well resourced but organised around goals related to anti-social behaviour, crime and disorder, rather than welfare and well-being. Across these pathways, we also identified varying levels of independence from, or integration with, statutory pathways (both social care and policing. In these moments, youth work - a consent-based profession – was found to interact with these pathways (at differing degrees) without consent being required.

Statutory safeguarding guidance in both England and Wales, and the legislative underpinning, suggests that many children impacted by violence would be at risk of significant harm, and therefore should be referred through child protection (or care and support in Wales) pathways. However, case study data and the findings of SCRs and other case/learning review mechanisms illustrate that this is far from the case. Traditional safeguarding systems were designed for the purpose of safeguarding children from risks posed by parent/carer (in)action. Many children impacted by violence are not experiencing violence from their parents or carers. Even for those who are living in challenging home circumstances, it is rarely the case that their parents or carers have exposed them to weapon-enabled violence, robbery or are criminally exploiting them. This has left national policy, and local procedural, gaps in which various pathways have emerged in the interim.

Model 1 illustrates a children's services pathway only, as this was the dominant pathway for coordinating plans for young people affected by violence and other forms of extra-familial harm. Models 2, 3, 4 and 5 feature both key children's services and community safety pathways, as this better reflects the arrangements in those sites.

Model	Overall description
1 – Social work and youth work co-located team, in a social care-led pathway response to EFH	- Response to violence affecting young people coordinated by children's social care - Co-located targeted youth work and social work team to respond to extra-familial harm, in collaboration with wider open access and voluntary sector provision - Routine engagement of youth workers in statutory safeguarding processes - Youth workers involved in a range of formal safeguarding activities across the pathway including joint visits with social workers, co-chairing reflective group supervision meetings and leading on delivery of safeguarding plans including with groups and places - Much youth work resourced through external funds secured through the local authority

	- Youth worker and social workers advise police on options to de-escalate intervention with young people and advocate for young people in conflict with the law - Social workers hold statutory responsibility for a young person's plan, youth workers lead support and intervention work
2 – Independent youth work provision connected into social care-led pathway. Limited involvement with community safety pathway	- Response to violence affecting young people coordinated by children's social care - Youth work offer, including open access, targeted and detached provision delivered independently of social work team - Strong relationship between youth work lead and social work lead around coordinated responses to extra-familial harm - Inconsistent engagement of youth workers in statutory safeguarding processes, and greater involvement of targeted youth workers - Mixed funding model including resourcing from children's services, external funding and some from safer communities - Distance between youth work organisations, youth workers and the police - Youth work and social work response/intervention not always coordinated – both often take place independently of each other
3 Both social care and community safety pathway, with youth work straddling both under a youth justice brief	- Response to violence affecting young people straddles social care and community safety structures under a youth justice and exploitation brief - Youth work offer features a mixed of targeted and detached provision, in addition to local VCS groups - Collaborative relationship between commissioned detached and targeted youth work provision and exploitation-focused social workers and exploitation-focused police officers - Youth workers participate in social care and community safety-led meetings in addition to their own service-focused meetings - Consistent engagement of youth workers across social care and community safety pathways, including joint visits with social workers and with the police - Various direct work and support provided via youth workers to young people while social workers often focus on the wider family network
4 – Youth work led respond to exploitation – linked into community safety pathway and to a lesser extent social care pathways	- Respond to violence affecting young people led by youth workers – who lead the exploitation team. They connect into the community safety pathways and their response to violence, as well as connect into children's social care where appropriate. Violence only recently integrated into the exploitation pathway. - No clear children's social care pathway response to violence affecting young people, social workers involved in case-by-case basis – exploitation team, led by youth workers coordinate the pathway - Key partnerships between youth work leads, open access youth work provision and detached support, with some connection into VCS youth work groups - Key collaboration between youth workers and local police, including schools police officers, to agree interventions and plans. Plans largely developed outside of a child protection pathway at present. - Work includes 1:1 educative support for young people built around their own needs, coordinated support for young people following police intensification activities, group mapping and group work
5 – Community safety led pathway with youth work involved,	- Dual pathway in operation – one coordinated by children's social care and one via community safety. Exploitation pathway traditionally under children's social care and violence under community safety. Violence is now also considered by children's social care but this happens in addition to the community safety pathway - Local youth work provision includes targeted, open access and detached youth work provision, under the safer communities directorate

children's social care pathway with less youth work involvement	- Youth workers have limited engagement in the social care led pathway – except for targeted youth workers in the exploitation team - Youth workers and youth work organisations, both statutory and voluntary, are consistently engaged in the community safety pathway and sometimes lead elements of it - Responses include place-based intervention including rapid response into public spaces, mobile diversionary activities, education work and support via open access provision

All pathways share key decision-making points at which children are **referred** into safeguarding systems, professionals complete **assessments** (although they assess for different things), plans are agreed via **meetings or panels** and **responses/support** is delivered. A typical pathway will involve all of these decision-making points, although a child may not move through them in a linear fashion.

However, the lead agencies involved in these points, the partners who participate in them and their focus/objectives all vary by locality. For example, during the assessment point in Model 1, social workers conduct home visits to children impacted by violence and complete these visits with youth workers with whom they are co-located. In Model 3 however, youth workers lead much of the assessment work in situations of violence and use a screening tool focused on exploitation (which more recently includes violence) that is distinct from the single assessments used by social workers for familial abuse. In Model 5, meetings that take place to coordinate responses to violence, and the children affected, are chaired by policing and community safety teams, with social work playing a minimal role. Whereas in Models 1 and 2, meetings are largely led by social care in respect of children under-18 to coordinate plans and responses.

Key distinguishing factors in these models include:

- Whether overall pathways, or specific system functions, are led by community safeguarding or children's services operational teams
- Whether youth workers routinely participate in specific system functions
- Whether youth workers chair or coordinate specific system activities
- Whether youth work is largely positioned as an organisation that delivers services with, or acts as a distant and critical friend to, criminal justice agencies and/or social work agencies

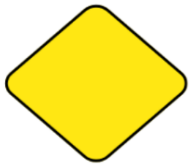
Figures 3-7 illustrate what these different pathways looked like in each of our five case study sites. Each figure maps the pathway that a fictional young person, Josh, would take through each site's local safeguarding system (and wider response to violence, if relevant) if they told a youth worker they had been stabbed in the shoulder over the previous weekend.

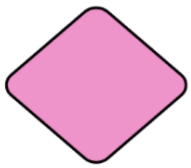
In each figure:

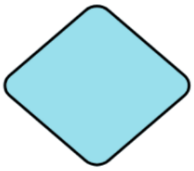
Discussion bubbles detail wider explanations about the system function point offered by professionals from that site, which offer caveats or help contextualise the information presented

.

Diamonds denote key ‘system functions’ – common points in a local system where a function is performed like referring children and young people into the system, assessing them, and meeting to develop plans to address the findings of the assessments.







- Yellow diamonds denote system points led by children’s social care,
- Pink diamonds denote system points led by policing or community safety.
- Blue diamonds denote system points led by youth work.

Grey boxes describe activities that take place either side of key system function points – for example, the visit to a young person that might take place prior to an assessment being completed, or the range of responses/interventions youth workers could draw upon following meetings.

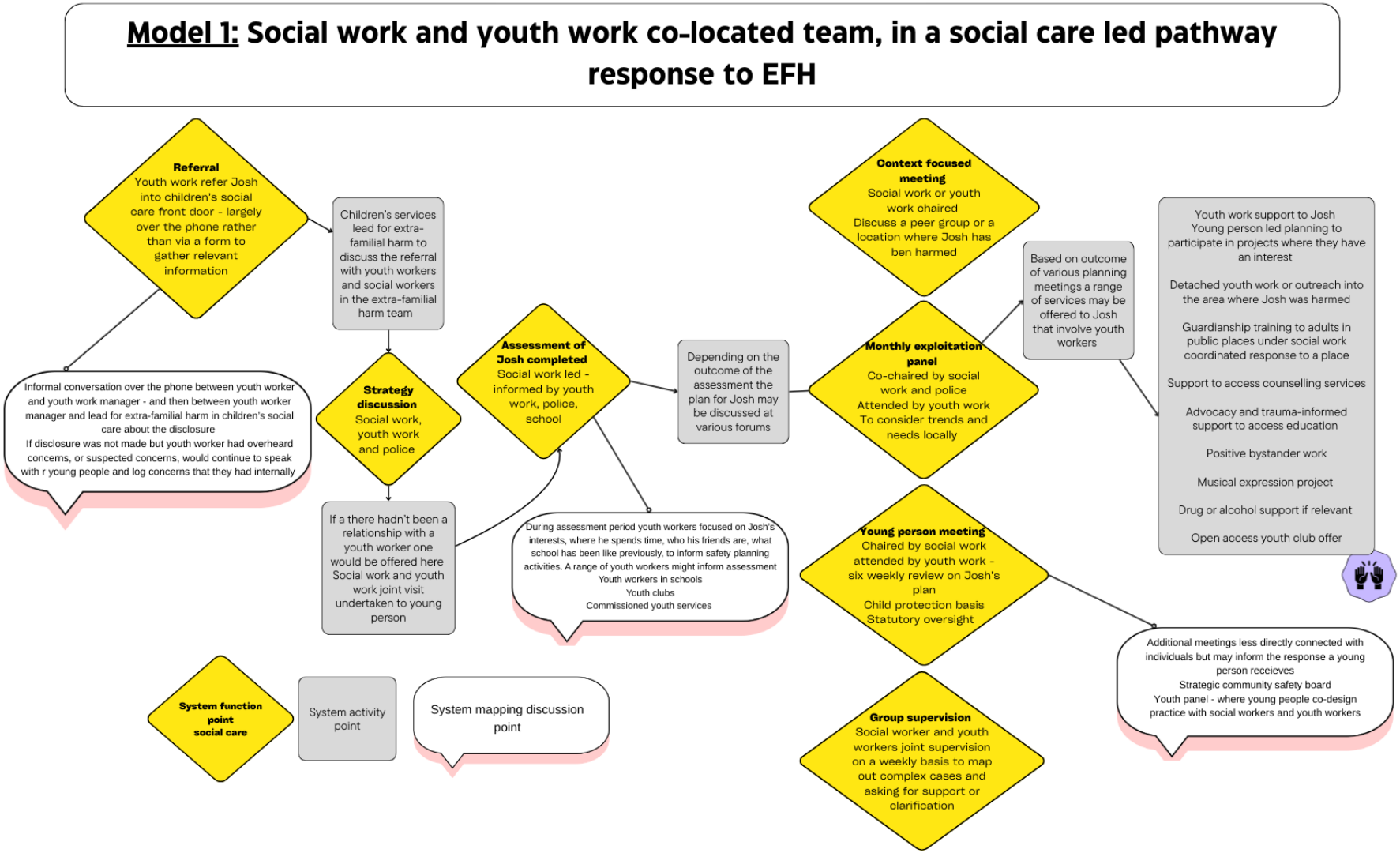


Figure 3 Safeguarding Pathway Model 1

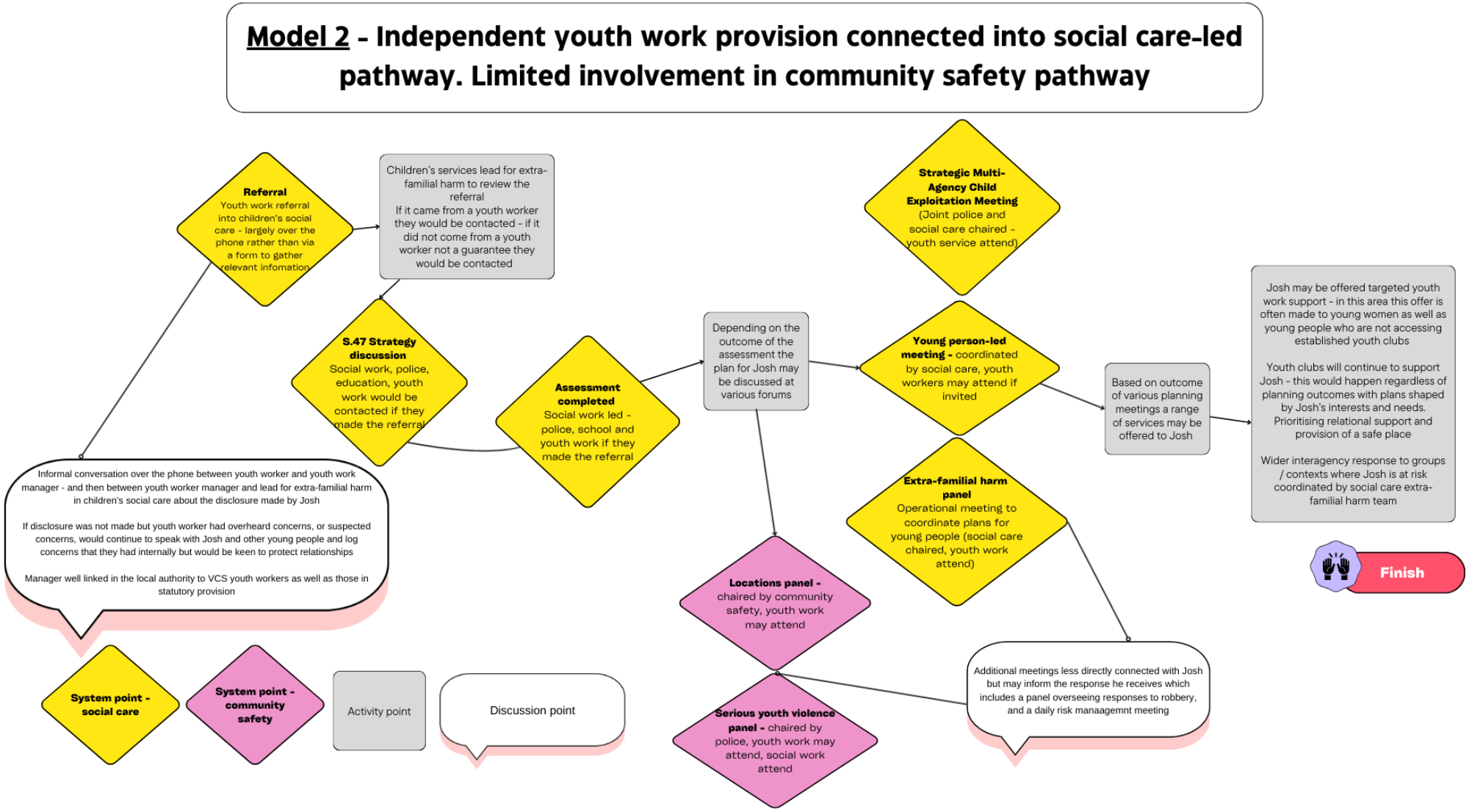


Figure 4 Safeguarding Pathway Model 2

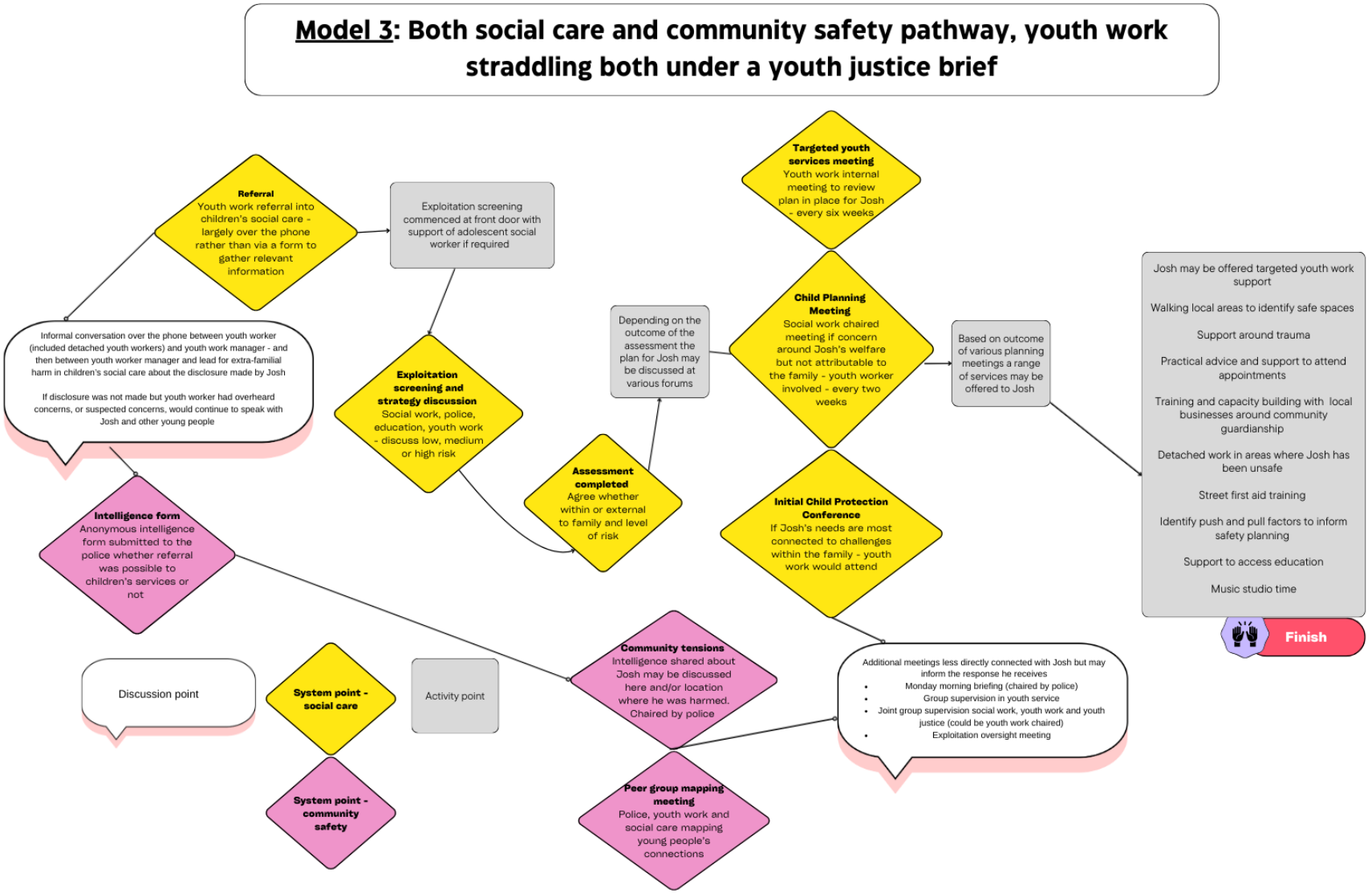


Figure 5 Safeguarding Pathway Model 3

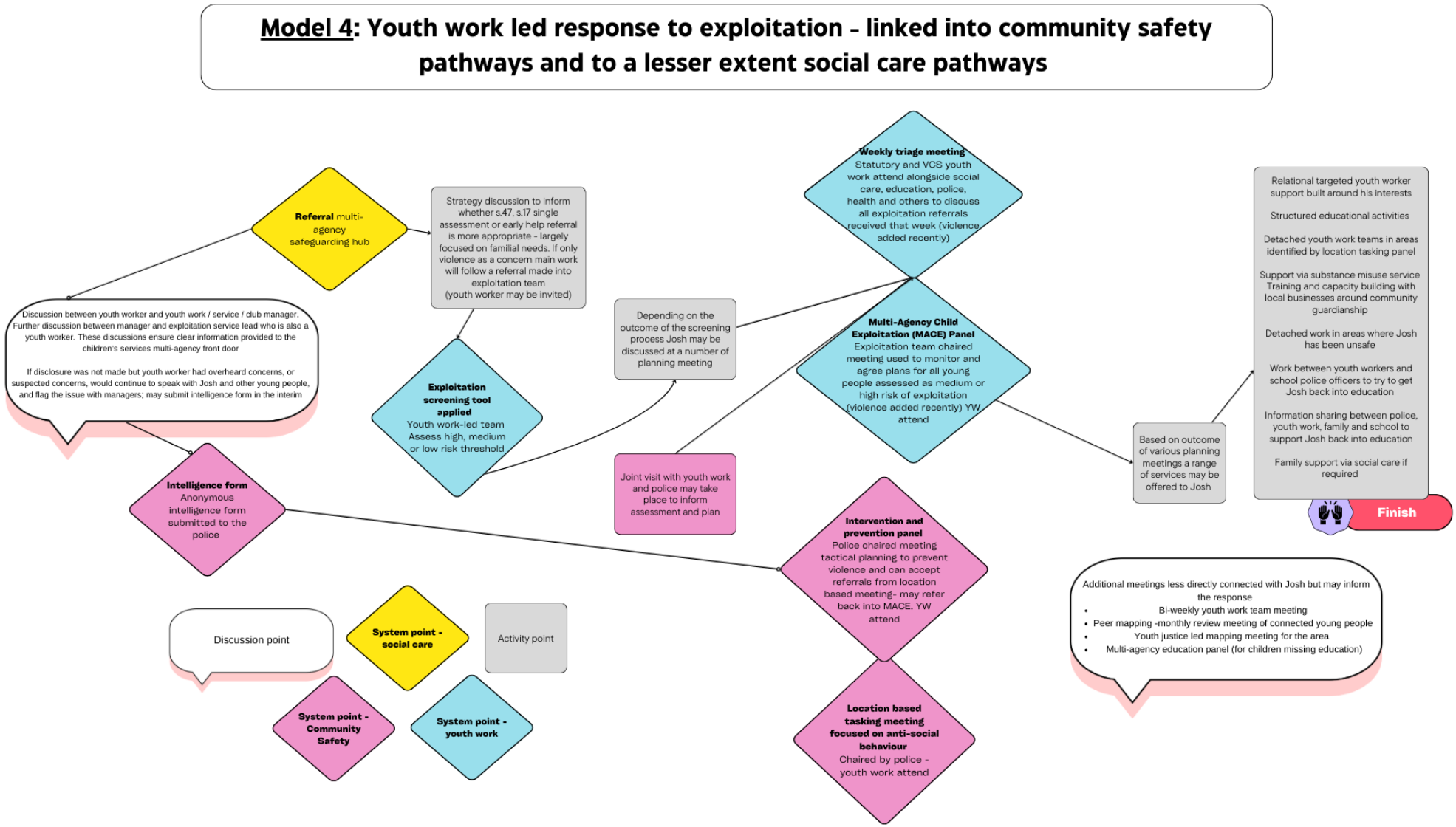


Figure 6 Safeguarding Pathway Model 4

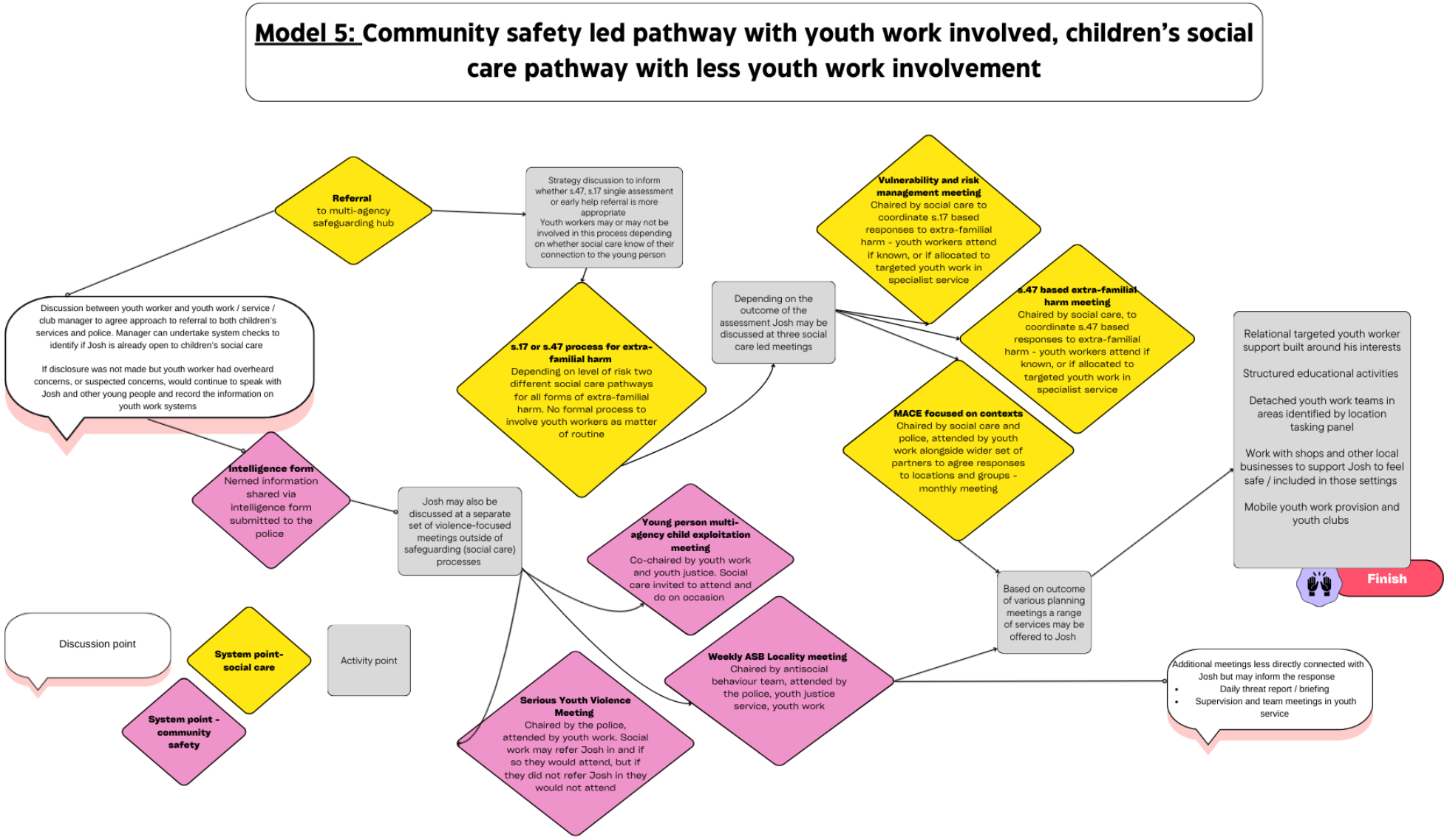


Figure 7 Safeguarding Pathway Model 5

The table and diagrams above summarise the key features of each pathway model. Across these models, we see a range of responses:

- From social care/safeguarding-led responses to violence, to policing/community-safety-led responses to violence
- From partnerships in which youth workers and the youth work service is positioned within children's services, to partnerships in which they are positioned within community safety, or ones in which they sit in between them both
- From partnerships in which the predominant youth work engaged in safeguarding is provided through targeted support and case work, to areas in which youth workers are viewed through a lens of open-access, place-based, group or detached offers
- From partnerships in which voluntary sector youth work provision is well connected with statutory systems, to those where such provision operates outside of statutory frameworks

These variations are illustrative of the uncoordinated legislative and policy framework summarised at the outset of this report. Responses to violence, and the children and young people who are impacted, currently straddle both safeguarding and community safety policy/legislative frameworks, and they are often divided in local areas accordingly. In some areas, the response is led and coordinated by either social care or community safety, while in others there are parallel pathways that are not always coordinated and sometimes in conflict. This, in turn, has implications for youth workers and youth work organisations. In some areas, they work predominantly with either social workers or police and community safety teams, while in areas with both, they sway towards the sector that dominates culturally, structurally or in terms of available resource. As such, what we found across the case studies was **five different pathways, punctuated by 'typical functions'**, i.e. all had processes for receiving referrals and completing assessments, and all featured meetings where plans were agreed. However, who chaired those meetings, and the questions asked during assessments, varied. Youth work roles were identified within the various 'typical functions' but varied in nature due to the divergence of approaches taken to organising those functions into a system. As such, the lack of a typical pathway means this study identified various roles (and associated opportunities/challenges) played by youth work within safeguarding systems/activities, and this variation was directly informed by the nature of those systems. If responses to violence were organised largely by children's social care – as we saw in Model 1 –the youth work role in the statutory system was predominantly organised around meeting young people's needs, and co-working with social workers to plans agreed in meetings that were chaired by social workers. If responses were largely coordinated by youth workers, under a community safety commissioning model – as we see in Model 3 – then youth workers often chaired meetings and led on plans, which did not always involve social workers, as well as feeding into wider meetings focused on crime and disorder chaired by policing. In an area where the community safety and child protection responses to violence both existed but ran in parallel, and youth work sat under a community safety brief, youth workers attended meetings (chaired by policing or youth justice colleagues) and contributed to plans for children and young people identified by community safety colleagues as impacted by violence; but did not as consistently contribute to social care meetings/plans to address violence.

It was also notable that the entry point for referring a child into safeguarding systems (across all sites) involved informal conversation as well as engagement with the formal referral process and paperwork. Much about how youth workers engage with these pathways is relational as well as structural. Therefore, even functions that could be characterised as 'formal' points of safeguarding systems, had 'informal' elements to them – creating a group of 'semi-formal' safeguarding activities to which youth work contributed.

RQ1b: What are the characteristics of children who receive safeguarding support from youth workers, and how might this vary across different demographic groups, including ethnicity?

Literature and case review reports analysed as part of this study indicate that, nationally, a disproportionate number of children and young people impacted by extra-familial harm are either Black, young men (in cases of serious violence and CCE), young women (in cases of CSE), neurodiverse or in care.

All five case study sites in this study noted the same disproportionalities when prompted. In respect of youth work services in particular, a smaller number of sites commented on variation within these patterns in terms of gender (more young men and Black young people accessing open access provision, and young women and neurodiverse young people being referred into targeted support). However, this study did not quantify these patterns nationally across England and Wales, nor does the data collected offer sufficient explanation for such disproportionality in the first place. When asked, no case study site could provide an account of how their system would adapt when engaging with these groups, despite youth workers offering case-examples of where they challenged discriminatory practices within systems (or where we observed them). It is not clear whether any issues of disproportionality identified were a) a reflection of which young people were identified by services; b) a result of their actual experiences of violence; or c) the result of a referral pathway used by statutory services for some children and young people affected by violence and not for others. However, it was clear that meaningful engagement with the issue of disproportionality, and the implications for youth work provision, is a matter of urgency.

Research into system/service responses to young people affected by violence often note that the victimisation and vulnerability of some young people is under-recognised, such as young women, including Black young women, and Black young people (Firmin et al., 2021; Franklin et al. 2024; Davis, 2025). This under-recognition occurs in a context where some young people, such as Black young people and/or neurodivergent young people, may be hyper-visible in other datasets/studies (e.g. criminal justice statistics) and under-recognised in others (e.g. specialist/therapeutic CSE or Harmful Sexual Behavioural services). This study surfaced similar patterns in under- and over-recognition.

The qualitative research conducted for this study (e.g. interviews and SCR report analysis) captured a similar range of characteristics and similarly minimal/inconsistent interrogation of their relevance. There was little mention in the SCRs of race/ethnicity, gender or neurodiversity, or service responses to these characteristics, being a matter warranting enquiry. While most reported some/all demographic data of the children and young people that were the focus of the review, this data was often incomplete, particularly in instances in which multiple children and young people might be involved. System/practice responses to issues of ethnicity and/or race were identified as barriers to safeguarding in four instances – mostly in relation to lack of consideration being made with regard to the influence of ethnicity on a young person's needs or experiences, and the implications for services or support plans.

Likewise, within the case study sites, some children and young people are disproportionately identified by services as those affected by violence, CCE and other forms of extra-familial harm. This includes boys and young men, neurodivergent young people, those with learning needs and Black young people. The same groups of children and young people were identified in wider literature into safeguarding responses to violence (Firmin et al., 2021; Wroe, 2021; Hood, 2023; Franklin et al. 2024; Davis, 2025).

When prompted during system workshops, professionals in all case study sites noted disproportionality within systems connected to their safeguarding responses to violence. This

included the over-representation of Black children and young people in their youth justice system and in school exclusion figures, as well as the over-representation of neurodivergent children and young people (or those waiting for an assessment) in both systems (as well as an intersection of ethnicity, Autism Spectrum Disorder and gender). Professionals in two case study sites also noted an increase in girls and young women being arrested for violent offences. However, in no case study site did participants give an account of how their safeguarding system responses would adapt, or be applied differently, for children and young people in these groups (in recognition of the risks of disproportionality and over-representation).

Some system workshop participants reflected on potential different experiences when children and young people were first screened by children's social care (two sites) and were arrested by the police (three sites). When asked, four gave accounts of variations by gender in which children and young people accessed open access youth club provisions (mostly accessed by boys and young men). One site reflected on the knock-on effect of access to targeted youth work, reflecting that this type of support was often offered to young women and neurodivergent young people who social workers believed would struggle to access youth club provisions – meaning that young men and Black young men in this area (who did access the local youth clubs) were inadvertently screened out of targeted support. Such findings only surfaced as a result of direct questioning and prompting, and the inclination of participants was to state that all young people were treated the same – rather than explore whether some should be treated differently to mitigate the impact of system challenges and bias.

Both practice observations and system workshops surfaced evidence of youth workers challenging discriminatory practices within safeguarding systems. In one case study site, a youth worker described a situation where the police had shared information which suggested two young people they were supporting had been seen with machetes in a public place. When the youth worker reviewed the information, she stated that there was no evidence that these two children and young people were the ones with the machetes – however, they were the only two Black children and young people with the group that were on camera. The youth worker challenged the police officer who made the referral and refused to include the information on her assessment. Likewise, in a meeting observed in a different site, a youth worker challenged a social worker on the account she gave of a young person's heritage:

Case Study Site: observation

Someone in the meeting was asking the ethnicity of a young person and the school designated safeguarding lead began stating that the young person was 'brown' but then couldn't say what his actual ethnicity was, and then stated 'if you looked at him you'd think…'. The youth worker challenged this language and asked for more clarity, which the designated safeguarding lead couldn't give. The meeting chair eventually stepped in and said this is not productive and uncomfortable (Observation template, 3.1)

As such, data from case study sites suggest key differences in gender, ethnicity, neurodevelopmental condition, and learning needs among young people identified as affected by violence and referred to youth work support pathways. However, the practical response to this, and the intentional practice around it, was harder to identify.

On occasion, youth work interviewees framed these characteristics as 'vulnerabilities', with one youth worker describing their intersecting nature as a 'massive jigsaw puzzle to solve'. One of the most common characteristics mentioned by interviewees in this respect was children and young people not engaging in education.

> *The biggest characteristic that I see is actually disrupted education though. I'm responsible for youth justice and we've done a little bit of a drill down on our Black and global majority young people who are known to youth justice services, disrupted education is key… And it's not just about exclusions, but also managed moves, and moves across boroughs* – **Youth Work Manager**

Interviewees also commonly stated that many young people they supported lived in families with a long history of intervention from children's services, and framed this in relation to neglect:

> *And you've got families that have lived on the social housing estates for several generations now. And they would be the families that you know are kind of well-known to children services… I'm now seeing the kids of the families that I worked with when I first started out* – **Social Worker**

> *We know we're working with a lot of traumatised children, young people who have experienced levels of neglect and abuse and experience* – **Youth Worker**

Across the dataset for this study, specific characteristics – and to some extent, specific familial characteristics – were disproportionately cited amongst children and young people receiving support due to violence and other forms of extra-familial harm, including those supported by youth work services. Yet this information was inconsistently recorded, and when it was identified, the relevance of, or reason for, the disproportionality lacked sufficient consideration. In some respects, it was often as if youth workers, amongst other professionals, wanted to be viewed as treating 'everyone the same' in systems that required they be supported differently, in order to counter the unequal treatment some young people received. There were exceptions to this pattern, with examples observed and reported in case study sites of youth workers challenging statutory partners, particularly in respect of race/ethnicity. Such interventions demonstrated the potential there was for youth workers to disrupt the structural and systemic drivers of extra-familial harm, and young people's exposure to it. However, it did not seem that many had been given the space to truly interrogate how to do this work consistently, effectively and in manner that was recognised in wider safeguarding systems.

As a result, the data collected for this study did not provide a sufficiently consistent evidence base for us to reach conclusions about the characteristics of children who receive safeguarding support from youth workers, or how this varied across different demographic groups. As outlined throughout this section, case study data in particular suggested issues of disproportionality among those identified as being impacted by serious violence (boys and young men, Black children and young people, neurodiverse children and young people) and, by default, those who were referred to youth services (or identified by them). A smaller number of sites (two) indicated variations between the profile of children and young people accessing, or being referred into, open access youth club provision (young men, and Black children and young people) and those referred to targeted support (neurodiverse children and young people, and girls and young women). However, these suggestions were made during system-mapping workshops and were not identified in other datasets we examined as part of this research. As such, it would not be clear whether any disproportionality amongst children and young people accessing youth work organisations or youth workers due to violence was a) a reflection of their identification by services; b) a result of their actual experiences

of violence; or c) a referral pathway used by statutory services for some children and young people affected by violence and not for others.

3.3 Youth work activities within and beyond safeguarding systems

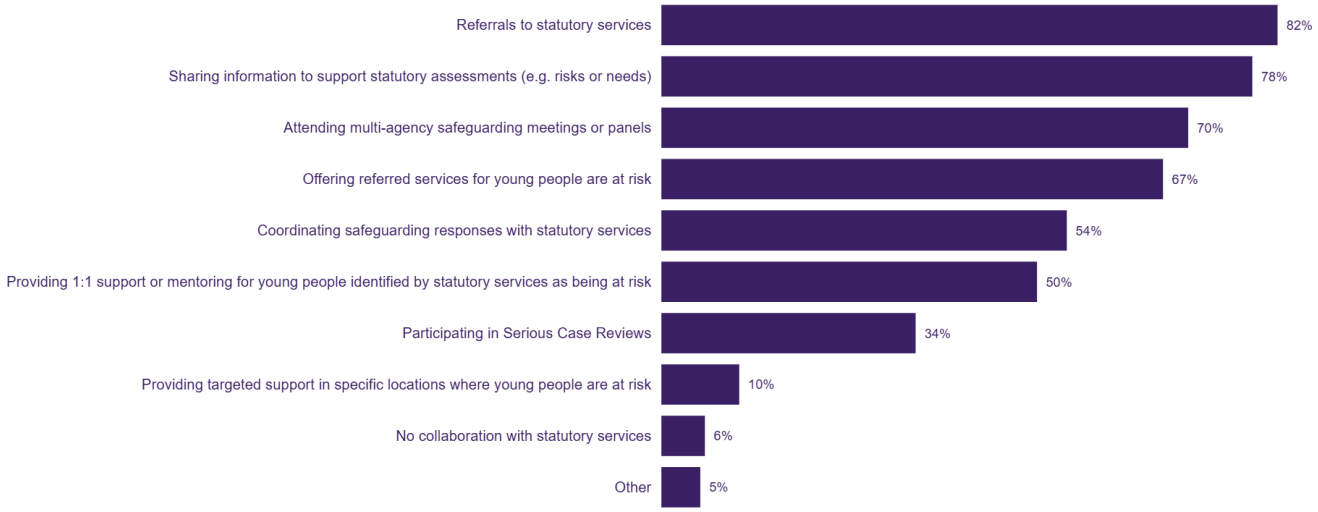
RQ3b: To what extent do youth workers participate in formal safeguarding procedures?

Youth workers are often involved in some form of formal safeguarding activity. Role type, organisation type and relationship with local authorities all have impact on the extent and type of involvement in safeguarding procedures. Youth workers embedded within 'exploitation' or equivalent teams or working within local authority social care are more likely to participate in formal safeguarding procedures than other types of youth worker. A range of youth workers refer children and young people into safeguarding systems, while a smaller cohort contribute to social care assessments, attend social-care chaired meetings and co-design safeguarding plans. Direct work with young people and support to build guardianship around groups and extra-familial contexts were also features of formal plans to safeguard children and young people impacted by violence.

LAIN survey analysis found that, in the last year, 69% of respondents received referrals about extra-familial harm from youth workers into children's social care, 72% included information from youth workers in safeguarding assessments, 77% noted youth worker attendance at extra-familial harm or exploitation panels, and 73% had youth workers attend child protection conferences for children and young people impacted by violence and other forms of extra-familial harm. When we consider these activities in case study sites, we see slightly different patterns, particularly by type of youth worker role. All five sites stated that youth workers would refer children and young people into children's social care due to violence – and that this occurred from a range of services: commissioned, non-commissioned (albeit via contact with a commissioned service), open access and targeted. Providing information to social care assessments was only consistently recognised in three of the five sites. Of the other two sites, one was more inconsistent due to social work having an inconsistent role in responding to violence affecting young people (Model 4). In the remaining site, open-access youth work organisations were more involved in policing and community safety responses than child protection assessments/meetings, whereas targeted youth workers would more consistently contribute to child protection processes (Model 5).

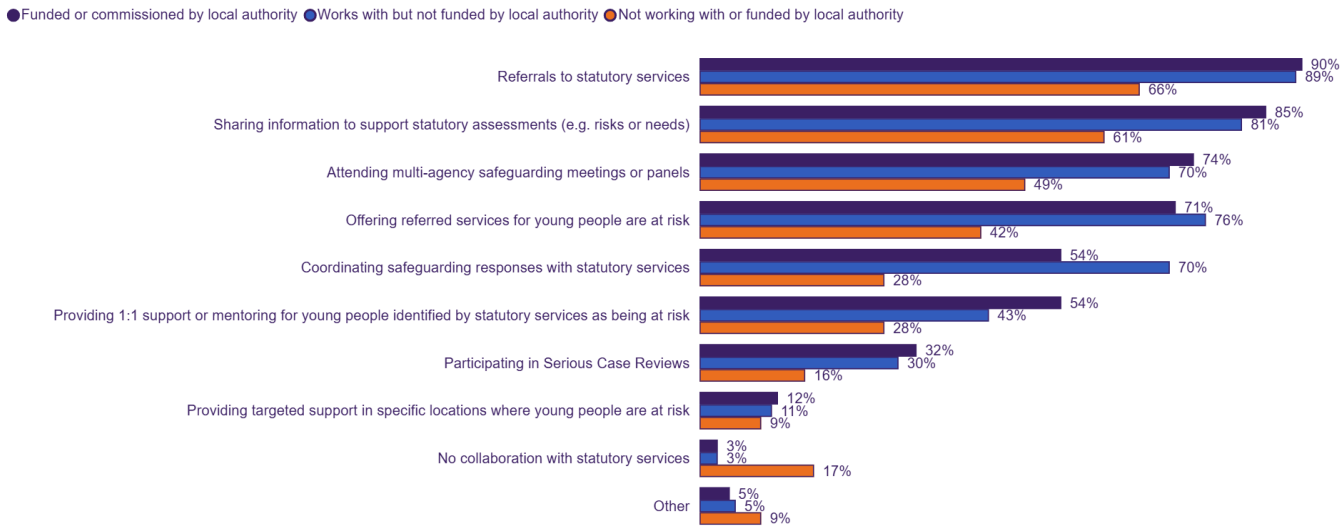
This extensive and varied level and nature of contribution was also identified by surveyed youth workers. Almost all (96%) of youth worker survey respondents stated that they collaborate directly with statutory services to safeguard children and young people at risk of, or involved in, violence or crime (figure 8). Respondents are, on average, likely to be involved in many different ways, and in many different instances during the last year. Over three quarters of respondents either refer to statutory services (82%) or share information to support statutory assessments (78%). The proportion of respondents attending multi-agency safeguarding meetings/panels was similarly high (70%). Just over a third (34%) had participated in some form of learning review or SCR activity. There are minor differences by nation with slightly higher proportions of Welsh respondents likely to attend multi-agency meetings (81% compared with 70% of English respondents) and offering referred services (81% and 67%, respectively). However, the low sample size for Welsh responses means that care should be taken when considering these differences.

Figure 8. Youth Worker Survey: Youth worker methods of collaboration with statutory services [base 329]



Relationship with the LA does impact on the methods of collaboration described in figure 8. Organisations directly funded or commissioned by LAs are approximately twice as likely to collaborate across the different methods compared with those that received no funding – suggesting that receipt of funding may be a key enabler for collaboration (figure 9). Having a youth work qualification greatly increases collaboration. For those that do have a qualification, level of youth work qualification also appears to have an impact, with degree level or higher JNC-recognised youth work qualifications typically 10-15% more likely to collaborate across the different methods than those with no JNC-recognised qualifications. This increases considerably when considering participation in SCRs where 59% of qualified respondents had collaborated, compared with 26% of non-youth-work-qualified respondents.

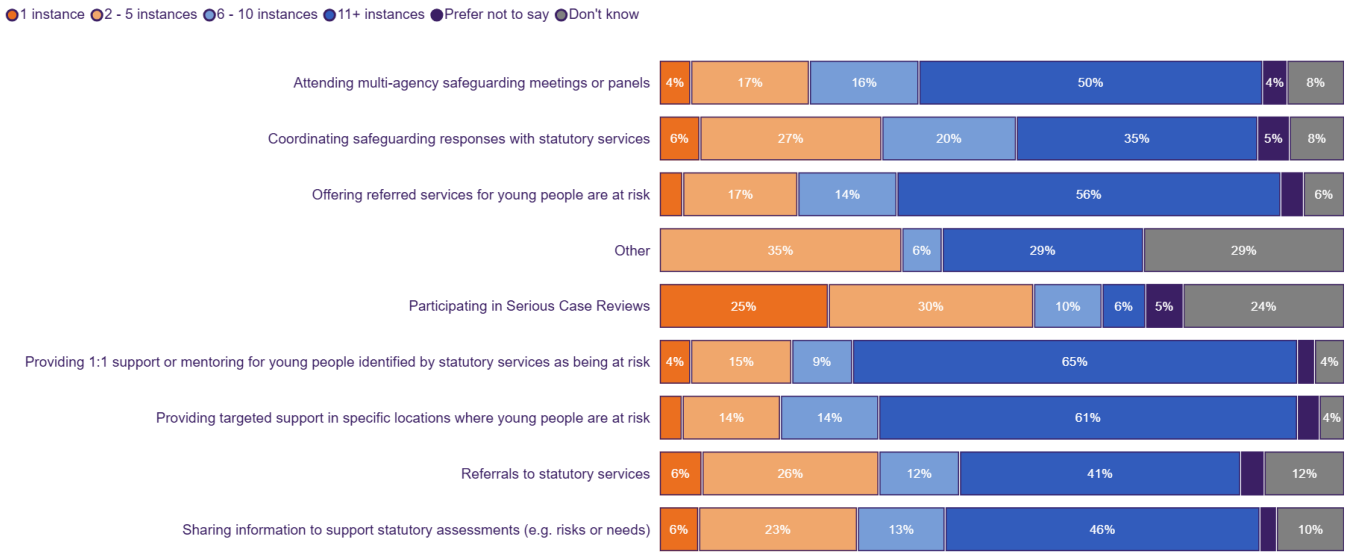
Figure 9. Youth Worker Survey: Youth worker methods of collaboration with statutory services by relationship with local authority [base 224]



Youth worker survey respondents that have collaborated with statutory services tend to have done so multiple times (11 or more) in seven of the nine categories in the last year (figure 10). There is no substantial difference by nation type. Participation in one to five SCRs is also common. While this trend does not change when considering whether youth workers are in a targeted or open access role, the proportion of those collaborating 11+ times is higher across all types of collaboration for

those in targeted roles. Similarly, services that are run, funded or commissioned by an LA are considerably more likely to have engaged 11+ times compared with those from the VCS or elsewhere. Qualification type also has an impact on engagement. Youth workers with a Level 5, 6 or 7 JNC recognised qualification are typically twice as likely to have collaborated in more than 11 instances across most categories than those with a level 2 or 3 JNC recognised qualification. Youth worker survey respondents feel very confident that they will be undertaking these types of activities in the future.

Figure 10. Youth Worker Survey: Extent of collaboration with statutory services in the last year [base 302]



Such contributions were visible in all five case study models, but to different extents. In the site with extensive youth work provision organised under a safer communities directorate (Model 5), the only youth workers consistently involved in formal safeguarding procedures were the small number in the exploitation service. In the site where youth workers largely led the response to extra-familial harm (Model 4), they coordinated a response that straddled both safeguarding and community safety responses. For example, they fed information into wider location-based responses led by community safety partnerships to disperse people from public spaces, or they responded to anti-social-behaviour complaints about young people by increasing youth work presence in public places, while also seeking to meet young people's relational needs by providing guidance and support. However, they were less clearly involved in social-care-led safeguarding procedures such as child protection conferences and plans (procedures which were under-used for extra-familial harm). In the three sites with greatest social care leadership around extra-familial harm, various youth workers reported being involved in statutory arrangements, including those who undertook detached youth work (two sites), those who ran open-access youth work provision (three sites), and those in voluntary-sector-commissioned services (three sites), in addition to targeted youth workers. There were varying levels of confidence in respect of consistency, with two sites confident that social workers would always enquire about youth work involvement with young people and invite youth workers to all statutory meetings/processes, whereas one site suggested it would depend on whether the initial referral came from youth work or not. All sites commented that wider reach into much smaller community youth work was less likely, and that much of this work to support young people took place outside of statutory pathways.

Participating in processes, however, does not mean that such participation is always acknowledged or valued. As other sections in this report illustrate, there are challenges in the process of

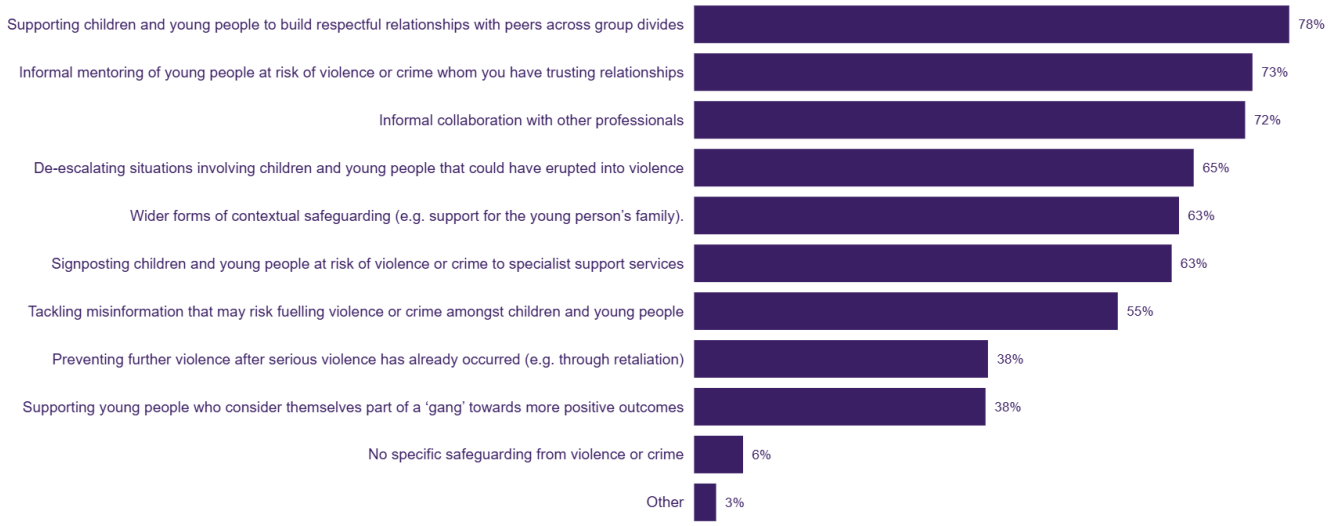
collaboration, and these challenges can mean that formal processes do not always provide the conditions in which the potential youth work contribution to safeguarding can be realised (such as enabling full participation in meetings), or where the actual youth work contribution to safeguarding is documented (such as being recorded in social work assessments or plans).

RQ2: Beyond participation in formal safeguarding procedures, how and to what extent do youth workers informally safeguard children who are vulnerable to violence and CCE?

Youth workers act in a range of ways to informally safeguard children and young people who are vulnerable to CCE and other forms of violence. They offer advice and support to young people impacted by violence, and to the wider professional network supporting them, outside of referral, assessment or planning processes. Through consent-based relationships, youth workers provide a safe space for young people to explore worries with trusted adults, access a wide range of services, and build full and happy lives. A range of organisational and individual characteristics impact on the extent of support provided. VCS organisations funded or commissioned by the local authority that focus on offering open access provision are most likely to be informally supporting these young people. This wider set of informal work enables youth workers to play a semi-formal role activities, such as providing advice to social workers and the police over the phone based on knowledge gathered in informal settings to influence formal processes.

Figure 11 illustrates the ways in which youth worker survey respondents indicate that they or their organisation informally safeguards children and young people from involvement in violence or crime. The most common ways cited were supporting children and young people's peer relationships (78%), informal mentoring (73%) and informal collaboration with other professionals (72%). On average, respondents indicate that they are involved in six of these ways. Youth workers in Wales were more likely to report de-escalating situations that could have erupted in violence (81%) compared to those from England (64%).

Figure 11. Youth Worker Survey: Approaches to safeguarding CYP from involvement in violence and crime [base 312]

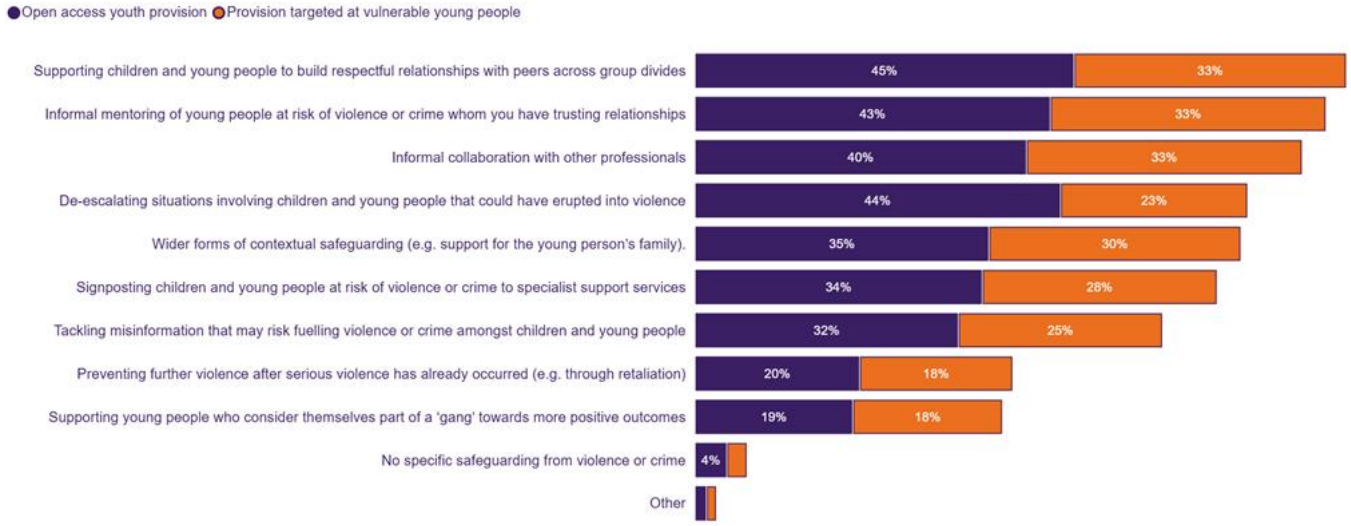


Just by having an open door policy to our [youth] club allows us to support young people at their own pace and create opportunities for us to support their development in safe environments and have non-judgemental conversations about their behaviours **– Youth Worker**

Since the service was cut, we have much less resource to spend on detached youth work so we have to be work smarter with what we have… For the most part this means directing youth workers to particular hotspot areas. While we know where these are, staff from other [council] departments also provide a steer which can be helpful.

There is variation by delivery type, relationship to the LA and youth worker type and qualification level. VCS respondents that are primarily involved in open access youth work are more likely to have provided informal support to young people than those involved in targeted provision (figure 12). They are more likely to cite instances of de-escalating risky situations as well as supporting children and young people to build respectful relationships. Similarly, organisations funded or commissioned by an LA are also more likely to deliver informal support than those that are not. Qualification type has a much smaller impact on provision of informal support, although degree-level staff are on average about 10% more likely to have provided informal support than those with no youth work qualification.

Figure 12. Youth Worker Survey: Extent of organisational engagement in informal safeguarding by type of youth work activity [base 244]



Through consent-based relationships, youth workers provide a safe space for young people to explore worries, access a wide range of services, and build full and happy lives. Such relationships created space for de-escalation within youth work settings and in public places where violence is at risk of occurring (captured in all five case study sites), disrupted conversations in which violence may be normalised (described in all five case study sites), and enabled youth workers to advocate for young people's needs and rights within wider professional networks where they may otherwise be overlooked (observed in three case study sites). Pen portraits submitted by youth workers in three case study sites documented various activities that were not formally recorded on safeguarding systems.

Pen Portrait 5: 7.30pm, Youth Club

Received a phone call from a detached youth work team where young people were complaining that the Youth Bus was not out tonight. Asked them to explain the current situation regarding lack of drivers and that we were trying everything to resolve the issue and hopeful it would be back out as normal in the next 2 weeks.

Pen Portrait 4: 5.00pm, Activity Centre

Met with [anon staff] and prepared for the session in [anon park]… A small group of young people from the Youth Advisory Board have helped to create the session…We are currently engaging with between 40-60 young people per session…Short while into the session, we were joined by local Beat Managers from [anon] Police. They came in plain clothes to be seen and build relationships with young people. The officers had lots of conversations with various young people throughout the session. This on the whole was really positive, however there were some young people who were apprehensive as thought they were undercover cops...Towards the end of the session, there was an incident where one of the young people became aggressive as we had asked that he did not throw the cup he had used for hot chocolate on the floor. The young person didn't take this well and shouted back at us "fucking sket"…I felt that the young person was trying to take control of a situation. Emotions may have been heightened due to Police presence in the park this evening. We do not know this young person very well so I wonder if he was testing boundaries to see how we, and also the Police officers would react to this behaviour.

Such work is made feasible through relationships and physical environments that enable young people to access adults they trust, in spaces where they feel psychologically and physically safe. Open access youth club provision is one such space.

> *Young people see our spaces as safe spaces for them to come, engage in activities which are designed to promote inclusion and health and well-being. We ae not reactionary, we are in a place of space to build up those relationships* – **Youth Worker**

> *We may take them off to a pottery class or go horse riding or whatever it may be to find a way to build that relationship so you can build that trust and then you can weave in those conversations and do that work around the exploitation* – **Youth Worker**

Additionally, in case study sites and in national interviews, youth workers talked about mobile youth club buses, detached provision in parks and high streets, and collaborative work with other adults in public spaces (e.g. retail security staff, transport hub staff, managers of fast-food restaurants) to change how they viewed and interacted with young people. Youth work across all of these settings was intended to create safe and inclusive environments for young people in which they could access/explore opportunities to develop, grow, socialise and explore. By its very nature, this work contributes to safeguarding by promoting young people's welfare and creating avenues through which they can access support and advice.

> *Our outreach teams try to reach out to our most vulnerable young people through their detached work. They find it can work well in engaging the hardest-to-reach older young people in places where the young people themselves feel comfortable and happier to engage* – **Youth Work Manager**

However, youth work is about more than safeguarding. It is also accessed by young people who are not experiencing violence and do not need to be safeguarded. A similar separation exists in

education, where the school environment can buffer against young people's experiences of violence (and safeguard them from it), while also helping students to flourish and develop socially. There is though, a key difference in how these two services are funded.

Education is a core service and is funded for its primary purpose. Youth work, in the case study sites and our wider dataset, was often funded through statutory commissioning frameworks used by either community safety or children's social care, and these core youth work activities were valued via safeguarding or crime prevention measures – rather than as an end in themselves. In framing them as 'informal safeguarding', this report risks making the same conflation. As such, it would be more accurate to state that a range of youth work activities which develop and support children to flourish also contribute to their safety and efforts to safeguard them – rather than to frame them principally as safeguarding activities. Within this broader framing, some activities – such as the de-escalation work in the park noted in a pen portrait above – will involve direct work around violence, but will only appear feasible in the context of this broader work. For example, could that youth worker have talked the young person down without a wider presence and set of trusted relationships with young people in the area; if their sole purpose was to talk to the young person about violence, would this have worked in the same way?

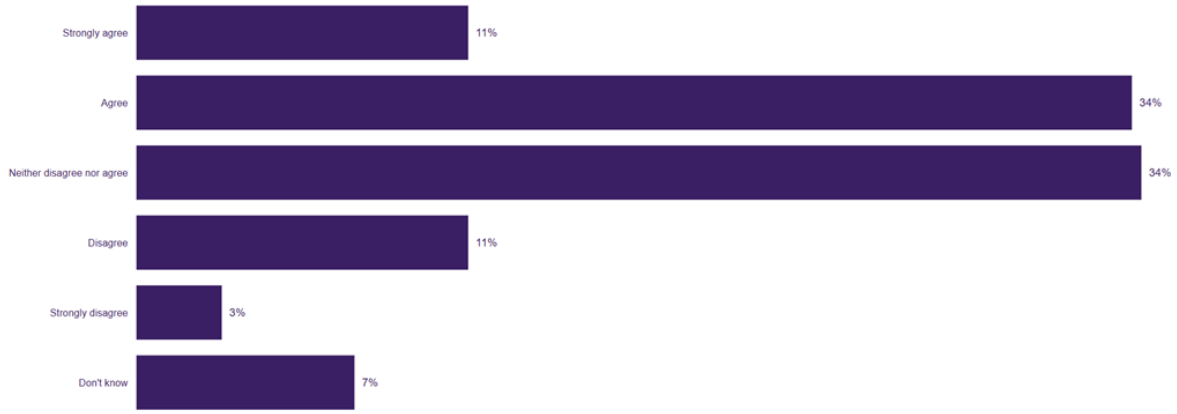
RQ2a: To what extent do tensions arise between informal and formal safeguarding and how are these tensions navigated?

The extent of tensions between informal and formal safeguarding may be considerable. Tensions are most common across four themes: shared outcomes/goals; lead agency; information sharing and consent; and inconsistent safeguarding arrangements that exacerbate all previous tensions. Tensions are addressed inconsistently and in an ad-hoc fashion, rather than proactively and through a shared understanding.

Nearly half (45%) of youth worker survey respondents either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that tensions often arise between youth workers and other professionals when safeguarding children and young people; only 14% of respondents disagreed to any extent with this statement (figure 13). This suggests that, from the youth worker perspective, the extent to which tensions arise may be considerable. Analysis of interviews with youth workers and all types of statutory professionals reinforces the notion that tensions can arise.

Those working within the LA are more likely to point to tensions arising (52%) than those working in the VCS (44%). Those funded or commissioned by an LA are slightly more likely to concur (47%) than those not working with or funded by an LA (41%). There is no real difference by nature of youth work activity, level of qualification of youth worker or nation type.

Figure 13. Youth Worker Survey: Belief that tension exists between youth workers and other professionals [base 313]



Tensions that arise between formal, informal and semi-formal safeguarding activities can be organised into four themes: shared outcomes/goals; lead agency; information sharing; and consent. To an extent, all themes are a consequence of, and at least exacerbated by, inconsistent safeguarding arrangements for children impacted by violence (summarised in section 3.2).

Shared outcomes/goals

Youth work and its goals are broader than those of safeguarding systems. The informal safeguarding that youth workers achieve is often a byproduct of their practice, rather than the goal or purpose of that practice. However, when youth work interacts with formal safeguarding systems this byproduct becomes the priority of wider partnerships, and can be the measure upon which youth work is defined. Youth workers risk their aims, objectives, values and practices (which informally facilitate safeguarding) being co-opted into systems where the primary goal is either safeguarding/protection or crime prevention/enforcement. Systems focused on the latter are sometimes more methodologically aligned to youth work, and those focused on the former are more ethically aligned; but neither are fully aligned in terms of goals.

> *I recognise that it is still the case that youth and community workers will likely have different views on what outcomes these children should get than some of my colleagues, this despite the work that we have tried to encourage to mitigate these views* – **Police Sergeant**
>
> *It is sometimes difficult to align our approach to that of statutory services… While we may well achieve the desired outcomes, it goes against our instinct to start a conversation with a predefined outcome in mind* **– Case Study Youth Worker**
>
> *A successful outcome for us [police] might be on reducing offences or time between offences, or even diverting young people away from wider youth offending…However I can imagine it more challenging for some youth workers to think about outcomes under the same lens* – **Police Community Support Officer**

To manage this tension, youth workers and the wider partnerships in which they worked:

- **Discussed shared goals for a young person**: coordinating plans around what young people needed and wanted ensured that youth workers' activities could be framed around matters that were beyond safeguarding goals, while also contributing to safeguarding. In this sense, safeguarding was realised without overshadowing or undermining the primary goals of youth work.

- **Sought management support and permission for challenge/advocacy:** youth work managers and leaders of youth work organisations needed to be aware of these tensions and provide support and permission for youth workers to challenge statutory partners. Part of this challenge would be to advocate for young people's needs to be met and their rights to be respected, as well as valuing/evaluating the contribution of youth work beyond formal safeguarding activities.

The lack of considered debate about this in most case study sites indicated there is space for youth work organisations, and the sector more widely, to fully recognise its value through its own lens (rather than those of offending or safeguarding) and to identify metrics to measure that value ahead of secondary measures related to statutory systems. Such national work may build upon these ad-hoc resolutions identified in our dataset.

Lead agency

A youth worker is often one of the people in a young person's professional network who knows them best. The methodology of much youth work practice also means they often know and have relationships in the public spaces, schools and peer contexts where violence affecting children and young people takes place. This knowledge, coupled with the voluntary nature of youth work practice, means they are often well-placed to shape and deliver responses to violence, particularly those developed in collaboration with young people and their wider communities. However, their voluntary footing means that youth workers cannot coordinate the statutory safeguarding response to violence. As such, in three of the five case study sites, the response was led by social care, who chaired all key meetings, coordinated the safeguarding assessments, and tasked youth workers in respect of both. In system mapping workshops for two of those three sites, participants commented that this process was not reciprocal – youth workers could not task social workers to take certain actions, nor could they chair meetings that social workers attended. In one site, youth workers did play a far more coordinating role, but this was in the absence of social work leadership. In the fifth site, youth workers collaborated far more with policing and community safety partners than with social care; finding that the social care process excluded most youth work input. Youth workers and their partners managed this tension by:

- **Discussing it openly**: this highlighted how youth workers were able to retain a more informal position, removed from statutory partnerships, and fulfil a role in young people's lives that was about more than safeguarding. The discussions also allowed space for differences in roles/contributions to be framed as such, rather than being positioned in terms of what roles/contributions were more respected or carried more weight. In many respects, the voluntary nature of youth work engagement gave them greater weight in meetings than professionals, who young people only spoke to because they were required to.

> *Being seen [by young people] as not part of the 'system' is key to our success. Time and again we are asked to help open the door for our other safeguarding partners… however this tends to be one-way traffic* **– Youth Worker**

- **Creating opportunities to lead/chair:** in two of the sties, youth workers chaired internal meetings, including planning meetings (that involved youth work and social work) and safeguarding-focused meetings (where youth work culture shaped the tone and approach). .

- **Offering internal team meetings:** internal team meetings within and across youth work organisations created space for youth workers to reflect on, and manage, the pressures of interacting with formal safeguarding processes – as well as identify their own safeguarding priorities. Opportunities to do this were created in different ways across all five case study sites, and three sites enabled VCS organisations to also collaborate with statutory youth work providers.

Information-sharing

All datasets in this study featured a tension in respect of when youth workers should share information about violence, and children affected by it, into formal safeguarding processes. This tension arises because much of the information that youth workers hold is gathered through their informal safeguarding role. In every case study site and across many interviews, youth workers noted that while some young people may make direct disclosures to them, they are often more likely to hear about violence through rumour, witnessing possible injuries, or by over-hearing other children talking about peers. In these scenarios, they may learn about violence, or a child in need of support, prior to having their consent to share that information into statutory systems (and it not reaching a threshold of significant harm), or not having sufficient details to be confident in the information they were sharing.

> *Since spending time in the schools I gain so much knowledge about the local young people – I don't mean proactively, simply by being present and picking up on conversations and so on. Its not really actionable, more just helpful in filling in some of the blanks* – **Youth Worker**

This felt distinct from situations where children approach youth workers and share what is happening to them in order to prompt a response, where the ongoing information-sharing process (at least with children's social care) was clearer. In these instances, youth workers (irrespective of where they are based) are clear about the boundaries of the youth work relationship with young people they support and the duty of care they have to disclose information in relevant situations. However, interviews with youth workers and safeguarding professionals highlighted the inherent difficulty that this can have on the relationship between youth workers and children and young people if this is not used sensitively.

> *Making disclosures to safeguarding colleagues certainly risks losing trust with young people – in one instance making a disclosure meant the young person went to prison as a result of breach of bail conditions. Whilst this was the right thing to do, it closed the door on my relationships with his friendship group* **– Detached Youth Worker**

Some safeguarding professionals highlighted the need for a 'healthy and realistic dialogue' between all professionals involved in safeguarding, including youth workers, to ensure that the trust established in working practices is not damaged.

Youth workers navigated this tension in a number of ways:

- **Phone call prior to referral**: as noted in all five models, every case study site stated that phone calls would take place between youth workers and youth work managers, and between youth work managers and children's social care, to talk about whether information should be shared and in what format. This also enabled youth workers to triangulate the information they held with that held by children's social care, which could then be combined to escalate or de-escalate concerns. In Models 1, 2 and 3, youth workers could identify specific named social workers within social care who led on extra-familial harm with whom they may have a conversation, and those people would then link into the children's social care referral pathway (often referred to as the 'front door') to help guide decision-making. In Models 4 and 5, such conversations were held directly with social workers in the front door part of children's social care rather than with a specialist social worker responsible for extra-familial harm.

- **Anonymous information sharing**: three of the five sites discussed using a 'police intelligence form' to share anonymous information with the police. For youth workers, this function enabled them to raise thematic concerns, such as locations, dates and times of potential incidents when they did not have all of the information to hand about the harm/risks that young people faced. This information could then feed into wider pictures that professionals were forming around violence in local areas.

- **Cause for concern log**: all sites described different ways in which some youth work organisations in the area, particularly those commissioned by statutory organisations or based within the LA, would log their own 'causes for concern'. This enabled them to record and monitor emergent issues that alone would not comprise a referral into statutory partners, but may do so at a later date once more was understood. It also provided them with a space to record interim actions they were taking to provide support and/or mitigate risks.

- **Sharing thematic information around location**: all sites described community-safety-chaired panels in which locations (rather than individual young people) affected by violence were discussed. Youth workers shared thematic information about locations (e.g. a young person had a phone stolen at X, or young people we support are increasingly talking about issues escalating at Y) into these meetings to contribute to a wider picture about trends related to violence in the local area. During interviews, targeted youth workers regularly cited instances in which they were able to provide localised information to support decision-making in similar meetings.

Consent

Information-sharing was a point of tension primarily because it involved youth workers who operate in consent-based relationships with young people sharing information into non-consent-based systems. The advice that 'safeguarding trumps everything so you must share information' is an oversimplified resolution to this tension. In reality, youth workers are well aware that sharing information about young people with statutory partners can undermine the relationship they have with a young person to the point that risk to that young person may increase. If the relationship is a key lever keeping the young person alive, then how does a youth worker share information, and know which information to share, in ways that does not do more harm than good? Does a young

person know, for example, that by choosing to spend time in a youth club, the information a youth worker overhears may be shared with statutory organisations that they have not consented to engage with; and, if they did know, would they still attend that youth club? Deciphering which information to share as it warrants a safeguarding concern and could enable a safeguarding action, compared to information-sharing that will not change safeguarding actions but may undermine safe relationships is a skill. Youth workers managed these tensions to different extents in the following ways:

- **Understanding the difference between consent processes in different statutory organisations**: in four out of the five sites, youth workers managed information-sharing with social care and information-sharing with the police in different ways. In these four sites, there was a recognition, to varying degrees, that a referral into children's social care would not require intervention without consent unless a threshold of significant harm had been reached. In short, youth workers understood that much of the social work support available to children and their families was offered voluntarily. In three sites, this understanding was built in collaborative relationships between social workers and targeted youth workers, through which youth workers came to understand when social work intervention required consent and when it did not; this was even more apparent in co-located teams. In a fourth site, variations in types of social work intervention were described by youth workers, but without a clear understanding of the legal thresholds for statutory and non-statutory social work interventions. Understandings were also more variable amongst colleagues in open-access services, who worked at a greater distance to social workers. In these three sites, youth workers noted that once information was shared with the police it was not clear how that would be used, and consent was not required for the police to use it to build intelligence pictures around young people and/or their peers. It was for this reason that they sometimes anonymised information shared with the police, unless young people gave consent for non-anonymised information to be shared. When these distinctions were not understood, some youth workers were not aware that some social work was consent-based, nor did they distinguish between social work and policing. This was reflected in some youth worker interviews. Such distinctions, however, were easier for youth workers to identify in areas where there was a clear social care response to extra-familial harm.

- **Co-location and upfront discussion about relationships**: opportunities for co-working and co-location helped youth workers to understand the role of statutory agencies, and to be upfront with children and young people about the nature of these relationships. In model 1, youth workers within the co-located team could explain the difference between the social work and youth work roles, and in this way build trusting relationships with those that they supported. The value of co-location was cited by many of the youth workers and safeguarding professionals who were interviewed. In the best examples, interviewees said it breaks down barriers to communication and the informality helps to encourage partnership working.

Just being in the office for a couple of days a week I learn more about what is going on with our cohort than I'd have imagined… Even overhearing others talking about certain cases is really helpful for my background knowledge, and I can jump in when I think it is helpful – **Targeted Support Youth Worker**

- **Gradual process of disclosure and collaboration**: many youth workers talked about young people gradually agreeing for information to be shared on their terms, and that this approach was developmentally appropriate in many cases but also sowed the seeds for collaborative safety-planning. Trusting relationships between statutory partners and youth workers gave space for this slower pace of information sharing, in which there was a belief by all that if significant information needed to be shared then this would happen.

3.4 What support and training do youth workers receive for their formal and informal safeguarding role?

Youth workers require a range of knowledge and skills to effectively safeguard children and young people and to engage with the wider systems that support them. While almost all youth workers have some form of safeguarding training, this on its own is insufficient for what is required in practice. A lack of opportunity to participate in multi-agency training that explores the local design of safeguarding systems is common. Furthermore, there are a range of personal and organisational characteristics that impact the extent of access to specialised safeguarding training and support.

When we compare the forms of safeguarding training that youth workers report – primarily through surveys and interviews – with the skills and knowledge required in practice, as observed, mapped and discussed in case study sites, we see a clear insufficiency. Most youth workers surveyed did report receiving some form of safeguarding training, and displayed high levels of understanding of safeguarding procedures. However, the variable design of safeguarding systems in the case study sites evidence a lack of a standard procedure upon which to be trained. In reality, training needs to provide the space for youth workers to understand that local responses to violence straddle safeguarding and community safety legislation, policy and associated procedures, and they do so differently depending on how services are organised locally. It feels key, therefore, to provide space to reflect on what their local models look like, and what this means for their role in both formal safeguarding systems and informal and semi-formal safeguarding practices.

Furthermore, our research finds that a range of personal and organisational characteristics impact the extent of specialised training that youth workers receive to support children and young people at risk of violence. Role, level of qualification, organisation type and organisation's relationship with the LA all appear to have an impact on the extent of training and support in safeguarding young people. The nature of this specialist training enables some youth workers to enhance their skills in delivering trauma-informed and culturally sensitive support to children and young people, and develop a detailed understanding about the nature and variable forms of violence they may encounter. Yet it does not seem to extend to knowledge of system insufficiencies, conflicting policy frameworks and/or addressing system harms – matters that are relevant for both informal and formal safeguarding activities.

Types of training undertaken

Analysis of the youth worker survey suggests that level of safeguarding training amongst paid youth workers responding to the survey is high in England and Wales. Overall, almost all (98%) indicate that they have received safeguarding training, and most have received mental health awareness training (82%) and trauma-informed training (79%) (figure 14). There is no substantial difference by nation type. The NYA's most recent annual workforce survey found that 86% of respondents had undertaken safeguarding training in the last year and almost all (97%) felt that they had a 'good' or 'excellent' understanding of safeguarding procedures. It is worth noting that, when asked in the youth worker survey what type of training or support would have the most beneficial impact for safeguarding purposes, approximately 16% highlighted some form of trauma-informed practice training. It is interesting to note the relatively low levels of violence-prevention training received

(24%) across survey respondents – this is an area of interest for future learning for about 10% of Youth sector WS respondents.

Figure 14. Youth Worker Survey: Youth worker access to training and support [base 271]

Qualitative fieldwork with youth workers tends to support these findings. Almost all youth workers indicated that they had undertaken general safeguarding training – however, in some instances youth workers did not feel sufficiently supported when dealing with specific responses to violence.

> *The safeguarding training I had way back when I was qualifying as a [youth support] worker was great – however that was years ago, and its only now in my current role that I'm coming up against situations in which I need to use it and I feel so out of touch* **– Youth Worker**

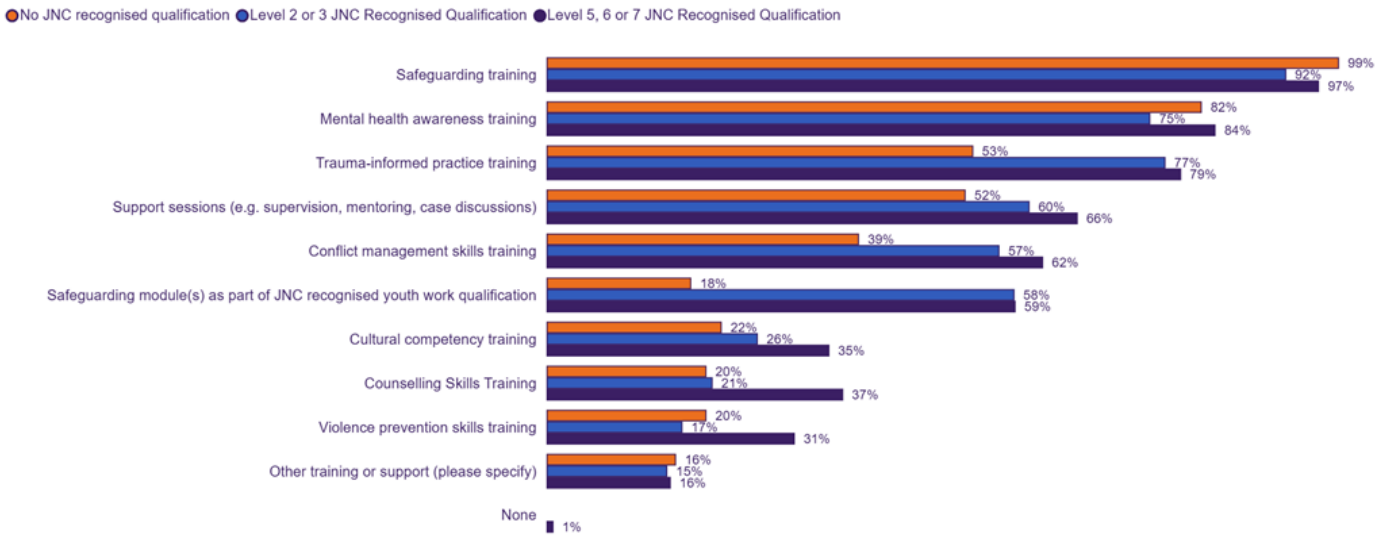
Case study data suggests that this may be because general safeguarding training is insufficient for engaging with local responses to violence and violence prevention work. Youth workers tended to talk about benefitting from a standardised package of safeguarding training or, in some instances, 'corporate safeguarding training', which was mandatory for all staff involved in safeguarding children and young people. This is valued by youth workers but seen as foundational and not providing the opportunity to critically think and evaluate their safeguarding role. For example, it does not invite professional reflection on the differing safeguarding roles youth workers may play within community safety or social care structures; the varying levels of consent-based work within social care and/or criminal justice systems and the impact on youth work relationships; or how challenging harmful professional practice is part of a safeguarding effort. All of these activities were captured in our data collection, and impacted the ability of youth workers to fulfil their unique safeguarding potential as a voluntary-based partner that interacted with largely statutory systems/frameworks.

Characteristics that impact on extent and quality of safeguarding training

Level of JNC-recognised youth work qualification does not substantially influence whether a youth worker has received safeguarding training – this remains universally high (around 96%) even for those that do not have a youth work qualification. Those without some form of qualification are least likely to have undertaken the specific training types (see figure 15). Level of qualification also has an impact on the range of training they have received. Degree qualified (or higher) youth workers are most likely to have undertaken all the specific training categories asked in the survey.

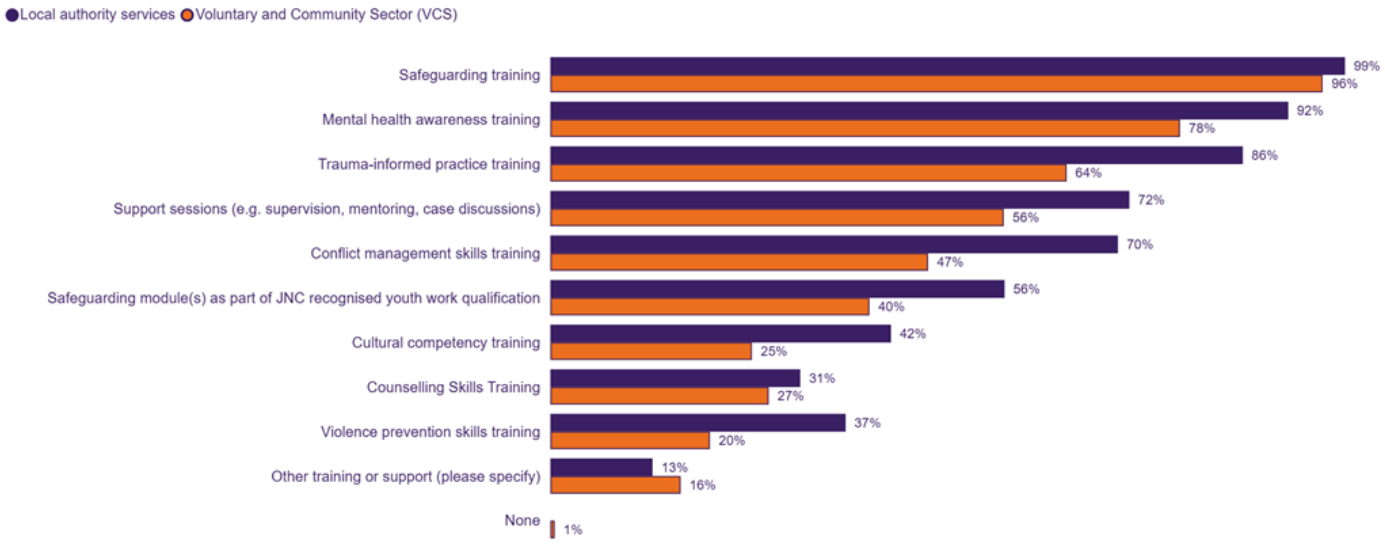
Although even here, only about a third of respondents with this qualification had received cultural competency training (35%), counselling skills training (37%) and violence prevention skills training (31%).

Figure 15. Youth Worker Survey: Youth worker access to training and support by level of qualification [base 271]



Where you work, and the relationship between your organisation and LA, may have an impact on access to specialised training and support in safeguarding young people. While receipt of standard safeguarding training remains very high across organisations in the VCS and LAs, respondents from VCS organisations are considerably less likely to have received any of the specialised safeguarding compared with those in the LA. As figure 16 demonstrates, the proportion of respondents from the VCS having access to trauma-informed practice training (22% lower) and conflict management skills training (23%) is lower than those in the LA.

Figure 16. Youth Worker Survey: Youth worker access to training and support by organisation type level of qualification [base 260]



This may in part be down to budgetary constraints that some VCS organisations, particularly smaller ones may be operating under.

We [youth work organisation] are in pretty good shape financially, we've been fortunate in being successful in a number of funding bids...but we can't use any of these pockets of funding for training or staff development, it's all about delivery – **Voluntary Sector Youth Work Manager**

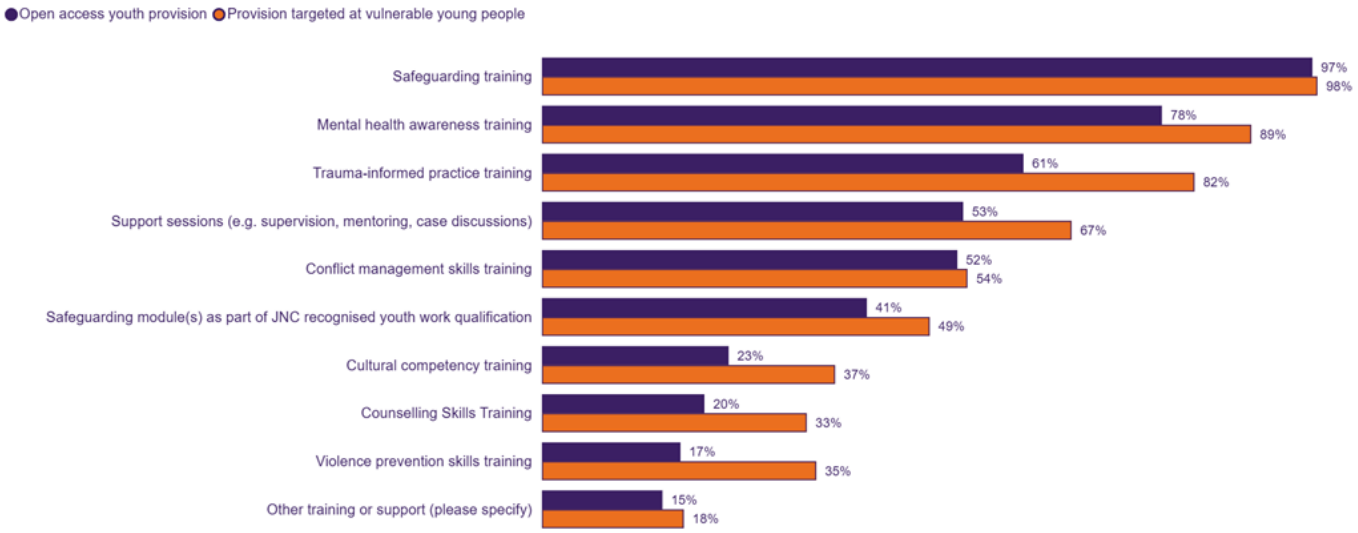
Where you work may have less impact on the extent of access to specialised training. Where access to this training is provided, VCS respondents have undertaken a mean average of five different types of training, compared with six from LA respondents. However, further research would be required to clarify if the training experienced was completed during respondents' current role. Analysis of NYA's Census (2024/5) suggests lower levels of safeguarding training in the last year (61% of respondents).

Relationship with the LA may also have an impact on the range of access to specialist safeguarding training. Respondents not working with or funded by the LA are less likely to have received the range of training and support than those that do. For example, only 49% received trauma-informed practice training, compared to 74% of respondents who were funded or commissioned by the LA. Interviews point to instances where VCS organisations that are supported by the LA are able to take advantage of free training. However, it is not clear how widespread this practice is. Figure 17 demonstrates that there is much less difference between organisations that are funded or commissioned by the LA and those that work with but are not funded by the LA. However, we suggest a note of caution about the conclusions that can be drawn from the relatively small base sizes included.

Figure 17. Youth Worker Survey: Youth worker access to training and support by relationship with local authority [base 186]

The type of role youth workers play appears to have some impact on training and support levels. Those respondents primarily involved in delivering provision targeted at vulnerable young people are unsurprisingly more likely to have received training in all categories compared to those primarily delivering open access youth provision (figure 18). However, we know from NYA Census 2024 that nearly two thirds of organisations (61%) primarily delivering open access provision are also involved in delivering a range of targeted activities on a weekly basis.

Figure 18. Youth Worker Survey: Youth worker access to training and support by provision type [base 214]



The way that safeguarding training is delivered may have an impact on its perceived effectiveness. Qualitative research with youth workers and safeguarding professionals highlights the benefit of a multi-agency approach to training and it is clear that many would welcome opportunities to train alongside other practitioners.

> *I think team training is key with us. As an individual in a previous organisation, I felt confident working with young people involved in violence. However none of my multi-disciplinary team did so these young people were often risk assessed out of coming into group sessions because of perceived risk to others. We need teams to be on the same page and trained together to ensure that these young people are not excluded* **– Youth worker**

For many youth workers, having a clearer and fuller picture of local safeguarding processes and procedures – such as where and how to refer, thresholds for interventions and options available to them – would be welcome. Some senior youth work and safeguarding managers believe that inconsistent engagement in the referral process by some youth workers is due to a lack of confidence or knowledge in engaging in local processes. A similar point was made in a SCR that included direct youth work involvement. The report highlighted how the targeted youth support worker was expected to take a leading role in planning but did not have access to the necessary information. This was considered a missed opportunity as the worker was the only individual to have an important and consistent relationship with the young person.

> *This episode illustrates the way in which Targeted Youth Services or similar voluntary services can be asked to play a leading role, because their approach is viewed as more likely to lead to engagement, but do not undertake a detailed assessment on which to base the intervention and rely on others to provide important history…Arrangements for joint supervision and planning between social care, TYS and/or YOS need to be in place and operating effectively* **– 'Child K' and services to reduce serious youth violence, SCR**

Youth workers welcome opportunities to participate alongside multi-agency colleagues in real-life scenarios/case studies that encourage critical thinking about their safeguarding role. This approach to training is seen as effective in building a safeguarding culture and fostering internalised accountability, and is a common theme identified as beneficial. For some, these sessions were also helpful in breaking down any misconceptions about professional roles and responsibilities.

Given the volume of formal and informal safeguarding activities reported in survey returns and observed in case studies, youth workers and youth work organisations would benefit from a range of general, local and specialist forms of safeguarding training. Such training would need to support both their approach to supporting children affected by violence, as well as inform their approach to engaging with a range of statutory safeguarding processes. Most of the training reported in survey responses is unlikely to sufficiently equip youth workers with the knowledge and skills that they need to thoughtfully and effectively interact with local safeguarding systems.

3.5 Youth work collaboration with statutory safeguarding organisations

RQ3a: To what extent are youth work organisations classed as 'relevant agencies' by local safeguarding partnerships?

Youth workers are involved in statutory safeguarding processes and participate in a range of key safeguarding functions. Youth workers would not be fulfilling these roles, or have such roles recognised by statutory partners, if they were not considered relevant agencies. Yet, the extent to which these contributions are recognised and recorded as such in England and Wales varies considerably and is impacted by the setting in which youth work is managed or commissioned. Other factors that influence this include organisation type, delivery type (targeted youth work) and relationship with the local authority.

Relevant agencies in England and Wales are defined as organisations and agencies whose involvement is considered necessary by Local Safeguarding Partnerships (LSPs) to safeguard and promote the welfare of local children. LSPs are expected to consult with relevant agencies when developing safeguarding arrangements, and relevant agencies are expected to co-operate with safeguarding partners and share information about safeguarding issues and concern. However, In England currently, youth workers are not explicitly named within one of the 38 relevant agencies, though they would be considered within the final miscellaneous category: 'any person or body involved in the provision, supervision or oversight of sport or leisure'. In Wales youth work organisations are not always explicitly named as 'relevant agencies' in the same way that statutory bodies are, however, they are included in broader categories of organisations involved in child welfare.

63% of LAs that responded to the LAIN survey identified that youth workers were 'extensively' or 'regularly' involved in their statutory safeguarding processes. Moreover, as outlined in various earlier sections of this report, youth workers, youth work organisations and local authorities all reported youth worker involvement in a range of key functions as part of interagency safeguarding activities. This involvement included:

- Referring children affected by violence into statutory safeguarding systems
- Contributing to social care assessments of children affected by violence
- Attending planning meetings for children affected by violence – including child protection conferences, MACE and equivalent panels, and strategic/thematic planning panels
- Being a key delivery partner in multiagency safeguarding plans to support children affected by violence or to respond to the groups, schools and/or community contexts where violence was taking place

The extent to which youth workers can be considered 'relevant agencies' depends to some degree on where they are based, the type of delivery they are involved in and their organisation's relationship with the local authority. There may also be some difference by nation type with youth workers in Wales more likely to attend multi-agency meetings than those in London. Overall, Local authority based youth workers are more likely to share information and attend multi-agency meetings than those in the VCS. Similarly, youth workers involved in targeted delivery are more likely than those in open access to be involved in these activities. Organisations that receive funding from the LA are also considerably more likely to be involved in both activities than those with no formal relationship with the LA. There is no substantial difference by qualification type.

	Nation		Sector		Relationship with LA		Type of delivery	
	England	Wales	VCS	LA	No formal relationship	Receive funding	Open access	Targeted
Sharing information to support assessment	**79%**	77%	77%	**87%**	61%	**85%**	79%	**87%**
Attending multi-agency meetings	69%	**81%**	66%	**86%**	49%	**74%**	65%	**85%**

Through case study and interview data, we also identified key safeguarding activities that had been assigned to youth workers in some areas, including:

- Delivering 'return home interviews' with children who had been missing from home

> *We are often asked to carry out these [return home] interviews because we already have relationships with these young people that other professionals don't have, so we often achieve better results* – **Youth Worker**

- Conducting 'joint visits' with social workers and/or police officers to young people at their family home or at their school to assist in assessing their needs and the risks they faced

> *Youth work colleagues have helped us in instances such as Section 47 enquiries to broker relationships between children and young people and/or their parents/carers which we would have struggled to do ourselves* – **Social Services Manager**

Youth workers would not be fulfilling these roles, or have such roles recognised by statutory partners, if they were not considered relevant agencies. Yet the extent to which these contributions were (a) recognised and (b) consistent varied across and within our dataset.

Case files provided by four of the five case study sites, for example, largely documented youth work contribution in respect of direct work with children as part of the planning process. Wider contributions in respect of referrals and contributions to assessments were less visible in social care assessment and planning documents. Whereas information provided by the police, for example, often explicitly shaped social care decision-making (in at least three of the five case study sites). The same pattern emerged in our analysis of SCR reports.

Our review of SCRs suggests that the extent to which youth work is *recognised* as a 'relevant agencies' may be limited. Of the 144 SCRs included in the review, only 17 cited instances in which youth work directly contributed to the specific case in hand, and a further 38 cited instances in which youth work or a youth work organisation was mentioned (e.g. within recommendations) but was not actively involved in the case.

Total number of SCRs reviewed	Youth work mention	Youth work involvement in process	High level of involvement	Medium level of involvement	Low level of involvement
144	38 (26%)	17 (12%)	0	8 (5.5%)	9 (6.25%)

This is inconsistent with the findings of sector surveys, interviews with youth workers and case study data – and suggests that although youth worker interaction is taking place, the extent to which it is being formally recorded is much more limited.

Meeting observations and system mapping workshops in case study sites also surfaced tensions in respect of the visibility and recognition of youth work contributions. One case study site reflected that the research process had made them aware that they were not routinely inviting youth workers to child protection conferences for children affected by extra-familial forms of violence. This was also communicated by youth workers who, during their system mapping workshop, stated that they had limited awareness of the local child protection arrangements for extra-familial violence, despite being very involved in community safety processes. In four of the case study sites, youth workers and social workers reflected on power imbalances between the two professions (detailed in section 3.4), particularly the extent to which social workers could chair meetings and task youth workers with actions, whereas the roles could not be reversed. This includes situations where the youth work support was central to a young person's plan, and/or the youth worker was best placed to assess need. As a result of these (and other) learning points that emerged from participating in this study, all sites reported making changes to how they organised their safeguarding responses to violence, including the involvement of youth workers.

Meeting observations in case study sites captured examples where youth workers did not verbally contribute much during interagency discussions, were not listened to, or were contradicted in interagency settings, particularly by police and social care representatives.

Case Study Site
There were only four professionals in the meeting, two social workers, one police officer and one youth worker. The youth worker didn't speak for the first 35 minutes and then was interrupted a fair amount or shut down because of the feelings of the social workers [about what the youth worker shared – which contradicted their views]. (Observation template, 3.2)

Case Study Site
...youth worker reported on the current social dynamics of the area and talked about the feelings amongst young people/the energy of the area since a recent murder of a young person in neighbouring borough. The youth worker had insight into the feeling of the area, the impact of incidents etc. didn't have young people to add to report etc. but really knew the temperature of the area and how young people were feeling – wanted to warn everyone that summer is likely going to be difficult. The police officer then said that report runs counter to what the local police had been saying – indicated that because the incident happened elsewhere it hadn't impacted upon the area as much. The youth worker said that there may not have been incidents occurring, but doesn't mean there isn't a specific energy or feeling emerging that could indicate potential problems for the young people going forward. (Observation template, 2.2)

Interviews with youth workers and safeguarding professionals captured these tensions well:

> *I've been in meetings before and the [social worker] person that is leading the meeting just reads out all my notes about a particular child to the [multi-agency] group, rather than saying, 'I'm not the best person to answer' and call on me [youth worker] who has been seeing that young person three times a week to lead the discussion. At best this isn't helpful...* – **Detached Youth Worker**

Typically we tend to work reasonably well in interagency environments, however in a handful of cases we have called the police 'out' where young people feel they are being badly treated by the police – sometimes this is because we see the young people more as victims of exploitation whereas some officers can see them as perpetrators of something – **Youth Worker**

Yet we also found examples where youth workers did influence the way social workers and police officers responded to children impacted by serious violence. In some observations, this was evidenced through the nature and extent of knowledge that youth workers held about young people and the places they spent time in. In fewer observations, this was due to youth workers holding a position of authority in meetings, including occasionally even chairing them:

Case Study Site
It was nice seeing a professional chair a meeting who knew the young people, their families, the community really well, so can see the benefits of having youth workers chairing these kinds of meetings. However, the lack of social care presence made it feel somewhat like the purpose of safeguarding is crime prevention or stopping YP being involved in crime. (Observation 5.1)

Case Study Site
Youth worker and social worker very collaborative and worked closely to safeguard. Youth worker leading on safety planning and definitely took on a safeguarding role. Youth worker also leading on gathering the views of young people for the assessment (Observation 1.2)

In terms of system mapping sessions, we observed varying levels of structural influence. In one site (Model 4), youth workers chaired exploitation panels, which had recently expanded to include all forms of extra-familial violence and therefore had some influence over statutory partners. It is worth noting that, in this site, the social care response to extra-familial violence was under-developed, and youth work leadership had grown to fill that gap. In another site (Model 1), where social workers and youth workers were co-located, the social work approach appeared to be influenced by youth work cultures – particularly in relation to group work and developing methods for spending time in, and developing relationships with people who had a presence in, extra-familial places and spaces (not just individual children and families). Youth workers also identified occasions where they challenged police accounts of what children were doing. During a visit to that site, we observed a police officer call the team to avoid an arrest, and the youth worker de-escalated that scenario over the phone. As such, police officers and social workers recognised the significant contribution of youth workers in those moments and looked to them as partners. Yet much of this influence would be 'semi-informal' – not recorded on data systems, assessments or plans, or resulting in youth workers taking a formal leadership role within statutory partnerships. As such, it is somewhat unsurprising that formal youth work involvement in statutory safeguarding instances was under recorded in social work assessments and plans in the case study areas.

The site case studies helped us understand the variability with which youth workers were viewed as relevant agencies by statutory partners. In sites where they were co-located with social workers, and/or where social care led the statutory response to extra-familial harm, youth work was more explicitly recognised as one of their partners. In sites where community safety partnerships lead on serious violence (as opposed to sexual exploitation, which was more often led by safeguarding partnerships) and/or commission/manage youth work, youth workers were more recognised within a safer communities framework than a safeguarding one. Moreover, across all sites, targeted youth

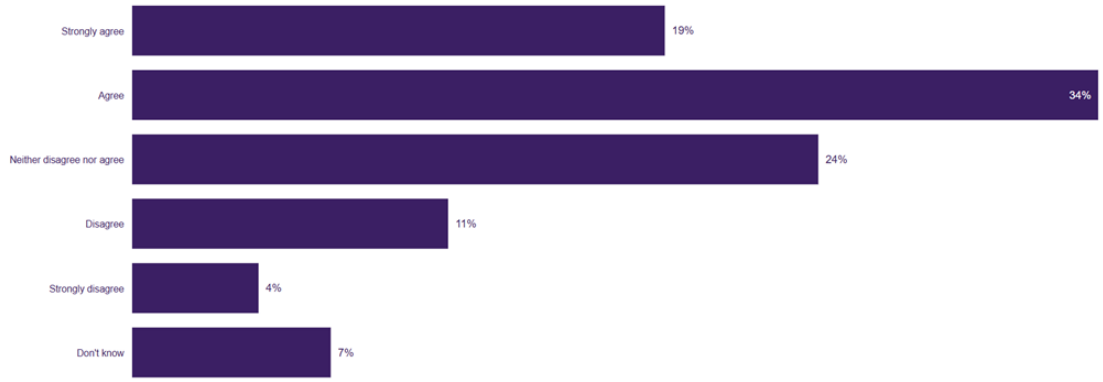
workers (particularly those integrated into ‘young peoples’, ‘adolescents’ or ‘exploitation’ teams) were viewed as relevant partners. In contrast, wider open-access and detached youth work, as well as that provided by voluntary sector agencies (especially those not commissioned by the LA), operated outside safeguarding systems, although they were often heavily involved in community safety systems.

RQ3: Are current approaches to collaboration between youth workers and statutory services working effectively to safeguard children from violence and CCE?

The lack of a standardised or consistent approach to collaboration between youth workers and statutory services means that assessing the effectiveness of collaboration is not possible. It is clear, however, that a range of personal and organisational characteristics impact on the perception of collaboration between youth workers and statutory services.

Just over half of youth worker survey respondents (53%) either ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that collaborative activities between youth workers and statutory professionals is effective in safeguarding children and young people from violence in their area (figure 19). The relatively low proportion of respondents (15%) that either ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ suggests that collaborative activities across the sector are good. However, there is considerable variation with this. Those working within LA youth services are more likely to agree with this statement than those working in the VCS, as are those working in organisations that are funded or commissioned by an LA. Qualification level also has an impact. 66% of those with the highest level of qualification (Level 5,6 or 7) ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ agree that collaboration is effective compared to 47% of those with a level 2 or 3 qualification or 46% of those with no youth work qualification. There is no substantial difference by type of activity delivered or by nation. This spectrum of views is reflected in interviews with youth workers and safeguarding professionals.

Figure 19. Youth Worker Survey: Extent of agreement that collaboration is effective in safeguarding children and young people [base 313]



The considerable variation in extent of collaboration across England and Wales is illustrated in the following quotations.

> *Sometimes I find manoeuvring my way through local community services particularly challenging. It can be a bit of a mine field and time consuming. It is much easier to pick up the phone to a contact at the local authority...* – **City Centre Policing Sargeant**

I think it [safeguarding activity] works pretty well really in the circumstances. There aren't enough of us, but we do so much on a very small budget…And that comes down to the fact that we work well with our colleagues in the council…I'm not saying it doesn't come with challenges but I think it works pretty well – **Targeted Youth Support Worker**

As illustrated through our case study models and wider findings, there is no standardised or consistent approach to collaboration between youth workers and statutory services who are working to safeguard children from violence and CCE. Some youth workers are co-located with social workers, others are based in separate teams but work together to support young people, and others have a very limited approach to collaboration.

This level of variation was reinforced by LAIN survey responses summarised in the table below. When asked to what extent have youth workers been involved in their local formal safeguarding response to extra-familial harm in the past year, 27% stated youth workers were extensively involved (reflective of Models 1 and 3), 36% stated youth workers were regularly involved (reflective of Models 2 and 4) and 11% stated youth workers were rarely involved (reflective of Model 5).

Level of youth work involvement in formal safeguarding systems	% of respondents
Extensively involved (e.g. multiple times per week)	27.4%
Regularly involved (e.g. weekly)	35.4%
Occasionally involved (e.g. monthly)	24.1%
Rarely involved (e.g. a few times a year)	11.2%
Not involved at all	1.6%

The most common form of collaboration, discussed across three of the five case study sites (Models 1, 2 and 3), was where social workers held statutory oversight of a young person's plan (and coordinated interagency partners around that plan) while youth workers focused on providing relational support to that young person. Both social workers and youth workers commented on the usefulness of this collaboration model, noting the consent-based nature of a youth worker relationship, which was developmentally attuned and concerned with young people's growth and flourishing (which was itself a route to safety for many young people). They also noted that this relationship would likely be undermined if youth workers also held statutory oversight for coordinating partners around support plans or held decision-making duties around thresholds of harm. Within these collaborative relationships, targeted youth workers (particularly those in specialist young people's/exploitation/extra-familial harm teams) performed a range of formal safeguarding activities including:

- Completing return home interviews when young people were missing from home (performed in three sites; two in connection with the police, and one in connection with social care)
- Undertaking joint visits with social workers to young people's homes (two sites)
- Leading on gathering young people's views to formally inform a social work assessment of need (two sites)
- Undertaking direct case-work support for a young person in accordance with a shared plan across social work and youth work (two sites)

Pen portraits brought such activities to life:

Pen Portrait 1: 11.30am, Secondary school

Met with young person, introduced myself, role and purpose of my visits. Completed the return home interviews. Gathered the relevant information as well as general communication whereby young person disclosed additional wishes, feelings and concerns aside from the reported missing episode. (these were shared with the relevant professionals following the RHI). (Pen Portrait, 1)

Pen Portrait 3: 9am, Young person's home

I spent time with [young person]. My plan was to do some work around values and the meaning of them and the impact on day-to-day life, feelings and decisions. However, [young person] is hoping to see his Dad at the weekend and it's been almost three years since he has seen him in person. There is a long history of domestic abuse which included coercive and controlling behaviour and physical abuse. [Young person] wanted to talk this through and where they could meet. We reflected together and he shared how he felt and the conflict within it too. We did some practical safety planning…This conversation happened whilst he replaced his wheels on his remote-control car. (Pen portrait, 3)

Across all sites that worked in these ways, youth workers, social workers and (on occasion) the police reported that youth work collaboration on these matters was effective.

It is important to note that in Model 2, such formal collaboration was minimal. While targeted youth workers were commissioned in the service, open-access youth work (which was independent of the statutory response to extra-familial harm and had a long legacy in the area) was the dominant model of youth work provision. While managers in these services informally contributed to assessments, and appeared to have a good collaborative working relationship with social workers, they valued their maintained independence from the formal processes listed above.

RQ3c: What are the barriers and facilitators to effective partnerships between youth workers and statutory services?

Against a backdrop of disinvestment in youth services over the past 15 years, youth workers and safeguarding professionals highlighted a range of barriers and facilitators to effective partnership working in England and Wales. At times, these barriers – and, to a lesser extent, facilitators – were associated with the tensions between formal and informal safeguarding activities. Barriers include: limited understanding of youth work; approaches organised on victim/perpetrator binaries; and staff turnover. Facilitators include: having a well-resourced and structured VCS open access offer; being able to demonstrate impact and youth work's contribution toward the impact; and opportunities to pilot collaborative approaches to supporting children and young people.

The barriers identified need to be considered within the overall context facing youth work in England and Wales. In England, there has been over £1.2 billion worth of real-terms cuts since 2010/11[4]. Real terms spending on youth services in Wales fell by 24% to £45.4m between 2011/12 and 2022/23 (Abreu, 2025). This has led to the closure of council-run youth centres and a reduction in the number of youth workers and youth worker hours – meaning that less time is spent supporting young people. During interviews, youth workers consistently talked about how the challenging funding landscape they are operating within impacts their ability to operate above and beyond delivering core business. Funding initiatives are often short term and can impact the establishment of relationships with wider safeguarding professionals. The source of income, as illustrated by the

[4] YMCA, (2025) Beyond the Brink? The state of funding for youth services

five models identified in this study, can also impact where youth work is positioned within systems, how its contribution to violence prevention is measured, and the reasons for which it is drawn upon. Youth work managers tell us of the increasing numbers of part-time or sessional roles that make up the workforce. NYA's own research into youth worker vacancies found that nearly a third of youth work jobs are temporary roles or 'zero hour contracts'[5]. Again, this time is focused on delivery, which reduces the time to engage in wider safeguarding efforts and can make access to training and CPD more problematic.

Youth workers are not the only sector affected. Local government has faced cuts of up to 40% on its revenue support grant (Atkins and Hoddinott, 2020). Given the rising demand on statutory agencies, it is unsurprising to hear of resourcing challenges faced by statutory safeguarding partners. These have resulted in changes to policing structures, social workers supporting high numbers of young people (impacting their relationships with children, families and other professionals), and significant delays in special educational needs assessments (impacting the role of schools in safeguarding children impacted by violence).

> *I'd say 60-70% of our [school] cohort of children that have some kind of contact with other statutory services are waiting for some form of SEN assessment – the backlog is huge in [local authority]* – **DSL/SEN Lead, Multi Academy Trust**

These system shortfalls are, in turn, likely to impact youth workers – in terms of where they are drawn upon, who contacts them, the nature of professional relationships, and the type of work they need to prioritise. It is this pressured landscape that provides the backdrop to the barriers and facilitators to effective partnership working outlined below.

Barriers

Limited understanding of youth work

A common perception among youth workers and some safeguarding professionals in England and Wales is that statutory services often display a lack of understanding about what youth work is and, importantly, what it is not. This can lead to the sense that youth work is reduced to a set of activities, which are in turn minimised by safeguarding colleagues. Youth workers regularly spoke about having to tackle misinterpretations of what their role is when engaging in a safeguarding conversation with other professionals – as typified in the following quotations:

> *You have got a lot of people that have very little experience of what a youth worker is and does in these [multi-agency] meetings. This can make it painful at times* – **Case study interviewee, Youth Worker**

> *We are in a social services team and i think some people just think we go out and play pool with young people...It is difficult sometimes when you've got those attitudes from certain social workers when you are trying to contribute towards a young person's welfare* – **Targeted Youth Worker**

[5] NYA (2025) Youth work Job Search Briefing. Accessible: https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Youth-Work-Job-Search-Briefing.pdf

Some [social workers] presumed that they knew what youth work was. And I think very, very quickly they realised that youth work is a different language and what they'd presumed from a professional point of view that they knew and understood. They absolutely didn't, and that they needed to undertake a lot of training to be able to develop their thinking and push it further to be able to manage the youth workers – **Senior Social Work Manager**

In part, however, this may be due to inherent differences in ways of working. Many interviews and the wider literature (e.g. Maxwell and Corliss, 2020) highlight the informal and inherently voluntary elements of youth work being at odds with the more case management and outcomes-based approach of statutory services to addressing safeguarding concerns. Walker (2023) concurs, suggesting that policy and initiatives which aim to include youth work in safeguarding, particularly in relation to extra-familial harm, are at odds with the principles of youth work. Typically, they tend to be short-term and centre on behavioural management and social conformity, which, again, is misaligned with core youth work values.

I think where it varies with me and your safeguarding professions is we might have different views on what outcomes those children should get – **Youth Worker**

However, despite this, analysis of SCRs suggests that where youth work is mentioned, there is a recognition of the unique role youth workers play in building trusted relationships with young people making them key professionals in safeguarding children and young people from extra-familial harm. In one instance, social workers struggled to know what to do where there wasn't a need for a specific practical or procedural task, and they felt their training and skills were less relevant and that they had nothing to add to the work being undertaken by youth workers (Serious Case Review: Child K and services to reduce serious youth violence)

Where there was direct mention of youth work involvement, SCRs highlighted the contribution of youth workers towards shaping the plan for the young people by contributing knowledge about extra-familial harm that other professionals did not know. In one instance, youth workers within Child Safeguarding Teams supported children allocated to other team members, using their knowledge and skills to help those at risk of child exploitation. (Pan Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership: 'Brian').

This review found instances where a lack of understanding of youth work can impact the extent of engagement with schools in England and Wales. Interviews with youth workers and education professionals identified a reluctance from some schools to engage with LA-targeted youth services. This was attributed to a perception of stigma for a school associating with LA children's services, and the associated impact this might have on parents' views of the schools. This suggests that some professionals may view youth work through a deficit-based lens of offending and risk, rather than recognising the benefits that youth work offers to young people in enabling them to flourish.

A lot of schools, especially Welsh schools, they're not always open to that support because they don't want families, for example, to think that there's something going wrong in that school or that there's bad things happening in that school – **Youth Worker**

Statutory systems organised on victim/perpetrator binaries

Unlike health, social care services and policing organisations are established to support children and young people either as a victim (social care) or as a perpetrator (policing). However, YEF's own research found that half (49%) of all children who perpetrated violence in the past year have also been a victim themselves[6]. Our review finds the false victim/perpetrator dichotomy can be reflected in both the language used and the outcomes measured. This is in contrast to youth work, which supports children and young people regardless of their identity. In these instances, youth workers often perceive the lack of a child-first approach to policing and talked about the tension between a 'victim vs perpetrator'. In a few instances, interviewees talked specifically about moments when an adultification bias may have occurred, i.e. where children from minority ethnic communities are perceived as more adult-like and less vulnerable than their peers.

> *[youth work] with the police can be at odds because we start from a position of seeing these young people as traumatised and victims. I think they [Police] start at a point of seeing them as criminals* – **Youth Work Manager**

Proactively challenging these attitudes over time is seen as the most effective way to facilitate better partnership working – though it is worth noting that this only happens over time and tends to be at the individual rather than systemic level.

> *I will say if I don't agree with something to people and I think over time that's stopped. If I'm asked to do something that I don't feel follows my youth work values I will say and give reasons that I shouldn't be doing this...and in all fairness our management team more often than not do listen* – **Detached Youth Worker**

Staff turnover

Youth work practice is relational and often requires time to develop effective relationships with statutory professionals. Staff turnover creates blockages to this way of working. Youth workers consistently highlighted the level of time and effort required to build relationships with statutory professionals, particularly with police forces and LA social care teams. This can be exacerbated by high turnover of staff in these services. Being required to re-establish relationship consistently requires additional time and resource and may not prove successful. Having a consistent stable workforce in both sectors, which provides the space for relationships to develop, is therefore seen as a key enabler of better partnership working.

> *So obviously all the police and the sergeants come from that enforcement side and we had to sort of especially of the constant change of sergeants and the police within the areas you're almost having to tell the same story over and over*

[6] YEF (2024) Children, violence and vulnerability 2024. Who is affected by violence? Available: https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/CVV24_R1_OverallViolence.pdf

again to get them to understand what we bring to the table, how we operate and what our principles are – **Case study interviewee, Youth Worker**

Lack of consistent system approach

This review highlights that youth work straddles criminal justice and safeguarding systems, and the extent of this varies by area. The lack of a consistent, safeguarding approach to extra-familial harm has been extensively critiqued by a range of policymakers, academics and voluntary sector organisations over the past 36 months (Action for Children, 2024; JTAI, 2024; Firmin et al. 2024; McAllister, 2022). A recent report by Ofsted, HMI Probation, the Care Quality Commission and HMIC concluded that:

> *A failure to consistently identify serious youth violence as a safeguarding issue is leaving too many children at serious risk of harm. Lack of comprehensive guidance from the government on how partners should address harm outside the family, including serious youth violence, is exacerbating this, as is a lack of focus by Local Safeguarding Partnerships (LSPs).* (JTAI, 2024)

Without a clear and consistent safeguarding approach, some areas are organising responses to extra-familial harm through a lens of crime reduction, and others are doing so through a lens of child welfare and meeting young people's needs – and many are trying to do both, even when they end up in conflict with one another. How do you respond to a young person whose behaviour is indicative of being anti-social in one system and being in need of protection in another system? One system will manage the young person through offending-focused behaviour and seeking to reduce the risks they pose, while the other system will work to promote their welfare and reduce the risks they face. What if, in tackling their offending, we increase their exposure to harm – for example, requiring them to attend a desistence programme by travelling through an area where they are unsafe? Or expecting them to desist from violence that they believe is keeping their sibling safe?

Youth work is provided across this spectrum of support – sometimes drawn upon to reduce anti-social behaviour in public spaces or to reduce a young person's offending, and sometimes drawn upon to understand their needs and to support them to disclose information about the harm they have endured. Sometimes this work will result in the gathering of information that could lead to them being convicted of crimes, and on other occasions to them being protected from those crimes.

The confusion as to how local systems and partnerships should organise themselves in response to violence affecting children and young people, and the lack of a primary goal (to which others might then be secondary) exacerbates the barriers described and the points of tension already noted in this study. It maintains victim-perpetrator binaries, it views youth work through (often conflicting) goals of statutory systems that are far more narrow than the goals of the youth work profession, and it fails to capture the value offered to local communities.

Facilitators

Thoughtful approach to measuring impact and contribution

Being able to demonstrate impact to other professionals can be a powerful way to encourage engagement in youth work. However, too often interviewees tell us that this focuses on measuring the impact on safeguarding and crime prevention. Adopting an approach that reflects broader youth work values and ethos, while also incorporating safeguarding is preferable. This approach should demonstrate individual development across a range of outcomes and include personal stories . Safeguarding professionals and youth workers both cited instances where the voice of children and young people and their parents/carers has been impactful in securing wider sector buy-in.

Hearing about the opportunities and challenges that the child had been going through, and hearing how influential the youth worker had been, just by being there and listening throughout their experience was an eye opener for me and definitely for many of those round the table. It has made me reflect on my ways of working going forward – **Social Work Manager**

Opportunities to pilot collaboration models

Our review has found many instances of collaborative approaches to supporting children and young people's safeguarding activity. In the best instances, the catalyst has often been ringfenced funding. Interviewees regularly cited violence prevention funders such as Violence Reduction Units and Police and Crime Commissioners as catalysts for commissioning a range of local services, which can include youth work to provide a local intervention. When effective, these not only have a positive impact on children and young people but also spur local agencies to co-ordinate future provision. In one example to prioritise young people's safety at the beach, the youth service co-facilitated a community-wide football tournament with a range of key partners, schools and other agencies for the most vulnerable young people. This helped to promote the different support available to young people in an environment they were more likely to engage. The success of the event has led to it becoming an annual activity, with the partners all contributing towards operating costs.

RQ3d: what would an effective partnership look like? Are there specific models/examples of best practice that could be adopted more widely?

This study has identified a spectrum of approaches to organising partnership responses to violence and other forms of extra-familial harm, and various ways in which youth workers are engaged in those partnerships. However, these are based on local factors. There are benefits and risks inherent to whether youth work is based in social care or community safety structures (and the spectrum between the two). In the best instances, youth workers operating within social care structures were able to focus on relational and contextual intervention and support without their role becoming blurred with statutory processes. Whereas within community safety models, youth workers appear to hold a level of leadership not present within social care models.

Models 1-5, supported by evidence noted elsewhere, provide a macro view of partnership responses to extra-familial harm, and collectively they illustrate a multi-levelled spectrum:

- From social care/safeguarding-led responses to violence, to policing/community-safety-led responses to violence
- From partnerships in which youth workers and the youth work service is positioned within children's services, to partnerships in which they are positioned within community safety, or ones in which they sit in between them both
- From partnerships in which the predominant youth work engaged in safeguarding is provided through targeted support and case work, to areas in which youth workers are viewed through a lens of open-access, place-based, group or detached offers
- From partnerships in which voluntary sector youth work provision is well connected with statutory systems, to those where such provision operates outside of statutory frameworks

These four levels of this spectrum intersect with each other to produce service pathways and partnership responses to violence that are unique to each local area. These pathways and partnerships have developed in the absence of neither a clear statutory framework for safeguarding

responses to extra-familial harm (that is wholly situated in safeguarding or community safety frameworks) nor a consistent youth work commissioning model within such frameworks.

In this study, we were not evaluating the efficacy of these different models. They were so locally driven, and in the absence of a clear, unified and detailed process for extra-familial harm in national safeguarding guidelines for England or Wales, that it is not possible to identify one that was more effective than all the others. We can, however, identify what appeared effective or promising about the different ways that youth work engaged with safeguarding processes, and which features of these different approaches seemed most challenging.

Youth work and social care models

Partnerships in which youth workers were co-located with social workers to form joint teams, framed youth work support through a lens of meeting young people's needs and providing support (as opposed to through a lens of reducing anti-social behaviour and preventing crime). This enabled youth workers to operate in a space ethically aligned to the values of the profession, and created space for them to advocate for young people's needs and rights.

In these partnerships youth workers and social workers were able to describe the value that each brought to safeguarding young people. This was also the case in partnerships where youth work interacted with social work-led responses to extra-familial harm (even without co-location). Youth work methodologies and consent-based relationships were best suited to directly supporting a young person, by identifying what they needed and wanted, and working in the places and spaces that mattered to them. Social workers were able to hold the statutory responsibilities around violence and abuse, and coordinate partners to act in accordance with those responsibilities. In all such sites, social workers also benefitted from the range of responses youth workers could offer – from building the capacity of hospitality and retail organisations to provide guardianship in public spaces, to working with young people in groups and public spaces where they spent their time. When this division of labour was at its best, social workers freed up youth workers to focus on relational and contextual intervention and support, without their role being blurred with statutory processes, particularly for children at risk of significant harm.

> *The work that our detached youth workers do, day in day out, can't be understated. They are the ones out there pounding the street and putting in the hard yards to establish those relationships in setting where the young people are more likely to open up – something that social workers don't have the capacity or the skills to do* – **Social Work Manager**

Both professions also benefitted from the fact that referrals into safeguarding processes would engage with ideas of 'consent' for a young person – unless a threshold of significant harm was reached – creating ongoing opportunities for collaboration on safety planning.

However, such pathways were not without challenge. In particular, and noted elsewhere in this report, the power imbalance between social workers and youth workers created tensions at times. In situations of co-location, youth workers sometimes felt compromised by casework models of practice in which they had to 'close' support to young people, which they would not need to do in open access provision. Pathways that were social care-led, but that maintained a greater separation between youth work and social work, seemed better able to utilise a broad spectrum of youth work provision, beyond case work, as part of safeguarding arrangements. However, in these pathways, youth work was less routinely involved in formal safeguarding functions.

Youth work in community safety partnerships

In partnerships where youth work sat within either community safety partnerships or within a Safer Communities brief, the contextual nature of youth work was automatically more aligned. Tensions around casework models was less apparent, and youth workers appeared to hold a level of leadership that they struggled to achieve in statutory social care-led safeguarding processes.

> *if we say to them [the police] that is something we're aware of and we're dealing with, we are allowed the time to deal with it and able to use that relationship based practise to do it. It's not going to be something that's going to be fixed by the next town tasking meeting. It's going to be something that, you know does require other services, patience and buy in with what we're trying to do* – **Detached Youth Worker**

However, in models that more closely aligned youth work with community safety partnerships, there seemed to be less debate about whether youth workers should be involved in practices such as mapping young people's friendship groups to identify those at risk of violence and sharing this with the police (three sites), or sharing information with the police in the form of intelligence in ways that named young people without consent (two sites). Youth workers, and those who worked with them, described this as effective youth work contributions to safeguarding. Youth workers undertook joint work with the police (three sites), including providing support in the aftermath of policing operations in local areas (two sites). Such practices, while methodologically situated in spaces and places familiar to youth work, orientated the profession towards goals of reducing anti-social behaviour and preventing crime, as opposed to goals around young people's broader welfare and flourishing. It raised important questions for youth workers such as whether young people were aware that by participating in a consent-based relationship with a youth worker, the information they shared may be passed into a non-consent-based process of intelligence mapping. Whereas in the two sites where youth work was more closely aligned with social care, youth workers were more critical about being involved in intelligence-gathering activities and did not always view these activities as 'safeguarding'.

Interview data surfaced examples of youth workers intentionally reviewing, and seeking to improve, partnership arrangements with the police, when operating in a more criminal-justice weighted model. In one instance, proactive investment in working with the police was required after attendance at regular police-led multi-agency meetings was deemed insufficient. The youth service hosted workshops with representatives from the police, and arranged for neighbourhood police to accompany detached youth workers where young people had invited them to their space. This helped the police officers to establish relationships with young people while also strengthening the relationship between youth workers and the police.

> *We were invited into the meetings and I think that we then decided that we need to do more because these children are just being named in these meeting. they don't know who they are, they don't know their background so for us to be able to advocate them* – **Youth Worker**

This relationship has since seen youth workers training new police teams and being involved in interview panels for neighbourhood officer roles.

'It helps us to make sure we are the getting the right person for the community that will help strengthen the ways that we work together going forward – **Youth Worker**

To a lesser extent, and often within these dominant models of community safety or safeguarding children partnerships, youth workers discussed collaborative models with education. Some areas have school-based youth workers. Where this is present, statutory professionals and youth work staff highlighted the benefit this can have. By working in partnership with school safeguarding and pastoral support colleagues, youth workers can gain insight on young people and their friendship groups. Furthermore, they can develop better relationships with young people when they then see them in the community – and school staff highlight greater confidence and less anxiety around dealing with complex and high-risk situations.

They [young people] recognise our faces even if we have never spoken to them before in school. they're like 'oh it's those people'. and then that is another opportunity for us to talk to them – **Youth Worker**

As a [Multi-Academy] Trust themselves, they were keen to accept or take on board the things that needed to change for safeguarding but recognised that by themselves some schools with the Trust were struggling to deal with safeguarding issues within the school but as a consequences of issues that occurred in the wider community. Over time, having the involvement of [youth worker] alongside police colleagues I have noticed that as a Trust we are more prepared and able to deal with serious incidents if/when they arise – ***MAT Dedicated Safeguarding Lead***

In one example, the LA-based youth service rolled out a programme of student safety activity to schools to address high levels of student exclusion. Youth workers offered bespoke training based on the contextual need of each school. The success of this programme has led to increased take up of youth work-delivered safeguarding activity and the creation of a 'Harm outside the Home' Champions group for local schools. Chaired by the youth service, with representatives from schools and allied professionals, this group allows greater information-sharing about at-risk students. It also helps to challenge any perceived stigma that a school engaging with children's services may present.

We connected with the other local organisations like the police and youth workers and created a safeguarding network around these children to try to prevent things happening again. It's been a really positive forum for us – **Vice Principal Secondary School**

Across the spectrum of partnerships identified in case study sites, and also alluded to in interviews and survey responses, it was noted that (a) youth workers required opportunities to reflect on the impact of these different arrangements on their practices with safeguarding professionals and (b)

the role of youth work in safeguarding young people was heavily influenced by the wider cultures of partnerships with which they were engaged and from where they secured funding.

4. Conclusions and insights for policy and practice

4.1 Conclusions

- Youth workers and youth work organisations make significant contribution to activities, partnerships and structures intended to safeguard children and young people from violence and other forms of extra-familial harm such as CCE and CSE. However, youth work contributions to safeguarding are often under-recognised in terms of how they are described, how they are documented and how they are understood by some professionals. Yet at the same time, within the current funding landscape, the value of youth work practices can also be reduced to the role they play in serving safeguarding and/or crime prevention objectives – despite the many other benefits that youth work can bring.

- The nature of youth work contributions is significantly influenced by the way local areas have organised their system responses to violence. This includes the extent to which community safety or safeguarding partnerships lead the response and/or commission the youth work contribution to that response, as we see across Models 1-5 in this study. In systems where the response to violence is significantly coordinated by community safety partnerships, and/or those partnerships that commission youth work, youth work provision is often place-based, agile and naturally situated in extra-familial contexts, and youth workers have opportunity to take a leadership role. However, in these models, youth work contribution is often measured in respect of offending and anti-social behaviour, and may draw youth workers into sanction-based or criminalising practices such as the use of dispersal, mapping or surveillance of children and young people. In systems where the response to violence is significantly coordinated by children's social care, youth workers operate in systems more aligned to assessing and responding to children and young people's needs and promoting their welfare. However, case-management models and power dynamics between youth workers and social workers can curtail youth work leadership and compromise the flexibility of youth work support.

- Youth workers engage in formal, informal and semi-formal safeguarding activities. Both formal and semi-formal work is enabled by their informal activities and the relational, voluntary and community-based nature of youth work practice. Yet at the same time, the ability of youth workers to maintain their informal contributions can be compromised by formal and semi-informal activities without the appropriate system, partnership and organisational consideration.

- The level of involvement that youth workers have in formal and semi-formal safeguarding practices is informed by whether they are:
    - Situated in statutory or voluntary organisations
    - Commissioned by children's services, community safety partnership, violence reduction unit or external funder
    - Providing open-access, detached or targeted support
    - Situated in co-located teams

- While most youth workers across a range of services/organisations have accessed safeguarding training, little of this appears to engage with the cultural and practical challenges of working in and with the inconsistent safeguarding children and community

safety systems identified in this study. Consequently, while many know traditional safeguarding processes, and some referred to developing trauma-informed or culturally sensitive skillsets to provide enhanced support to children and young people affected by violence, few are given the space to grapple with the system tensions surfaced in this study. This is particularly important for tensions that come when: consent-based services interact with statutory organisations; youth workers experience unequal power dynamics with social care or policing organisations; or when youth workers are involved in systems that entrench inequalities or disproportionately target certain groups of children affected by violence.

4.2 Insights for policy and practice

Here we provide key insights for policy and practice based on our research.

Key insights:

1. **Develop a standardised pathway for children and young people affected by violence.** There is no typical safeguarding pathway for children and young people affected by violence, and this has implications for how safeguarding is practiced – both by youth workers and wider multi-agency partnerships. This lack of a typical pathway is the consequence of there being no clear strategic or operational lead for responding to violence affecting young people. As illustrated in figure 1 at the outset of this report, responses are divided across Safer Communities and Local Safeguarding Children strategic partnerships. This, in turn, means operational arrangements– including panels to oversee practice, the commissioning of services and the monitoring of services – straddle both community safety partnerships and children's social care. The former is delivered upon a legislative basis concerned with preventing crime and disorder, the latter around meeting children's needs and promoting their welfare. The two systems are not ethically or practically aligned and could operate counter to each other in respect of individual children and young people. This confusion illustrates a lack of clarity as to whether violence affecting young people is predominantly a community safety or safeguarding issue, and this in turn impacts how youth workers are funded and drawn upon as part of the response.

   A resolution on the type of safeguarding pathway adopted is therefore required – at least to the extent that the lead strategic body remains consistent, and a minimum operational standard is used to apply existing child protection legislation to this group of children. It is critical that the Departments for Education in England and Wales and the Home Office collaborate with key practice associations that support children's services and community safety partnerships such as the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Local Government Association/Welsh Local Government Association) and national association of social work, national association for Designated Safeguarding Leads and Safeguarding Wales in order to:

   - establish single principal leadership for this issue at all levels;
   - understand the implications for policy, commissioning and practice;
   - and identify like variations across England and Wales.

   In light of wider commitments to avoid criminalising children in need of support and protection, it may make sense to situate violence as a safeguarding issue first and a community safety issue second. This will require partners to organise their response to violence in respect of meeting young people's needs and promoting their well-being; aligned to wider commitments to avoid criminalising children in need of support and protection. If this commitment is made, statutory guidance will need revision to communicate the typical child protection (or equivalent) pathway for children and young people impacted by violence, and the ways in which this pathway informs and intersects with the work of community safety partnerships.

Such a reworking would likely prompt discussions about whether youth work organisations should be named as relevant agencies. We recommend that they should be.

2. **National governments should produce standardised guidance that brings clarity to the role of youth work in all settings in contributing towards safer communities.** This study has demonstrated the extent to which youth workers from all types of organisations, regardless of relationship with local authority, are involved in informally safeguarding young people and can participate in formal safeguarding systems. In addition, this study identified a vast array of youth work practices that seek to create safety for young people, their families, friendship groups and wider communities. Many of these activities go beyond relational one-to-one practice and also involve work to build safety and support within friendship groups via both open access and detached provision.

   In the current environment where most youth work provision is delivered by the VCS, local and national commissioners must give greater consideration to the implications of commissioning youth work under safer communities or safeguarding briefs. Statutory commissioning often puts youth work organisations in a stronger position to apply for other additional external funding sources due to the credibility and financial security they gain from that commissioning. However, the positioning of youth work resource within these briefs appears to affect who youth workers partner with, how they are engaged, and who recognises their contribution, in what activities they are included, and how their value is measured; all of which has safeguarding implications. Despite this, there is limited evidence to suggest that this is the correct approach due to a lack of safeguarding quality controls. Standardised guidance that brings clarity of the value and limitation of youth work in all settings contributing towards safer communities should be available when commissioning activities. This would have the added benefit of demonstrating to safeguarding professionals the value of having a youth work presence in key multi-agency structures such as a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). National government should lead on this and consider its inclusion, for example, within an updated version of the Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 guidance, as it will apply to England and Wales.

3. **The role of youth work in contributing towards safeguarding activities should be recognised and recorded**. Standardised mechanisms are required to better recognise the safeguarding contributions of youth workers within system functions – such as mechanisms for noting when information from youth workers informs social care assessments; for routinely checking if a young person is accessing youth work services during assessments and when developing plans; and for recording when some form of youth work is involved in the referrals/front door process. There is no consistent system of capturing this information in social care assessment documentation, and no expectation that this should happen. The implications of such formalisation require consideration by leading social work bodies (such as British Association of Social Workers and the Association of Directors of Children's Service) and youth work bodies (such as the NYA and National Federation of Detached Youth Workers). Were these changes to be made, then designers of case management systems, along with sector regulators and inspectorates, would likely document them more consistently. Those who commission service evaluations, such as the Youth Endowment Fund and Foundations would also benefit from considering whether impact of interventions beyond one-to-one engagement is significantly explored in the work they resource.

   It is also possible that greater recognition of youth work organisations as relevant agencies to safeguarding partnerships would support more formalised recognition in operational processes. In all situations, it is important to balance the voluntary and independent nature of youth work support against the statutory nature of many safeguarding processes. However, the absence of

recognition in both local paperwork and national policy at present means that while much of this work still occurs, it is invisible outside of observing practice or interviewing youth workers. This is likely to contribute toward youth work being undervalued as a profession and not consistently recognised by other safeguarding professionals.

4. **Government departments across England and Wales who are responsible for safeguarding should review current guidance and formalise safeguarding pathways for violence affecting children and young people.** There is work to do to document, evaluate and better resource this element of youth work activities, recognising impact beyond individual children and towards creating wider contexts conducive to their protection, safety and wellbeing. This could be enabled if safeguarding interventions, beyond those providing to individuals, were fully recognised in safeguarding guidance, and reflected in social work case management systems. As such, government departments across England and Wales who are responsible for safeguarding guidance should review the extent to which these features of the work are promoted in revised guidance to better formalise safeguarding pathways for violence affecting young people.

5. **Safeguarding sector bodies alongside national youth sector bodies should be encouraged to collaborate on the design of interagency training and support to be delivered by local authorities and their partners**. There are two key areas that appear under-developed in terms of safeguarding learning and development. Firstly, greater space for all those involved in the child safeguarding system (including youth workers themselves, social workers at all levels of seniority, and the police) to critically engage with the role played by youth workers in variable safeguarding systems; including why they differ and what the implications may be for local practices. Local Safeguarding Children's Partnerships/Boards, as part of their standardised safeguarding training, should prioritise this form of multi-agency training for all those involved in the child safeguarding system, including youth workers that may not work with or for the local authority. Secondly, recognition of difference – on matters such as ethnicity, gender, neurodiversity and learning needs, and the ways these intersect – is critical. Safeguarding services could learn from youth work practice, which is based on anti-discriminatory practice, to embed stronger statutory responses to interpersonal, service or system-level discrimination that may impact how different groups of children and young people receive and access services. National safeguarding bodies already mentioned should work with the youth work sector to develop collaborative guidance or training for safeguarding services, that moves beyond training on compliance with systems and is instead focused on interagency critical engagement with systems.

   Interagency training and group supervision/facilitated discussions seem important to address gaps in how different sectors understand their roles and address the common tensions that develop when such roles come together under one plan. Safeguarding sector bodies already mentioned alongside national youth sector bodies should be encouraged to collaborate on the design of training and support. Local authorities would then roll out training and the necessary supervision. When designing training content, sector bodies should consider the merits of the system mapping adopted at case study sites. All sites reported making changes to how they organised their safeguarding responses to violence after participation in the exercise. This would also offer the potential to pilot the models of effective practice that are explored in RQ3d. All practitioners involved in the local child safeguarding system should have opportunities to participate in this. While types of practitioners involved will be based on local conditions, we would envisage that youth workers operating in targeted and open access services, social

workers, the police and representatives from local education providers and health may likely be involved.

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6.Annex 2: Research Tools

In annexe 2 we provide the following research tools

A.2.1	Youth Worker Survey
A.2.2	Safeguarding Professionals topic guide
A.2.3	Youth Worker topic guide
A.2.4	Case study youth work meeting observation template
A.2.5	Case study local area workshop guide
A.2.6	Rapid Evidence Review: search strategy
A.2.7	LAIN survey [relevant questions]
A.2.8	National Youth Sector Census 2024/25 [relevant questions]

A.2.1. Youth Worker Survey

1) *Are you currently working or volunteering in a youth work role?**

( ) Yes: working in a full time youth work role

( ) Yes: working in a part-time youth work role

( ) Yes: volunteering in a full time youth work role

( ) Yes: volunteering in a part-time youth work role

( ) No I am neither working nor volunteering in a youth work role

2) *Do you have any of the following youth work qualifications?*

Please select all that apply*

[ ] Level 2 Youth Support Worker (JNC recognised)

[ ] Level 3 Youth Support Worker (JNC recognised)

[ ] (Pre 2010) Level 5 Professional Youth Worker (JNC recognised)

[ ] Level 6 or 7 Professional Youth Worker (JNC recognised)

[ ] No JNC recognised qualification

[ ] Other (please specify): _____

3) *Please select from the list below the sector that most closely represents the organisation you currently work in**

( ) Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

( ) (VCS) Community Interest Company

( ) Religious or faith-based organisation

( ) Local authority youth service

( ) Local authority social services

( ) School or related education provider

( ) Youth justice sector (e.g. police, prison service)

( ) Other (please specify): _____

( ) Prefer not to say

4. ***Please provide your organisation's postal code***

_____

5) Please select the type of youth work activity that you are primarily involved in*

( ) Open access youth provision

( ) Provision targeted at vulnerable young people

( ) Detached or street based provision

( ) Outdoor learning

( ) Other (please specify): _____

( ) Prefer not to say

6) Please describe your organisation's relationship with your local authority

( ) My organisation is currently in receipt of grant funding from our local authority

( ) My organisation is currently commissioned by our local authority to deliver one or more services

( ) My organisation currently works directly with our local authority but does not receive local authority funding to do so

( ) My organisation does not work directly with our local authority and is not currently in receipt of local authority funding to do so

( ) Other (please specify): _____

( ) Don't know

( ) Prefer not to say

Q7 – 16 relates to the Youth Clubs Review

17) Please indicate the ways in which you collaborate directly with statutory services to safeguard children and young people at risk of, or involved in violence or crime.*

[ ] Referrals to statutory services

[ ] Sharing information to support statutory assessments (e.g. risks or needs)

[ ] Attending multi-agency safeguarding meetings or panels

[ ] Participating in Serious Case Reviews

[ ] Coordinating safeguarding responses with statutory services

[ ] Providing targeted support in specific locations where young people are at risk (e.g. through detached youth work)

[ ] Offering referred services for young people are at risk

[ ] Providing 1:1 support or mentoring for young people identified by statutory services as being at risk

[ ] Other (please specify): _____

[ ] No collaboration with statutory services

Over the last year approximately how many times have you or your organisation collaborated in the following:*

1 instance	2 - 5 instances	6 - 10 instances	11+ instances	Prefer not to say	Don't know

18) *Which of the following statutory services have you or your organisation engaged with when safeguarding children and young people at risk of or involved in violence, or crime?**

[ ] Education

[ ] Health [Integrated Care Boards]

[ ] Local authorities

[ ] Police or Youth Justice

[ ] No engagement with statutory services

How confident are you in undertaking the following activities in the future?

Please answer on a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all confident, 10 being very confident)*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Prefer not to say	Don't know

19) *Have you or your organisation safeguarded children and young people from involvement in violence or crime in other ways?*

Please select all that apply*

[ ] Wider forms of contextual safeguarding (e.g. support for the young person's family).

[ ] Informal collaboration with other professionals (e.g. sharing expertise or information outside of established processes).

[ ] Informal mentoring of children and young people whom you have trusting relationships with and who you believe as being at risk of violence or crime

[ ] Supporting children and young people to build respectful relationships with peers across group divides

[ ] De-escalating situations involving children and young people that could have erupted into violence

[ ] Preventing further violence after serious violence has already occurred (e.g. through retaliation)

[ ] Supporting children and young people who consider themselves part of a 'gang' to disengage and move towards safer, more positive outcomes

[ ] Working towards tackling instances of misinformation that may risk fuelling violence or crime amongst children and young people

[ ] Signposting children and young people who you believe to be at risk of violence or crime to specialist support services

[ ] Other (please specify): _____

[ ] No specific safeguarding from violence or crime

20) *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neither disagree nor agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**Don't know**
Collaboration between youth workers and statutory services in my area is effective in safeguarding children and young people from involvement in violence and crime	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
I believe that youth workers should be more involved in safeguarding processes alongside statutory service	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

professionals						
I believe that tensions often arise between youth workers and other professionals when safeguarding children and young people	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

21) *Have you received training or support to assist you in safeguarding children and young people at risk of violence or crime?*

Please select all that apply*

( ) Safeguarding training

( ) Safeguarding module(s) as part of JNC recognised youth work qualification

( ) Mental health awareness training

( ) Cultural competency training

( ) Counselling skills training

( ) Trauma-informed practice training

( ) Conflict management skills training

( ) Violence prevention skills training

( ) Support sessions (e.g. supervision, mentoring, case discussions)

( ) Other training or support (please specify):

_____

( ) None

( ) Prefer not to say

22) *What type of training and/or support would have the most beneficial impact in your role of safeguarding children and young people at risk of or involved in violence or crime?*

_____

23) *Have you or your organisation safeguarded children and young people from involvement in violence or crime in other ways?*

Please select all that apply*

[ ] Informal mentoring of children and young people whom you have trusting relationships with and who you believe as being at risk of violence or crime

[ ] Supporting children and young people to build respectful relationships with peers across group divides

[ ] De-escalating situations involving children and young people that could have erupted into violence

[ ] Preventing further violence after serious violence has already occurred (e.g. through retaliation)

[ ] Supporting children and young people who consider themselves part of a 'gang' to disengage and move towards safer, more positive outcomes

[ ] Working towards tackling instances of misinformation that may risk fuelling violence or crime amongst children and young people

[ ] Signposting children and young people who you believe to be at risk of violence or crime to specialist support services

[ ] Informal collaboration with other professionals (e.g. sharing expertise or information outside of established processes).

[ ] Wider forms of contextual safeguarding (e.g. support for the young person's family).

[ ] Other (Please specify)

[ ] No specific safeguarding from violence or crime

24) *As part of this research for YEF, we will be conducting some online interviews. Is this something you would be happy to be contacted about?*

By saying yes now, you agree to be contacted to take part in the follow-up research, but you do not have to take part when invited*

( ) Yes

( ) No

A.2.2. Topic guide for safeguarding professionals interviews

Introduction

1. To start, it would be great to hear a little bit about you. Please could you give your name, organisation and job role .

Safeguarding role

2. Please tell me a little about the nature of your role, in particular how you engage with children and young people?
    - Does your role include a formal safeguarding role? If so please can you tell me more about how this works. [**PROBE**: reactive vs preventative]
    - [**PROMPT If formal role**] do you follow a specific process/pathway when a young person presents with a safeguarding concern? What factors influence how you respond to a safeguarding role?
    - **[PROMPT If informal role]** please can you tell me more about how this works?
3. What training and/or support have you received to give you the skills and knowledge you need to support young people?
    - [**PROBE]** frequency, (non) mandatory, in/external, self/instructor-led]
4. To what extent do you work with other partner organisations/individuals when undertaking your safeguarding role?
    - **[PROBE]** types of organisations and job roles do they tend to be e.g. statutory, VCS etc

Engaging with youth workers

5. How often do you engage with youth workers as part of your day to day role?
6. What are the typical ways in which you engage with youth workers?
    - [**PROBE**] location/setting/youth work role {e.g. targeted/detached/open access}]
    - **[PROBE]** type of relationship with youth workers, process of raising a safeguarding issue.
    - **[PROMPT]** what is the typical role that youth workers play in safeguarding concerns?
    - **[PROBE]** length of involvement in the process, extent of involvement e.g. MARGs/MARBs, protection plans etc]
7. In your experience, to what extent do youth workers participate in formal safeguarding procedures (from referrals to multi-agency safeguarding conversations?
    - To what extent are youth work organisations classed as 'relevant agencies' by local safeguarding partnerships
    - Are they more likely to be involved in one specific process than others? If so why?
8. What if anything do youth workers bring to safeguarding processes that other professionals do not?
9. Can you give an example of good practice where you have worked in collaboration with a youth worker when approaching a specific safeguarding case
    - **[PROMPT**] Are there specific models that you are aware of that could be adopted more widely?
10. To what extent do tensions arise between informal/formal safeguarding with youth workers and safeguarding professionals?
    - [**PROMPT**] How do you navigate these tensions?

Looking forward

11. Do you believe that youth workers should be more involved in informal and formal safeguarding processes for young people alongside statutory practitioners?
    - [**PROBE**] Yes/No
    - What would be the impact of greater involvement of youth workers in safeguarding process for young people?
    - **[PROMPT]** What should this look like?
12. What are the barriers to more effective partnerships between youth workers and statutory services?
    - [**PROMPT**] relational, operational, system level barriers, nation
    - [**PROBE**] Barriers for statutory services and for youth workers including relationship to local authority,
13. What are the enablers to more effective partnerships between youth workers and statutory services
    - [**PROMPT**] relational, operational, system level enablers
14. Is there anything else we have not yet discussed in relation to safeguarding that you think would be relevant to the research?

A.2.3. Topic guide for youth worker interviews

Introduction

1. To start, it would be great to hear a little bit about you. Please could you give your name, organisation and your role within the organisation.
    - [**PROBE**] type of organisation, relationship with local authority, type of delivery
2. Do you or your organisation offer any targeted activities/programmes for young people at risk of involvement in violence, violence against women and girls or crime?

Role of youth workers

3. Please tell me a little about the nature of your role - in particular what safeguarding role you tend to play
    - Does your role include a formal safeguarding role? If so please can you tell me more about how this works. [**PROBE**: reactive vs preventative]
    - [**PROMPT If formal role**] to what extent would you say you or your organisation has collaborated with statutory services to safeguard children and young people from involvement in violence, violence against women and girls or crime?
    - [**PROBE BASED ON SURVEY RESPONSES**] different collaborative methods selected
    - **[PROBE BASED ON SURVEY RESPONSES]** Do you tend to be involved in one type of collaborative method more than others? Why is that?
    - What factors influence how you respond to a safeguarding issue?
- [**PROBE**] specific local factors/context that may contribute towards their response

4. Do you or your organisation informally contribute towards the safeguarding of young people from involvement in violence, violence against women and girls or crime?
    - [**PROBE**] Examples of the different ways of informal support.

5. To what extent do you work with other partner organisations/individuals when undertaking your informal and/or formal safeguarding role?
    - **[PROBE]** types of organisations and job roles do they tend to be e.g. statutory, VCS etc

6. What if anything do youth workers bring to safeguarding processes that other professionals do not? [**PROBE**] youth work skills, trusted adult relationship, voluntary nature of relationship

- What distinguishes your role in safeguarding young people from other professionals?

7. Can you give an example of good practice where you have worked in collaboration with statutory professions when providing effective safeguarding support?
    - **[PROMPT]** Are there effective models of collaboration that you are aware of that could be adopted more widely?
8. To what extent do tensions arise between informal/formal safeguarding with youth workers and other (safeguarding) professionals?
    - [**PROMPT**] How do you navigate these tensions?

Training and support

9. Have you received training to give you the skills and knowledge you need to support people involved in safeguarding processes?
    - [**Probe**]type of training, frequency, delivery, length
    - [**PROMPT**] what enabled you to undertake this training or access support?
10. [**ASK If training received**] what impact has this had on your ability to safeguard children and young people?
    - [**PROBE**] what are you doing differently as a result?
    - [**PROMPT**] could you give an example of how this training has made a difference in the support that you have provided?
    - [**PROBE**] Is there any *additional* training/support that you would welcome to ensure that you can support young people at risk of violence and CSE.

11. [**ASK If training not received**] How do you anticipate training would help you support young people at risk of violence and CSE?
    - [**PROMPT**] type of training
    - What would enable you to undertake safeguarding training? [**PROBE**: resource, training type, frequency, method of delivery]

12. Outside training, what support do you receive in relation to safeguarding young people?
    - [**PROBE**] management/supervision, reflective practice, networking, CPD
    - [**PROBE**] what additional support would help you when safeguarding young people?

Looking forward

13. Do you believe that youth workers should be more involved in informal and formal safeguarding processes for young people alongside statutory practitioners?
    - [**PROBE**] Yes/No
    - What would be the impact of greater involvement of youth workers in safeguarding process for young people?
    - **[PROMPT]** What should this look like?

14. What are the barriers to more effective partnerships between youth workers and statutory services?
    - [**PROMPT**] relational, operational, system level barriers, nation
    - [**PROBE**] Barriers for statutory services and for youth workers including relationship to local authority,

15. What are the enablers to more effective partnerships between youth workers and statutory services [**PROMPT**] relational, operational, system level enablers

16. We are interested in speaking with safeguarding professionals that you may have engaged with as part of your safeguarding activities that we have discussed. Would you be happy to introduce me to them… **[Interviewer to obtain contact details]**
17. Is there anything else we have not yet discussed in relation to safeguarding that you think would be relevant to the research?

Thank and close

A.2.4 Youth work meeting observation template

Meeting name and purpose:	
Meeting location:	
Meeting date and time:	
Practitioner's Roles:	
Researchers present:	

Notes during meeting: *(Please note those discussed, age, gender, ethnicity; context(s) discussed; and type of harm discussed).*	
Actions from meeting: *We want to capture specifically the role of youth workers within these meetings and the extent to which they contributed to safeguarding activities.*	
What were the overall safeguarding actions agreed as a result of this meeting for all partners?	
What formal actions did youth workers take – prior to or following the meeting?	
What informal actions did youth workers take – prior to or following the meeting?	
Were any tensions observed during the meeting, in relation to the role of youth workers – either in relation to sharing information and/or taking actions?	

Reflection post meeting: *Note any evidence of safeguarding activities undertaken by youth workers in (or committed to as a result of) this meeting – noting any of the following:* - *Actions focused around individuals, groups, contexts* - *Nature of safeguarding activity – information gathering, behaviour-based intervention, educational work, ecological practices* - *Who did youth workers most collaborate with – statutory partners, community partners, young people, families – were there any challenges/strengths of this*

A.2.5 Local Area Workshop guide

Contextual Safeguarding approaches and youth worker	
Domain one: did youth work activity in the meeting target the context of harm?	
Domain two: Was the approach of youth workers focused on child welfare?	
Domain three: What partners did youth workers engaged and how?	
Domain four: what was the goal of youth work intervention?	

For all of the above to what extent did the answer for youth workers differ from, or align with, the work of other partners in the meeting?

Youth Work and Safeguarding: Local Site Workshop

Introduction: Researcher to introduce purpose and structure of the workshop and then invite all attendees to introduce themselves

Young person introduction: Researcher to introduce a vignette of a young person, Josh, impacted by violence to the group.

Step 1: As a group can you describe the ways youth workers in your area would *refer* Josh into a safeguarding process? What entry points might they use?

(Group to map on post sits and post on the wall)

Step 2: As a group can you describe the ways youth workers in your area would contribute to a safeguarding *assessment* for Josh? In what ways might they do this (i.e. speak to the young person, provide a written report to the social worker, attend planning meetings etc.)

(Group to map on post sits and post on the wall)

Step 3: As a group can you describe the ways youth workers in your area would contribute to *planning* support for Josh. In what ways might they do this, and does this differ if the young person is supported via early help, child in need, child protection or other local planning processes?

(Group to map on post sits and post on the wall)

Step 4: As a group can you describe the ways youth workers in your area would contribute to *delivering* support for Josh. What type of support might they provide, and does this differ if the young person is supported via early help, child in need, child protection or other local planning processes?

Reflection and refinement

- Does this represent an accurate map of Josh's potential journey through your local safeguarding systems and the role of youth workers within it?

- Would any of the above change if the original referral for Josh came from the police following an arrest? Or from school following a disclosure?

- Would any of the above change if other/different intersectional issues needed to be considered – if Josh was racially minoritised? If Josh were a girl? If Josh identified as gay, bisexual or transgender? If Josh had a learning need or disability?

- Does any of the above vary by case/situation/partner? Are there tensions or limitations with what you have described in terms of what youth workers are able to do?

Break

Considering Contexts

Step 5: Does this map change when youth workers want to raise a safeguarding concern about a context (location or group) where Josh is impacted by violence rather than just about Josh? Where would they *refer* these concerns?

(Group to map on post sits and post on the wall)

Step 6: Are these contexts ever *assessed* to understand what is happening there? If so, how do youth workers contribute to these assessments?

(Group to map on post sits and post on the wall)

Step 7: Are *meetings/panels* convened to agree safeguarding responses to these contexts? If so, how do youth workers participate in these meetings/panel?

(Group to map on post sits and post on the wall)

Step 8: Are youth workers involved in delivering safeguarding *responses* to these contexts? If so, how?

(Group to map on post sits and post on the wall)

Reflection and refinement

- Does this represent an accurate map of the journey Josh's peers, or the park he spends time in, would take through your local safeguarding systems and the role of youth workers within it?

- Would any of the above change if the original concern related to different 'types' of harm such as criminal exploitation compared to serious violence or anti-social behaviour?

- Are there any key ways that youth workers interact with your local safeguarding system in response to violence that isn't represented on this system map?

Map photographed

Dictaphone switched off

Combination of recorded conversation and photographs used to draw a visual representation of youth worker intersection with systems, and a narrative attached to the map. Map circulated to attendees for agreement/amendment

A.2.6. Youth Workers and Safeguarding search strategy for rapid evidence assessment

Research questions

This rapid evidence assessment of academic and grey literature aims to answer the following project 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?

    a. What is the typical pathway for a child if risk of/involvement in violence is identified by youth workers?

    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?

    a. To what extent do tensions arise between informal and formal safeguarding and how are these tensions navigated?

3. **Collaboration.** Are current approaches to collaboration between youth workers and statutory services working effectively to safeguard children from violence and CCE?

    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?

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

We will do an initial screening of abstracts/executive summaries and publicly-available 'grey' literature based on the following inclusion/exclusion criteria. Publications retained after initial screening will be recorded in a spreadsheet, referenced and saved in a shared file on Share Point. Upon reading each publication, we will do a secondary screening to select those we include in the analysis using the same criteria, in addition to mapping out which research question(s) they are relevant to and recording this on the spreadsheet. Time/resource permitting, we may also include material relevant to youth workers' role in wider safeguarding (beyond violence/exploitation) to identity patterns of systemic behaviour.

Include	**Exclude**
• Published between 2014-2025 • Peer reviewed (for academic literature)	• Publications published before 2014 (unless appears highly relevant)

• Focus on England and/or Wales • Focus on young people aged 10-18 • Discusses the role of youth work/youth workers in safeguarding • Discusses youth violence/exploitation • Relevant to research question(s) (secondary screening).	• Outside of England and/or Wales (can include cross-country comparative studies featuring one of these) • Not relevant to youth work • Not relevant to safeguarding

Search terms

Search terms may be applied with some degree of flexibility, and in some cases modified and/or combined to better adapt to the different databases. Snowballing will also be used to identify further material in citations.

Primary search combination:

("youth work" OR "youth worker*") AND ("safeguarding" OR "child protection") AND ("England" OR "Wales" OR "United Kingdom" OR "UK") AND ("violence" OR "exploitation")

Secondary search:

(“faith-based youth work*”) AND (“safeguarding”) AND ("England" OR "Wales" OR "United Kingdom" OR "UK")

Possible additional combinations:

If needed, combinations may be trialed with the following search terms in order to identify specific themes/generate material related to specific questions. For example, if we want to find more results related Q3, we might try the following combination: “Youth work*” AND “safeguarding” AND (“collaboration" OR "multi-agency" OR “partnerships”) AND (“England” OR “Wales” OR “United Kingdom”)

Youth work	“youth work sector” OR “Youth work organisation*” OR “Youth work services” OR “youth work provision*” OR “youth work practice” OR “youth work intervention*” OR “youth work response*”
Safeguarding	AND “safety” OR “early help” OR “prevention” OR “multi-agency partnership*” OR “safeguarding partnership*” OR “collaboration" OR “children social care” OR “children’s services”
Violence/exploitation	AND “weapon*” OR “crime*” OR “gang*” OR “abuse*” OR “harm*” OR “child criminal exploitation” OR “trafficking” OR “county lines”
Child/young person	AND “child*” OR “youth” OR “young person” OR “adolescent*” OR “teen*” OR “minor” “juvenile” OR “deliquen*” OR “young adult” OR “emerg* adult*”

Note: YEF uses the below category of youth work provisions in other commissioned research (we replicated this category in our survey to our Contextual Safeguarding local areas network). We can map out these against what we find in the analysis for an overview of the service landscape. We can also record these directly in the spreadsheet when screening.

- Open access youth clubs or centres
- Uniformed youth groups (e.g. boy scouts, girl guides)
- Other open access youth provision
- Street-based youth work (e.g. outreach youth work, detached youth work, mobile youth work)
- Targeted youth services for children at risk of exploitation
- Targeted youth services for children with other vulnerabilities (e.g. mental health, housing, substance misuse)
- Case work (as part of a youth service)
- Case work (as part of an interdisciplinary team)

Databases

- Google Scholar
- PROQUEST
- JSTOR

Academic Journals

With a focus on child and adolescent safeguarding and/or youth work:

- Journal of Youth Studies
- Youth and Society
- Children and Youth Services Review
- Journal of Children's Services
- Children & Society
- International Journal of Open Youth Work
- Youth Justice
- British Journal of Social Work

Potential additional journals:

- International Journal of Adolescence and Youth
- Child Abuse Review
- Child and Adolescent Social Work
- Child Abuse and Neglect the International journal
- Childhood Vulnerability Journal
- Societies

A.2.7 LAIN survey [relevant questions]

1. Over the last year, to what extent have youth workers been involved in in your local formal safeguarding response to extra-familial harm?

- Not involved at all
- Rarely involved (e.g., a few times a year)
- Occasionally involved (e.g. monthly)
- Regularly involved (e.g. weekly)
- Extensively involved (e.g. multiple times per week)

2. If they have, please confirm which forms of youth work have been involved in your local response to extra-familial harm over the last year (tick all that are relevant):

- Open access youth clubs or centres
- Uniformed youth groups (e.g. boy scouts, girl guides)
- Other open access youth provision
- Street-based youth work (e.g. outreach youth work, detached youth work, mobile youth work)
- Targeted youth services for children at risk of exploitation
- Targeted youth services for children with other vulnerabilities (e.g. mental heath, housing, substance misuse)
- Case work (as part of a youth service)
- Case work (as part of an interdisciplinary team)
- Other: Please describe

3. Over the last year, which of the following have youth workers been involved in?

- Referrals into children's social care
- Sharing information for social care assessments
- Attendance at extra-familial harm / exploitation panels
- Attendance at child protection (or equivalent) meetings for young people affected by extra-familial harm
- 1:1 support for young people identified by children's social care as at risk of, or experiencing, extra-familial harm
- Group work with peers who are impacted by extra-familial harm
- Responses to contexts impacted by extra-familial harm
- Assessments of contexts impacted by extra-familial harm
- Other: Please describe

4. Over the last year, who has received training provided or commissioned by your local authority on responding to extra-familial harm? (Please tick all that apply):

- Social workers
- Police officers
- Education professionals (e.g. teachers, pastoral staff, safeguarding leads)
- Health professionals (e.g. GPs, school nurses, CAMHS)
- Youth workers employed by the local authority
- Youth workers in local authority-commissioned services
- Youth workers in non-commissioned services
- Youth work volunteers
- Other (please specify): _____."

4.2.8 National Youth Sector Census 2024/25 [relevant questions]

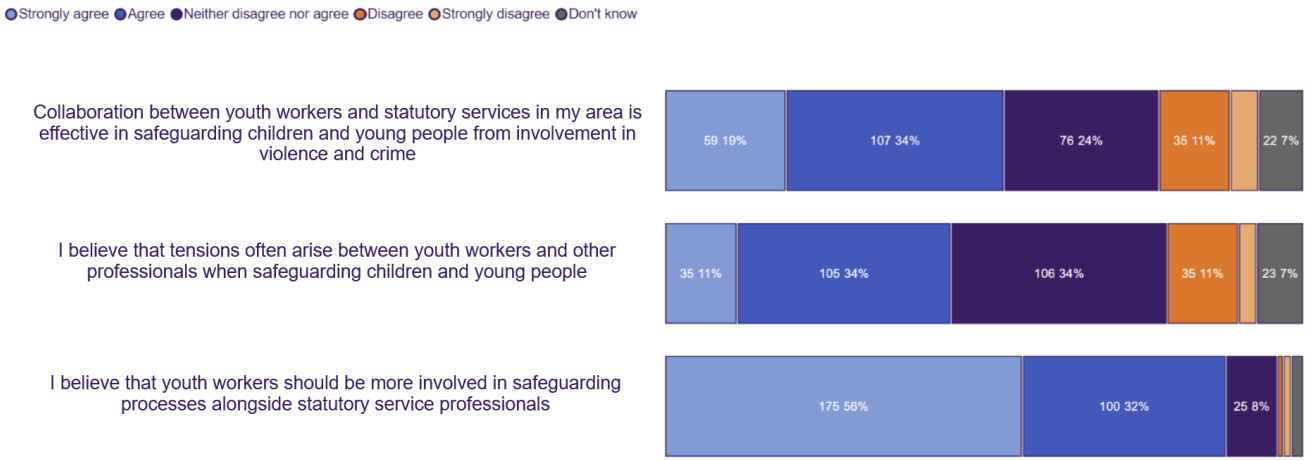
Main Function of your organisation [single choice] "Which describes your organisation's main function"	○ Directly delivering youth provision, enrichment activity or other out of school activities o Directly delivering referred services for children and young people ○ Infrastructural support for youth provision and out of school activities

	○ Contracting or commissioning others to deliver youth provision and out of school activities ○ Providing grant funding to organisations which deliver or support the delivery of youth provision ○ Other youth sector activity [Please specify]
Activities Undertaken [Multiple choice] "Which of the following does your organisation undertake"	• Directly delivering youth provision and out of school activities • Directly delivering referred services for children and young people • Infrastructural support for youth provision and out of school activities • Contracting or commissioning others to deliver youth provision and out of school activities • Providing grant funding to organisations which deliver or support the delivery of youth provision • Other youth sector activity [Please specify] • Do not conduct any youth sector activities
Local authority safeguarding training [single choice] "Over the last year, has your organisation received any safeguarding training provided or commissioned by youth local authority?"	• Yes • No • Don't know • Prefer not to say
Safeguarding vulnerable young people [single choice] "Over the last year, has your organisation been involved in safeguarding children from involvement in violence, violence against women and girls or crime?"	• Yes, direct involvement • Yes, indirect involvement • No involvement • Don't know • Prefer not to say
Safeguarding vulnerable young people [multiple choice *to be completed by respondents who selected 'yes' in the previous safeguarding question*] "Over the last year, has your organisation collaborated with statutory services to safeguard children from involvement in violence, violence against women and girls or crime?"	• No collaboration with statutory services • Referrals to statutory services • Sharing information to support statutory assessments (e.g. on risks or needs) • Attending multi-agency safeguarding meetings or panels • Serious Case Reviews • Coordinating safeguarding responses with statutory services • Providing targeted support in specific locations where young people are at risk (e.g. through detached youth work) • Providing 1:1 support or mentoring for young people identified by statutory services as being at risk • Other [please specify]
Targeted Support [multiple choice] "Please check any of these commonly targeted areas which your organisation	• Responding to violence, abuse and crime • Exploitation (CSE/CCE) • Addressing youth employment, training, and skills for work • Supporting mental health and wellbeing

delivers or commissions a programme of support towards”	• Supporting physical health and activities (i.e. sports) • Supporting schools and colleges, including alternative provision • Providing Information, advice or guidance • Supporting young carers • Supporting care experienced children or young people • Offering Holiday, Activity, Food programme • Identity based work • Other [Please specify] • None of the above • Prefer not to say
Targeted support [multiple choice] ‘Has the level of demand for the targeted services that you provide changed over the last year?’	Grid question to offer the following options: ‘decreased demand; ‘no change in demand’; increased demand’ ‘new service’; ‘prefer not to say’
Targeted support [multiple choice] ‘Does your service provide direct targeted support for…	• Antisocial behaviour • Knife crime • Violence against women and girls
Targeted support [multiple choice] ‘Does your service provide indirect targeted support for…	• Antisocial behaviour • Knife crime • Violence against women and girls
Targeted support [single choice] ‘Does your service provide referred services for young people at risk of antisocial behaviour, knife crime or violence against women and girls’	• Yes • No • Don’t know
Referred services [single choice] ‘How does your organisation find it when engaging children and young people with its referred services’	• Straightforward • Somewhat difficult • Difficult • Very difficult
Delivery over the last year [Multiple choice] “Have the needs of young people your organisation engages with changed over the last year?”	• Supporting physical health and activity • Supporting mental health and wellbeing • Addressing employment, training and skills for work • At risk of involvement in violence, violence against women and girls and/or crime • Providing information, advice and guidance • Supporting care experienced young people • Needing help with safeguarding issues, online harm and/or exploitation • Youth homelessness • Access to a trusted adult/someone to talk to

7.Annex 3: Additional charts

Youth Worker Survey: youth worker agreement across the three statements (base: 313)



Youth Worker Survey: youth worker agreement across the three statements by organisation type (base: 298)

Youth Worker Survey: youth worker agreement across the three statements by organisation relationship with local authority (base: 215)

Youth Worker Survey: youth worker agreement across the three statements by qualification level (base: 313)


Strongly agree
Agree
Neither disagree nor agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree
Don't know
Level 2 or 3 JNC Recognised Qualification
Collaboration between youth workers and statutory services in my area is effective in safeguarding children and young people from involvement in violence and crime.
13 21%
16 26%
18 29%
5 8%
7 11%
I believe that tensions often arise between youth workers and other professionals when safeguarding children and young people.
7 11%
25 40%
19 31%
6 10%
5 8%
I believe that youth workers should be more involved in safeguarding processes alongside statutory service professionals.
38 61%
18 29%
5 8%
Level 5, 6 or 7 JNC Recognised Qualification
Collaboration between youth workers and statutory services in my area is effective in safeguarding children and young people from involvement in violence and crime.
29 22%
53 40%
33 25%
11 8%
I believe that tensions often arise between youth workers and other professionals when safeguarding children and young people.
16 12%
55 41%
45 34%
10 8%
I believe that youth workers should be more involved in safeguarding processes alongside statutory service professionals.
82 62%
42 32%