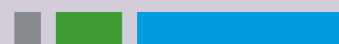


## REPORT

# Review of youth clubs' role in supporting children at risk of or involved in violence

**Emilio Torrini, Vicky Kaisidou, Bijun Qin, Nazia Chowdhury, Emma Sutton, and Carmen Villa**

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**RSM**



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# Executive summary

The Youth Clubs Review was conducted by the Strategy, Economics and Policy team at RSM UK Consulting (RSM),<sup>1</sup> in partnership with the National Youth Agency (NYA) and Carmen Villa from the University of Warwick. It was commissioned by the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF), and it aimed to explore the role of open-access youth clubs in preventing violence among children in England and Wales. The review examined how youth clubs are set up and operated, what encourages at-risk children to attend and engage, what kinds of support are offered, and what changes to policy and practice could strengthen their contribution to violence prevention.

The review focused on open-access provision – youth clubs that are open to all young people and not reliant on referrals. These youth clubs offer supervised, informal spaces where children can take part in activities, build relationships with peers and staff, and access support. While there is increasing interest in the role youth clubs play in youth violence prevention, existing evidence is limited.

## Methodology

RSM used a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative data collection, including:

- An online survey of youth workers (321 usable responses,) to understand provision type, reach, support offered, and characteristics of attending children;
- Online interviews with 25 youth workers to explore delivery models, what works well and less well, and examples of supporting children at risk of or involved in violence;
- In person focus groups with 30 children aged 11–18 to understand their experiences of attending youth clubs and perceptions of safety and support;
- Two deliberative sessions with 13 sector leaders (including senior staff from national and local government, national youth organisations, VRUs and other funders) to identify examples of good practice refine policy implication;
- Analysis of secondary data, using Police UK crime data, YEF's Children, Violence and Vulnerability (CVV) survey, and the NYA's 2024 Youth Sector Census and Workforce Survey to explore links between youth club presence and violence.

Insights were triangulated across sources and mapped against four core research questions, and sub-questions (RQs).

## Set-up and operation: How well are youth clubs structured and operated to prevent violence amongst children?

Youth clubs are available to children in areas with high levels of violence. Our analysis found that youth clubs are more likely to be available to children and young people in areas with high levels of violence, higher proportion of youth population and high deprivation. Most local authorities (77%) in England have at least one youth service provider (YSP) in the NYA census, and 67% of these offer open-access provision. Violence rates were slightly higher in areas with youth clubs (32.3 vs 29.7 per 1,000), likely because youth clubs are sited in higher-risk communities. Within local authorities, small census units where youth service providers are located have much higher violence incidence rates than units without (59 violent incidents in

<sup>1</sup> Effective 1<sup>st</sup> November 2025, the Strategy, Economics and Policy team became part of the RSK Group and has been rebranded as Fortia Insight.

areas per 1,000 compared to 35 in areas without). The correlation between violence and the location of youth service provider is similar for open access or targeted youth support.

Among youth service providers, youth clubs are mostly small, community-based organisations. Nearly half have 1–5 paid staff, and many depend on volunteers. Staffing models, activities, and opening hours vary by club type and region. Youth clubs are generally open during the hours which children and young people are at greatest risk of involvement in violence (typically understood as the afterschool hours, or from 4pm to 8pm weekdays). Few youth clubs operate on weekends. Youth clubs based in community centres are the most common and often offered a broader range of services.

Survey data showed that youth clubs deliver leisure and cultural activities (86%), sport and related physical health activities (77%) and structured social and emotional skills programmes (68%), while fewer provide access to counselling or therapy (31%). The latter is the activity that youth clubs sign post children to other providers (as opposed to deliver it at the youth club) most frequently (58%), followed by knife crime education / awareness activities (52%), structured social and emotional skills programmes (49%) and mentoring programmes (48%). Youth workers and sector leaders interviewed reported that youth-led design, flexibility, and collaboration with services are key strengths of youth clubs.

These aspects – youth club location, opening times and types of activities being delivered - varied among youth clubs across different regions, and are shaped by several factors that explain why no two youth clubs operate in exactly the same way. These factors include funding stability, staffing qualifications, geographic location, and local community needs. For example, some youth clubs benefit from secure, long-term funding and youth workers with professional qualifications. Others face instability due to short-term grants and reliance on volunteers. Urban and rural areas experience distinct challenges; rural communities may have no provision, while urban ones often offer multiple youth clubs.

In terms of youth club staff, a ratio of 1 adult (paid or volunteer) to every 8 to 10 children was seen as manageable, but many youth clubs operate with higher ratios - with staff sometimes supervising 12 to 14 children at one given time. These figures are considerably higher than NSPCC best practice recommendations, which suggest one adult for every eight to ten children. Lower ratios were perceived to enable more meaningful engagement and safer environments, especially in high-risk areas.

Overall, youth clubs are typically found in high-need areas and operate when children are most vulnerable, offering many positive activities. However, inconsistent staffing, funding, and resources mean that not every child has access to quality support.

### **Attendance and engagement: What encourages children at risk of or involved in violence to attend and engage?**

Children were seen to attend youth clubs when the setting feel safe, inclusive, and familiar. According to youth workers, attendance is often influenced by peer and family connections - children are more likely to attend if someone they know already attends. Youth clubs situated near transport hubs are considered more accessible.

Survey data indicated that youth clubs receiving local authority grant funding are more likely engage children exhibiting risk factors. For example, 49% of local authority-funded youth clubs reported engaging children using illegal drugs, compared to 37% of those without local authority funding. Similarly, 44% of local authority-funded youth clubs reported engagement with children carrying weapons, compared to 24% without.

Youth workers described informal activities - like shared meals, games, or creative sessions - as useful entry points. These were thought to help build rapport and trust over time, especially with children facing instability at home. Most youth workers estimated that 60–70% of children attending youth clubs seek

support beyond social activities. Trusted relationships are built gradually and often tied to individual staff members who show consistency, empathy, and relatability.

Youth clubs that reflect the cultural identities and lived experiences of their communities - through staffing, events, or partnerships - were seen as more welcoming by children from minority ethnic backgrounds. Participation was also felt to increase where children could shape rules or activities through youth committees or suggestion schemes.

## **Support for children at risk: What kinds of support do youth clubs provide, and how are children identified?**

Support that youth clubs offer to children takes both formal and informal forms. According to the survey, 72% of respondents indicated that their youth club provided targeted programmes alongside open-access sessions, typically delivered in short and tailored formats. Formal support includes educational workshops, signposting to services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), or referrals to youth justice teams. Informal support (described by youth workers as the foundation of their approach) includes one-to-one conversations, creative activities, or providing sensory-friendly spaces. Many clubs embed targeted interventions (e.g. small group sessions on masculinity or conflict) within regular open-access sessions.

Interviewed staff reported that youth clubs are attended by children facing a range of vulnerabilities and risks. In terms vulnerabilities, 36% of survey respondents reported that the majority of children attending their youth clubs are eligible for free school meals, 19% noted that most attendees have special educational needs, are persistently absent (6%), suspended (5%) or excluded (3%) from school. In terms of immediate risk factors among children attending youth clubs, 44% reported that most or some use illegal drugs, making it the most prevalent risk factor. Being contacted by police over a suspected offence follows, with 2% reporting most children and 38% reporting some children affected. Additionally, 54% noted that a few children were approached to store weapons, drugs, or money for someone else, while 30% said none had faced this. In contrast, being supported by a youth offending team is least common, with no respondents indicating that most children fall into this category. These trends are consistent across club types and activities.

Youth workers identified at-risk children through registration forms, direct observation, peer disclosures, and personal disclosures to trusted staff. Multi-agency collaboration, particularly with schools and social workers, was considered key to recognising risks such as exploitation or gang involvement. However, staff noted that information is sometimes fragmented or delayed, and many children are reluctant to share personal details.

Most of the youth club staff surveyed reported playing a crucial role in safeguarding children from violence and crime by fostering respectful relationships across group divides (82%), providing informal mentoring to children at risk (79%), and collaborating with other professionals (77%). Violence de-escalation and signposting to specialist services are also common. A substantial proportion of youth club staff reported helping children exit gangs (39%) or de-escalating situations that could have erupted into violence (40%). Interviewees highlighted the importance of direct support, tailored interventions, and multi-agency efforts in reducing antisocial behaviour and supporting at-risk children effectively.

Survey responses suggested that violence within youth clubs is relatively uncommon. Antisocial behaviour was reported more frequently than serious violence. Serious incidents, such as knife possession or sexual violence, are rare but tend to cluster in high-football clubs or those in more deprived areas.

Most youth workers have received safeguarding (99%), mental health awareness (84%), and trauma-informed practice training (72%). Conflict management (57%) and supervision (61%) are fairly common. However, cultural competency (24%), counselling skills (26%), and violence prevention (27%) training are

less frequent, revealing gaps in areas like inclusive practice and direct violence prevention. Volunteers were less likely to receive specialist training than employees.

## **Barriers and facilitators: What limits youth clubs' ability to prevent children from becoming involved in violence? And what could strengthen it?**

Youth workers and sector leaders consistently identified three core challenges: i) short-term funding, ii) limited workforce capacity, and iii) weak integration into wider youth services.

In interviews and survey responses, youth workers described delivering trusted, community-based support - but often "on a shoestring." Lack of stable, long-term funding restricts their ability to plan, staff consistently, or scale high-impact models. Only 13% of survey respondents reported receiving funding through a multi-year grant. Competitive short-term models were seen as prioritising compliance with funding requirements over local community needs.

Staff shortages, especially of male and qualified youth workers, were seen as undermining both safety and relational practice. Volunteers often lack access to Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and youth clubs struggle to retain experienced staff. While youth workers were seen as "trusted adults" by children, many youth workers felt excluded from multi-agency systems. Some welcomed better integration (for example, joint referrals or co-location of services) while others warned this could compromise informal, youth-centred work. This tension merits further exploration.

Facilitators include co-producing provision with children, structuring sessions by age, and tailoring support to local risks. Examples of good practice include clubs offering quiet spaces for disclosure, providing wraparound daytime-evening support, or partnering with VRUs and police on diversionary activity. Some youth clubs also build strong referral links from schools or youth justice teams, especially when trust has been built over time.

Policy and practice changes proposed by stakeholders focus on five areas: flexible multi-year funding, localised commissioning, a statutory duty for youth work, investment in workforce development, and the protection of open-access youth spaces. These changes were felt to be essential to strengthen prevention and respond to increasing complexity in children's lives and have informed the priority insights for funders, policymakers and commissioners set out below.

## **Insights for policy and practice in the youth sector**

The insights that follow are based on the views and experiences shared by youth workers, children, and sector leaders through interviews, focus groups, survey responses, and deliberative sessions.

This review found that youth clubs are widely perceived to support violence prevention by offering safe, youth-led spaces, where trusted adults provide informal support and connect children to wider services. They are commonly located in areas with high levels of deprivation, school exclusion, and violent crime, and often engage children facing multiple vulnerabilities. Despite this, youth clubs frequently operate under short-term funding, with limited staffing, inconsistent access to training, and variable integration with other services. The following insights for policy and practice aim to strengthen youth clubs' ability to support children at risk, structured under three themes:



1. Funding and commissioning
2. Workforce development
3. Inclusive, youth-led and place-based practice

The insights are targeted at different actors using the following symbols:










## 1. Funding and commissioning

- 1.1 Ensure the stability of youth clubs funding through the provision of multi-year, flexible grants.** Short-term, competitive funding was identified as a challenge to maintaining high-quality work in youth clubs, so five- to seven-year core grants are needed to support youth clubs.  
- 1.2 Extend youth club provision to areas with high violence and limited access.** Funders and commissioners should prioritise under-served localities, using violence prevalence and service gaps to guide where new provision is most needed.
- 1.3 Ring-fence funding for consistent staffing and peak-risk opening hours.** Clubs should be supported to open each weekday between 4-8pm and during school holidays, with adequate staffing to enable safe, relationship-focused delivery.
- 1.4 Support local agencies to commission youth services based on community needs.** Locally led approaches - such as those by PCCs and VRUs - were seen as effective at addressing local needs. Integration of youth budgets across education, social care, and youth justice should be encouraged.

## 2. Youth work workforce development

- 2.1 Recognise youth work as a skilled profession.** National frameworks should set expectations for pay, supervision, and career development that match the responsibilities and skills youth workers bring.   
- 2.2 Embed youth clubs in multi-agency safeguarding and referral systems.** Youth workers spot risks through relationships but often lack shared information. Local partnerships should involve youth clubs in information-sharing and case management. Funders must provide time and resources for meaningful participation.
- 2.3 Expand access to specialist training in violence prevention.** Commissioners should invest in accessible CPD covering conflict management skills, gang involvement, and related themes - delivered locally and embedded in youth work qualifications.
- 2.4 Retain youth workers in youth-centred roles while supporting integrated working.** Integrated working with statutory services should complement, not replace, the need for consistent and informal youth club spaces.

## 3. Inclusive, youth-led and place-based practice

- 3.1 Support co-designed and culturally responsive youth provision.** Clubs should reflect local identities and community needs using participatory methods and celebrating diversity.  
- 3.2 Consider location and accessibility when planning and funding provision.** Funding decisions should account for transport links, safety, and proximity to areas with unmet needs.
- 3.3 Integrate advice, support, and activities under one roof.** Youth clubs should be supported to offer flexible, stigma-free targeted support alongside open-access provision, enabling them to reach and build trust with young people who need it most.

# List of acronyms

<b>CAMHS</b>	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
<b>CCE</b>	Child criminal exploitation
<b>CPD</b>	Continuing Professional Development
<b>CSE</b>	Child sexual exploitation
<b>CVV</b>	Children, violence and vulnerability
<b>CYP</b>	Children and Young People
<b>DCMS</b>	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
<b>IAG</b>	Information, Advice and Guidance
<b>JNC</b>	The Joint Negotiating Committee
<b>LA</b>	Local Authority
<b>LSOA</b>	Lower Super Output Area
<b>NEET</b>	Not engaged in education, employment, or training
<b>NSPCC</b>	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
<b>NYA</b>	National Youth Agency
<b>ONS</b>	Office for National Statistics
<b>PCC</b>	Police and Crime Commissioners
<b>RQ</b>	Research question
<b>SEN</b>	Special Education Needs
<b>VRU</b>	Violence Reduction Unit
<b>YEF</b>	Youth Endowment Fund
<b>YSP</b>	Youth Service Provider



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background

Open-access youth clubs have long played a key role in supporting the wellbeing, development, and safety of children across England and Wales. These settings provide informal educational environments where children can participate voluntarily in structured and unstructured activities, form trusting relationships with adults, and access support that may otherwise be unavailable through schools or formal services (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS], 2024; YMCA, 2020).

Historically, open-access provision was framed as a universal entitlement for all young people, particularly those in disadvantaged areas. However, shifts in policy and funding since 2010 have transformed the landscape of youth work, with substantial reductions in local authority spending leading to a decline in open-access services and a growing emphasis on targeted provision (DCMS, 2024; YMCA, 2020). For instance, more than two-thirds of council-funded youth centres in England have closed since 2010, with budget cuts leading to the shuttering of 1,243 centres, leaving 581 in operation (Wallis, 2024). This significant reduction has impacted the availability of universal youth services, particularly in areas with high levels of deprivation. Analysis from the Centre for Young Lives (2025) suggests that reversing this trend would be not only socially beneficial but economically sound. Their cost-benefit model estimates a return of at least £2.40 for every £1 invested in youth provision.

In this report, the term ‘open-access’ refers to those activities open to all children and providing a safe space for informal activities such as sports, arts, and socialising. In contrast, the term ‘targeted’ youth provision refers to provision for specific groups of children identified as vulnerable or at risk – such as those involved in crime, facing exclusion, or with mental health needs – and often involving structured interventions or referrals.

Emerging evidence suggests that youth clubs can play a preventive role in reducing violence among children, particularly those facing multiple forms of disadvantage. Data from the Youth Endowment Fund’s 2024 Children, Violence and Vulnerability (CVV) survey shows that children who attend youth clubs are significantly more likely to have faced vulnerabilities such as experiences of violence, exclusion from school, or contact with the police, suggesting that youth clubs are already engaging children most at risk (Youth Endowment Fund, 2024). Children who’ve been directly affected by violence were twice as likely to regularly go to a youth club – 60% of victims and 65% of those who’ve perpetrated violence, compared to 31% who hadn’t been victims or perpetrators. Villa (2024) found that youth club closures between 2010 and 2019 in London led to a 4% decline in high-school exam performance and a 14% increase in crime among teenagers in affected areas. Moreover, the DCMS Youth Survey Pilot Report (2022) indicates that young people themselves perceive youth clubs as protective spaces, especially when staffed by consistent, approachable adults and offering engaging, youth-led activities.

Despite this, evidence on the specific role that open-access youth clubs play in preventing or responding to violence remains limited. Some of the current literature focuses on specialist youth violence interventions (e.g. mentoring or diversion schemes), with less attention paid to the more every day, relational, and informal forms of support that youth clubs provide (de St Croix, 2018). In addition, little is known about how clubs operate in practice – including their reach, staffing models, operating hours, and alignment with local needs – or about the characteristics of clubs that are most successful in reaching and engaging children at risk of violence. There is also a lack of evidence on how clubs identify and respond to children facing specific risks, such as criminal exploitation, exclusion from education, or involvement in serious youth violence (YEF, 2023).

Furthermore, persistent racial disparities shape how children experience violence and youth justice in England and Wales. Black children represent 26% of those in youth custody, despite making up just 6% of the 10–18 population (Ministry of Justice, 2024). The YEF’s (2023) survey of 7,500 children found that although most violence involved White children as both perpetrators (70%) and victims (72%), Black teenagers were significantly more likely to be both victims (21%) and perpetrators (22%) than their White peers (16% and 14%). Research must therefore account for how race intersects with vulnerability, access to services, and outcomes for young people.

In this context, YEF has commissioned this study to examine the current role of open-access youth clubs in supporting children who are at risk of, or involved in, violence. The study aims to address key gaps in understanding and generate insights that can inform more effective practice and investment across the youth sector.

## 1.2. Objectives of the review

This review was conducted by the Strategy, Economics and Policy team at RSM UK Consulting,<sup>2</sup> in partnership with the National Youth Agency (NYA) and Carmen Villa from the University of Warwick. It aims to review the current role of open-access youth clubs in England and Wales in supporting children at risk of or involved in violence. It seeks to understand:

- The structure and operations of youth clubs in relation to violence prevention;
- The extent and nature of children’s attendance and engagement;
- The types of formal and informal support provided by clubs; and
- The policy and practice enablers that help (or hinder) effective delivery.

Findings will inform YEF’s broader work on how the youth sector can contribute to reducing serious violence and will underpin evidence-based recommendations to strengthen provision.

## 1.3. Research questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

**Table 1. Research questions**

Key area	Main research question	Sub-questions
<b>Set up and operation</b>	<b>RQ1</b> How well are youth clubs in England and Wales structured and operated to prevent violence amongst children and young people?	<p><b>RQ1a.</b> Are youth clubs available to children in areas with high levels of violence?</p> <p><b>RQ1b.</b> Are youth clubs open at times during which violence is known to occur amongst children?</p> <p><b>RQ1c.</b> Do youth clubs enable children to take part in positive activities (e.g. arts, sports), social skills training, or psychological therapy?</p> <p><b>RQ1d.</b> How much variation is there in these aspects (between different clubs, regions, or nations), and what explains that variation?</p>

<sup>2</sup> Effective 1<sup>st</sup> November 2025, the Strategy, Economics and Policy team became part of the RSK Group and has been rebranded as Fortia Insight.

		<p><b>RQ1e.</b> What are the barriers and facilitators for youth clubs operating in ways that reduce violence?</p> <p><b>RQ1f.</b> What is the ideal staff ratio between staff (paid and volunteer) and young people in youth clubs?</p>
<b>Attendance and engagement</b>	<p><b>RQ2.</b> What characteristics of youth clubs encourage children at risk of/involved in violence to attend them, and what characteristics facilitate meaningful engagement amongst those children?</p>	<p><b>RQ2a.</b> To what extent do children who attend youth clubs engage with develop trusting relationships with staff (whether volunteers or professionals)?</p> <p><b>RQ2b.</b> What are the barriers and facilitators for staff to develop trusting relationships with attendees?</p> <p><b>RQ2c.</b> What characteristics of youth clubs encourage children from minority ethnic backgrounds to attend them, and what facilitates them to engage meaningfully?</p>
<b>Support for children at risk</b>	<p><b>RQ3.</b> To what extent do youth clubs provide support to children who are at risk of or involved in violence and what kinds of support (both formal and informal) do they provide?</p>	<p><b>RQ3a.</b> How, if at all, do youth clubs identify children at risk of/involved in violence?</p> <p><b>RQ3b.</b> How commonly does violence occur on youth club premises and how is this handled?</p> <p><b>RQ3c.</b> What training do staff (volunteers or professionals) have that is relevant to supporting children at risk of or involved in violence?</p> <p><b>RQ3d.</b> What are the barriers and facilitators for youth clubs providing effective formal and informal support to children at risk of or involved in violence?</p> <p><b>RQ3e.</b> What are the barriers and facilitators for youth clubs situating targeted provision within open-access provision?</p>
<b>Policy and practice changes</b>	<p><b>RQ4.</b> What policy and practice changes could improve youth clubs' ability to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence? Are there specific models/examples of best practice that could be adopted more widely?</p>	

## 1.4. Structure of the report

The report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2: Methodology** – outlines the study design, data collection, and analysis approach;
- **Chapter 3-6: Findings** – structured loosely around the research questions, drawing on data from survey, interviews, focus groups and secondary data analysis as appropriate:
  - **Chapter 3 (RQ1)** explores how youth clubs are set up and operate to reduce violence;
  - **Chapter 4 (RQ2)** examines attendance and engagement among young people at risk of or involved in violence;
  - **Chapter 5 (RQ3)** focuses on the types of support provided and how youth clubs respond to risk; and

- **Chapter 6 (RQ1e, RQ2c, RQ3d, RQ4)** identifies barriers and enablers of effective youth club operation, support provision, and engagement with children at risk of or involved in violence, as well as explores opportunities for policy and practice change to strengthen violence prevention;
- **Chapter 7: Conclusions and Insights for Policy and Practice** – summarises key findings, implications of this study and insights for policy and practice; and
- **Annexes** – include the full methodology (Annex A.1), research tools (Annex A.2), additional charts and tables (Annex A.3), and references (Annex A.4).

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Overview

This review used a mixed-methods design to explore the support open-access youth clubs provide to children at risk of or involved in violence. It combined primary quantitative and qualitative data collection with analysis of relevant secondary datasets.

### 2.2. Research activities and data sources

#### 2.2.1 Project initiation

During the project initiation and planning phase (January to February 2025), a variety of activities were carried out to inform the data collection and the analysis phase.

- A project initiation meeting;
- Utilising NYA's Youth Consultants, formed a Youth Voice group. This group consisted of nine children and young people aged 16 – 25 with diverse lived experience, skills and perspectives. The Youth Voice Group played a collaborative role in the research process by:
  - Co-designing research tools and creative engagement methods.
  - Assisting in the delivery of focus groups and interviews with children.<sup>3</sup>
  - Providing feedback on research findings.
- Review of secondary data led by the advisor, Carmen Villa;
- A stakeholder engagement plan.

#### 2.2.2 Data collection

The data collection phase (February to April 2025) involved a mixed-method approach comprising an online survey to gather evidence from a wide range of youth workers in England and Wales. In addition, qualitative data sources allowed for exploration of contextual factors that demonstrate how youth clubs support vulnerable children and young people. The full methodology is listed below:

##### Survey of youth workers

An online survey was distributed through NYA's network and e-bulletin, with support from the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services between March and April 2025. This survey was also used for YEF's review of youth workers' role in safeguarding, with respondents directed to relevant questions based on their role. Responses were also encouraged through outreach to clubs participating in NYA's Youth Sector Census and Annual Workforce Survey.

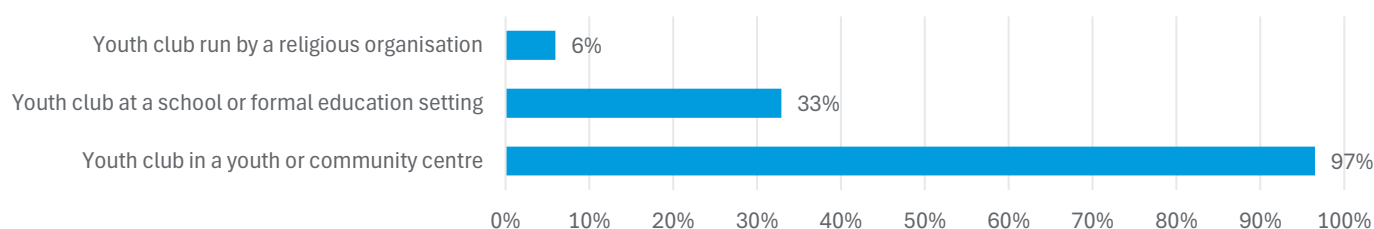
In total, 607 responses were submitted, which includes those pertaining to the review of youth workers' role in safeguarding. For the purposes of this review, RSM received 504 eligible responses from the NYA. Out of the 504 responses, 252 were complete responses and 252 were partial responses. During data cleaning, 183 (36%) of all responses were deemed unsuitable to be included in the analysis having not met the minimum standards of quality, strength, comprehensiveness, and relevance. This gave a final sample of 321 usable responses. It is important to note that respondents who did not select any of these three options to Q7: "1) Youth club in a youth or community centre, 2) Youth club at a school or formal education setting, and 3) Youth club run by a religious organisation but open to all children without a focus on religious teaching or

<sup>3</sup> The focus groups with children were led by NYA's experienced adult researchers.

practice” were excluded from the sample, as their responses were deemed to be outside the scope of this review (refer to Section A.1.1 for further details).

**Description of the survey sample:** Figure 1 shows that the majority (97%) of the survey respondents’ organisations provide open access youth provision based in youth or community centre. One third delivered youth clubs based at schools or formal education settings. A minority (6%) offered youth clubs that are run by religious or faith-based organisation (but open to all children without a focus on religious teaching or practice).

**Figure 1. Type of open access youth provision**



Source: Youth sector survey Q7a.

Base: 286.

Note: Organisations could provide more than one type of open access youth provision (Response options in Q7a are not mutually exclusive).

In terms of the primary type of youth work activity that survey respondents are involved in, nearly two thirds (62%) of the survey respondents are primarily involved in open access youth provision while 33% focus on offering provision targeted at vulnerable children<sup>4</sup>. There are also a very small number of them primarily providing detached or street-based services (3%) and outdoor learning (1%). The majority of the survey respondents are working in a youth work role, with nearly three quarters working full time and 20% working part time. A minority (6%) of the survey respondents are volunteering in a youth work role. In terms of the qualifications, over one third of the survey respondents reported having Level 6 or 7 Professional Youth Worker qualifications while one third do not have JNC recognised qualification.

The largest proportion of responses was received by the North West (15%), followed by London (13%) and Yorkshire (12%). Among respondents, 58% work in the voluntary and community sector, 29% in local authorities, and 13% in other sectors. Half of the survey respondents’ organisations receive funding (28%) or are commissioned (24%) by local authorities, while 32% report no formal relationship.

Fifteen percent of clubs serves between 1–50 children annually, 15% serves 51–100, and the largest group (34%) serves 201–500, highlighting a wide range in scale.

## Qualitative research

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling strategies was employed to engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders for qualitative research.

- Sector leaders were identified through direct outreach and referrals within relevant organisations. These individuals participated in structured deliberative sessions held online, each lasting approximately two hours and designed to foster learning, discussion, and decision-making.
- Youth work practitioners and volunteers were selected from survey respondents who had agreed to follow-up interviews. They took part in in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted online,

<sup>4</sup> These responses are included in our sample because they reflect the primary activities performed by individual youth workers, rather than the specific type of service (open-access, targeted, detached, or outdoor) offered by their respective youth organisations.



typically lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. Interviews were available in both English and Welsh to accommodate participants' preferences.

- Children were recruited through direct referral from youth workers and youth organisations, as well as through existing networks and targeted invitations. They participated in three in-person focus groups held at youth club premises, one in London and two in Birmingham. Each session lasted about an hour, and participants received a small voucher as a token of appreciation.

The table below outlines the profile of 68 individuals engaged through a mix of in-person and online research encounters.

**Table 2. Approach to qualitative data collection by stakeholder group**

Stakeholder group	Sampling strategy	Method of engagement	Participant characteristics
<b>Sector leaders –</b> 13 participants	<p><b>Stratified purposive:</b> NYA and RSM reached out to contacts. Participants were invited to take part in deliberative sessions by RSM.</p> <p><b>Snowballing:</b> i) Initial contacts within the organisations were identified; ii) These initial contacts were either invited for interviews if their roles were relevant, or were contacted to help identify potential participants within their organisations; iii) These referrals were then used to reach additional participants.</p>	<p><b>2 deliberative sessions</b> (via Microsoft Teams) – lasted 120 minutes along <u>three key principles</u>: learning, deliberation, decision-making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local authority: 3</li> <li>PCC: 2</li> <li>Grant-making national charities: 3</li> <li>VRU/VRP: 3</li> <li>Central government: 2</li> </ul>
<b>Youth work organisations and practitioners (youth workers and volunteers) –</b> 25 participants	<p><b>Stratified purposive:</b> Interviewees were sampled from survey respondents who had consented to follow-up interviews. RSM and NYA facilitated contact, and RSM invited participants. Sample stratification helped observe thematic differences by group and sub-group.</p> <p><b>Snowballing:</b> As above.</p>	<p><b>25 in-depth, semi-structured interviews</b> (online)</p> <p>All interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and were offered in English and Welsh by RSM's in-house Welsh researcher.</p>	<p><b>Youth club type:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community centre provisions: 19</li> <li>School or formal education setting: 6</li> </ul> <p><b>Type of support provided:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open access youth provision: 23</li> <li>Open access, Targeted and Detached youth work: 1</li> <li>Provision targeted at vulnerable children: 1</li> </ul> <p><b>Region:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>East of England: 1</li> <li>London: 3</li> <li>North East: 3</li> </ul>

Stakeholder group	Sampling strategy	Method of engagement	Participant characteristics
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North West: 5</li> <li>• South East: 2</li> <li>• Wales: 2</li> <li>• West Midlands: 3</li> <li>• West Yorkshire: 2</li> <li>• Yorkshire and Humber: 5</li> </ul> <p><b>High/low crime rates in local authority (1=low, 2=medium and 3=high):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High: 16</li> <li>• Medium): 7</li> <li>• Low: 2</li> </ul>
<b>Children –</b> 30 participants	<p><b>Stratified purposive:</b> RSM facilitated contact through direct referral from interviewed youth workers. In addition, NYA established contact through existing networks with youth organisation. Email invitations were sent from NYA.</p> <p><b>Snowballing:</b> from youth workers and Youth Voice Group.</p>	<p><b>3 in-person focus groups</b> (one in London, two in Birmingham at the same youth club)</p> <p>Focus groups with children lasted approximately 60 minutes, with each participant receiving a £20 Love2Shop voucher as a thank-you.</p>	<p><b>Gender:</b></p> <p>Male: 15 Female: 15</p> <p><b>Age:</b></p> <p>11yrs old: 7 12yrs old 3 13yrs old: 4 14 yrs old: 1 0 15 yrs old: 6</p> <p><b>Ethnicity</b></p> <p>White: 6 Asian/Asian British: 3 Black, Black British, Caribbean or African: 17 Mixed or multiple ethnic background: 4</p>

## Secondary data

A range of existing data was analysed to contextualise findings and inform the various research questions. Sources included: NYA's 2024 Youth Sector Census and Workforce Survey; YEF's Children, Violence and Vulnerability Survey; Police UK violent crime data; ONS 2021 Census indicators.

The NYA census was used to obtain proxies of youth service providers (YSPs) presence by area. The term 'YSPs' includes all organisations providing open access and/or targeted youth work support to children. We were able to calculate YSPs by region, local authority, or census area (LSOA). The database contained 779 youth service providers (YSPs). Most of these YSPs belong to the voluntary sector (670). The majority directly deliver youth activities (695). Out of all the YSPs, 44% (341) provided both open access youth work (universal) and targeted support. About 30% (231) provided only universal youth services (youth clubs), and 16% (122) provided only targeted youth services (targeted youth work). About 14% of all YSPs also provided spiritual or faith-based development, and faith-based development took place mainly (86%) in open-access providers.

To obtain information on crime, we used the CVV survey with details on children's experiences of crime and violence, but which is only available at the regional level. We also proxied for violent crime involving youth at smaller geographies using total violent crime from police recorded crime data. We believe violence involving children is likely to correlate with aggregate violence. Beyond crimes directly affecting or involving children, violence on other groups could affect children indirectly through many other potential channels (normalisation of observed adult behaviour, adult exploitation, spillovers of adult's victimisation). According to recent statistics, 25% of children have been a victim of a crime or perpetrated an offence (Youth Endowment Fund, 2023).

The geographies used for the analyses beyond region were local authority and Lower super output area. Local authorities are administrative units in England, with a total of 296, each containing an average population of approximately 250,000. Lower Super Output Areas are small census units in England, numbering 32,844, each with an average population of about 1,677 residents. At the LA level this was obtained from Office for National Statistics (ONS), covering the fiscal year ending in March 2024, and more granular crime data at the LSOA level from Police UK for the year 2023.

Last, we explored socioeconomic attributes using the ONS 2021 Census, available at the LSOA level. This allowed to examine differences in the correlation of crime and violence based on the proportion of the local youth population, and the correlation of YSP presence with deprivation indicators. A detailed description of each data source, the rationale for selecting these and how they answer the research questions are presented in Section A.1.2 of the Annex.

## 2.3. Data analysis and synthesis

### 2.3.1 Qualitative analysis

Thematic analysis of data from interviews and focus groups was conducted using NVivo14. For open interview responses, inductive thematic analysis was applied with a coding framework, following Braun and Clarke's principles: familiarisation with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

### 2.3.2 Survey analysis

The descriptive analysis presented in this report is based on:

- a. tabulation of frequencies and percentages,
- b. crosstabulations between variables of interest using Chi square tests of association.

### c. Analysis of open-ended responses.

#### a. Frequency base of close-ended questions

There are several considerations that have been considered while reporting survey responses.

First, in generating the visuals accompany the analysis, close-ended response categories against which no responses were recorded for a given survey question have not been reported. However, any additional insights that can be gleaned in relation to an absence of responses have been included within the accompanying text for that section.

Second, questions with low response rates have been filtered out from the analysis based on the total response rate – any questions and sub-category with less than 30 have been excluded from the analysis.

Third, questions with several response categories have been recoded to generate insights at a more aggregate level.

#### b. Chi Square tests of association

A further component of the descriptive analysis presented in this report is based on conducting Chi square tests of association that demonstrate statistically significant associations between various variables of interest, to highlight any differences in responses between subgroups. The significance tests reported in this report have applied thresholds in a two-step process to analyse the quantitative data:

The first threshold relates to the total number of responses per category of response in a question. Any crosstabulations that do not meet a minimum threshold of 30 have been dropped from the analysis.

The second threshold relates to significant p values resulting from tests of association. A common industry standard of  $p \leq 0.05$  has been applied, such that any Chi square tests of association that do not meet this threshold have been excluded from this report. For questions that do not meet significance thresholds but offer useful insights, results are shown as frequency or percentage crosstabulations with pie and bar charts. Additionally, Chi-square tests were used to identify significant associations between variables and highlight subgroup differences in responses.

#### c. Analysis of open-ended responses

The responses to open-ended questions have been analysed in conjunction with close-ended questions. Broadly, we took two approaches for this analysis. For close-ended survey questions with an 'other' open-ended response category, any responses received were recoded into the original close-ended options, if deemed fit. The visuals reported in the analysis reflect these added numbers. In the rare instance where the 'other' response did not fit back into the original close-ended list of options, any fresh insights generated have been reported within text. Further, for the survey question (Question 22) that was completely open-ended, thematic analysis has been dovetailed to bring to light the insights generated through the quantitative analysis. They have also been incorporated wherever they provide additional context or explanation relating to a certain insight being generated through the quantitative analysis.

### 2.3.3 Synthesis

All evidence sources were mapped against the core research questions (Section 1.3). Findings were triangulated across methods to strengthen the robustness of insights. Where perspectives diverged across participant groups or between data sources, we considered the quality, context, and consistency of evidence to interpret findings. Particular weight was given to objective monitoring data where available.

A validation session was held with the NYA's Youth Consultants to review the emerging findings and insights for policy and practice. This helped ensure that conclusions reflected the lived realities of young people engaging with youth clubs.

### 2.3.4 Secondary data analysis

The secondary data analysis begun with geocoding the NYA census, a comprehensive database detailing the presence of youth service providers (YSPs) for 779 individual organisations across England. We successfully geocoded 766 YSPs.<sup>5</sup>

The NYA census only includes one postcode for YSP, and it does not specify whether the postcode refers to the location in which services are provided or the location where an organisation might be registered. Therefore, the NYA census cannot be considered a complete source. By comparing the NYA census to other sources we estimate that it contains slightly less than 50% of all youth clubs in England. Discussions on the calculation are provided in the Annex A.1.2.

Two analyses were performed of the relationship with violence: one at the local authority level and another at the Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) level. These analyses explored the correlations between the presence of YSPs in an area and the incidence of violence. Basic descriptive statistics and linear regression methods were used.

## 2.4. Methodological limitations

This study has the following limitations:

**Limited insight from children:** the insights from children were limited due to the lack of detailed information from the children focus groups. The venues where focus groups were held did not provide adequate environment for participants to open up about their experiences with youth clubs, limiting the richness of data collected. Consequently, the interviewers were unable to fully utilise the topic guides to steer the conversation.

**Participant self-selection biases for interviews and survey with youth workers:** youth workers that have been interviewed and surveyed could decide for themselves whether they wanted to take part in research activities, which may mean that views of more engaged or better-resourced organisations are over-represented.

**Survey data:** one limitation of the survey pertains to the calculation of the children to staff ratio using the survey data. Respondents were asked about the number of children they engaged with over the past 12 months, with the options provided as ranges rather than exact numbers. Consequently, when calculating the ratios, we used the mean of these ranges (e.g., 125 for the range "101 to 150"). This method was considered the most feasible approach given the data available and can still offer readers a general understanding of the approximate number of children each youth worker engaged with over the past year.

**Analysis of secondary data:** our analysis contrasts areas with a strong youth service providers against those with fewer or none using a sample from the NYA census. The first limitation is that, unfortunately, the NYA census is not a complete source, which means there are areas with YSPs which are not accounted for. We believe the NYA is a useful source in that areas with more YSPs are more likely to be in the census, and we prove this in the Appendix by comparing the NYA census to other data, at least within London. However, a concern remains in that analyses of the correlation between YSP presence and violence would be attenuated (bias towards zero) as some areas in the comparison group (accounted as not having YSPs) would in reality have some. It is impossible to assert the extent of the bias. Second, our analyses at the local authority and LSOA level are not specific to violence involving children. We argue that they are however a useful proxy and supplement our analyses with that of CVV data at the regional level. Further details on data limitations are provided in the Annex.

<sup>5</sup> There were 13 errors in postcode names in the raw data.

### 3. Set up and operation of youth clubs

#### Key findings

- Youth service providers are more likely to be present in areas with higher proportions of children, greater deprivation, and increased levels of violence. In England, most local authorities (77%) have at least one youth service provider listed in the NYA census. The association between violence rates and the presence of youth service providers is consistent across both open access and targeted support provision.
- Youth clubs vary widely in size and structure. Most clubs are small, with 1-5 paid staff and a wider pool of volunteers, though some in school or faith-based settings report larger teams. The majority of surveyed clubs operate out of youth or community centres and offer open-access provision. Some are located in schools or run by faith-based organisations, each with different staffing models and resources.
- Most youth clubs are open on weekday evenings (particularly 6-8pm), which aligns with peak times for serious youth violence. Weekend provision is more limited and varies significantly by region, often constrained by funding and staffing. Staff and youth workers reported adapting opening hours to local risks and children's routines. Some also described maintaining contact with children outside session times to offer informal support.
- Clubs offer a wide range of positive activities, including sports, arts, volunteering, and informal education. Activities are often shaped by children input and used as entry points for deeper engagement or specialist referrals. Access to structured interventions like counselling or therapy is less consistent. Fewer clubs provide these in-house, though many signpost to external services. There is regional variation in what activities are offered, with lower access to experiential learning and therapy in some areas, which may reflect unequal local investment.
- Staff-to-young person ratios vary widely. While a ratio of 1:8 to 1:10 was seen as manageable, youth workers reported that youth clubs operate with higher ratios - with staff sometimes supervising 12 to 14 children at one given time. These figures are considerably higher than NSPCC best practice recommendations, which suggest one adult for every eight to ten children. Lower ratios were perceived to enable more meaningful engagement and safer environments, especially in high-risk areas.

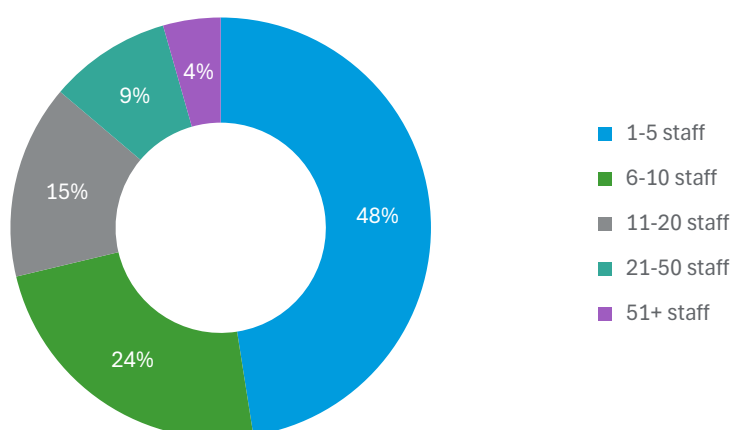


### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter explores how youth clubs in England and Wales are structured and operated to reduce violence among children. It examines where youth clubs are located, their operating times and staff ratios and how these might prevent violence. This section is informed by secondary data analysis, youth sector survey, deliberative sessions, interviews with youth workers and volunteers and focus groups with children.

Before presenting the findings, it is worthwhile to briefly examine profile and characteristics (e.g. organisational, staffing) of youth clubs across England and Wales that responded to the survey (N=193). As shown in Figure 2, nearly half (49%) reported having only between 1–5 paid staff, and a further 24% had 6–10, indicating that most clubs are small in scale. Larger staff teams were less common: 14% had 11–20, 9% had 21–50, and just 4% had 51 or more<sup>6</sup>.

**Figure 2. Number of staff**

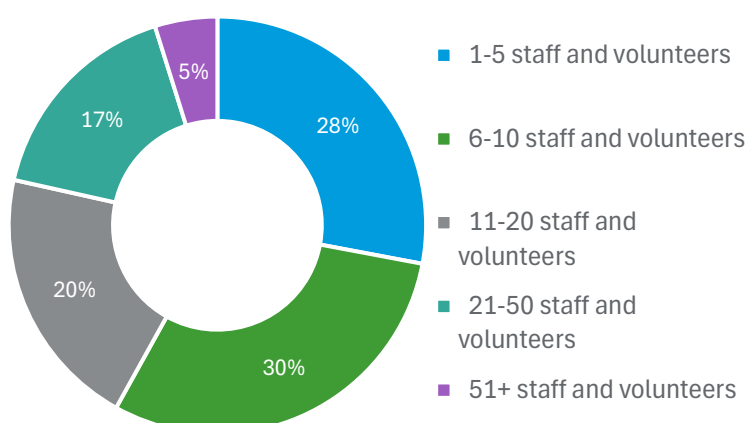


Source: Youth sector survey Q15a.

Base: 193.

When including volunteers, overall capacity increased. Figure 3 shows that of 30% of respondents reported 1–5 total staff and volunteers, 29% reported 6–10, and 36% reported 11–50. Only 5% had more than 50 people involved in delivery.

**Figure 3. Total number of staff and volunteers**



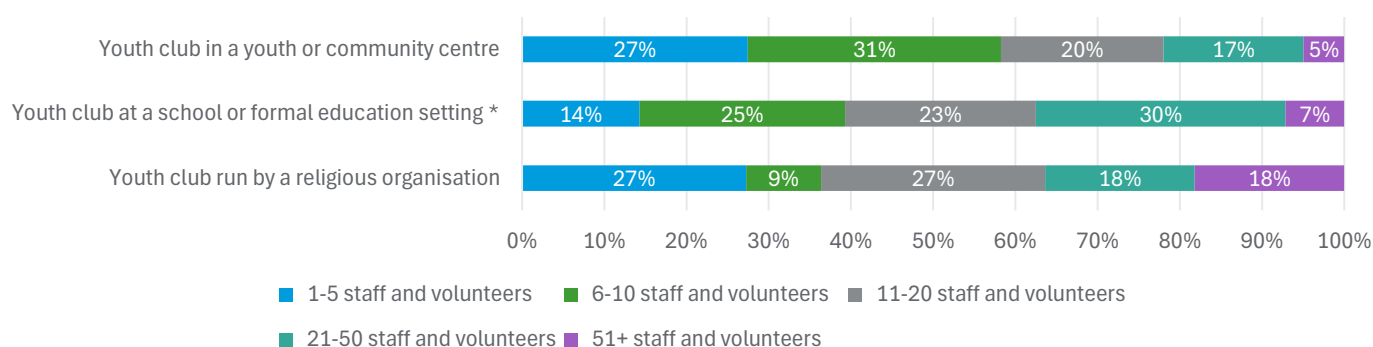
Source: Youth sector survey Q15a and Q15b.

Base: 198.

<sup>6</sup> This sample seems comparable in staffing levels to that in the NYA census, where 30% of youth clubs have 1-- 5 staff and volunteer members, the following 30% have 5 to 10 and the rest are bigger organisations.

Figure 4 illustrates that staffing levels (covering both paid staff and volunteers) also varied by club type. All three types of youth clubs had mixed profiles but tended towards smaller teams. A chi-square test of independence revealed a **statistically significant** association between staffing levels and whether the youth club is located at a school or formal education setting. This suggests that organisations in educational settings tend to have more staff/volunteers delivering youth clubs compared to outside these settings. More than half (58%) of youth clubs in community centres had teams of fewer than 10 staff and volunteers, compared to other types of youth clubs. Yet youth clubs run by religious organisations showed greater variation. In addition, a larger share of youth clubs run by religious organisations had more than 51 staff and volunteers.

**Figure 4. Total number of staff and volunteers by youth club type**



*Source:* Youth sector survey Q7a, Q15a, and Q15b.

*Base:* 182 (Youth club in a youth or community centre), 56 (Youth club at a school or formal education setting), 11 (Youth club run by a religious organisation).

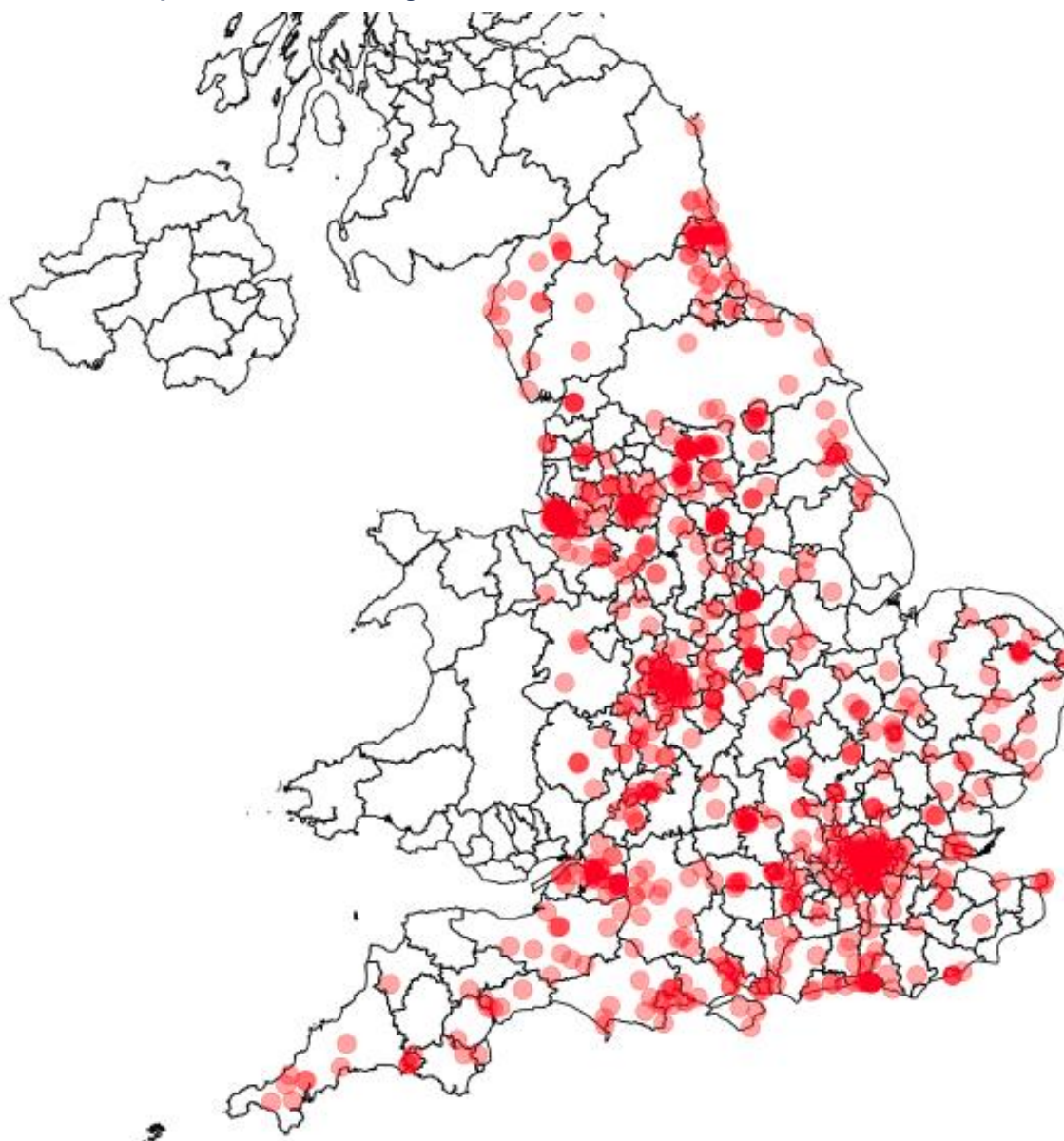
*Note:* 1) \* indicates that chi-square test result is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. 2) Multiple response options – one organisation surveyed may provide more than one type of open access youth provision.

### 3.2. Are youth clubs available to children in areas with high levels of violence? (RQ1a)

#### ➤ Youth clubs are more likely to be located in areas with high levels of violence.

We examined the availability of YSPs in the NYA census across England by conducting two analyses: one at the local authority level and another at the LSOA level (Lower Super Output Areas are small census units in England). Figure 5 shows the map of YSPs across England, overlaid with LA boundaries.

**Figure 5. Youth service providers across England**



*Note:* Youth service providers from the NYA Census (2024) overlaid with local authorities in the UK, defined by Ordnance Survey and obtained through the ONS.

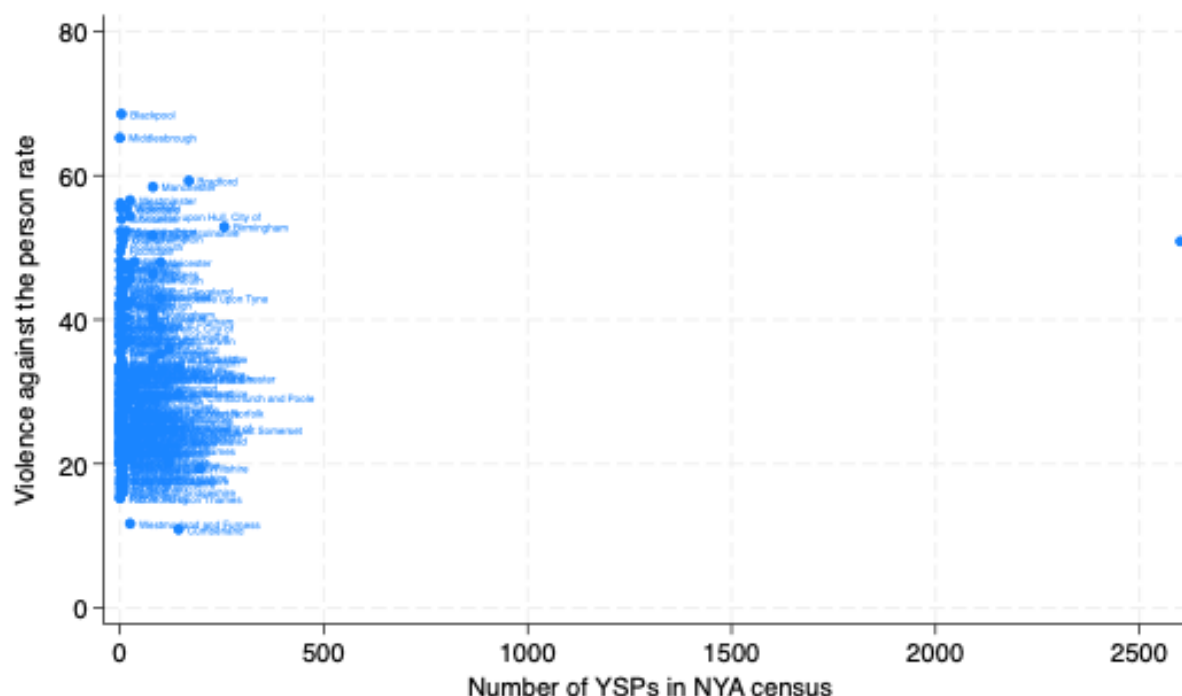
Among all local authorities (LAs), 77% have at least one YSP in the NYA census (229 LAs). The LA with the most YSPs is Liverpool (51 YSPs in sample), followed by Birmingham (16 YSPs) and Wiltshire (14 YSPs). Of all local authorities, 67% have open-access youth clubs; 60% have targeted support, 56% have both types of services. About 26% of all LAs have organisations providing faith-based development.

At the census unit level (LSOAs, very small areas with approximately 1,700 residents), 2% have at least one YSP in the NYA census (716 of all LSOAs). About 1.5% of LSOAs have (511) have open-access (universal) provision.

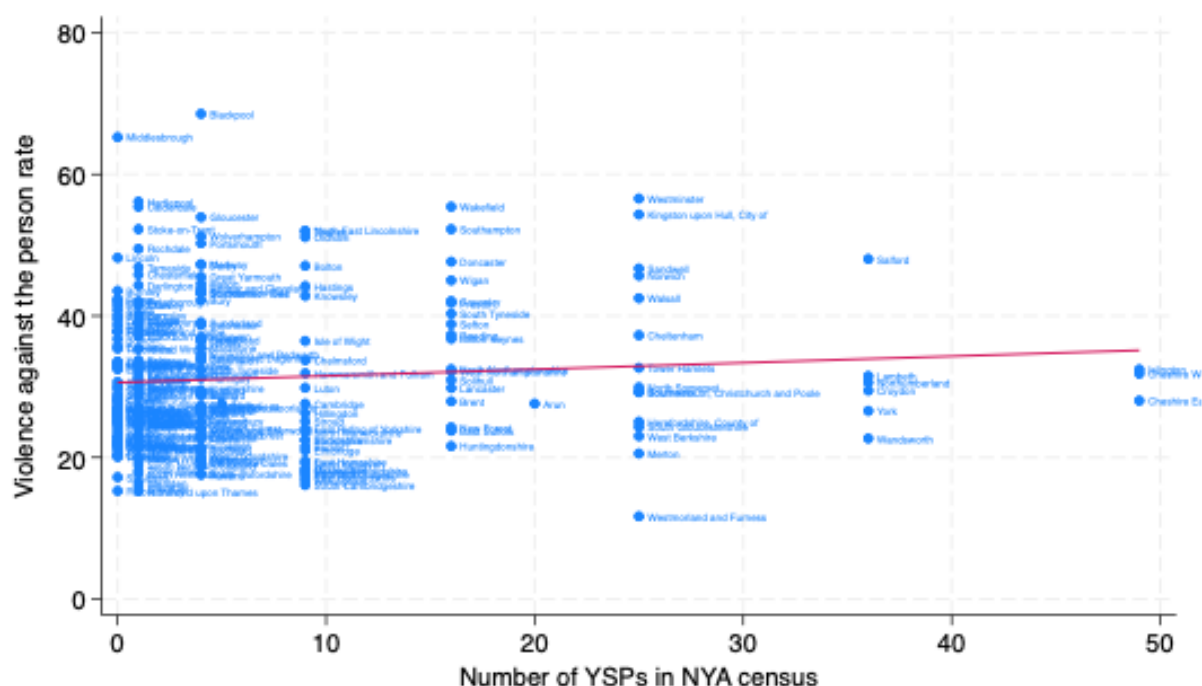
Local authorities where YSPs are located (regardless of whether the YSPs offer open access or targeted support) had 32.3 violence against the person crimes per 1,000 population, whereas areas without youth services had a violence rate of 30. The difference is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level (but not at the 95% level).

Each additional YSP per LA correlates with a 0.1 percentage point increase in violence against the person crime rate. Figure 6 shows the number of YSPs and violence rates; and Figure 7 displays the data with a fitted line after excluding an outlier (Liverpool).<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 6. Youth service providers and violence against the person crime rate, by LA, raw data**



**Figure 7. Youth service providers and violence against the person crime rate, by LA, raw data, excluding Liverpool and including fitted values line**



*Note:* Youth clubs and other youth activities providers from the NYA Census (2024) and with local crime rates for the year ending March 2024 from ONS (2024).

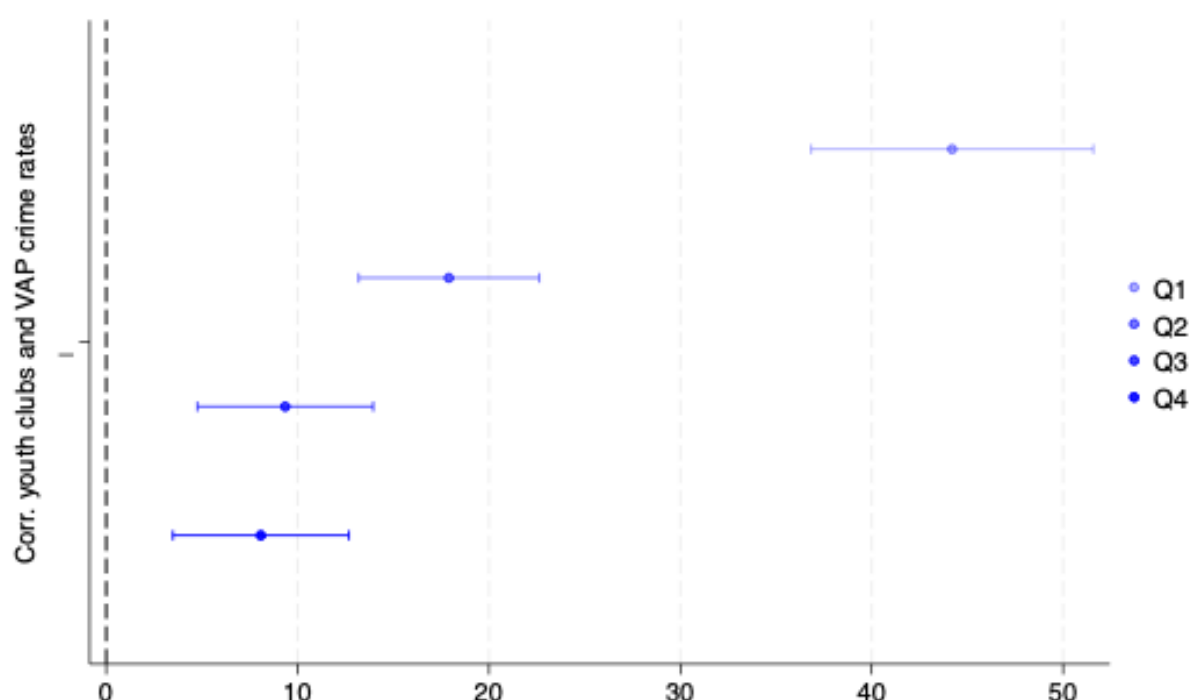
<sup>7</sup> Liverpool is excluded for exhibition purposes. Omitting Liverpool does not meaningfully change the observed correlation between YSPs and violence.

Local authorities are however relatively large geographical units (with approximately 250,000 residents in some cases). It is possible that some children within a local authority are perhaps very far from a youth club to attend. Besides, within each local authority there are many neighbourhoods, with different attributes and criminality rates. Thus, correlations at the local authority level do not inform us whether YSPs locate in low or high criminality neighbourhoods within (higher criminality) local authorities. Therefore, to understand correlations with more precision, a narrower analysis might be needed, even if that means restricting our attention to the immediate vicinity of youth clubs. At the census (LSOA) level, the correlation between YSP presence and violence is more marked. LSOAs with YSPs had 59 violent crimes per 1,000 in the year in 2023; whereas areas without YSPs had only 35. While there is limited variation in the number of YSP in LSOAs - the highest concentration being 3 - an additional youth club per LSOA is associated with a 25-percentage point increase in the violence against the person crime rate.

➤ **The relationship between youth clubs and violence is not exclusive to areas with high proportions of children.**

At the LSOA level, the relationship between YSPs and violence is independent of the proportion of youth population, as illustrated in Figure 8. All quantiles of youth population show a positive and significant correlation with violent crimes. We did not find a statistically significant difference in the correlation from quantiles 2 to 4. In fact, the predictive power is larger in areas with lowest proportions of youth population. We hypothesise that this could be because YSPs sometimes locate in more densely populated parts of neighbourhoods (perhaps sometimes in town centres) which are very close but not necessarily in the same LSOAs where more families with children reside.

**Figure 8. Correlation between youth service providers and violence against the person crime rate, by LSOA, by quantile of proportion of population under 20 years old**



*Note: Estimated correlation between an additional youth clubs per LSOA and violence against the person crime rates. Bars show confidence intervals at the 95% confidence level. Youth activities providers from the NYA Census (2024), local crime rates from PoliceUK (2023), youth population estimates from the Census (ONS, 2021).*

Additionally, the analysis is supplemented with the CVV survey conducted by YEF in 2024. This dataset, available at a regional level, includes information on crime witnessed or experienced by CYP, as well as on the availability of youth clubs, specifically youth clubs in a youth or community centre. Consequently, this

enables us to determine whether the incidence of violence at the regional level, as experienced by CYP, varies in relation to areas with a higher number of youth clubs.

Among CYP reporting that there was a youth club in their area, 8.4% had experienced a crime in the last 12 months and 15.5% had witnessed a violent crime. Instead, for CYP reporting there was not a youth club in their area 7.7% had experienced a violent crime in the last 12 months; and 12.4% had witnessed one. The difference in the proportion experiencing a crime is not statistically significant between CYP reporting having a youth clubs and those reporting not having one. The different in the proportion witnessing a crime is statistically significant at the 99% confidence level.

The analysis shows that the differences are particularly detectable at small areas, as youth club attendance is likely a very local phenomenon (and local authorities, or regions are very large). This is likely to reflect that youth clubs tend to locate in more deprived areas (which also tend to be more affected by pervasive issues such as violence), where families cannot provide paid for after-school activities and hence where these services are most needed.

➤ **Areas with targeted, or open-access YSPs have similar levels of violence.**

Table 3 presents the average violent crime rates based on whether a LA has no YSPs or not; and further distinguishes areas with both open access and targeted support, only open access, or only targeted support. There is no significant difference in violent crime rates between areas with only open access providers and areas with only targeted support. Similarly, there is no significant difference in violent crime rates between areas with no YSPs and areas with no targeted support. Areas with both open access and targeted support (the majority) exhibit slightly higher violent crime rates; however, any differences by type of YSP provision are not statistically significant.

**Table 3. Youth service providers and local crime at the LA level**

Type of YSP provision in the area	Violent crimes per 1,000 population	Count of LAs
<b>No YSPs</b>	29.7	62
<b>Has YSPs</b>	32.2	190
• <b>Both open access and targeted</b>	32.9	151
• <b>Only open access</b>	29.7	29
• <b>Only targeted</b>	29.3	10

*Note: Youth service providers from the NYA Census (2024) and average violent crime rate for the fiscal year ending March 2024 from ONS. LAs in England.*

➤ **Unemployment is the primary socioeconomic indicator influencing youth service provision.**

The analysis next assessed the local area correlates of YSP provision, using detailed LSOA level data from the 2021 ONS census. The correlation of YSP presence with ethnicity, unemployment rate, proportion of residents with a disability, and proportion with poor health conditions was separately assessed using univariate models. We focused on the availability of YSP and not the number of YSPs because, at the LSOA level (very small areas), very few areas have more than one YSP in the census data.

Figure 9 presents the coefficients and associated 95% confidence levels.

Areas with more Mixed ethnicity population and areas with a higher proportion of population from Other ethnicities are more likely to have YSPs than areas with White residents.<sup>8</sup> The ethnicity that correlates more

<sup>8</sup> Ethnic groups from ONS are used. Mixed ethnic groups include White and Asian, White and Black and Other mixed ethnicities. Other ethnic groups include Arab and other ethnic groups.



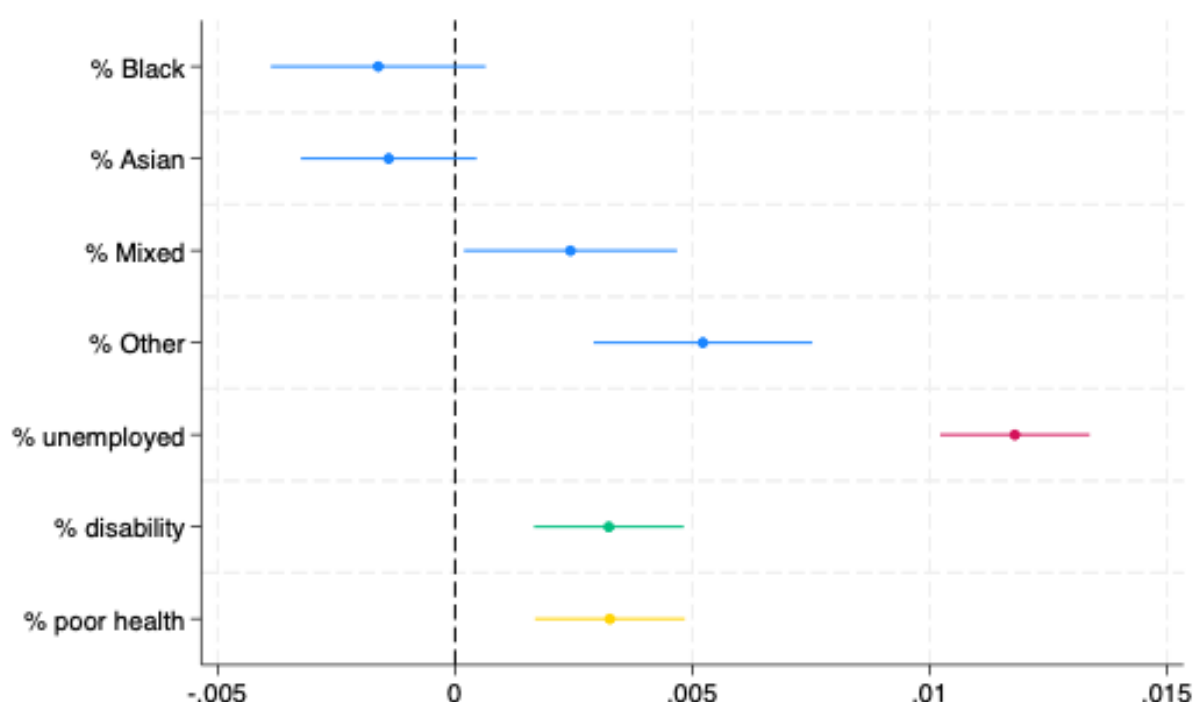
highly with YSP presence is Other – although the magnitudes are small (a 1 standard deviation increase in the proportion of Other ethnicity residents correlates with an increase of less than 0.5% in the likelihood of YSP presence). The proportion of Black or Asian residents does not predict YSP presence differentially than the proportion of White residents.

In terms of health indicators, areas with higher proportions of population with poor health, or with disabilities are more likely to have YSPs, although the magnitudes are relatively small.

The key socioeconomic predictor, however, is the proportion of unemployed residents. A 1 standard deviation increase in unemployment rates – an additional 2.3 pts – correlates with a 12% increase in the likelihood of YSP presence.

In the Annex A.1.2 we replicate Figure 8 controlling for local proportion of unemployed residents and find that, even after controlling for local unemployment the relation between YSP presence and violence crime is very strong and statistically significant.

**Figure 9. Correlation between youth service providers presence and various socioeconomic indicators from the census, by LSOA**

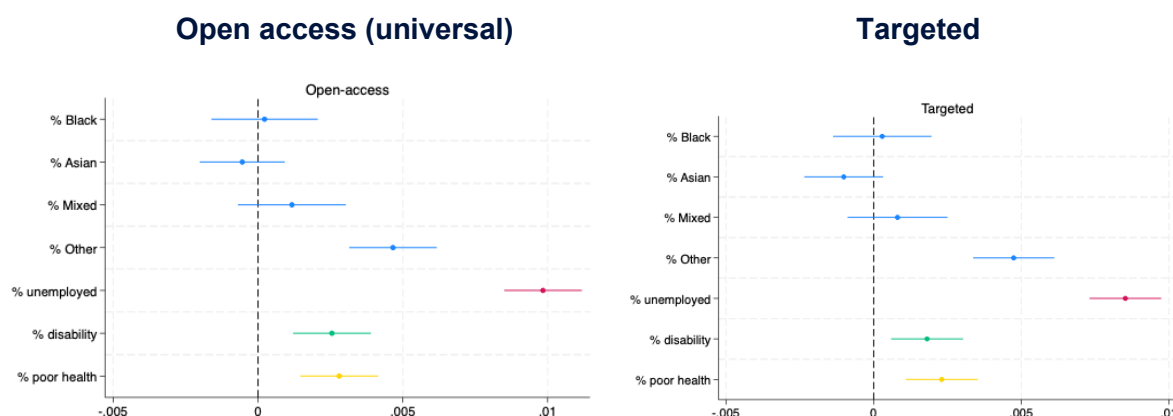


*Note: Estimated correlation between the probability of YSP location and different socioeconomic indicators from the Census. Bars show confidence intervals at the 95% confidence level. Relationship expressed in standard deviations. Youth service providers from the NYA Census (2024), the remaining variables are from the Census (ONS, 2021).*

There are virtually no differences in socioeconomic predictors of areas with open access or targeted YSPs, as shown in Figure 10 (this is because the majority of areas have both).



**Figure 10. Correlation between youth service providers presence and various socioeconomic indicators from the census, by LSOA, by open access or targeted**



*Note:* Estimated correlation between the probability of YSP location and different socioeconomic indicators from the Census. Figure 4a) estimates likelihood of open-access youth clubs; figure 4b) estimates likelihood of targeted youth service providers. The same YSP can provide both. Bars show confidence intervals at the 95% confidence level. Relationship expressed in standard deviations. Youth service providers from the NYA Census (2024), the remaining variables are from the Census (ONS, 2021).

Although this topic (presence of youth clubs in areas where violence is known to occur) was not explored in depth during the interviews with youth workers, a few highlighted that the physical location of a youth club may directly affect attendance and safety. For example, youth clubs in areas of high deprivation face unique challenges, as concerns about local violence and crime can deter participation.

*My car was once caught up in a shooting at the end of the driveway to our building. It was nothing to do with children. It was an older demographic. The house opposite is entrenched in violence, poverty, substance misuse. We run other projects like a girls' singing project. We have children who travel further afield, quite a mixed demographic in terms of their heritage and age. We've had cameras installed on the main road outside, which is an extra level of reassurance, local authority or police cameras. But the attendance absolutely nosedived because of parents' concerns of risk that's external to what we have any control over. (Youth worker interview)*

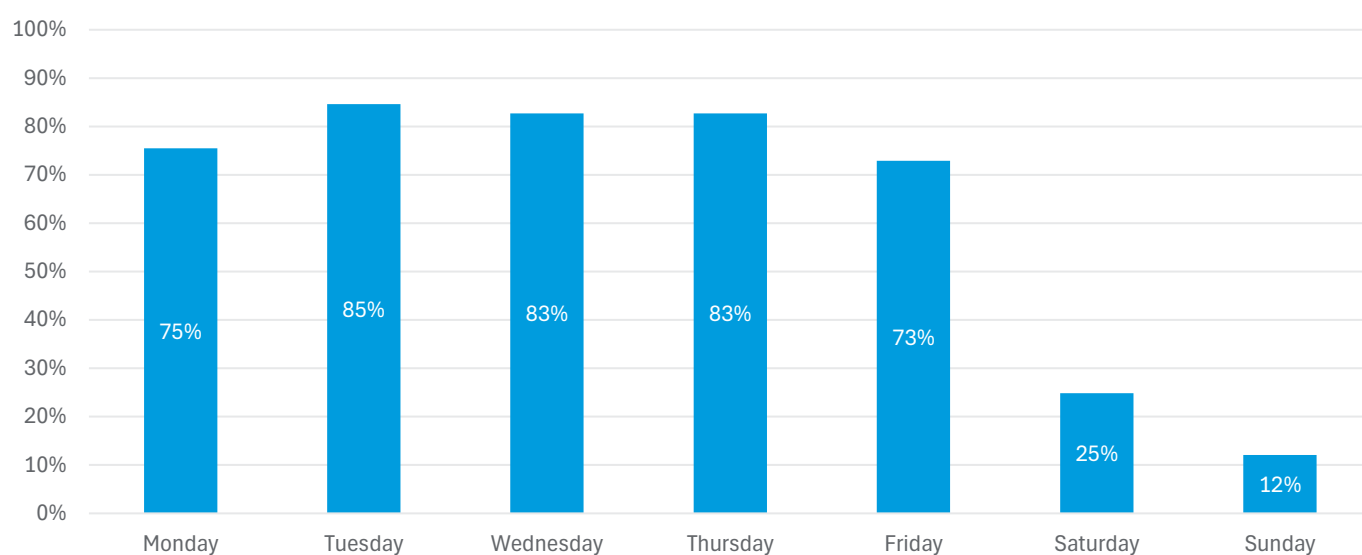
### 3.3. Are youth clubs open at times during which violence is known to occur amongst children? (RQ1b)

Serious violence involving children is particularly likely to occur after school hours, between 4pm and 8pm, when opportunities for unsupervised social interactions increase. This period is identified as especially risky, underscoring the importance of interventions and safe spaces to prevent youth violence during these critical hours (YEF, 2024, p. 11). While overall violence tends to increase during summer, evidence suggests that violence involving children may decrease during the school holidays and rise again in the autumn when school resumes (Ibid.).

#### ➤ Youth clubs mostly operate Monday to Friday across all regions.

Figure 11 shows which days across the week the youth clubs are open. Most youth clubs operate on weekdays (73% to 85%), with Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday being the most common days of operation. Over half (53%) are open every weekday, while a smaller proportion (8%) operate seven days a week. Weekend provision is less common, with 25% on Saturday and 12% on Sunday.

**Figure 11. Youth clubs' operation days**



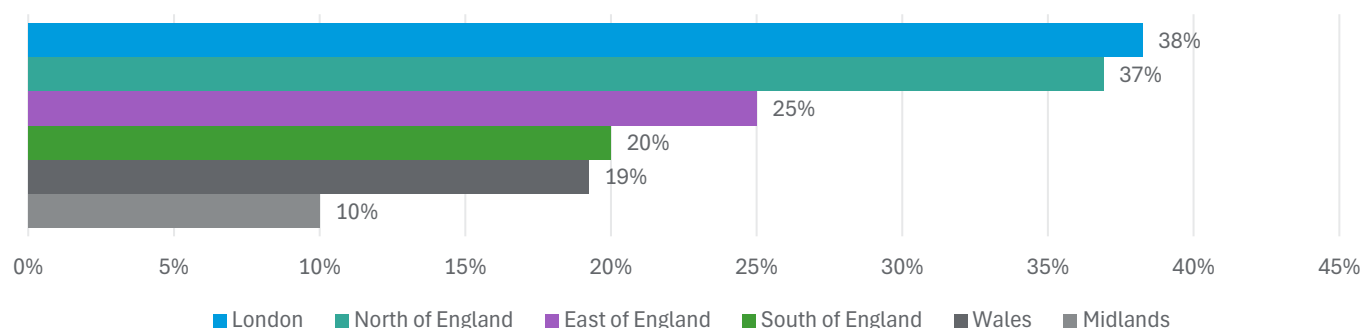
Source: Youth sector survey Q7b.

Base: 306.

Note: Percentages do not sum up to 100% because youth clubs may operate on multiple days across the week.

Survey data shows that youth clubs open on weekdays across all regions. For weekend operation, London had the highest proportion of openings at 38%, closely followed by the North of England at 37%. In contrast, the Midlands recorded the lowest level of weekend operation (10%). The East of England, South of England, and Wales had similarly moderate weekend operations at about a quarter (19% to 25%).

**Figure 12. Youth clubs' operation on the weekend by region\***



Source: Youth sector survey Q4 and Q7b.

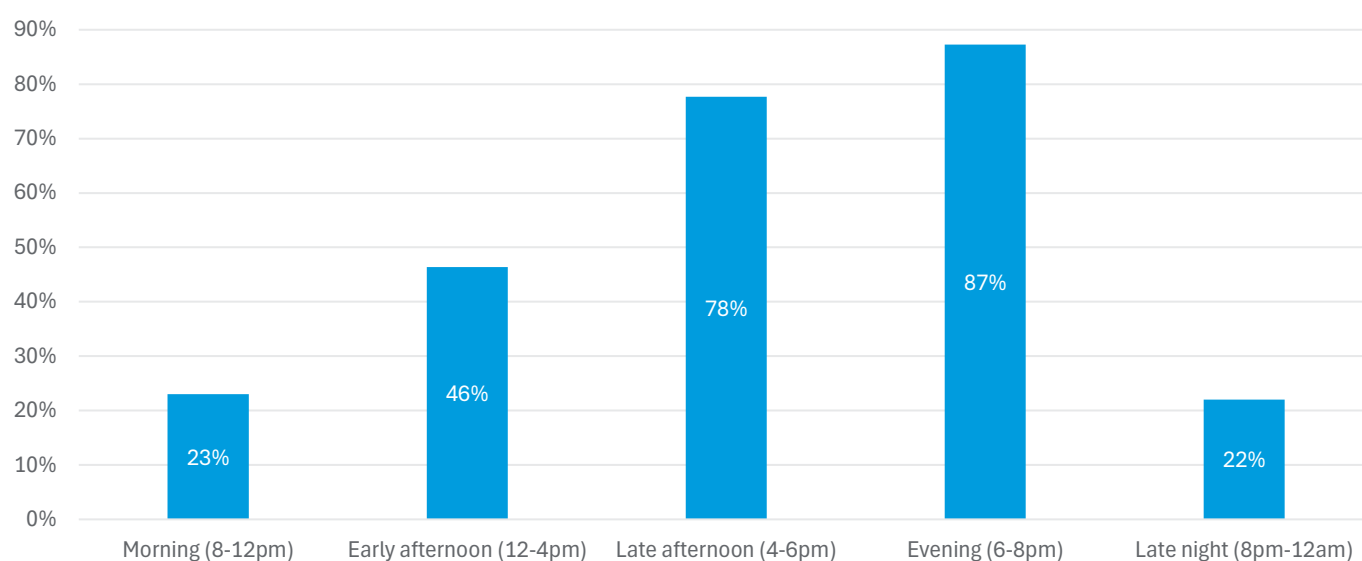
Base: 34 (London), 60 (South of England), 40 (Midlands), 103 (North of England), 16 (East of England), 26 (Wales).

Note: 1) \* indicates that chi-square test result is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

➤ **Youth clubs are open at times when violence and crime is more likely to occur amongst children.**

Figure 13 details weekday operating hours in the survey respondents' youth clubs. The majority (87%) are open in the evening from 6pm to 8 pm on weekdays, while some operate in the morning from 8am to midday and late night from 8pm to midnight, 23% and 22% respectively.

**Figure 13. Youth clubs' operation hours on weekdays**



Source: Youth sector survey Q7c.

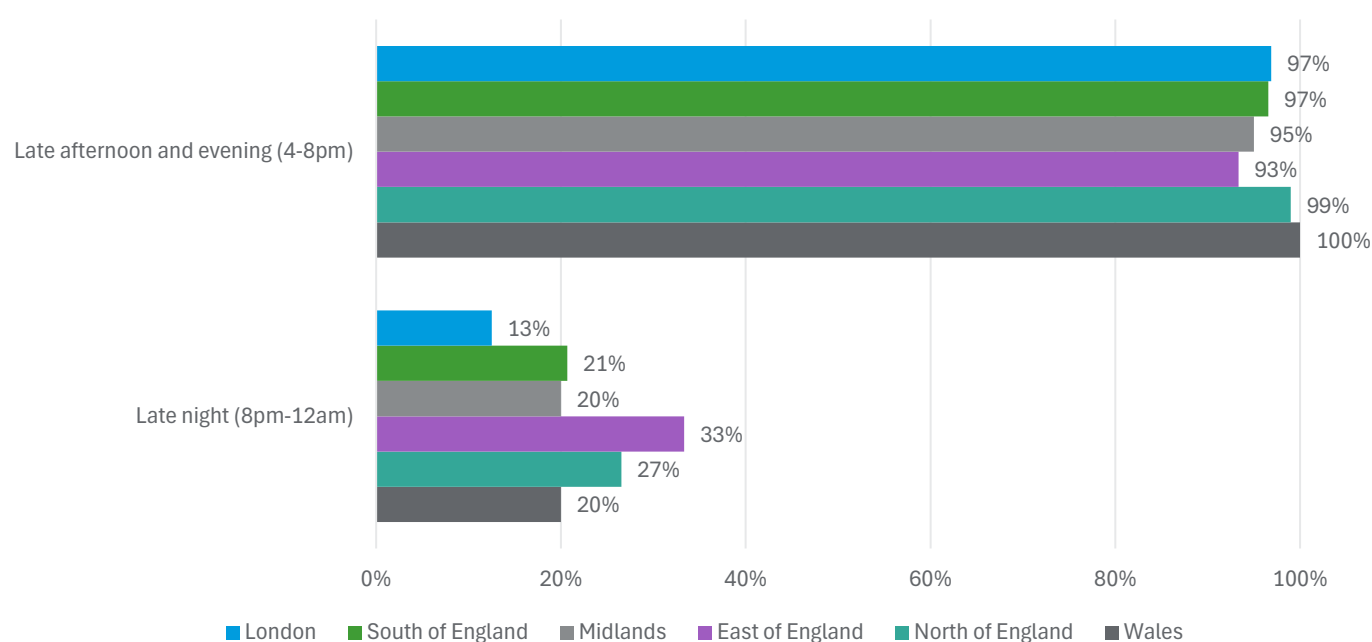
Base: 291.

Note: Percentages do not sum up to 100% because youth clubs may operate during multiple time periods on weekdays.

Figure 14 below demonstrates that most youth clubs surveyed are open between 4-8pm in the evening on weekdays, with all of youth clubs in the Wales open between these hours. All other regions also reported high levels of operation, with no region falling below 93%. However, operation in the late evening between 8pm-12am was considerably less common across regions. The East of England (lowest base among the 6 regions) reported the highest share of late evening openings at 33%, opposed to 13% in London.

Some youth workers interviewed reflected that youth clubs often adapt their opening hours to periods when violence and crime are more likely to take place. With youth clubs adapt by staying open later during dark evenings to provide a safe alternative to the streets, and by maintaining informal contact with children through platforms like Instagram. These strategies aim to ensure that children feel supported, connected, and safe - key factors in reducing their involvement in violence.

**Figure 14. Youth clubs' operating hours on weekdays by region**



Source: Youth sector survey Q4 and Q7c.

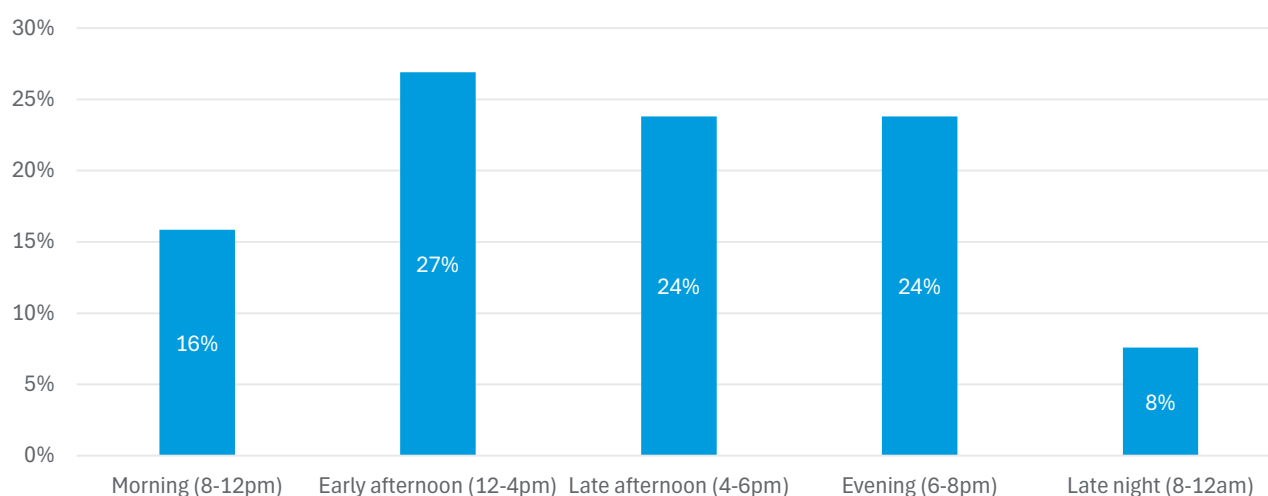
Base: 32 (London), 58 (South of England), 40 (Midlands), 98 (North of England), 15 (East of England), 25 (Wales).

Note: Multiple response options - sub-group percentages do not add up to 100% because a youth club can be open on multiple time periods during weekdays.

When comparing this to weekend, Figure 16 below highlights that the hours of operation are more limited within the youth clubs surveyed. Weekend evening (6-8pm) operations were highest in the Midlands and North of England (75% and 63% respectively), while East of England reported the lowest level at 33%. Late night (8pm-12am) openings were far less common across all regions, with only Wales (38%) reporting any notable activity. The East of England, in particular, reported no late-night weekend operations at all.

Figure 15 displays weekend opening hours in the survey respondents' youth clubs. One quarter of the youth clubs are open in the early afternoon, late afternoon, and/or evening on the weekend. A minority are open in the morning (16%) and in the late evening (8%).

**Figure 15. Youth clubs' operating hours on the weekend**

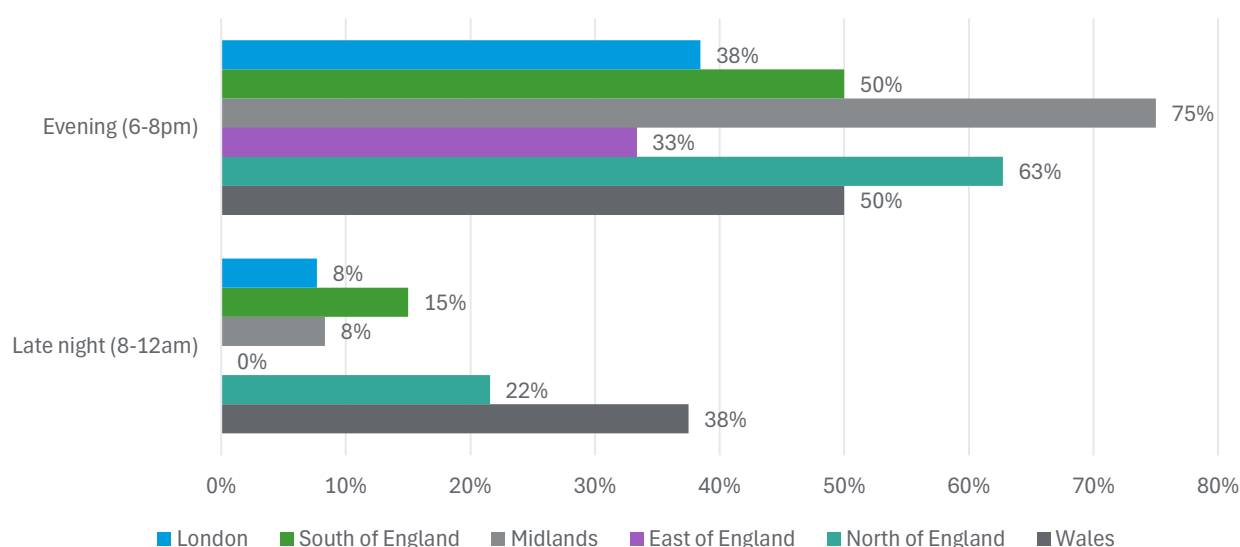


Source: Youth sector survey Q7d.

Base: 290.

Note: Percentages do not sum up to 100% because youth clubs may operate during multiple time periods on the weekend.

**Figure 16. Youth clubs' operating hours on the weekend by region**



Source: Youth sector survey Q4 and Q7d.

Base: 13 (London), 20 (South of England), 12 (Midlands), 51 (North of England), 3 (East of England), 8 (Wales).

Note: 1) Multiple response options - sub-group percentages do not add up to 100% because a youth club can be open on multiple time periods during the weekend. 2) Base sizes too small for statistical testing in nearly all regions.

Interviews with youth workers highlighted that youth clubs opening hours vary significantly across different areas, shaped by the needs of children, their families, and the local context. Most interviews with youth workers noted that youth clubs tend to open from around 4:30-5pm coinciding with when children get off the school bus - so they can go straight to the youth clubs. Sessions typically run until around 6-8pm, depending on age groups and family routines, allowing enough time for homework or other responsibilities after sessions have ended.

*The reason we start at five is because there are children who leave school and come in waiting outside. There was an increase in antisocial behaviour because they were hanging about in the town centre. We got in touch with the police, and their recommendation was to change our times. We did, and that has remained. We still get children in the town centre from four, but it has improved the situation. (Youth worker interview)*

Additionally, some youth worker interviews highlighted that youth work often starts before formal session hours as many youth clubs maintain an open-door policy enabling children to still speak with youth workers outside of session hours.

Youth workers also noted that weekend sessions are particularly beneficial for children who may not have access to activities such as sports or dance classes, which are often available to more affluent families. Youth clubs open during weekends, help to provide a safe, supportive space at times when many children might otherwise be at home or on the streets. However, many respondents shared that they are currently limited in expanding weekend hours further due to cost and resourcing constraints so are often run on an ad-hoc basis.

*Weekends we tried to, but the funding is tight, and we can't stretch it. If I end up on a Saturday, then we'd have to close on Monday. It would be really awkward. We do special occasions. If there's something going on, we can open up on a Saturday night, but it's not regular. (Youth worker interview)*

Youth workers were able to engage children in one-to-one sessions during the day and support their transition into peer-based activities in the evening. By maintaining trusted relationships across different contexts and times of day, these centres offered a more holistic approach to support and prevention.

*When mentoring finishes, they are handed over to the youth workers, which softens the transition. When a young person comes through the door, they are introduced and allocated a youth worker... The emphasis is on continuous support without overwhelming the young person. (Youth worker interview)*

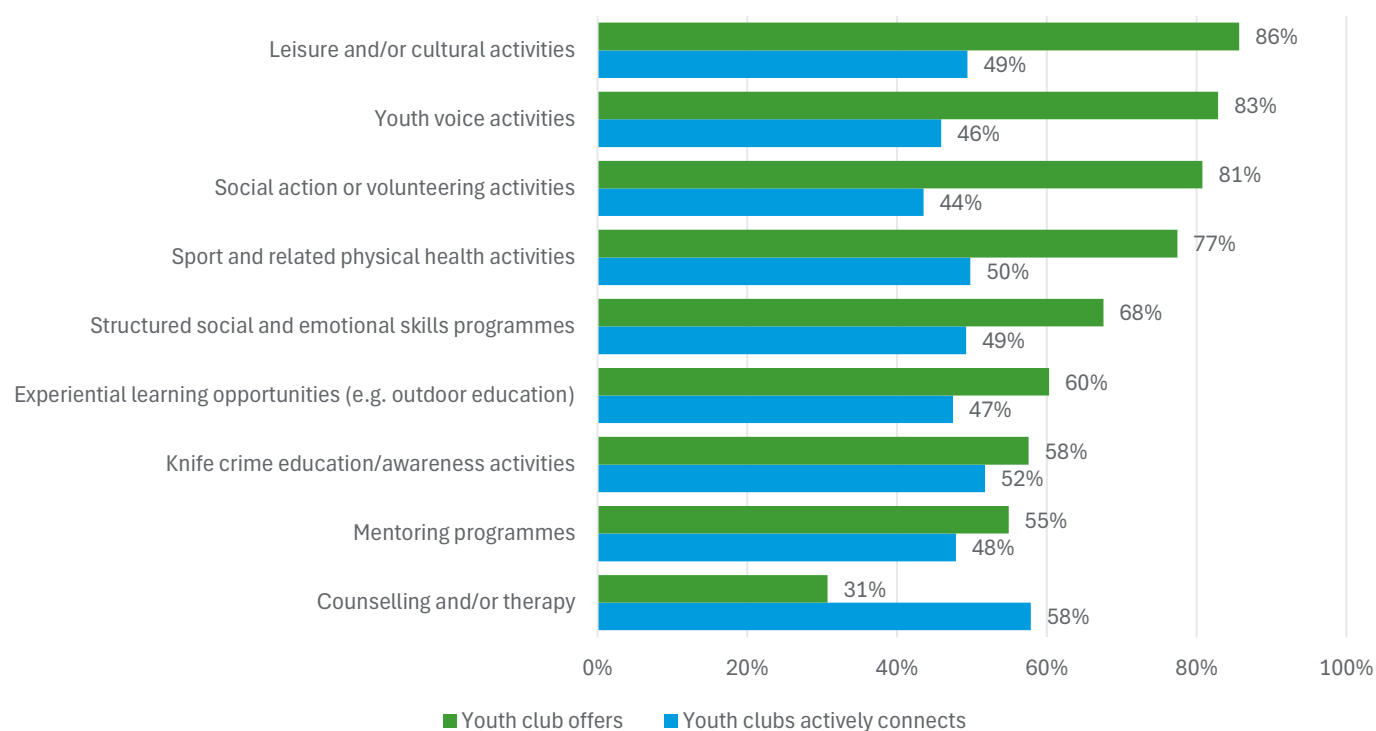
While some youth clubs adapt their schedules to address local needs, such as antisocial behaviour or higher risks of violence, many struggle to maintain consistent weekend sessions due to insufficient resources. As a result, weekend activities are often ad-hoc and contingent on special occasions or short-term funding, leaving a gap in continuous support for children in communities that may benefit most.

### **3.4. Do youth clubs enable children to take part in positive activities (e.g. arts, sports), social skills training, or psychological therapy? (RQ1c)**

#### **➤ Youth clubs enable children to take part in a range of positive activities.**

Youth clubs offer a range of activities to children, with leisure or culture activities being the most frequently offered or signposted. The majority of the survey respondents (86%) deliver leisure or culture activities, and over three quarters (77%) deliver sport and related physical health activities. Half of the youth clubs actively connect children with external providers for these two types of activities. In contrast, counselling or psychological therapy is the least commonly offered activity by youth clubs, with 31% of survey respondents providing it directly. However, a larger proportion (58%) of survey respondents reported actively signposting children to external counselling or therapy providers.

**Figure 17. Activities offered or signposted by youth clubs**



Source: Youth sector survey Q8.

Base: 259 (Leisure and/or cultural activities), 257 (Sport and related physical health activities), 255 (Social action or volunteering activities), 257 (Youth voice activities), 255 (Mentoring programmes), 257 (Experiential learning opportunities (e.g. outdoor education)), 256 (Structured social and emotional skills programmes), 257 (Knife crime education/awareness activities), 254 (Counselling and/or therapy).

This was corroborated by interviews with youth workers and sessions with sectors leaders. They noted that youth clubs deliver a range of positive activities while also supporting the development of social skills and, in some cases, personal growth and therapeutic engagement. From physical pursuits such as football, boxing, roller-skating, and multi-sports to creative activities such as crafting, painting, karaoke, and gardening, clubs cater to diverse interests, often informed by consultation with children. Youth workers cited examples of activities that not only provide fun but also act as entry points for deeper engagement and learning on a range of different topics.

*We've taken them on trips, including canoeing and high ropes, and done arts and crafts. We've had people come in to talk about health, and I've done work around gangs and youth violence. The youth club is now their own, and these children have moved away from anti-social behaviour. They understand the risks and consequences of their actions. (Youth worker interview)*

*The types and range of activities are a real strength we've seen. (Commissioning Manager, Young People's Services – Local authority)*

In addition, youth clubs foster informal learning, relationship-building, and life skills development. Focus groups with children found that hanging out with friends, playing games, singing karaoke, playing on games consoles, and sharing food as meaningful parts of children's experience at youth clubs. Notably, children participants during focus groups often cited the opportunity to make friends as being the initial driver for joining, and the subsequent driver for continuing to attend youth clubs was to maintain these friendships.

Youth workers reported that a variety of activities (such as boxing, music production, and skating) contributed to building relationships with children attending youth clubs. In addition to recreational programming, some youth clubs have incorporated structured support focused on emotional and psychological wellbeing. These youth clubs may provide one-to-one support, informal therapeutic sessions,

and referrals to specialist services like CAMHS, counselling centres, and mental health practitioners. In certain instances, youth workers are trained to deliver basic therapeutic interventions under clinical guidance. For example, one youth worker described supporting a young person with autism and anger outbursts:

*We started doing one-to-one work with her, looking at different coping strategies and stress management. We made stress balls, tried yoga, and meditation... Now this young person is different when she comes to the centre weekly. (Youth worker interview)*

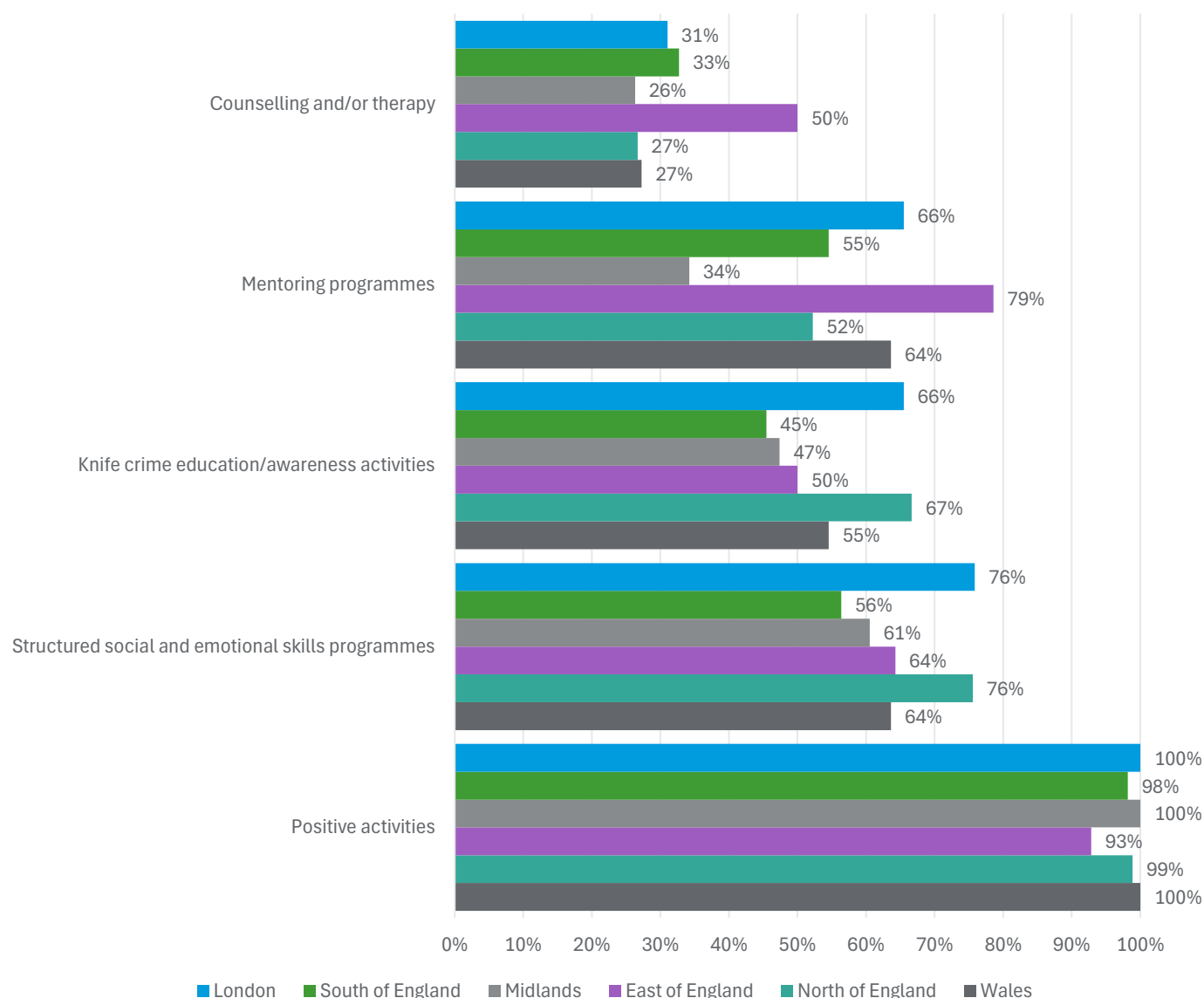
Some youth clubs developed partnerships to host external providers on-site, improving accessibility for young people who face barriers to formal services. Structured programmes such as “Music to My Ears” and forest school initiatives have also been used to engage vulnerable youth in therapeutic and skill-building activities.

➤ **Variation exists in the types of activities delivered and signposted by youth clubs.**

As shown in Figure 18, positive activities were the most commonly delivered by youth clubs, with at least 93% of youth clubs surveyed in every region offering them. These positive activities include leisure and/or cultural activities, youth voice activities, social action or volunteering activities, sport and related physical health activities, and experiential learning opportunities (e.g. outdoor education). Structured social and emotional skills programmes, and knife crime education /awareness activities were most common in London and North of England (76%, 66%-67% respectively). Mentoring programmes were most commonly delivered by youth clubs in East of England (79%), followed by those in London (66%). In contrast, counselling and therapy services were the least commonly offered across most regions. East of England, despite the smallest sample, had the highest proportion offering them (50%).



**Figure 18. Activities offered by youth clubs, by region**



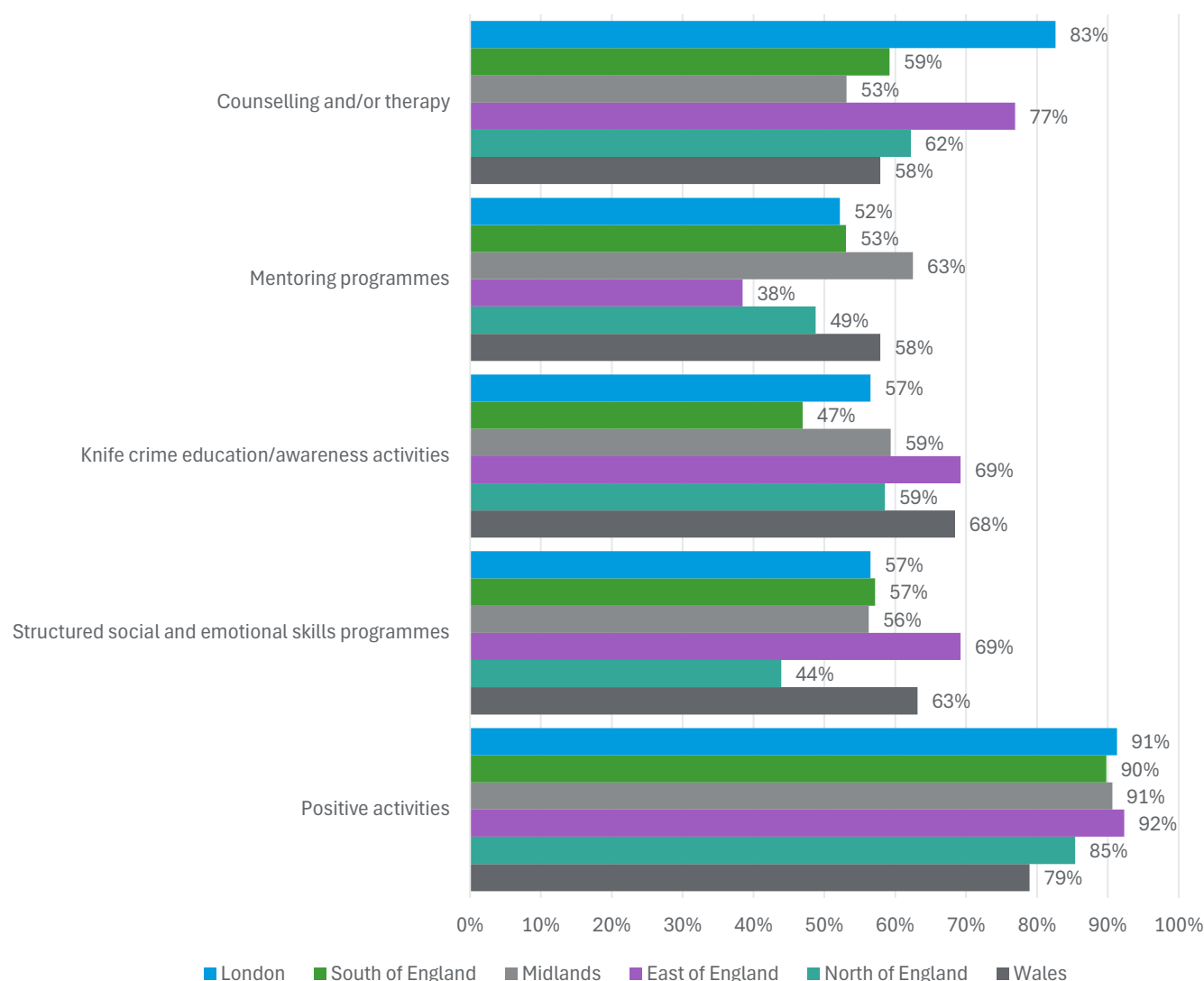
*Source:* Youth sector survey Q4 and Q8.

*Base:* 29 (London), 55 (South of England), 38 (Midlands), 14 (East of England), 90 (North of England), 22 (Wales).

*Note:* Multiple response options - sub-group percentages do not add up to 100% because a youth club can offer multiple activities.

Figure 19 shows how youth clubs connect children to external providers for these same activities. Positive activities remained the most frequently signposted, with the highest levels in East of England (92%, lowest base) and the lowest levels in Wales (79%). Counselling and therapy services were another area where strong signposting was evident, with London having the highest proportion actively connecting children to such activities at 83%. Structured social and emotional skills programmes, and knife crime education /awareness activities were mostly signposted in East of England (69%) and Wales (63% and 68% respectively). The highest share of youth clubs in Midlands (63%) reported signposting children to mentoring programmes.

**Figure 19. Activities that youth clubs actively connect children to services, by region**



Source: Youth sector survey Q4 and Q8.

Base: 23 (London), 49 (South of England), 32 (Midlands), 13 (East of England), 82 (North of England), 19 (Wales).

Note: Multiple response options - sub-group percentages do not add up to 100% because a youth club can offer multiple activities.

### 3.5. What is the ideal staff ratio between staff (paid and volunteer) and children in youth clubs? (RQ1f)

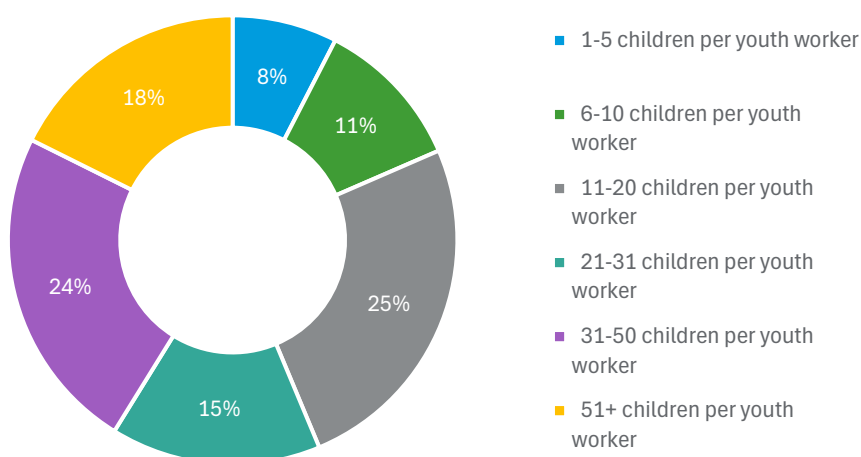
There is no formal guidance on supervision ratios for organisations outside of education or early years sectors. However, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) best practice guidance suggests that at least two adults should be present when working with or supervising children. Depending on the needs and abilities of children and the nature of activities the NSPCC suggests the following ratios as a minimum for adults working with children (NSPCC 2024):

- 9 - 12 years – one adult to eight children; and
- 13 - 18 years – one adult to ten children.

- **Over a 12-month period, the ratio children per youth worker was higher than the NSPCC best practice recommendations.**

Figure 20 illustrates the distribution of children-to-youth worker ratios. These ratios were calculated by RSM using survey data – precisely by dividing the total number of children engaged by a youth club over the past 12 months by the total number of youth workers at a youth club, including both staff and volunteers. This indicated that 25% of youth clubs had ratios of 11–20 children per youth worker. An additional 24% had higher ratios of 31–50 children per youth worker, while 18% noted ratios exceeding 51 children per youth worker. In comparison, lower ratios were less frequently observed: 11% of clubs had ratios of 6–10 children per youth worker, and fewer than 10% had ratios of 1–5 children per youth worker. These figures are considerably higher than NSPCC best practice recommendations, which suggest one adult for every eight to ten children. It is important to note that youth worker survey did not ask about the number of individual children an individual worker personally engaged with. Consequently, these findings may not accurately represent the number of children each youth worker directly supervises or how supervision is structured across various activities.

**Figure 20. Distribution of children per youth worker**



Source: Youth sector survey Q15a, Q15b, and Q16.

Base: 119.

- **Youth workers felt that staff to children ratios of 1:8 or 1:10 were sufficient to manage youth club sessions safely, though many expressed a preference for lower ratios, such as 1:5, to better support relationship-building.**

Most youth workers interviewed felt that a staff to children ratio of 1:8 or 1:10 per session was manageable for ensuring participant safety, although this contrasts with the survey data displayed in Figure 20. Furthermore, interviews with youth workers shared that they were frequently stretched to cover high numbers, sometimes with as many as 12 to 14 children per youth worker. Age, activity type, setting, and the needs of the children - especially those with neurodiverse profiles - also affect appropriate ratios. To build meaningful relationships, smaller ratios were seen as essential. A ratio of 1:5 allowed for more one-on-one time and deeper engagement. As one youth worker explained,

*The smaller the ratio, such as five or six to one staff to children, then you get more meaningful time in terms of having conversations, learning from each other, and finding out the real issues impacting children's lives. Ideally, you want that ratio to be as low as possible, which allows you to have more breakthroughs in terms of understanding the children and finding out how we can help them. That would be helpful, but it's not always possible. (Youth worker interview)*

Additionally, some clubs have formal peer leadership programmes with defined roles whereas others give children tasks on a more informal / ad hoc basis. These clubs utilise “peer leaders” to manage larger groups.

*We've got a core group of about six children who are quite mature. A few of them are very sensible. We might go to these children and say, 'I'm giving you this message, you let the wider group know.' So, we get them to come on board to help us manage the larger group. Sometimes it's relying on those children who are like leaders, a bit more senior and responsible. Without them, we would really struggle at times.*  
(Youth worker interview)

In high-risk areas, staffing is not just about engagement but also safety. Staffing ratios was about safeguarding, crisis response, and maintaining a secure environment. Youth clubs have to adapt their staffing strategies to in response to safety concerns for instance, using a staff member as a “security guard” at the entrance to act as a deterrent following the Southport attack in 2024<sup>9</sup>.

*“We try to have 1:8 in [youth club]. We know they [children] have the potential to carry weapons because we've had disclosures of that before, where they stashed their watered-down bleach or acid before coming into the youth group. Ideally, I would prefer a lower staffing ratio, but we have CCTV outside. One person goes out, and there's a public presence as well. Ideally, it would be more, but I'm held by my funders.* (Youth worker interview)

### 3.6. Conclusion: How well are youth clubs in England and Wales structured and operated to prevent violence amongst children? (RQ1)

#### ➤ There is variation in the way that youth clubs are structured and operationally set-up across England and Wales.

Youth clubs across England and Wales vary widely in how they are structured and operated, with differences shaped by funding, staffing, geography, and local community needs. Some areas benefit from long-term funding and employ professionally qualified youth workers, which supports consistent service delivery and effective planning. In contrast, many clubs rely on short-term funding or volunteers with only basic training, leading to instability and inadequate support for children.

*I think the problem is that in England and Wales, the way youth clubs are run varies from area to area. In Rochdale, all our youth clubs are run by qualified youth workers, and to me, there's a significant difference there.* (Youth worker interview)

Urban and rural areas face different challenges. For instance, rural communities often lack any provision, while urban areas may have multiple clubs tailored to specific groups. Cultural needs also influence provision, such as separate sessions for boys and girls in some communities. Youth clubs operate in a range of settings, including council-owned buildings, community centres, schools, and mobile vans, each with its own challenges. Successful clubs are those that are closely connected to their communities, build trusted relationships, and adapt their services based on local needs and children’s voices:

*There is so much variety in youth clubs across the country, and their strength lies in responding to the local picture.* (Youth worker interview)

#### ➤ Youth clubs across England and Wales are uniquely positioned to prevent violence among children through youth-led, locally responsive approaches. However, their impact is undermined by short-term funding, inconsistent operations, and lack of sustained investment.

<sup>9</sup> In July 2024, a knife attack at a children’s dance workshop in Southport left three girls dead and several others injured. The attacker, a 17-year-old male, was arrested at the scene and later sentenced to life in prison. The incident shocked the nation and led to calls for stronger safeguards against non-ideological threats.

Most interviews with youth workers and sector leaders felt that youth clubs were able to support violence prevention among children with many delivering youth-led, age-appropriate, and locally responsive approaches to youth work.

However, interviews with youth workers and focus groups with sector leaders also noted that the ability of youth clubs to operate consistently and effectively is hindered by persistent structural and operational challenges. A key issue is the reliance on short-term funding, which limits continuity, planning, and the ability to build trusted relationships over time.

*They do the work for the amount of funding they've been given - for example, three years - and then they're gone. It's not OK because children need consistency when working with trusted adults. (Senior Manager, Young People – VRU)*

*There is so much variety in youth clubs across the country, and their strength lies in responding to the local picture. A mature youth club in one area might have been there for 50 years, dealing with a stable community and welcoming the same people. It has trusted staff and consistent programming, responding to local needs. In a rapidly changing urban area, a youth club might be more recent, responding to a newly arrived community that might not feel welcome in existing provisions. There is a lot of variety in youth services, and this variety is its strength. (Youth Work Project Lead - Violence Reduction Partnership VRP)*

Overall, this chapter illustrated that youth clubs tend to be located in areas with higher levels of need and are often open at the times when children are most at risk. Many provide a wide range of positive activities. But provision remains inconsistent. Local variation in staffing, funding, and availability means not all children have access to high-quality, well-resourced support. The next chapter explores which children attend youth clubs, and what features of provision help foster meaningful engagement - particularly among those at risk of, or already involved in, violence.

## 4. Attendance and engagement

### Key findings

- Youth workers described how community-based youth clubs, with accessible locations and youth-led programming, often fostered greater attendance - suggesting that these elements help create a sense of ownership, belonging, and ease of access for children.
- Children were seen to attend youth clubs primarily when friends or relatives also attended, highlighting the role of social networks in driving participation.
- Children valued youth clubs as safe, welcoming spaces where they felt emotionally supported and free from judgments – this was felt to be particularly important for those facing instability elsewhere.
- Youth workers and children highlighted that the club's proximity and ease of travel influenced attendance, especially where public transport options were limited.
- Offering food, leisure activities, and informal conversation helped build initial trust, especially for children with limited support at home. These touchpoints often evolved into deeper engagement.
- Trusting relationships between staff and children were seen as central to ongoing attendance. Many youth workers estimated that the majority of attendees sought support or advice beyond activities. Children built trust with individual staff rather than teams, often preferring staff who reflected their own backgrounds, showed consistency, and offered informal support.
- Anonymous or indirect communication tools, such as whiteboards or suggestion boxes, helped children raise concerns in low-pressure ways, particularly those with anxiety or low confidence. Co-production approaches (such as letting children shape rules or suggest activities) were thought to increase buy-in and deepen relationships between children and staff.
- Children from minority ethnic backgrounds were more likely to feel welcome and engaged where staff shared their lived experience and clubs celebrated cultural events or collaborated with local faith institutions. Barriers to inclusion for minority ethnic children included concerns about racism, cultural taboos limiting open discussion, and underrepresentation in staff or leadership teams.

## 4.1. Introduction

This chapter explores what encourages children at risk of or involved in violence to attend youth clubs, and what supports meaningful engagement once they do. It draws on survey responses from youth workers, as well as interviews and focus groups with youth workers and children. The analysis examines the characteristics of youth clubs that promote attendance, engagement, and trust-building, and identifies key barriers and enablers to inclusion and accessibility.

## 4.2. What characteristics of youth clubs encourage children at risk of/involved in violence to attend them, and what characteristics facilitate meaningful engagement amongst those children? (RQ2)

### ➤ Children tend to attend youth clubs if someone close to them also attends.

Youth worker interviews highlighted that children often attend youth clubs because their friends or family members (i.e., siblings, relatives) attend youth clubs. This indicates that social bonds and peer-led motivation foster a socially comfortable atmosphere, especially when the youth club is closely connected to and integrated within communities.

*The majority of children come because their friends come, so it is very much a social thing.” (Youth worker interview)*

*Children have seen their friends come here, and older brothers, sisters, and relatives also want to be part of that. (Youth worker interview)*

### ➤ Community-based clubs with accessible locations and youth-led programming foster strong attendance by making young people feel ownership, inclusion, and ease of access.

Clubs embedded in local communities benefit from word-of-mouth and shared school ties. Accessibility also plays a role. For instance, clubs near transport hubs are more likely to attract regular attendance, while long or complex journeys can deter it. Youth worker interviewees noted that some children depended on parental transport due to the difficulty or length of public transport journeys, limiting regular attendance. However, other youth worker interviewees indicated that many of children attended those youth clubs located near bus stations. It can be, thus, assumed that geographic accessibility is linked to participation, motivating children to participate when they can travel to them easily.

*If I wanted to get here by bus it would take at least three or four different bus trips – and I would not be bothered doing that. (Child focus group)*

*We are down at the bus station, and we offer what was originally planned to help with antisocial behaviour in the bus station. We were given a space to create a youth club and that has had huge attendances. (Youth worker interview)*

Group activities such as cooking, quizzes, and outdoor learning also encourage attendance, especially when children have ownership over programming and rules. Youth workers interviewed described that when children were involved in shaping the sessions and establishing rules, they were more engaged and take greater ownership of their experience. As a result of co-production, children are more motivated to attend youth clubs. By acting on children’s feedback and attendance, youth clubs can ensure they remain relevant, inclusive, and supportive of individual identities.

*Building a den, lighting a fire... they will begin conversations that our youth workers can then develop. (Youth worker interview)*

*We have got a young person’s charter that they make the rules themselves... so that you all feel safe. (Youth worker interview)*



*The other thing we do is the youngsters make the rules. We have got a youth committee who make the rules, and they can change them. (Youth worker interview)*

*I like that we're asked for our views on what we want to do, and then the workers make that happen most of the time. They're thoughtful and put time into the sessions. (Child focus group)*

- **Youth clubs are perceived as safe, supportive, and positive environments by the children who attend them. Ensuring that children feel both physically and emotionally safe - being welcomed, supported, and not judged – Is crucial for maintaining their engagement in youth clubs.**

Both interviews with youth workers and focus groups with children indicated that children are drawn to youth clubs because it offers a safe, inclusive space where they feel accepted, welcome, and supported. This is especially important for those lacking reliable support at home or in educational settings. Feelings of physical and emotional safety are critical to sustained engagement.

*I always feel safe because I can rely on the workers to keep me safe. (Child focus group)*

*It is a safe place for children to come and not be judged, and work with a trusted adult. (Youth worker interview)*

*They know that the space is there for them, so they will come to it...They will walk out if they have had a bad day, but they will come back the next day and apologise, saying they were just in a bad mood last night. (Youth worker interview)*

Several children in focus groups noted that parents viewed youth clubs as a preferable alternative to other forms of after school clubs such as a football club. Some respondents also shared that despite it being their first visit, they had a positive impression of the club. One child in particular noted:

*My dad didn't want me to go to the football club after school and found this club for me instead. It's my first visit here but seems good. (Child focus group)*

Having spent some time at their youth club, another child shared that:

*I feel very safe because I can speak about what's on my mind while knowing I'm with responsible adults. (Child focus group)*

Additionally, children appreciated the practice of leaving the club together, which enhanced their sense of safety while walking home. However, there were some concerns during the winter months when it gets darker earlier, as a few participants felt less safe traveling to and from the club during this time. Overall, the youth clubs were seen as a supportive and safe environment by its attendees.

- **Targeted outreach and providing a safer alternative attract children at risk of or involved in violence to youth clubs. Meanwhile, forming trusting relationships with youth workers, consistent and tailored support sustains engagement for these children.**

Youth clubs play a vital role in attracting children who are at risk of or involved in violence. Peer-led motivation is particularly powerful in communities with strong social bonds. Clubs also serve as safe alternatives to unsafe environments, such as areas with drug activity. Targeted outreach and location-based programming are key—clubs operating near hotspots for antisocial behaviour or in areas of high deprivation are more likely to attract those most in need.

Offering food, safe space, and leisure activities such as boxing, graffiti art provided a crucial initial hook for children, especially those from unstable home environments. These informal incentives helped children develop a routine of regular attendance, which could then deepen into more meaningful engagement. Interviewees noted that once children became familiar with youth workers or the club environment, they were more likely to attend regularly and engage in deeper ways, including disclosing personal needs and participating in structured activities.

*The relationship between a vulnerable young person and their youth worker is often more important than it is with mainstream young people. (Youth worker interview)*

*Play Monopoly, eat food, play card games, play the 'wolf game', hang around with friends, develop life skills, sing karaoke. (Child focus group)*

One youth worker in particular shared an example of good practice within a youth club offering open access provision, demonstrating how consistent engagement, empathy, and trust-building can transform the lives of children. It highlights the importance of connecting emotionally and shows how small, yet consistent acts of care can foster hope, aspiration, and meaningful change in challenging circumstances.

*Many of the children I work with come from single-parent families and live in housing that's far from suitable. One case that's stayed with me is of two brothers who lived in a ground-floor flat—multi-occupancy accommodation. Their bedroom had nothing but a mattress on bare floorboards. Their mother, her boyfriend, and their new baby all shared a sofa bed in the lounge, which doubled as the kitchen. It was cramped, chaotic, and offered no real sense of home. These boys were constantly getting into trouble. And honestly, I understood why. When there's nothing to go home to, no comfort, no privacy, no peace. It's easy to get pulled into the wrong crowd or make poor choices. Their environment gave them no reason to believe in anything better. That's where we came in. Through our youth work sessions, we didn't just manage their behaviour, we gave them something to look forward to. We gave them a reason to believe in themselves. Bit by bit, we helped them find hope and build aspirations. It wasn't about grand gestures; it was about consistency, showing up, and listening. (Youth worker interview)*

#### 4.3. To what extent do children who attend youth clubs develop trusting relationships with staff (whether volunteers or professionals)? (RQ2a)

##### ➤ Youth club attendance is driven by meaningful engagement rather than mere presence.

The responses from youth workers reveal that a significant proportion of children attending youth clubs do so for more than just socialising - they actively seek support, advice, or direction. While estimates shared during interviews vary, but many place this figure between 60% and 70%, with some suggesting even higher engagement depending on the activities on offer. Several youth workers noted:

*Around 70% of our children attend because they know we will support them. (Youth worker interview)*

*I'd say 60%. It's a high number that come for additional support. (Youth worker interview)*

However, not all children engage with youth workers in a meaningful way, as some attend primarily to socialise with friends or participate in activities without seeking guidance. As one worker noted:

*They'll talk to youth workers, but they're not seeking advice... they're there to see their friends. (Youth worker interview)*

##### ➤ Listening and responding to children's views without judgments can help them feel safe and foster trust early in their journey.

In the focus groups, children consistently described youth club staff as approachable, kind, and supportive. They valued being heard and seeing their views reflected in youth club activities. These qualities made them feel comfortable disclosing sensitive issues and fostered meaningful connection. Youth workers are more likely to gain and sustain trust from children if they could listen to children with empathy rather than judgement.

*I like that we were asked for our views on what we want to do, and then the workers make that happen most of the time. They are thoughtful and put time into the sessions. (Child focus group)*

*I feel very safe because I can speak about what is on my mind while knowing I am with responsible adults. (Child focus group)*

Youth worker interviews and sessions with sector leaders also acknowledged that children respond positively to environments where they felt safe, listened to, and not judged. Demonstrating attentiveness during early interactions help children feel welcomed and emotionally safe, particularly on their first visits. Providing quiet spaces and flexible interactions is crucial to cultivate this sense of security and reinforce the perception of youth clubs as youth-centred, supportive environments, especially those children from chaotic or complex backgrounds.

*Youth practitioners coupled with a safe space are vital. Many youth clubs do detach and outreach work, which is about going to where a young person is." (Senior Manager, Young People – VRU)*

*We are a trusted professional relationship they choose to have... they tell us a lot more than they tell anyone else. (Youth worker interview)*

- **Youth workers reported that trusted relationships with staff built emotional security and encouraged attendance, fostering trust through sustained interactions.**

*The value of the relationship between a vulnerable young person and their youth worker is often more important than it is with our mainstream children. (Youth worker interview)*

*Once we build the relationship, it's the relationship they come back for. (Youth worker interview)*

Youth worker also noted that participation tended to peak between ages 6 and 15, before declining due to pressures such as exams. However, older children were seen to re-engage during times of personal difficulty, gesturing to the enduring value of these relationships.

*I think one of the biggest things is the relationship they have with the staff that keeps them coming back. Children come for a period of time, and they might drop off for a little bit, but when there is a crisis or they feel a need, they will come back. Some might drop off at 16 or 17 because they start college, make new friends, or start an apprenticeship. While they might drop off coming regularly, after six months they might drop in because they want to update the staff on what's going on in their lives. (Youth worker interview)*

These views were broadly echoed by children across focus groups. Many described youth workers as approachable, kind, supportive, and “like a friend and a professional” (Child focus group) who could be trusted with worries or personal issues. children valued that staff were non-judgemental, welcoming, and took time to listen and act on their views.

*They're thoughtful and put time into the sessions. (Child focus group)*

*If you are worried, they cheer you up. (Child focus group)*

*I feel very safe because I can speak about what's on my mind while knowing I'm with responsible adults. (Child focus group)*

- **Youth workers also described how trust often developed gradually through light-touch interactions, such as games or shared meals, rather than formal conversations.**

This method was thought to help reduce pressure on children to discuss personal issues when they felt ready.

*Around 70% of our children attend because they know we will support them. (Youth worker interview)*

*Many children do not feel they can trust us, so we have to build that rapport with them initially. (Youth worker interview)*

Children supported this, reporting that they felt free to talk to youth workers when they needed to, though some could not recall specific examples. Some mentioned having a mentor or knowing they could confide in staff without being judged - especially if they had done something wrong.

*I could go and talk to the youth workers about it and not feel judged. (Child focus group)*

➤ **Children often seek advice from youth club staff during informal activities, facilitate deeper conversation.**

Youth workers noted that children often sought advice during informal activities, discussing sensitive topics like mental health and relationships. These organic interactions served to foster psychological safety, thus making it easier for children to open up.

*They do ask us for advice, and it comes in many different forms. (Youth worker interview)*

*They come to engage in the activity. In my experience, children would not go to a youth worker and say, 'I need a bit of advice on this', but while a young person is doing an activity and while you're talking to them. This is something that our mental health practitioner has learned. (Youth worker interview)*

There was consensus among youth worker and children interviewed that children develop trusting relationships on an individual basis and that these are not equally distributed across staff at a youth club. Children were seen to often form connections with specific staff due to personal relatability (e.g., staff with similar experience or background), consistency, and demeanour.

*It can vary. The children have their favourite staff or the staff that they feel most comfortable talking to. If they know that a male member of staff is doing arts and crafts, they might not do the arts and crafts, but they might go to sit at that table and speak to that member of staff. If they have a particular female member of staff in what we would class as our quiet room, they might go and sit in there and talk to them. It's either based on the staff member or the space. (Youth worker interview)*

➤ **Anonymous communication helps children feel more comfortable talking to youth club staff.**

A few youth workers noted that youth clubs employ creative and low-pressure methods to encourage communication, such as anonymous note systems or discussion prompts. These alternatives were thought to support free expression, especially for those who are less confident or prefer not to engage directly.

*We use a whiteboard to provoke discussion with children and use this around local topics. For example, last week due to a spate of anti-social behaviour, we asked children if they felt safe. This then enabled us to offer support, guidance and advice. (Youth worker interview)*

*We have things like boxes where they can leave anonymous notes if they do not feel comfortable approaching a youth worker directly. (Youth worker interview)*

It was noted that such approaches can broaden access to emotional support and are particularly valuable for children with anxiety, as they offer a less intimidating way for children to express their thoughts and feelings. These methods remove the pressure of face-to-face conversations, which can be overwhelming, especially for children who are at the initial stages of engagement or are unsure how to express their emotions.

#### 4.4. What characteristics of youth clubs encourage children from minority ethnic backgrounds to attend them, and what facilitates them to engage meaningfully? (RQ2c)

##### Beneficial characteristics

It should be noted that, as the focus groups conducted as part of this study comprised many children from minority ethnic backgrounds, general motivations for attending and participating in youth clubs - such as seeking safety, being heard, and contributing to programme decisions - are also applicable to these participants and should be considered alongside any additional insights specific to their experiences (refer to Section 4.2).

##### ➤ **Creating environments that prioritise safety, openness, and mutual respect helps encourage honest dialogue and identity exploration.**

Youth clubs allowed children to discuss sensitive or marginalised topics without fear of judgement. Children are more likely to explore aspects of their identity that might otherwise be stigmatised elsewhere when youth workers create such safe and respectful environments.

*We created a safe space for children to sit around a table and discuss both sides of the argument... It gives children the confidence to have that discussion without going on social media and entering a rabbit hole." (Youth worker interview)*

However, youth worker interviews highlighted that children from minority ethnic communities are more likely to engage when they see their cultural or lived experiences reflected in the staff team. This is because relatable role models help build credibility and foster trust, making it easier for children to discuss personal or sensitive topics at the youth club.

*The workers represent the community they come from. Children can relate to that because of shared experiences, whether cultural or religious. (Youth worker interview)*

Youth workers who demonstrate curiosity, openness, and genuine respect for children's lived experiences help foster inclusive, affirming environments. Youth workers' respectful, open, and curious attitudes create environments where children feel welcome and empowered to share and educate others.

*They are very inclusive and make us feel welcome at the club. (Child focus group)*

*If you ask questions, children want to educate us. (Youth worker interview)*

In addition, youth worker interviewees also noted that youth clubs prioritise anti-racist work to establish and maintain a safe environment. An explicit commitment to anti-racism reinforces inclusion and sends a strong message to children from minority ethnic backgrounds that youth clubs are safe spaces where equity and justice are prioritised.

*Anti-racist work is a serious priority for us organisationally. We lead the council on it. (Youth worker interview)*

Another interviewee framed anti-racist work as essential to safeguarding, highlighting that addressing racism is part of *children's experience of protection and healing* (Youth worker interview).

These perspectives show that anti-racist practice within youth clubs is not only about increasing cultural diversity within the clubs, but also about actively confronting systemic harm and creating environments where all children feel safe.

##### ➤ **Children from minority ethnic backgrounds feel that they are seen and included when youth clubs are sensitive to cultural need.**



Youth worker interviews stated that youth clubs recognise the importance of celebrating diverse cultural and religious traditions through festivals, food, and adapted timetables. Such culturally responsive practices help children feel respected and valued, fostering a deeper sense of belonging. Flexibility in programming allows youth clubs to respond to cultural needs and demonstrate their commitment to inclusion.

*We celebrate all kinds of festivals... Every culture is celebrated within the youth centre. (Youth worker interview)*

This was reflected by children participating in a London-based focus group, where all participants were from minoritised ethnicity background and multiple participants mentioned that the youth workers were from similar backgrounds and could identify with them. The sense of inclusion was further reinforced by the welcoming environment created by staff, as described by children.

*We are always welcome at the youth club and the staff are welcoming and they don't judge. (Child focus groups)*

It was also noted that youth clubs aim to challenge prejudice and build empathy among children from all backgrounds through cultural awareness activities. Highlighting cultural diversity can help dismantle stereotypes and create a more inclusive environment.

*We want children to understand different cultures. This helps break down prejudice and stereotypes they may have heard from grandparents, parents, and other members of society. (Youth worker interview)*

- **Community consultation and local partnerships with faith-based or cultural groups serve as another channels of building trust with communities that may not traditionally access youth services.**

Youth worker interviews described that ongoing consultation ensures programming remains relevant and responsive. Involving families and children from diverse backgrounds in planning helps youth clubs tailor services to the lived experiences of the communities they serve.

Some youth clubs collaborated with religious institutions to engage with children at institutional activities. This strategic approach on working with culturally relevant institutions such as mosques or community centres, deepens cultural relevance and builds trust with underrepresented groups.

*We are constantly consulting with the community about what we offer and if it is suitable and meets the needs of the diversity within the community. (Youth worker interview)*

*We joined up with a local mosque... and offered to support them in some of the work they are doing." (Youth worker interview)*

## Detrimental characteristics and areas for improvement

- **Cultural dynamics can make it harder for children from minority ethnic backgrounds to speak openly with staff.**

Youth worker interviews noted that some children from minority ethnic backgrounds may hesitate to express themselves honestly with youth workers who are older or seen as authority figures within their community. Cultural norms around respect for elders can create barriers to open conversation, especially on sensitive or taboo topics (e.g., LGBTQ+, sexual health).

*Children might not feel comfortable raising them with you. They might be worried about how you are going to react. Whether that is sexual health, things like that, they might not feel comfortable coming to you. They see you as their elders. It is respectful. (Youth worker interview)*

- **The lack of specific goals and actions around cultural inclusion and diversity within strategic planning may prevent youth clubs from establishing a diverse environment.**

Some youth workers reported that the youth clubs they work with do not intentionally cater to minority ethnic children, relying instead on generic inclusion practices. A lack of active inclusion strategies can limit ethnic minority children's sense of belonging, safety, and cultural recognition. Particularly, proximity to their local community, familiarity, and cultural relevance play a significant role in participation of children in youth clubs. Hence, intentional and localised approaches may be more effective than generic inclusion efforts.

*We don't typically target anyone specifically; it's Open Access. (Youth worker interview)*

*We treat everyone the same regardless of their ethnicity. (Youth worker interview)*

*When we have events where we bring all our youth clubs together, we get less engagement from the Black and Asian communities. However, on a day-to-day basis, our youth clubs feed the different communities they are based in. (Youth worker interview)*

Lack of diversity in leadership can limit organisational responsiveness to different cultural needs. Representation at all levels is essential for creating youth work that genuinely serves all communities.

*The youth work being captured is missing out on certain groups... You need the workforce that can deliver the youth work. Until we have people in positions of influence, it will struggle to reach the targets it should be reaching. (Youth worker interview)*

## 4.5. Conclusion

The findings in this chapter suggest that children are more likely to attend and engage with youth clubs when they feel safe, included, and able to build trust with staff. Youth workers highlighted that social networks, informal activities, and consistent, relatable staff all helped create welcoming environments, especially for children facing challenges elsewhere. Proximity, transport, and local authority involvement were also seen to support regular attendance.

Furthermore, youth clubs that reflected the cultural identities and needs of their communities appeared better able to foster deeper relationships with children from minority ethnic backgrounds. Crucially, engagement was found to be strongest where children had a voice in shaping activities and could access support without pressure. Still, barriers to inclusion remain as children from ethnic minority communities often face cultural challenges that discourage open communication with youth workers, alongside a lack of targeted inclusion strategies and diverse leadership, which can limit their sense of belonging and engagement in youth clubs. The next chapter explores how different factors shape the support youth clubs provide and how clubs identify and respond to children at risk of or involved in violence.



## 5. Support for children at risk

### Key findings

- 72% of survey respondents said their youth club provided targeted provision alongside open-access sessions, often in short, tailored formats. Survey data suggested this model may be more likely to reach children involved in or at risk of violence.
- 82% of survey respondents said their youth club supports respectful peer relationships across group divides, 79% offer informal mentoring to at-risk youth, and 77% collaborate informally with other professionals. Violence de-escalation is practised by 72%, while 66% signpost children to specialist services. Importantly, 40% have intervened to prevent further violence after serious violence has already occurred, and 39% are involved in gang exit work, underscoring ongoing support for children even after challenges have occurred. Overall, direct support, early intervention, and partnerships are central to youth clubs' safeguarding strategies.
- Youth clubs frequently engaged with children experiencing a variety of vulnerabilities and risk factors. 36% of survey respondents reported that the majority of children attending their youth clubs are eligible for free school meals, 19% noted that most attendees have special educational needs, and 2% indicated that the majority of participants are supported by social workers.
- In terms of immediate risk factors among children attending youth clubs, 44% of survey respondents observed that most or some use illegal drugs, making it the most prevalent risk factor. Being contacted by police over a suspected offence follows, with 2% reporting most children and 38% reporting some children affected. Additionally, 54% noted that a few children were approached to store weapons, drugs, or money for someone else, while 30% said none had faced this. In contrast, being supported by a youth offending team is least common, with no respondents indicating that most children fall into this category. These trends are consistent across club types and activities.
- Youth club staff are predominantly aware of children having SEN as demonstrated by 91% of respondents. Half of respondents also indicated being aware of children having a social worker and being on free school meals and (54% and 53% respectively, indicated being always or usually aware). Meanwhile, youth clubs are least likely to be aware of children going missing with 19% of respondents indicating being never or rarely aware of such vulnerability.
- Youth clubs in receipt of local authority funding were more likely to report engagement with children at risk of violence, according to survey responses. Youth workers described how local authority involvement supported consistent engagement by influencing the club's ethos and aligning activities with community-based approaches.
- Survey responses suggested that violence within youth clubs is relatively uncommon. Antisocial behaviour was the most commonly witnessed incident (22% weekly), followed by verbal threats and occasional physical violence. Staff linked higher incident rates with clubs engaging larger numbers of children or operating in higher-risk areas.
- With regards to training, 92% of survey respondents had received safeguarding training; 78% mental health; 67% trauma-informed practice. However, only 20% reported training in violence prevention, and 23% in cultural competency. Youth workers described barriers to accessing training and information, citing limited funding, time, and support for volunteers.

## 5.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the varied role of youth clubs in supporting children who are at risk of or involved in violence. It explores the extent and nature of both formal and informal support provided by youth clubs, including the methods used to identify children who are vulnerable or at risk of or involved in violence, the prevalence and management of violence on youth club premises, and the relevant training received by staff. Additionally, this section examines the barriers and facilitators that influence the efficacy of youth clubs in providing support to children. It also addresses the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating targeted provisions within open-access settings. The findings presented are derived from the youth sector survey, deliberative sessions, interviews with youth workers and volunteers and focus groups with children.

For the purposes of this study, formal and informal support are defined as follows:

**Formal support:** Structured, established activities or procedures. Examples of formal support include offering scheduled positive activities onsite to build children's skills, referring vulnerable children to targeted support from other organisations, any established procedures that involve identifying children's vulnerability or need (e.g. in-take forms), and established multi-agency working.

**Informal support:** Support through trusting relationships and flexible responses to individuals' needs. Examples of informal support include informal ongoing one-to-one support for a vulnerable young person, providing support to their wider family, supporting children to build respectful relationships cross group divides, and tackling misinformation that risks fuelling violence.

## 5.2. To what extent do youth clubs provide support to children who are at risk of or involved in violence and what kinds of support (both formal and informal) do they provide? (RQ3)

Table 4. Examples of formal and informal support

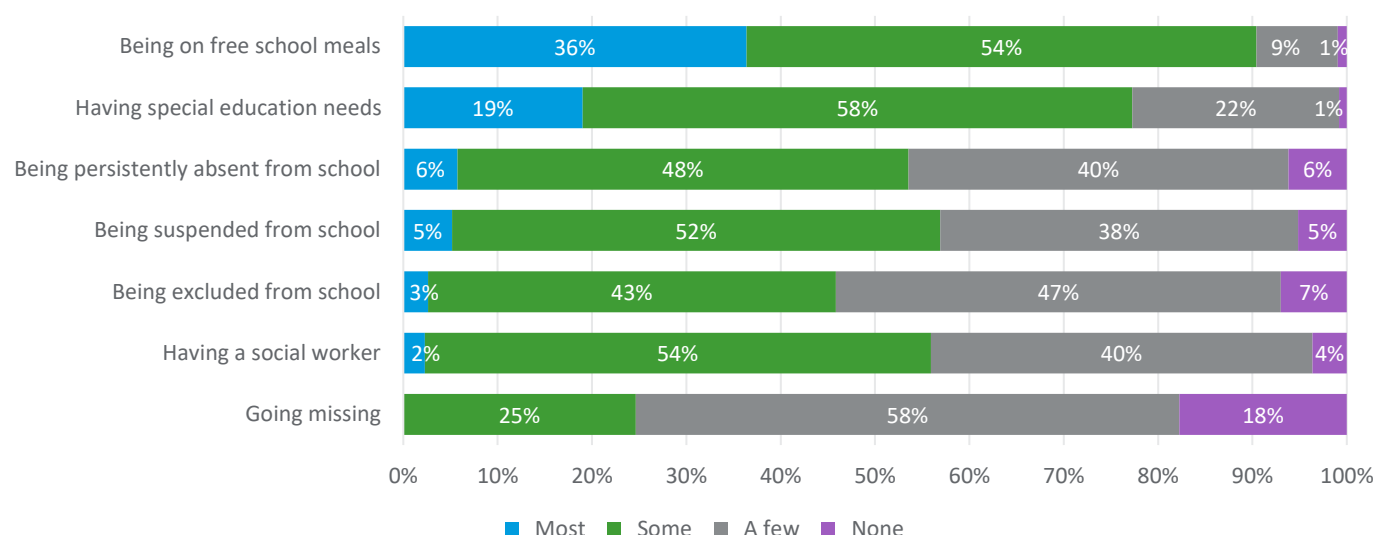
Formal support mechanisms	Informal support and activities
<p>Many clubs provided structured support for children at risk of violence, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Mental health services:</b> In-house or external professionals offered tailored sessions (e.g. body confidence, stress management, self-harm, anger).</li> <li>• <b>Educational workshops:</b> Topics included knife crime, healthy relationships, drug and alcohol awareness, often led by police or health professionals.</li> <li>• <b>Referral pathways:</b> Clubs supported children to access services like CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and youth offending teams, often attending sessions alongside children.</li> </ul>	<p>Informal provision was seen by many youth workers as the core of effective support. Key features included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Recreational and creative activities:</b> Sport, art, cooking, and outdoor programmes were widely used to develop skills and reduce antisocial behaviour.</li> <li>• <b>One-to-one support:</b> Open access and drop-in activities helped children manage personal challenges and build trusting relationships.</li> <li>• <b>Inclusive spaces:</b> Clubs offered calm and sensory-friendly rooms to support neurodiverse children or those facing personal distress.</li> </ul>

- **Youth clubs regularly support children with various vulnerabilities and risk factors associated with violence. While most children are not at immediate risk, youth clubs are well positioned to engage and support those who are.**

Staff report that high proportions of children with wider vulnerabilities and immediate risk factors associated with violence attend youth clubs. Evidently, the most prevalent vulnerability among children who attend youth clubs is being on free school meals (36% of survey respondents who indicated that most children attending the youth club have this vulnerability and more than half indicated that some children have this vulnerability). This is followed by SEN (19% of survey respondents indicated that most children have this vulnerability and 58% indicated that some children have it). In contrast, going missing is the least prevalent vulnerability as indicated by 18% of survey respondents reporting no children having this vulnerability and 58% reporting a few children having it. This pattern of prevalence holds when broken down by youth club type (Figure 44), youth club activity (Figure 45), youth clubs' safeguarding efforts (Figure 46), and whether youth clubs provided targeted support or not (Figure 47). These figures can be found in Annex A.3.

Most youth workers interviewed corroborated this finding, stating that youth clubs play a crucial role in identifying and supporting children with a range of vulnerabilities.

**Figure 21. Youth clubs' engagement with vulnerable children**



Source: Youth sector survey Q11.

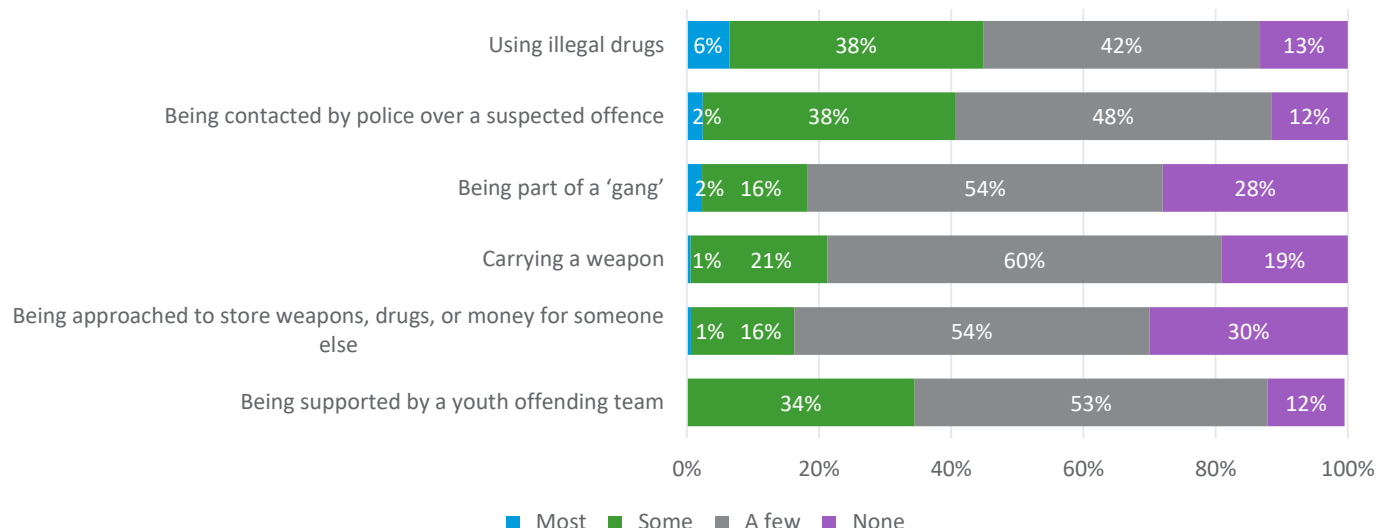
Base: 248 (Having special education needs), 247 (Being on free school meals), 247 (Having a social worker), 247 (Going missing), 247 (Being suspended from school), 247 (Being excluded from school), 247 (Being persistently absent from school).

As shown in the mapping of youth clubs against levels of violence (Section 3.2), youth clubs are often located in areas of high violence, making them well-placed to engage with children at risk of becoming involved in violence. This trend was also evident in the survey results. While the overall proportion of children at immediate risk of crime/violence is lower than those with wider vulnerabilities, staff report that a considerable proportion of the former attend youth clubs, (Figure 22).

The most prevalent immediate risk factor among children who attend youth clubs is using illegal drugs (44% of respondents indicated that most or some children who attend use illegal drugs). This is followed by being contacted by police over a suspected offence (2% of respondents indicated that most children have been contacted by police and 38% report some children have been contacted). This is followed by being approached to store weapons, drugs or money for someone else (which indicates a risk of being a victim of criminal exploitation), with the majority indicating a few (54%) or none (30%) of the children have experienced this. In contrast, being supported by a youth offending team is the least prevalent immediate

risk factors, with no respondents indicating that most children are being supported by a youth offending team. As above, this finding pattern of prevalence holds when broken down by youth club type (Figure 48), youth club activity (Figure 49), and youth clubs' safeguarding efforts (Figure 50). These figures can be found in Annex A.3.

**Figure 22. Youth clubs' engagement with children at immediate risk of crime or violence**



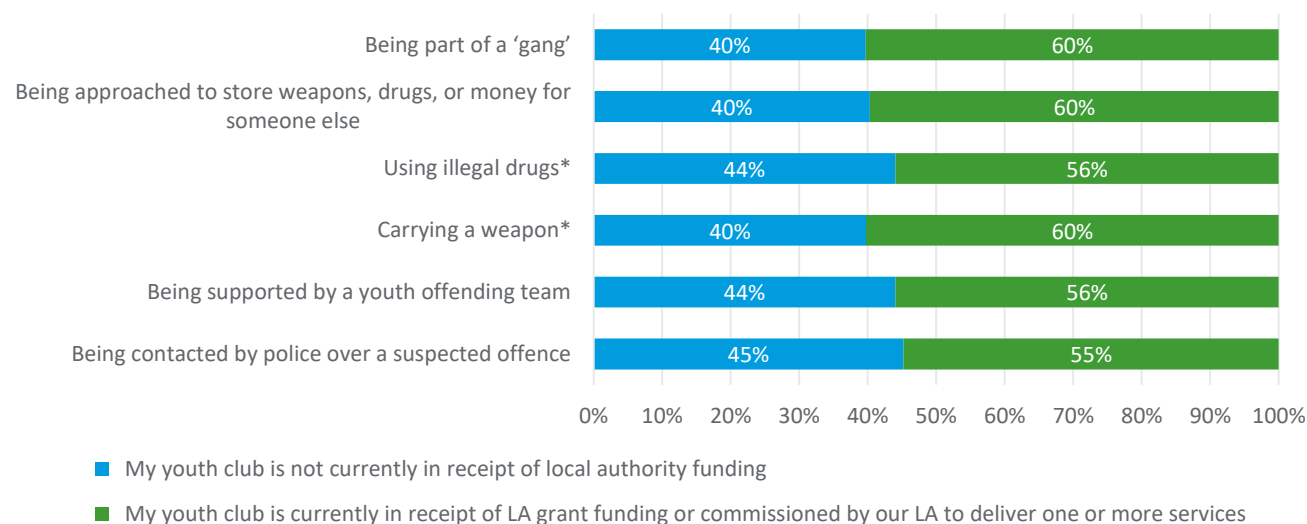
Source: Youth sector survey Q13.

Base: 241 (Being contacted by police over a suspected offence), 241 (Being supported by a youth offending team), 241 (Carrying a weapon), 241 (Using illegal drugs), 241 (Being approached to store weapons, drugs, or money for someone else), 241 (Being part of a 'gang').

- **Active involvement from local authorities, through grant funding and commissioned work, may enable youth clubs to engage a larger number of children at immediate risk of crime or violence.**

Survey data presented in Figure 23 shows that youth clubs with stronger local authority links, receiving grant funding or being commissioned by LAs for services, are reported to engage higher proportions of children at risk of or involved in violence. The association are statistically significant in regard to children's involvement in illegal drug use and weapon carrying. This suggests that youth clubs surveyed who received LA funding are more likely to engage with children in these issues, with 12% more engaging with those "using illegal drugs" and 20% more with those "carrying a weapon" compared to youth clubs not receiving LA funding.

**Figure 23. Funding received by youth clubs, by children's risk factors**



Source: Youth sector survey Q6 and Q13.

Base: 115 (Being contacted by police over a suspected offence), 109 (Being supported by a youth offending team), 88 (Carrying a weapon), 109 (Using illegal drugs), 62 (Being approached to store weapons, drugs, or money for someone else), 68 (Being part of a 'gang').

Note: 1) \* indicates that chi-square test result is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

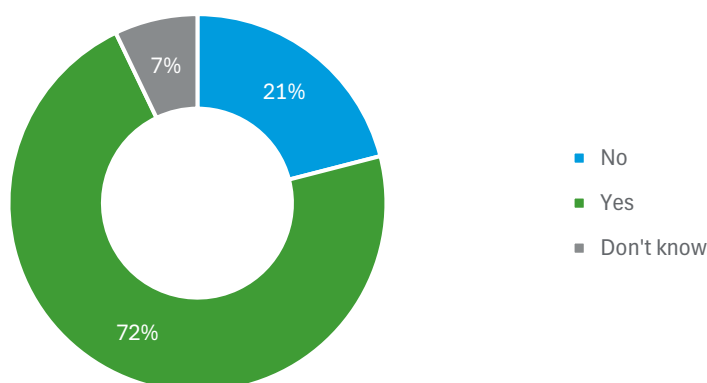
Interviews further unpacked how local authorities' involvement helped youth clubs engage with at-risk children. Youth worker interviews emphasised the importance of a close relationship between youth clubs and local authorities (LAs), as well as LA's involvement in designing youth club approaches. They noted that the LA's view of what youth work should look like (e.g., valuing community-based approaches) shaped how youth clubs planned and delivered their activities. This involvement from LA has consequently facilitates the sustained engagement of youth clubs with children, highlighting the crucial role that local government involvement plays in empowering youth organisations to effectively connect with children.

There was no consistent or statistically significant relationship identified between the staff/volunteer engagement ratio with children and attendance by children exhibiting risk factors. Therefore, this has not been reported.

➤ **Targeted provision was often implemented together with open-access sessions, typically in brief and customised formats.**

As presented in Figure 24, survey data shows that nearly three quarters of the youth clubs provided targeted services for children during the periods in which open access provision is offered.

**Figure 24. Proportion of youth clubs offering targeted support**



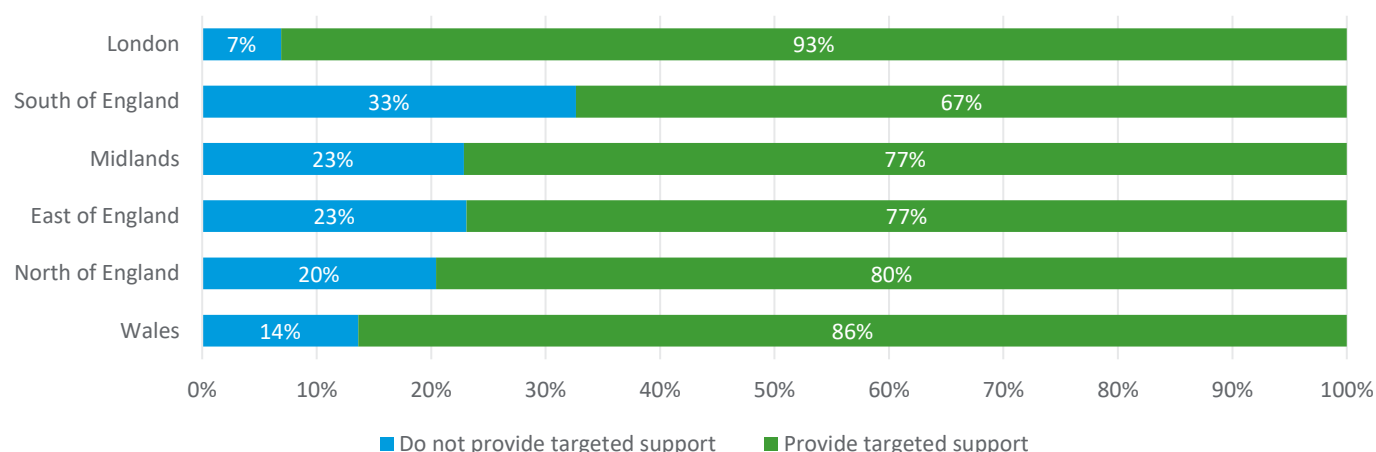
Source: Youth sector survey Q9.

Base: 281.

Survey data also show that the majority of youth clubs across England and Wales offer targeted support alongside open-access provision.

When broken down by region, London has the highest proportion doing so (93%), followed by Wales (86%). However, a sizeable minority – particularly in South of England (33%), Midlands and East of England (23%) – do not provide targeted support. Note that East of England had a relatively small base compared to other regions. A chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between region and availability of targeted support for children.

**Figure 25. Availability of targeted support for children in youth clubs by region\***



*Source:* Youth sector survey Q4 and Q9.

*Base:* 29 (London), 49 (South of England), 35 (Midlands), 13 (East of England), 93 (North of England), 22 (Wales).

*Note:* \* indicates that chi-square test result is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Interview findings align with survey data, with most youth workers reporting that their youth club offers targeted support within open-access provision.

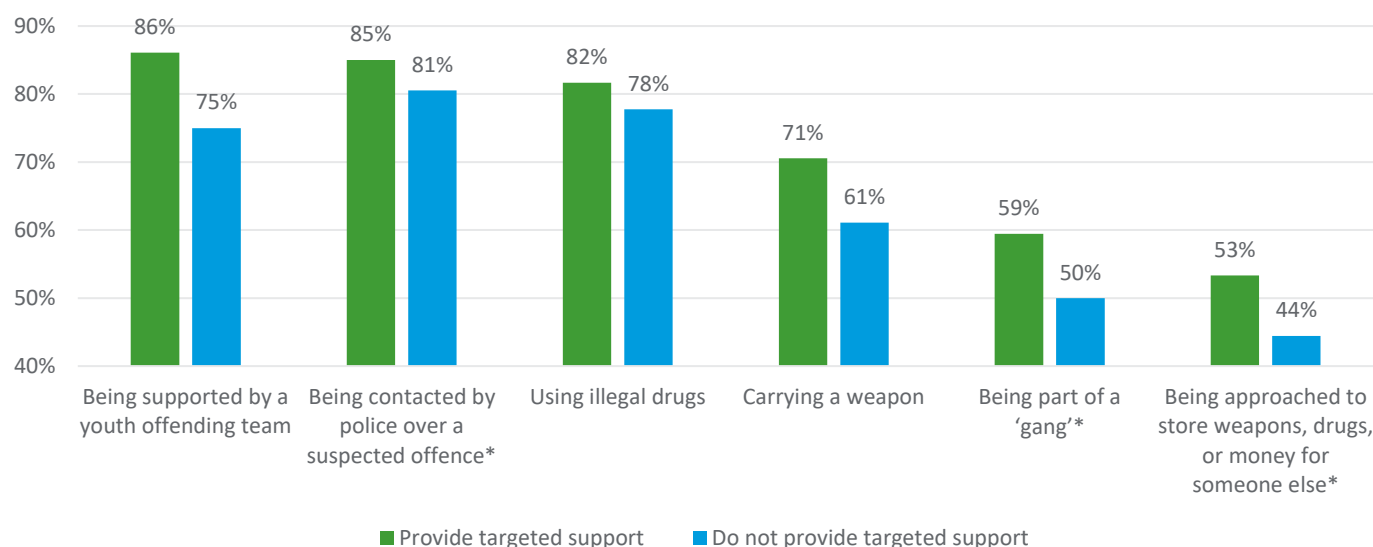
Survey data suggests that youth clubs in receipt of LA funding are slightly more likely to provide targeted support than those who not received LA fundings (74% and 72% respectively). However, no statistically significant difference was found. While the differences are modest, they might suggest that youth clubs delivering targeted provision tend to have more varied and active relationships with local authorities - through funding, commissioning, or direct collaboration - with this engagement potentially helping these youth clubs (e.g., in accessing wider resources, aligning with local priorities, and delivering more coordinated support to children at risk).

➤ **According to survey data, situating targeted provision together with open-access sessions may reach more children who are involved in or at risk of experiencing violence.**

Survey data (Figure 26) illustrates that youth clubs offering targeted services during open access sessions are more likely to report working with children involved in or at risk of serious violence. A chi-square test of independence revealed a **statistically significant** association in regard to three specific risk indicators: “Being contacted by police over a suspended offence”, “Being part of a ‘gang’”, and “Being approached to store weapons, drugs, or money for someone else”. The difference in reporting engagement with children involved in or at risk of violence between youth clubs surveyed providing targeted support and those not are not statistically significant. However, base sizes for youth clubs not offering targeted support are small (n=36), so differences should be interpreted cautiously.



**Figure 26. Proportion of youth clubs reporting contact with high-risk children, by whether they offer targeted services**



Source: Youth sector survey Q9 and Q13.

Base: 180 (Provide targeted support), 36 (Do not provide targeted support).

Note: \* indicates that chi-square test result is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Furthermore, survey findings indicate that the likelihood of offering targeted support varies slightly by youth club type. It is most common in school-based clubs (90%, N=77) and those based in community settings (80%, N=233). It is somewhat less so among those run by religious organisations (71%, N=14), although this finding should be interpreted with caution due to the small base size. Note that one organisation could provide youth club services in more than one settings. Interviewees confirmed that targeted work is often embedded within or delivered alongside open-access provision; however, they did not explicitly differentiate this provision by youth club type. As one youth worker described:

*It's Open Access with a bit of targeted work... We started a programme with some of the boys in a separate room for about 20 minutes at a time, focusing on positive masculinity...It was targeted work, only a short period of their session, so they still had all the fun stuff, food, etc. (Youth worker interview)*

➤ **Youth clubs help prevent youth violence and crime by fostering respectful relationships, mentoring at-risk children, and collaborating with professionals.**

Survey results (Figure 27) showed how youth clubs safeguard children from engaging in violence or crime. The most common form of safeguarding reported was supporting children in building respectful relationships with their peers across group divides, with 82% of respondents reporting that they or their organisation had done this. This highlights the importance of fostering positive social interactions. Interviewees described how youth clubs help reduce the risk of antisocial behaviour and violence by offering safe, structured environments. One youth worker explained:

*The dark nights kicked in, and the children didn't want to play football in the unsafe area with drug dealers. We went back in. They were interested in how people become homeless, so we explored that. They did podcast work, interviewing housing navigators. They created care packages for homeless people and named their group 'Young Change Makers'. (Youth worker interview)*

Closely following this, 79% of respondents indicated that they had informal mentoring of children and young people who are at risk of violence or crime. Interview evidence strongly supports this, with youth workers describing how mentoring helps young people manage anger, anxiety, and trauma. One youth worker shared,



*We're working with young people on the floor and able to have early intervention. If myself or the staff team identify any issues, whether that be self-harm, low mental health, or anger management, we work with that child on an early intervention level (Youth worker interview)*

Informal collaboration with other professionals is also a common form of safeguarding, with 77% of respondents reporting this. Violence interruption is another major area of focus, with 72% of respondents reporting that they or their organisation had de-escalated situations involving children and young people that could have erupted into violence. Interviewees described direct interventions with young people involved in knife crime, gang activity, and drug use, highlighting a clear commitment to breaking the cycle of violence.

*A young person brought a knife into the youth club, so we made him attend a session on the dangers of knife crime and referred him for specialist support before allowing him back. (Youth worker interview)*

*We found young people under the influence, so we worked with emergency services and recovery hubs to get them immediate help and long-term support. (Youth worker interview)*

*When this boy brought cannabis into the youth club, we used the moment to educate him about the dangers of drug involvement and exploitation, helping him reflect on his choices rather than immediately punishing him, since then, he stayed out of trouble. (Youth worker interview)*

Another method for safeguarding children is signposting at-risk children to appropriate services (66%), which is often regarded as formal method of support provision. This emphasised the role of guidance and referral in their support strategies. Interviewees also consistently emphasised the importance of this approach. One in particular explained,

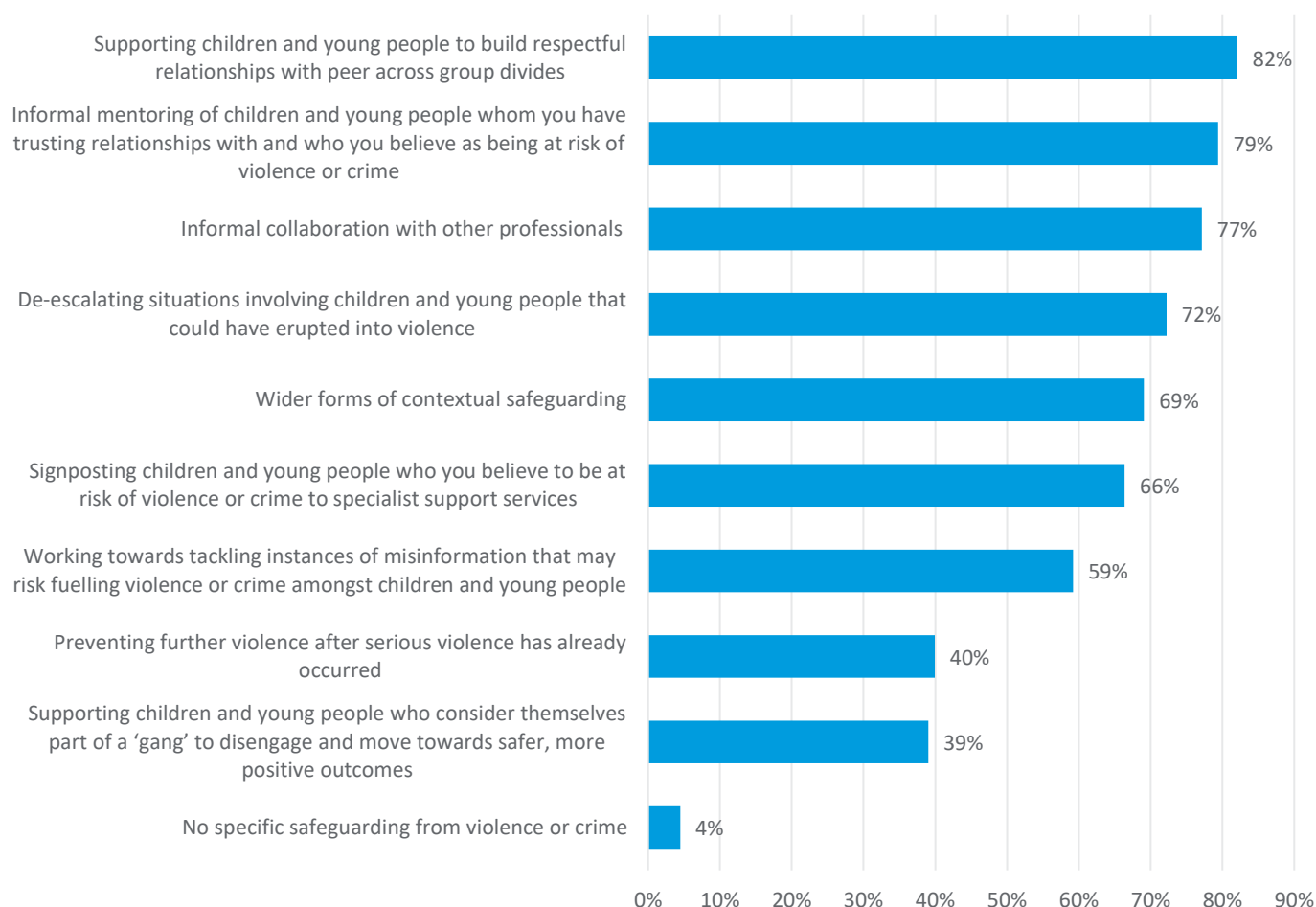
*We attend the first few sessions with young people to help them feel safe and supported as they transition into specialist services like counselling or youth justice. (Youth worker interview)*

39% of respondents mentioned that they are involved in gang exit work, helping children who consider themselves part of a gang to disengage and move towards safer, more positive outcomes. This comparatively lower emphasis on gang exit work may, in part, reflect the universal nature of youth clubs, which are designed to serve all children in the community. As the majority of those attending are not involved in gangs, the focus may naturally lean towards broad preventative measures and early intervention rather than specialist disengagement programmes. Interview evidence supports this, with one youth worker describing how they identify cohorts of children associated with anti-social activities and implement support plans through multi-agency collaboration.

*When a boy was caught with a knife at school, we reached out to his peer group and worked with other agencies to put support in place. (Youth worker interview)*

Encouragingly, 40% of respondents indicated that they are involved in preventing further violence after serious incidents have occurred, highlighting a substantial commitment to supporting children even in the aftermath of significant challenges.

**Figure 27. Proportion of youth clubs that safeguard children from involvement in violence or crime**



Source: Youth sector survey Q19.

Base: 220.

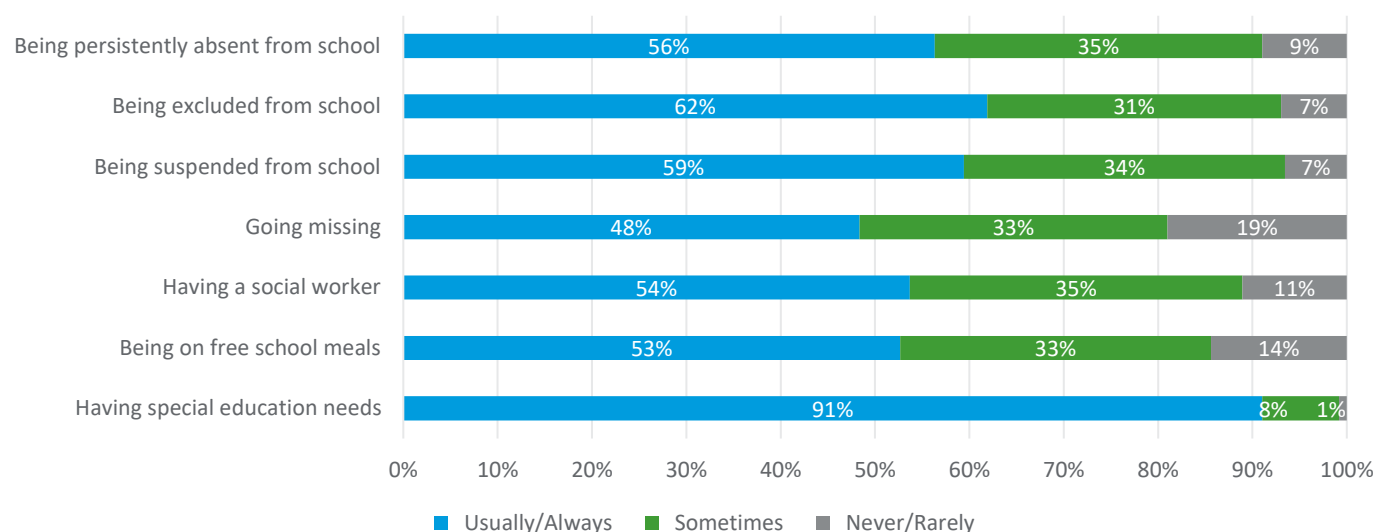
Note: Multiple response options - sub-group percentages do not add up to 100% because a youth club can be open on multiple days during the week.

### 5.3. How, if at all, do youth clubs identify children at risk of/involved in violence? (RQ3a)

- **While two-thirds of surveyed youth workers are generally aware of children's vulnerabilities, only one third are aware of children being at immediate risk of crime or violence.**

As demonstrated by survey responses (shown in Figure 28), youth clubs are predominantly aware of children having SEN as demonstrated by 91% of respondents (who are always or usually aware). Half of respondents also indicated being aware of children having a social worker and being on free school meals and (54% and 53% respectively, indicated being always or usually aware). Conversely, a considerable proportion of respondents also indicated being never or rarely aware of children being on free school meals (14%). Meanwhile, youth clubs are least likely to be aware of children going missing with 19% of respondents indicating being never or rarely aware of such vulnerability.

**Figure 28. Youth clubs' awareness of children's vulnerabilities**



*Source:* Youth sector survey Q10.

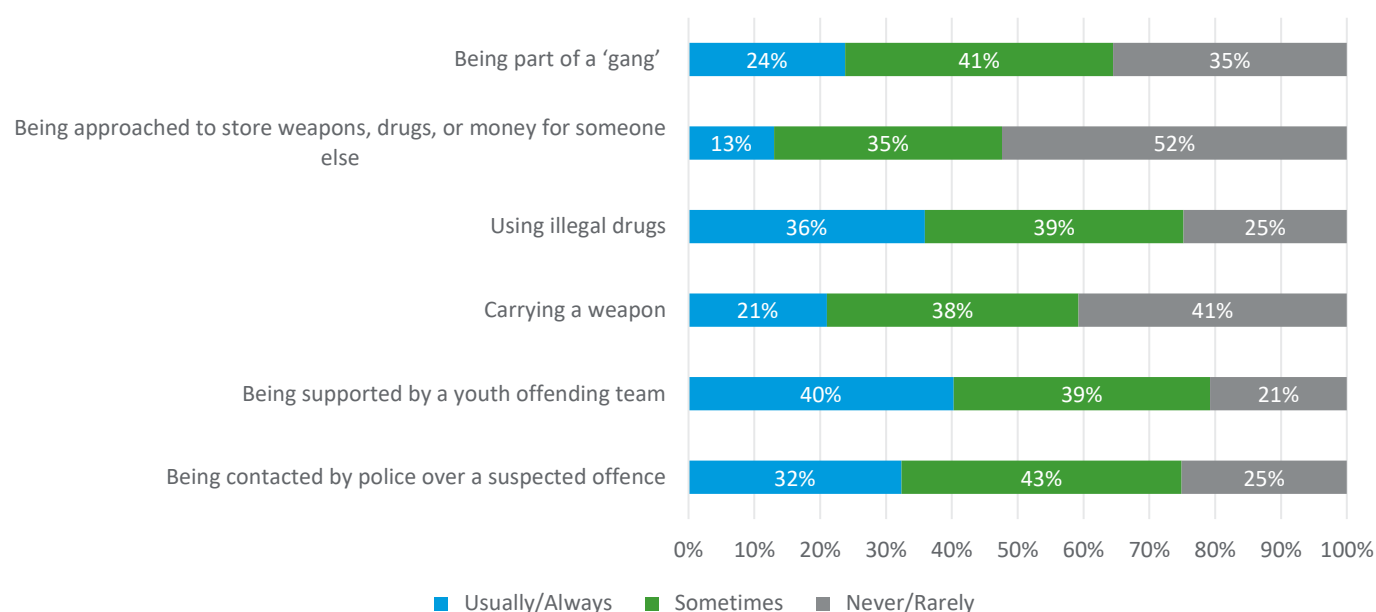
*Base:* 245 (Having special education needs), 243 (Being on free school meals), 244 (Having a social worker), 242 (Going missing), 244 (Being suspended from school), 244 (Being excluded from school), 245 (Being persistently absent from school).

Survey responses on awareness of vulnerabilities across England and Wales indicated that youth clubs report similarly high levels of awareness regarding children with key vulnerabilities. Wales demonstrates slightly higher rates of awareness across all vulnerabilities, except for children receiving free school meals (see Figure 51 in Annex A.3). In addition, survey data reveals that youth clubs without direct ties to local authorities are equally likely to report awareness of vulnerable children among their attendees as those with funding or commissioned relationships. This indicates that staff awareness of children's needs does not depend on local authority involvement (see Figure 52 in Annex A.3). When analysed by youth club type, survey results show very high awareness of vulnerable children across all youth club types, with slightly higher reporting in youth clubs not run by religious organisations (see Figure 53 in Annex A.3). Furthermore, youth clubs offering targeted support report marginally higher awareness of vulnerable children, particularly those excluded, suspended, or persistently absent from school (see Figure 54 in Annex A.3).

Figure 29 shows the proportion of survey respondents who are aware of children who attend youth clubs being at immediate risk of crime or violence. When they are aware of such risks, they are most likely to be aware of children being supported by a youth offending team (40% indicated being always or usually aware). Similarly, youth club staff are more likely to be aware of children using illegal drugs, as demonstrated by 36% of respondents who indicated being always or usually aware. In contrast, youth club staff are least likely to be aware of children carrying weapons or being approached to store weapons, drugs or money, as demonstrated by 41% and 52% of respondents who indicated that they are never or rarely aware of such risk factors.

Lower awareness among youth clubs about children's involvement or risk of becoming involved in crime and violence is consistent with insight from interview respondents. All youth workers interviewed mentioned that youth clubs collect information about children through formal and informal methods. While most indicated being aware of certain vulnerabilities among children, only a minority collect specific details about violence or criminal records. Although, interviewees noted when such risk factors or instances of involvement are identified and addressed, they are facilitated by collaboration with other agencies and services, and through targeted interventions.

**Figure 29. Youth clubs' awareness of children at immediate risk of crime or violence**



Source: Youth sector survey Q12.

Base: 235 (Being contacted by police over a suspected offence), 236 (Being supported by a youth offending team), 233 (Carrying a weapon), 234 (Using illegal drugs), 231 (Being approached to store weapons, drugs, or money for someone else), 231 (Being part of a 'gang').

In terms of geographical location, youth club staff surveyed report slightly higher awareness of most risk factors in Wales. Meanwhile, clubs in England more often report awareness of gang involvement and drug storing (see Figure 55 in Annex A.3). However, it is worthwhile noting that no statistically significant results were found in chi-square tests. Survey responses examining awareness of such risk factor by relationship with local authorities reveal that youth clubs without direct ties to local authorities were just as likely to report awareness of children at such risk among their attendees as those with funding or commissioned relationships. This suggests that staff awareness of children's risk factors does not depend on local authority involvement (see Figure 56 in Annex A.3). Survey results also reveal that awareness of such risk factor is very high across all youth club types, with highest level of awareness reporting in youth clubs run by a religious organisation but open to all children without a focus on religious teaching or practice (see Figure 57 in Annex A.3).

## Identification practices

Our research identified three main practices that youth clubs use to identify wider vulnerabilities and risk factors associated with children's involvement in crime and violence.

### 1. Youth clubs identify wider vulnerabilities through registration forms.

Insights from interviews with youth workers highlighted that youth clubs often use registration and consent forms to gather initial information about the children attending their programs. These forms can include questions to identify vulnerabilities such as SEN or being on free school meals. For example, one respondent mentioned,

*We obtain basic information from parents through consent forms, which gives us details about any additional vulnerabilities. (Youth worker interview)*

Multiple youth workers highlighted the importance of these forms in identifying special educational needs (SEN). This information allows youth club staff to maintain the safety of children and offer reasonable accommodations.

### 2. Youth club staff identify risk factors through their interactions with children.

Youth club staff themselves also play a crucial role in identifying vulnerable children through their observations and relationships with them. Interviews indicated that staff are able to identify signs of vulnerability, such as having a social worker during one-to-one interactions and activities. Noting the importance of observation, one respondent mentioned:

*We dynamically risk assess all the time based on behaviour. The staff can pick up on these things and then we dig a little deeper. (Youth worker interview)*

Observation also enables staff to identify signs of neglect or poverty. For instance, one youth worker described how they notice when a young person may not be eating properly:

*We can notice if they're not looking after themselves. We ask them, have you eaten today? What have you had today? They'll say, 'I've just had an energy drink' or 'I didn't get any lunch because I've got no money.' (Youth worker interview)*

Youth workers highlighted the importance of building a trusting relationship between staff and children that attend the clubs. Children sometimes disclose their own vulnerabilities and risks directly to staff at the youth club. This self-disclosure is facilitated by the trusting relationships built between staff and children. One youth worker explained:

*Because of the nature of the relationship we build, they tell us all the issues they're going through. (Youth worker interview)*

Interviews with youth workers also indicated that children often disclose information about each other during one-to-one discussions with staff, which aid in identifying risk factors and providing relevant support. One youth worker noted:

*A child will say whether another child is involved with [something]. (Youth worker interview)*

### **3. Youth clubs rely on multi-agency collaboration to facilitate identification and response to risks and involvement in violence/crime.**

Interviews with youth workers highlighted that youth clubs frequently collaborate with other agencies, such as schools, social services, and the police, to identify children at risk or involved in violence. These collaborations allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the children's circumstances and needs. One youth worker described this approach:

*We work closely with the [local] Youth Offer, which involves a multi-agency approach. We can identify issues through schools or other youth services we work with. (Youth worker interview)*

Another youth worker mentioned the role of multi-agency meetings:

*We sit on what we call antisocial behaviour hotspots meetings... that's a multi-agency meeting driven by actual instances of crime. (Youth worker interview)*

Youth clubs also gather information from the community and social media to identify children at risk or are involved in violence. This includes monitoring social media activity and receiving information from other community members. One respondent mentioned the influence of social media in identifying risk factors related to involvement in violence:

*I've seen them watch quite violent content on Snapchat, YouTube, and TikTok, which rings alarm bells. (Youth worker interview)*

### **4. Youth clubs conduct continuous risk assessment to determine risk factors.**

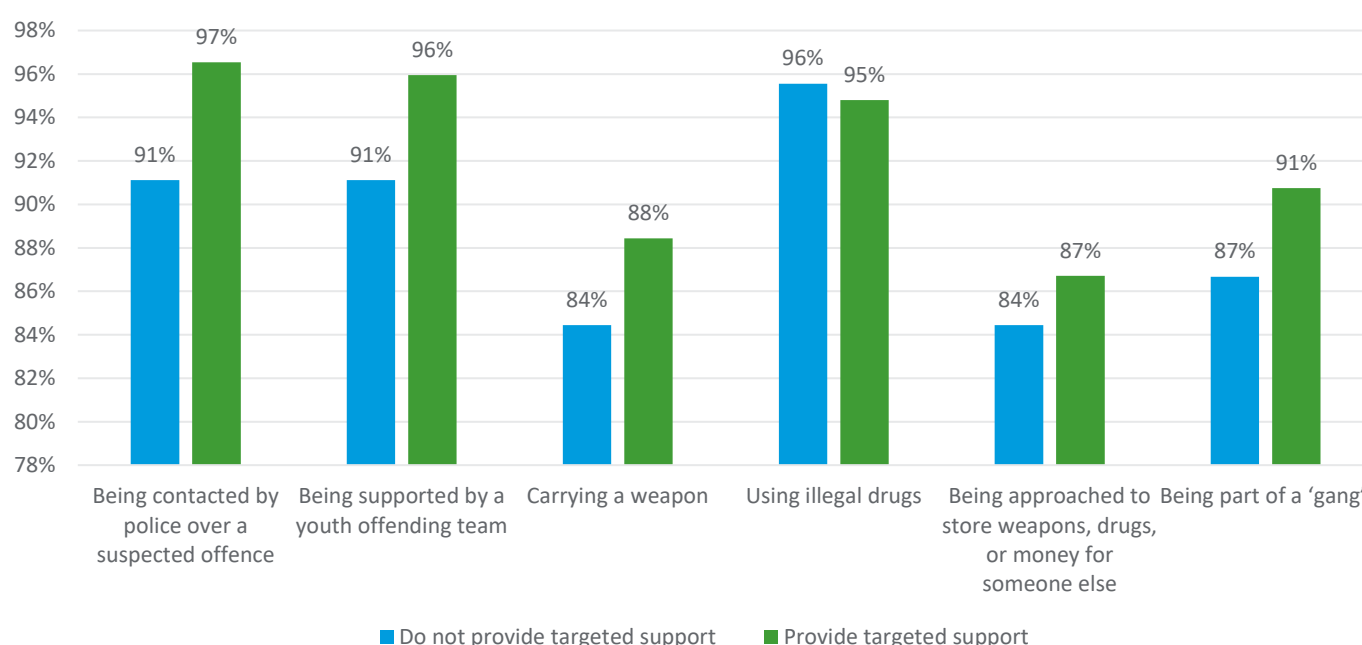
There was consensus among youth workers interviewed about supporting children that have been identified as being at risk or involved in violence through targeted interventions. The type of support provided depends on the children's personal circumstances and the type of criminality including knife crime, involvement with

gangs, drugs and/or alcohol. Youth workers interviewed shared that youth clubs often run special programmes and targeted interventions in partnership with local police or youth agencies to address specific risks and vulnerabilities. These programmes are designed to engage children who are at risk of offending or involved in violence. One respondent described such a programme:

*These programmes were very much about identifying groups of children at risk of offending or who could be offending. (Youth worker interview)*

As also demonstrated by survey responses in Figure 30, youth clubs that provide targeted support reported slightly higher awareness of children facing immediate risk of violence. The most notable difference was in awareness of children being contacted by the police in relation to a suspected offence, reported by 97% of youth clubs surveyed providing targeted support compared with 91% of those that do not. This may reflect closer relationships with children or improved detection of such incidents. Given the small differences observed (i.e., 1 to 6 percentage points), no chi-square test was conducted as these variations are unlikely to be of practical importance. As such, the findings should only be interpreted as indicative.

**Figure 30. Proportion of youth clubs aware of children being at immediate risk of crime or violence, by whether they offer targeted services**



Source: Youth sector survey Q9 and Q12.

Base: 194 (Provide targeted support), 54 (Do not provide targeted support).

Most youth workers also indicated that youth clubs continuously monitor and evaluate their sessions to identify any emerging risks or vulnerabilities. This ongoing risk assessment helps them to adapt their support and interventions as needed. Several youth workers also emphasised the importance of collecting feedback from children who attend the club. In particular these feedback sessions shed light on attendees' perspective of their own safety when attending the youth club and needs for improvement in safety measures. One respondent in particular noted,

*We have feedback sessions where they talk to each other about sessions. Did this go well? What could we change? (Youth worker interview)*

*We use a whiteboard to provoke discussion with children. For example, last week due to a spate of anti-social behaviour we asked children if they felt safe. This then enabled us to offer support, guidance and advice. (Youth worker interview)*



## Challenges when collecting data on risk factors of violence

Youth clubs encounter several challenges in identifying and supporting at-risk children. One major barrier is the voluntary nature of attendance and the reliance on self-disclosure. This reliance can lead to gaps in knowledge about the children's backgrounds and risks they may be exposed to. As one respondent noted:

*"Because we're Open Access and attendance is voluntary, you rely on the children to give you a lot of their information, and you have to trust these are true. (Youth worker interview)"*

Another key issue is the reluctance of children to share personal information. Several youth workers noted that this reluctance to disclose personal information led in some instances to the decision to stop asking for such information. For instance, when asked about free school meals, children questioned its relevance:

*Children had no idea and said, 'What's it got to do with you? What do the Council need that information for?' (Youth worker interview)"*

Another barrier is the hidden nature of some risk factors. Many youth workers shared that identifying some risk factors are more difficult than others. For instance, it is more difficult to identify when children have access to or are carrying weapons as they are generally well concealed. In addition, youth workers noted that it is often difficult to identify when children are involved with gangs or relevant crimes. One youth worker shared:

*It's difficult because some of it is hidden, isn't it? It goes on behind closed doors. (Youth worker interview)"*

Additionally, there are systemic issues related to information pathways. Many youth workers highlighted the inconsistency in communication from other agencies that may have more insight or relevant information to enable identification of risk factors or exposure to violence. This inconsistency is exacerbated by frequent staffing changes in these agencies, which may disrupt established relationships and trust. One youth worker noted:

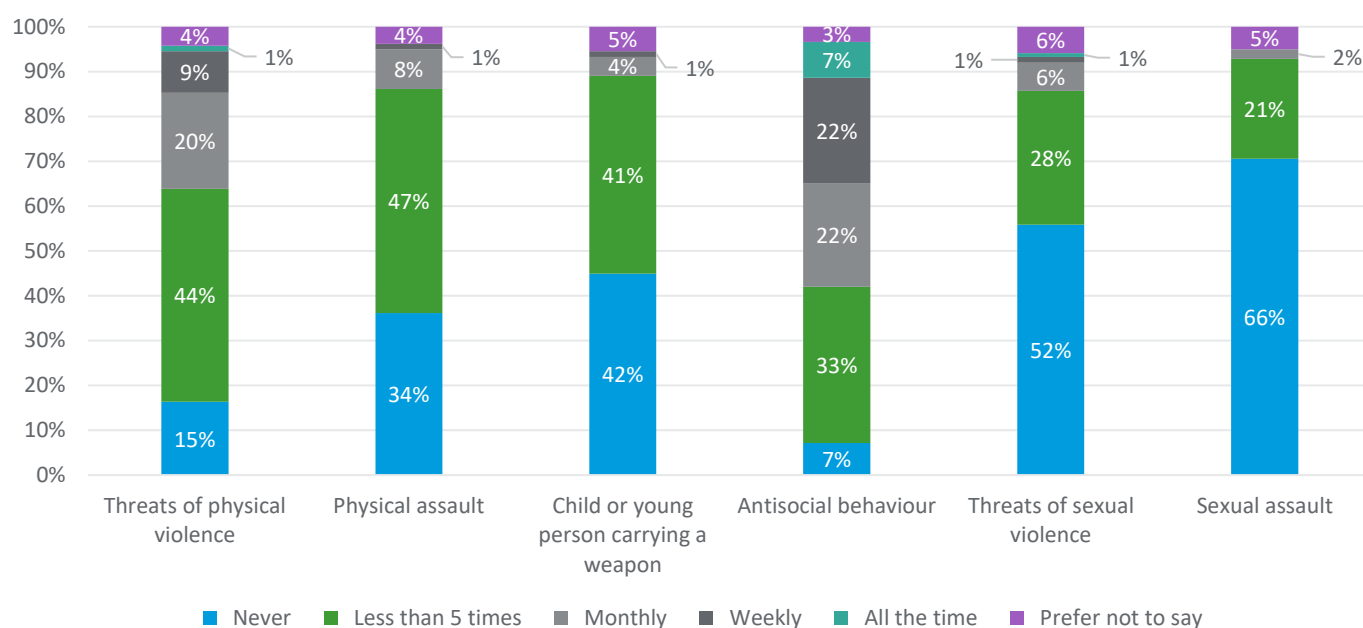
*Sometimes pathways of information are not that strong. Sometimes we won't hear much from the youth offending team. (Youth worker interview)"*

### 5.4. How commonly does violence occur on youth club premises and how is this handled? (RQ3b)

Survey responses suggest that violence within youth clubs is relatively uncommon, as shown in Figure 31. Antisocial behaviour is the most frequent issue, with 22% of respondents reporting it occurs weekly and only 9% saying it never occurs. Threats and acts of physical violence are also reported, though less frequently. Carrying weapons is rare, and most respondents said that sexual violence or threats never occur. These findings indicate that while youth clubs are generally safe spaces, antisocial behaviour and physical threats are priority areas for prevention and intervention.



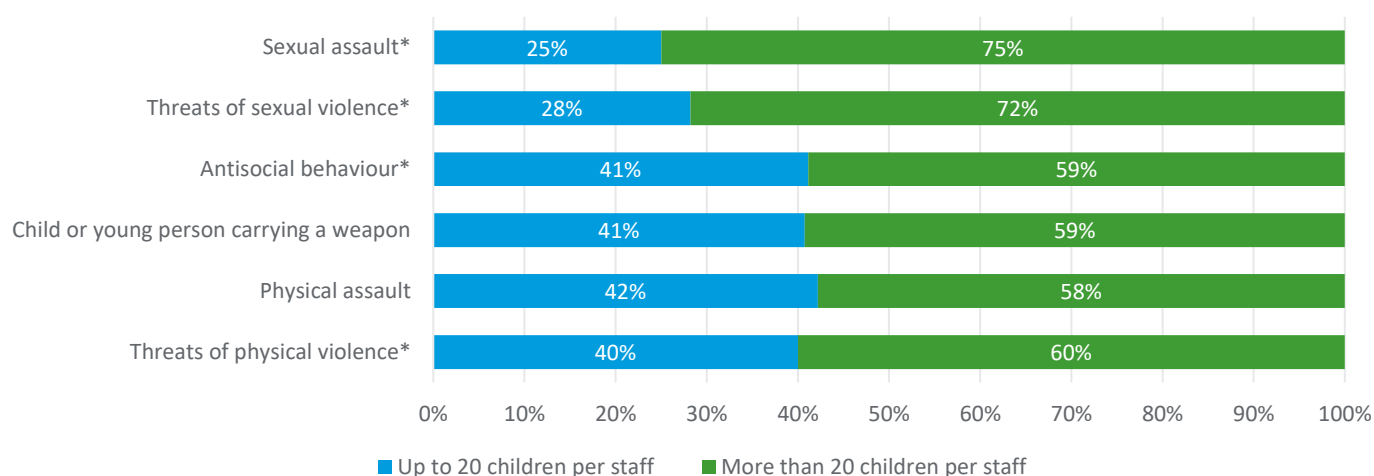
**Figure 31. Frequency of witnessing incidents of violence in youth clubs in the last 12 months**



Source: Youth sector survey Q14.

Base: 238.

**Figure 32. Incidents of violence witnessed in youth clubs, by ratio staff per children**



Source: Youth sector survey Q14, Q15a, Q15b and Q16.

Base: 95 (Threats of physical violence), 64 (Physical assault), 54 (Child or young person carrying a weapon), 107 (Antisocial behaviour), 39 (Threats of sexual violence), 24 (Sexual assault).

Note: \* indicates that chi-square test result is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Figure 32 explores whether the number of children attending a youth club over the past 12 months is associated with the frequency of witnessing different types of violence within youth clubs. Of the six types of violence considered, statistically significant associations were identified for sexual assault, threats of sexual violence, antisocial behaviour, and threats of physical violence. Descriptively, youth clubs where staff and volunteers engaged with larger numbers of children (20+) more frequently reported incidents across all types of violence, compared to those where staff and volunteers engaged with fewer children. However, this may reflect underlying factors, such as serving higher-risk populations, increased footfall, or improved detection due to staff experience, rather than indicating a direct causal relationship.

This finding holds when considering the number of staff only (see Figure 58 in Annex A.3). This may reflect the higher-risk populations these clubs serve, or improved incident detection due to greater staff capacity. The findings suggest that staffing levels alone are not a reliable indicator of incident prevalence and must be interpreted alongside local context and youth club reach.

Interview findings are broadly aligned with survey responses. While most youth workers said violence was rare, several shared examples of incidents involving physical aggression, weapons, or drug-related conflict - though these were typically described as isolated or infrequent.

### Antisocial behaviour

Several youth workers shared experiences of antisocial behaviour, including emotional aggression and damage to property. Female staff in particular reported feeling unsafe during altercations, often requiring male security presence.

*We've only had a few instances of physical fights, but when it happens, female staff definitely feel unsafe... Luckily, we've had a male security guard on duty. (Youth worker interview)*

Bullying was mentioned as an issue, particularly affecting vulnerable children such as those with special educational needs.

*[They are] quite vulnerable... [They] became a bit of a target at the youth club. (Youth worker interview)*

### Weapons and serious violence

Some youth workers described incidents involving knives or shootings, although these often took place near rather than within the club. Clubs used metal detection wands in suspected cases and worked with youth offending teams to respond.

*Children usually tell you who is violent... We have the facility to wand if we suspect. (Youth worker interview)*

One youth worker described how a shooting near the premises - unrelated to any attendees - led to a sharp drop in attendance due to parental concern.

*Attendance absolutely nosedived because of parents' concerns of risk... external to what we have any control over. (Youth worker interview)*

### Drug-related behaviour

Most youth workers said drug use inside youth clubs is rare, but when it does happen, it often overlaps with aggression. Some reported visible drug selling or purchasing near the premises.

*There are instances of criminality on the doorstep, which are often quite open. (Youth worker interview)*

### Children's perspectives

Focus group with children consistently highlighted they had not experienced or witnessed violence in youth clubs. Many credited the staff for maintaining a safe environment.

*They [the staff and volunteers] wouldn't let any of that stuff happen. (Child focus group)*

Some children mentioned seeing knives on the streets but not within the club. A few clubs had installed knife bins outside, allowing children to safely dispose of weapons before entering.

## 5.5. What training do staff (volunteers or professionals) have that is relevant to supporting children at risk of or involved in violence? (RQ3c)

Findings from the survey indicate that high proportions of youth workers have received of safeguarding and mental health-related training. As shown in Figure 33, almost all respondents had received safeguarding

training (99%), reflecting its central importance across youth work. Mental health awareness training was also prevalent (84%), alongside trauma-informed practice training (72%), suggesting wide recognition of mental health and trauma as key factors when working with vulnerable children.

Support sessions such as supervision, mentoring, and case discussions (61%) and conflict management skills training (57%) also featured prominently. In contrast, cultural competency (24%), counselling skills training (26%), and violence prevention skills training (27%), were less common. These findings highlight potential gaps in youth worker training, particularly in areas relevant to inclusive practice and direct violence prevention.

**Figure 33. Type of training received by youth workers**



Source: Youth sector survey Q21.

Base: 200.

Note: Multiple response options – staff may have received more than one type of training.

Interviews highlighted similar patterns in the types of training received, emphasising both foundational and emerging training needs. Safeguarding was consistently described as a core requirement. All interviewees indicated completing safeguarding training and regular refreshers.

*It's our bread and butter in terms of what we have to do every year. (Youth worker interview)*

Trauma-informed practice was also widely discussed. Most youth workers reported receiving this training and saw it as essential when working with at-risk children.

*Trauma-informed training and care involve acknowledging that some children engage in risk-taking behaviours due to past trauma. (Youth worker interview)*

While many youth workers valued training on conflict resolution and de-escalation, they felt current provision was insufficient.

*We touch on the reasons why violence may occur, but not necessarily ways of dealing with it. (Youth worker interview)*

Several youth workers also stressed the need to extend training to more staff, noting its importance in everyday youth work. Programmes such as *Leap Confronting Conflict* - which combines conflict resolution and trauma-informed practice - were cited as particularly useful. Prevent training (focused on countering radicalisation and extremism) was also noted as important.

Others mentioned specialised training programmes they had engaged with, such as *Rise Up* (commissioned by the London VRU), which includes content on online harms, working with girls and young women, and race and youth work. Respondents highlighted several training programmes and practices specifically aimed at supporting children at risk of or involved in violence. These initiatives focus on equipping youth workers with the knowledge and tools to address complex and evolving challenges.

*I also got them to do a Prevent awareness course, which is about the prevention of criminalisation... understanding what radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism are and how to identify and explore that. (Youth worker interview)*

*“There’s training around crime prevention and awareness of county lines. Our staff are encouraged to apply for these courses. (Youth worker interview)*

## Training needs and challenges

- **Youth workers expressed strong interest in ongoing professional development but highlighted some barriers to access.**

Many interviews with youth workers reported that training opportunities are not easily accessible due to geographical and logistical constraints, and emphasised the need for more local, face-to-face, and interactive options. Several youth work workers interviewed also noted that the youth work sector is facing a shortage of trained professionals, and this is largely due to limited access to professional training opportunities particularly for newly qualified staff.

*Training has to be ongoing. I could do this job for another 15 years and still not know it all. (Youth worker interview)*

*There's been a massive reduction in trained and qualified workforces. It's about having access to professional training for youth workers. (Youth worker interview)*

Many youth worker interviewees stated that a lack of funding restricts youth workers’ access to training and modern engagement tools. This can delay the development of trust between youth workers and children.

*Sometimes the experience of our sessional youth workers and volunteers and their ability to access training can be a barrier. As a charity, we don't always have funding to put them through formal qualifications. (Youth worker interview)*

- **While a wide range of training is available to youth workers, there are clear gaps in depth and coverage – in particular safeguarding, violence reduction, mental health, and cultural awareness.**

Survey respondents were asked to choose one type of training they felt would make the biggest difference in helping safeguard children at risk of crime or violence. Although, at present, there is insufficient evidence to say whether trauma-informed training helps prevent children from becoming involved in violence<sup>10</sup>, it was the most frequently cited need, as the need for this knowledge was shared by 29% of survey respondents. Youth worker interviews also saw this as critical for understanding and supporting children affected by adverse experiences. However, many felt current training lacks depth.

*How can you do a four-hour course on trauma-informed care and claim to understand trauma and a trauma-informed approach? (Youth worker interview)*

Conflict management and de-escalation training was also felt to be a key priority (21% of survey respondents). These two were among the training programs with the highest reported uptake by youth club staff. Survey and interview participants emphasised the need for practical skills to prevent and manage

<sup>10</sup> Youth Endowment Fund. (n.d.) Trauma-informed training and service redesign. [online] Youth Endowment Fund. Available at: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/trauma-informed-training-and-service-redesign/>

potentially violent situations. One interviewee noted the importance of learning to de-escalate conflict “without causing harm.”

Safeguarding remains essential as shared by 19% of respondents to the survey (and as noted earlier, relevant training is being provided), but many respondents called for more advanced, contextualised training. Topics such as child sexual exploitation (CSE), child criminal exploitation (CCE), and local safeguarding risks were commonly mentioned. One interviewee also highlighted,

*Enhanced safeguarding is essential because basic training is never enough when working with children.*  
(Youth worker interview)

Violence prevention training (17% of survey respondents) - including awareness of knife crime and gang involvement - was also identified as important for both education and prevention.

Youth workers interviewed highlighted the need for training in counselling skills (9% of respondents), including motivational interviewing and reflective practice, to better support children one-to-one. Mental health awareness training (3% of respondents) was also sought, but many noted that it does not fully equip them to deal with the complexity of children’s needs. Last but not least, cultural competency and anti-racism training (2% of respondents) were identified as areas for improvement. Interviewees described participating in training initiatives that addressed race equity, notably the *Rise Up* programme developed by the London VRU, which incorporates focused content on race within the context of youth work. They also highlighted the need to go beyond standalone sessions by embedding anti-racist principles within broader systemic and trauma-informed practices, reflecting a more integrated and strategic approach to promoting race equity in their work with children. Further, staff called for support to better understand and meet the needs of children from diverse backgrounds.

## 5.6. Conclusion

Findings from this chapter highlight the breadth of support that youth clubs provide to children at risk of or involved in violence. Staff commonly support children with a range of overlapping needs - most frequently special educational needs, poverty, and school exclusion - through both informal relationships and structured interventions. While many clubs offer targeted provision, this is not universal, and gaps remain in areas such as information sharing, early identification, and staff training.

Most youth workers reported that they could recognise emerging risks but faced barriers in responding consistently, including limited access to external services and a lack of time or funding for multi-agency working.

Despite these challenges, many youth clubs were seen by children as safe, trusted spaces where support could be accessed without stigma. The next chapter explores the structural and operational enablers and barriers that shape the ability of clubs to deliver this type of work effectively and sustainably.

## 6. Barriers and facilitators: what limits youth clubs' ability to prevent children from becoming involved in violence? And what could strengthen it?

### Key findings

#### Barriers

- Funding was reported to be uneven and short term, limiting the consistency and reach of provision, particularly in areas of high need. Smaller youth clubs appeared less likely to access local authority funding, potentially limiting their ability to deliver targeted provision.
- Workforce shortages were widely cited, with challenges in recruiting, retaining, and diversifying staff, especially male and specialist youth workers. Low staff per children ratios were perceived to restrict relationship-building, particularly in busy sessions or when supporting children with complex needs.
- Youth workers described barriers to situating targeted work within open-access settings, including stigma, challenging behaviour, and limited staff skills. Sector leaders raised concerns about shifting from open-access to referral-only models, which may exclude children not meeting formal thresholds.

#### Facilitators

- Youth-led and co-designed activities were seen to support engagement, agency, and inclusion.
- Age-specific sessions helped tailor provision and manage risk, while flexible grouping allowed peer support and progression.
- Strong local partnerships were reported to improve support pathways, especially where relationships with statutory services were well established.
- Co-location with services was perceived to improve access, though managing diverse needs in shared spaces remained challenging.
- Children and youth workers recognised the importance of continuity in staffing, highlighting that stable relationships are fundamental to establishing trust.
- Flexibility, clear targets, and local relationships were described as enabling tailored, inclusive delivery.

#### Stakeholder views on policy and practice changes

- Multi-year and flexible funding were widely seen as essential for planning and stability.
- A clearer statutory duty on youth work was proposed to secure recognition and accountability.
- Investment in workforce development was seen as critical, including routes for progression, supervision, and Continuing Professional Development (CPD).
- Maintaining youth-centred spaces was seen as key, alongside integration with local services.
- Youth-led and context-sensitive approaches were felt to be most effective for reaching children facing multiple risks.



## 6.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the conditions that support or hinder youth clubs in preventing violence and supporting children at risk. It brings together evidence on the barriers and facilitators that affect how youth clubs operate, how staff build trusted relationships with children and how clubs provide both formal and informal support. It then explores in detail the barriers and facilitators in relation to targeted provision within open access settings. Drawing on insights from youth workers, sector leaders, and children, it also explores what policy and practice changes could improve the role of youth clubs in violence prevention, and highlights models and approaches that may be suitable for wider adoption.

## 6.2. Key barriers (RQ1e, RQ2c, RQ3d)

### 1. Funding is distributed unevenly making it challenging to provide consistent support to vulnerable children.

Many interviews with youth workers highlighted the role that youth clubs play in violence prevention but felt that it is often undermined by limited and inconsistent funding. The lack of financial support often restricts their ability to scale up services or respond effectively to emerging needs. With many youth clubs operating tight budgets, relying on borrowed resources, goodwill, and unpaid contributions to deliver high-impact sessions.

*In terms of being equipped, I feel my team is equipped to deliver what we do, but it could always be better because we are delivering on a shoestring. We pull in resources and beg and borrow to get what we need. For example, a person with lived experience came in and worked with our children for free. It was a service he charges for when he goes into schools, but because we didn't have the funding, he kindly did it for free for us. (Youth worker interview)*

The reported lack of funding for youth clubs was identified as an obstacle to effective violence reduction efforts. While some organisations can provide well-funded, organised, and high-quality sessions, others encounter difficulties due to limited staffing and inadequate support, leading to inconsistent services and environments that fail to adequately address children's needs. For example, many youth workers stated they cannot extend valuable services such as breakfast clubs due to financial and physical limitations.

*The size of the provision, the room sizes, obviously when you have 52 for Breakfast Club that's challenging and can be limiting. The Breakfast Club is very valuable, but we'd like to extend it, but we don't have the funding or the manpower, so it's all limited by our capacity to deliver in terms of money, staffing, and to some degree, the facility. (Youth worker interview)*

It was felt that charitable organisations may have greater flexibility than statutory services to implement and test new methods, yet their ability to respond effectively remains contingent upon securing short-term funding and possessing adequate staff capacity.

*The challenges are resources and funding. We are the voluntary sector, so it is hard. (Youth worker interview)*

Insufficient and unstable funding was also cited as the most commonly reported barrier by sector leaders. They highlighted that often they are required to make difficult decisions about where to allocate resources. As a result, some high-need areas may remain underserved, limiting access to relational opportunities for children who may benefit most from sustained support.

*"The model works for vulnerable children when there are enough qualified and experienced youth workers and a safe space for them. The problem arises when they have to do this with higher need and less capacity." (Youth and Commissioning Service Manager - Local authority)*



## 2. Lack of funding limits staffing and workforce capacity, hindering youth clubs operating effectively to reduce violence.

Youth workers interviewed frequently reported that challenges related to the workforce capacity and staffing levels affect youth clubs ability to support children and reduce violence. It was reflected interviews with youth workers that recruitment of volunteers and paid staff was challenging in part due to the perceptions held of children by society. Furthermore, it was felt that people may be deterred from entering the youth sector as they do not feel they have the skills or training to support children with complex needs.

*The broader negative narrative that society creates about children creates a difficulty in recruiting volunteers into the setting. (Youth worker interview)*

The workforce gender makeup was also cited as a barrier for youth clubs to reduce violence. The NYA's Workforce Census 2024 shows that among 983 respondents to the question on gender, 63% were female, 33% were male, and the rest identified with another or no gender, or preferred not to say. Findings from Interviews with youth workers highlighted that youth clubs with more female staff found it harder to deal with challenging male behaviours. This applies in particular to those youth clubs that have a female-dominated frontline workforce, making it difficult to challenge some behaviours with boys particularly when physical violence occurs. For example, one youth club leader specifically requested a focus on employing more male youth workers, which was noted as a challenge. It was reflected that it was harder to find men who want to work with children.

*We struggle some weeks when we have high numbers [of children], especially if there are more boys than usual. It's quite challenging and difficult, and fights happen. We've managed to handle it well, but it does become challenging. We question what's safe and what isn't to do. We've only had a few instances of physical fights, but when it happens, female staff definitely feel unsafe. Luckily, we've had a male security guard on duty during those times, which has been helpful. Female staff don't feel comfortable breaking up fights between teenage boys because we could get hurt. We need someone physically stronger present. (Youth worker interview)*

Workforce challenges were also cited by sector leaders, who cited examples of youth clubs facing shortages of qualified staff and high turnover.

*Workforce development is a huge issue. There's that stat about how many youth workers have left the profession. (Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner)*

This may be a reference to a 2019 Unison report which found that over 4,500 youth workers have left the profession since 2011.<sup>11</sup>

## 3. In turn, lack of capacity limits youth clubs' ability to build relationships with children.

Youth worker interviews flagged that when staffing is limited, particularly during busy sessions, it is challenging for them to give children sufficient individual attention. This lack of meaningful interaction with children not only delays the development of trusting relationships but also stretches the capacity of the current youth workers.

*If we get high numbers in the youth club and we only have three members of staff, we are limited in how many children we can have conversations with. (Youth worker interview)*

*Children's needs are much more complex now. Even a qualified youth worker faces challenges. (Senior Manager, Young People – VRU)*

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/04/Youth-services-report-04-2019.pdf?>

No statistically significant relationship between total number of staff and volunteers and youth clubs' relationship with their LAs was found based on the chi-square test result (see Figure 36 in Annex A.3).

### 6.3. Key facilitators (RQ1e, RQ2c, RQ3d)

#### ➤ Co-creation of provision with children was felt to help prevent violence.

Many interviews with youth workers noted that involving children in shaping the services they access helps ensure that the work is relevant, inclusive, and suitable for them. This approach ensures that activities reflect children's interests and lived experiences, while also opening up opportunities they may not have considered. By involving them in planning and decision-making, youth clubs promote a sense of agency, belonging, and responsibility. Some youth clubs go further by embedding youth leadership structures into their core model. For instance, ambassador programmes allow children to help plan sessions, trips, and community events - giving them a voice and a stake in their environment.

#### ➤ Age-specific sessions enabled youth clubs to tailor activities to each age group, and flexible grouping facilitated peer interaction and progression.

Some interviews with youth worker reflected that structuring provision by age allows activities and conversations to be more relevant and appropriately pitched. Splitting sessions into age groups created safer, more comfortable environments, where children could speak more freely and engage meaningfully with staff and peers. Tailoring sessions in this way helps to build trust, support age-relevant discussion, and ultimately reduces the risk of conflict or disengagement that can lead to violence.

*When we first set up one of our youth clubs, we did the full 10 to 18 age bracket. Older children didn't like it because they didn't feel they could have open conversations about things with a 10-year-old there. We did it for a few weeks just to get things in place, and then we split our youth clubs. Now our youth clubs are 10 to 13 and 14 to 18. There is a bit of an overlap with our 13-year-olds because of the sponsorship groups. We found that works really well because the children feel more comfortable about the conversations they can have with the staff. (Youth worker interview)*

However, some interviews with youth workers revealed that some youth clubs took a flexible and inclusive approach to age grouping, recognising that children develop at different rates and often value older peer connections. It was felt that this structure not only supports engagement but also creates opportunities for older participants to take on peer-led roles, encouraging responsibility and positive role modelling. One youth worker explained:

*We divide our provision into two groups, Play Rangers for ages 5 to 14, and the Excel project for those aged 11 or 12 and up. We have an interim gap of ages between 11 and 14, depending on the age appropriateness of activities or whether the peer groups want to stay with their siblings. Older participants, especially around age 14, are also encouraged to take on peer-led or leadership roles with younger children. (Youth worker interview)*

#### ➤ Collaboration with wider services and multiagency working enable youth clubs to support vulnerable children.

Most interviews with youth workers reported working alongside wider agencies including youth justice, schools and children's services to signpost children to access support services that they are unable to deliver in-house. Sector leaders also highlighted that multiagency collaboration - with police, mental health services, and social care - creative staff skillsets, and family engagement were also widely seen as essential. Youth clubs embedded in their communities with strong ties to local authorities and services were seen as more effective.

*Because they've been around for so long and are so embedded in the community, there is an element of them having reach from all of those levels of formality that you were suggesting. (Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner)*

Additionally, some youth clubs collaborate with wider services to deliver activities. For examples, monthly drop-in sessions at some youth clubs address topics such as drug and alcohol use or healthy relationships offered in partnership with Violence Reduction Units. Other youth clubs deliver targeted activities on specific days when children may be involved in anti-social behaviour.

*We work closely with the Police and Fire Service. We put on diversionary activities on troublesome nights like mischief night and Bonfire night, whether it's the weekends or during the week. (Youth worker interview)*

*The range of creatives and pathways links with multi-agency working, so they can bring in lots of different types of professionals. (Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner)*

Interviewed youth workers observed that their relationships with wider services were reciprocal, often involving referrals of children to the youth club. This allowed the youth club to form positive relationships with children and integrate them into its activities.

*We've developed a relationship alongside Youth Justice where they see the benefits of that transitional phase. They support the young person to attend while youth workers build that relationship. Then they can slowly step back, and we can hold that relationship with the young person going forward. (Youth worker interview)*

#### ➤ **Stable staff enable trusting relationships to be developed with children over time.**

It was highlighted by Youth worker interviews that continuity of staffing is essential in building deep, dependable relationships with children. When staff remained in post at the same youth club for extended periods, they were described as familiar and trustworthy figures, and their presence became a stable part of a young person's experience. This could reduce burdens for engagement, particularly for those who need some time to develop trusting relationships, ensuring children's consistent access to support over time.

*Continuity is massive. I'm a big believer in keeping the same staff team in place in a project or provision. They almost become part of the furniture to the children. (Youth worker interview)*

*Once they get to know that you are consistent and trustworthy...I think children will not seek more from you until they have got that initial relationship and feel they can trust you. (Youth worker interview)*

## **6.4. Key barriers for youth clubs to situate targeted provision within open-access provision (RQ3e)**

The following sections explore both the enablers and barriers encountered in delivering targeted support within open-access youth settings. Section 6.4.1 highlights practices that underpin trust and safety for children, while section 6.4.2 examines the challenges youth clubs face when integrating targeted provision, including the risks of stigma and the complexities of managing high-risk behaviour.

### **6.4.1 Key barriers**

#### **1. Risk of stigmatising children**

It was noted that targeted interventions can unintentionally isolate or label children. Youth workers emphasised the importance of integrating support in ways that avoid segregation. Some clubs said involving children in programme design and delivery helped embed targeted support without stigma. This reportedly empowered children and gave them a sense of ownership and pride.

*We have gangs and children with low aspirations, so we do targeted sessions. We are a youth-led organisation with an ambassadors programme that gives children a voice within the organisation. They sit with me to plan our sessions, trips, and fun days, which decreases antisocial behaviour and creates a sense of ownership and pride within the community. (Youth worker interview)*

*No young person wants to be singled out as being different in a negative way. Children don't want to be segregated. (Youth worker interview)*

This highlights the importance of integrating targeted support in a way that does not isolate or label children.

## 2. Managing high-risk or disruptive behaviour

Managing the behaviour of children who require targeted interventions can be difficult, especially when their actions impact the broader group. This is particularly relevant when providing support to children involved in serious crime or violence, as it impacts the safety of other attendees and staff. Illustrating the complexities involved in integrating targeted support within open-access settings, one respondent shared:

*A small group of children who were identified by the police as being at risk of CCE. They approached us, youth offending and police teams, to put in a specific targeted intervention. That group, when they first engaged with us, we couldn't have mixed them with the Open Access stuff because they were quite prolific in antisocial behaviour. (Youth worker interview)*

## 3. Limited workforce capability

Youth workers stressed that providing effective targeted support requires time, structure, and specialist skills that are reflective of the changing environment of children for instance digital and social media, which they often lacked.

*People delivering targeted early help work are working quite intensely one-to-one with children. It's more structured, involving adults and coordinating a professional network, with a higher level of case recording. (Youth worker interview)*

This highlights the intensive nature of targeted support and the need for skilled practitioners.

Even where funding exists, it was stated that youth clubs must continuously train staff to stay relevant and effective.

*It's about us keeping up with our training. It's about us keeping relevant. (Youth worker interview)*

This commitment to professional development is required to ensure that staff are equipped to address emerging issues and provide high-quality support.

## 4. Alignment with local and national government priorities

Youth workers noted that aligning delivery with local authority priorities or adapting to changes in government, which often result in shifts in funding tied to specific programmes, can present challenges. This is particularly true when attempting to remain responsive to the needs of children.

*It's shaping delivery around the issue and what the local authority or the government is trying to tackle at that time. (Youth worker interview)*

## 5. Shift from open access to targeted provision

Sector leaders raised concerns about the shift from open access to targeted provision. They highlighted that referral-only models may exclude children who require support but do not meet the established formal thresholds. During the group sessions, it was argued that the shift could result in significant gaps in service provision, leaving a segment of vulnerable children without necessary support. In fact, the

criteria used to establish formal thresholds can vary widely, potentially leading to inconsistencies in who receives support. They stressed the importance of robust mechanisms to ensure no children are left underserved.

*Although my teams have detached workers signposting, they're blocked because they're not a targeted audience. (Commissioning Manager, Young People's Services – Local authority)*

### 6.4.2 Key facilitators

#### 1. Co-location of services is a key factor that impact youth clubs' ability to support vulnerable children.

Some interviews with youth workers and deliberative sessions with sector leaders highlighted some clubs benefit from co-location with wider services (e.g. health, mental health, and substance misuse). This model allows for a holistic approach and provides opportunities for children to access wider support services in a familiar setting supported by staff they know. This enabled children to access the youth club as well as be signposted to more specialist, wider support services.

*We've got health services located in one of our youth hubs, including clinical therapeutic services, GP services, sexual health services, and substance misuse services, all packaged together. Some of these services have been in existence for a long time but repackaging them in a way that's co-located in the same place and clearly advertised to children. (Youth worker interview)*

Children who have established relationships with youth workers help ease access to these services, but managing diverse needs within the same space can be challenging, particularly for newer or evolving services. Established clubs often find this integration more manageable through staggered opening hours or by offering separate spaces for specific services.

*We attract children that nobody else wants to work with. We integrate a lot of children together and I think that is the key to them socialising more freely. (Youth worker interview)*

#### 2. Flexibility and responsiveness

Youth workers felt that flexibility - including offering one-to-one support or using separate spaces - helped clubs respond effectively to diverse and changing needs. Interviewees shared that having separate spaces for different activities allows children to engage effectively whether as a group or on a one-to-one basis with their peers and youth workers.

*We do targeted sessions, but we don't target children...that isn't youth work. (Youth worker interview)*

Before austerity cuts, some local authorities operated youth clubs that were open throughout the day and evening on weekends. During the day, these centres offered drop-in Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services in informal, youth-friendly settings. In the evening, they transitioned to open-access youth clubs offering recreational and developmental activities. This model enabled consistent, wraparound support for children, especially those not in school, at risk of becoming not engaged in education, employment, or training (NEET), or disengaged from other services.

#### 3. Community engagement and partnership with local authorities

Some youth workers said long-standing relationships with local communities supported inclusion and cohesion and enhance the provision of targeted support within open-access settings - especially for children facing multiple risk factors.



## 6.5. What policy and practice changes could improve youth clubs' ability to prevent children from becoming involved in violence? (RQ4)

This section presents insights gathered from group sessions with sector leaders, including funders, commissioners, implementers, and policymakers. These insights are organised to address the research question and are distinct from those recommended by RSM in the following chapter. Sector leaders noted several policy and practice adjustments that might enhance youth clubs' capacity to prevent children from engaging in violence. Additionally, youth workers identified examples of effective practices that could be implemented more broadly to address existing barriers.

The improvements suggested include implementing changes in:

1. how youth clubs (and youth work more broadly) are funded;
2. establishing a clearer statutory duty on youth work and empowering local agencies and communities for effective youth work whilst balancing between local autonomy and central support;
3. recognising the need for qualified youth workers for effective early intervention and violence prevention in youth clubs. Similarly, recognising youth work as a career with increased investment in continuous professional development;
4. implementing a youth-led approaches; and
5. engaging children at an earlier age (i.e., from 8 years of age) with youth workers embedded in communities and public spaces to prevent harm early.

These changes would ensure that youth clubs have the financial stability and autonomy to develop tailored interventions that meet the specific needs of their communities.

### 6.5.1 Enhancing funding strategies to prevent violence amongst children

There was broad consensus among funders - including local authorities, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), grant-making charities, and Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) - that youth clubs are not inactive but are struggling financially. Stakeholders noted that youth services more broadly are facing significant financial pressure, resulting in funders needing to be more selective. In some cases, statutory services as well as youth clubs are experiencing cuts. With demand for funding outpacing supply, many funders have tightened their eligibility criteria. A few sector leaders expressed concerns that a scarcity of funding may lead to favouring 'new' models or approaches at the expense of some more established models that have delivered effective initiatives, both locally and nationally.

*The entire landscape is so tight on cash that we must be very selective in what we fund/provide. For instance, at the end of last year our funding applications increased threefold due to uncertainties surrounding government decisions and lack of funding streams that had been cut off. (Youth and Commissioning Service Manager - Local authority)*

When asked about potential changes and solutions to reduce pressure, sector leaders suggested three options, one (Option 1) of which is already being implemented:

#### **Option 1. Provision of larger envelopes of unrestricted, multi-year grants.**

Some funders - including grant-making charities and Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) – reported that they are now offering funding through extended contracts lasting up to seven years, ensuring long-term commitment and stability for youth clubs. However, despite efforts to implement multi-year grants, they reported that a lack of sufficient funding across the youth sector remains a significant challenge, affecting the ability of youth work to deliver consistent positive outcomes.

*“We gave more funding on five-year contracts with two years extension, making them seven-year contracts. This means that youth clubs are commissioned long-term, providing consistency.” (Managing Director - Grant-making national charity)*

*“We’ve tried to do multi-year grants now, but that’s not the case across the board, adding an extra layer of challenge for youth work. The massive lack of cash across the board is the problem, not anything that youth work is or isn’t doing.” (Senior Manager, Young People – VRU)*

### **Option 2. Implementation of flexible, bottom-up local funding models.**

Rather than having a top-down distribution of funds decided by the government, initiatives such as the Home Office’s Safer Streets were deemed more effective when managed locally. Various local entities, including Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), were considered better placed to oversee local distribution of funds to youth clubs. Empowering local agencies with decision-making authority over financial allocations was viewed as significantly advantageous compared to directives from the central government and as enabling local areas to develop solutions for addressing youth violence based on specific needs of their youth clubs.

*“Various bodies, like police and crime commissioners, can handle local distribution. Empowering local agencies around how money is spent rather than dictating it from the top would be really helpful.” (Project and strategy manager – PCC)*

### **Option 3. Ring-fence funding for interventions that focus on preventative outcomes.**

While earmarking funds can provide more consistent assistance, the application criteria have become increasingly stringent, with a focus on community safety outcomes. One of the inherent challenges for youth clubs is the difficulty in measuring its impact, as preventative actions are not easily quantifiable. Youth clubs provide critical general support to children, preventing many from needing more expensive targeted interventions later on. Although difficult to quantify, the preventative work of youth clubs saves significant public funds by reducing the need for costly legal and incarceration processes. Despite the goal of maintaining flexibility in funding allocation, the demand from most funders for concrete, measurable results present a significant obstacle.

*“We ring-fenced a pot of our money for children, which has helped ensure we’re offering that on a more even basis.” (Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner)*

*“I’ve seen children that our workers have prevented from growing into criminality, which has been a net cost saving to the public purse. That’s not recognised. What is recognised is the bill that’s being paid down the further end of the pipeline.” (Youth and Commissioning Service Manager - Local authority)*

## **6.5.2 Establishing a new statutory duty that promotes informal education through community-based youth work**

Commissioners from local authorities described youth work as an essential form of informal education. They felt this role could be better embedded within national and local education strategies. A clearer statutory duty to promote informal, community-based youth work could strengthen the sector’s legitimacy and integration. Considering that local authorities are increasingly accountable for children outside of school settings, such integration could prove beneficial.



*Youth provision covers a lot of streams, from youth work to formal education to positive activities. Children need it all. Youth work as a form of informal education and practice needs to be recognised. (Youth and Commissioning Service Manager - Local authority)*

In addition, both local authority staff and government officials have suggested that national guidance should encourage the integration of universal and targeted provision. Rather than focusing solely on young individuals who are excluded or NEET, local authorities could be required to offer services that children can access when they need them, and to provide clear access points across education, youth work, and care systems. If this does not occur, there is a risk of perpetuating siloed approaches. Specifically, if youth work keeps being funded through children's social care, the focus will remain on referrals and crisis intervention rather than on preventative measures.

*By making it a requirement for joint commissioning, pooling a percentage of existing resources for children's services by LA's across education, social care and community safety resources in to a youth transformation service. (Commissioning Manager, Young People's Services – Local authority)*

### **6.5.3 Foster local collaboration by implementing a more balanced approach between local autonomy and central support**

Another update to the current guidelines was suggested in relation to the fostering collaboration between youth clubs, schools, and colleges. In this model, youth clubs should be encouraged to initiate contact, and local authorities should act as the connecting bridge between educational institutions and youth clubs. One respondent described a contextual safeguarding summit, which had been running for four years and that for the first time included third sector organisations as partners (in addition to schools).

*The more we can put in specific policies and procedures on the education side, the more we can encourage those partnerships, which will empower youth clubs and help drive things forward. (Youth and Commissioning Service Manager – Local authority)*

Another point discussed by local authority staff and government officials was the empowerment of local communities to make decisions about youth clubs and related services. There was strong support for allowing local communities greater control over service design and delivery using their limited funding, with central government playing a supporting and enabling role. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of a collaborative approach in policymaking to recognise the challenges of the time (increasingly complex needs) and enable communities to make informed choices that are best suited for their specific circumstances. Although most stakeholders agreed that a multi-level, collaborative strategy is essential to develop systems that allow regions to make decisions appropriate to their unique circumstances, no practical suggestions were made as to how to implement this approach.

*When it comes to youth clubs and everything related to them, it's about finding the balance between letting areas get on with it and do what they do best, while also providing guidance and considerations. (Policy Advisor – Central Government, DMCS)*

Lastly, respondents also cited collaboration between youth clubs and businesses as a promising example. Engaging high-street brands - such as McDonald's, Burger King, and KFC - was viewed as an opportunity to improve the safety of children in public places they frequent. Businesses that have large footfall from children can play a role in contextual safeguarding by training staff to recognise signs of risk and coordinate with local services.

*Youth work plays a crucial role in creating safer and more welcoming town and city centres. This can be achieved through collaboration with businesses and the implementation of contextual safeguarding practices across various sectors. (Programmes and Funding Partnerships Manager - National grant-making charity)*

#### 6.5.4 Recognising the need for qualified youth workers for effective early intervention and violence prevention in youth clubs.

There was consensus among sector leaders that early intervention is crucial, beginning with children as young as 8 years old, to curb negative behaviours. They highlighted that the role and benefits of youth clubs in the violence prevention cycle should also be recognised by policymakers, schools and families. It was stressed that qualified youth workers should be seen as professionals on par with teachers and social workers, offering essential support to children.

*We can all bang on about more funding, so let's take that as a given for the request. We've talked a lot about workforce. Perhaps what would be helpful from policy is to recognise the value of youth work. (Police Representative - Violence Reduction Partnership)*

*I think we need to recognise youth work as a career just as important as teaching. (Managing Director – National grant-making charity)*

Calls were made from local authority staff and VRU representatives for policies to support the development of a highly skilled youth workforce that reflects the profession's unique character.

*Policy needs to enable the growth of youth workforce, and the finances need to enable youth work on its own terms. It needs to be something that is growing, evolving, developing, and getting better. (Senior Policy Advisor – Central Government, Home Office)*

Some warned against what was described as a 'new trend', that is dispersing youth workers too widely across institutions (e.g. schools, hospitals, police stations) at the expense of dedicated youth settings. While placing youth workers in different settings can extend reach, respondents felt this risks diluting their core role and eroding the relational, youth-centred foundation of open-access provision. Maintaining distinct youth spaces was seen as essential to building trust, offering consistent support, and preventing the fragmentation of services. (e.g. schools, hospitals, police stations) at the expense of dedicated youth settings.

*By changing the approach and transitioning towards something new, we need to ensure we're not creating more fragmentation and expectations without replacing the ones that already exist. (Senior Policy Advisor – Central Government, Home Office)*

Sector leaders also stressed the importance of supervision, career progression, and supporting new and volunteer youth workers. Considering the ever-changing needs of children, a balanced approach in policy-making is necessary to strengthen the sector at different levels, ensuring that youth workers, from highly qualified practitioners to new entrants and volunteers, are adequately supported and equipped to meet the complex demands of their roles.

*Supervision is important to impart knowledge and support others. This needs to play a key role in practice reviews. (Commissioning Manager, Young People's Services – Local authority)*

#### 6.5.5 Implementing a youth-led approach is essential to developing innovative and community-sensitive strategies and practices facilitated by youth clubs.

Youth clubs are crucial for the development and support of children, offering a safe space and preventing costly interventions later on. However, not all children find these clubs safe due to local conflicts and risks. In an area marked by high levels of violence, it was observed that certain children were not accessing the local youth club. A gap analysis was conducted to identify other nearby provisions, and consultations were held with the children to understand the barriers to access. The issues identified included postcode conflicts, fear of traveling to the club, and a lack of engaging activities. To address these concerns, the youth club

collaborated with the children to co-create activities based on their interests, resulting in a significant increase in engagement.

*Complementary detached youth work and tailor-made, community-sensitive approaches are necessary to reach those most vulnerable. (Senior Manager, Young People – VRU)*

This chapter has shed light into the main barriers and enablers affecting youth clubs' ability to support children at risk of violence, including funding, staffing, partnership working, and the integration of targeted support. It set out a number of policy and practice changes perceived by youth workers and sector leaders to strengthen the role of youth clubs. The final chapter will draw together insights from across the study to identify priority actions for funders, commissioners, and policymakers.

## 7. Conclusions and insights for policy and practice

Youth clubs in England and Wales play a vital but often overlooked role in supporting children at risk of or involved in violence. Although set up as open-access services, they often operate in areas with high levels of deprivation, unemployment, and violent crime. Survey and mapping data show that they are just as likely to be present in these areas as more targeted services. Youth workers and sector stakeholders described youth clubs as often engaging children facing multiple vulnerabilities, including school exclusion, poor mental health, and contact with the youth justice system.

Despite financial constraints and staffing pressures, youth clubs are widely seen as safe, accessible spaces. Children involved in this study consistently described youth clubs as welcoming and non-judgemental. Youth workers felt that informal activities – such as games, cooking, or shared trips – helped build trust, which over time enabled children to disclose concerns or seek support. Many clubs also offer targeted support or act as a bridge to other services, including youth offending teams, mental health services, and police. These perceptions suggest that youth clubs are playing a frontline role in supporting children with high levels of need. In addition to their supportive and developmental roles, youth workers are often at the frontline of safeguarding children from violence. They play a crucial part in de-escalating conflicts, intervening to interrupt cycles of violence, and acting as bridges between divided groups, fostering understanding and reducing tensions within communities.

However, the consistency and scope of provision vary greatly. Many youth workers described a reliance on short-term funding, part-time staffing, and limited weekend or late-evening opening hours. These factors were seen to hinder relationship-building and limit support at times when children may be most at risk. Training was also reported as inconsistent. While safeguarding and mental health training were common, youth workers reported more limited access to training in trauma-informed care, conflict de-escalation, or cultural competence.

Some youth clubs have developed flexible models – combining open-access with targeted support, working closely with partners, and co-designing activities with children. Youth workers perceived these approaches to be more engaging and responsive, particularly for children who may not access formal services. Overall, the findings suggest that youth clubs were seen as trusted by children, rooted in their communities, and well-placed to provide relational, preventative support. Yet this role is often underfunded, fragmented, and highly dependent on local circumstances.

The insights that follow respond to these findings. They are grouped into three thematic areas:

- funding and commissioning;
- workforce development; and
- inclusive, youth-led and place-based practice.

They are also targeted to relevant actors, such as policymakers, funders, and commissioners. The actors responsible for implementing each insight are shown using the symbols below.

Key	Funders & Commissioners <sup>12</sup> 	Policymakers <sup>13</sup> 	Youth clubs 
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<sup>12</sup> E.g., VRUs, PCCs, local authorities (as commissioners), grant-making charities.

<sup>13</sup> Includes Government departments, national policy officials (e.g. DfE, DCMS, Home Office).

## 1. Funding and commissioning

### 1.1 Ensure the stability of youth clubs funding through the provision of multi-year, flexible grants.



Short-term, competitive funding was identified as a challenge to maintaining high-quality work in youth clubs. It impacts workforce retention, strategic planning, and the ability to establish long-term relationships with children, particularly those vulnerable and at risk of violence. It is recommended that both local and national funders consider providing core grants for five to seven years to support youth clubs, with flexibility to respond to local needs.

### 1.2 Extend youth club provision to areas with high violence and limited access.

While youth club locations are often influenced by levels of need, there are still disparities in access. Some local authorities with high rates of youth violence, may lack sufficient provision. Funders and commissioners should prioritise extending youth provision in under-served locations, using violence prevalence and service gaps as key criteria.

### 1.3 Ring-fence funding to support consistent staffing and operations during peak risk times.

Youth workers and children highlighted that risk of violence is particularly high between 4–8pm on weekdays – a period when many youth clubs are already open, but not consistently. Some clubs only open once or twice a week, limiting opportunities to build trust and provide sustained support. Funding should ensure clubs can open every weekday during these high-risk hours. It should also support sufficient staffing levels, enabling lower ratios that foster safe, supportive environments and meaningful relationships.

### 1.4 Support local agencies to commission youth services based on community needs.

Locally led approaches, such as those implemented by PCCs, VRUs, and local authorities, allow for effective, response and context-specific delivery of services in youth clubs. Funding schemes from central government, such as Safer Streets, were perceived to be more effective when jointly implemented with by individuals aware of youth needs at the local level. National policy should support the integration of budgets across education, social care, and youth justice to establish early intervention programmes within community settings.

## 2. Youth work workforce development and integration

### 2.1 Recognise youth work as a skilled profession.

Youth workers establish trust over time and provide continuity that statutory services frequently cannot offer. Sector leaders advocated for youth work to be recognised nationally as a skilled profession, with clear qualification pathways and supervision. National policy and sector bodies should develop and apply consistent professional standards to support workforce retention in open-access and targeted provision.



### 2.2 Embed youth clubs in multi-agency safeguarding and referral systems.

Youth workers often identify risks through trusted relationships but lack access to joined-up information. Local partnerships with schools, health, youth justice, and social care services should include youth clubs in information-sharing and case management processes. Funders and commissioners should ensure clubs have time and funding to participate meaningfully.

### 2.3 Expand access to specialist training in violence prevention.

While safeguarding and mental health training are common, youth workers reported inconsistent access to training on issues central to violence prevention - such as conflict de-escalation, racial identity, and gang

involvement. Commissioners and funders should invest in local onboarding and CPD for new and existing staff, including volunteers where feasible. Training providers should also embed these themes in core youth work qualifications.

## 2.4 Retain youth workers in youth-centred roles while supporting integrated working.

There is growing interest in placing youth workers in schools, police teams, and health settings. While this can strengthen multi-agency work, it should not come at the expense of youth-centred spaces. Dedicated, accessible youth clubs are key for providing informal, consistent, and trusted support. Investment should balance integration with the protection of open-access youth spaces.

## 3. Inclusive, youth-led and place-based practice

### 3.1 Support co-designed and culturally responsive youth provision.

Youth work already emphasises co-production and responsiveness. This recommendation is intended to reinforce and resource that approach, thus ensuring youth clubs can adapt programming based on local needs and ongoing feedback.

Funders and commissioners should support clubs to engage community and faith groups, embed lived experience, and celebrate diverse identities.



### 3.2 Consider location and accessibility when planning and funding provision.

Some children reported facing postcode-based risks, travel anxiety, or parental concerns about their safety. Funders and commissioners should prioritise clubs located near transport hubs, schools, or in neighbourhoods with unmet need. Location should be a strategic consideration in funding decisions.

### 3.3 Encourage youth clubs to offer targeted alongside open-access provision

Youth workers described how offering targeted support - such as 1:1 sessions or small group work—within open-access settings can help engage children earlier and build trust without stigma. Before austerity, some youth clubs provided daytime drop-in support and transitioned to evening activities. This wraparound model helped sustain trusted relationships and engage children facing exclusion or at risk of NEET. Funders and commissioners should therefore explore flexible models that allow youth clubs to provide a mix of open-access, targeted, and informal support throughout the day.

## A.1. Methodology note

Table 5 presents a mapping of how the data collection method answered each research question.

**Table 5. Research question mapping**

Research question	Data collection method to explore RQs				
	Secondary data analysis	Youth sector survey	Sessions with sector leaders	Interviews with youth workers and volunteers	Focus groups with children
1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1a	✓				
1b		✓		✓	
1c		✓		✓	✓
1d	✓		✓		
1e		✓	✓	✓	
1f		✓		✓	✓
2		✓		✓	✓
2a				✓	✓
2b				✓	✓
2c				✓	✓
3		✓	✓	✓	✓
3a		✓		✓	
3b		✓		✓	✓
3c			✓	✓	
3d			✓	✓	
3e			✓	✓	✓
4			✓	✓	

### A.1.1 Primary data (Survey)

#### Data collection

The complete survey dataset was provided to the RSM team on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2025 as an Excel file comprising 252 full responses and 252 partial responses. Since most fields were not mandatory, the dataset includes some missing data, such as local authority geography. To ensure confidentiality, minimal identifiable information was requested in the survey. Therefore, the only method for identifying duplicate responses was through the field asking respondents to provide a contact email address if they wished to participate in further research.

#### Rationale for removing responses



The initial step involved identifying responses that were unsuitable for inclusion in our analysis. A total of 183 responses were excluded as they did not meet the minimum standards of quality, strength, comprehensiveness, and relevance. Specifically, the criteria for exclusion from the survey analysis included the following:

**Table 6. Rationale for removing responses**

Criteria	Number of responses excluded from the analysis		
	Complete	Partial complete	Total
Responses from outside England and Wales	2	2	4
Responses without a postcode	0	1	1
Duplicates (e.g. identifying via email addresses <b>Q25: Please provide the best email address for us to contact you about this research</b> )	2	0	2
Responses with no answers after <b>Q3: Please select from the list below the sector that most closely represents the organisation you currently work in</b> )	0	153	153
Responses from the respondents who provided a response to Q7 but did not select any of these three options to <b>Q7: 1) Youth club in a youth or community centre, 2) Youth club at a school or formal education setting, and 3) Youth club run by a religious organisation but open to all children without a focus on religious teaching or practice.</b>	15	8	23
<b>Total</b>	19	164	183

After considering the aforementioned factors, **321 responses will be included in our final survey sample.**

### Coding responses

All free-text questions received >5 responses. Responses were manually coded into existing closed categories in Excel.

For Q10-Q13, cross-tab analysis were conducted with Q4 (youth club location), Q6 (youth club's relationship with LAs), Q7a (youth club type), Q8 (range of activities offered or signposted by youth clubs), Q9 (availability of targeted services), Q15 (number of staff and volunteers), Q16 (number of children), and Q19 (ways of safeguarding children). The analysis was run in Stata, with outputs exported to Excel for producing figures. For these cross-tab analyses, we combined together all responses showing that a characteristic was present (e.g. 'Most', 'Some', 'A few' for Q11 and Q13; 'Always', 'Usually', 'Sometimes', 'Rarely' for Q10 and Q12), as described in Table 7 below. The figures therefore show the distribution of survey responses by factors such as region or youth club type when a characteristic was reported or aware.

**Table 7. Grouping logic for analysis**

Question	Purpose	Grouping approach
Q1 – Youth worker role	Cross-tab analysis	"Yes: working in a full time youth work role" + "Yes: working in a part-time youth work role" → "Employee"; "Yes: volunteering in a full time youth work role" + "Yes: volunteering in a part-time youth work role" → "Volunteer"
Q4 – Postcode	Regional breakdown	Grouped into 10 regions: London, North East, North West, Yorkshire, East Midlands, West Midlands, South East, East of England, South West, Wales
	Cross-tab analysis	Grouped into 6 regions: London, North of England, Midlands, East of England, South of England, Wales
Q6 – Youth clubs' relationship with LAs	Cross-tab analysis	"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 is currently in receipt of LA grant funding or commissioned by our LA 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" → "My organisation is not currently in receipt of local authority funding"
Q7c – Hours of operation on weekdays	Cross-tab analysis	"Late afternoon (4-6pm)" + "Evening (6-8pm)" → "Late afternoon and evening (4-8pm)"
Q8 – Activity provision	Cross-tab analysis	Combined "Youth club offers" + "Actively connects"; excluded "Neither"
Q10 – Awareness of vulnerability	Descriptive analysis	"Usually" + "Always" → "Usually/Always"; "Rarely" + "Never" → "Rarely/Never"
	Cross-tab analysis	Combined all except "Never" and "Prefer not to say" into "Youth workers are aware"
Q11 – CYP vulnerabilities	Cross-tab analysis	"Most", "Some", "A few" → "Youth clubs have CYP with this vulnerability"; excluded "None", "Don't know", "Prefer not to say"
Q12 – Awareness of violence risk	Descriptive analysis	"Usually" + "Always" → "Usually/Always"; "Rarely" + "Never" → "Rarely/Never"
	Cross-tab analysis	Combined all except "Never" and "Prefer not to say" into "Youth workers are aware of this risk"
Q13 – Immediate risk indicators	Cross-tab analysis	"Most", "Some", "A few" → "CYP with risk indicators attend"; excluded "None", "Don't know", "Prefer not to say"
Q14 – Incidents of violence	Cross-tab analysis	"Less than 5 times", "Monthly", "Weekly", "All the time" → "Incidents of violence have been witnessed in the youth clubs"
Q15 – Staffing & volunteer size	Descriptive & cross-tab	Grouped into 5 ranges: 1–5, 6–10, 11–20, 21–50, 51+

## A.1.2 Secondary data analysis

This appendix outlines the methodological steps taken to analyse the relationship between youth service providers (YSPs), local violence, and socioeconomic conditions in England. The analysis uses secondary data and combines multiple sources at different levels of spatial aggregation.

### 1. Geocoding

- The NYA Census 2024 dataset was geocoded using the postcode of each youth service provider.
- Postcodes were converted to coordinates and matched to Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) and Local Authorities (LAs) using the batch converter at [gridreferencefinder.com](https://gridreferencefinder.com).
- LA codes were harmonised to 2023 boundaries.
- LSOA codes were harmonised to 2021 boundaries.

### 2. Measures of Youth Club Availability

- We computed the presence of YSP in an area (LA and LSOA), and by type of provision (open access, targeted, both).
- At LSOA level, we focused on a binary indicator of presence due to low count variation.
- At LA level, both binary and continuous measures (count of YSPs) were used.

### 3. Crime Data and Matching

- Violent crime data at LA level (year ending March 2024) was sourced from ONS.
- Violent crime at LSOA level (calendar year 2023) was taken from Police UK.
- Rates were calculated using population denominators from the 2021 Census, both overall and for the youth population (under 20).
- Crime includes all violence against the person. While not disaggregated by age, national statistics indicate that a large share of violent offences are committed by or against youth.

### 4. Socioeconomic Covariates

- From the 2021 Census (ONS), we extracted indicators at the LSOA level: ethnic composition, unemployment, proportion with poor health, and disability.
- Analyses examined bivariate relationships between YSP presence and each indicator.

### 5. Data Completeness and Bias Checks

- To estimate completeness of the NYA Census, we compared it to Villa (2024), a dataset on youth clubs in London based on FOI requests.
- The NYA Census reports 105 youth clubs in London; Villa (2024) reported 223 in 2019. Adjusting for potential closures, we estimate ~47% coverage.
- We validated spatial bias by comparing regional-level youth club counts in the NYA Census to the proportion of youth reporting club availability in the CVV survey (2024). A positive association suggests no strong regional bias.

### 6. Survey Data Matching

- The CVV survey was used to complement the analysis with youth-reported experiences of crime and perceptions of local youth club availability.
- This dataset was only available at the regional level and used to test the correlation between youth club presence and youth-experienced or witnessed violence.

## 7. Estimation Strategy

- We estimated correlations between YSP presence and violent crime rates using linear regression models.
- Results were stratified by quantiles of youth population share to explore heterogeneity.
- Robustness checks included controlling for unemployment and removing outliers (e.g. Liverpool at LA level).
- Confidence intervals were calculated at the 95% level.

## Data sources

The analysis used the following sources:

- **The NYA Census 2024:** a unique database on the presence of youth service providers (YSPs). This source was created by the National Youth Agency surveying youth organisations. The survey was disseminated via email and newsletters. It contained information from 779 distinct organisations across England. We use this source to proxy for YSP presence by area. Since the data is geocoded, we have this information at any geography level desired.
- **Violent crime data at LA level:** local crime at the local authority level from the Office for National Statistics for the fiscal year ending in March 2024 (latest available at the time of writing). Contains the count and rate of crimes occurring in an area. Violent crimes are recorded as Violence Against the Person and are recorded by local police forces. It does not contain the identity of known offenders, nor categorisations by the age of the offender (e.g. it is impossible to distinguish crimes committed by children). We use this data to obtain latest violence indicators possible.
- **Violent crime at LSOA level:** local crime data at the lower super output area as recorded by police forces obtained from Police UK for the calendar year 2023. Violent crimes are recorded as Violence Against the Person and are recorded by local police forces. It does not contain the identity of known offenders, nor categorisations by the age of the offender (e.g. it is impossible to distinguish crimes committed by children). We use this data to obtain latest violence indicators possible at such narrow level.
- **The 2021 Census:** obtained by the Office for National Statistics. We selected population indicators and the following socioeconomic attributes: ethnicity, with the unemployment rate, with the proportion of residents with a disability, and with the proportion with poor health conditions using univariate models. The census is repeated every 10 years; hence this is the latest census available.
- **CVV survey:** survey collected by YEF containing information about children's experiences of violence. Data is captured at the regional level but allows us to obtain information on children's violence experiences specifically.

## Data completeness

Our analysis compares areas with youth clubs to areas without (or areas with higher prevalence of youth clubs to areas with less). Hence, an important consideration relates to data completeness.

To assess completeness, a comparison was made between the NYA census and Villa (2024), who created a new database of youth clubs in London using Freedom of Information Requests to each local authority. To the best of our knowledge, the data in Villa is the most complete census of youth clubs in London (where youth clubs are defined as spaces for open-access provision). The source contains all the youth clubs local

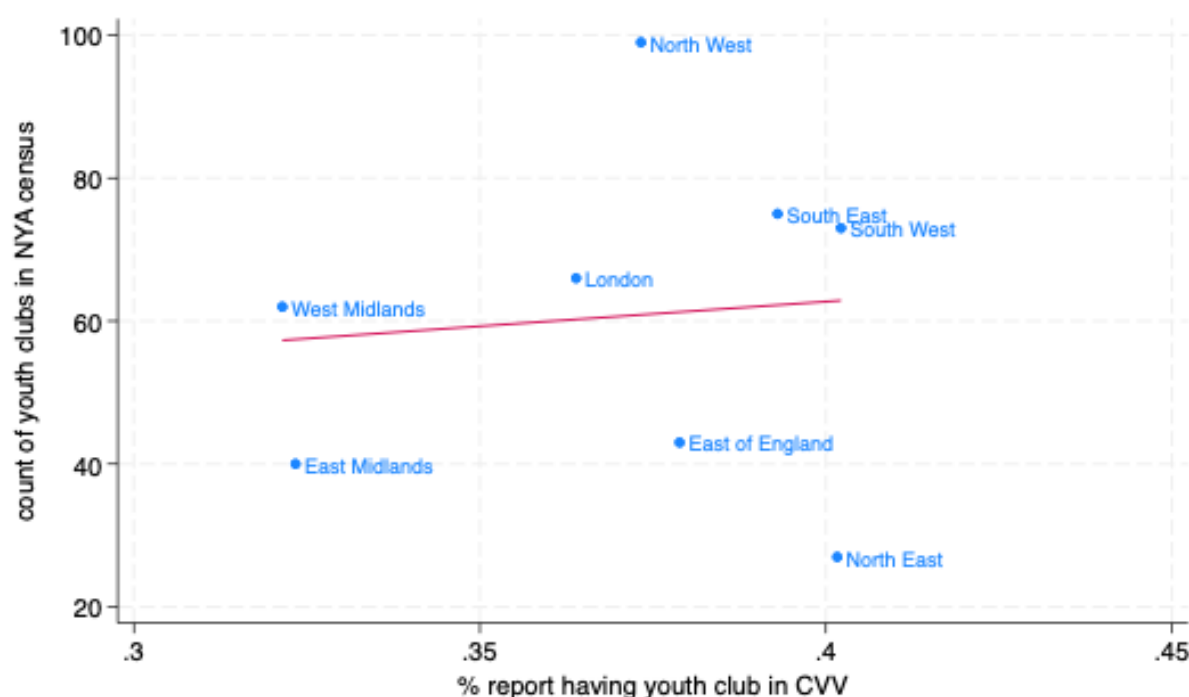
authorities are aware of and is more complete than, for instance the youth clubs in Berry (2021), or providers in the Points of Interest database.

The NYA census reported 105 youth clubs (open access) in London in 2024, whereas Villa (2024) documented 223 youth clubs (open access) by the end of 2019. While it is possible that some of the 223 youth clubs in Villa (2024) closed between 2019 and 2024, we do not expect this number to be 118 (223-105). Hence, our best guess for the completeness of the NYA census is that it contains information for 47% of youth clubs in the country.

To determine whether there is a spatial bias, the correlation between the availability of youth clubs at the regional level as recorded in the NYA census and the proportion of youth reporting the presence of a youth club in their area according to the CVV survey data for 2024 was assessed. If the bias in the NYA census does not significantly vary across regions (and assuming the CVV data is representative), a higher proportion of youth reporting the existence of a youth club in their area in the CVV data should correspond with a greater number of youth clubs in the census. Indeed, within England, and specifically examining open access youth clubs - which is the most comparable measure between the CVV and NYA census - there exists a clear positive association. At the regional level the correlation is 9.5%. While these are small numbers (again, regions are very large areas), this suggests that, even if the census is incomplete, there is an association between census reporting and real presence of youth clubs.

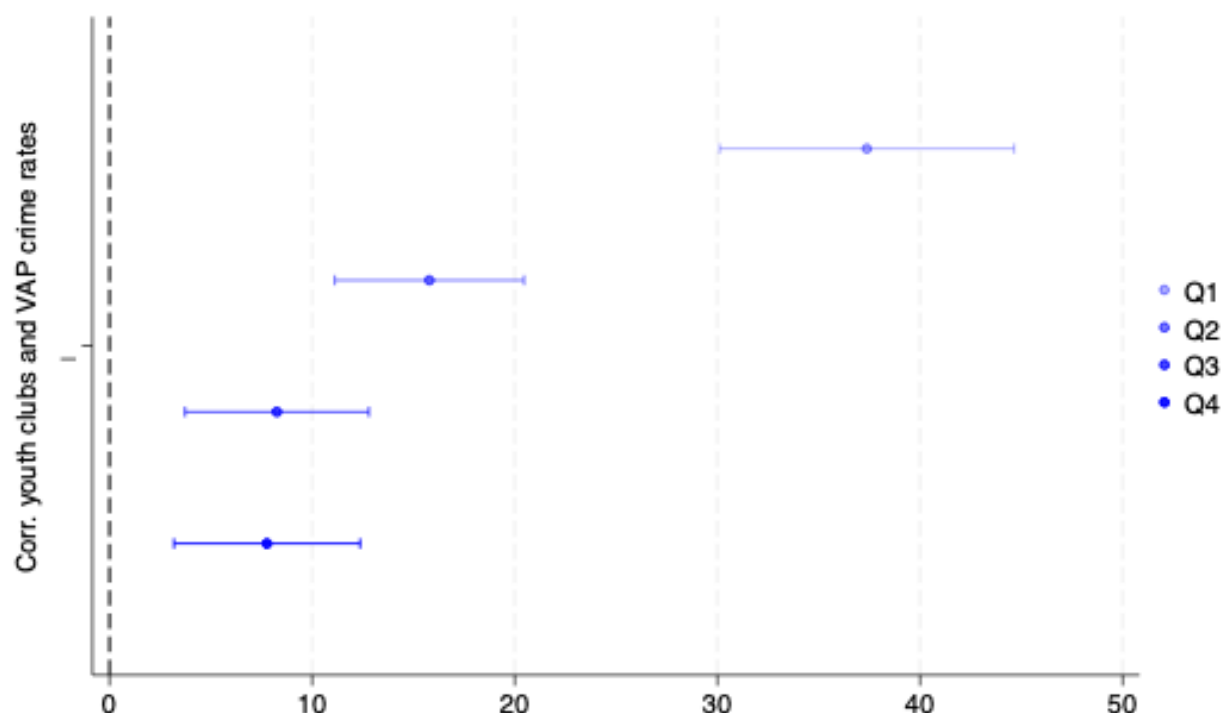
## Additional charts

**Figure 34. Correlation between youth club availability in the NYA census and the CVV data**



*Note: Estimated correlation between the number of youth clubs in a region from the NYA census and the proportion reporting there is a youth club in their area in the CVV data. Youth club refers to an open-access youth service provision.*

**Figure 35. Correlation between youth service providers and violence against the person crime rate after controlling for local unemployment, by LSOA, by quantile of proportion of population under 20 years old**



*Note: Estimated correlation between an additional youth clubs per LSOA and violence against the person crime rates after controlling for local unemployment. Bars show confidence intervals at the 95% confidence level. Youth activities providers from the NYA Census (2024), local crime rates from PoliceUK (2023), youth population estimates from the Census (ONS, 2021), proportion of unemployed residents from the ONS Census 2021.*

## A.2. Research instruments

### A.2.1. Youth worker survey questionnaire

#### About you

**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
- 

#### Qualifications

**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): \_\_\_\_\_
- 

#### Your organisation

**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 children
- ☐ 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

## Provision

**7a) Please indicate the type(s) of open access youth provision that your organisation provides\***

- ☐ Youth club in a youth or community centre
- ☐ Youth club at a school or formal education setting
- ☐ Youth club online
- ☐ Uniformed club e.g., Scouts, Girlguiding
- ☐ Youth club run by a religious organisation but open to all children without a focus on religious teaching or practice
- ☐ Youth club or ministry run by a religious organisation and focussed on religious teaching or practice, e.g. prayer, scripture study
- ☐ Other type of youth club (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Other type of open-access youth provision (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ My organisation does not offer open access youth provision

## Days in operation

**7b) Please indicate the days of the week in which the youth club(s) that your organisation operates. Please select all that apply\***

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
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## Hours in operation

7c) Please indicate the opening hours for the youth club(s) that your organisation operates in the week (Monday – Friday inclusive).

*Please tick all that apply\**

Morning (8-12pm)	Early afternoon (12-4pm)	Late afternoon (4-6pm)	Evening (6-8pm)	Late night (8-12am)	Not open on weekdays
------------------	--------------------------	------------------------	-----------------	---------------------	----------------------

7d) Please indicate the opening hours for the youth club(s) that your organisation operates on the weekend (Saturday-Sunday inclusive)

*Please tick all that apply\**

Morning (8-12pm)	Early afternoon (12-4pm)	Late afternoon (4-6pm)	Evening (6-8pm)	Late night (8-12am)	Not open on the weekend
------------------	--------------------------	------------------------	-----------------	---------------------	-------------------------

## Specific offer

8) Does your youth club offer or actively connect with children and children to any of the following?

*Please select all that apply\**

	Youth club offers	Actively connects	Neither
Leisure and/or cultural activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sport and related physical health activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social action or volunteering activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Youth voice activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mentoring programmes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experiential learning opportunities (e.g. outdoor education)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Structured social and emotional skills programmes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Knife crime education/awareness activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Counselling and/or therapy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**9) Does your youth club offer targeted services for children and young people during the periods in which open access provision is offered?\***

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

## Vulnerabilities

**10) Would you be aware of whether a child or young person who attended your youth club (at least once a month) had any of the following vulnerabilities?\***

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Prefer not to say
Having special education needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being on free school meals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having a social worker	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Going missing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being suspended from school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being excluded from school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being persistently absent from school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**11) To the best of your knowledge, how many the children or young people who attend your youth club have each of the following vulnerabilities? \***

	None	A few	Some	Most	Don't know	Prefer not to say
Having special education needs	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Being on free school meals	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Having a social worker	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Going missing	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Being suspended from school	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Being excluded from school	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Being persistently absent from school	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

## Indicators of crime or violence

**12) Would you be aware of whether a child or young person attending your youth club had the following indicators of immediate risk of violence or crime? \***

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Prefer not to say
Being contacted by police over a suspected offence	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Being supported by a youth offending team	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Carrying a weapon	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Using illegal drugs	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Being approached to store weapons, drugs, or money for someone else	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

Being part of a 'gang' (a group, probably with a name, who are involved in violence or crime)	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
---	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

**13) To the best of your knowledge, how many children or young people who attend your youth club have each of the following indicators of immediate risk of crime or violence? \***

	None	A few	Some	Most	Don't know	Prefer not to say
Being contacted by police over a suspected offence	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Being supported by a youth offending team	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Carrying a weapon	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Using illegal drugs	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Being approached to store weapons, drugs, or money for someone else	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Being part of a 'gang' (a group, probably with a name, who are involved in violence or crime)	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

**14) In the last 12 months, please indicate the frequency with which you or other youth workers have witnessed any of the following incidents in your organisation's youth club(s)?\***

	Never	Less than 5 times	Monthly	Weekly	All the time	Prefer not to say
Threats of physical violence	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Physical assault	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Child or young person carrying a weapon	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

Antisocial behaviour	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Threats of sexual violence	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Sexual assault	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

**15) How many paid staff and volunteers does your organisation currently use to deliver your youth club(s)?**

*If you do not know, please leave this question blank*

15a. Number of employed staff (full time equivalent): \_\_\_\_\_

15b. Number of volunteers (full time equivalent): \_\_\_\_\_

**16) Approximately how many young people attended your organisation's youth club(s) over the last 12 months?\***

- ( ) 1-50
- ( ) 51-100
- ( ) 101-150
- ( ) 151-200
- ( ) 201-500
- ( ) 501+
- ( ) Don't know

## Youth work and safeguarding

**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

## Training

**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?**

\_\_\_\_\_

## Thank You!

### A.2.2. Topic guide for session with sector leaders

#### Introductory questions

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself by telling us your organisation and your role, and what is your / your organisation's involvement in work to support vulnerable children and young people, in particular those at risk of violence?

#### Set-up and operation of youth clubs

2. Based on your experience, how well does the structure and operation of youth clubs in England and Wales enable them to support vulnerable children and young people?
  - To what extent do you find the structure and operation of youth clubs varies across different clubs?

- To what extent do you find the structure and operation of youth clubs varies across different localities – i.e. regions or nations? What are the main factors behind these variations?

## Formal and informal support

### 3. How well do youth clubs support vulnerable children and young people through established activities or procedures?

- What are the enablers?
  - Is there specific type of support you are aware of that have been particularly impactful?
- What are the barriers?
  - What examples of how these barriers have been addressed effectively have you encountered?

### 4. Are you aware of how prevalent incorporating targeted support within an open-access framework to assist children at risk is? Are you aware of any models of this?

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating targeted support within an open-access framework to assist children at risk?

### 5. How well do youth clubs support vulnerable children and young people through trusting relationships and flexible responses to individuals' needs?

- What are the enablers?
  - Is there specific support you are aware of that have been particularly impactful?
- What are the barriers?
  - What examples of how these barriers have been addressed effectively have you encountered?
- Are there particular groups that you think are underserved by youth clubs?

## Policy and Practice

### 6. What policy changes do you think are needed to improve youth clubs' ability support to vulnerable children and young people? *Prompt: Funding allocation, data-sharing policies, collaboration across sectors, local policy alignment with national strategies, flexibility in youth club programming, support for volunteer-led services.*

- Are there specific local or national policies that currently hinder youth clubs' work? What needs to be changed to support youth clubs' work?  
*Prompt: Funding restrictions, insufficient focus on youth violence prevention, challenges with policy implementation at the local level.*

### 7. Are there specific models or examples of best practice that you believe could be adopted more widely by youth clubs? *Prompt: Multi-agency collaboration, early intervention programmes, community-led approaches, youth empowerment initiatives, cross-sector training initiatives.*

## Wrap-up

8. Is there anything we haven't covered that you think is important for this research?
9. Our research will run until May 2025. Would it be ok to contact you again if we had any more questions?

## A.2.3. Topic guide for youth worker interviews

### Welcome and introduction

- Welcome everyone to the session. Explain **why** we are here today and **why we want to hear from you**.
- Researcher to explain basic ground rules for the session:
  - Raising hand to speak
  - Active listening and respect for others
  - There is not a break scheduled but don't be afraid to ask for a break if needed (just let a staff member know)

### Icebreaker – tell us about your local area

- Ask each participant to introduce themselves and share **one good thing** about the area where they live and **one thing they would change if they could**.

### Standing debates

- Ask all the participants to stand up. (If anyone is not able to stand, let them share their views from a seated position)
- Explain that we will read out some statements for a 'standing debate'. We will ask them to stand towards one side of the room if they agree with the statement, or towards the other side of the room if they disagree with the statement. They can stand in the middle or anywhere in between to reflect their individual view. Give an example to ensure everyone understands the exercise. Something like "chocolate is the best ice cream flavour".
- Reiterate that there are no right or wrong answers.
- Researcher to read out the following debate questions:
  - *I go to the youth club all the time.*
  - *The youth club is easy to get to from where I live.*
  - *Every young person is welcome at the youth club, regardless of their background.*
  - *I can talk to the staff at the youth club about my problems.*
  - *The staff at the youth club look out for me.*
- For each statement, gather views from across the different sides of the debate and find out the reasons why they agree/ disagree.
- Facilitators to encourage people to state their own beliefs and not to be influenced by others around them.
- Reiterate that there are no right or wrong answers.

### Teamwork – Attendance, activities and personal support

- Split the group into two teams. Give each team a piece of flipchart paper, card, pens and post it notes. Explain the concept of a mind map. (As an option we could also add some pre-prepared images for this activity).
- Ask each group to create a mind-map / collage of:
  - **What do you do while you are at the youth club?** *Prompt: could be formal sessions such as sports / physical activities, arts and crafts, music production, tutoring / mentorship, social skills training, counselling or other type of psychological therapy or informal such as socialising with friends, play PlayStation, table tennis, talking to youth workers*
  - **What are the youth workers and other staff at the youth club like?**
  - **Do you feel safe at your youth club?** *Probe on:*
    - How do arguments and conflicts affect people at the youth club? Have you ever experienced or witnessed these situations, and how did they make you feel?

- Would you feel okay telling a staff member if there was a problem? Why or why not?
- Ask each group to feedback on their mind-map/collage and explain their answers.
- Facilitators to encourage participants to be as creative with their mind-map as possible.

### Your ideas for change

- Working in small groups, come up with **2 changes** you would like to see in your youth club and **2 things you would not want to change** – based on your experience of attending this youth club.
- Some questions to consider:
  - *What information is needed to inform young people about what support and activities are available?*
  - *What would you want to see more of in your youth club to support everyone?*
  - *What do you think could help you or someone else feel safer at the youth club?*

### Wrap up and close

- Summing up the session
- Invite participants to share reflections on what, if anything, has surprised you today and why.
- Ask them if they have any questions.
- Remind the group about what we will be doing with the recorded information today and confidentiality / anonymity.
- Refer to aftercare leaflets and any sources people can access for support with their mental health should they need it.
- Mention that we will share the report with your youth workers upon completion so you can see the impact that you helped to make.

## A.2.4. Topic guide for focus groups with young people

### Section 1: Role and context

#### 1. Can you briefly describe your role within the youth club? *Probe on:*

- What are the main groups of children and young people that your youth club supports?

#### 2. Do you have any previous / wider experience of supporting children involved in violence?

### Section 2: Set-up and operation of youth clubs

#### 3. What are your views on how well youth clubs in England and Wales are equipped to support vulnerable children and young people? *Probe on:*

- How does the structure and operation of youth clubs affect the support youth clubs can offer?

#### 4. **Reference to answer to Q15 and Q16 of the Youth Sector survey.** In the survey you said your workforce (paid staff and volunteers) is of about [add number from survey responses]. And that the average number of young people that you support is [add number from survey responses]. This gives ratio of [add number]. From your perspective, is this enough to manage the behaviour of the children and young people who attend and keep them safe at all times? *Probe on:*

- IF YES – can you give a few examples?
- IF NO – Why not? What would be the ratio of staff (both paid and volunteer) to young people in your youth club to enable this?

#### 5. In addition, is this [add ratio number from Q4] enough to build trusting relationships with and support the children and young people who attend? *Probe on:*

- IF YES – can you give a few examples?

- IF NO – Why not? What would be the optimal ratio of staff (both paid and volunteer) to young people in your youth club to enable this?
- 6. Is your youth club located in an areas where vulnerable children and young people need it the most? Probe on:**
- How do children and young people tend to travel to your club?' (foot, bus, car, etc.)
  - Does your club have the public transport links it needs to enable children and young people to attend?
- 7. Are your club's operating hours suited to effectively support vulnerable children and young people? (longer opening hours on weekends/school holidays, extended evening sessions). Probe on:**
- IF YES:
    - can you give a few examples of what enables your club to be open?
    - how are these times selected?
    - are you aware of times/days when violence amongst children and young people is most likely to occur?
  - IF NO:
    - why not?
    - what are the barriers?
    - what needs to be in place for your club to be open? (*funding, staffing levels, resourcing, training provision of targeted support, community engagement*)

### Section 3: Attendance and engagement

- 8. In your view, what makes vulnerable children and young people in your area want to attend your youth club? (relatable staff, community links, peers)**
- 9. How do children and young people engage with staff (volunteers or professionals) within your youth club? Probe on:**
- To what extent do children who attend youth clubs ask staff for advice / support / direction?
  - Roughly speaking, what proportion of young people do this, as opposed to “just” attending?
  - What are the barriers and facilitators for staff to develop trusting relationships with attendees?
  - What practices have you found most effective in fostering meaningful engagement among vulnerable children and young people? (e.g. developing trusting relationships with staff, regularly taking part in positive activities that build their skills)
- 10. How well do you feel your youth club engages children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds? Does your youth club specifically cater to the needs of children from these backgrounds? What supports children from these backgrounds to meaningfully engage in the youth club? Probe on:**
- IF YES: can you give a few examples?
  - IF NO:
    - why not?
    - what are the barriers?
    - what needs to be in place?
    - How can improvements be made?
- 11. Reference to answer to Q10 of the Youth Sector survey. If answered ‘Prefer not to say’ to most statements, then SKIP TO Q13. I’d like to discuss your youth club’s approach to identify children and young people’s vulnerabilities. In the survey you said you are [add]. Can you tell me more about how you go about identifying these characteristics? Probe on:**

- Could you tell me more about why this is?
- Do you collect this information in an established way?
- Why/why not?
- Is support tailored considering this vulnerability?
- Can you give an example of the support you provide to children who have a general vulnerability?

**12. Reference to answer to Q12 of the Youth Sector survey. If answered ‘Prefer not to say’ to most statements, then SKIP TO Q13. I’d like to discuss your youth club’s approach to identify children and young people who are at immediate risk of violence or crime. In the survey you said you are [add]. Can you tell me more about how you go about identifying these characteristics? Probe on:**

- Could you tell me more about why this is?
- Do you collect this information in an established way?
- Why/why not?
- Is support tailored considering this vulnerability?
- Can you give an example of the support you provide to children who have an indicator of immediate risk?

#### Section 4: Support for vulnerable children and young people

**13. Reference to answer to Q8 of the Youth Sector survey. In the survey you said that your youth club provides [add type of activities] and direct / connect young people to [add type of activities]. Can you tell us more about what factors you consider when deciding what activity/ies are provided at the youth club and what are directed to external providers? Probe on:**

- Can you give a few examples of the decision-making process?
- What are the factors you consider?
- Psychological therapy and social skills training programmes have a strong evidence base for supporting young people at risk of involvement in violence, have you considered either providing or connecting young people to these?
- Why? Why not?
- What are the barriers?

**14. ASK TO THOSE WHO ANSWERED ‘Yes’. In the survey you said that your youth club offers targeted services for children and young people during the periods in which open access provision is offered. Can you tell us more about the set up and it this works in practice? Probe on:**

- What are benefits of integrating targeted provision within open-access settings?
- Any challenges?
- Can you share any examples where this integration has had a positive impact on young people?

**15. ASK TO THOSE WHO ANSWERED ‘No’. In the survey you said that your youth club does not offer targeted services for children and young people during the periods in which open access provision is offered. Can you tell us why not and what the challenges of integrating targeted provision within open-access settings are?**

- What do you think the benefits of integrating targeted provision within open-access settings could be?
- What would need to be in place for you to consider this?

**16. ASK TO THOSE WHO ANSWERED ‘Don’t know’.** In the survey you said that you don’t know if your youth club offers targeted services for children and young people during the periods in which open access provision is offered. Have you since found out? Is this something you would consider doing in the future?

**17. Reference to answer to Q21 of the Youth Sector survey.** In the survey you said that you have received [add training type]. To what extent it was relevant and useful to your work to support children and young people who are at high risk of involvement in violence, and why? *Probe on:*

- How adequate do you think the current training provisions are for equipping staff to handle issues related to violence?
- Are there specific training programmes you’re aware of that have been particularly helpful?

## Section 5: Future considerations

**18. From your perspective what barriers do you think exist for youth clubs’ in their ability to support vulnerable children and young people?** *Probe on:*

- Are there specific local or national policies that currently hinder youth clubs’ work?
- What needs to be changed to support youth clubs’ work?

**19. Is there anything that you think could be done better to support youth clubs in supporting vulnerable children and young people?** *Probe on:*

- IF YES – can you give a few examples?
- IF NO – do you have any specific recommendations for sector leaders or policymakers to enhance the effectiveness of youth clubs in preventing violence? (*Funding, targeted programmes, improved partnership working*)

## Wrap-up

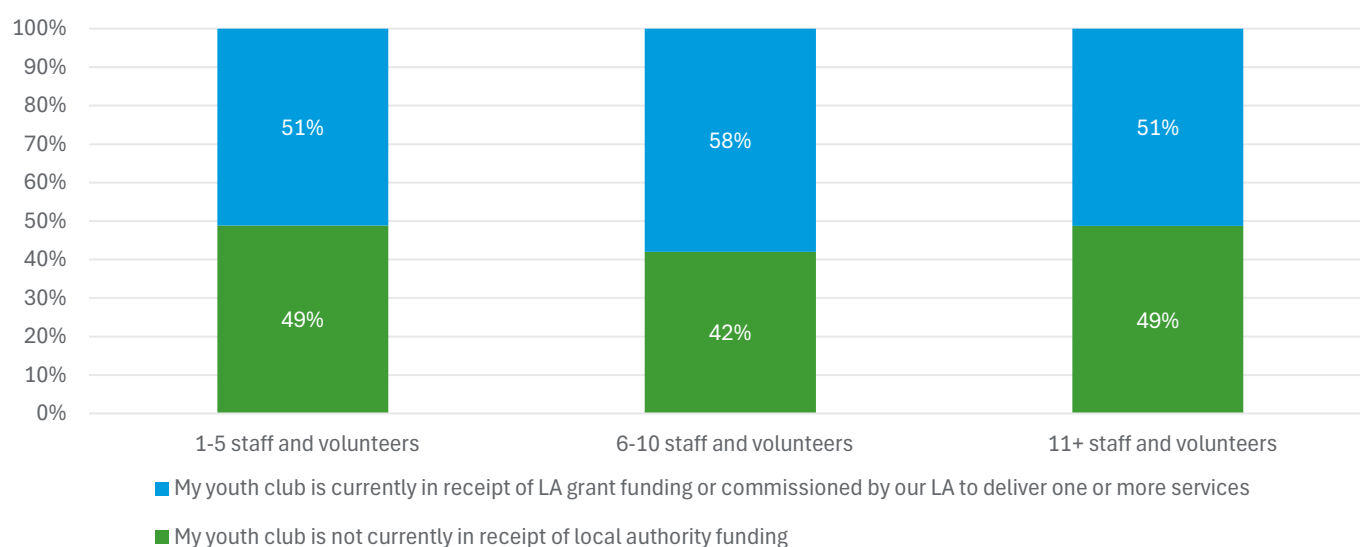
**20. Is there anything we haven’t covered that you think is important for this research?**



## A.3. Additional charts

Survey data shows that across all staffing groups, the proportion of youth clubs receiving LA funding remained relatively consistent 51% of those with 1 to 5 or over 11 staff and volunteers receiving funding, and slightly higher (58%) among those with 6 to 10 staff and volunteers. Similarly, the proportion of youth clubs not in receipt of LA funding ranged between 42% and 49% across all staffing groups.

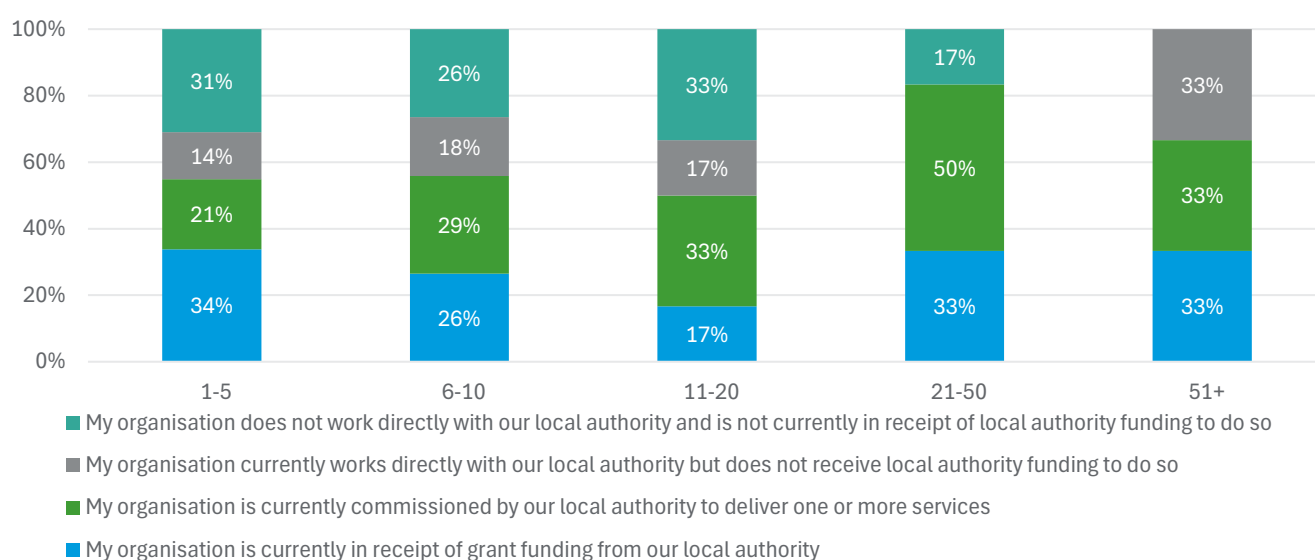
**Figure 36. Total number of staff and volunteers by youth clubs' relationship with local authorities**



Source: Youth sector survey Q6, Q15a, and Q15b.

Base: 43 (1-5 staff and volunteers), 50 (6-10 staff and volunteers), 39 (11+ staff and volunteers).

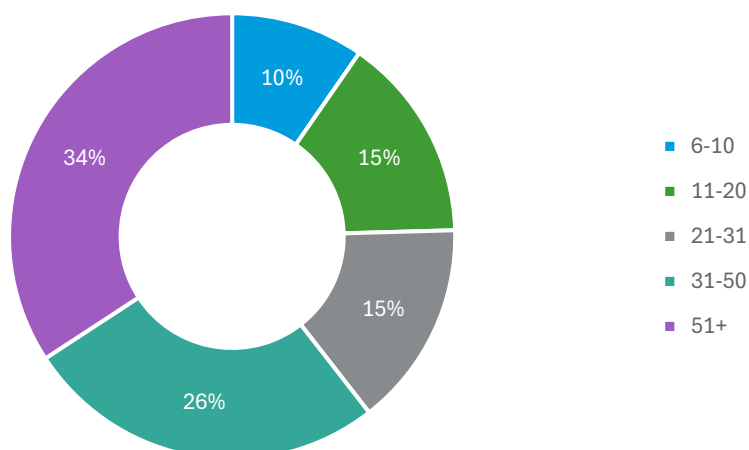
**Figure 37. Number of staff by youth clubs' relationship with local authorities**



Source: Youth sector survey Q6 and Q15a

Base: 49 (1-5 staff), 51 (6-10 staff), 24 (11-20 staff), 13 (21-50 staff), 4 (51+ staff)

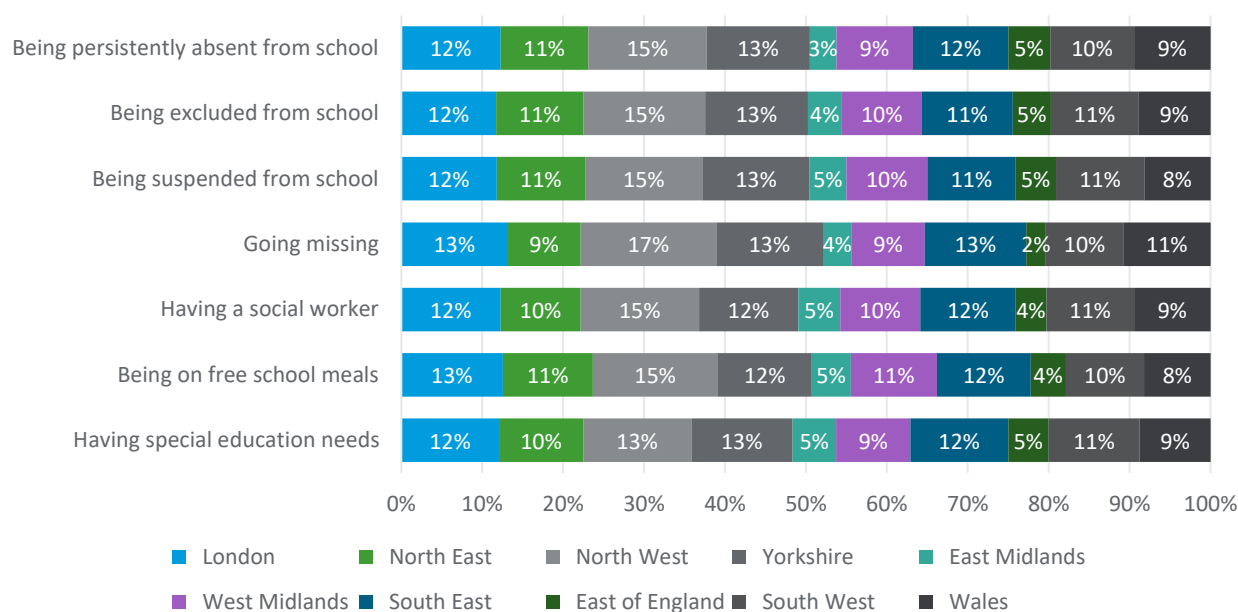
**Figure 38. Number of children that each staff engaged with over the past 12 months**



Source: Youth sector survey Q15a and Q16

Base: 114

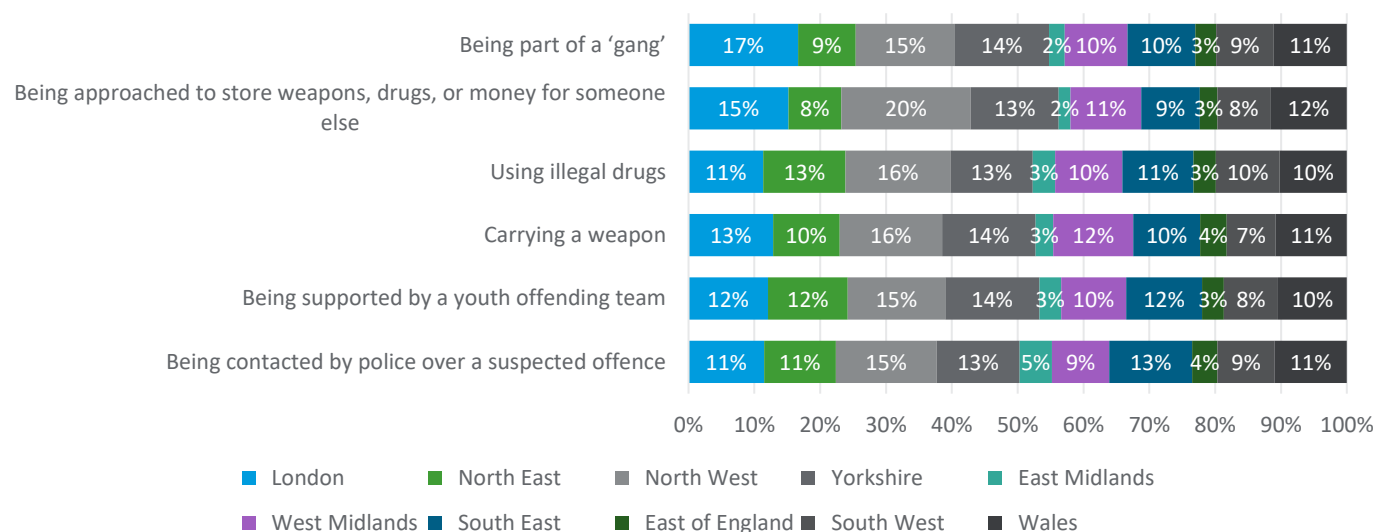
**Figure 39. Engagement with vulnerable children by youth clubs' location**



Source: Youth sector survey Q4 and Q11

Base: 240 (Having special education needs), 207 (Being on free school meals), 212 (Having a social worker), 167 (Going missing), 220 (Being suspended from school), 213 (Being excluded from school), 212 (Being persistently absent from school)

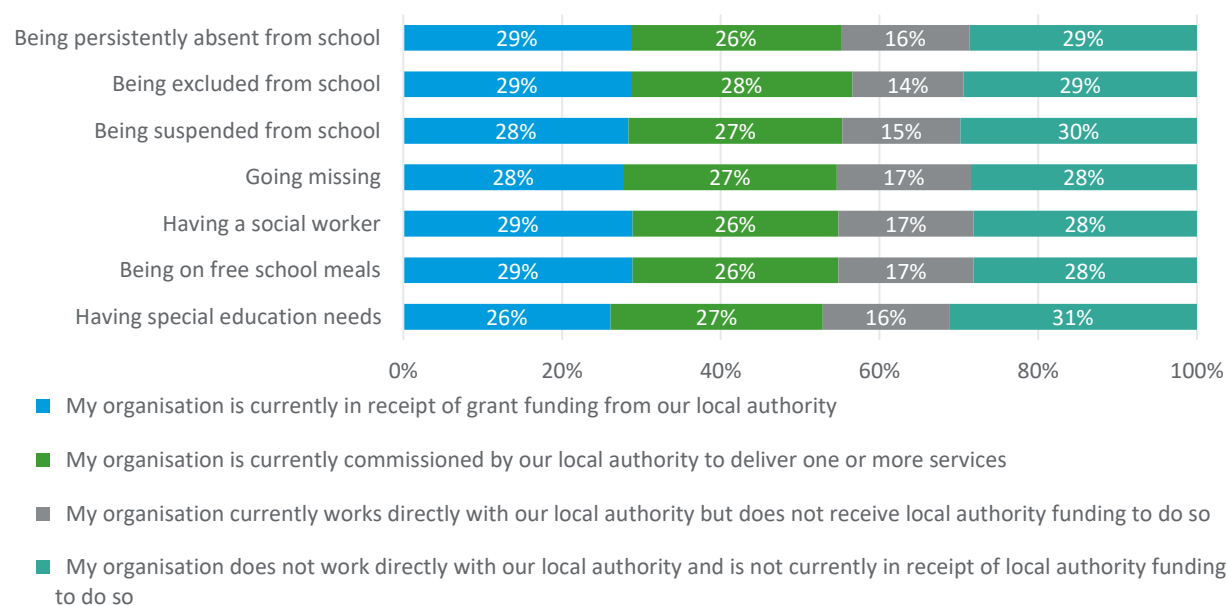
**Figure 40. Engagement with children at immediate risk of crime/violence by youth clubs' location**



Source: Youth sector survey Q4 and Q13

Base: 183 (Being contacted by police over a suspected offence), 182 (Being supported by a youth offending team), 148 (Carrying a weapon), 176 (Using illegal drugs), 112 (Being approached to store weapons, drugs, or money for someone else), 126 (Being part of a 'gang')

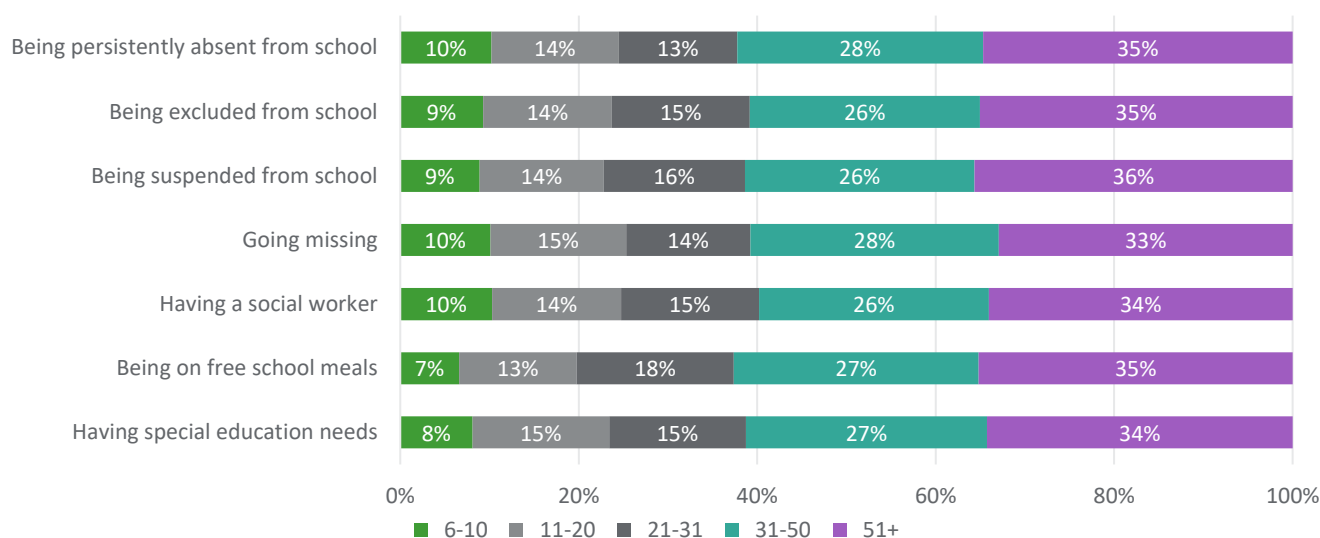
**Figure 41. Engagement with vulnerable children by relationship with local authorities**



Source: Youth sector survey Q6 and Q11

Base: 157 (Having special education needs), 135 (Being on free school meals), 136 (Having a social worker), 130 (Going missing), 141 (Being suspended from school), 136 (Being excluded from school), 136 (Being persistently absent from school)

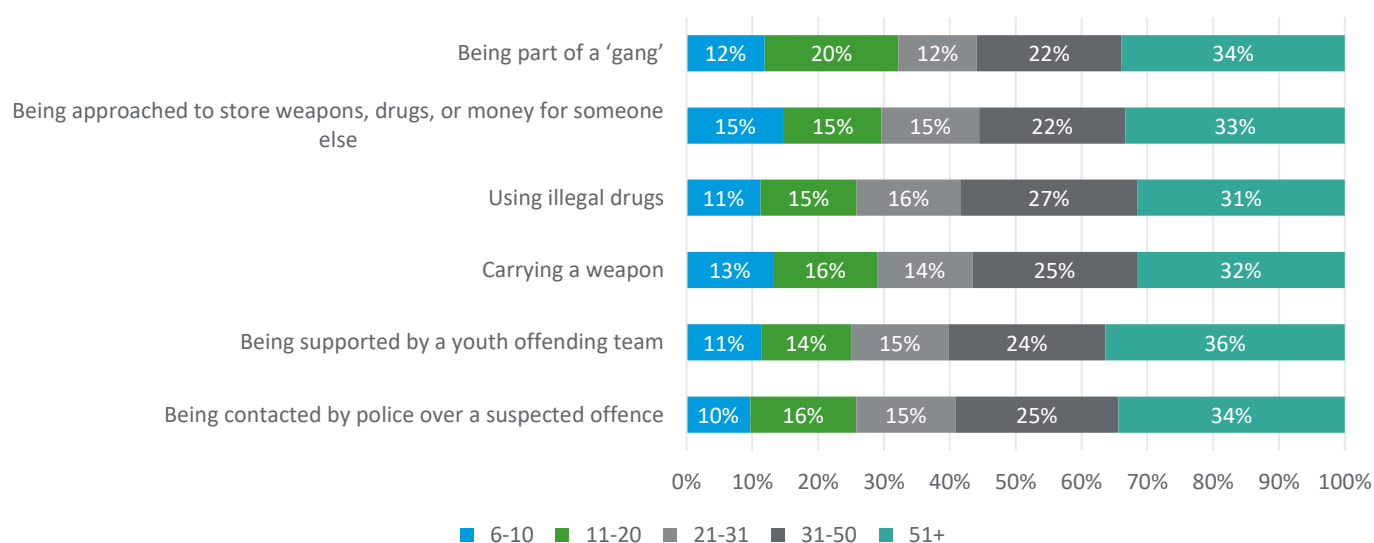
**Figure 42. Engagement with vulnerable children by staff engagement ratios over 12 months**



Source: Youth sector survey Q11, Q15a, and Q16

Base: 111 (Having special education needs), 91 (Being on free school meals), 97 (Having a social worker), 79 (Going missing), 101 (Being suspended from school), 97 (Being excluded from school), 98 (Being persistently absent from school)

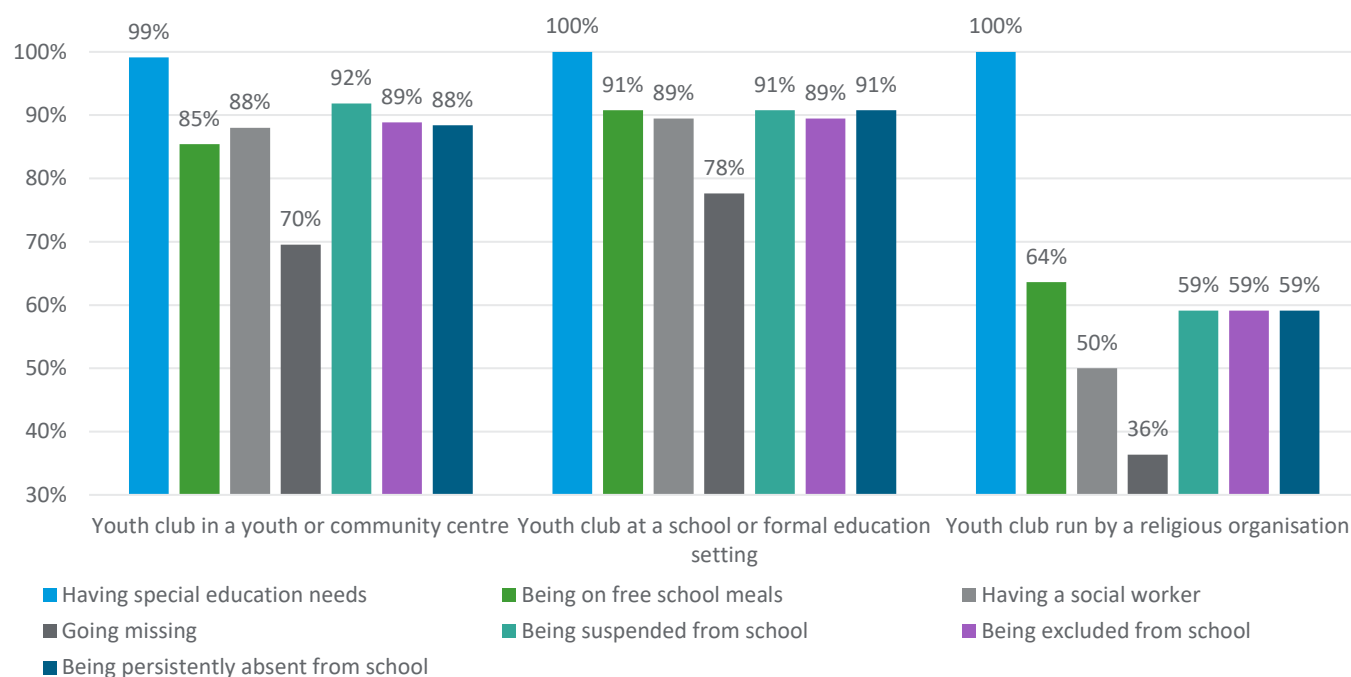
**Figure 43. Engagement with children at immediate risk of crime/violence by staff engagement ratios over 12 months**



Source: Youth sector survey Q13, Q15a, and Q16

Base: 93 (Being contacted by police over a suspected offence), 88 (Being supported by a youth offending team), 76 (Carrying a weapon), 89 (Using illegal drugs), 54 (Being approached to store weapons, drugs, or money for someone else), 59 (Being part of a 'gang')

**Figure 44. Engagement with vulnerable children by youth club type**

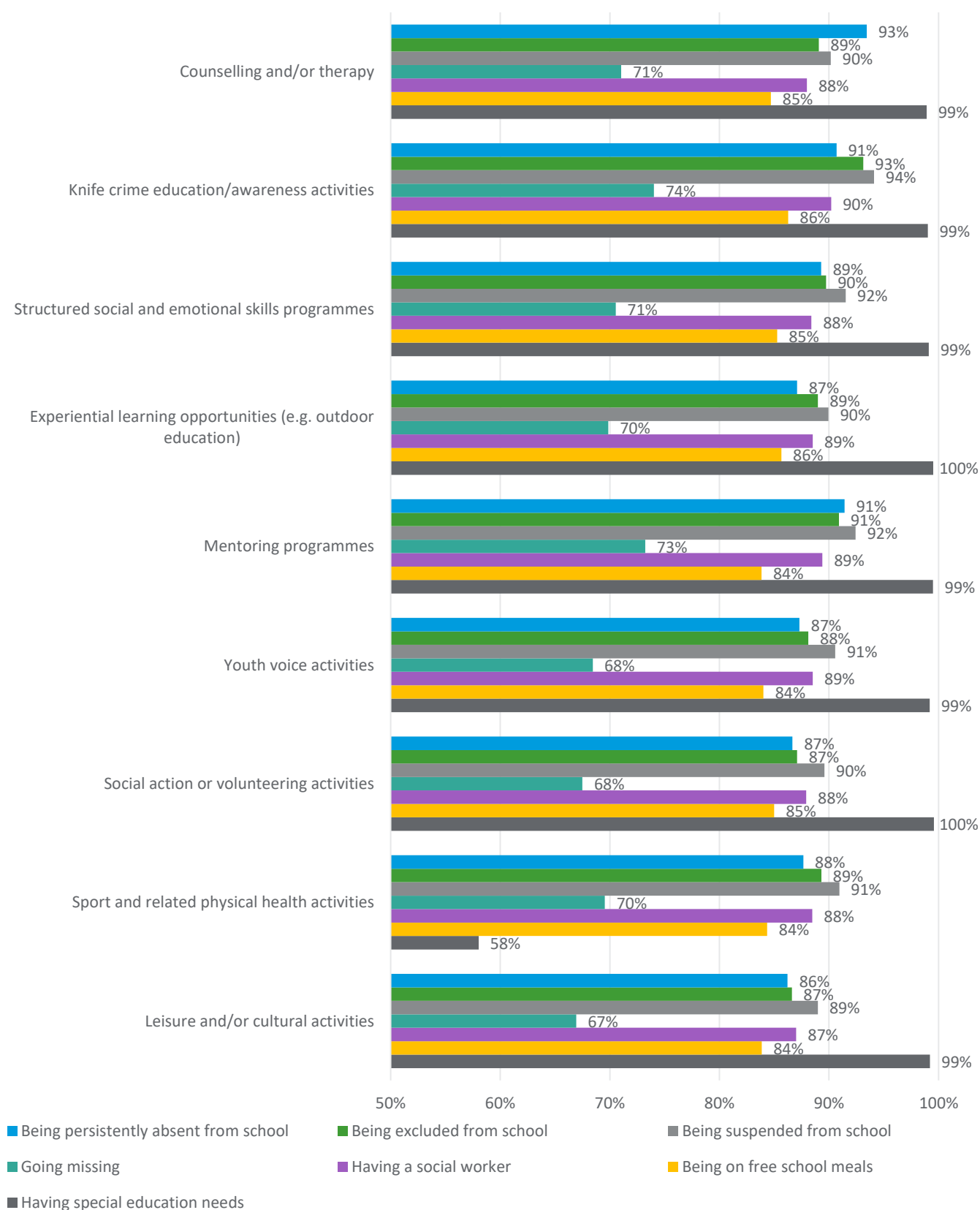


Source: Youth sector survey Q7a and Q11

Base: 233 (Youth club in a youth or community centre), 76 (Youth club at a school or formal education setting), 15 (Youth club run by a religious organisation)

Note: Multiple response options – one organisation surveyed may provide more than one type of open access youth provision.

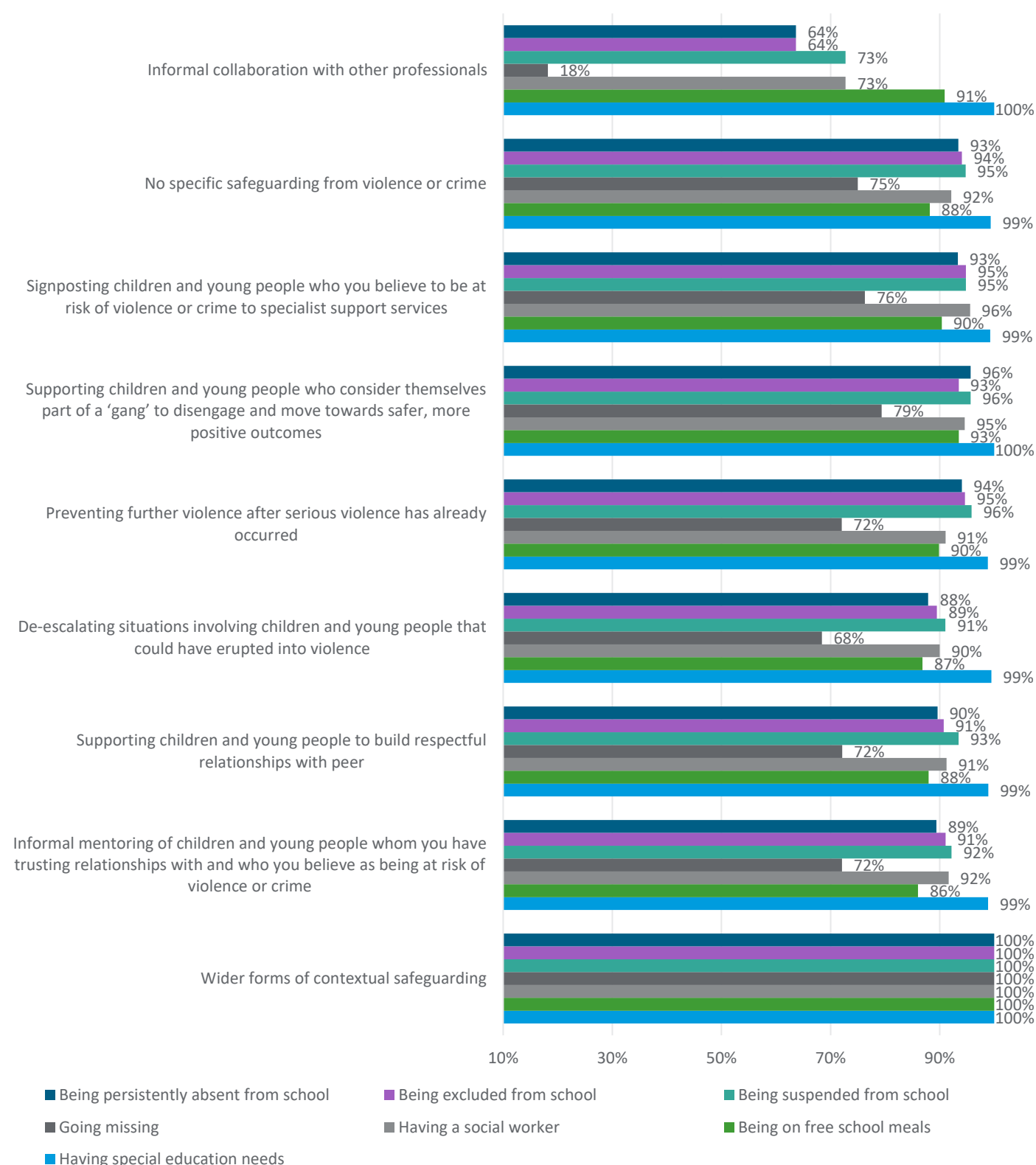
**Figure 45. Engagement with vulnerable children by activities offered or signposted by youth clubs**



Source: Youth sector survey Q8 and Q11

Base: 254 (Leisure and/or cultural activities), 243 (Sport and related physical health activities), 240 (Social action or volunteering activities), 244 (Youth voice activities), 198 (Mentoring programmes), 209 (Experiential learning opportunities (e.g. outdoor education)), 224 (Structured social and emotional skills programmes), 204 (Knife crime education/awareness activities), 183 (Counselling and/or therapy)

**Figure 46. Engagement with vulnerable children by safeguard effort**

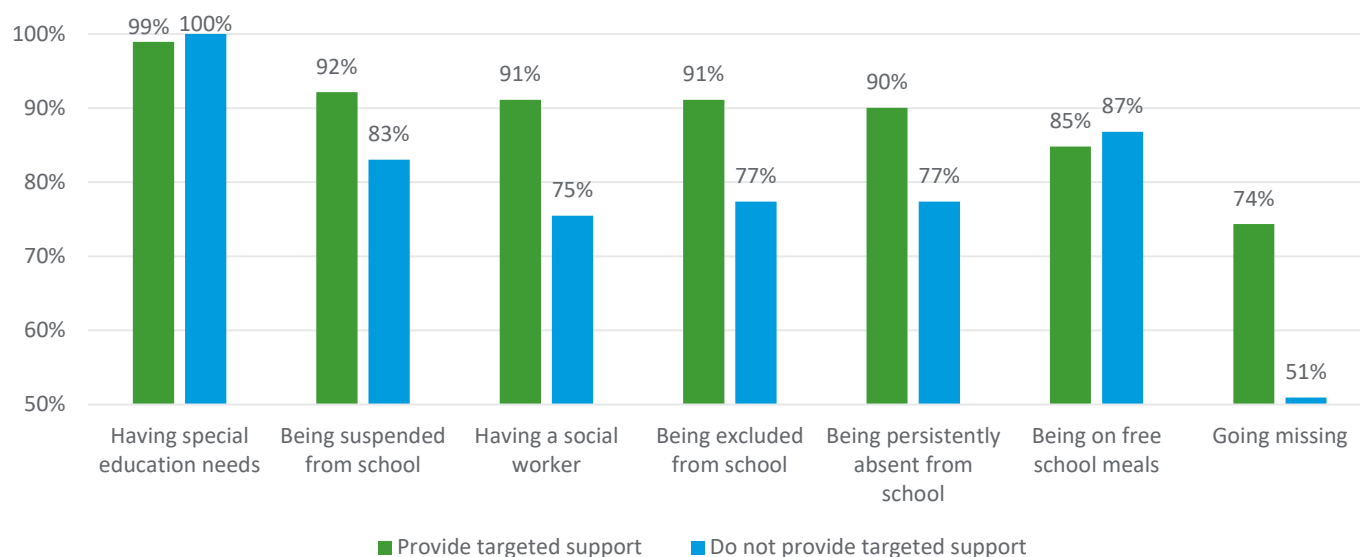


Source: Youth sector survey Q11 and Q19

Base: 3 (Wider forms of contextual safeguarding), 179 (Informal mentoring of children and young people), 183 (Supporting children and young people to build respectful relationships with peer), 190 (De-escalating situations involving children and young people), 168 (Preventing further violence after serious violence has already occurred), 92 (Supporting children and young people who consider themselves part of a 'gang' to disengage and move towards safer, more positive outcomes), 135 (Signposting children and young people who you believe to be at risk of violence or crime to specialist support services), 152 (No specific safeguarding from violence or crime), 11 (Informal collaboration with other professionals)



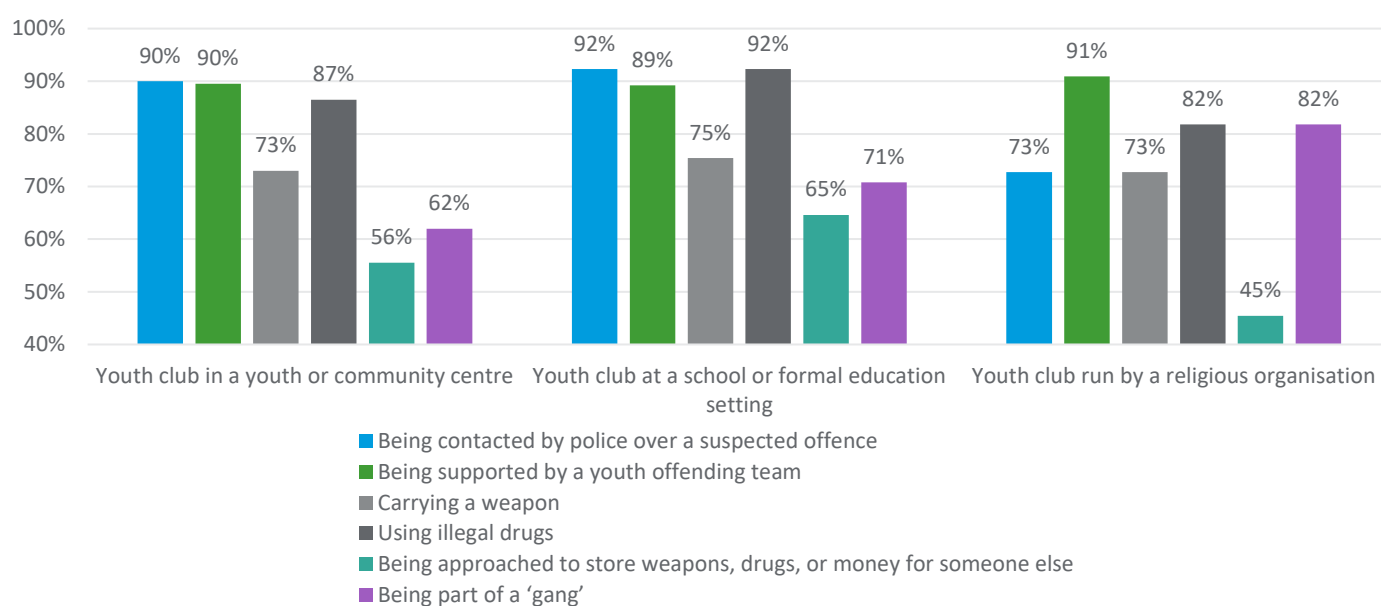
**Figure 47. Engagement with vulnerable children by whether youth clubs provided targeted support for children**



Source: Youth sector survey Q9 and Q11

Base: 191 (Provide targeted support), 53 (Do not provide targeted support)

**Figure 48. Engagement with children at immediate risk of crime/violence by youth club type**

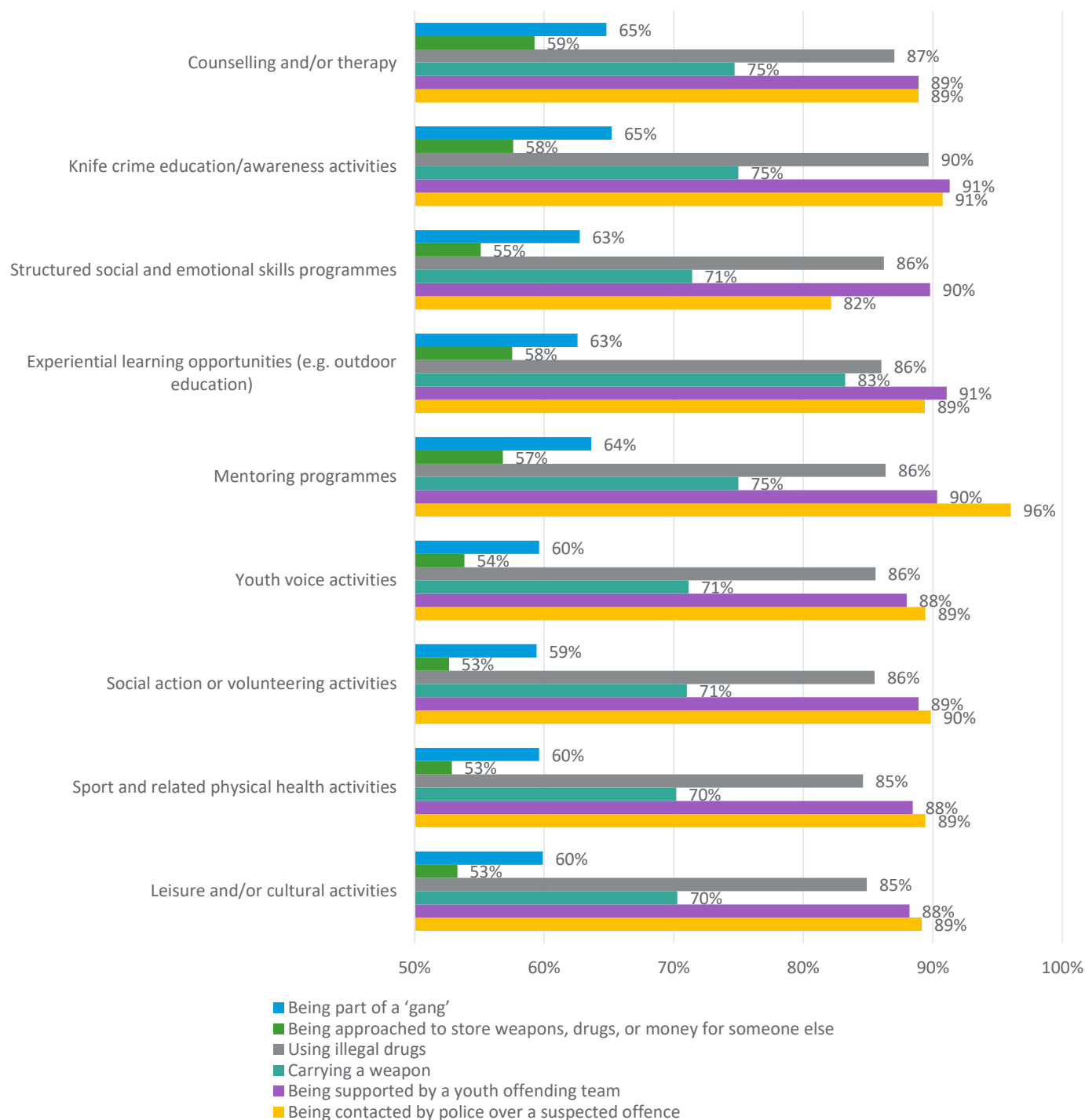


Source: Youth sector survey Q7a and Q13

Base: 200 (Youth club in a youth or community centre), 65 (Youth club at a school or formal education setting), 11 (Youth club run by a religious organisation)

Note: Multiple response options – one organisation surveyed may provide more than one type of open access youth provision.

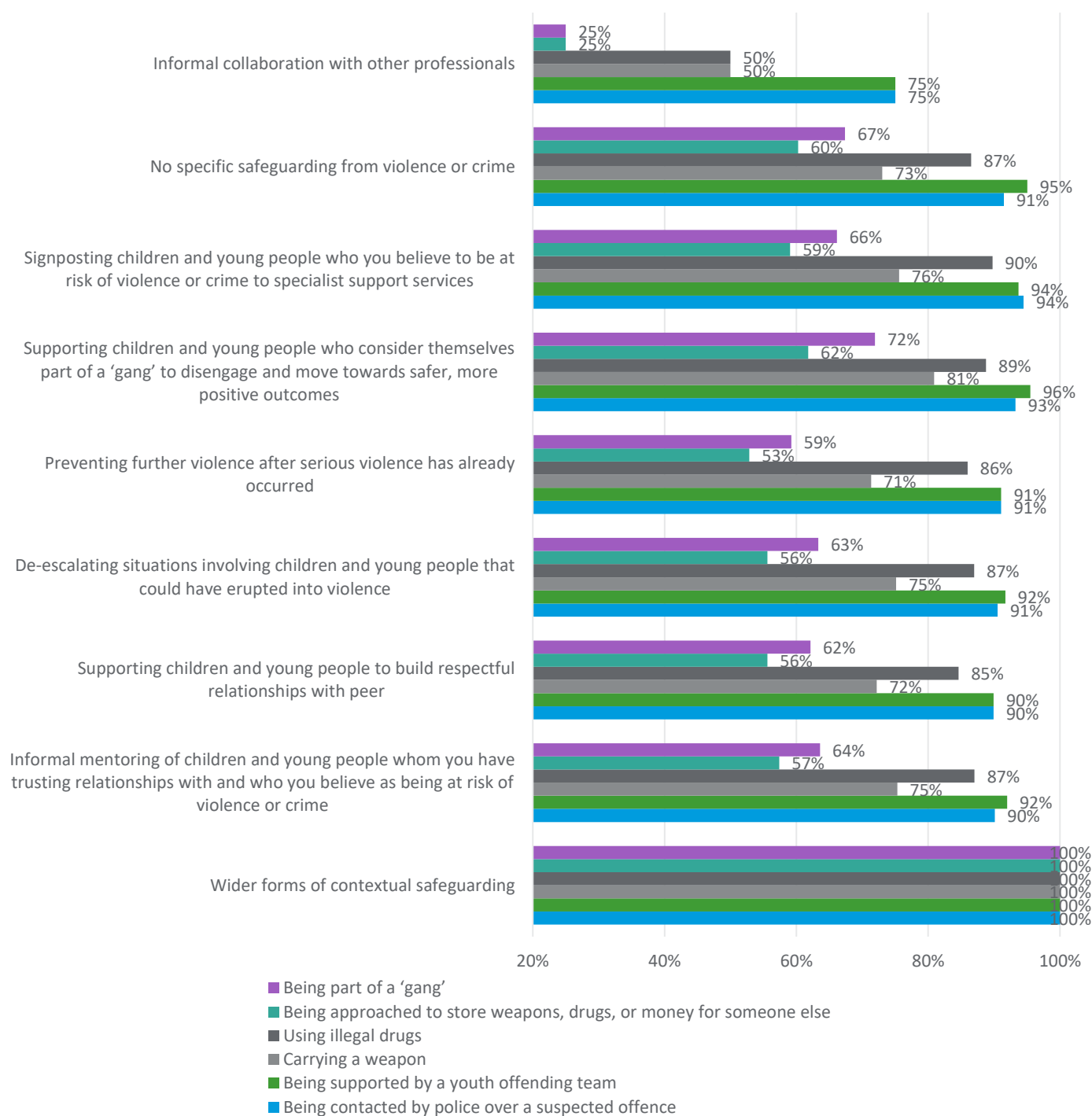
**Figure 49. Engagement with children at immediate risk of crime/violence by activities offered or signposted by youth clubs**



Source: Youth sector survey Q8 and Q13

Base: 212 (Leisure and/or cultural activities), 208 (Sport and related physical health activities), 207 (Social action or volunteering activities), 208 (Youth voice activities), 176 (Mentoring programmes), 179 (Experiential learning opportunities (e.g. outdoor education)), 196 (Structured social and emotional skills programmes), 184 (Knife crime education/awareness activities), 162 (Counselling and/or therapy)

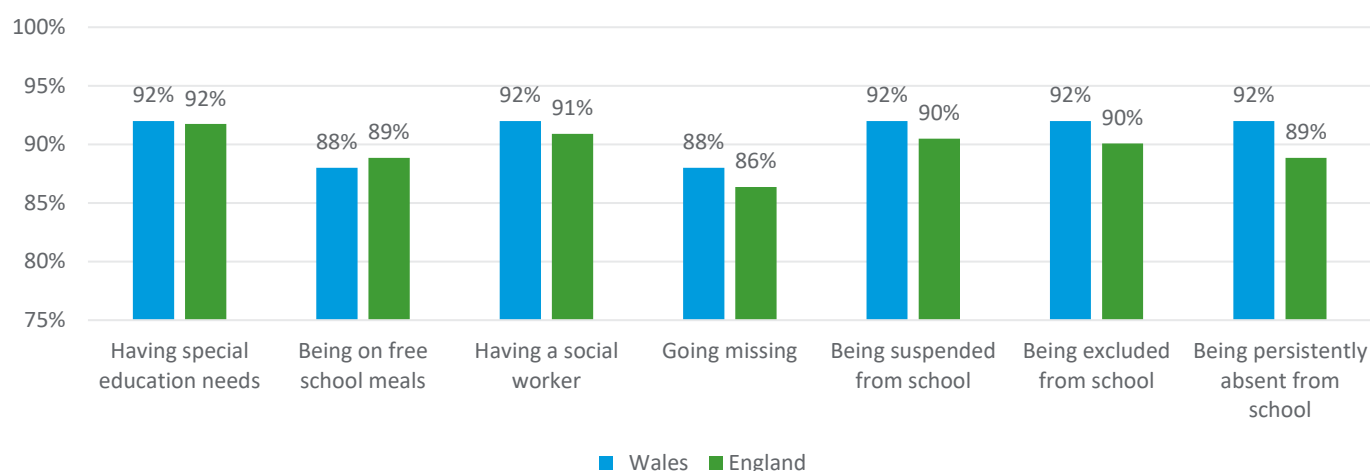
**Figure 50. Engagement with children at immediate risk of crime/violence by safeguard effort**



Source: Youth sector survey Q13 and Q19

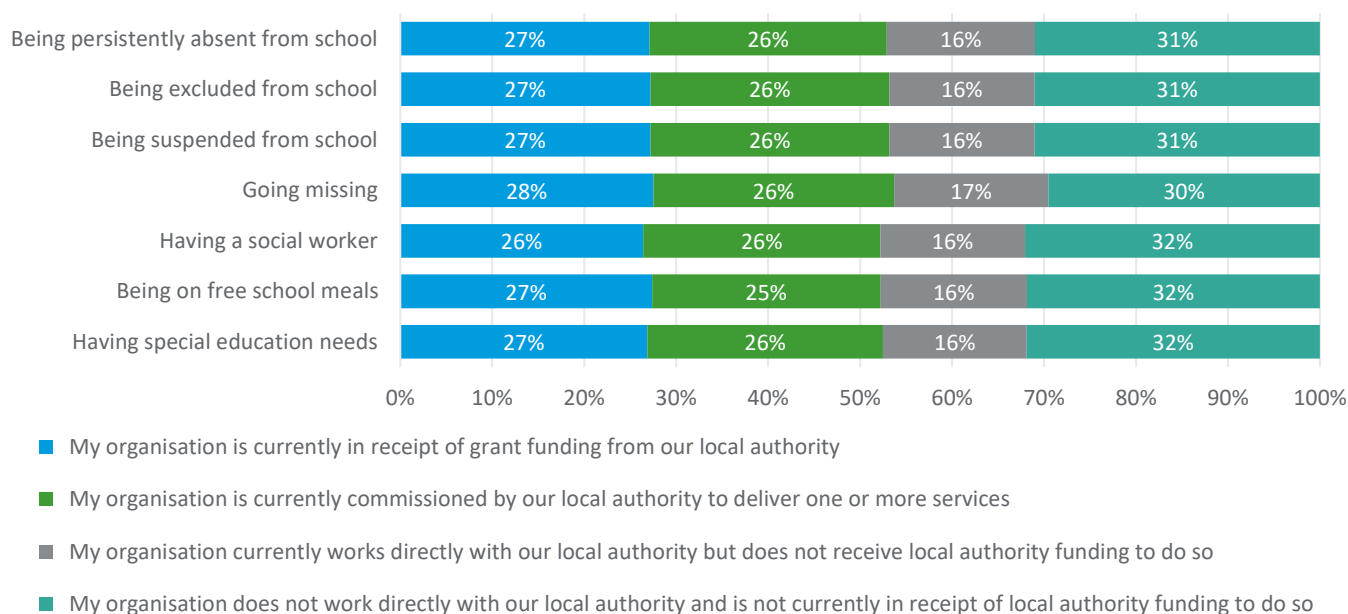
Base: 3 (Wider forms of contextual safeguarding), 162 (Informal mentoring of children and young people), 169 (Supporting children and young people to build respectful relationships with peer), 169 (De-escalating situations involving children and young people), 157 (Preventing further violence after serious violence has already occurred), 89 (Supporting children and young people who consider themselves part of a 'gang' to disengage and move towards safer, more positive outcomes), 127 (Signposting children and young people who you believe to be at risk of violence or crime to specialist support services), 141 (No specific safeguarding from violence or crime), 4 (Informal collaboration with other professionals)

**Figure 51. Proportion of youth clubs being aware of children's vulnerabilities by location**



Source: Youth sector survey Q4 and Q10  
 Base: 25 (Wales), 242 (England)

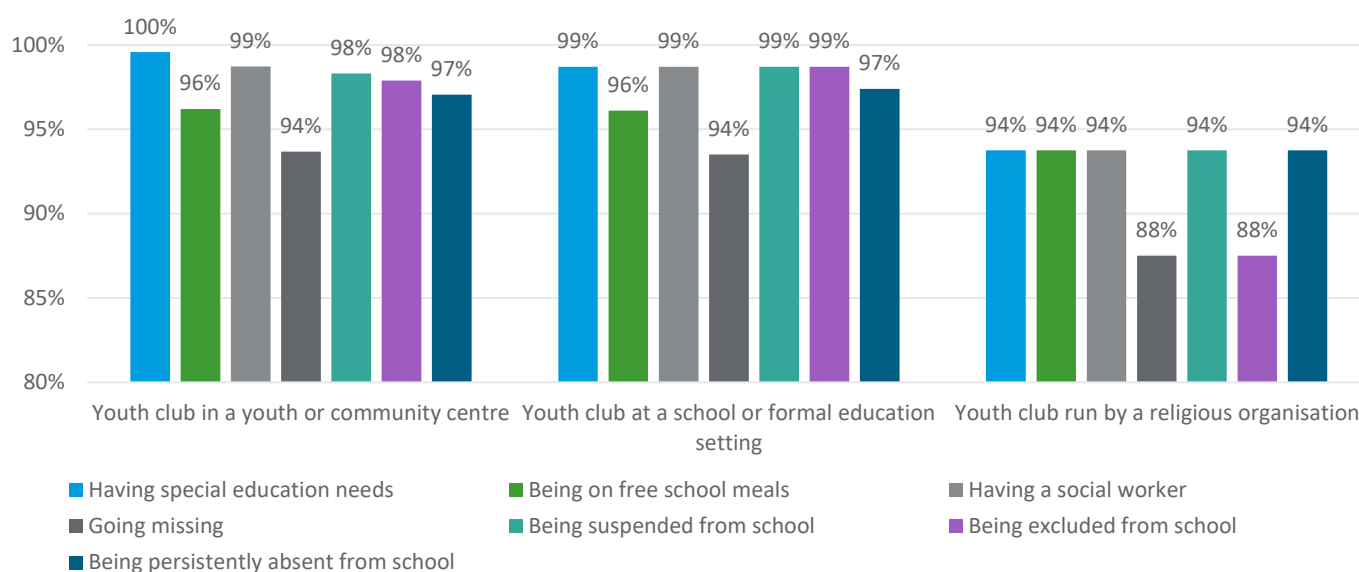
**Figure 52. Proportion of youth clubs being aware of children's vulnerabilities by youth clubs' relationship with local authorities**



Source: Youth sector survey Q6 and Q10  
 Base: 160 (Having special education needs), 157 (Being on free school meals), 159 (Having a social worker), 149 (Going missing), 148 (Being suspended from school), 158 (Being excluded from school), 155 (Being persistently absent from school)

Youth clubs without direct ties to local authorities were just as likely to report awareness of vulnerable children among their attendees as those with funding or commissioned relationships. This suggests that staff awareness of children's needs does not depend on local authority involvement.

**Figure 53. Proportion of youth clubs being aware of children's vulnerabilities by youth club type**



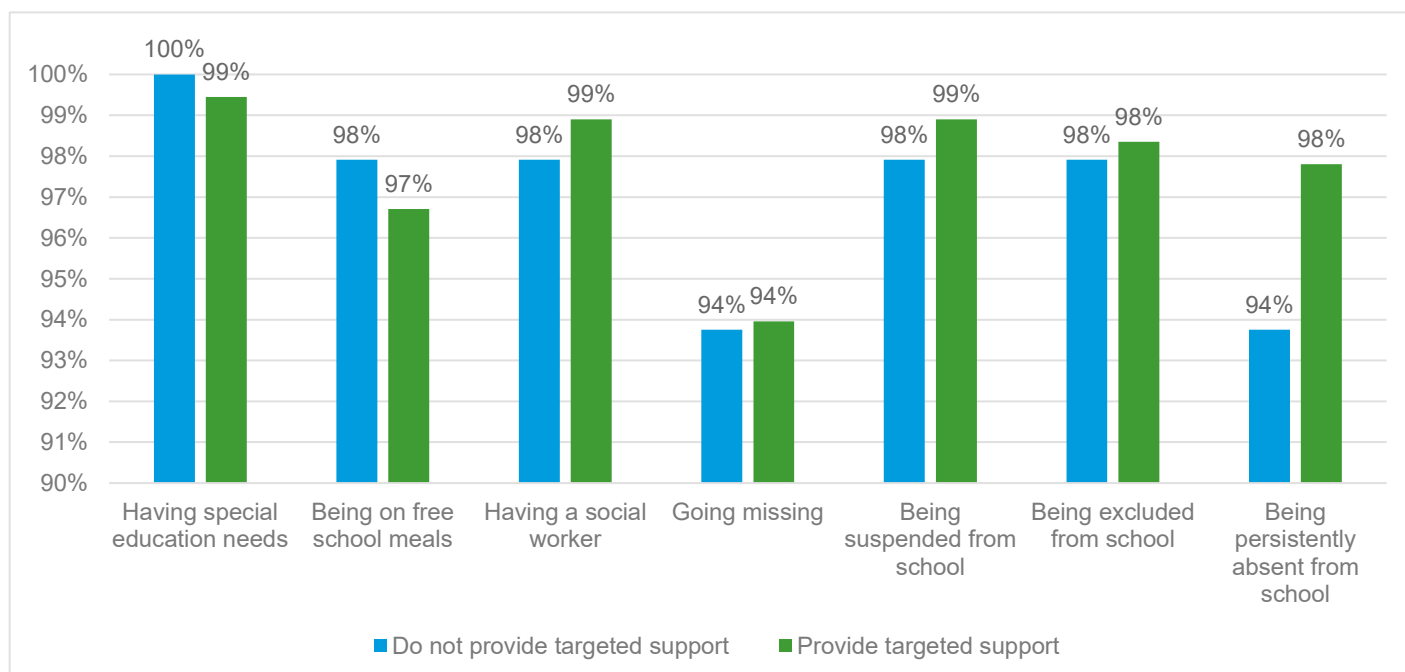
Source: Youth sector survey Q7a and Q10

Base: 237 (Youth club in a youth or community centre), 77 (Youth club at a school or formal education setting), 16 (Youth club run by a religious organisation)

Note: Multiple response options – one organisation surveyed may provide more than one type of open access youth provision.

Awareness of vulnerable children is very high across all youth club types, with slightly higher reporting in youth clubs not run by a religious organisation..

**Figure 54. Youth clubs' awareness of children's vulnerabilities, by whether they offer targeted services**

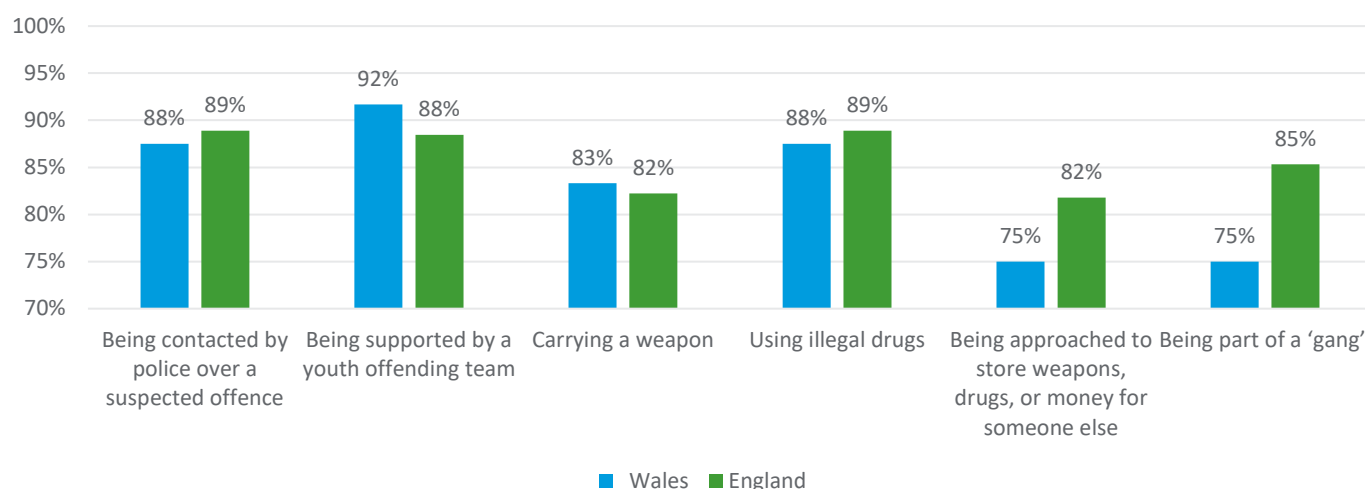


Source: Youth sector survey Q9 and Q10

Base: 182 (Provide targeted support), 48 (Do not provide targeted support)

Youth clubs offering targeted support report slightly higher awareness of most vulnerable children, while youth clubs not offering targeted support more often report awareness of vulnerable children having special education needs or being on free school meals.

**Figure 55. Proportion of youth clubs aware of children being at immediate risk of crime or violence by location**

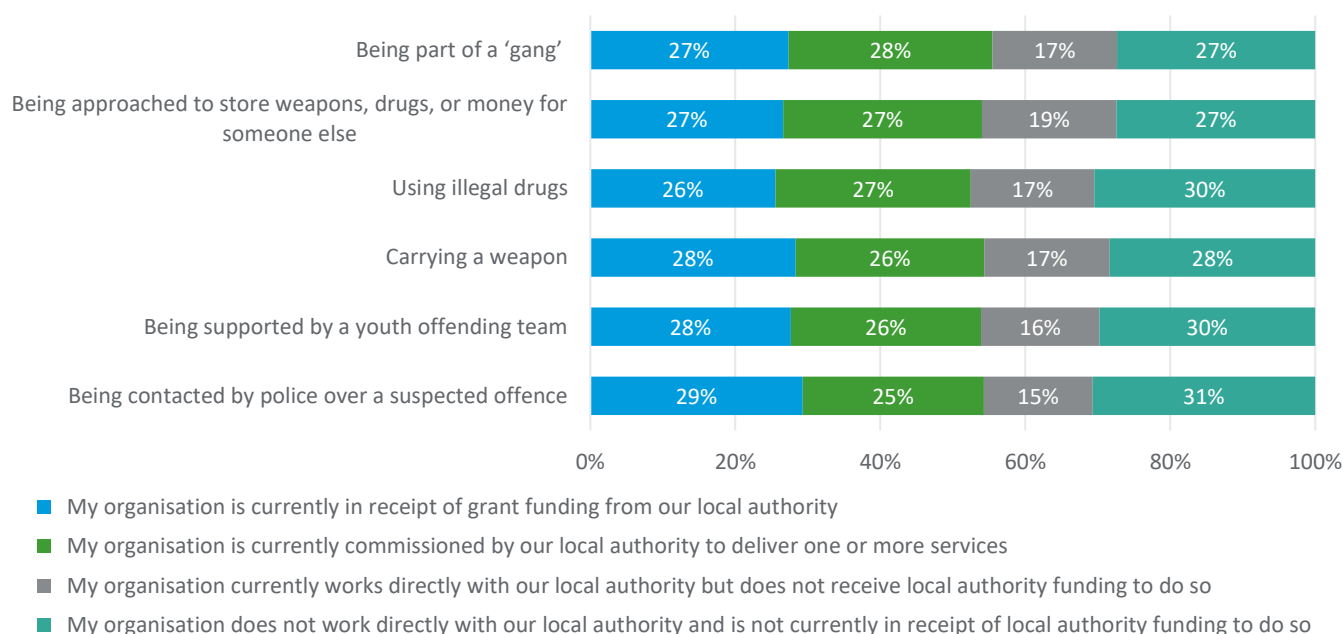


Source: Youth sector survey Q4 and Q12

Base: 24 (Wales), 225 (England)

Clubs in Wales report slightly higher awareness of most risk factors, while clubs in England more often report awareness of gang involvement and drug storing.

**Figure 56. Youth clubs' awareness of children being at immediate risk of crime or violence by youth clubs' relationship with local authorities**

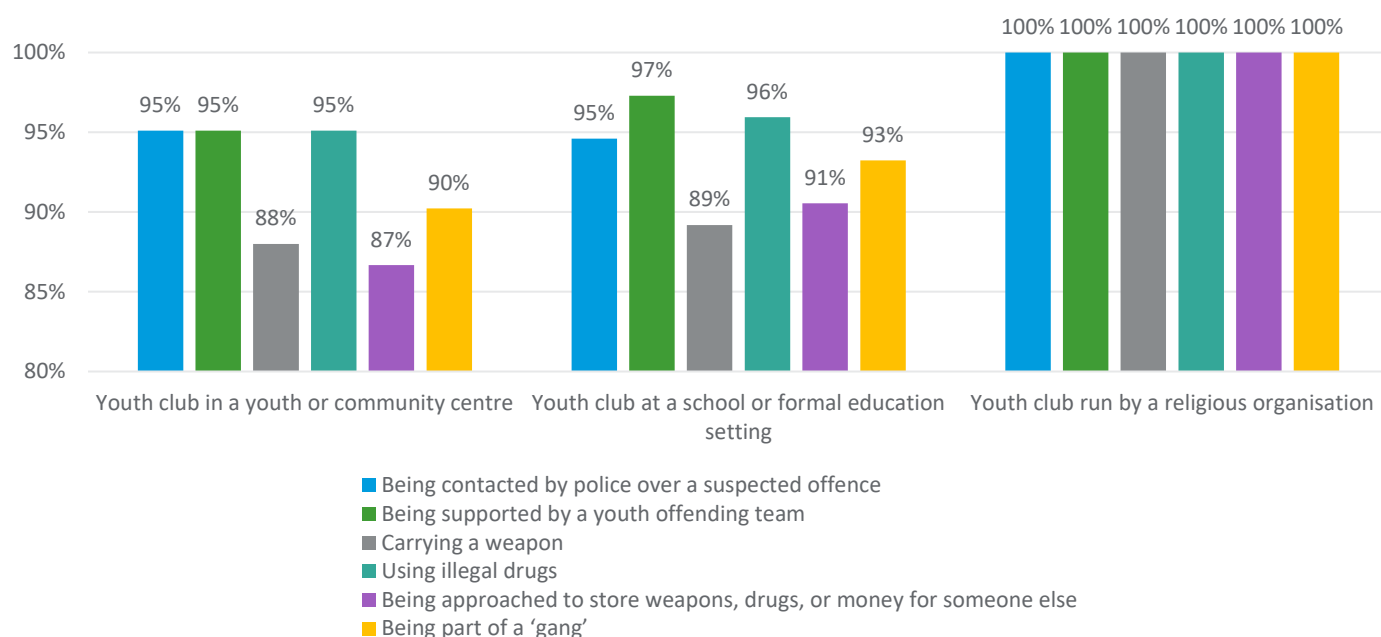


Source: Youth sector survey Q6 and Q12

Base: 140 (Being contacted by police over a suspected offence), 141 (Being supported by a youth offending team), 127 (Carrying a weapon), 141 (Using illegal drugs), 124 (Being approached to store weapons, drugs, or money for someone else), 128 (Being part of a 'gang')

Youth clubs without direct ties to local authorities were just as likely to report awareness of children at immediate risk of crime/violence among their attendees as those with funding or commissioned relationships. This suggests that staff awareness of children's needs does not depend on local authority involvement.

**Figure 57. Proportion of youth clubs aware of children being at immediate risk of crime or violence by youth club type**

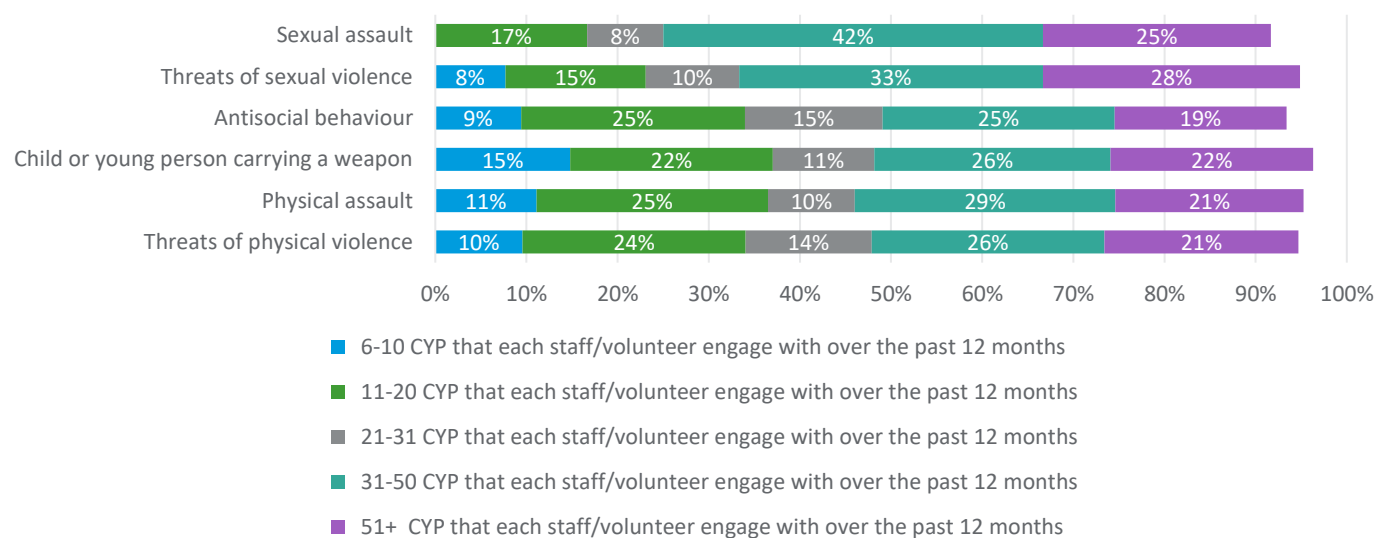


Source: Youth sector survey Q7a and Q12

Base: 225 (Youth club in a youth or community centre), 74 (Youth club at a school or formal education setting), 13 (Youth club run by a religious organisation)

Note: Multiple response options – one organisation surveyed may provide more than one type of open access youth provision.

**Figure 58. Incidents of violence witnessed in youth clubs by children-staff ratio**



Source: Youth sector survey Q14, Q15a and Q16

Base: 94 (Threats of physical violence), 63 (Physical assault), 54 (Child or young person carrying a weapon), 106 (Antisocial behaviour), 39 (Threats of sexual violence), 24 (Sexual assault)



## A.4. References

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