**YOUTH
ENDOWMENT
FUND**

Youth work and violence prevention

Practice guidance for youth work commissioners on how to reduce children and young people's involvement in violence

About the Youth Endowment Fund

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

The charity was established in 2019 with a 10-year, £200 million endowment from the Home Office.

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

This guidance sets out eight evidence-based recommendations to help prevent 10-17-year-olds[1] from becoming involved in violence. It emphasises getting the **right focus** on vulnerable children and young people and high-risk contexts, funding **approaches that work**, and laying **strong foundations** for high-quality youth work.

It is primarily written for local funders and commissioners of youth work in England and Wales – such as local authorities, Violence Reduction Units (VRUs), and housing associations – whose decisions shape the local youth work system. This guidance is also relevant to philanthropic funders, who can use it to align their grants with evidence, and youth workers, who can use it to inform service design and advocate for the conditions they need to deliver high-quality support.

Why focus on preventing violence?

Violence is the use or threat of intentional physical force.[2] It includes murder, physical assault, sexual assault, harm with a weapon, and robbery.[3] Violence is, unfortunately, common amongst children and young people. The Youth Endowment Fund's (YEF's) recent survey of 11,000 13-17-year-olds across England and Wales found that, in the last year, nearly one in five had been victims of violence and one in eight had committed violence.[4] Much of this violence is serious: nearly three in ten victims needed medical treatment from a doctor or a hospital. More broadly, half of 13-17-year-olds reported that they had witnessed violence being committed against someone else.

Why focus on youth work?

All services that impact children and young people's lives have a role in keeping them safe from violence. YEF is producing guidance for formal education, children's services, policing, youth justice, and health, as well as for the youth sector. Youth work plays a critical role by engaging children and young people on their own terms.[5] It is important for violence prevention because:

- **Youth work engages children and young people who are vulnerable to violence.** Children and young people who report committing violence are almost twice as likely to attend a youth club as their peers (65% vs 35%).[6] They are also more likely to report a trusting relationship with a youth worker, sports coach, or mentor, highlighting the sector's potential to reach those who need it most.[7]

- **Universal youth services can protect children and young people from violence.** The kinds of support that universal youth services deliver day-to-day – helping children and young people build social and emotional skills, engage in positive activities, and develop trusting relationships with safe adults – can prevent violence.[8]

- **Specialist youth services can deliver effective targeted support.** For children and young people at particular risk of involvement in violence, specialist youth services can deliver effective support like formal mentoring and structured positive activities.[9]

This guidance focuses exclusively on violence prevention. There are many other reasons to fund youth work, and the purpose of youth work itself is not violence prevention. Nevertheless, the evidence shows that protecting children and young people from violence can be one of the benefits of youth work.

What role do youth workers play?

Youth workers are the 'golden thread' running through this report. The trusting relationships that children and young people develop with the adults who staff youth clubs, offer positive activities, and act as mentors or caseworkers are key to their success.[10] These adults include qualified youth workers, professional mentors, sports coaches, and volunteers. This report uses the term 'youth worker' inclusively to refer to anyone who provides youth work in practice, regardless of their job title or qualification.[11] For A&E navigators, we use the term 'caseworker' to reflect the broader, more varied nature of that role.

Why must we address racial disproportionality?

Most children and young people involved in violence are White.[12] However, relative to their share of the population, some minority ethnic groups – particularly Black children and young people – are over-represented in violence victimisation and perpetration. This disproportionality is driven by factors such as poverty, racism, and unequal access to support.[13] Encouragingly, youth work is particularly effective at engaging children and young people from disproportionately impacted communities: children and young people from Black and mixed backgrounds are more likely to attend youth clubs and to have a trusting relationship with a mentor than those from White backgrounds.[14]

The recommendations in this report aim to strengthen the support the youth sector provides to children and young people from Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic backgrounds, and we expect five of the eight recommendations to help tackle racial disproportionality.[15]

What about the broader system?

Over the last fifteen years, the youth sector has experienced dramatic funding cuts, which have weakened youth work infrastructure and left many youth work commissioners with limited resources.[16] This practice guidance recognises the challenging context in which youth work and its commissioning take place and aims to help you make the most of the funds available. Later in 2026, we will produce recommendations for improving the broader system in which youth work commissioning takes place to make it easier to fund 'what works'.

What evidence underpins this guidance?

This guidance draws upon the best available global evidence on how to prevent children and young people's involvement in violence. This includes the YEF Toolkit: a rigorous, independent summary of 39 different violence prevention strategies that draws on the findings from over 2,000 existing studies. This guidance also uses new YEF-funded research, including four reviews of youth sector practice, our annual survey of over 11,000 13-17-year-olds, and insights from young people collected by our Peer Action Collective's (PAC) peer researchers. Our Strategic Advisory Group and Youth Advisory Board, together with an Expert Panel of youth sector leaders, commissioners and academics, have shaped this guidance to ensure the recommendations are feasible and relevant.

How to use this guidance

The recommendations in this report are 'best bets' derived from the evidence: approaches that, on average, have been found to reduce violence, making them good starting points for future efforts. Your judgement and knowledge of local contexts remain critical in applying them. Where you are already implementing a recommendation, focus on refining practice in line with the sub-recommendations.

Recommendations

👓 Right focus

1	### Target support where violence risk is highest **Why?** Support should follow need. **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:** A. Identify vulnerable children and young people and high-risk contexts. B. Work with local partners to identify gaps. C. Commission in partnership with children and young people.

📋 Approaches that work

2	### Close the most urgent gaps in youth club access **Why?** Youth club deserts can make children and young people less safe. **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:** A. Map existing youth clubs and identify deserts. B. Open new youth clubs to improve access for the most vulnerable. C. Increase funding for existing youth clubs. D. Actively publicise the full local youth offer.

3	### Raise the standard and reach of mentoring **Why?** Vulnerable children and young people need trained adults who stay long enough to earn their trust. **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:** A. Map mentoring provision and identify gaps. B. Offer vulnerable children and young people at least six months of weekly, one-to-one mentoring by safe, trained adults.

4	### Maximise the protective power of positive activities **Why?** The best activities do not just keep vulnerable children and young people busy – they build skills and relationships. **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:** A. Fund a range of structured positive activities, including sports. B. Offer vulnerable children and young people at least six months of weekly positive activity sessions by safe, trained adults. C. Fund provision that builds social and emotional skills and trusting relationships.

5 Embed sustained support in high-need A&E departments

Why? Vulnerable children and young people need ongoing follow-up support, not brief signposting.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:
- A. Target support to the children and young people who need it most.
- B. Make caseworkers available in the right places and times.
- C. Combine sustained direct support with access to evidence-based interventions.
- D. Equip caseworkers for the demands of the role.

🧱 Strong foundations

6 Make multi-year core funding the default

Why? Short-term, restricted funding can weaken the quality of youth provision.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:
- A. Offer funding that lasts 3–5 years.
- B. Fund everyday core operating costs.
- C. Fund providers to collect and use data to improve quality and inclusion.

7 Equip youth workers to safeguard children and young people

Why? Youth workers already safeguard vulnerable children and young people from violence – often without the necessary support.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:
- A. Fund regular supervision and specialist training for youth workers.
- B. Involve youth workers in local safeguarding and/or community safety systems.

8 Prioritise evidence-based strategies and avoid harmful approaches

Why? Limited resources are best spent on violence prevention strategies that are supported by evidence.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:
- A. Use robust evidence to inform decision-making.
- B. Be aware that many violence prevention strategies have limited evidence.
- C. Avoid approaches that have been proven to cause harm.

👓 Right focus

Recommendation 1.
Target support where violence risk is highest

Why?

Some children and young people experience individual adversities or harmful contexts that make them more vulnerable to involvement in violence.[17] Where resources are limited, commissioners can make the biggest difference by supporting those who need it most.[18]

Recommended actions

A. Identify vulnerable children and young people and high-risk contexts.

B. Work with local partners to identify gaps.

C. Commission in partnership with children and young people.

A. Identify vulnerable children and young people and high-risk contexts

Certain risk indicators can be useful in helping to identify groups of children and young people who may benefit from extra support. Use administrative data to identify 10-17-year-olds who:

- Have been **excluded** from school.[19]
- Attend **Alternative Provision** (AP).[20]
- Are **severely absent** from formal education.[21]
- Are being **looked after** (this risk indicator applies to boys in particular).[22]
- Have received a **criminal conviction.**[23]

Youth workers (and other practitioners) may identify other key risk indicators, such as:

- **Numerous adverse childhood experiences** (ACEs):[24] for example, exposure to domestic violence, parental substance misuse, and physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.
- **Drug/alcohol use** (during early adolescence) or **addiction** (at any age):[25] for example, ever trying illegal drugs or regularly drinking alcohol by age 14.
- **Self-harm or suicidality** (amongst boys):[26] for example, boys who have hurt themselves on purpose or had thoughts about ending their life in the last year.
- **Harm-involved social networks:**[27] for example, having friends who misuse substances or get into trouble in school in early adolescence,[28] or identifying as part of a 'gang' at any age.[29]

💡 **TIP**

Where possible, draw on existing work examining violence and vulnerability in your area (e.g. strategic needs assessments). Connect with local partners who conduct this kind of work, such as local authorities, VRUs, Child Safeguarding Partnerships, Community Safety Partnerships, Prevention Partnerships, and Young Futures Hubs.

- **Experience of violence:** for example, being a victim of serious violence,[30] carrying a weapon,[31] or previously perpetrating violence.[32]

Many vulnerable children and young people will have more than one risk indicator. Consider how risks may overlap and ensure provision meets the needs of those facing the greatest combined risks.

💬 YOUTH VOICE

Children and young people's accounts of their involvement in serious violence in the UK[33]

Children and young people often see their involvement in violence as a response to difficult lives. They describe how trauma, poverty, social exclusion, and a family history of violence can foster low social connection and aspiration. Facing marginalisation or limited academic attainment, some see violence as a route to financial security and self-respect or turn to hypermasculinity to build identity and status. From their perspective, the line between being at risk and being violent is often blurred, with behaviour shaped by surroundings.
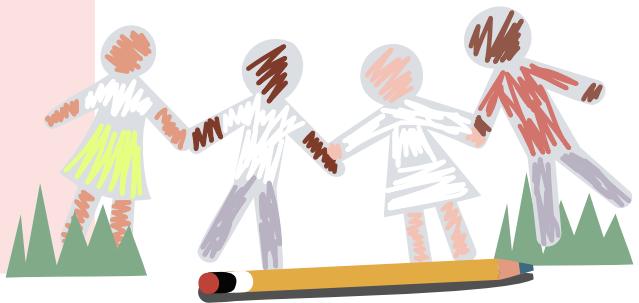
Alongside supporting individual children and young people, **focus on identifying and changing the local contexts where harm occurs.**[34] Consider:

- **Locations.** Much of the violence that occurs happens in a small number of places, called hotspots: 50% of violent crime happens in 2% of street segments.[36] Children and young people who live near or frequent hotspots are more vulnerable to involvement in violence.

- **Times.** Violence is concentrated at certain times. Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to being seriously injured through violence on weekdays after school, 4-8pm.[37]

- **Other contextual contributors.** For example, social media amplifying conflicts,[38] or adults criminally exploiting pupils from a certain AP setting.[39]

Evidence suggests that focusing efforts on high-risk contexts doesn't simply shift violence elsewhere – it reduces it.[40]

💡 **TIP**

Publicly available data can help identify hotspots. Police.uk lists the lower layer super output area (LSOA) where every recorded crime took place, as well as the nearest street. Crimes are categorised by type, including 'violence and sexual offences'. However, not all crimes are reported, so consider combining this with safety mapping conducted with children and young people.

💬 YOUTH VOICE

"You just felt oppressed constantly … because you felt you were in a dirty, dangerous environment 24/7. It was almost like it was dragging you down with it".

Young person interviewed by PAC.[35]

B. Work with local partners to identify gaps

Audit existing youth provision for the vulnerable children and young people and the harmful contexts you identified. Take into account provision funded by local partners, including different local authority departments, youth justice, health services, VRUs, Community Safety and Child Safeguarding Partnerships, the voluntary and community sector (VCS), schools, colleges, and AP settings. Speak to county-based youth work infrastructure organisations (such as your Regional Youth Work Unit), local providers, and young people to build a picture of local provision. Draw on existing work wherever possible (for example, Local Youth Transformation Pilot areas are already auditing youth provision).[42] The following online sources may also be useful:

- The National Youth Agency's (NYA's) interactive map of all organisations in England that have completed the NYA census (create a free account to access the map).[43]

- UK Youth's map of the 9,000 delivery organisations in its network.

- 360Giving's database of charitable grants from funders.

- The University of South Wales and the Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services' study on the composition of the Welsh youth sector.

- Local resources published by local authorities or VCS infrastructure bodies, such as:

  - Essex Council for Voluntary Youth Services' map.

  - Infoengine's directory of third sector services in Wales.

  - London Youth's visual overview of youth organisations in London.

Identify gaps in support. Speak to local youth workers and referral partners in allied sectors about where there are gaps in support. Consider:

- Geographical **distribution**. Do vulnerable children and young people have provision in their area? Is this easily accessible? Do they feel safe travelling there?

- The **groups** being supported. Consider the risk indicators: are some vulnerable groups overlooked? What are programmes' eligibility criteria? Are existing referral pathways working?

- The **types** of youth work. Is there a balance of open-access and targeted provision?[44] Are approaches that work to prevent violence (described in Recommendations 2–5) available?

- The **quality** of support. Can children and young people access support promptly? Do they stay engaged? Does practice align with the sub-recommendations of this report?

- **Integration** with other support. Is provision well-integrated with other services, such as mental health or family support? Is information shared appropriately across youth work, education, children's services, and community safety partnerships?
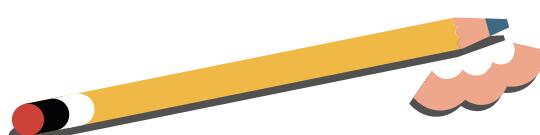
💡 TIP

When using maps and databases, check how location is defined. Many resources record where organisations are registered, not where services are delivered.

💡 TIP

You are likely to identify more gaps than you have resources to fill. Share your findings with local partners and work together to address the most pressing gaps in support.

Within the limitations of the resources available, address gaps by funding sustained open-access and targeted youth provision that facilitates trusting relationships. Trust between young people and youth workers takes time to build and cannot be transferred between programmes, so:

- Fund organisations that are already trusted by the local community. These may be smaller, grassroots organisations. Such organisations may require additional support (e.g. with reporting requirements).

- Ensure time-limited, targeted programmes deliver support for at least six months and are integrated with ongoing open-access provision.[46] For example, place targeted programmes within a youth club or have a mentor introduce their mentee to a youth worker in a local club before mentoring ends.

C. Commission in partnership with children and young people

Commission youth services in partnership with the children and young people who will use them. Co-commissioning is resource-intensive, requiring investment and skill. Provide an inclusive space and facilitation to help children and young people express their views, then act upon them (or explain where this has not been possible) and provide feedback on the actions taken.[47] Consider establishing a youth forum or using existing youth advisory boards or co-production groups.

Ensure that the children and young people you work with are representative of those you intend to support, including those from the vulnerable groups described above and from diverse ethnic backgrounds.[48] Consider recruiting through youth clubs and using youth workers to engage vulnerable children and young people and facilitate the expression of their views.[49] Vulnerable children and young people are more likely to have mental health or neurodevelopmental conditions (such as ADHD or developmental language disorder), so ensure sessions are inclusive and accessible.[50]

💬 **YOUTH VOICE**

"There was a youth worker that works there, who I would go there to see. Yeah, I really liked her, and then she left. Then I stopped going".

Young person interviewed by PAC.[45]

Children and young people have the right to have their views "given due weight in all matters affecting them".

United Nations (1989), Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12

💬 **YOUTH VOICE**

Creating youth forums that matter[51]

From Bradford PAC's Toolkit

Let young people shape the forum. Don't just invite young people in; involve them from the start. Co-create the forum's purpose and priorities with them.

Keep it practical and flexible. Be youth-led in format. Choose times, locations, and platforms that suit young people. Provide food, cover travel, and keep the tone relaxed.

Focus on real-world impact. Forums need more than talk; young people need to see change. Choose achievable goals and share progress visibly.

Create two-way relationships. Make sure young people speak with, not at, professionals. Get buy-in from leadership and set up regular meetings.

Use the forum to build confidence and skills. Frame it as a development opportunity and offer chances to lead parts of sessions, present to stakeholders, or feed into decisions.

Reflect the real community. Make it representative. Reach beyond your usual circles and target young people from a range of backgrounds and lived experiences.

Approaches that work

Recommendation 2.
Close the most urgent gaps in youth club access

Why?

Access to a youth club can protect children and young people from involvement in violence.[53] But funding for youth clubs has fallen dramatically. Last year, one in seven local authorities reported no youth clubs in their areas.[54]

Recommended actions

A. Map existing youth clubs and identify deserts.

B. Open new youth clubs to improve access for the most vulnerable.

C. Increase funding for existing youth clubs.

D. Actively publicise the full local youth offer.

A. Map existing youth clubs and identify deserts

Youth clubs are open-access spaces where children and young people spend time socialising with peers, supervised and supported by youth workers. Forty per cent of 13-17-year-olds attend some form of youth club at least once a month, and 70% say that some form of youth club is available where they live.[55] The most commonly attended types of youth clubs are at schools (17%) and youth or community centres (12%). The youth clubs provided by religious organisations are sometimes overlooked – over one in 10 (11%) 13-17-year-olds regularly attend a faith-based youth club.

Map youth clubs in your area, including different types, such as clubs in schools, youth or community centres, and religious organisations.[57] Speak to local partners who deliver or fund youth provision to find out what mapping has already taken place and build a picture of local provision. The sources described in Recommendation 1 may be helpful. For example, the NYA census is estimated to include almost half of all English youth clubs based in youth or community centres.[58] When using databases, search for terms such as *'youth club', 'youth centre', 'youth zone', 'youth hub', 'youth programme',* and *'youth group'.*

Identify the potential reach of the youth clubs you have mapped. Consider them in context to build a picture of local need, attendance, transport and access, safety risks, community assets, and referral routes. Speak to staff about where attendees tend to live.[59] As a rule of thumb, urban areas without a club within a 40-minute walk can be considered youth club deserts.[60]

💬 YOUTH VOICE

"There were people that I grew up with who turned to the youth club and actually – I don't want to say 'found a way out' – but, in a way, they did. They saw something that they may like, and now, they're actually living pretty good lives. But now, when I walk past that place where the youth club was … the only place that those kids can turn to is the street corner".

Young person interviewed by PAC.[52]

✍ CURRENT PRACTICE

Local authorities are required to establish and publicise local youth provision. However, two in five (42%) couldn't report the number of youth centres in their area that were run by other organisations. Even among those with a recent youth provision needs assessment, over a third (37%) couldn't provide this information.[56]

📖 **WIDER RESEARCH**

London youth club closures[61]

A study of youth club closures across London between 2010 and 2019 found that crime increased when youth clubs closed. Children and young people living in areas where all nearby youth clubs shut became 14% more likely to commit crime than their peers in areas where all youth clubs remained open. Violent crimes committed by children and young people were around 20% higher in affected areas, and affected children and young people performed slightly worse in national exams. A what-if analysis suggested that crime increases could have been almost completely avoided had decision-makers prioritised children and young people's access to at least one local club.

B. Open new youth clubs to improve access for the most vulnerable

Establish new youth clubs in youth club deserts.[63] There will be more deserts than you have funding to address.[64] In deciding where to locate new youth clubs:

- Prioritise improving access for vulnerable children and young people (as defined in Recommendation 1).[65]

- Consider the distribution of violence.[66] Use data to identify priority neighbourhoods (for example, using police data to identify clusters of adjacent LSOAs with high levels of violent crime). Within those priority neighbourhoods, choose the specific location carefully. You may wish to avoid placing new clubs in hyperlocal violence hotspots that could put attendees at risk (for example, the specific streets where violence frequently occurs).

- Consult with local partners, practitioners (such as youth workers and school leaders), and children and young people to understand the benefits and drawbacks of potential locations.

- Consider how children and young people will travel to the club.[68] Think through transport links, transport costs, the location of local secondary schools and AP settings, and how fears about violence or postcode conflicts may affect willingness to travel.

- Consider how the new club can be integrated with existing support. For example, by providing funding to existing VCS organisations and grassroots collectives (or using approaches such as community asset transfers or nominal rents) to enable them to open a new youth club in their local area. New youth clubs could be based in youth or community centres, schools, or religious organisations.[69]

Allow time for a design stage, ideally involving co-design with local children and young people, to ensure the youth club meets the needs of those it intends to support. Be aware that a new club will require time to 'bed in' to the local community; attendance may take weeks or months to grow.

✍ **CURRENT PRACTICE**

Half (52%) of all 13-17-year-olds say they'd like to try some type of youth club that they don't currently attend.[62]

💬 **YOUTH VOICE**

"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".

Young person interviewed as part of RSM UK Consulting's review of youth clubs in England and Wales.[67]

💬 YOUTH VOICE

Vulnerable children and young people attend youth clubs[70]

YEF's survey of over 10,000 13-17-year-olds across England and Wales found that vulnerable children and young people are much more likely to attend youth clubs than their peers. Sixty-five per cent of 13-17-year-olds who had perpetrated violence in the last year attend a youth club, compared to 35% of those who had not perpetrated violence. Even bigger differences appear across several important risk indicators for violence, as illustrated below:
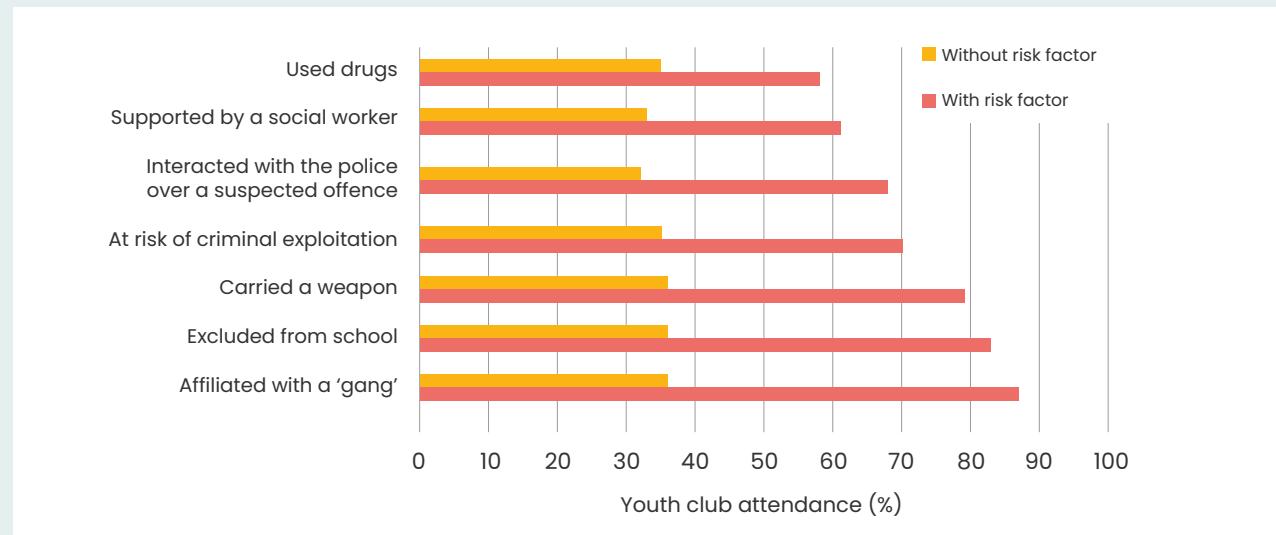
The likelihood of attending youth clubs also varied by ethnic background: children and young people from Black (64%), mixed (52%), and Asian (48%) backgrounds are more likely to attend youth clubs than White children and young people (36%).

Provide sufficient multi-year core funding to enable the new club to:[71]

- **Open every weekday after school** (4-8pm) to engage children and young people at this key risk time.[72]

- **Offer free or low-cost activities** to reduce financial barriers.[73]

- **Provide nutritious meals** (where appropriate), as improving nutrition can reduce aggression, antisocial behaviour, and offending.[74]

- **Maintain high staffing levels** to support a safe environment and give attendees the opportunity for meaningful interactions with youth workers.[75] As a minimum, there should be no more than eight 9-12-year-olds per adult and no more than ten 13-18-year-olds per adult at any time.[76]

- **Equip staff** with the basic training described below and the regular supervision and specialist training described in Recommendation 7.

Basic training requirements[77]

All youth workers should be trained in:

• Safeguarding

• Relationship development and maintenance

• Local services for children and young people

• Sources of support for youth workers

Many youth workers will have prior training, but services may need to train volunteers or unqualified staff. Training should use discussion and role play and focus on skill development (particularly trust-building, listening, and non-judgmental counselling skills).

Enable the youth club to provide additional evidence-based, targeted support.[78] This could be provided through:

- Youth workers offering vulnerable children and young people mentoring (see Recommendation 3) or structured positive activities (Recommendation 4) at the club.

- Co-located services embedded within the youth club.[80] This can facilitate trust, engagement, and continuity for children and young people and can strengthen relationships between youth workers and allied professionals.[81]

C. Increase funding for existing youth clubs

Don't open new youth clubs at the expense of existing clubs. Existing clubs have the benefit of being integrated into the community, with trusting relationships already in place. In general, existing open-access youth services already tend to be located in higher-violence areas.[82]

Enhance the support that existing youth clubs provide, prioritising those that serve more vulnerable cohorts. Ask youth club leaders what they need to improve the support they offer; many will require additional funding. A survey of 321 youth workers from youth club organisations found that:[83]

- Only half of youth clubs (53%) are open every weekday.

- Many youth clubs reach high numbers of children and young people with small staff teams. Fifty-seven per cent of clubs report annual caseloads of more than 20 children and young people per full-time staff/volunteer, with 18% reporting caseloads of more than 50.

- Specialist training is limited. Ninety-nine per cent of respondents had received safeguarding training, but only 27% had received training in violence prevention skills.

- Targeted support is common. Almost three-quarters (72%) of youth clubs offer targeted support.

D. Actively publicise the full local youth offer

Advertise all local open-access youth provision, including provision you do not fund or run, coordinating with local partners and collaborating with children and young people.[85]

- **Make use of the information you've gathered.** Use your youth club mapping to create a public directory of local open-access provision, or add to an existing directory.[86] Fund advertising for the directory and keep it up to date.[87] Add missing information to the NYA census (England) to improve the visibility of youth provision.

- **Increase the quantity and quality of marketing for the local youth offer.** For example, printed marketing, social media marketing, and activity open days (bringing local providers to a community location to showcase what they offer).[88]

"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".

Youth worker interviewed as part of RSM UK Consulting's review of youth clubs in England and Wales.[79]

💡 **TIP**

Where funding is limited, consider encouraging youth clubs in the same area to open on different evenings.

💬 **YOUTH VOICE**

"If there are any youth activities available, they are not advertised well".

Young person interviewed by SQW and UK Youth as part of a review of barriers and enablers to participating in youth activities.[84]

- **Reach children and young people through the settings they spend time in.** This should include local schools, colleges, and AP settings, and could also include youth clubs and religious organisations.[89]

🔍 CASE STUDY

Youth voice in advertising the local youth offer[90]

Through PAC, two teams independently identified a lack of information about activities as a key issue facing young people in their area – and decided to fix it.

Bradford: PAC Yorkshire designed an interactive map to help peers find activities and support services.
The team gathered feedback on the map's design and on which activities and services to include. Its reach was boosted through endorsements from the Lord Mayor of Bradford, EFL in the Community, and local schools.

Gateshead: PAC North-East collaborated with Gateshead Council to produce an interactive map and directory of local activities and support. The team gathered feedback on how to engage young people and the providers listed on the map. The council hosts the directory and has committed to keeping it up to date.

Recommendation 3.
Raise the standard and reach of mentoring

Why?

Trusting relationships with safe adults can protect children and young people from violence.[92] But mentoring provision is patchy, and many programmes only offer short-term support.[93]

Recommended actions

A. Map mentoring provision and identify gaps.

B. Offer vulnerable children and young people at least six months of weekly, one-to-one mentoring by safe, trained adults.

A. Map mentoring provision and identify gaps

Map all mentoring provision for vulnerable children and young people in your area (as defined in Recommendation 1). The term 'mentoring' is broad, and mentors include qualified youth workers, professional mentors, and volunteers.[95] Focus on formal mentoring programmes that match a child or young person with a mentor and enable them to meet regularly. Mentoring does not need to have an explicit focus on violence to prevent violence.

Draw on existing work where possible. Speak to local partners who deliver or fund youth provision to find out what mapping has already taken place and draw on the sources described in Recommendation 1.

Identify gaps in mentoring for vulnerable children and young people in your area. Consider the geographical distribution of mentoring programmes, referral routes, eligibility criteria, programme focus, the settings where mentoring takes place (e.g. AP, youth clubs, at home), and the quality of support provided (as described below).

💬 YOUTH VOICE

"[Since] I've been doing sessions with [my mentor], I've had encounters where a fight could have happened …. [The techniques my mentor showed me have] helped me in actual scenarios, and it's helped me stay calm … if I didn't have a trusted adult, I reckon I could have gone down a very, very bad path of violence".

Young person interviewed by PAC.[91]

📖 **WIDER RESEARCH**

Grants for mentoring across England and Wales[96]

An analysis of mentoring grants between 2023 and 2025, recorded in 360Giving, found £24m awarded, equating to only £12m a year (although there will be other unrecorded grants). The distribution was highly uneven, with over half going to projects in London. Only three awards were recorded in each of Wales and North East England. Twenty-one grants (worth £1.5m) mentioned 'crime' or 'violence' in their descriptions.

Region/Nation	Amount awarded	Number of awards
London	£13,625,836	106
West Midlands	£1,940,022	21
East Midlands	£1,540,662	8
Yorkshire and the Humber	£1,457,545	8
North West	£1,368,840	30
South East	£1,112,936	9
South West	£910,580	24
East of England	£739,770	9
Wales	£202,307	3
North East	£200,420	3

B. Offer vulnerable children and young people at least six months of weekly, one-to-one mentoring by safe, trained adults

Fund mentoring programmes for vulnerable children and young people that provide **one-to-one support** from a safe adult.[97] This should involve **at least six months of weekly meetings,** each lasting 1-2 hours.[98]

Ensure mentors have the **basic training** described in Recommendation 2, as well as the regular **supervision** and specialist **training** described in Recommendation 7. Mentors should also be trained in specific areas relevant to the children and young people being mentored, such as CV writing or criminal justice procedures.[99]

Programmes should also:

- Rigorously assess mentors' suitability, motivations, and commitment during recruitment.[100]

- Develop a protocol for matching mentors and mentees that takes into account mentees' interests, opinions, needs, and aspirations and mentors' skills, experience, and cultural competency.[101]

- Make parents/carers aware of mentoring, as this can facilitate mentees' commitment.[102]

- Develop clear referral pathways into the programme and out to external partners, and make mentors aware of these.[103]

💡 **TIP**

Providers may also find self-assessment tools such as the Mentoring Quality Framework *helpful.*

"Providers will say they mentor, but there is no understanding of whether that is a qualified mentor or if it is just a guy that's having a chat at the end of the sports session".

Housing Association representative interviewed by SQW and UK Youth.[94]

- Assess and adapt to mentees' needs and remove barriers to engagement (e.g. lack of transport to sessions).[104]

- Manage the end of the mentoring relationship carefully to avoid feelings of abandonment or loss. Communicate an end date, provide the mentee with resources or contacts to other relevant organisations, and celebrate progress.[105]

🔍 CASE STUDY

Spark2Life Meaningful Mentoring[106]

Spark2Life delivers intensive mentoring for 11–18-year-olds who are impacted by violence, crime or exploitation. Over a 12-month period, each child or young person is matched with a mentor who provides weekly one-to-one support. Mentors aim to support children and young people to reduce offending and improve their wellbeing, relationships, education and financial stability.

Spark2Life mentors also aim to advocate for children and young people by attending appointments and court hearings, liaising with solicitors and professionals, amplifying mentees' voices in multi-agency meetings, and supporting access to education, training, and employment opportunities. As mentoring progresses towards the end of the 12-month period, sessions are guided by a structured "Moving On" plan that supports independence and identifies ongoing needs.

All Spark2Life mentors are full-time, paid caseworkers, each supporting around 10–15 children and young people. Mentors complete an induction, including AQA-accredited Wholistic Mentoring course, safeguarding, and Criminal Child Exploitation training, followed by ongoing clinical supervision and continuing professional development.

YEF is evaluating the impact of Meaningful Mentoring and will publish findings in 2027.

Recommendation 4.

Maximise the protective power of positive activities

Why?

Positive activities – from sports programmes to summer jobs – can reduce children and young people's risk of becoming involved in violence.[108] But the best activities do more than keep vulnerable children and young people busy: they build social and emotional skills and trusting relationships with youth workers.

Recommended actions

A. Fund a range of structured positive activities, including sports.

B. Offer vulnerable children and young people at least six months of weekly positive activity sessions by safe, trained adults.

C. Fund provision that builds social and emotional skills and trusting relationships.

A. Fund a range of structured positive activities, including sports

Provide a variety of targeted positive activity programmes to appeal to different interests. These should include organised sports programmes, as these have direct evidence of reducing offending.[110] However, not all children and young people are interested in sports, and the mechanisms that make them effective are likely to apply to other activities (such as arts, music, adventure and wilderness activities).

Improve access in underserved areas. Children and young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to have access to activities.[111] Concentrate new provision in areas with higher violence and deprivation, choosing venues that children and young people can travel to easily and feel happy to attend. Fund transport where needed.[112]

💬 YOUTH VOICE

"I love playing rugby. Gives me a chance to get some of that anger out in a legal way".

Young person interviewed by PAC.[107]

✒️ CURRENT PRACTICE

Most 13-17-year-olds say that team sports (72%) and individual sports (62%) are available where they live. However, less than half report having access to arts activities (47%), volunteering (37%), part-time employment (34%), or wilderness activities (21%).[109]

B. Offer vulnerable children and young people at least six months of weekly positive activity sessions by safe, trained adults

Fund programmes that provide at least six months of weekly sessions, with structured pathways that support ongoing development.[113] Some programmes may provide high-intensity support over a shorter (but still sustained) period – such as summer job programmes that run 25 hours per week for six weeks.[114] Encourage programmes to schedule sessions at key risk times where appropriate, particularly 4-8 pm on weekdays after school.[115]

Ensure staff have the basic training described in Recommendation 2, the regular supervision and specialist training described in Recommendation 7, and training in the activity they are delivering.

💡 **TIP**

All providers you fund should also meet the NYA's Youth Work Practice Standards.

C. Fund provision that builds social and emotional skills and trusting relationships

Fund provision that combines positive activities with other types of effective support, such as:[116]

- **Formal mentoring.**[117] This is a good approach for arts programmes, as standalone arts programmes currently lack direct evidence of impact on violence or crime.[118]

- **Social skills training.**[119] Positive activities naturally generate opportunities for social and emotional development (e.g. teamwork, empathy, and self-regulation). These skills can be centred through a socioemotional curriculum.

Programmes without an explicit mentoring or social skills component may still foster social and emotional development and trusting relationships.[120] Fund providers to maintain high staffing levels and recruit highly qualified staff (or train staff well).
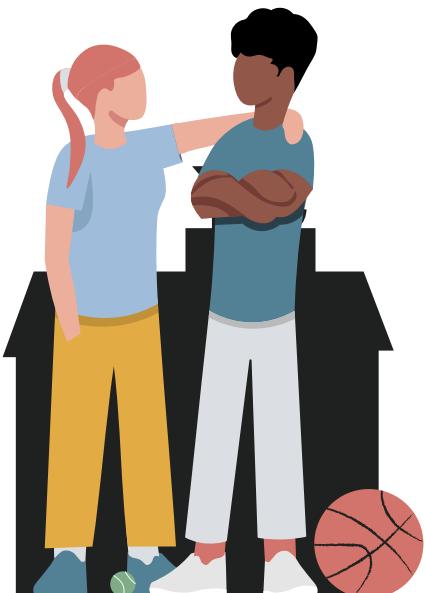
CASE STUDY

AudioActive's SHIFT programme[122]

The SHIFT programme provides music-based mentoring for 11–17-year-olds who have offended or are at significant risk of offending. Over 6 months, children and young people meet their mentor regularly for one-to-one, 90-minute, in-person sessions tailored to their musical interests and personal goals. Sessions combine music-making with work on behaviour, emotion regulation, relationships, education and careers. Mentees work towards a musical performance or production, with the opportunity to gain a City & Guilds badge. Mentors are trained in a range of areas (including safeguarding, cultural competency, and special educational needs and disabilities) and receive regular reflective supervision.

YEF is evaluating the impact of SHIFT and will publish findings in 2027.

Photo by Graeme Miall

CASE STUDY

Dallaglio RugbyWorks programme[121]

RugbyWorks Term Time is a programme for 11-16-year-olds who have been permanently excluded or repeatedly suspended from school. It runs for an academic year, with weekly non-contact rugby sessions focused on developing skills such as teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and self-management. Children and young people work towards a regional tournament, and those who want to continue are referred to local sports clubs. They also attend 18 workshops covering employability, careers, digital skills, and mental well-being and receive one hour of mentoring every three weeks.

There is a maximum ratio of two coaches to 16 children and young people. All coaches have a youth work or sports coaching qualification, receive at least 2.5 hours of supervision per month, and complete 150 hours of additional training during their first year, including training in safeguarding, ACEs, special educational needs, child exploitation, and serious violence.

YEF is evaluating the impact of RugbyWorks and will publish findings in 2027.

Recommendation 5.

Embed sustained support in high-need A&E departments

Why?

Sustained, specialist support can protect vulnerable children and young people who attend A&E as a result of violence.[123] But many A&E navigator services provide only short-term support, and some high-need hospitals lack this support entirely.[124]

Recommended actions

A. Target support to the children and young people who need it most.

B. Make caseworkers available in the right places and times.

C. Combine sustained direct support with access to evidence-based interventions.

D. Equip caseworkers for the demands of the role.

A. Target support to the children and young people who need it most

A&E navigator services place a caseworker, often called a navigator, in emergency departments to support children and young people with violence-related injuries.[125] Caseworkers come from a range of backgrounds, including youth work, education, and healthcare.[126]

🔍 WIDER RESEARCH

Distribution of A&E navigator services[127]

A&E navigator services are available in 41% of English hospitals and 17% of Welsh hospitals. They are particularly common in major trauma centres: 70% have a service.

Navigator services tend to be located in areas with higher levels of deprivation and violent crime. However, over a third (35%) of the emergency departments whose catchment areas experience the highest rates of violent crime lack a service.

Use this interactive map to see which hospitals in your area have a service and to view violent crime rates in their catchment areas (allow one minute for the webpage to load).

Bivariate Map of Crime Rates and Navigator Presence*

HIGHER VIOLENT CRIME

NAVIGATOR NOT PRESENT   NAVIGATOR PRESENT

* Crime Data for Greater Manchester is unavailable
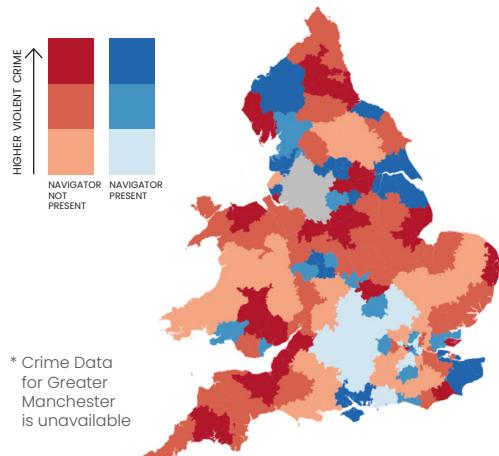
Prioritise providing support in hospitals that see high numbers of vulnerable children and young people.
Use data to assess need at each hospital and establish new services where need is highest (e.g. dark red areas on the map above). To build a thorough picture of need, ask local health partners to share anonymous data on relevant emergency department presentations amongst under-18s,[128] and ask NHS safeguarding teams or local authority children's services to provide the number of safeguarding referrals or child protection strategy meetings involving each hospital.

Consider expanding eligibility criteria to support children and young people presenting with substance misuse, self-harm, or suicidal ideation (key risk indicators). This may require securing additional funding – for example, from Integrated Care Boards or Local Health Boards – to support more referrals and train caseworkers in these issues.[129]

Don't restrict support to those assumed to be experiencing a 'teachable' or 'reachable' moment.[130] Eligibility criteria should not be limited to acute events, such as a violent injury or drug overdose. Children and young people with longstanding vulnerabilities to violence (such as numerous ACEs) may also benefit from support: these may not appear in hospital data but may be spotted by caseworkers.[131]

B. Make caseworkers available in the right places and times

Align service hours with the times that vulnerable children and young people present to A&E. Patients with violence-related injuries typically present outside normal working hours.[132] But navigator services usually operate Monday to Friday, with less than a third open on weekends, and working hours can be restricted by hospital contracts.[133] Just over half (56%) operate in the evenings, and none operate between midnight and 6 am.

Provide caseworkers with a base in A&E. Availability and visibility within A&E are reported to increase the likelihood of referrals to the service.[134] Half of services (52%) are physically based in the emergency department, around a third (30%) are elsewhere in the hospital, and around a fifth (18%) are outside the hospital.[135]

Allow caseworkers to offer support in other hospital settings, including inpatient wards, outpatient clinics, and urgent treatment centres. Currently, 10% of services do not approach children and young people who have been admitted to hospital wards.

C. Combine sustained direct support with access to evidence-based interventions

The evidence for the impact of A&E navigator programmes comes from services that offered direct, intensive, ongoing support.[136] But many programmes have limited capacity for in-house support and rely on referrals to external services.[137]

Fund increased staff capacity so services can:[139]

- **Provide ongoing direct support** for **at least six months** after discharge,[140] ideally from the same caseworker a child or young person met in hospital.[141] For example, ongoing mentoring, social skills training, or psychological therapy, depending on individual needs and the caseworker's skillset. Caseworkers should offer **weekly meetings** for at least the first two months.[143]

- **Engage in multi-agency collaboration.** Caseworkers should act as a bridge between children and young people and wider systems of support.[144] For example, helping them complete forms, accompanying them to appointments, and advocating for them at multi-agency panels.[145]

- **Provide referral follow-up.** Caseworkers should arrange in-person introductions to referred services where possible. Follow-up should include tracking wait times and engagement, and re-engaging children and young people if issues arise.[146]

**Help services build a robust referral network** so children and young people can access prompt support from a range of evidence-based services. This should include the youth work outlined in Recommendations 2-4, alongside other violence-prevention support such as psychological therapy and nutrition programmes.[147] Link services with wider violence-prevention efforts, such as Young Futures Hubs.

✒️ CURRENT PRACTICE

The support A&E navigator services offer[138]

A survey of all 74 identified A&E navigator services in England and Wales (with a 68% response rate) asked what support they can offer after hospital discharge, both in-house and through referral. Over half of services (58%) can directly support children and young people for at least six months. However, most services (62%) report that support usually lasts less than six months in practice. Over a third (38%) typically provide support for less than three months. The findings on types of support show that most services have a wide range of referral partners and that some kinds of support are rarely offered in-house.

Types of support available after discharge — In-house ■ Referral ■
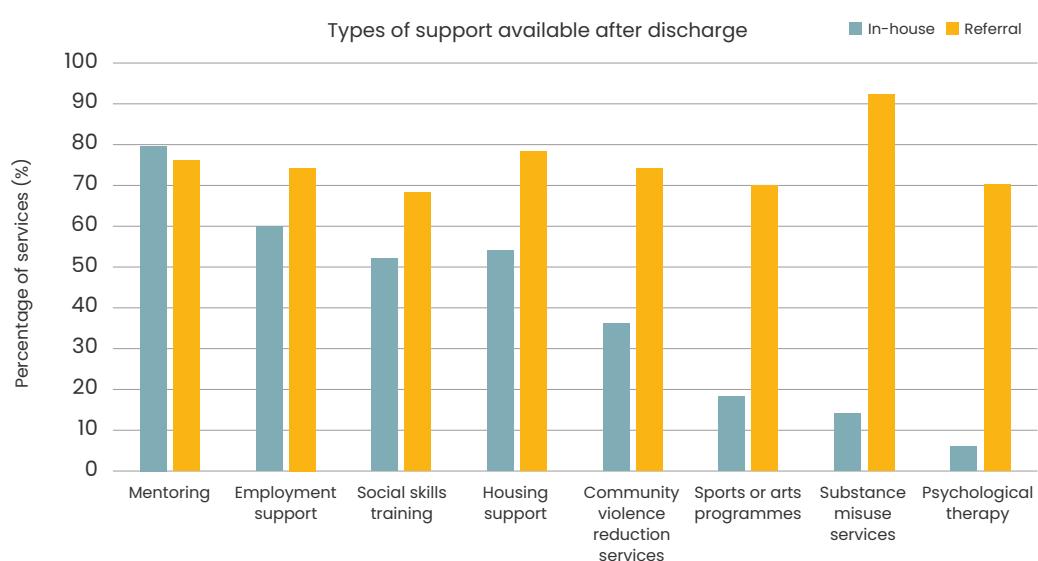
D. Equip caseworkers for the demands of the role

Hospital-based caseworkers support children and young people experiencing acute vulnerability, distress, and trauma.[149] **Ensure that the caseworkers in services you fund:**

- **Are trained to provide specialist support.** All caseworkers should receive the basic training described in Recommendation 2 and the regular supervision and specialist training described in Recommendation 7. Consider funding additional training to enable caseworkers to deliver high-quality post-discharge support.

- **Are appropriately graded and remunerated.** A&E navigators are often recruited at Band 4 of the NHS pay scale (equivalent to an audio-visual technician or psychological well-being practitioner in training).[150] The best practice set out in this recommendation requires high levels of expertise and responsibility on the part of caseworkers; banding and remuneration should reflect this

- **Have the access and authority to operate effectively.** A&E navigators may face challenges integrating into hospital environments, such as obtaining desk space, building awareness of the service, and gaining the honorary NHS contracts required to access medical records.[152] Secure institutional backing from hospital executive teams and senior divisional managers, and work through issues around data access, data sharing, and embedding the service.[153]

"This job can be heavy. It can be really heavy".

A&E navigator interviewed by Roberts et al (2026) review of A&E navigator services across England and Wales.[148]

"We could go into A&E now and say, 'We're the navigator service', and some people would say, 'No idea'".

A&E navigator interviewed by Roberts et al (2026) review of A&E navigator services across England and Wales.[151]

🧱 **Strong foundations**

Recommendation 6.
Make multi-year core funding the default

Why?

Short-term or tightly restricted funding makes it hard for youth work providers to retain and develop staff, build infrastructure, and maintain continuity for children and young people.[154] One in three youth work providers has less than six months of funding in reserve.[155]

Recommended actions

A. Offer funding that lasts 3–5 years.

B. Fund everyday core operating costs.

C. Fund providers to collect and use data to improve quality and inclusion.

A. Offer funding that lasts 3–5 years

Offering multi-year funding can make the most of limited resources. **Plan to move to a multi-year commissioning cycle for youth work.**[157] This could involve:

- Awarding multi-year grants/contracts 'subject to annual budget' where required. The award letter/contract can set out an intended 3–5-year funding profile, with payments released after the annual budget is approved.

- Building in flexibility and fair access when procuring. For example, by including a review-and-variation clause to allow adjustments as needs change or by planning staggered start dates across multi-year awards to keep opportunities open to new providers in later years.

- Setting aside a small, flexible pot to keep multi-year commitments stable if one year is tight, or to fund responsive or pilot projects.

Ask other local funders to contribute to the youth offer and align with your multi-year approach.[164] This could involve:

- Pooling youth-work budgets and coordinating funding within a joint, long-term commissioning framework.[165] For example, across different local authority departments, VRUs, the VCS, and Integrated Care Boards or Local Health Boards.

- Engaging town and parish councils (where applicable).[166] Consider setting expectations for financial or in-kind contributions, keeping reporting requirements proportionate to the grant value, and asking funded providers to support councils with brief updates or meeting attendance.

📖 **WIDER RESEARCH**

Between 2010-11 and 2023-24, local authority youth provision expenditure fell by almost three quarters in England and by over a quarter in Wales: real-term cuts of £1.2b and £16.6m.[156] The real terms spend per head fell from £182 to £50 in England and from £121 to £97 in Wales.

Visit the YMCA's interactive map to view local authority spend per head on youth work in your area.

Making the case for long-term investment

Consider:

- *Emphasising the preventative value of youth work. Funding youth work may lead to wider cost savings.[158] One study found that "for every £1 saved by shutting youth clubs, the wider losses from lower educational returns and higher crime were about £2.85 – i.e., nearly £3 per £1 saved".[159]*

- *Positioning youth services as a statutory duty, rather than a discretionary spend. Section 507B of the Education Act 1996 states that local authorities must "secure … sufficient educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of [young people's] well-being".[160]*

- *Highlighting value for money.[161] Multi-year funding reduces the re-procurement and reporting burden for both funders and providers (saving money)[162] and can make local providers more appealing to external funders.*

- *Stressing the importance of a skilled, stable workforce. Youth workers identify insecure roles as a key reason people leave the field or never enter.[163] Multi-year funding enables providers to offer the good employment conditions necessary to retain skilled staff.*

B. Fund everyday core operating costs

Offer grants/contracts that cover core organisational costs.[168] For example, infrastructure, administration, monitoring, partnership-building, and staff development. Over time, neglecting these costs weakens the quality of youth work in your area.

Use the grant/contract to incentivise collaboration among local providers.[169] A competitive funding culture can discourage collaboration (e.g. providers may avoid sharing information or signposting children and young people to other organisations). Design commissioning to reward collaboration. For example, encourage joint bids, shared staff, locally led partnerships, and co-located services with allied professionals.

> "We've been fortunate in being successful in a number of funding bids … but we can't use any of these pockets of funding for training or staff development; it's all about delivery".
>
> Youth work manager interviewed by NYA and University of Durham.[167]

CASE STUDY

South Gloucestershire Council's seven-year commissioning cycle[170]

In 2013, South Gloucestershire Council had a budget of £1m for universal youth provision and had 19 youth centres. By 2019, this had fallen to £440,000, with no centres under direct council control. After consulting the VCS, the council instituted a seven-year commissioning cycle. To maximise funds, it worked with town and parish councils to encourage them to co-fund youth services, offering infrastructure support (including administration, contracting, monitoring, and reporting). The council secured £1m of matched funding, significantly expanding the local youth offer. The council also fostered a collaborative partnership between local youth organisations, which worked together to secure an additional £500,000 of National Lottery funding.
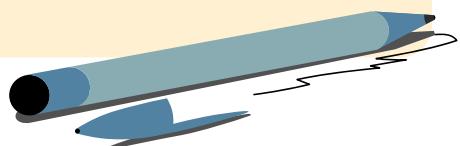
C. Fund providers to collect and use data to improve quality and inclusion

Core funding should cover any administrative support or training needed for high-quality monitoring and continuous improvement. Expectations for data collection should be proportionate to provider size, funding level, and the type of youth provision. All providers should regularly involve children and young people in shaping the service, and use their feedback (e.g. brief surveys, focus groups, youth panels) to improve it. Targeted programmes should also robustly monitor take-up, attendance, and completion, alongside other relevant data. For example, A&E navigator services should record injury type, support delivered, referrals made, and A&E re-attendance.

To promote inclusion, youth services should sensitively ask children and young people for demographic information (including age, gender, and ethnicity), ensuring they comply with the law and best practice in data collection.[172] Services should monitor how take-up varies by demographic group, collect qualitative data to understand disparities, and plan to address any inequities.

CURRENT PRACTICE

One in seven A&E navigator services (14%) don't record referrals that were declined. One in five (22%) don't record the length of patients' engagement with the programme.[171]

🧱 **Strong foundations**

Recommendation 7.

Equip youth workers to safeguard children and young people

Why?

Youth workers already safeguard vulnerable children and young people from violence.[173] But they often lack the support and training they need, and their role is often overlooked in local safeguarding systems.[174]

Recommended actions

A. Fund regular supervision and specialist training for youth workers.

B. Involve youth workers in local safeguarding and/or community safety systems.

A. Fund regular supervision and specialist training for youth workers

Youth workers regularly safeguard children and young people from violence and, in doing so, may face challenging situations and vicarious trauma.[175] This highlights the importance of regular support and appropriate training, including for those with lived experience. The core funding you provide should include supervision and training, along with the time and cover to attend them.

✍️ **CURRENT PRACTICE**

Youth workers safeguard children and young people from violence[176]

A survey of over 300 youth workers in England and Wales found that most of them safeguarded children and young people from violence in a range of ways, including by informally mentoring those at risk (73%), de-escalating conflicts (65%), and tackling dangerous misinformation (55%). Over a third engage in violence interruption (38%) and 'gang' exit work (38%), highlighting their role as protective adults for peer groups affected by violence. Only 6% reported no specific safeguarding from violence or crime. Over a third (39%) have not received any support (such as supervision, mentoring, or case discussions) to assist them in safeguarding vulnerable children and young people.

Ensure that youth workers in all the services you fund take part in regular, high-quality, reflective supervision sessions.[177] Sessions should enable youth workers to debrief, reflect, and receive support and guidance in a culturally responsive way.[178] Those who provide targeted support to vulnerable children and young people may benefit from clinical supervision.[179]

Ensure that youth workers who support vulnerable children and young people receive specialist safeguarding training, covering areas like:[180]

- **Violence.** For example, the nature of violence, types of violence (including violence against women and girls and dating and relationship violence[181]), risk indicators for involvement in violence, and effective violence prevention interventions (such as those rated high or moderate in the YEF Toolkit).

- **Child criminal exploitation.** For example, types of exploitation (such as county lines and organised criminal networks), risk indicators, recruitment and control tactics (such as grooming, coercion, and debt-bondage), statutory safeguarding, and legal processes (such as the National Referral Mechanism and the Section 45 defence).

- **Emerging issues.** For example, the role that social media can play in driving violence.[182] Training should be ongoing, as the issues that vulnerable children and young people face are not stagnant.

Where possible, fund joint in-person training for youth workers and allied professionals (such as teachers, social workers, and youth justice practitioners) to foster mutual respect, tackle misconceptions about different professions, and build a strong, collaborative safeguarding culture.[183]

Fund multi-agency training on local procedures for responding to children and young people at risk of, or involved in, violence.[184] Across England and Wales, there is no typical pathway for this cohort: in some local authorities, responses are coordinated by children's services; in others, by community safety partnerships; and sometimes, both run separate, parallel pathways.[185] This variation means that training must be tailored to your area. Training should:

- Cover both local safeguarding and community safety systems and practice.

- Examine issues like consent, advocacy, information-sharing, critical challenge, and statutory and non-statutory partnerships.

- Enable participants to critically reflect on – not just comply with – local arrangements and identify barriers to prioritising children and young people's welfare.

B. Involve youth workers in local safeguarding and/or community safety systems

Youth workers' involvement in safeguarding systems varies widely across local authorities. It is common for youth workers to contribute to formal safeguarding systems anywhere from multiple times per week (27% of local authorities) to once a month (24%).[186] VCS organisations should be part of local safeguarding arrangements,[187] but one in eight local authorities (13%) report that youth workers' involvement is rare or non-existent.

Identify the pathway(s) for responding to children and young people or contexts impacted by violence in your area. Speak to partners in both children's services and community safety to understand the local pathway(s), including:

- Referral methods, e.g. phone calls to children's social care and anonymous intelligence forms submitted to the police.

- Assessment methods, e.g. exploitation screening tools and social work assessments.

- Meetings to agree plans, e.g. child protection planning meetings, exploitation panels, and anti-social behaviour meetings.

- Delivery of agreed plans, e.g. responses led by education, youth work, health, or social care.
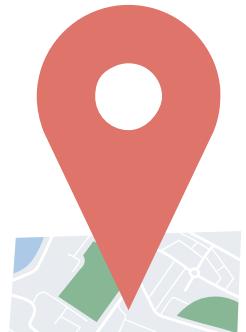
Identify gaps in youth workers' contribution to the local pathway(s), considering all youth workers in your area.[188] Your approach should depend on your organisation's role in the pathway:

- Organisations with a **limited role** (such as housing associations) should focus on the elements of the pathway they contribute to: do youth workers attend and actively contribute to the safeguarding and/or community safety meetings that your organisation is involved in?

- Organisations **responsible for a pathway** (such as local authorities) should consider the role that youth workers play throughout the pathway. This could be achieved through a multi-agency workshop bringing together representatives of relevant organisations; an example workshop plan (conducted in five local authority areas across England and Wales) is provided below.

Improve youth workers' contributions to the local response.[190] Youth workers' contributions should reflect their unique role: whereas other professionals involved in safeguarding and community safety pathways may often act without children and young people's consent, youth work is a consent-based profession which relies on children and young people's trust.[191]

Consider improvements to youth workers' contributions to the local response, including:

- Routinely checking whether a young person accesses youth work during assessments.[193]

- Developing formal agreements for information-sharing between services.[194]

- Giving youth workers the opportunity to contribute information and insight to safeguarding assessments, where appropriate, or clearly documenting the contributions they are already making.

- Inviting youth workers to safeguarding or crime prevention meetings – or providing greater opportunity for them to contribute to those they already attend.[195]

- Developing a memorandum of understanding or service-level agreement clarifying different organisations' roles, responsibilities, aims, and objectives.[196]

- Providing briefings or training to other professionals (such as social workers or police) on the nature of youth work and youth workers' role.[197]

- Delivering a youth work response to vulnerable children and young people or contexts affected by violence, where appropriate.

Greater interaction with other services can strain capacity.[198] For example, youth workers may need to choose between attending a meeting and running a youth session. Fund the additional support that may be required to increase youth workers' contribution.

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

Youth worker interviewed by NYA and University of Durham.[192]

Local multi-agency workshop: pathway mapping[189]

Imagine that a young person (Josh) told a youth worker that he had been stabbed in the shoulder the previous weekend. What pathway would Josh take through your local safeguarding system (and wider response to violence, if relevant)?

For each numbered step, discuss and agree on the answer as a group. Then label Post-it notes and stick them on the wall to develop a map of the pathway(s).

Individual support

Describe the ways in which youth workers in your area would:

1. Refer Josh to a safeguarding process.
2. Contribute to a safeguarding assessment for Josh.
3. Contribute to planning support for Josh.
4. Contribute to delivering support for Josh.

Review and adapt your map:

• Does this map accurately reflect Josh's journey through your local safeguarding systems and youth workers' role in them?

• Consider whether any parts of the pathway would change:

  • If Josh is supported via early help, child in need, child protection, or other local planning processes.
  • If the original referral came from the police following an arrest or from a school following a disclosure.
  • If other intersectional issues need to be considered. For example, if Josh were from a Black, Asian or other minority ethnic background; were a girl; were gay, bisexual, or transgender; or had a learning need or disability.

• Are there tensions or limitations in terms of what youth workers are able to do?

Considering contexts

Does this map change when youth workers have safeguarding concerns about a context (location or group) where Josh is impacted by violence, rather than just about Josh?

1. Where would they refer these concerns?
2. Are these contexts ever assessed to understand what is happening there? If so, how do youth workers contribute to these assessments?
3. Are meetings/panels convened to plan safeguarding responses to these contexts? If so, how do youth workers participate in these?
4. Are youth workers involved in delivering safeguarding responses to these contexts? If so, how?

Review and adapt your map:

• Does this map accurately reflect the pathway that concerns about Josh's peers, or the park he spends time in, would take through your local safeguarding systems and youth workers' role in them?

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

• Are there any important ways in which youth workers interact with your local response to violence that aren't represented on this map?

🧱 **Strong foundations**

Recommendation 8.

Prioritise evidence-based strategies and avoid harmful approaches

Why?

Where resources are tight, commissioners should prioritise violence prevention strategies supported by robust evidence of impact, as these are most likely to reduce children and young people's involvement in violence.

Recommended actions

A. Use robust evidence to inform decision-making.

B. Be aware that many violence prevention strategies have limited evidence.

C. Avoid approaches that have been proven to cause harm.

A. Use robust evidence to inform decision-making

Fund service models that multiple well-designed studies have found to be effective, such as the types of youth provision in Recommendations 2–5.

Consider funding other effective violence prevention strategies that can be delivered in youth work settings, such as:

💡 **TIP**

If your remit extends beyond youth work, learn about other effective approaches in the YEF Toolkit.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)	COST **£££**	EVIDENCE QUALITY	ESTIMATED IMPACT ON VIOLENT CRIME **HIGH**

CBT is a talking therapy used for many psychological difficulties. When applied to violence prevention, it is based on the idea that negative or impulsive thoughts could lead to aggressive behaviour. Through the support of a trained therapist, CBT aims to help children and young people become more aware of these thoughts and learn to change or manage them. Around a third (31%) of youth clubs currently offer counselling or therapy (e.g. through co-located services) and over half (58%) refer children and young people to it.[199]

Relationship violence prevention lessons and activities	COST **£££**	EVIDENCE QUALITY	ESTIMATED IMPACT ON VIOLENT CRIME **MODERATE**

Relationship violence prevention aims to reduce violence, including emotional, physical, and sexual violence, between children and young people in intimate relationships. Activities may include discussing attitudes and behaviours associated with dating and relationship violence, reflecting on accounts of such violence from the perspective of both victim and perpetrator, and role-playing. Programmes are typically delivered in schools, often by external facilitators, but can also be delivered in youth clubs.

B. Be aware that many violence prevention strategies have limited evidence

Some commonly used violence prevention strategies have not been robustly evaluated, so their impact is uncertain. This includes:

Detached youth work	COST **?**	EVIDENCE QUALITY	INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE OF IMPACT **?**

Detached youth work aims to engage children and young people 'where they are at', providing youth work in the places they choose to frequent, such as street corners, parks, and fast-food outlets. It is a flexible and youth-centred approach that may include building trusting relationships, arranging positive activities, and signposting to other support. Almost three-quarters of local authorities (73%) report using street-based youth work.[200]

The impact of detached youth work on violence has not been robustly evaluated. YEF is exploring a large-scale evaluation to expand the evidence base. Existing qualitative research suggests that detached youth work may support positive outcomes, such as reduced risky behaviour and improved engagement in education.[201] Detached youth work may function similarly to the types of youth work outlined in Recommendations 2–4 and could also act as a bridge to engaging children and young people in these types of support.

If you decide to fund detached youth work:

- Focus on reaching vulnerable children and young people and tackling the contexts that put them at risk.

- Ensure detached youth workers receive regular supervision, specialist safeguarding training (see Recommendation 7), and training in delivering detached youth work.

- Ensure that detached youth workers are from the area where provision is delivered or have strong knowledge of that area.[202]

- Enable detached youth workers to refer children and young people to evidence-based support (such as youth clubs, mentoring, and psychological therapy).[203]

- Make local stakeholders, such as police and schools, aware of the detached provision and encourage them to signpost children and young people to it.[204]

Trauma-informed training and service redesign	COST ?	EVIDENCE QUALITY 🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍	INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE OF IMPACT ?

Trauma occurs when an event or set of circumstances causes physical or emotional harm with lasting adverse effects on well-being. Trauma-informed practice involves training staff to understand the impact of trauma, recognise its signs and symptoms, and adapt policies, procedures, and practices to prevent re-traumatisation. Over three-quarters of youth workers (79%) report receiving trauma-informed practice training.[205]

We do not yet know whether these efforts reduce re-traumatisation or vulnerability to violence.[206] Trauma-informed practice is also not well defined and varies widely across settings.[207] We do know that children and young people who have experienced trauma are more likely to become involved in crime and violence.[208] And trauma-specific psychological therapies, which aim to support recovery from trauma, can reduce this vulnerability.[209] YEF is currently funding evaluations of four trauma-informed practice programmes to improve the evidence base.

If you decide to fund trauma-informed practice training:

- Be clear about the practices you seek to change and assess whether these aims are being met.

- Ensure the training defines trauma clearly and provides actionable practice recommendations that apply in youth work settings.

Knife crime education programmes	COST £££	EVIDENCE QUALITY 🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍	INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE OF IMPACT ?

Knife crime education or awareness programmes aim to reduce knife carrying. They may include exploration of attitudes towards carrying knives and discussion of the potential consequences, including stories, photos, or videos depicting the impacts of violence. They are typically one-off, 1–2-hour sessions. Most youth clubs (58%) offer them.[211]

There is no robust evidence regarding the impact of these programmes on knife carrying or violence.[212] There is a risk that programmes could backfire. If sessions increase fear of knife-related violence, this could make children and young people more likely to carry knives for self-protection – half of 13-17-year-olds who carry weapons say they do so for their own safety.[213] **Consider shifting funding from knife crime education programmes to violence prevention strategies with a stronger evidence base.**
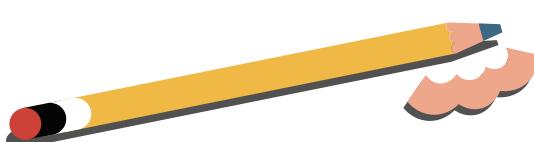
C. Avoid approaches that have been proven to cause harm

Some approaches to violence prevention have been found to have a harmful impact. **If you are funding any of the programmes below, we recommend withdrawing funding and redirecting it to other types of support.**

Prison awareness programmes	COST £££	EVIDENCE QUALITY	ESTIMATED IMPACT ON VIOLENT CRIME HARMFUL

Prison awareness programmes aim to deter children and young people from crime by demonstrating the difficulties of life in prison. Current or former prisoners meet children and young people and show them what prison is like. The most studied programmes involve children and young people visiting a prison, but similar programmes involve prisoners visiting a school or community setting, such as a youth club.

Boot Camps	COST £££	EVIDENCE QUALITY	ESTIMATED IMPACT ON VIOLENT CRIME HARMFUL

Boot camps are military-style residential camps for children and young people who have offended. They aim to improve children and young people's self-discipline through demanding physical tasks, military-style drills, short-term confinement, and swift punishment for misbehaviour. These programmes have been used as alternatives to custodial sentences and are typically delivered by prison officers, military staff, or Youth Offending Teams.

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