Youth Clubs

Toolkit technical report

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About National Children's Bureau

This report has been produced by the National Children's Bureau on behalf of the Youth Endowment Fund. The National Children's Bureau works collaboratively across the issues affecting children to influence policy and get services working together to deliver a better childhood. They were commissioned by the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) as their Toolkit Partner 2023-2026. The Toolkit partnership is managed on behalf of NCB by Dr Ciara Keenan. Any queries relating to the methods should be directed to ckeenan@ncb.org.uk

About Youth Endowment Fund

The Youth Endowment Fund's mission is to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence. They do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice. The fund was established in March 2019 by children's charity Impetus, with a £200m endowment and ten-year mandate from the Home Office. For more information, please visit www.youthendowmentfund.org.uk.

Acknowledgements

Abstract/Plain Language Summary

This report examines the effectiveness of Universal Youth Clubs in reducing violence, crime, offending, and other related outcomes for children and young people. Universal Youth Clubs provide open-access spaces offering educational, social, and recreational support. Evidence comes from two quasi-experimental studies in England, analysed via meta-analysis and further informed by 17 implementation studies.

Key findings:

- Evidence on violence is limited. Only one study (Villa, 2024) reported one direct measure, finding that youth club closures in London were linked to an 8.3% increase in violent crime. No pooled conclusions can be drawn on violence.

- Youth clubs are associated with a 13% reduction in crime and offending outcomes, based on seven effect sizes from two studies. This effect is statistically significant and robust across different analytic methods.

- Across all nine outcome categories, youth clubs are associated with an 11% reduction in adverse outcomes, based on 36 effect sizes across two studies.

- Youth club presence is associated with about a 6% improvement in school engagement based on 7 effect sizes from 2 studies.

- Subgroup analysis indicates an average 15% improvement in community connectedness based on 8 effect sizes from 2 studies.

- The two effectiveness studies differed in scale and design. Villa (2024) used large-scale administrative data with high methodological quality, while Bashir et al. (2013) conducted a smaller evaluation of the myplace programme with moderate quality. Study variation likely contributed to heterogeneity (I^2 = 91.64%).

- Evidence security is low. Only two QEDs met inclusion criteria and the small evidence base and high heterogeneity limit certainty in findings.

- Implementation evidence indicates that youth clubs should be affordable, providing low-cost and free activities to children and young people.

- Both structured activities and unstructured time are vital. During unstructured time, staff should be available and engaging with the children and young people throughout, taking a mentorship role.

- Gender-specific activities for children and young people should be considered to improve engagement, such as safe-spaces for LGBTQ+ children and young people to come together or female-only activities.

- Long-term investment in youth clubs should be prioritised to provide stability to children and young people and local communities.

- Youth club spaces and activities should be created and tailored in collaboration with children and young people to ensure they adequately meet their needs.

- There was a lack of data available on equality, diversity, inclusivity and equity. However, embedding inclusive approaches, such as culturally appropriate activities, gender-safe spaces and low-cost opportunities improves accessibility of youth clubs.

- Children and young people hold overwhelmingly positive views of youth clubs.

Conclusion

Universal youth clubs are associated with lower offending and better school engagement and community connectedness among young people, with benefits directionally consistent across outcomes. However, the data included in the meta-analysis are limited to two English studies, and findings are likely to vary dependent on context and implementation. Seventeen studies provided implementation data; however, most were low or very low-quality, with fewer insights on Adoption, Feasibility, Fidelity, Sustainability, and Cost. Despite this, findings indicate that the success of youth clubs is dependent on children and young people being involved in the design and implementation of youth club activities and spaces, having time for structured and unstructured activities, support from qualified and experienced youth workers, and reliable income. To strengthen confidence in findings, more high-quality, large-scale impact evaluations are needed, with particular attention to violence outcomes, demographic subgroups, and the active ingredients of effective provision.

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Preface on Terminology

This review draws on evidence spanning over half a century, during which language around personal characteristics has evolved significantly. At times, we may have to reproduce original terminology used in studies which we recognize today as being outdated and unacceptable offensive terms. This only occurs when the terminology is used in direct quotations or refers to an outcome that the author measured that remains relevant to our analysis. The wider narrative will adhere to current inclusive-language standards guided by the National Children's Bureau, Youth Endowment Fund, and Race Equality Foundation. These guiding principles include using capitalization to acknowledge shared identities (e.g., Black, Asian), whilst not capitalizing white due to its association with white supremacy. The review also avoids deficit framing and respects individuals' self-identification. Person-first language will generally be used when referring to children and young people, except for Deaf and autistic communities, who widely prefer identity-first language. The team acknowledges limitations in terminology and strives for respectful and precise representation throughout. The full preface on terminology can be accessed here.

Objective and Approach

The objective of this report is to review the evidence on the effectiveness of **Universal Youth Clubs** in reducing and/or preventing violence and offending involving children and young people. Unlike targeted programmes, which focus on specific groups (for example, those already involved in the youth justice system), universal clubs are open-access spaces available to all young people in a community. This emphasis on universal provision reflects its inclusive, preventative, and non-stigmatising nature, as well as its demonstrated capacity to engage diverse peer groups, foster community cohesion, and deliver broad developmental benefits[1].

This technical report draws on a comprehensive systematic review methodology and includes:

- **Two effectiveness studies from England.** These studies include one direct measured outcome on violence; seven measured outcomes on crime and offending; and 36 measured outcomes across all relevant areas of child and youth development (defined by the YEF Outcomes Framework).
- **Implementation insights from 17 international studies.** Six were from the US, four from England, three from Canada, and one each from Australia, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Ireland, examining factors such as acceptability, fidelity, and sustainability.

By combining quantitative meta-analysis with qualitative insights from process evaluations, this report provides a rounded evaluation of the impact, effectiveness, and practical considerations of universal youth clubs for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows: First, the **Description of the Intervention** outlines the key components of youth clubs. Second, **How Effective is the Intervention?** presents findings from our meta-analysis on crime reduction and broader social outcomes. Third, **Who Does it Work For?** examines evidence on the populations that benefit most from youth clubs. Fourth, **What Factors Affect Implementation?** explores key facilitators and barriers using Proctor's Implementation Outcome Framework. Fifth, **How Much Does It Cost?** reviews available cost data. Finally, the **Conclusion and Takeaway Messages** summarise key findings and recommendations, followed by **Appendices** detailing the systematic review methodology and characteristics of included research.

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[1] For the full inclusion and exclusion criteria, see Appendix 1

Description of the Intervention

Universal Youth Clubs are community-based spaces that provide safe, inclusive, and engaging environments for personal, social, and educational development. They represent a distinctive "third place" beyond home and school where young people can belong, build relationships, and explore interests on their own terms (Croix & Doherty, 2023). Typically operating in purpose-built or adapted facilities, and staffed by trained youth workers, these clubs deliver a wide range of activities, from sports, arts, and cultural projects to homework clubs, mentoring, and accredited skills programmes (Bashir et al., 2013).

Features of the approach

A defining feature of universal youth clubs is the **open-access, voluntary, drop-in model**. Any young person may attend, often at little or no cost, and participation is flexible, varying from a few months to several years depending on life circumstances. Sessions are usually offered weekly or several times a week, creating consistent opportunities for young people to connect with peers and trusted adults.

These clubs also provide safe and structured spaces at times and in places that may otherwise be characterised as 'hot spots' for violence and crime. By offering alternative positive activities, clubs can play a protective role in preventing involvement in violence, while youth workers, serving as positive role models, offer informal support, guidance, and where necessary, connections to wider services that address needs or behaviours associated with violence and offending.

Importantly, research indicates that these spaces do far more than occupy young people's free time. They foster confidence, responsibility, and social skills, while also creating access to adults who can provide advice and emotional support (Vorhaus et al., 2011). Evidence from the UK highlights the consequences of their absence: austerity-era cuts and closures of youth clubs in London were associated with declines in exam performance and increases in youth crime (Villa, 2024). At the same time, evaluations of investment in new clubs such as *myplace* found that high-quality facilities attracted thousands of new participants, many of whom had not previously engaged in structured provision (Bashir et al., 2013). International research further supports the view that well-designed, supervised clubs reduce the risk of antisocial behaviour, provided they are structured to offer skill-building and positive peer cultures, with access to supportive adults (Mahoney & Stattin, 2001).

This report is therefore timely given the fragmented nature of the evidence base and the fact that there are few rigorous evaluations linking open-access provision directly to reductions in violence, crime and offending. The purpose of this report is to provide a robust, systematic review of the available international research, clarify what is known, and highlight gaps that need to be addressed to inform research, policy and practice.

In the following sections, details are provided on the interventions which inform this report, noting their key components, any equipment, materials, supplies or training required, the duration and intensity of interventions, who delivered the interventions, and where and how the interventions were delivered.

Key components of Youth Club intervention

There are many common features offered in the youth clubs in this review, with the central component being an informal space for young people to socialise with peers. The youth clubs in most of the included studies offer additional activities such as sporting programmes, support with homework, counselling and citizenship activities. Young people are free to attend as frequently or infrequently as they wish and can choose which, if any, activities to participate in.

The specific activities on offer differ by site and the included studies provide varying levels of detail, however some examples include:

- Activities such as dancing, playing games, pool, table tennis and arts and crafts (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Barnekov et al., 1999; Bashir et al., 2013; Glish, 1979; Mercier et al., 2000; Tefera et al., 2021; Villa, 2024; Vorhaus et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2021).
- Team sports such as football, basketball or softball (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Barnekov et al., 1999; Bashir et al., 2013; Glish, 1979; Haberlin, 2014; Mercier et al., 2000; Rihan, 2011; Seely, 1949; Villa, 2024; Vorhaus et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2021).
- Emotional support such as counselling or receiving one-to-one support from an adult (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Bashir et al., 2013; Glish, 1979; Haberlin, 2014; Mercier et al., 2000; Vorhaus et al., 2011).
- Educational activities, tutoring, support with homework, study groups or careers advice (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Barnekov et al., 1999; Bashir et al., 2013; Glish, 1979; Haberlin, 2014; Mercier et al., 2000; Villa, 2024; Vorhaus et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2021).
- Role modelling or mentoring from staff and volunteers (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Haberlin, 2014; Villa, 2024).

- Citizenship activities such as nursing home visits or Duke of Edinburgh's Award (Bashir et al., 2013; Glish, 1979; Haberlin, 2014; Rihan, 2011; Vorhaus et al., 2011).
- Support developing knowledge and life skills (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Rihan, 2011; Tefera et al., 2021).
- Programmes designed to prevent delinquency or substance abuse (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Barnekov et al., 1999).
- Day trips (Barnekov et al., 1999; Bashir et al., 2013; Glish, 1979; Haberlin, 2014; Vorhaus et al., 2011).

Five of the studies focused on Boys and Girls Clubs of America or Canada (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Barnekov et al., 1999; Haberlin, 2014; Mendel, 2010; Shannon & Robertson, 2007). While descriptions of the clubs and levels of detail varied across studies, overall, Boys and Girls Clubs are intended to support character development, relationship building and leadership skills while also offering young people a safe place to spend time. It is important to note that unlike the UK, where provision tends to be provided for free, Boys and Girls clubs provision are not always provided free of charge. Relationships and role modelling with positive adults is also an important feature and clubs provide opportunities for young people to receive one-to-one support from staff and volunteers. Haberlin (2014), noted that "The staff and volunteers at the [Boys and Girls Club] attempt to strike a balance between providing unstructured time for free play, and planning programs that promote educational and career skill development".

Other papers similarly described a mixture of formal and informal activities and socialising, although often with a less-developed programme of activities and development opportunities than those offered at Boys and Girls Clubs.

Villa (2024) describes youth clubs in London, England, as offering "a safe space to engage in recreational, educational and social activities", while the Salmon Youth Club in Bermondsey, England, (Vorhaus et al., 2011) similarly offers "personal, social, educational and employment development opportunities for young people". Also in England, Bashir et al. (2013) describes how myplace Youth Clubs offer activities, advice and guidance in modern buildings with spaces for socialising. Community-Based Youth Organisations described by Wells et al. (2021), Rihan's (2011) description of youth clubs in Egypt, Tefera et al.'s (2021) study of youth clubs in Ethiopia, and Seely's (1949) study about the El Centro Youth Centre in Texas, US, all describe centres offering formal and informal activities, along with space for other activities such as sports and homework.

The Amherst Youth Centre (Glish, 1979) began as an informal space for socialising and playing games, however over the years developed more formal offerings such as outings, softball games, tutoring and nursing home visits.

Youth cafés in Ireland are offered as meeting spaces to socialise with other young people (Moran et al., 2018), although can vary in whether they offer additional programmes such as homework or dance clubs. The activities at the youth clubs described by Croix & Doherty (2023) are less clear from the description, although some of the clubs appear to offer opportunities for both formal and informal activities and socialising.

Two papers explicitly mentioned youth clubs having a fundamental goal to reduce crime. The YMCA Youth Center (Mercier et al., 2000) offers activities with the ultimate aim of preventing/reducing crime and delinquency through reducing risk factors such as school dropouts and drug and alcohol use. Likewise, Police-Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYCs; Cross et al., 2015), "provide a wide range of sporting, leisure, cultural and welfare activities and programs", with the aim of "get[ting] to the kids before the kids get to the police station".

Equipment, materials or supplies

Most studies did not state the equipment, materials or supplies required; however, a building, furniture, and staff or volunteers can be assumed for all youth clubs.

Resources for activities offered at the youth clubs are also necessary. Activities vary by club but might include sports, pool, table tennis, arts and crafts, video games, darts, or a television (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Barnekov et al., 1999; Bashir et al., 2013; Glish, 1979; Haberlin, 2014; Mercier et al., 2000; Rihan, 2011; Seely, 1949; Tefera et al., 2021; Villa, 2024; Vorhaus et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2021).

Arbreton et al. (2008, 2009) describe Teen Centers in Boys and Girls Clubs. These are special rooms or areas for teenagers to socialise which are designed to be comfortable and inviting. These areas might have TVs, computers and sofas as well as larger facilities such as dance studios. The report notes that many clubs have dedicated budgets and staffing for teen attendees.

Who delivers Youth Clubs

Limited detail was provided regarding who youth clubs are delivered by. Two studies mentioned a director of the youth clubs having been appointed (Glish, 1979; Seely, 1949), with Seely (1949) noting that the director possessed a Master's degree in Education.

Several studies referenced staff (Barnekov et al., 1999; Bashir et al., 2013; Haberlin, 2014; Mendel, 2010; Mercier et al., 2000; Moran et al., 2018; Seely, 1949; Tefera et al., 2021; Vorhaus et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2021) or volunteers (Bashir et al., 2013; Glish, 1979; Haberlin, 2014; Moran et al., 2018; Vorhaus et al., 2011) at the youth clubs. One paper mentions adults, however it is unclear whether these were volunteers or paid employees (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009), while another noted that a school principal was involved (Seely, 1949). Two studies noted youth workers were present at the youth clubs (Croix & Doherty, 2023; Villa, 2024).

How was the intervention delivered

While many authors did not state how the intervention was delivered it can be assumed they were delivered face-to-face. Many appeared to take place primarily in groups, with opportunities for one-to-one conversations and support with adults (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Barnekov et al., 1999; Bashir et al., 2013; Glish, 1979; Haberlin, 2014; Mercier et al., 2000; Vorhaus et al., 2011), while all had opportunities for more informal socialising such as watching TV or 'hanging out'.

Where Youth Clubs are delivered

All youth clubs were based in the community or public and recreational spaces. Most authors did not provide more detail regarding location, however Barnekov et al. (1999) described how the Boys and Girls Club facility on Route 40 in New Castle County, Delaware was situated close to low/moderate income neighbourhoods.

Croix & Doherty (2023) described how the youth clubs could take place informally, depending on where the young people wanted to participate. Glish (1979) described how the Amherst Youth Centre took place in some rooms in a converted school, while Mercier et al. (2000) noted that the YMCA Youth Center operated from three different locations over the years, "a basement on a commercial street, the former Y building, and a corner-style grocery flat". Youth Cafés (Moran et al., 2018) were located in urban and rural locations across Ireland, while the Community-Based Youth Organisations described by Wells et al. (2021) included both city recreation centres and nonprofit youth-serving organisations in urban neighbourhoods.

Training for the providers of Youth Clubs

Only three studies reported special training for those working in youth clubs, with the remaining studies not providing this information.

Villa (2024) stated that "trained youth workers" were employed in the London youth clubs but did not provide details of the training. Similarly, Croix & Doherty (2023) noted "experienced and professionally qualified youth workers" were present at the youth clubs, while Bashir et al. (2013) mentioned that myplace volunteers received the same training as full staff members, although did not provide details of what that training entailed.

Duration of Youth Clubs

Most studies did not state the duration or intensity of the youth clubs.

Where opening hours were stated, most youth clubs were open daily (Villa, 2024; Vorhaus et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2021) or five to six days a week (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Mercier et al., 2000; Seely, 1949; Wells et al., 2021). Bashir et al. (2013) reported how opening hours of myplace centres vary, with some open 365 days a year and others for two hours, two evenings a week. Similarly, Moran et al. (2018) described how youth café opening hours depend on the size of the café, with small cafés open one to four hours a week and large cafés open for nine or more hours a week.

There were no reports of minimum attendance requirements, with all youth clubs appearing to operate open-door policies, allowing young people to drop-in when they wish. No authors stated a duration or length of attendance at the youth clubs, though several appeared to allow indefinite attendance, providing young people were within the specified age range of the club (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Bashir et al., 2013; Haberlin, 2014; Villa, 2024).

How Effective is the Intervention?

This section examines the effectiveness of Universal Youth Clubs in reducing violence, crime and offending, and other related outcomes through meta-analysis to provide a robust and objective summary of existing evidence, incorporating advanced statistical techniques, including robust variance estimators (Pustejovsky & Tipton, 2022), for improved accuracy.

We included quantitative data from **two studies** which provided information across a variety of outcomes related to the impact of youth clubs for children and young people.

These studies both employed quasi-experimental designs (QED), but their methodological approaches varied as summarised below:

Villa (2024) employs a quasi-experimental difference-in-differences (DiD) design to estimate the effects of closing youth clubs on youth outcomes in London. The "treatment" is the closure of local youth centres during a period of austerity, and the comparison group is areas where youth clubs remained open over the same time. Villa (2024) uses administrative data (Metropolitan Police Service records and education data) at the community-block level, with fixed effects and a stacked DiD estimator to handle staggered closures.

Bashir et al. (2013) is an impact evaluation of the myplace programme (a UK government funded initiative building new "world-class" youth centres). It uses a quasi-experimental pre–post design with a comparator group of youth in similar areas without a myplace centre. The evaluators conducted baseline (early 2012) and follow-up (late 2012) surveys of young people, tracking outcomes for those who attended a new myplace centre vs. those who did not. This provides a difference-in-differences style comparison of outcome changes over time between the participant group and a matched comparison group.

Both studies meet the inclusion criteria for our meta-analysis, as neither is a simple observational study without comparison groups and each study attempts to isolate a causal effect of the availability of a Universal Youth Club on youth outcomes.

The studies differed substantially in scale. Bashir et al.'s (2013) myplace evaluation followed approximately 180–200 young people in both the intervention and comparator groups at follow-up, reflecting notable attrition from baseline samples of around 400. In contrast, Villa's (2024) analysis of London youth club closures used administrative records covering tens of thousands of observations

(8,000–22,000 block-year units for crime outcomes and about 9,000 area-year units for education outcomes).

Although published a decade apart, both analyse data from the 2010s. Villa (2024) measured changes between 2010 and 2019 (a period of youth club closures in London) and Bashir et al.'s (2013) evaluation was conducted between November 2011 and March 2013.

It is important to note that both studies were in the English context, and the social context is roughly similar (post-2008 era, during recessionary times where youth services were reduced; Black et al., 2019). Villa (2024) focused on London, and while Bashir et al.'s (2013) process evaluation included information from many different youth clubs nationally, the causal impact analysis was confined to Enfield (London), Bradford, Torbay, Oxford, and Wigan.

Both studies were independently assessed for methodological quality by two experienced reviewers using the YEF-EQA critical appraisal tool and were rated as follows:

- Villa (2024): High quality
- Bashir et al. (2013): Moderate quality

Funding information was reported in both studies. Villa (2024) received funding from the Nuffield Foundation through the Transforming Justice: The Interplay of Social Change and Policy Reforms research grant. Bashir et al. (2013) received funding from the Big Lottery Fund, and the UK Government's Department for Education.

In terms of demographic representation, Bashir et al. (2013) reported more females than males in both groups (61% in the intervention group and 64% in the comparator group), while Villa's (2024) administrative data aggregated outcomes for all youth in affected areas and did not disaggregate by gender.

The age ranges overlap substantially (Villa, 2024: 10–17, Bashir et al., 2013: 13–19, with most in mid-teens). In respect of ethnicity, Bashir et al. (2013) reported a majority white sample (86% white in the intervention group and 78% of the comparator group) while Villa (2024) did not report ethnicity explicitly, as it used aggregated crime data.

Measured Outcomes

Across the two effectiveness studies, **nine outcome categories** were identified within the YEF Outcomes Framework[2]. These categories capture different aspects of youth violence, crime and offending, and other crime related outcomes, including:

1. Violence (k=1; n=1)
2. Crime and offending (k=6; n=2)
3. Drug and alcohol use (k=2; n=1)
4. Bullying (k=1; n=1)
5. School engagement (k=7; n=2)
6. Community Connectedness (k=8; n=2)
7. Self-esteem (k=7; n=1)
8. Happiness (k=3; n=1)
9. Building and Maintaining Relationships (k=1; n=1)

These outcomes were derived from administrative police and education records *and* self-report survey measures.

Absence of violence outcomes

The initial objective of this analysis was to assess the impact of Universal Youth Club interventions on reducing violence, as defined by the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF). Violence is understood as a broad construct encompassing both behaviours and offences — physical, verbal, psychological, or sexual in nature (YEF, 2023: p.12).

Of the two studies included in this review, only Villa (2024) reported an outcome that directly measured violence (police-recorded violent offences by young people). The analysis found that youth club closures in London led to an 8.3% increase in violent crime among young people. This equated to approximately 426 additional detected violent offences attributable to closures (from a total of 5,127), with an estimated victim cost of around £5 million. The author concluded that when accounting for undetected incidents, the true number of additional violent crimes could be more than 4.25 times higher.

However, as this **evidence on violence is limited to a single outcome from a single quasi-experimental study, this is insufficient for meta-analysis.** No pooled conclusions can therefore be drawn about the effectiveness of youth

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[2] The YEF Outcomes Framework identifies specific outcomes linked to reducing the risk of children and young people becoming involved in crime and violence, providing a structured approach for measuring the impact of interventions

clubs in reducing violence specifically. In line with YEF's Toolkit Technical Guide, crime and offending outcomes can be used as proxy measures to estimate likely impact on violence, which is used to produce the Toolkit summary.

Table 1: *Summary of findings on crime and offending outcomes*

Outcome	LogRIRR (SE)	CI (95%)	P	% reduction[3]	Impact rating	Number of studies	Evidence Security rating
Crime & Offending	−0.13 (0.03)	−0.20 to −0.07	<0.001***	13%	Moderate	2	Level 1

The Log RIRR of −0.135 corresponds to a relative risk reduction of 13%, and an absolute risk reduction of 2.45%[4]. The risk of becoming involved in crime among those who attend youth clubs is 22%, compared to 25% among those who do not attend youth clubs.

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[3] This represents the percentage reduction in reoffending

[4] See YEF Toolkit Technical Guide (pp. 25- 28) and Appendix 1 for full calculation details and conversion formulae used to derive relative and absolute risk reductions from log-transformed risk ratios.
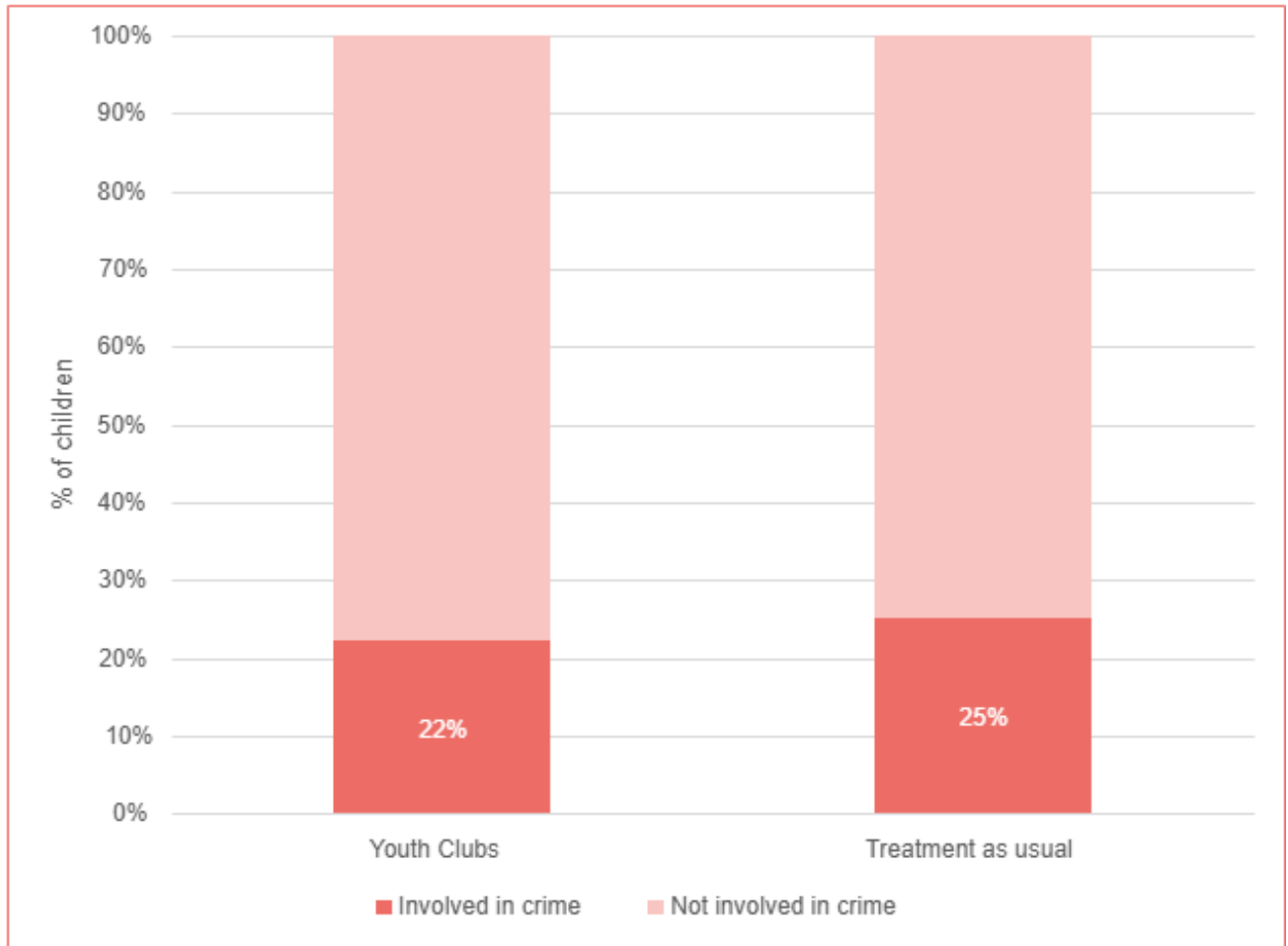
Figure 1: *Risk of becoming involved in crime for children attending Universal Youth Clubs compared to those who do not attend*

Meta-analysis of crime and offending outcomes

Universal Youth Clubs are associated with a moderate impact on crime and offending outcomes, corresponding to a 13% reduction across these outcomes, based on seven effect sizes across two studies.

A total of $k = 7$ effect size estimates related to crime and offending were included in the analysis. The estimated average outcome based on the random-effects model was $\hat{\mu} = -0.135$ (95% CI: -0.20 to -0.07). This estimate was statistically significantly different from zero ($z = -3.87$, $p < 0.001$). **The Relative Incidence Rate Ratio (RIRR) is 0.87** (95% CI: 0.82 to 0.94) and based on YEF impact categorisation, the effect size (LogRIRR) corresponds to a moderate impact on

crime and offending behaviours. Interpreted at the area level[5], youth club presence is associated with **an approximate 13% reduction in crime and offending outcomes**, with high confidence that the true reduction lies between 6 and 18%.

According to the Q-test, there was no significant heterogeneity[6] in the true effect sizes across studies ($Q(6) = 0.21, \ p = 0.9998$), and the between-study variance was estimated as $\tau^2 = 0.000$. The I² was 45.8%, indicating a moderate proportion of variability due to real differences between studies. The 95% prediction interval for the true outcomes ranged from -0.1493 to -0.1214, meaning that even though study-level effects vary somewhat (i.e., the I² is not zero), the direction of effect is consistently negative.

A Robust Variance Estimation (RVE) approach was applied to account for potential dependencies among estimates, given that the seven effect sizes came from two studies (clusters). The pooled estimate remained the same (-0.135), and statistical significance was maintained under RVE adjustment (p = 0.04).

The robust standard error under RVE was small (SE = 0.01), reflecting the extremely limited number of clusters. As simulation studies show, even with RVE adjustments, such few clusters can lead to underestimates of uncertainty and overly narrow confidence intervals. Therefore, although the effect remained significant (at the p=0.5 level), these findings should be interpreted with caution.

Table 2: *RVE Output for meta-analysis on crime and offending outcomes*

Estimate	SE	t-stat	d.f (Satt)	p-val (Satt)	Sig
-0.135	0.01	-12.8	1	0.0497	*

A forest plot showing the observed outcomes on crime and offending behaviour and the estimate based on the meta-analysis model is shown in Figure 2 below.

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[5] We use Villa's ATT (area-level) estimate because it could be transformed to a standardised mean difference (SMD), allowing direct combination with Bashir et al. (2013) in the meta-analysis. See Appendix 1 for transformation steps and justification.

[6] With only two studies, estimates of heterogeneity (τ^2, I²) are inherently unstable; however, following Campbell Collaboration and Cochrane guidance, we report them for completeness but interpret them cautiously, please note that any apparent variability throughout this report should not be over-interpreted by the reader.

Study (Author, Year)	Description		
Bashir (2013)	Any ASB (≤3 mo)		0.23 [-2.12, 2.58]
Villa (2024)	Offending rate aged 10-17		-0.13 [-0.23, -0.03]
Villa (2024)	Crime Incidence rate aged 10-17		-0.14 [-0.24, -0.04]
Villa (2024)	Distribution of detected crimes ages 10-17		-0.04 [-0.92, 0.84]
Villa (2024)	Acquisitive Crime (theft, burglary, etc.)		-0.25 [-1.45, 0.95]
Villa (2024)	Violent Crime (assault, robbery etc.)		-0.19 [-1.04, 0.66]
Villa (2024)	Drug-related Crime		-0.12 [-0.94, 0.70]
Random-Effects Model			-0.14 [-0.20, -0.07]

Log RIRR (Crime & Violence outcomes)

Figure 2: *Forest plot showing the observed estimates of the random-effects model on crime and offending behaviour (7 outcomes across 2 studies)*

Meta-analysis on all outcomes

Universal Youth Clubs are associated with a moderate impact on all relevant outcomes, corresponding with a 11% reduction across these outcomes, based on 36 effect sizes across two studies.

A total of $k = 36$ effect sizes were included in this analysis. The estimated average outcome based on the random-effects model was $\hat{\mu} = -0.119$ (95% CI: -0.17 to -0.06). This estimate was statistically significantly different from zero ($z = -3.89$, $p < .0001$). **The Relative Incidence Rate Ratio (RIRR) is 0.89,** (95% CI: 0.84 to 0.94) and based on YEF impact categorisation, the effect size (RIRR) corresponds to a moderate impact. The results indicate that young people engaged in youth clubs experienced **an approximate 11% reduction across all outcomes**, with high confidence that the true reduction lies between 6% and 16%.

The analysis revealed substantial heterogeneity across studies. Although the estimated between-study variance was small ($\tau^2 = 0.002$), the I^2 statistic indicated that 91.64% of observed variability was due to real differences between studies rather than sampling error, $Q(35) = 74.43$, $p < .0001$. A 95% prediction interval for the true outcomes is given by -0.1961 to 0.004. Hence, although the average outcome is estimated to be negative, in some studies the true outcome may in fact be positive[7].

To account for potential dependencies among estimates an RVE model was applied. The pooled estimate remained the same ($\widehat{\mu} = -0.119$), but the standard error decreased slightly (original SE: 0.03 vs with RVE: 0.02). With only two clusters contributing to the estimates, the degrees of freedom were highly constrained (df = 1), resulting in wide confidence intervals (95% CI: -0.38 to 0.15) and a non-significant result ($p = 0.11$). Taken together, the model suggests that youth clubs are associated with meaningful reductions in adverse youth outcomes. However, when applying RVE the effect lost statistical significance, reflecting limited statistical power due to sparse clustering.

Table 3: *RVE Output for meta-analysis on all outcomes*

Estimate	SE	t-stat	d.f (Satt)	p-val (Satt)	Sig

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[7] Note that while the upper bound of the prediction interval is 0.004, while technically positive, the possible positive effect is extremely small and practically negligible.

-0.119	0.02	-5.46	1	0.11	Not sig

A forest plot showing the observed outcomes on all relevant outcomes is shown in Figure 3 below.
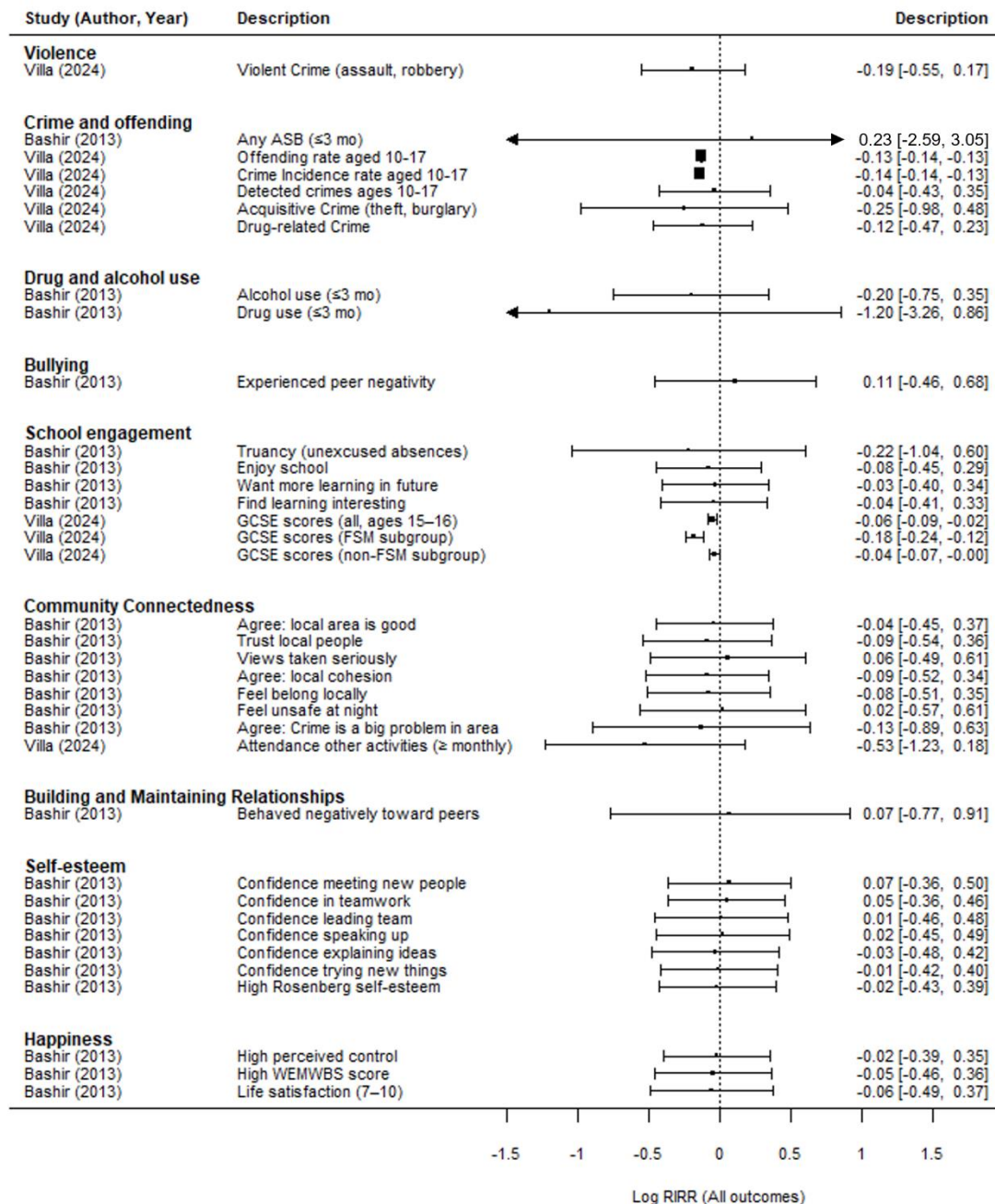
Figure 3: *Forest plot showing the observed estimates of the random-effects model on crime and offending behaviour (36 outcomes across 2 studies)*

Moderator Analysis

As outlined in our methodology (Appendix 1), due to the small number of studies, meta-regression was not conducted as any moderator analysis would not be valid for confirmatory inference due to the nearly non-existent degrees of freedom, unstable heterogeneity estimates, and lack of replication within most categories.

However, because both studies included outcomes across two outcomes on the YEF Outcomes Framework (School Engagement and Community Connectedness), we report a subgroup analysis below. This should be viewed as exploratory only, rather than confirmatory.

Table 4: *Subgroup analysis on School Engagement and Community Connectedness*

Subgroup	k; n	LogRIRR (95% CI)	P	Qw(df) p-value	Qb (df)[8]	p[9]
School Engagement	7; 2	-0.06 (-0.08 to -0.04)	<0.0001 ***	Q(df = 6) = 16.08, p-val = 0.01	K=15 QM(df = 1) = 0.049	p-val = 0.824
Community Connectedness	8; 2	-0.163 (-0.55 to 0.23)	0.42	Q(df = 7) = 1.97, p-val = 0.96		

Note: k= number of effect sizes; n = number of studies; Qw= within studies; Qb= between studies.

School Engagement

For the School Engagement outcome (7 effect sizes), the average effect was -0.06, RIRR = 0.94 which is roughly a 6% improvement in school engagement outcomes for children and young people attending youth clubs. This improvement was statistically significant (z = -5.7989, p < 0.0001), indicating the beneficial effect of youth club participation on school engagement. The

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[8] 'Qw (df) p-value' is the within-group heterogeneity test (Qw), which tests whether the variation in effect sizes within the subgroup is greater than would be expected by chance.
[9] The p-value corresponds to whether heterogeneity between the subgroups (Qb) is statistically significant

heterogeneity test here was Q(6) = 16.0834 (p = 0.0133) and suggests there was significant variability in the school engagement effects across both studies.
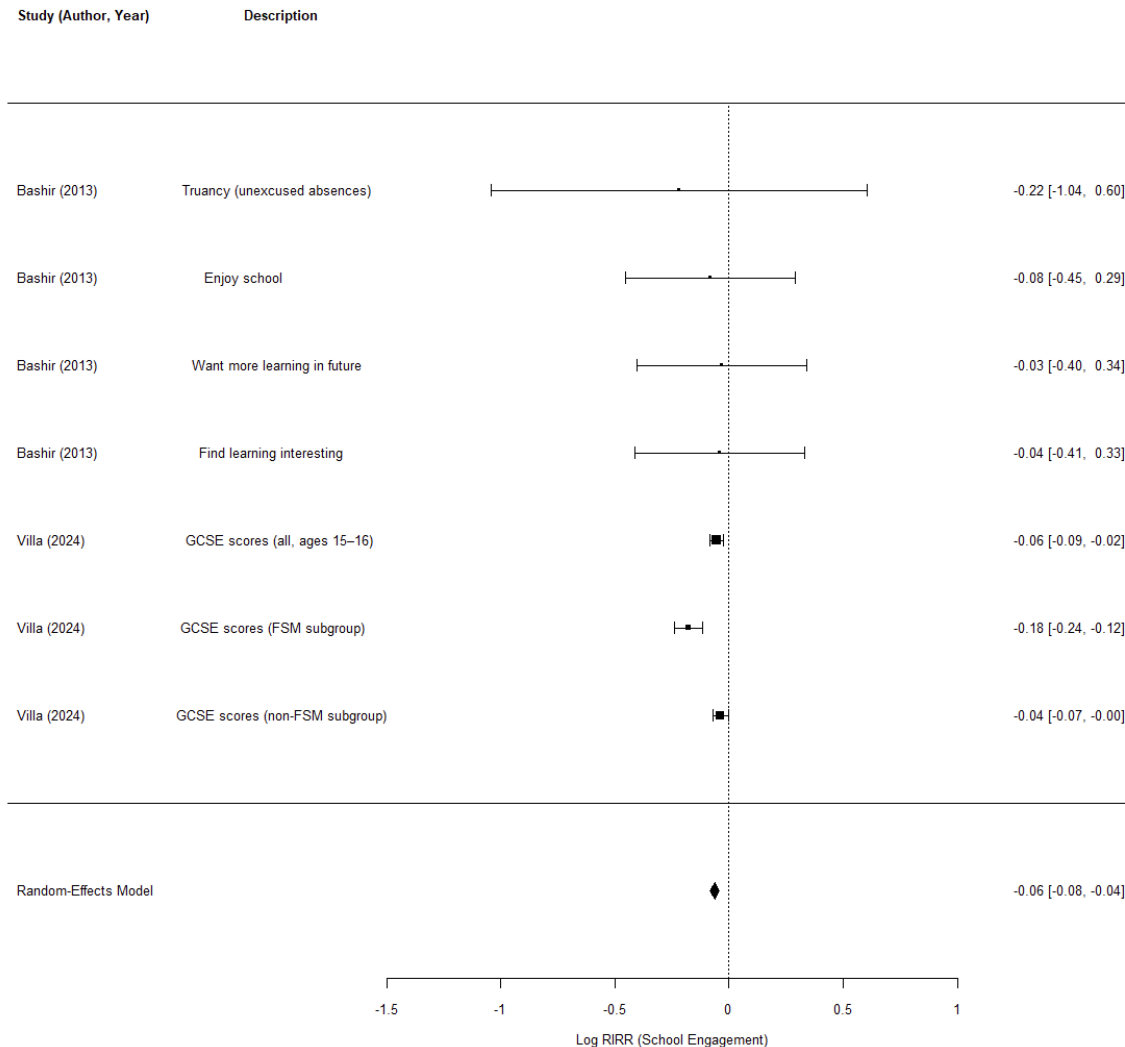
Figure 4: *Forest plot showing the observed estimates of the random-effects model on School engagement*

Community Connectedness

For the Community Connectedness domain (8 effect sizes), the average effect was -0.16, RIRR = 0.85 which is roughly a 15% improvement in community connectedness outcomes for children and young people attending youth clubs. However, this improvement was not statistically significant ($z = -0.8145$, $p = 0.4154$), indicating the beneficial effect of youth club participation on Community Connectedness could be due to chance variation. However, the heterogeneity test for this outcome indicates no significant heterogeneity, $Q(7) = 1.9665$ ($p = 0.9617$),

meaning the effect sizes for community connectedness were quite consistently positive across both studies.

Study (Author, Year)	Description		
Bashir (2013)	Agree: local area is good		-0.04 [-0.45, 0.37]
Bashir (2013)	Trust local people		-0.09 [-0.54, 0.36]
Bashir (2013)	Views taken seriously		0.06 [-0.49, 0.61]
Bashir (2013)	Agree: local cohesion		-0.09 [-0.52, 0.34]
Bashir (2013)	Feel belong locally		-0.08 [-0.51, 0.35]
Bashir (2013)	Feel unsafe at night		0.02 [-0.57, 0.61]
Bashir (2013)	Agree: Crime is a big problem in area		-0.13 [-0.89, 0.63]
Villa (2024)	Attendance other activities (≥ monthly)		-0.53 [-1.23, 0.18]
Random-Effects Model			-0.16 [-0.56, 0.23]

Log RIRR (Community Connectedness)

Figure 5: *Forest plot showing the observed estimates of the random-effects model on Community Connectedness*

Q-test for between-group heterogeneity

The analysis also tested whether the effect of youth clubs differs between the two included outcome domains (community connectedness vs. school engagement). The Q-test for subgroup differences was not statistically significant, ($Q(1) = 0.049$ p $=0.824$), indicating that differences in effect size across outcome these two categories do not meaningfully contribute to the observed heterogeneity. In practical terms, we found no meaningful difference across these two outcome

categories and youth clubs appear to help both community connectedness and school engagement by similar amounts.

Publication Bias

The meta-analysis included only two studies, which makes any formal assessment of publication bias infeasible. As the Cochrane Handbook notes, funnel plots and related methods are generally uninformative when fewer than 10 studies are available, as tests with fewer studies lack adequate power to distinguish real bias from chance (Mellor, 2024).

However, we know there are differences in the included studies. Villa (2024) is a recently published peer-reviewed article reporting strong positive findings, while Bashir et al. (2013) is a grey literature evaluation report that found null effects. Our searches and inclusion criteria were intentionally broad and objective, encompassing both academic and grey literature to reduce the risk of publication bias. Nonetheless, the possibility remains that other evaluations with null or negative findings were either not reported or not accessible, consistent with the "file drawer problem."

Sensitivity Analyses

In this analysis, we conducted a leave-one-out sensitivity analysis to assess robustness. This method systematically removes one estimate at a time and recalculates the pooled effect size. By examining the effect size changes across iterations, we can determine if any individual estimate significantly alters the results.
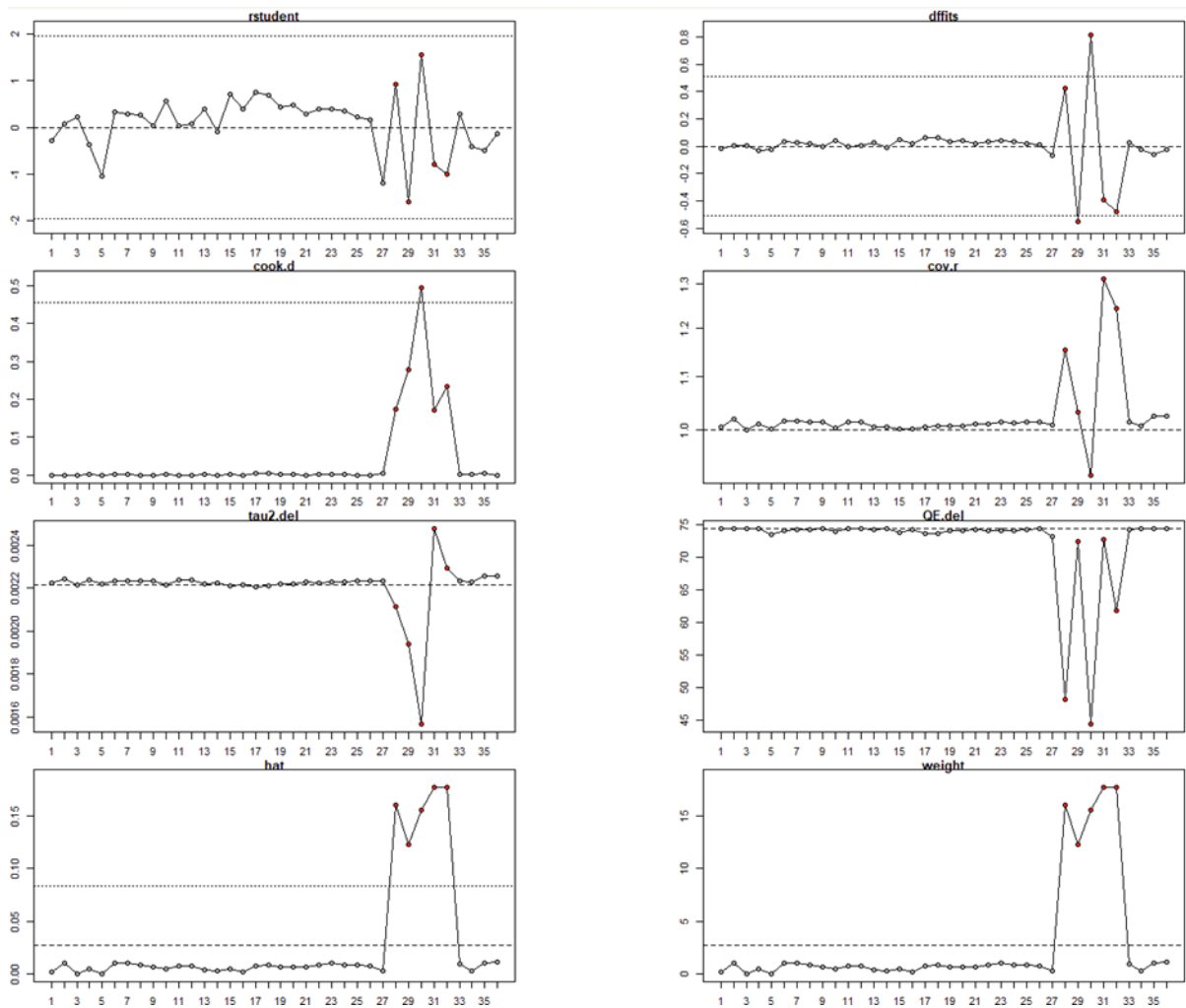
Figure 6: *Influence diagnostics for individual outcomes*

The largest change in the pooled log effect when omitting a single study was 0.004. No studies were identified as potentially influential (Cook's distance > 0.571). In practical terms, this indicates that no single outcome materially altered the direction or significance of the pooled effect.
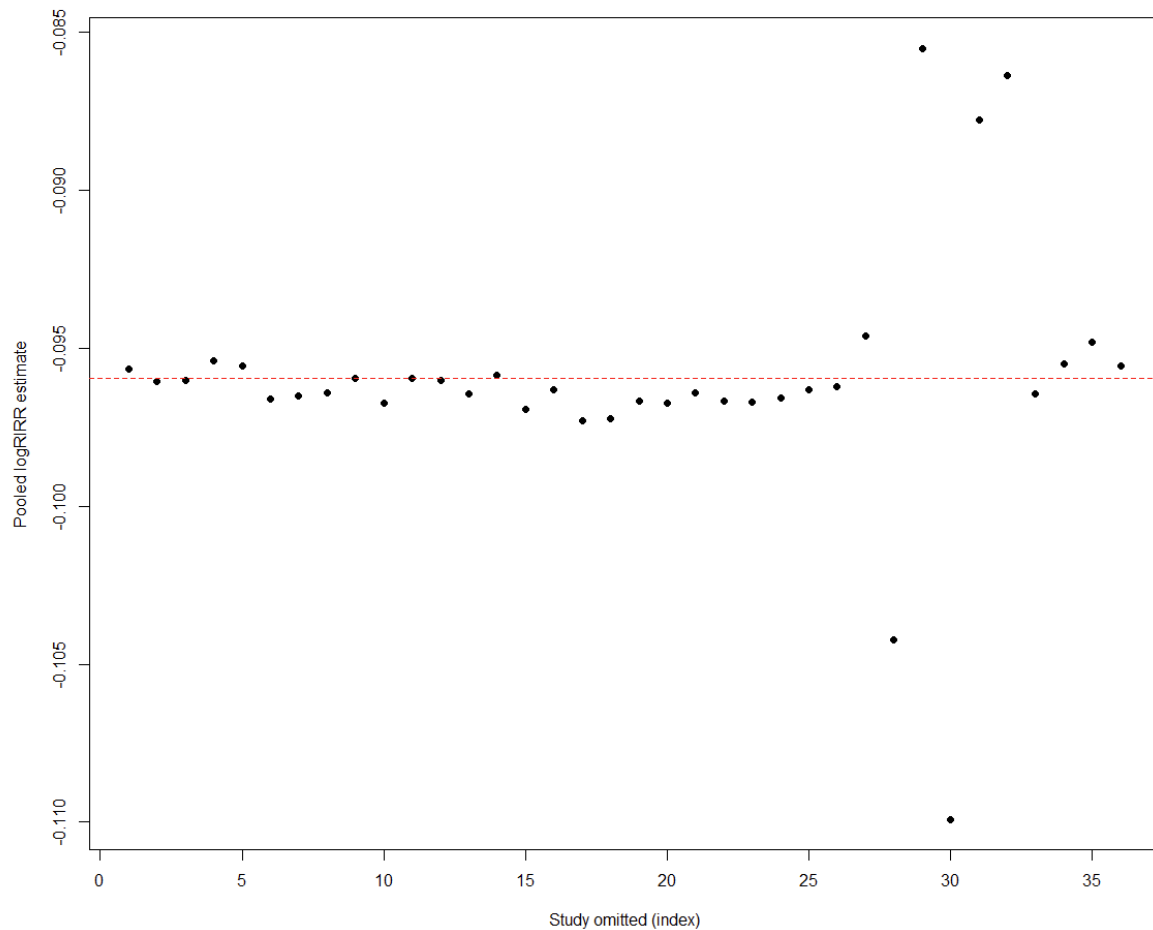
Figure 7: *Leave-One-Out Sensitivity Analysis[10]*

The leave-one-out analysis also examined the influence of individual outcomes on heterogeneity. The original meta-analysis indicated high between-study heterogeneity (I^2 = 91.6%). Across the leave-one-out models, I^2 values ranged from 53.83% to 92.00%, with a mean of 89.70%.

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[10] This plot shows the effect size estimates for each leave-one-out iteration, with the original pooled effect size (red dashed line) for reference. None of the individual removals caused a significant shift in the overall estimate.
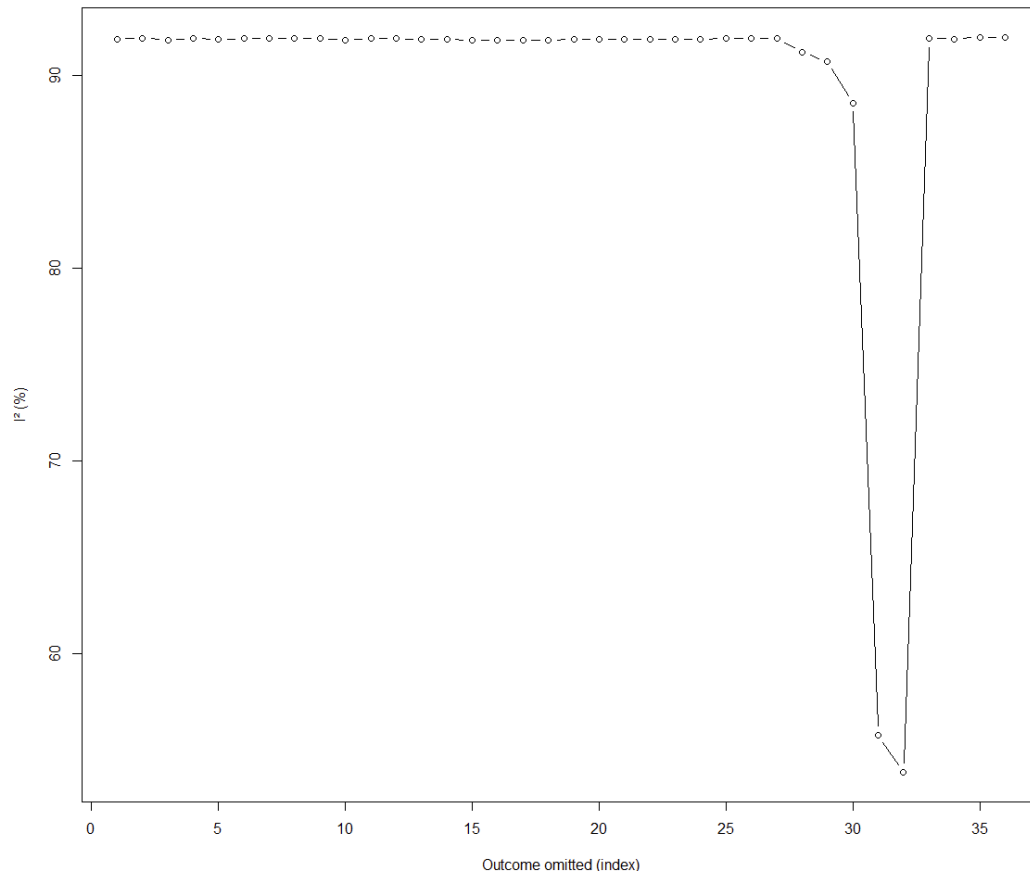
Figure 8: *Heterogeneity (I^2) across Leave-One-Out iterations*

Collectively, these results provide strong evidence that the pooled effect estimate is not unduly influenced by any individual estimate, and that the observed heterogeneity is not driven by a single outcome.

How Secure is the Evidence?

Crime and Offending Outcomes

Our confidence in the findings of Universal Youth Clubs on crime and offending is very low. The meta-analysis included seven crime and offending related outcomes drawn from two studies that assessed the impact of Universal Youth Clubs on children and young people.

Study quality, as assessed using the YEF-EQA, was as follows.

Two QEDs: One was rated as high quality **(Type B),** and one was rated as moderate quality **(Type C)**.

As a result, a **Level 1** evidence security rating was applied.

Only moderate heterogeneity (45.8%) is evident in the crime and offending meta-analysis, and as a result the initial evidence security rating was not downgraded, and **an evidence security rating of 1 out of 5 is maintained.**

All outcomes

Our confidence in the findings of Universal Youth Clubs on all outcomes is **very low.** The meta-analysis included 36 outcomes drawn from two studies that assessed the impact of Universal Youth Clubs on children and young people.

Study quality, as assessed using the YEF-EQA, was as follows.

Two QEDs: One was rated as high quality **(Type B),** and one was rated as moderate quality **(Type C).**

As a result, a **Level 1** evidence security rating was applied.

While substantial heterogeneity (91.64%) is evident in the meta-analysis of all outcomes, reflected in the RVE adjustment and broad range of observed effects, subsequent subgroup analysis investigating the type of outcome measured accounts for much of the observed variation. As a result, the initial evidence security rating was not downgraded, and **an evidence security rating of 1 out of 5 is maintained.**

Who does it work for?

This narrative summary of equity-related outcomes supplements the meta-analysis by providing additional insights into how youth clubs may affect different demographic groups.

Six studies provided narrative into the experiences of children and young people according to their personal characteristics, which helps to understand who youth clubs work for (Bashir et al., 2013; Croix & Doherty, 2023; Cross et al., 2015; Rihan, 2011; Villa, 2024; Wells et al., 2021). This covered gender, ethnicity, SEND, socioeconomic status, and intersectionality. No studies explored neurodiversity, place of residence, care experience and education.

Three studies were from England (Bashir et al., 2013; Croix & Doherty, 2023; Villa, 2024), and one each was from Australia (Cross et al., 2015), Egypt (Rihan, 2011), and the US (Wells et al., 2021). Using the YEF-EQA tool, one was rated as high-quality (Villa, 2024), five as moderate quality (Bashir et al., 2013; Croix & Doherty, 2023; Cross et al., 2015; Wells et al., 2021) and one as low-quality (Rihan, 2011).

Studies where personal characteristics of the sample were described (e.g., gender) but not specifically related to outcomes of interest or do not contribute to the understanding of who youth clubs work for, have not been included in this section.

Gender

Five studies explored the impact of youth clubs according to the gender of children and young people.

According to Bashir et al. (2013) males who attended myplace youth clubs in England were significantly more likely to report increased levels of college/school enjoyment at a six-month follow-up, compared to youth who did not attend. In addition, young males who attended were significantly more likely to report a reduction in truancy during the follow-up, in comparison to young people not attending, who experienced a slight increase in truancy. This demonstrates that youth clubs have a significant impact on education and behaviour in males. Of note, Villa (2024) found that the closure of youth clubs across London, UK, led to reductions in educational attainment for both males and females, with no significant difference between genders. This indicates the importance of youth clubs for all children and young people, regardless of gender.

Two studies examined the importance of gender-specific activities and spaces for children and young people at youth clubs. In the US, five community-based

youth organisations (CBYOs) offered spaces and programmes that addressed gender-specific needs while maintaining inclusive opportunities for all youth. For girls, initiatives like the girls' leadership group created safe, affirming environments enabling connection, goal-setting, and mutual support. These spaces fostered trust, confidentiality, and empowerment, allowing girls (many of whom navigated intersecting racial, gendered, and economic challenges) to see themselves as leaders. For boys, staff relationships often emphasized mentorship, guidance, and positive role modelling.

One study in England explored the creation of a safe and inclusive space at a youth club for transgender young people (Croix & Doherty, 2023). Participants emphasised the critical importance of having a dedicated environment where their identities were recognised, affirmed, and supported: "When you're from a marginalised group and you don't have enough space in the world as is, you can go to a space where that's all of who you're with... and that time doing activities like climbing or archery or raft building... it does save your life". The group offered both social and emotional support, bridging gaps in mainstream services that often failed to meet the needs of transgender children and young people. Youth workers facilitated activities that encouraged participation on equal terms, ensuring that every voice was heard and respected. The deliberate focus on inclusion, representation, and tailored support demonstrates a commitment to equity, as these young people could engage in meaningful youth work free from judgment, discrimination, or barriers linked to gender identity.

However, a study based in Egypt indicated that discrimination and barriers associated with gender in the wider community were continued in youth clubs (Rihan, 2011). Specifically, children and young people's engagement in youth clubs mirrored community inequalities: boys were more engaged in sports, gym, and recreational activities, whereas girls were largely limited to indoor activities, seminars, and library use. One youth club tried to challenge these by embedding measures such as designated gym hours for girls. Nevertheless, prevailing cultural norms and community restrictions in many areas continued to limit young girls' engagement, underscoring the need for spaces which challenge gender inequality and promote equal opportunities, empower women, and foster broader participation in youth centre programmes.

Ethnicity

One study examined the role of ethnicity in relation to youth clubs (Cross et al., 2015). The Police-Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYCs) in Queensland, Australia is a programme that engages young people from diverse racial and ethnic

backgrounds, including Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities in positive activities. PCYCs embedded specific culturally sensitive activities to promote engagement of children and young people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Activities such as Indigenous Elders Day and multicultural events facilitated inclusive participation and fostered a sense of belonging, highlighting the visibility and engagement of youth from different backgrounds. Young people from Black and Global Majority backgrounds reported feeling welcomed and supported, emphasising the importance of visible role models. These efforts suggest that culturally sensitive approaches with diverse role models promote equity across racial and ethnic lines, though ongoing attention to outreach and representation is essential to sustain inclusive participation.

SEND

One study examined the impact of disabilities in children and young people, in relation to English youth clubs, which were given funding for the development of new or improved spaces (Bashir et al., 2013). Amongst young people who used the youth clubs, those who identified as having a disability had higher levels of school/college enjoyment at a six-month follow-up, in comparison to those without a disability. Whilst this may suggest that youth clubs are particularly impactful for those with SEND, the authors highlight that the result should be interpreted with caution due to the low number of individuals in the sample that identified as having a disability.

Socioeconomic Status

Two studies explored socioeconomic status in relation to youth clubs. To enhance access to youth clubs for young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, Police-Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYCs) in Australia offered low-cost or free participation in activities such as sports, camps and recreational programmes, reducing financial obstacles (Cross et al., 2015). In addition, programmes such as breakfast clubs and subsidised employment initiatives promoted equitable access. Staff emphasised proactive outreach to ensure participation from families who might otherwise be excluded due to cost or time constraints. Participants noted that affordability and inclusivity created opportunities for personal development, skill-building, and safe community engagement that might not otherwise be available. These measures demonstrate a commitment to

reducing socioeconomic inequities and enabling broad access to youth clubs, which supports the development of young people.

Villa (2024) examined the impact of youth club closures across London, UK. Findings indicate that the impact of youth club closure on educational attainment was greater for pupils receiving Free School Meals (FSM) than those who were not. The author notes that for pupils receiving FSM, test scores fell by 11.5 standard deviations compared to 2.4 for those not receiving FSM. Echoing the findings of Cross et al. (2015), this highlights the importance of access to youth clubs for children and young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as these provide developmental opportunities which can help with their attainment outside of youth clubs, such as education.

Intersectionality

One US-based study examined the intersection between ethnicity and socioeconomic status, in relation to the impact of five CBYOs. Wells et al. (2021) interviewed 74 Black and Global Majority young people who attended the CBYOs and lived in neighbourhoods marked by high poverty and limited safe spaces. At the time of data collection, about 35% of residents lived below the poverty line, the city's violent crime rate was four times the national average, and Black and Global Majority young people comprised 90% of public-school enrolment with a 51% high school graduation rate.

These intersecting realities of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic disadvantage shaped the significance of CBYOs as spaces for safety, belonging, and opportunity. As a 15-year-old Black male recovering from a gunshot injury shared, "I don't like going places no more like outside or the park, I just stay up at the rec center play basketball and do my homework here, go home, come back here every day." For many, CBYOs provided a refuge from community violence while meeting basic needs such as meals and employment. A Black female similarly described them as "a home away from home," where youth could be there "from nine to nine every day of the week" and could build lasting bonds with staff.

The cultural responsiveness of CBYOs emerged in their ability to welcome and integrate youth from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds while navigating the inequities of low-income urban life. Youth described acceptance and belonging as core to their CBYO experience. "Everybody accepts me… everybody like loves to talk to me and be around me… I feel like I'm… part of my community," shared one participant, underscoring how CBYOs provided affirmation in contrast to exclusion experienced elsewhere. These experiences were sustained through long-term relationships with staff who shared a commitment to youth development and

built a trusting relationship with the young people. This highlights the importance of embedding approaches responsive to the experiences and characteristics of young people.

What factors affect implementation?

Seventeen studies provided evidence related to implementation, of which two (Bashir et al., 2013; Villa, 2024) also provided effectiveness data used in the meta-analysis above (see Appendix 5 for details of the studies providing evidence on implementation). Six studies were from the US (Arbreton et al., 2008; Barnekov et al., 1999; Glish, 1979; Mendel, 2010; Seely, 1949; Wells et al., 2021), four from England (Bashir et al., 2013; Croix & Doherty, 2023; Villa, 2024; Vorhaus et al., 2011), three from Canada (Haberlin, 2014; Mercier et al., 2000; Shannon & Robertson, 2007), and one each from Australia (Cross et al., 2015), Egypt (Rihan, 2011), Ethiopia (Tefera et al., 2021), and Ireland (Moran et al., 2018). One study was classed as high-quality (Villa, 2024), seven studies as moderate quality (Arbreton et al., 2008; Bashir et al., 2013; Croix & Doherty, 2023; Cross et al., 2015; Haberlin, 2014; Moran et al., 2018; Wells et al., 2021), five as low-quality (Glish, 1979; Mercier et al., 2000; Rihan, 2011; Shannon & Robertson, 2007; Tefera et al., 2021), and the remainder as very low-quality (Barnekov et al., 1999; Mendel, 2010; Seely, 1949; Vorhaus et al., 2011). Data for each individual study, regardless of quality, are available in Appendix 5.

Factors that influenced the implementation of formal diversion approaches are organised using Proctor et al.'s (2011) Implementation Outcome Framework. Appendix 6 highlights the availability of evidence according to each of Proctor's implementation outcomes. Where studies reported on the experiences or perspectives of children and young people, these views are summarised with appropriate direct quotations from primary studies given, where available.

To briefly summarise, key themes from this section highlight that for youth clubs to be most effective and accepted within the community, the following should be established during implementation:

- Youth clubs should be affordable, providing low-cost and free activities to children and young people as much as possible
- Structured activities should be provided, drawing on children and young people's input and ideas to ensure these are relevant and enjoyable
- Unstructured time is vital, allowing children and young people to spend time with peers in a safe environment. However, staff should be available and engaging with the children and young people throughout, taking a mentorship role

- Gender-specific activities for children and young people should be considered to improve engagement, such as safe spaces for LGBTQ+ children and young people to come together or female-only activities
- Long-term investment in youth clubs should be prioritised to provide stability to children and young people and local communities
- Youth club spaces should be created and tailored in collaboration with children and young people to ensure the spaces adequately meet their needs
- Youth clubs should be led by trained youth workers, skilled in building relationships with children and young people

Acceptability

Acceptability explores aspects of the intervention or change that children and young people find agreeable, palatable, or satisfactory. The acceptability of youth clubs for young people was strongly tied to the spaces themselves and the feelings that those spaces generate, particularly a sense of personal acceptance. Youth club spaces that were welcoming, non-judgemental and socially supportive were particularly valued in helping young people feel free and accepted (Croix & Doherty, 2023; Cross et al., 2015; Moran et al., 2018; Vorhaus et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2021). Indeed, one study emphasised the importance of emotional safety as key to the acceptability of youth clubs and strongly tied to feelings of non-judgemental acceptance (Moran et al., 2018). In addition, youth clubs were viewed as acceptable if they were perceived as positive and safe spaces for children and young people (Arbreton et al., 2008; Cross et al., 2015; Haberlin, 2014; Mendel, 2010; Seely, 1949; Vorhaus et al., 2011). Youth clubs perceived as acceptable were viewed as safer than the alternatives of being on the streets or at home (Cross et al., 2015) or generated feelings of a home environment (Haberlin, 2014). To support this, one study highlighted the importance of young people being involved in co-creating their space with the staff (Croix & Doherty, 2023).

The skills, values and attributes of staff working with the young people were highlighted as key factors influencing the acceptability of youth clubs (Arbreton et al., 2008; Croix & Doherty, 2023; Cross et al., 2015; Haberlin, 2014; Mendel, 2010; Shannon & Robertson, 2007; Vorhaus et al., 2011). These included strong communication and relationship-building skills leading to the development of positive interpersonal connections (Croix & Doherty, 2023; Mendel, 2010; Vorhaus et al., 2011). Co-production and co-creation skills were also seen as particularly important, with young people strongly valuing being able to co-create safe

spaces alongside centre staff (Croix & Doherty, 2023). Other skills needed include conflict resolution skills (Arbreton et al., 2008) and the ability to create "supervised freedom" (Mercier et al., 2000).

Staff values and attributes that were particularly important included trust, respect, open-mindedness, approachability and friendliness. These were emphasised as being important by both young people and adults alike in supporting the acceptability of youth clubs (Arbreton et al., 2008; Croix & Doherty, 2023; Cross et al., 2015; Haberlin, 2014; Vorhaus et al., 2011). They were also viewed as central to young people being able to connect with their peers and feel emotionally safe (Wells et al., 2021). Studies also showed that young people particularly valued the caring nature of the staff they engaged with, and this was demonstrated by young people feeling noticed and listened to (Arbreton et al., 2008; Haberlin, 2014; Mendel, 2010) and the presence of relational warmth (Croix & Doherty, 2023; Wells et al., 2021). This was described by some studies in terms of young people feeling part of one big family (Vorhaus et al., 2011) or one big friendship group (Haberlin, 2014).

Youth clubs vary in terms of the types of activities they offer, from structured youth clubs involving adult-led programmes and defined activities, through to unstructured youth clubs offering a flexible space for peers to socialise and develop relationships, emphasising autonomy and freedom of choice with minimal adult direction. A balanced approach often combines both structured and unstructured time to support youth development holistically. In the studies reviewed, it was clear that children and young people particularly valued the opportunity to take part in both formal structured and programmed activities and informal unstructured activities (Arbreton et al., 2008; Haberlin, 2014; Mercier et al., 2000; Wells et al., 2021). The studies did not detail what the structured activities were or what the balance was between the two sets of activities. Acceptability was strongly linked to children and young people being able to engage in activities that they enjoyed or wanted to take part in (Rihan, 2011) and having free time that was not timetabled (Arbreton et al., 2008; Moran et al., 2018). As well as this, young people particularly valued activity offerings that were broad rather than narrow in scope (Bashir et al., 2013; Haberlin, 2014).

Lastly, only one study mentioned the cost/affordability associated with attending the youth club as a factor tied to the acceptability and inclusivity of the intervention. Not charging to come to the youth club was seen to be central to its acceptability (Cross et al., 2015).

Adoption

Adoption concerns the decision or action to employ an intervention or implementation target. This examines aspects relating to the uptake of the intervention by services, schools or communities. A total of five studies described various aspects relating to the adoption and uptake of youth club activities and approaches. Overall, adoption was high where the range of activities was varied and included opportunities for engagement in both structured and unstructured activities. Adoption was most successful when the activities were perceived as relevant to, and meeting the needs of, children and young people (Cross et al., 2015; Vorhaus et al., 2011; Rihan, 2011).

Whilst structured activities (e.g., education, employment and life skills programmes) in the Police-Citizen Youth Clubs in Australia had good levels of adoption, it was often the more unstructured activities such as drop-ins, discos and sports activities that were more widely adopted (Cross et al., 2015). Other studies indicated that uptake, attendance and engagement were highest for extra-curricular activities, such as sports or social trips, with one study noting that there was typically little uptake of structured programmes of activities beyond sports (Rihan, 2011). Key in influencing uptake was the balance between opportunities for skill development whilst also being enjoyable for young people to engage in. Conversely, where activities were seen as tokenistic (e.g., youth parliament) and/or irrelevant to the lives of children and young people, often attendance was poor and uptake more limited (Rihan, 2011).

Uptake and engagement were affected by how spaces were curated and tailored to meet the needs of children and young people (Croix & Doherty, 2023), with child-led spaces helping to foster participation and engagement. Adoption and uptake of youth clubs were supported by low-cost memberships and subsidies, as well as ensuring a relational approach was used, and activities met local needs and resources (Cross et al., 2015).

Appropriateness

Appropriateness refers to the perceived fit or relevance of an intervention to the given context or problem. It can include discussion of adaptations that are made to improve the intervention's fit with the context and the perceived usefulness of the intervention. The purpose of a youth club is to provide a safe, supportive and enjoyable environment where young people voluntarily participate and progress in a range of activities that have both a recreational and developmental or educational objectives. The studies that had content relevant for this

implementation outcome examined the appropriateness of components of their offering, such as their youth work approach and associated activities (Croix & Doherty, 2023) or the appropriateness of the intervention as a whole in terms of meeting the needs of young people and the wider community (e.g., Barnekov et al., 1999; Cross et al., 2015). Most of the studies judged youth clubs to be appropriate if they provided a suite of activities that aimed to meet the immediate social, emotional and developmental needs of children and young people (Barnekov et al., 1999; Croix & Doherty, 2023; Cross et al., 2015; Mendel, 2010; Mercier et al., 2000; Rihan, 2011; Wells et al., 2021). These were viewed as helping to empower young people and boost their confidence and self-esteem, making them less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviours.

Many youth clubs reviewed were in communities with high numbers of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and in areas with high crime, with youth clubs judged as appropriate at helping young people who are at risk but not necessarily in distress or at crisis point (Bashir et al., 2013). Therefore, the preventative and early intervention approach of youth clubs was identified as highly appropriate in preventing children and young people from offending or engaging in violence. A study of youth cafés in Ireland, for example, highlighted that these were viewed as appropriate to attendees as they helped young people navigate a range of life challenges, preventing them from engaging in risk-taking behaviours (Moran et al., 2018). Similarly, other studies discussed the preventative nature of youth clubs in helping young people avoid risk-taking behaviours such as drink or drugs (Arbreton et al., 2008; Haberlin, 2014; Mendel, 2010) or those at risk of exclusion from school (Bashir et al., 2013). Haberlin (2014) emphasised the importance of the multiplicity of ways that they support children and young people to avoid risk-taking behaviours, by helping them foster positive peer relationships, providing a listening ear when they feel angry and positive role models. Supporting this assumption, Barnekov et al. (1999) found that community members and police associated youth clubs with a decrease in minor crime in the area.

The importance of a safe space for children and young people meant youth clubs were viewed as highly appropriate. Youth clubs reviewed were praised for having inclusive and supportive environments, including for LGBTQ+ children and young people (Cross et al., 2015). In addition, youth clubs which provide a safe and rich environment compensate for where children and young people may not experience this in their community or at home (Wells et al., 2021).

Whilst almost all of the studies emphasised the appropriateness of the intervention in terms of meeting the social, emotional and developmental needs

of young people, a number of interventions also saw their mission extending beyond this in supporting young people in a variety of other areas (e.g. education and/or career progression). For example, Mendel (2010), in their study of Boys and Girls Clubs in Cleveland, highlighted that a strong emphasis was placed on creating responsible citizens through making them academically and career ready. Whilst this goal of youth development was deemed to be appropriate, the intervention recognised that partnerships with schools or specialised service providers may be necessary as an area for further development to make this happen. Similarly, Rihan (2011) discussed that the youth club's mission extended beyond the immediate recreational and social needs of young people to include being a platform for leadership development, civic engagement and employability. However, in this study, the activities that emerged to address these identified needs were often poorly implemented, but more importantly, were viewed as lacking relevance for children and young people. This emphasises the importance of delivering high quality activities that are specifically focused on the developmental and aspirational needs of young people and that follow their interests. Therefore, appropriateness should be judged not just in terms of what youth clubs set out to achieve but should also consider the interests and aspirational needs of young people.

Feasibility

Feasibility concerns the extent to which the intervention can be successfully implemented in a specific setting. This is fundamentally about the practicality or ability to deliver the intervention in the target environment. Youth clubs were praised for being able to accommodate the needs of children and young people to use spaces and equipment autonomously (Croix & Doherty, 2023). Use of drop-in access, mixed recreational activities and opportunities for supervised yet flexible engagement, in combination with an easily accessible centre in the community are particularly conducive to meeting children and young people's needs, making them more feasible to implement (Mercier et al., 2000; Moran et al., 2018; Wells et al., 2021). In addition, feasibility was increased when youth clubs had extended opening hours and the integration of multiple supports on-site such as employment opportunities, meals and leadership activities (Wells et al., 2021).

Research suggests that feasibility of youth clubs is enhanced by partnering with outside organisations, enabling them to bring in more resources (Wells et al., 2021). For Police Community Youth Clubs in Australia, partnering with local organisations was critical in reducing resource burdens on staff whilst helping to ensure specialist input from outside organisations (Cross et al., 2015). However, for

this to be feasible, partners may need to adapt their roles and perspectives. For example, when youth clubs partnered with police, they adapted their role to be less law-enforcement-led and more focused on providing mentorship to children and young people (Cross et al., 2015). Feasibility in this context concerned the extent to which police could adapt their policing model to fit in with the culture they were trying to create.

Bashir et al. (2013) examined the impact of providing funding for the development of new or improved youth clubs. Critically, insufficient staffing and over-reliance on volunteers had impacted the feasibility of the delivery model, restricting opening hours and reducing the provision offered to children and young people. This demonstrates the importance of having qualified youth workers employed to run youth clubs.

Fidelity

Fidelity refers to the degree to which an intervention was delivered as intended. Five studies examined fidelity, primarily in terms of whether the underlying principles of youth work were delivered as intended. For example, in English youth clubs, fidelity to youth work principles was evident in the consistent implementation of relational, informal, and participatory practices, with youth workers carefully curating physical and social spaces to reflect the ethos of informal learning (Croix & Doherty, 2023). Similarly, programmes were consistently implemented in line with their objectives. For instance, Police-Citizens Youth Clubs in Australia were largely delivered in line with their intended objectives of fostering positive youth–police relationships, youth development, and community connection. Staff and officers described a consistent focus on building trust through respectful, non-judgemental engagement, reinforced by consistent role modelling, empowerment messages, and the promotion of safe, inclusive environments (Cross et al., 2015).

However, youth clubs had to implement activities based on the needs of the children and young people and communities, meaning they were implemented differently in different areas (Cross et al., 2015). Staff implementing the Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland reported the need to adapt national programme models to fit the unique needs of Cleveland youth, particularly noting that some standardised programming was "outdated" or mismatched to the local context. Such adaptations suggest that while core elements are consistently delivered, fidelity often requires balancing national frameworks with local flexibility (Mendel, 2010). Critically, a process evaluation in Egypt highlights that cost, infrastructure and leadership issues impacted on service delivery fidelity across sites (Rihan, 2011).

These studies highlight the need for adaptability in implementing youth club programmes, whilst ensuring that the correct infrastructure and leadership are in place to enable these to be reliably implemented.

In England, the ability to sustain long opening hours at youth clubs was highlighted as an issue amongst stakeholders (Bashir et al., 2013). Some youth clubs were opening less frequently than intended due to a lack of young people attending and budget cuts made by the local authority. Stakeholders suggested several reasons why low attendance could be an issue, including a lack of awareness of the centre and not being able to offer activities the young people want. Some areas have tried to address these issues, including hiring a marketing manager to raise awareness of the centre with young people in the immediate area, as well as outside of it.

Reach/Penetration

Reach and penetration refer to the extent to which the intervention has been integrated or reached eligible recipients. Youth clubs were able to successfully reach diverse young people, in terms of ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic background (Croix & Doherty, 2023; Cross et al., 2015; Seely, 1949; Vorhaus et al., 2011). In many cases, children and young people attended the youth clubs for prolonged periods (>12 months), with some returning to volunteer once they reached adulthood (Vorhaus et al., 2011). Outreach and flexible club environments enabled inclusion of children and young people who may not otherwise engage in organised youth activities (Croix & Doherty, 2023). In particular, youth clubs provide a safe environment which is not easily substituted for other activities (Villa, 2024).

Some studies highlighted that the type of facilities available and their location affected the reach and penetration of youth clubs (Bashir et al., 2013; Rihan, 2011). Attempts to mitigate the impact of youth club location included working with transport companies to extend routes or offer discounted travel to youth club members (Bashir et al., 2013). In addition, public outreach activities were essential to raising the awareness and profile of youth clubs and their offerings to the community (Barnekov et al., 1999). Ensuring activities were of interest to young people and were low-cost or free was also highlighted as important for widening the reach and penetration of youth clubs into a community (Cross et al., 2015; Shannon & Robertson, 2007).

Sustainability

Sustainability refers to the ability to maintain or continue to implement youth clubs over time. Most of the included studies discussed the barriers to sustainable implementation of youth clubs, including financial stability, access to resources and job security for staff. In England, Villa (2024) examined youth club closures across London. Nearly all youth workers who responded to the survey noted that their funding had reduced in recent years, which resulted in fewer youth clubs and higher levels of unemployment for youth workers. Some respondents noted that because of the funding cuts they were no longer able to provide one-to-one support for young people or to fund trips. It was difficult to attract new youth workers due to reduced professional prospects, with a general sense that youth work was not appropriately valued and professionals felt unsupported by the government.

Bashir et al. (2013) examined the myplace programme, which provides funds for the development of new and improved youth clubs across England. Ongoing access to funding was highlighted as a concern for the sustainability of these new and improved youth clubs. Whilst some had secured funding from external providers for the short-term (one-to-two years), there were concerns around the long-term viability. Providing free activities was flagged as an area that was likely to be reviewed as the need to generate an income to sustain the youth clubs grows.

The vulnerability to funding cuts was an issue internationally (Rihan, 2011). In the US, a smaller resource base for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland, compared to larger areas, led to sustainability risks (Mendel, 2010). In Australia, sustainability of PCYCs whilst low-cost or free delivery models, volunteer involvement, and flexible scheduling enhanced viability, structured programmes, particularly those involving external partnerships, were vulnerable to funding cuts (Cross et al., 2015). Informal mentoring, volunteering, and skill-building activities proved more resilient, requiring fewer external resources and being more easily woven into everyday operations. Similarly, the use of youth cafés in Ireland was resilient to shifts in attendance patterns and seasonal changes, due to its informal, drop-in structure, reliant primarily on volunteer youth workers (Moran et al., 2018).

Experiences of Children and Young People

Twelve studies explored the views of children and young people participating in community-based youth work (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Croix & Doherty, 2023; Cross et al., 2015; Haberlin, 2014; Mendel, 2010; Mercier et al., 2000; Moran et al.,

2018; Shannon & Robertson, 2007; Tefera et al., 2021; Vorhaus et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2021).

Three studies were conducted in the UK (Croix & Doherty, 2023; Moran et al., 2018; Vorhaus et al., 2011), three from Canada (Haberlin, 2014; Mercier et al., 2000; Shannon & Robertson, 2007), four from the US (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Mendel, 2010; Wells et al., 2021), one from Australia (Cross et al., 2015) and one from Ethiopia (Tefera et al., 2021). Study quality varied: six were assessed as Moderate (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009; Croix & Doherty, 2023; Cross et al., 2015; Moran et al., 2018; Wells et al., 2021), three as Low (Mercier et al., 2000; Shannon & Robertson, 2007; Tefera et al., 2021), and two as Very Low for process evaluations (Haberlin, 2014; Vorhaus et al. 2011). Despite variation in quality, the collective evidence highlights consistent themes in how children and young people experience and evaluate youth work provision, with notable differences in relation to cultural, structural, and organisational contexts.

Across countries and contexts, children and young people consistently valued youth spaces as safe, inclusive and supportive environments that allowed them to build confidence, form social connections and escape pressures from school, home, or unsafe neighbourhoods. In Ireland, youth cafés were described as vital refuges where children and young people could "just be you" and not feel pressured to "wear a mask" in the way they did at school or home (Moran et al., 2018). Similarly, young people at a youth club in London spoke positively about acceptance and belonging, with one young person emphasising "no-one really judges you" and another highlighted how the centre offers a constructive alternative to street-based activities; "even if you come and you don't do any activities, it's still good to be here, cos you're not just on the streets gallivanting, in bad places and stuff" (Vorhaus et al., 2011). In the US, young people engaged in community-based youth organisations echoed these sentiments, describing these spaces as "a second home" and places where they could "be themselves" without fear of harm or exclusion (Wells et al., 2021). Taken together, these findings illustrate the importance of safe and accepting environments, which children and young people consistently associated with enhanced confidence, resilience, and wellbeing.

Beyond safety and acceptance, one study showed how youth spaces could be life-changing for those from marginalised backgrounds. In Croix & Doherty's (2023) study of open youth work in England, one young participant explained that "when you're from a marginalised group and you don't have enough space in the world as is, you can go to a space where that's all of who you're with… and that time doing activities like climbing or archery… it does save your life". This

testimony illustrates the heightened significance of youth work for those excluded or underrepresented in mainstream social spaces, where identity-affirming environments provide not only recreation but also survival, resilience and belonging. Similarly, in Ireland, youth cafés offered emotional refuge from challenges such as relationship breakdown, discrimination, and societal pressures around image, substance use, and sexuality. Several spoke about the café's role in helping them "face the future", overcoming social anxiety, and changing harmful behaviours, with one young woman (aged 17) explaining, "having the support of the people here… that I belong somewhere" was key to stopping drug use. In contrast, such experiences were less explicitly explored in the Australian, US or Ethiopia contexts, suggesting that questions of marginalisation and equity are more visible in some research contexts than others.

Children and young people's experiences also reflected contextual differences shaped by programme design and local context. In Australia, the Police-Citizens Youth Clubs were viewed not only as recreational spaces but as environments fostering behavioural change and personal growth. Female youth club attendees observed how male peers had become more respectful over time: "With encouragement the boys have changed…they were complete assholes when I first met them…now they're more encouraging…they like get you on their team" (Cross et al., 2015). This highlights the transformative role of structured group activities in reshaping attitudes and relationships. By contrast, Canadian youth placed strong emphasis on being able to influence programmes through leadership opportunities (Haberlin, 2014). As one participant involved in Keystone, the leadership programme of a Boys and Girls Club, described "being able to put my own ideas in [to the Club]" led to "some changes to make it better." While both cases highlight positive developmental outcomes and participation, they reflect different components: the Australian model foregrounds behavioural change through structured engagement, whereas the Canadian example stresses autonomy and youth voice.

Importantly, the relational dimension of youth work was repeatedly emphasised across studies. In England, children and young people described youth workers as approachable and non-judgemental, with one young person reflecting that "I feel like [youth workers] should know how to communicate…you can't be judgmental…that's their only way of support and advice" (Croix & Doherty, 2023). In the US, the value of daily consistency was highlighted "You can be here from nine to nine every day of the week… you can build a bond with staff" (Wells et al., 2021). In addition, quantitative evidence from a large-scale survey reinforced

these relational findings (Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009) with young people rating that staff provided an environment which is structured, with peer cooperation encouraged, along with high expectations and recognition (average response of 3 or more out of 4). These instances show how sustained relationships with trusted adults were central to young people's experiences of belonging, safety, and self-worth. Notably, these findings underscore that the impact of youth work is tied to relational ethos and consistency of care rather than authority and discipline.

Children and young people also highlighted the significance of social mixing and peer connections. In the UK, one participant reflected that youth clubs acted as "a bridge, between all different ages… like socialising, which you wouldn't normally have at school" (Croix & Doherty, 2023). In Ireland, youth cafés were described as "a family… we support each other" (Moran et al., 2018), while Canadian participants in drop-in centres similarly valued opportunities for peer connection and recognition, explaining that "helping out in the community makes you feel good" (Shannon & Robertson, 2007). Across settings, social interaction was not just recreational but deeply tied to identity, belonging, and resilience.

However, there were also critical perspectives and challenges. In Ethiopia, while youth centres were credited with preventing involvement in "undesirable" activities and promoting prosocial behaviour, concerns were raised about young people skipping school to attend or engage in gambling (Tefera et al., 2021). In Canada, youth involved in volunteering expressed that while recognition was motivating, at times "people forget to say thank you… it's really just saying that you don't appreciate the hard work" (Shannon & Robertson, 2007). Such critiques illustrate that youth spaces are not inherently empowering; rather, its value depends on how effectively programmes balance structure with autonomy, participation with recognition, and safety with opportunities for challenge.

Universally, young people value spaces that are safe, welcoming, and relationally supportive where they can socialise freely and build confidence. When comparing studies, key similarities emerged around the importance of safety, belonging, and relational support, but notable differences lie in how these outcomes are achieved and understood. In England and Ireland, youth provision was framed primarily as inclusive and protective, countering exclusions from school, society, and family pressures. In Canada, the emphasis was on participation, leadership, and young people's capacity to shape provision. In Australia, behavioural transformation through structured recreation was central, while in the US, community-based youth centres were experienced as protective "second homes" from community violence, with a strong emphasis on identity and role modelling.

Finally, in Ethiopia, the youth centres were positioned more as preventative and corrective institutions with a stronger moral framing than the more participatory ethos seen in Western contexts.

Taken together, these findings highlight both universal and context-specific aspects of young people's experiences in youth work and community provision. However, the outcomes young people emphasise including behavioural change, leadership, recognition, safety or prevention, vary by setting, reflecting cultural, structural, and organisational differences. Critically, young people's voices underscore that the success of such interventions rests on being treated with respect, given genuine opportunities for participation, and having their contributions valued.

How much does it cost?

Four studies provided data on cost, of which two were from England (Bashir et al., 2013; Villa, 2024), one was from the US (Arbreton et al., 2008) and one was from Egypt (Rihan, 2011). With the exception of one study, all were over ten years old.

Three studies highlighted that children and young people were expected to pay small membership fees (Arbreton et al., 2008; Bashir et al., 2013; Rihan, 2011). In England, fees ranged from 50p per visit to an annual membership of £12 (Bashir et al., 2013). In the US, annual fees ranged from $2 to $10, with ample opportunities for scholarships for families from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Arbreton et al., 2008). In Egypt (Rihan, 2011), these ranged from E£2 to 28 (average E£13.58), with additional fees for specific activities (e.g., E£20 per month for karate). It is critical, given the findings regarding socioeconomic status above, that consideration is given for low-income families who may not be able to afford the entry fee, enabling all young people to access youth clubs.

Two studies based in England conducted in-depth cost-benefit analyses. Villa (2024) explored the impact of youth club closures in London. Prior to closure, the yearly running costs of youth clubs ranged from £32,500 to £610,523; the average cost was £169,567, and the average cost per young person estimated at £350 per year. However, Villa (2024) concluded that for every £1 saved through closure of youth clubs, the costs to society equate to £2.85. Most of this figure (£1.90) is related to reduced educational attainment and the remainder (£0.95) is related to the costs of crime. Bashir et al. (2013) found that youth club attendees reported engaging in higher levels of exercise, which the authors suggest may prevent young people from becoming obese. If 1% of attendees experience these positive effects, the authors estimate the monetary value of this impact to be £305,500, rising to £729,400 if 10% of attendees experience these positive effects. These

findings demonstrate the importance of youth clubs in cost savings for the wider community, including educational, justice, and health systems.

Conclusion and Takeaway Messages

The following discussion interprets our findings on Universal Youth Clubs, first examining the limited evidence on violence reduction, then situating this within broader impacts on crime, offending, and other relevant youth outcomes.

Violence

Our primary question for this review was whether universal youth clubs reduce youth violence. Direct evidence was limited to a single quasi-experimental study (Villa, 2024) of London club closures. We add no new estimates beyond Villa's (2024) calculations. With only one violence outcome, no meta-analysis was feasible, however, we add Villa's violence estimate to the crime and offending analysis.

Crime and Offending

When looking at crime and offending outcomes more broadly, a clearer positive pattern emerges. Combining data from the two available studies, our meta-analysis found that participation in universal youth clubs is associated with a moderate and meaningful reduction in youth crime and offending. In quantitative terms, youth club attendees showed about a 13% reduction in crime and offending behaviours compared to similar youth who did not participate in youth clubs. In practical terms, if we assume that 25% of non-attending children and young people would typically become involved in crime, our findings imply this might drop to roughly 22% among youth club participants, a modest yet important absolute risk reduction.

This finding is consistent with wider research on youth programmes in the international context, for example, an evaluation of Boys & Girls Clubs in public housing areas observed 13% fewer crimes in housing projects that offered a club programme compared to similar sites without a club programme (Boys & Girls Clubs of America, 2004).

All outcomes

Beyond crime and offending outcomes, the two included studies tracked a wide array of outcomes of interest, reflecting different aspects of young people's lives. In total, nine YEF outcome domains were identified across the two studies, spanning not only violence, crime and offending, but also outcomes like drug and alcohol use; bullying; school engagement; community connectedness; self-esteem; happiness; and building and maintaining relationships. To get a high-

level view, we conducted a meta-analysis across all measured relevant outcomes to see the overall trends associated with youth club participation.

Encouragingly, the results suggest that youth clubs tend to produce positive impacts across this broad spectrum of outcomes. On average, participation was linked to about an 11% improvement (or reduction in negative outcomes) when compared to non-participation. In other words, considering all relevant outcomes together, youth club attendees fared better overall as they had lower rates of problem behaviours and better scores on positive indicators than those not participating in clubs.

This has both policy and practice significance as it implies that the benefits of youth clubs are not confined to one area; rather, they seem to extend to both reducing adverse outcomes (like crime, substance use, or bullying) and enhancing beneficial outcomes (like engagement in school, wellbeing, and social connections).

The evidence base is sparse, so these findings are best viewed as promising but tentative. They highlight the potential for youth clubs to contribute to multiple aspects of young people's development, while also underscoring the need for more research to enhance confidence in each area.

What Works?

Consistent with best practice guidance (Pollock et al., 2022), we did not conduct meta-regression due to the limited number of studies (fewer than 10), which can increase the risk of both Type I and Type II errors[11] due to low statistical power.

Instead, we ran subgroup analyses for two outcome domains reported in both studies, School Engagement and Community Connectedness to test whether effects differed across domains. Given the small number of clusters, results from the subgroup analysis should be interpreted cautiously and treated as tentative.

The meta-analysis suggests that youth club participation yields modest but meaningful benefits for young people's educational and social engagement. A small yet significant improvement in school engagement (around a 6% increase) was observed, echoing wider evidence that taking part in structured extracurricular activities is linked to better attendance, higher attainment and

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[11] Type I error refers to finding an effect that is not truly there (a "false positive"), while Type II error refers to missing a real effect (a "false negative"). Statistical power is the probability of correctly detecting a true effect; when power is low, the risk of Type II error increases.

lower dropout rates (Donnelly et al., 2019), underlining the role of such clubs in supporting academic engagement.

Meanwhile, the positive boost in community connectedness, around a 15% improvement, is consistent with qualitative and survey findings that youth programmes can strengthen young people's bonds and sense of belonging in their communities (Onside, 2025). Government reviews similarly highlight that participation in youth social action and clubs fosters greater school engagement and social cohesion among young people (Alma Economics, 2021).

Notably, there was no significant difference between the positive effects observed on both school engagement and on community connectedness, suggesting that improvements in educational engagement and community ties go hand-in-hand for children attending youth clubs.

These findings align with international evidence. A recent rapid review from Ireland found that young people's participation in community youth programmes is linked to modest but positive gains in school engagement and produce meaningful benefits for young people's sense of belonging and connection to their community (Brady et al., 2022). An evaluation of Boys & Girls Clubs in the United States (Research for Action, 2024) found that participants had higher school attendance rates compared to non-members. Similarly, a longitudinal cohort study of the same clubs in Canada (Enns, J. et al., 2022) reported that club members were more likely to achieve higher grades over time.

Who Benefits Most?

Due to the limited number of effectiveness studies, it was not possible to assess group differences (e.g., by gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status) within the meta-analysis. The small number of studies and limited reporting of subgroup-specific outcomes meant that such comparisons could not be conducted. Consequently, the meta-analysis findings reflect effects across all participants and do not provide evidence on whether certain groups may benefit more or less from youth club participation.

Only six studies provided narratives into the experiences of youth clubs according to the personal characteristics of children and young people, covering gender, ethnicity, SEND, socioeconomic status, and intersectionality between ethnicity and socioeconomic status. No data was available on neurodiversity, place of residence, care experience or education.

Findings indicate that youth clubs have a positive impact on children and young people who have a disability, are Black and Global Majority, from low

socioeconomic backgrounds, are transgender or receive Free School Meals. However, these must be interpreted with caution as they are based on single studies. Despite this, inclusivity was consistently praised across studies as the reason for youth clubs' success in this space. For example, having low-cost options, culturally appropriate activities, and gender-safe spaces allows children and young people to engage with youth clubs successfully, regardless of their backgrounds. Engaging children and young people in activity development to ensure it meets their needs is particularly important for the success of youth clubs.

Limitations

Challenges with the studies measuring effectiveness

Only two quasi-experiments met inclusion criteria, both leveraging the same nationwide austerity-era club closures. This limited evidence-base reduces certainty of findings. The only violence estimate comes from Villa (2024), and although this is a very high-quality QED, and the number of observations is statistically robust, an additional group-based design to confirm this finding would be advantageous.

One potential incompatibility to note in the meta-analysis relates to follow-up duration of each. Villa (2024) observes outcomes up to several years after clubs closed, capturing potentially persistent effects on offending. Bashir et al.'s (2013) follow-up was only a matter of months, capturing only short-term changes in self-reported behaviour. This difference does not preclude meta-analysis, but it implies we are combining a study with longer term effects with a study measuring shorter term effects, which is likely a key driver of heterogeneity in the all-outcomes analysis.

An additional incompatibility to note, and a key limitation of this synthesis is the stark contrast in sample size and statistical precision between the two included studies. Villa's (2024) study, based on tens of thousands of observations, provides highly precise estimates of approximately a 15% increase in youth crime associated with club closures. By contrast, Bashir et al. (2013) followed fewer than 400 young people and produces a much less precise estimate, indicating roughly a 2% reduction in offending that was not statistically significant. In a weighted meta-analysis, Villa's (2024) result inevitably dominates the pooled estimate because of its far smaller variance. In practice, this means the meta-analytic effect size will lie very close to Villa's (2024) pooled estimate, with only modest adjustment. The pooled confidence interval will likewise be shaped almost entirely

by Villa's narrow interval, while Bashir et al.'s (2013) very wide interval adds little to overall precision but does contribute to between-study heterogeneity.

Finally, although we pre-specified moderator analyses at the protocol stage (moderators like study quality, study design, funding characteristics, etc.) the evidence base (two independent studies with outcomes sparsely distributed across categories) did not permit meaningful meta-regression or subgroup analysis to identify conditions under which youth clubs may be more effective.

We therefore limited synthesis to outcomes observed across both studies (crime and offending, school engagement, and community connectedness) as pooling multiple effect sizes within each category to obtain a more precise category-specific summary and to examine whether the effects trended in a consistent direction across both studies, rather than over-interpreting underpowered moderator models. Even so, caution must be exercised as each meta-analysis draws on only the same two independent studies, leaving the effective degrees of freedom for RVE essentially nil. Simulation work indicates that with fewer than 10 clusters, RVE standard errors are biased downward and Type I error rates are inflated, with low power also raising the risk of Type II error (e.g., Hedges et al., 2010; Tipton & Pustejovsky, 2015). Accordingly, we treat these estimates as exploratory and descriptive, and we do not pursue broader moderator models, as any apparent moderator differences would almost certainly reflect study-specific factors rather than generalisable patterns.

Challenges with the studies measuring implementation

There was limited data available for Adoption, Feasibility, Fidelity, Sustainability, and Cost, where the number of studies exploring these outcomes was low (fewer than nine studies). In addition, the quality of included studies was generally poor, with the majority rated as low or very low-quality on the YEF-EQA. Low-quality studies often fail to report context systematically, making it difficult to align findings with Proctor's implementation outcomes framework. Furthermore, low-quality studies are prone to bias, particularly regarding cost and sustainability outcomes which require more robust longitudinal data and economic methods.

Only six of the seventeen included studies were written in the past 10 years. Given that the continuation of youth clubs is known to be affected by community resourcing, such as reliable funding (e.g., Villa, 2024), the lack of recent implementation data limits our ability to interpret barriers and facilitators to implementing youth clubs today. This was particularly problematic for Cost, where only one study was written within the past 10 years.

Final Thoughts and Recommendations

Even with limited evidence, the direction of findings is consistent: youth clubs appear to reduce youth crime and deliver substantial economic and social benefits more broadly. For every £1 'saved' through closing youth clubs, there is a cost to society of £2.85, caused by reductions in educational attainment and increased crime involvement amongst children and young people (Villa, 2024). Evidence from implementation studies indicates that the success of youth clubs is dependent on providing affordable, low-cost and free activities to children and young people. Both structured activities and unstructured time should be available. Structured activities should draw on children and young people's input and ideas to ensure these are relevant and enjoyable, whilst staff should be available during unstructured time, taking a mentorship role. Gender-specific and culturally appropriate activities for children and young people should be considered to improve engagement, such as safe spaces for LGBTQ+ children and young people to come together and female-only activities. Youth club spaces should be created and tailored in collaboration with children and young people to ensure the spaces adequately meet their needs, whilst being led by trained youth workers, skilled in building relationships with children and young people. Long-term investment in youth clubs should be prioritised to provide stability to children and young people and local communities. Overall, children and young people hold very positive views on youth clubs.

Drawing together the learnings from this mixed-methods evidence synthesis, we make the following key recommendations:
- Fund high-quality evaluations, including quasi-experiments and, where feasible, randomised trials across varied settings to test impact on violence, crime, and wider outcomes.
- Establish systems for ongoing monitoring of youth club outcomes (crime rates, attendance, self-reports, wellbeing) to build a stronger evidence base over time.
- More subgroup analysis is needed to understand who benefits most, particularly in relation to gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and SEND.
- We recommend engaging children and young people in developing youth club spaces and activities, ensuring these are personally meaningful and encouraging uptake.
- Youth clubs need to be supported by a stable and reliable income. As such, Local Authorities need to prioritise sustainable funding for youth clubs,

which will lead to long-term cost reductions in education, justice and health spaces.

The evidence to date points to benefits across crime reduction, education, and community connectedness, with no evidence of harm. The case for investment is clear: when run well, youth clubs provide safe spaces, positive relationships, and developmental opportunities that can change young people's trajectories while delivering long-term value for society. As further high-quality research emerges, these conclusions should be revisited and refined, but the current evidence supports youth clubs as a valuable component of youth development and crime prevention strategies.

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Appendix 1. Methods of the systematic review

Protocol

Prior to initiating this systematic review, we developed a comprehensive protocol for an Evidence and Gap Map (EGM) outlining the research objectives, eligibility criteria, search strategy, data extraction, quality appraisal, and synthesis methods. This protocol was registered and is available on the Open Science Framework (OSF),[12] ensuring transparency and adherence to predefined methods.

The search strategy and eligibility criteria outlined in the protocol are designed to be sufficiently comprehensive to capture a broad and systematically identified body of literature, enabling the extraction of relevant subsets of studies for inclusion in the Toolkit. The methods described below are aligned with the current Toolkit Strands on Problem-Oriented Policing and Pre-court Diversion ensuring a structured and rigorous approach to evidence synthesis.

Eligibility Criteria

To define the scope of relevant research, we applied the following criteria from the outset:

- **Population:** Studies had to include children aged 0–17 with open eligibility. Interventions restricted to specific groups (e.g. young people already in the youth justice system) were excluded.

- **Dosage:** Eligible interventions operated on a regular, weekly basis and offered multiple opportunities for engagement. Time-limited programmes (e.g. 12-week courses) or those requiring prescribed attendance (e.g. at least once per week) were excluded.

- **Setting:** Provision had to be community-based (e.g. youth centres, recreation centres, churches). School-based clubs were included if they met the other criteria. Closed settings such as custody were excluded.

- **Activities:** Clubs needed to provide a voluntary mix of structured and unstructured activities (e.g. homework support alongside informal socialising). Interventions without opportunities for unstructured time (e.g. football training programmes) or those defined as single-focus (arts

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[12] Protocol is available to access here: https://osf.io/vamxy

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projects, mentoring schemes, wilderness camps, or uniformed groups such as Scouts) were excluded.

- **Participation model:** Only open-access, drop-in, voluntary provision was eligible. Programmes with fixed schedules or mandatory attendance were excluded.

- **Delivery model:** Interventions had to be delivered by voluntary and community sector organisations, led by youth workers or trained volunteers. Delivery by school staff, youth justice providers, or mental health specialists was excluded.

Details of screening

A total of 2,607 titles and abstracts identified as potentially relevant to the current strand were independently assessed by two reviewers. To ensure a fair distribution of workload, the screening process was structured as follows:

- Eight reviewers screened a total of 2,607 records.
- The EPPI-Reviewer robot conducted a duplicate screening of all 2,607 records to enhance consistency.

A senior team member reconciled discrepancies between reviewers and the robot. Common errors and inconsistencies were noted and discussed in a team meeting, ensuring alignment in decision-making criteria.

At the end of title and abstract screening:

- 267 studies were marked as included.

- 2,340 studies were marked as excluded.

A total of 267 studies proceeded to full-text screening.

Table 55: *Full-text screening results*

Reason for exclusion	Number of Records Excluded at Full-Text Level
1	Did not target children and young people
35	PDF not accessible
51	Study Design not eligible
48	Outcomes or intervention not relevant

| 20 | Excluded based on language |
| 3 | Duplicates |

For inaccessible PDFs, the team attempted to contact lead authors to request access to the report or further data. Following full-text screening, 111 studies were flagged as potentially relevant for inclusion. These were distributed across the team.

Of these 111 papers, 6 papers were excluded upon further review. All 6 excluded studies were thoroughly checked by a senior team member.

Table 66: *Reasons for exclusion after full-text screening*

Reason for exclusion	Number of Records Excluded at EGM Data Extraction Level
Study design not meeting inclusion criteria	5
Outcomes or intervention not relevant	1

Following data extraction for the EGM (111 studies), 23 studies were deemed eligible for additional extraction for the Universal Youth Clubs Toolkit strand.

However, of the 23 studies initially selected for further extraction for the strand, six were subsequently excluded by a senior member of the research team.

Five were excluded from the Universal Youth Clubs strand due to study design and one was excluded due to outcomes not being relevant.

Therefore, a total of 17 studies were included at the Toolkit data extraction level. The characteristics of these studies are detailed in Appendix 3 and Appendix 5.
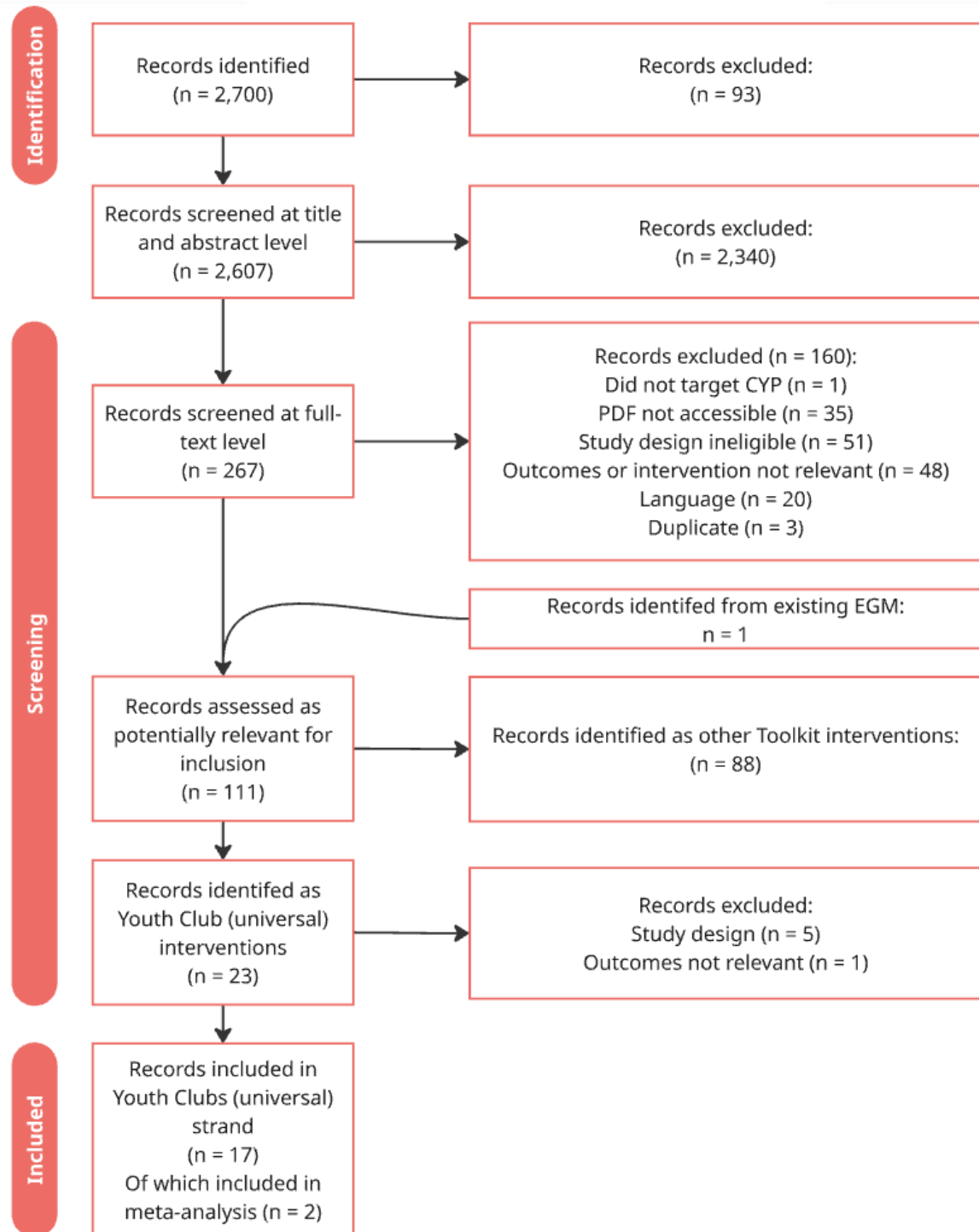
Figure 9: PRISMA Flow Diagram

Quality appraisal process

The YEF-EQA tool was used across all 17 Toolkit studies to systematically assess the quality, reliability, and relevance of the research. This tool was applied by one

reviewer, with a second reviewer checking their appraisals. Both studies included in the meta-analysis were quality appraised in duplicate by two senior reviewers.

Table 77: *Quality appraisal ratings for studies included in the Universal Youth Clubs Toolkit strand*

Study ID	Overall quality of the study	Study Design
Arbreton et al. (2008)	Moderate	Process evaluation
Barnekov et al. (1999)	Very low	Process evaluation
Bashir et al. (2013)	Moderate Moderate	QED – Quasi-Experimental Design Process evaluation
Croix & Doherty (2023)	Moderate	Process evaluation
Cross et al. (2015)	Moderate	Process evaluation
Glish (1979)	Low	Process evaluation
Haberlin (2014)	Moderate	Process evaluation
Mendel (2010)	Very low	Process evaluation
Mercier et al. (2000)	Low	Process evaluation
Moran et al. (2018)	Moderate	Process evaluation
Rihan (2011)	Low	Process evaluation
Seely (1949)	Very Low	Process evaluation
Shannon & Robertson (2007)	Low	Process evaluation
Tefera et al. (2021)	Low	Process evaluation

Villa (2024)	High	QED – Quasi-Experimental Design
Vorhaus et al. (2011)	Very low	Process evaluation
Wells et al. (2021)	Moderate	Process evaluation

How the findings were analysed and combined

Comparability of the outcome definitions:

A key step prior to running the meta-analysis is ensuring that the crime and offending outcomes are defined consistently enough to combine. Both studies measure youth offending or antisocial behaviour, but there are differences in how these are collected and calculated:

Villa (2024) defines crime outcomes using official crime records. The primary outcome is the **youth offending rate**, defined as "the number of residents aged 10–17 who have offended per 1,000 residents aged 10–17". A second measure is the **youth crime incidence rate**, defined as "the number of crimes committed by residents aged 10–17 per 1,000 youths". Within this, Villa provides details on whether these were acquisitive crimes, violent crimes, or drug-related crimes. In essence, the first is a per-capita rate of youth offenders (a proportion of youths engaging in crime), and the second is a per-capita rate of total offences by youths. These outcomes are derived from police administrative data (Metropolitan Police Service), ensuring objective recording of criminal offending (mostly reported and detected offences).

Bashir et al. (2013) measured youth offending and antisocial behaviour outcomes via a survey of young people. Specifically, they asked youths whether they had engaged in any of five delinquent acts in the past three months: purposely damaging a vehicle, stealing from a home, shoplifting, graffiti and/or vandalism, or smashing public property. From these, a composite binary indicator was constructed to flag whether a respondent did at least one such antisocial act in the last 3 months. This composite "antisocial behaviour (ASB) involvement" outcome serves as their crime and offending measure. In addition, the survey tracked related risky behaviours like underage drinking and drug use.

Both studies target a conceptually similar outcome: youth involvement in crime or antisocial behaviour. Villa's (2024) outcome definition is broader and more official, and it includes any recorded crime (violent, property, drug offences, etc.) committed by youth, with a yearly perspective and an official threshold

(detection by police). Bashir et al.'s (2013) outcome definition is narrower in scope (focusing on property-related offences) and relies on self-report over a 3-month period, likely capturing less serious incidents and those that would not have come to police attention otherwise.

It was agreed by the review team and YEF that both studies do provide high-level indication on the effect of Universal Youth Clubs on Youth Crime and Offending and so they should be combined in a meta-analysis.

Comparability of the treatment group:

Villa (2024) defines "treatment areas" as blocks where all nearby youth clubs **closed** and "comparator areas" as blocks where no nearby clubs closed. In contrast, Bashir et al. (2013) investigates the presence vs. absence of a new youth club. The "treatment group" consists of youths who attended a youth club, while the "comparator group" consists of similar youths in areas without a youth club.

Essentially, these are two sides of the same coin. If youth clubs have a protective effect, closing them should increase youth crime, and conversely opening or running them should decrease youth crime. Conceptually, this meta-analysis estimates the effectiveness of the presence of youth clubs. To do this, we retain Villa's (2024) closure estimates but recode their direction so that a beneficial effect of having a youth club corresponds to a reduction in crime and offending. Bashir et al (2013) treatment effect is already oriented in this way (investigates whether attendance reduces adverse outcomes and increases positive ones). This recoding is necessary and ensures consistency across studies, with **negative log effects always interpreted as a benefit of youth club provision.**

Preparing the data frame

As is common in meta-analysis, the team encountered several challenges in bringing effects onto a common scale across the two included studies.

First, the effects provided in Villa (2024) were estimated with regression models (e.g. panel regressions with fixed effects); crime outcomes were essentially treated as count or rate data (e.g. number of offences per population) and expressed as percentage changes, whereas exam outcomes were continuous. In Bashir et al.'s (2013) evaluation, outcomes were mostly binary or categorical measures (e.g. whether a young person engaged in any antisocial behaviour in the last 3 months, whether they enjoy school, etc.). Bashir et al.'s (2013) evaluation tracked the proportion of respondents with positive outcomes in each group over time. They then computed the within-group change (the percentage-point change from baseline to follow-up in each group) and the "difference in change" between the myplace and comparison samples. Bashir et al.'s (2013) analysis was

not regression-based, and statistical significance of changes was tested via McNemar's test for within-group changes and z-tests for differences in proportions between groups. In addition, Bashir et al. (2013) did not report odds ratios or SMDs (standardised mean differences); and results were presented as percentage-point changes rather than in a traditional effect size metric. For a meta-analysis, we needed a common metric that accommodates these differences in data structure.

Considering the nature of the data and methods, the **log Relative Incident Rate Ratio (log-RIRR)** (Wilson, 2022) emerges as the most appropriate effect size metric for a meta-analysis of these two studies.[13] We standardise direction so that a negative log-RIRR indicates a favourable effect of youth clubs (i.e., lower incidence of a harmful outcome, or higher probability of a desirable outcome after recoding).

The relative incident rate ratio (RIRR) provides a robust measure of change over time, independent of variations in population size or time intervals. Wilson (2022) notes that raw counts can be misleading due to population fluctuations, so analysis should focus on changes in underlying rates. A critical property of log RIRR and its logarithmic transformation is the stability across different units of time and population scales (e.g., annual vs. monthly rates or per 100,000 vs. per 10,000 population).

$$RIRR = \frac{(A x D)}{(B x C)}$$

To stabilise variances, the log transformation of RIRR was applied. The variance of log RIRR was computed as:

$$V(logRIRR) = \frac{1}{A} + \frac{1}{B} + \frac{1}{C} + \frac{1}{D}$$

To account for over-dispersion in count data, an adjustment was applied:

$$V(logRIRR) \, x \, D, \qquad N = 0.0008 \, X \, N + 1.2$$

where N represents the mean number of incidents per case.

A Poisson regression model was used to analyse count data, addressing potential over-dispersion and handling the skewed distribution of crime incidents. The analysis included random effects to account for between-study variability.

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[13] Initially we sought raw count data from Bashir to compute paired effect sizes, but at the time of writing this were not provided. Although Bashir's outcomes are paired, a simple RIRR (treating pre/post as independent) provides a reasonable approximation; bias is likely minimal, and a preventive effect would appear as RIRR < 1.0.

Second, there was a need to standardise the direction of some log RIRR values so that negative values consistently indicate a favourable intervention effect[14]. For example, in Bashir et al. (2013) the outcome "Proportion of respondents who enjoy school/college" increased more in the treatment group than in the control group, showing a greater improvement in the treatment condition. Since higher scores reflected a beneficial effect, the log RIRR required a negative adjustment to align with other outcomes where lower incident rates indicated a positive effect[15]. This approach ensures consistent and interpretable results across studies.

Third, Villa (2024) reported three educational outcomes (GCSE scores) as standardised mean differences (e.g., ATT = -0.035, SE = 0.009). Because all other outcomes in our synthesis were ratio-based (log-RIRR), we transformed these SMDs to the same metric to avoid incoherent pooling of difference- and ratio-scale effects. Following Wilson (2022), we (i) converted each SMD to a log-odds ratio assuming a logistic latent distribution

$$log(OR) \approx 1.814 \times SMD$$

(ii) converted logOR to a log-risk ratio using the Zhang–Yu approximation with a prespecified baseline risk

$$RR = \frac{OR}{(1 - p_0) + p_0\, OR}$$

and (iii) expressed the common effect as

$$LogRiRR = -\ln(RR)$$

Meta-regression

Although the dataset included 36 outcomes across the two effectiveness studies, a formal meta-regression was not conducted. Any moderator analysis would not be valid for confirmatory inference because of the nearly non-existent degrees of freedom, unstable heterogeneity estimates, and lack of replication within most moderator categories.

Robust variance estimation (RVE) is considered to account for dependency among outcomes, but the method requires a reasonable number of independent studies (clusters) to produce reliable standard errors and valid hypothesis tests. With only two studies, moderator analysis would result in unstable estimates, wide

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[14] Since a negative log RIRR reflects a decrease in crime (i.e., a reduction in incident rates), we retained the original direction of log RIRR values to align with this interpretation.
[15] This is achieved by simply multiplying the positive log RIRR by -1, Standard errors (SE) remained unchanged, as they represent variability rather than effect direction.

confidence intervals, and p-values that cannot be interpreted at conventional thresholds. Key limitations include the inability to reliably estimate between-study variance or test moderators with so few clusters, and the heightened risk of Type I errors if standard methods are used.

Put simply, any apparent moderator effects would likely reflect methodological differences between the two studies rather than generalisable patterns and it is not considered valid for confirmatory inference due to the nearly non-existent degrees of freedom and potential for biased results.

Meta-analysis

A random-effects model was fitted to the data. The amount of heterogeneity (i.e., τ^2), was estimated using the restricted maximum-likelihood estimator (REML; Viechtbauer, 2005). In addition to the estimate of τ^2, the Q-test for heterogeneity (Cochran, 1954) and the I^2 statistic (Higgins & Thompson, 2002) are reported. In case any amount of heterogeneity is detected, a prediction interval for the true outcomes is also provided (Riley et al., 2011).

To protect inference against within-study dependence and small samples, we obtained cluster-robust (CR2) standard errors, confidence intervals, and tests, clustering on study (Tipton, 2015; Pustejovsky & Tipton, 2018). These use small-sample, Satterthwaite-type degrees of freedom.

Studentized residuals and Cook's distances are used to examine whether studies may be outliers and/or influential in the context of the model (Viechtbauer & Cheung, 2010). Studies with a studentized residual larger than the $100 \times (1 - 0.05 / (2 \times k))$th percentile of a standard normal distribution are considered potential outliers (i.e., using a Bonferroni correction with two-sided $\alpha = 0.05$ $\alpha = 0.05$ for k studies included in the meta-analysis). Studies with a Cook's distance larger than the median plus six times the interquartile range of the Cook's distances are considered to be influential.

Software: The analysis was carried out using R (version 4.4.2) (R Foundation for Statistical Computing, 2020) and the metafor package (version 4.8.0) for model fitting and plots (Viechtbauer, 2010). clubSandwich was used for Robust Variance Estimation and CR2 inference (Tipton, 2015; Pustejovsky & Tipton, 2018). Data were imported with readxl.

Implementation data

Information on factors that influenced, or were perceived to influence, implementation was extracted from studies where this was reported by study authors.

To capture implementation outcomes the toolkit data extraction made use of Proctor et al's (2011) Implementation Outcomes Framework to capture and categorise the barriers and facilitators to achieving good implementation.

The data extraction for the toolkit is an extension of what is already captured in the EGM. For the EGM, the focus was on whether or not implementation outcomes were measured. In other words, does a study report on indicators of how well the programme/intervention was implemented or not. For toolkit data extraction we capture why implementation did or did not go well, what influenced implementation? This is typically thought of as barriers and facilitators to implementation. Information on barriers and facilitators will be presented using Proctor et al's (2011) Implementation Outcomes as headings so that the reader can understand the evidence, and gaps in the evidence, on the following implementation outcomes:

- **Acceptability**: Stakeholders' perceptions that the intervention or change is agreeable, palatable, or satisfactory.

    o Example indicators: Children's views on the intervention, participant engagement, satisfaction with content or delivery.

- **Adoption:** The decision or action to employ an intervention or implementation target.

    o Example indicators: Uptake of the intervention by services, schools, or communities.

- **Appropriateness:** The perceived fit or relevance of the intervention to the given context or problem.

    o Example indicators: Adaptations made to improve the intervention's fit with the context, perceived usefulness.

- **Feasibility**: The extent to which the intervention can be successfully implemented in a specific setting.

    o Example indicators: Evidence of practicality or utility, ability to deliver the intervention in the target environment.

- **Fidelity**: The degree to which the intervention was delivered as intended.

- o Example indicators: Training quality, dosage and intensity of the intervention, adherence to the prescribed approach.

- **Reach/Penetration:** The extent to which the intervention has been integrated into a service setting or reached eligible recipients.

  - o Example indicators: Ratio of recipients served to the target population, evidence of saturation or integration.

- **Sustainability:** The ability to maintain or institutionalise the intervention over time.

  - o Example indicators: Evidence of routinisation, integration into policies or practices, durability of implementation efforts.

Where implementation barriers/facilitators or influences on an implementation outcome were not measured and/or reported, this is stated.

The information extracted on each implementation outcome was narratively summarised. Further analysis and integration of implementation information with the meta-analysis and meta-regression was limited because of a lack of detailed evaluations of implementation.

Appendix 2. Location Details

	Number of UK Studies	Number (and Location) of International Studies
Overall, for Strand	4	13 (Australia; Canada x 3; USA x 6; Egypt; Ethiopia; Ireland)
Contributing to Evidence Quality Rating	2	0
Contributing to Estimated Impact on Violence	0	0
Contributing to Estimated Impact on Crime and Offending	2	0
Contributing to EDIE Information	3	3 (Australia; USA; Egypt)
Contributing to Implementation	4	13 (Australia; Canada x 3; USA x 6; Egypt; Ethiopia; Ireland)
Contributing to Cost Data	2	2 (Egypt; USA)

Appendix 3. Characteristics of included studies for effectiveness

Authors (Year)	Country	Study Design	Intervention	Population/ Place	Comparison	Outcomes Measured	Quality Level	Findings
Bashir et al 2013	England	QED and PE	myplace: Centres delivering a wide range of out of school activities and support services which vary from area to area including fitness classes, drop-in sports/team games, residential trips and arts classes.	Open-door policy where youth participate on a voluntary and drop-in basis.	Comparison group included young people from areas that did not have myplace provisions, however, they may/may not have been attending other youth clubs in their areas.	Crime and offending Drug and alcohol use Bullying School engagement Community Connectedness Building and Maintaining Relationships Self-esteem Happiness	QED – Moderate PE – Moderate	Attendance at myplace youth centres had a positive but limited impact on young people's outcomes. Statistically significant improvements were observed mainly for education and learning, particularly in enjoyment of school and reduced truancy among males, and for exercise participation. Other outcome areas such as antisocial behaviour, substance use, community engagement, peer

								relationships, aspiration, confidence, and wellbeing showed small positive changes for myplace attendees compared to the comparator group, but these were not statistically significant.
Villa, 2024	England	QED	Youth clubs in England: Community-based after school programme that provides young people space to engage in recreational and social activities (board games, ping-pong, video games)	Open-door policy where youth participate on a voluntary and drop-in basis.	Treatment as usual	Violence Crime and offending School engagement Community connectedness	High	Areas where youth clubs had closed saw increases in offending and crime incidence rates for young people aged 10 – 17. Closure of youth centres was also associated with lower test scores at ages 15 – 16 and lower rates of participation in organised activities.

Appendix 4. Measured outcomes across included studies for effectiveness

YEF outcome framework category *Category description (as described in the framework)*	Measured outcomes *(descriptions by study authors)*	Studies
Violence	"Violent incidence rate aged 10-17"	**(n=1, k=1)** Villa (2024)
Crime and offending	"Proportion of respondents who have engaged in at least one form of ASB in the last 3 months", "Offending rate aged 10-17", "Crime Incidence rate aged 10-17", "Distribution of detected crimes ages 10-17", "Acquisitive rate aged 10-17", "Drug offences aged 10-17"	**(n =2, k=6)** Bashir et al. (2013); Villa (2024)
Community connectedness	"Proportion of respondents who agree their local area is a good place to live"; "Proportion of respondents who agree they generally trust people in their local area"; "Proportion of respondents who agree their views and opinions are taken seriously by people in their local area"; "Proportion of respondents who agree their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together"; "Proportion of respondents who agree they feel they belong to their local area"; "Proportion of respondents who agree they don't feel safe going out at night in their local area"; "Proportion of respondents who agree that crime is a big problem in their local area"; "Attends organised activities"	**(n =2, k=8)** Bashir et al. (2013); Villa (2024)

Self-esteem	"Proportion of respondents who feel confident meeting new people"; "Proportion of respondents who feel confident working with other people in a team"; "Proportion of respondents who feel confident being the leader of a team"; "Proportion of respondents who feel confident speaking up in a group"; "Proportion of respondents who feel confident explaining their ideas clearly"; "Proportion of respondents who feel confident having a go at things that are new to them"; "Proportion of respondents obtaining a normal/high score (15-30) on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale"	**(n =1, k=7)** Bashir et al. (2013)
School engagement	"Proportion of respondents who missed lessons without permission (i.e. truancy)"; "Proportion of respondents who enjoy school/college"; "Proportion of respondents who would like to do more learning in the future"; "Test score aged 15-16"; "Scores at age 15-16", "[GCSE] scores for FSM (subgroup) aged 15-16", "[GCSE] scores for non-FSM (subgroup) aged 15-16"	**(n =2, k=7)** Bashir et al. (2013); Villa (2024)
Happiness	"Proportion of respondents giving a positive view on at least 4 measures regarding how in control of their lives they felt"; "Proportion of respondents obtaining a high score (41-70) on the Warwick- Edinburgh Mental WellBeing Scale (WEMWBS)"; "Proportion of respondents scoring 7-10 when asked on a scale of 1 to 10 'How satisfied are you with your life?'"	**(n =1, k=3)** Bashir et al. (2013)
Drug and alcohol use	"Proportion of respondents who have had an alcoholic drink in the last 3 months"; "Proportion of respondents who have taken illegal drugs in the last 3 months"	**(n =1, k=2)** Bashir et al. (2013)

Bullying	"Proportion of respondents who have experienced at least one form of negative behaviour from peers in the last three months"	**(n =1, k=1)** Bashir et al. (2013)
Building and Maintaining Relationships	"Proportion of respondents who have behaved negatively towards peers in at least one form in the last three months"	**(n =1, k=1)** Bashir et al. (2013)

Appendix 5. Characteristics of included studies for implementation

Authors (Year)	Country	Study Design	Intervention	Quality Level	Implementation Outcomes	Experiences of children and young people/ Parents/ Professionals
Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009	US	PE	The study explored participation in Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Boys and Girls Clubs are intended to offer a range of activities and a safe space for young people to socialise with peers and Club leaders. The authors conducted interviews with 56 young people and 86 staff from 10	Moderate	Acceptability: Young people participated in a variety of activities but also appreciated the opportunity for unstructured free time with peers. Relationships with supportive adults were an important feature of the Club with adults modelling positive behaviours and remaining attentive to young people's needs. Appropriateness: Young people described how attending the Club prevented them from doing "something stupid outside" such as smoking or drinking, noting	Surveyed young people reported having opportunities to voice their opinions and develop relationships with safe, supportive adults and peers. On a survey, young people rated that staff provide an environment which is structured, with peer cooperation encouraged, along with high expectations and recognition. There were felt to be opportunities for skill development,

					staff talk to them about avoiding risky behaviours.	however opportunities to influence the Club were rated lower.
					Cost: The report noted a small yearly membership fee of around $2 to $10, noting that "ample opportunities for scholarships" are available.	
Barnekov et al., 1999	US	PPD and PE	Explored the impact of a new Boys and Girls Club of America facility. Boys and Girls Clubs are intended to offer a range of activities and a safe space for young people to socialise with peers and Club leaders. The authors conducted a survey with local residents, reviewed local crime and education data, and conducted interviews with	Low – PPD Very low - PE	Acceptability: Survey respondents rated the programmes highly, with 13 of 16 programmes rated 'good' or 'excellent' by over 70% of respondents. Appropriateness: Interviewees felt that the Boys and Girls Club had positively impacted the local area, primarily through offering a supervised and structured environment for young people to attend outside of school hours. Local police felt the Club had contributed to a decrease in minor crime in the area, while school officials felt the Club's	N/A

individuals knowledgeable about the local area such as police, educators and community organisations.

tutoring programme had a positive effect on students.

Feasibility: Some local parents indicated they did not have sufficient information about the Club or felt it was too expensive. It was noted that many parents believed the Club costs more than it does and greater communication with parents could alleviate the concern.

Reach / penetration: Some interviewees felt there was a need to expand the Club to reach more local children. It was also felt that improving public outreach would raise awareness of the Club and its offerings.

Bashir et al., 2013	England	QED and PE	This study involved an evaluation of the myplace programme. myplace provides funds for the development of new	PE – Moderate QED - Moderate	Acceptability: Young people appreciated the quality of the buildings, equipment and facilities available at the centres. They enjoyed having somewhere comfortable to spend time with friends and the variety of	N/A

and improved youth centres across England. The author used a variety of data collection methods to hear views from stakeholders in 10 centres which had received funding.

activities on offer but would have liked the centres to have longer opening hours.

Adoption: Centres worked with various external partners, enabling young people to access their services easily. However, some challenges were noted around multiagency communication and funding difficulties.

Appropriateness: Interviewees noted that the centres were developed in response to young people reporting an absence of places for them to spend time and locals reporting concerns about young people spending time on the streets. Young people were heavily involved in the development of the centres which included specialist provisions to meet the needs of those with additional needs and/or disabilities.

Feasibility: Architects were employed to design the buildings in collaboration with young people, in one case ensuring the space was appropriate for children with a variety of needs. Some issues were raised with the buildings, including a lack of sporting facilities, no room for commercial activities and safety and noise concerns in open areas. Some centres had insufficient staffing which impacted opening hours and the availability of activities.

Reach / penetration: Where centres were in city centres, the location was felt to be crucial for ensuring easy access for young people. Where centres were in residential areas, it was felt to be more difficult to attract young people, with the cost of travelling thought to negatively impact attendance. However, some centres worked with local travel

operators to offer extended routes or discounted fares. The cost of attendance and a lack of awareness of the centres' offers were also considered barriers to more young people attending.

Sustainability: Stakeholders from some centres reported that the need to generate an income might prevent them from offering free activities in the longer term. Some centres were opening less frequently than intended due to a lack of young people attending and budget cuts. In some cases, funding was secured from external sources for periods of one to two years.

Cost: The estimated annual cost per young person attending a centre is around £1340. myplace funding totalled £236.707 million. Grants ranged from £1.189 million to £5 million, with the average grant around £3.757 million, though many centres also

					sourced additional funding. It was estimated that the total annual operating costs of 40 myplace centres would be £20.809 million. The average income for 2011/2012 was £451,176, and the average predicted operating costs for 2012/2013 was £477,463. Some centres charge a fee to attend, varying from 50p per visit, to £12 per year.	
Croix & Doherty, 2023	England	PE	Croix and Doherty (2023) conducted a study to explore open youth work as a form of informal education operating across diverse spaces such as youth clubs, community centres, and streets. Drawing on a three-year qualitative study with young people and youth workers in	Moderate	Acceptability: Youth work spaces were highly acceptable because they were welcoming, non-judgemental, and socially supportive, fostering trust and peer interaction. Adoption: Youth workers readily implemented flexible, youth-centred strategies across physical and social environments to engage young people effectively. Appropriateness: The approach met young people's social and	The study involved 58 young people and 59 youth workers, highlighting the value of safe, inclusive spaces. Young people described these spaces as "life saving," while youth workers stressed the importance of trust, flexibility, and participation. Findings show that supportive, relational youth work is

			eight settings across England, it examined how these spaces are actively created and curated to provide relational, educational, and liberatory "third places" beyond home, school, and work.		emotional needs, supporting inclusion, identity expression, and cross-community connections.\n\nFeasibility: Youth work methods were practical and adaptable, functioning in diverse spaces and persisting even under challenging circumstances.\n\nFidelity: Implementation remained true to youth work principles, emphasising relational, participatory, and informal practices.\n\nReach/Penetration: Programmes successfully engaged diverse and marginalized young people across multiple sites and contexts.	crucial for personal and social development.
Cross et al., 2015	Australia	PE	Conducted a process evaluation to explore the crime prevention and community safety impacts of Police-Citizens Youth Clubs	Moderate	Acceptability: Young people, families, and staff widely value PCYC programmes for creating safe, engaging, and supportive spaces that foster positive relationships.	Young people described PCYC programmes as safe and supportive spaces that helped them build confidence, social skills and positive

(PCYCs) in Queensland, Australia using a qualitative case study approach. Three clubs, metropolitan, regional, and Indigenous were studied through interviews and focus groups with 152 participants, including young people, staff, volunteers, parents, police, and stakeholders. The research focused on participants' perceptions of PCYCs' effectiveness in achieving aims such as building positive relationships, supporting

Adoption: PCYCs consistently implement programmes across clubs, with staff and police embracing activities that integrate youth development and community engagement.

Appropriateness: Programmes align well with community needs, targeting at-risk youth, promoting life skills, and addressing social and developmental challenges.

Feasibility: Activities are practically delivered through flexible, low-cost models, supported by existing staff, volunteers, and community partnerships.

Fidelity: Core programme principles respectful police-youth interactions, skill development, and empowerment are consistently maintained, even when activities are adapted locally.

relationships with peers and police. They valued activities like sports, camps, and discos for providing a sense of belonging and purpose. Overall, young people reported feeling included, proud of their contributions and positively engaged in their communities.

			education and employment, reducing victimisation, and fostering life skills, confidence, and belonging		Reach/Penetration: Programmes effectively engage diverse youth populations, including at-risk, Indigenous, and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, though broader perceptions of police are less consistently influenced. Sustainability: Long-term impacts are supported by stable organisational presence, trusted relationships, embedded programmes, low-cost delivery, community partnerships, and participant investment	
Glish, 1979	US	PE	Surveyed 1,364 Amherst students in grades 7–11 to assess whether the Amherst Youth Center, a programme designed for youth not engaged in conventional school,	Low	Reach/penetration: Students were classified as traditional or non-traditional, and attenders were overrepresented in non-traditional clusters for ages 12-15 but not 16-17. While effective for younger teens, the Center reached only a minority of non-traditional youth overall.	N/A

			sports, or community activities, was effectively reaching its target population.			
Haberlin, 2014	Canada	PE	This study explored young people's experiences of Boys and Girls Clubs in Canada through interviews with 10 young people. Boys and Girls Clubs are intended to offer a range of activities and a safe space for young people to socialise with peers and Club leaders.	Moderate	Acceptability: All young people described a positive and welcoming environment at the Club, in some cases likening it to a family or a "second home". Leaders were felt to be positive and friendly, and the environment was generally considered open and inclusive. Though there were a small number of reports of young people being left out or feeling unsafe.

Appropriateness: Recent instances of fighting had caused some young people to feel unsafe at the Club, though new rules instigated in response were felt to be effective. Attending the Club was felt to support young | Young people are encouraged to share ideas and support with the development of new Club activities, while those involved with the Club's leadership programme for older young people were required to create and lead new activities. |

					people to manage their emotions, avoid risky behaviours and cultivate self-confidence and personal responsibility, while developing positive relationships with peers and leaders.	
Mercier et al., 2000	Canada	PE	Mercier et al (2000) conducted a theory-driven evaluation of a YMCA youth drop-in centre in Canada by combining concept mapping with staff and focus groups with youth to explore their perceptions and needs regarding the Youth Centre.	Low	Acceptability: Youth and staff perceive the YMCA Youth Centre as a welcoming, safe, and enjoyable space that meets the social and recreational needs of its participants. Appropriateness: The Centre's mix of unstructured and structured activities aligns well with youth needs for personal growth, socialisation, and a supervised alternative to street or home environments. Feasibility: The Centre successfully operates with available staff, resources, and space to provide consistent programming, though support	Young people described the Youth Centre as a place for connection, recreation, and support. Through group discussions, they shared priorities and aspirations, highlighting the importance of youth-informed, inclusive spaces that respond to their diverse needs and experiences.

					and follow-up services are limited by resource constraints. Fidelity: Core programme elements such as supervised freedom, recreational activities, and flexible participation are implemented as intended, maintaining alignment with the staff-defined programme theory.	
Mendel, 2010	US	PE	Mendel (2010) examined the impact of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland (BGCC) through staff and alumni perspectives. Using evaluation exercises, surveys, and focus groups, the research explored how BGCC programmes support youth development	Very Low	Acceptability: Staff and alumni widely value BGCC, especially for providing safe spaces and caring adult relationships, making the programmes highly acceptable. Appropriateness: Programmes align well with the needs of at-risk youth, particularly in social-emotional development and mentoring, though less so in academic or vocational training. Fidelity: Core mission areas are consistently implemented, but staff adapt national models to	Children and young people experienced BGCC as a safe and supportive space where caring relationships with adults and peers fostered belonging, responsibility, and growth. Alumni recalled these positive interactions more than specific programmes as lasting influences that shaped their identity and resilience

					better fit local youth needs, balancing fidelity with flexibility. Sustainability: Long-term alumni impacts show strong sustainability through relationships and safe spaces, though resource constraints pose challenges for maintaining programme breadth.	
Moran et al., 2018	Ireland	PE	Moran et al (2018) conducted a process evaluation to explore young people's perceptions of youth cafés in Ireland, focusing on themes of individuality and connectedness. A total of 102 participants (55 males, 47 females) took part, recruited from youth cafés in	Moderate	Acceptability: Young people valued the youth café as a welcoming, non-judgemental space where they could express themselves freely and feel respected by staff and peers. Appropriateness: The café's focus on individuality, personal choice, and supportive relationships aligned well with the developmental needs and social realities of young people. Feasibility: The informal structure, committed staff, and strong peer networks enabled the café to operate effectively and respond	Young people experienced the youth café as a safe, non-judgemental space that fostered self-expression, confidence, and belonging. It provided support for making positive life choices, building trusting relationships, and overcoming personal challenges, while also encouraging empathy, community connection, and a

			both urban and rural locations.		to the evolving needs of participants.	broader sense of identity.
					Sustainability: Deep community integration, participant ownership, and demonstrable personal benefits supported the café's long-term viability.	
Rihan, 2011	Egypt	PE	Rihan (2011) conducted a process evaluation using a mixed-methods approach to assess six youth centres across three Egyptian governorates which included 6th October, Behira, and Alexandria. It combined qualitative tools, including 66 in-depth interviews with key informants and six focus group	Low	Acceptability: Youth centres were generally accepted for their recreational and sports services, but acceptability was limited by a lack of inclusivity, and weak opportunities for youth involvement in decision-making.	N/A
					Adoption: Recreational programmes such as sports and trips were widely adopted, while developmental and civic-oriented services showed weak adoption due to perceived irrelevance or poor design.	
					Appropriateness: Programmes generally met youth recreational needs but were less aligned with broader youth development	

discussions with 35 youth participants, with quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of youth centres' operations, facilities, services, and youth engagement.

goals, limiting relevance for leadership, skills, and employability.

Fidelity: Core recreational services were delivered reliably, but capacity-building and leadership activities often lacked quality, consistency, and alignment with their stated goals.

Feasibility: Participation was feasible when costs were low and services were relevant, but weak infrastructure, bureaucratic hurdles, and limited staff capacity constrained the centres' ability to expand or improve programmes.

Reach / Penetration: Centres reached a broad share of local youth populations through recreational programming, but daily engagement was low and penetration into skill-building, leadership, or civic engagement remained minimal.

					Sustainability: Operations were financially fragile, with overreliance on subsidies and membership fees, limited transparency, and weak youth ownership undermining the long-term sustainability of services. Cost: Youth under 18 paid 1-18 pounds per year (average 8.75), and those above 18 paid 2-28 pounds (average 13.58). Some centres also charged activity fees.	
Shannon & Robertson, 2007	Canada	PE	Shannon and Robertson (2007) explored younger youths' (ages 8–12) and Executive Directors' perspectives on volunteering within Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, focusing on how volunteering fosters community	Low	Acceptability: Volunteering was generally well-received by youth, fostering pride, empathy, and a sense of value, though recognition and appreciation were crucial for maintaining engagement. Feasibility: Younger youth could successfully carry out a wide range of supervised volunteer tasks, developing skills and confidence, though initial	Young people found volunteering both personally rewarding and a way to connect with their communities. It helped them develop new skills, build confidence, and foster empathy, while feeling valued and respected when their efforts were acknowledged.

			connection and personal development. Using qualitative interviews, the research examined the types of volunteer activities undertaken, motivations for participation, and perceived impacts.		incentives often helped secure participation. Reach/Penetration: The program engaged youth in diverse activities both in the Club and the wider community demonstrating broad participation across skill levels and interests.	However, lack of recognition sometimes left them discouraged
Seely, 1949	US	PE	Seeley (1949) evaluated the development, operation and impact of El Centro Youth Center in Denton, Texas from its founding in 1944 through 1949	Very Low	Acceptability: El Centro is widely accepted, evidenced by steadily rising attendance and membership, positive community evaluations and strong stakeholder support, with minimal discipline problems reported. Reach/Penetration: El Centro demonstrates broad reach, drawing youth from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and across Denton County, while	N/A

potentially contributing to a measurable decline in juvenile offences (from 10 in 1944 to 0 in 1949).

| Tefera et al., 2021 | Ethiopia | PE | The authors explored how youth centres in Ethiopia contribute to young people's development. A questionnaire heard from 2,165 staff and young people from 94 youth centres across the country. | Low | Acceptability: Young people reported modest impacts from attending the youth centres and felt the centres were supportive through preventing them from going to 'undesirable' areas, developing pro-social attitudes in areas such as work, theft and substance use and improving their health and self-confidence.

Appropriateness: In the survey, young people reported very few negative impacts from attending the youth centre, however open text responses revealed a small number of negative experiences, the most prevalent being skipping school and gambling. | Modest positive effects of attending youth centres were reported, with benefits including preventing young people from going to 'undesirable' areas, developing pro-social attitudes in areas such as work, theft and substance use and improving their health and self-confidence. Few negative experiences were reported, although there were some instances of young people skipping school to attend the youth |

						centre or participating in gambling.
Villa, 2024	England	QED and PE	The author utilised public crime and education data to estimate the impact of the closure of youth clubs across London, UK. Villa also heard from 33 youth workers and 7 people who used to attend youth clubs through a short nationwide survey.	High	Sustainability: Youth workers reported that funding reductions were impacting the programmes that youth clubs could offer and their ability to recruit staff. Cost: The yearly running costs of youth clubs ranged from £32,500 to £610,523, with an average cost of £169,567. The mean cost per young person was estimated at around £350 per year. It was calculated that for every £1 saved through closure of youth clubs the costs to society are £2.85.	N/A
Vorhaus et al., 2011	England	PE	Vorhaus et al (2011) present an extract which comes from an evaluation of the Salmon Youth Centre, commissioned by the Centre for	Very Low	Acceptability: Young people feel comfortable, welcomed, and supported at Salmon, enjoying positive relationships with peers and staff. Appropriateness: Activities and responsibilities match young	Young people at Salmon Youth Centre feel safe, accepted, and supported. Participation in activities helps them build confidence, cooperation, and

			Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning at the Institute of Education. The evaluation aimed to assess the effectiveness of the Centre's youth work approach in supporting young people's transition from childhood to adulthood.		people's needs and aspirations, helping build confidence, independence, and life skills. Reach/Penetration: The centre engages a diverse range of young people over time, including those at risk, and is strongly embedded in the local community.	independence, while the centre provides a positive alternative to spending time on the streets.
Wells et al., 2021	US	PE	Wells et al (2021) conducted a qualitative study and interviewed 74 youths of colour from five community-based youth organisations (CBYO) in Rochester, US. Data collection emphasised cultural sensitivity, rapport-	Moderate	Acceptability: Youth viewed CBYOs as welcoming, supportive, and family-like spaces where they felt a strong sense of belonging. Appropriateness: CBYOs aligned closely with youths' needs by providing safe, supervised environments with opportunities, resources, and recreation in	Youth described CBYOs as safe, supportive spaces that offered opportunities to build skills, connect with peers, and escape neighbourhood challenges.

building, and capturing diverse youth experiences in low-income urban neighbourhoods

contexts where few safe options existed.

Feasibility: Extended hours, central locations, and integrated supports made CBYO participation practical and easy to sustain.

Fidelity: CBYOs consistently delivered their core elements of supportive relationships, access to resources, and opportunities for youth voice across sites and participants.

Reach/Penetration: CBYOs served a broad and diverse group of youth while extending their influence into the wider community through programmes, jobs, and civic engagement opportunities.

Appendix 6. Availability of evidence according to each of Proctor et al.'s (2011) implementation outcomes

Authors (Year)	Acceptability	Adoption	Appropriate-ness	Feasibility	Fidelity	Reach/ penetration	Sustainability	Cost
Arbreton et al., 2008, 2009	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Barnekov et al., 1999	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Bashir et al., 2013	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Croix & Doherty, 2023	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Cross et al., 2015	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Glish, 1979	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Haberlin, 2014	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Mercier et al., 2000	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Mendel, 2010	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No

Moran et al., 2018	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Rihan, 2011	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shannon & Robertson, 2007	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Seely, 1949	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Tefera et al., 2021	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Villa, 2024	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Vorhaus et al., 2011	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Wells et al., 2021	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No