

Youth Access `Right 2B Safe` Project Evaluation

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Youth Access/Right 2 Be Safe Project Evaluation

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Executive Summary

Background: The Right 2B Safe Project was planned by Youth Access to illustrate how Youth Information and Counselling Services (YIACS) could contribute to safeguarding young people, potentially complementing the work of the overstretched statutory services. The project aimed to strengthen YIACS capacity to identify people at risk of harm, to increase access to help, and to increase awareness of YIACS's contribution to local child protection and safeguarding. Three local YIACS took part, in Southampton, Leeds and London.

Evaluation methods: The evaluation drew on a range of material gathered throughout the two years of the project, including notes and minutes from meetings, reports to funders, interviews with staff from the participating projects, interviews with local statutory services, analysis of written reflections from the staff, analysis of the Right 2B Safe database and summaries of case studies of young people using the service.

Delivering the project: A total of 742 young people were engaged with the Right 2B Safe project between July 2013 and January 2015. The data suggested that the client group was as originally intended: those with multiple difficulties including a high frequency of safeguarding concerns. All three projects reported they had reached more young people with CSE needs as a result of the funding. Over half of the young people were in contact with the service for between one and three months, with the remainder in contact for four months or longer. The majority reported a range of positive outcomes including feeling safer.

Cross cutting issues: A number of cross-cutting themes emerged, providing insight into the complexities of working together around safeguarding, but also highlighting the unique and useful contribution that can be made by the voluntary sector. YIACS are able to do different kinds of work from the statutory service, and provide youth-friendly environments, but more work needs to be done to build stronger links with the existing statutory services and play to the strengths of both sectors in order to improve the offer to young people. Insecure funding streams added to the complexity of provision in this area.

Conclusions: As a result of the new activities undertaken under the Right 2B Safe banner, the three projects involved all reached increased numbers of very vulnerable young people with complex needs. However, building mutual knowledge and understanding between sectors takes time, and improving joint working with existing child protection and safeguarding services was quite challenging.

1 Background to the Right 2B Safe project

The Right 2B Safe Project was planned by Youth Access in order to illustrate how Youth Information Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) can contribute to safeguarding young people, potentially complementing the work of the overstretched statutory services.

The role of Youth Information Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) in safeguarding

Voluntary organisations, both local and national, play an important role in delivering services for young people, including youth work, aspects of health care, counselling and advice (Youth Access, 2015). Because of their location in the local community, often operating with an open-door, drop in policy, voluntary sector organisations are particularly useful resources for young people, who may prefer their approach to the more formal statutory services (JustRights, 2014). The recent Department of Health Children and Young People's taskforce report emphasised the importance of building on and harnessing the unique contribution of the voluntary sector (Department of Health, 2015).

Youth information Advice and Counselling Services are a subset of voluntary sector organisations providing services to this age group. Unlike single, issue-based services (such as contraceptive services) they provide coordinated support across a range of issues including emotional health and wellbeing, sexual health, housing/homelessness, money, drug and alcohol and sexual exploitation. The style of service delivery in YIACS is young-person centred, informal, and flexible and includes the option for young people to refer themselves for help rather than relying on referrals from other agencies such as primary care. The important role that YIACS play in the landscape of provision for young people has been emphasised in relation to, for example, mental health (Department of Health, 2015; New Philanthropy Capital, 2008).

Safeguarding is an issue that arises in any service provision to young people. Safeguarding means protecting children from maltreatment, preventing impairment of their health and development, and providing safe and effective care and promoting best outcomes (The Charity Commission 2014; Department of Health 2013). Safeguarding is broader than 'child protection' and is important for the Right 2B Safe project not just because it is critical for anyone working directly with children in case safeguarding issues arise in the course of practice, but because the projects involved can actively seek out young people with safeguarding needs and extend the reach of services to help them. The voluntary sector is active in working to safeguard the young people coming through the doors. A range of umbrella and specialist organisations – including Youth Access - offers standards, guidance, training and advice for voluntary sector organisations on how to contribute to safeguarding.

There is a certain amount of skill exchange that exists between the statutory services and the voluntary services – this can take a number of different forms in different parts of the country but includes, for example, safeguarding training both offered by the statutory

services for the voluntary, and by the voluntary for the statutory. Joint working is also common, with the voluntary sector often represented on local Safeguarding Children Boards or other related committees, and contributing to the development of local strategic plans and development and review of policies and procedures.

However many of the links are not formal and not well articulated. The funding landscape is complicated, with many local voluntary sector organisations providing services that in effect help the local statutory services but which are funded through a patchwork of grants rather than as a commissioned service. There can be a need for building good communication channels and promoting better understanding of what all agencies can contribute. Developing better and more explicit links between the statutory and voluntary sector services working with young people may improve the general offer available to this age group.

Project aims

The Right 2B Safe Project set out to:

- Strengthen Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) capacity to identify young people at risk of harm, particularly sexual exploitation and violence
- Increase access to timely and appropriate help for those young people identified as in need or at risk
- Increase awareness of YIACS's contribution to local child protection and safeguarding strategies, particularly for 13-19 year olds.

It was intended that the three partnership projects would be supported by Youth Access to implement a programme of early identification, intervention and prevention, targeted on those at risk, and to build relationships with local statutory services to explain and promote the role that YIACs can take in local safeguarding and child protection.

Project partners

Youth Access designed the collaborative Right 2B Safe project, bringing together three local providers in Southampton, Leeds and London to extend their activities and share learning. The partners included:

- **No Limits**, a large YIACS based in Southampton which works with other smaller YIACS throughout the Hampshire area. No Limits is a charity offering free and confidential information, advice, counselling support and advocacy for children and young people under 26 who live in Southampton and Hampshire. The charity works across the area through three drop-in centres, Health and Wellbeing drop-in sessions in schools and colleges, and through other specialist projects including Right 2B Safe.
- **Off Centre** is based in Hackney, London and provides counselling, therapy, advocacy and other services to young people aged 11-25 living, studying or working in the

borough. Young people coming to Off Centre present with multiple and complex issues. The range of needs include bereavement, family breakdown, substance misuse problems, young offenders, in care/leaving care, teenage pregnancy, victims/perpetrators of crime, abuse and violence in the home, mental health problems, asylum seekers and refugees.

- **The Market Place**, in Leeds, provides free, confidential advice and support to young people aged 13-25 years. It provides a range of young person centred support services particularly for mental health, sexual health and crisis support needs.

Evaluation aims

The overarching question for the project evaluation was “What factors ensure best practice in YIACS’s responses to safeguarding issues and how can their contribution be better recognised by Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs)?”

In order to address this question, the evaluation aimed to achieve the following:

- Document how well the project progressed and what it managed to deliver
- Pull together and supplement data that the services were collecting themselves about the young people they saw and the pathways they took
- Draw together messages about barriers and enabling factors involved in raising YIACS’s profiles with local statutory services
- Undertake some before and after comparisons of outcomes for the young people who come into contact with the project.

2 Evaluation methods

The evaluation drew on a range of material gathered throughout the two years of the project. This included notes and minutes from meetings documenting the project's progress; reports to funders; interviews with staff from the participating projects, interviews with local statutory services, analysis of written reflections offered by the staff, distillation of key messages from the Right 2B Safe database and summaries of case studies of young people using the services.

Meeting notes and minutes

Throughout the two years of the project (April 2013 to March 2015) a series of regular, all-day project meetings were held at the Youth Access offices in London, bringing together staff from the three local projects to share experiences and planning. Minutes of these meetings were drawn on, together with any notes relating to other ad hoc meetings.

Reports to funders

The project funding applications and updates to funders were also a source of information, as they documented ongoing progress.

Discussions and interviews with participating projects

Round table discussions with the participating projects and Youth Access were undertaken at regular project meetings. Issues covered included challenges in building the role of the YIACS in the local safeguarding landscape, discussions concerning the number and type of cases being handled, issues relating to shared information and anything else that arose in the course of project implementation.

In addition, individual interviews with professional staff at the three sites were undertaken during August and September 2014. Nine people were interviewed in total. All interviewees were told that their comments would be reported anonymously, without any reference to the site involved.

Interviews with local statutory services

During the project a series of interviews were undertaken between February 2014 and February 2015 (mainly between Feb-May 2014) in order to explore how statutory services viewed the YIAC sector in their area, in particular in terms of its contribution to safeguarding young people. The evaluators were provided with a list of senior staff in statutory services in each of the three areas by Youth Access. This comprised approximately 30 people, and a selection were contacted by email with a copy of the Right2BSafe flyer. A small number of

those contacted replied stating that they were not the most appropriate person to speak to, and referred us on to another person in their team or in the Local Authority. A total of 12 interviews were completed across the course of the project.

The interviews were conducted over the telephone and ranged in length from 15 to 40 minutes. Interviewees were mostly in senior posts in Children's Services and the NHS and their roles included safeguarding in relation to Looked After children, sexual health, substance misuse, youth justice, commissioning and LSCB management and operations.

The interview questions were developed in consultation with Youth Access, and covered the following topics: respondent's current role in relation to safeguarding, the local safeguarding context; knowledge about the main YIACS operating in the area, views on the contribution off the YIACS to local safeguarding of young people; familiarity with the Right 2B Safe Project, challenges to joint working; and ways of developing better links.

Staff reflections form

Staff in the participating projects were encouraged to complete a reflections form towards the end of the two years. They were asked to reflect on one or two particular cases and focus on their experiences. In particular the form asked them to think about the initial referral process, any referral pathways and their experiences of information sharing.

Right 2B Safe database

Although all three of the participating projects had established ways of recording information about clients, it was important that we streamlined and coordinated the information needed for the evaluation, so a new database was established and managed by Youth Access. Staff input information about demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, living circumstances); disabilities and sexual identity; education training or work status; past and current contact with various services; safeguarding needs; reasons for referral; kind of help offered; and ratings of outcome. Data were available from July 2013 until the end of January 2015.

Although the data provide a good insight into the young people using the services and the range of issues impacting on their lives, they did not include data on all those using the service under the 'Right 2B Safe' banner, as the project continued to run two months after we began to write the evaluation report.

Case studies

Staff drew up a small selection of case studies summarising the experiences of some of the young people who made use of the Right 2B Safe services. These are not necessarily representative of the cases who were seen, but provide interesting examples of the range of issues that people presented with, the challenges of joint working, and the ways in which interventions could successfully help young people to cope.

3 Delivering the project

In this section we revisit the project aims and the intended outcomes for young people, as described in the introduction, and assess the extent to which they were achieved. We describe the services that were offered, the young people who were seen, the extent to which the project managed to increase the YIACS capacity to identify young people at risk of harm and provide them with services, and the extent to which it succeeded in increasing awareness of YIACS contribution to local safeguarding.

Services offered as part of the Right 2B Safe project

The funding was intended to increase the range of services offered to young people at risk, and to help in the identification of safeguarding needs. As the projects taking part served different communities and had different organisational histories, they provided rather different kinds of activities as their contribution to the project. From the outset the Right 2B Safe funding both allowed continuation of some activities that were already being undertaken, but also supported development of a new 'offer' in the three areas.

In Hackney the main client group was sexually abused or exploited young women, particularly during the first year, and the services delivered mainly consisted of individual counselling and therapeutic group support. Later in the project a group for young men was also set up.

In Hampshire the target was on 11-19 year olds at risk of abuse, neglect and/or sexual exploitation. Using Right 2B Safe funding, No Limits delivered brief interventions in drop-in settings, one to one casework and a programme of group work including a weekly LGBT group. A training module on sexual exploitation and safeguarding was also developed and was delivered to other organisations in the area by a senior project worker on the Right 2B Safe funding stream.

In Leeds, the Market Place offered a 12 week self-harm and safeguarding group work programme for young women and men aged 13-18 years. The focus was on risk taking behaviours, self-harm, anger management and looking after mental health and wellbeing. Young people eligible for the Right 2B Safe Project had the option to fast track into counselling for up to one year, or in to an 8-12 week set of individual solution-focused support sessions.

Table 1 shows the range of interventions offered to young people across all three projects

Type of intervention	Proportion receiving intervention
One-to-one counselling	42%
Group work sessions	19%
Other internal service	17%
Advice service	8%
Other external service	7%
Accommodation advice	5%
Signposted to other service	2%

Describing the young people who were seen

A separate report by Youth Access provides full details on the client group who were seen under the Right 2B Safe banner. However it is important to summarise some of their main characteristics to give a sense of the client group being reached.

All the frontline agencies operated as self-referral services with supported referrals from external agencies also accepted. In total 742 young people were engaged by the project's staff between July 2013 and the end of January 2015, the majority of whom were female (74%). This partly reflects the activities being offered (such as self-harm groups) so that young women may have been more encouraged to approach the services. The client groups varied considerably by area because of the variations in the local population; in Hackney for example, the majority described themselves as Black/African Caribbean or Black British, whereas in the other areas the majority were white British. The majority of the young people were living at home (82%) but a significant minority were in a range of other living situations such as hostels, supported housing, local authority care or with extended families. It is hard to know how many of this group of 742 would have been seen by the project in the absence of Right 2B Safe funding, as some would have fallen into the usual client groups for the local area. However, there is no doubt that Right 2B Safe increased the numbers of young people seen at all three sites.

Key findings concerning their backgrounds and presenting issues included:

- The majority of the clients had **multiple past and ongoing contact** with other services, primarily social services (23% of all the services noted by young people) but also including GPs (21%), the police, outpatient mental health services, and other services such as housing and youth justice.

- The single most likely **entry route into the project** was through self-referral (27%), followed by schools (14%) and social services (12%). Other sources included referrals from other parts of the YIACS service, through, for example, other drop in services where concerns for safety had been identified.
- The most frequently identified **safeguarding issues** in the referrals were for emotional abuse and sexual exploitation, followed by neglect, sexual abuse, experiencing domestic violence and physical abuse. Although efforts were made at the outset of the project to assign clear definitions to these terms (project notes suggest the NSPCC definitions were adopted), in practice the workers entering the data may not have been aware of this. However, the list gives a flavour of the seriousness of the issues giving causes for concern.
- Issues that the service **specifically worked with** included mental health, bullying violence and exploitation, health, family health concerns, young people's general wellbeing and social welfare. The majority of the mental health issues were self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, depression, family relationship difficulties and substance abuse.
- The level of **complex and multiple need** was clear in the data on the client group. In year one, 62% of the young people using the services were experiencing three or more problems at the point of referral. These are the problems that were mentioned at referral – after building trust with the young people, more difficulties were often revealed.

These data suggest that the client group seen under the Right 2B Safe banner was as originally intended; those with multiple difficulties including a high frequency of safeguarding concerns. Over half (56%) of the young people who engaged with the help offered by the Right 2B Safe Project were in contact with the service for between one and three months, but a significant proportion (26%) were in contact for four to six months, and the remainder for longer than six months; a significant length of time.

There are no clear data available on the proportion who were referred but who never engaged, but this clearly is an issue as it is in any service for very vulnerable young people in this age group. Generally the voluntary sector is more flexible and accommodating than some of the statutory services can be, and assertive outreach is a feature of the sector.

Outcomes were measured using several different tools, including a checklist based on youth Access's Advice Outcomes tool with the addition of some item specific to the Right 2B Safe project's intended outcomes. However outcomes data were only available on a subset of 227 young people. Table 2 lists the how often these 227 young people were recorded as having "improved a lot" or "improved a bit", ranked from the most successful outcomes to the least.¹ That 127 out of the 227 reported improvements in feeling safe reflects the project's focus on safeguarding.

¹ Although the numbers suggest considerable improvement in a number of important areas, they do not reflect what the key problem was with which the young person initially presented – if, for

Table 2: Improvements for young people on a range of outcomes

Outcome	Number improving 'a lot' or 'a bit'
Knowledge of help available	179
Confidence	171
Feelings about the future	149
Sad feelings	134
Understanding of rights	126
Angry feelings	125
Feeling safe	125
Levels of stress	114
Scared feelings	104
Involvement in Ed, training & employment	100
Schoolwork	99
Family situation	98
People young person associates with	93
Amount of trouble	87
Suicidal feelings	86
Self-harm occurrences	83
Physical health	68
Fights and being violent	64
Housing situation	55
Times young person goes missing	49
Use of alcohol	37
Use of contraception	36
Use of illegal drugs	28

Strengthening YIACs capacity to identify young people at risk of harm

The projects all felt that the Right 2B Safe funding was critical in helping them provide services to young people facing multiple risk and safeguarding issues, which included

example, 83 young people presented with self-harm, a recovery rate of 83 would reflect 100% improvement. However if all 227 came in with self-harm, 83 would represent a lower improvement rate. So these data are only a general indication of improvement for the group as a whole in relation to the full range of problems they brought to the services.

identifying people who needed help. In some cases this meant that the funding allowed them to continue doing what they had been doing previously:

“We’ve definitely used it [the funding] to keep our clinical service going. So it’s been funding our ongoing work. We would have had to severely cut back our clinical work without the grant”.

But in some cases funding also facilitated expansion of the services they provided, increasing their capacity to identify young people at risk of harm:

We wanted to go into areas where we didn’t necessarily have representation, but where we knew young people were in need, where we knew there was CSE going on but no local services....”

This expansion of services included taking on new staff, and funding the development of new activities such as group work with a focus on self-harm, risk, CSE and safeguarding. The interviews provided plenty of qualitative evidence of these kinds of activities. However it was not possible to quantify from the data available specifically how many more young people were identified as at risk of harm as a result of the strands funded by Right 2B Safe.

Increasing access to timely and appropriate help

All three projects reported that they felt they had reached more young people with CSE needs. Thus for example, *“...we’ve started to get into some really hard to reach areas, deprived communities like [place] where CSE and DV are rife. That’s a great achievement.”* Another project commented on the importance of increasing staff time at the drop-in service, again allowing them to get more people through the door.

In some cases this was achieved by focusing on particular issues and using this as a lever to address CSE:

“We wanted...to get more people into our service who were experiencing CSE, and who had clear safeguarding issues, but who wouldn’t come into [name of service] if we called it that, so we’ve focussed on self-harm to get people involved, to get them in, then we can do the work”.

In other cases it implied extending the reach to groups who may not have been targeted in existing CSE services:

“We’ve run a group for boys and young men at risk. That’s been really important, they’re a neglected group in CSE”.

We ran a group for young people with special needs locally. It was really good, worked really well. Some workers were sceptical that you could address CSE properly with special needs young people, but it worked really well.”

The projects felt that the main successes of the projects involved building trust and expertise among the staff, capitalising on the voluntary sector's trusting relationship with young people, and allowing more signposting to additional sources of help. Thus, for example, one project noted that the voluntary sector was able to offer a long series of ten sessions in order to build a trusting relationship allowing disclosure of domestic violence. Another noted that young people already trust the voluntary organisations and have grown to know the staff, allowing a base of trust to work from. This kind of work is much more difficult in the statutory services. Another project commented:

"We do a lot of signposting, as part of this project, so even those we don't work with in our clinical service, we make sure they're signposted to get help elsewhere. That's an additional outcome from the project, so we've increased our capacity".

Interviewees from statutory partners also commented on the fact that:

"They have good reach, they can get to young people, they can support young people who might not get to services otherwise"

Increasing awareness of YIACs contribution to local safeguarding

Links between the voluntary sector organisations and their local social care and children's services were mixed, and participants in the projects worked to improve these during its course. Whilst there was a positive view about the statutory staff in general, the voluntary sector practitioners noted that the statutory staff were overwhelmed by the challenge of their work, and did not have the resources to do much more than assess young people. Pressure to close cases, pressure of staff turnover, and issues with high and rising thresholds all meant that there was limited capacity for relationship building with the voluntary sector.

In some cases the projects noted a lack of change in the basic relationship between services over the course of Right 2B Safe:

"I would say the project itself, no, it hasn't changed our relationship with statutory services. We liaise well with CAMHS, and we know a lot of their staff, and they know us. The others, social care, police, health – we obviously have referrals from them, and we liaise with them, but it's up and down. Their staff change so much, you can't build a relationship".

However projects did feel that there had been a positive impact in terms of joint training and awareness and increased referrals. In one case, for example, they commented that

"...social care send us through a lot more referrals now, often where it's become clear that CSE is an issue, often linked to DV. They know that we can work with them long-term, in the way that Children's Services or similar just can't anymore. It's assess and refer on for them".

In another, it was noted that as the Right 2 Safe project became more well-known and established, it began to receive more referrals. For example, a young man's group that was set up as part of the project became a focus of new referrals over time.

In addition, one project commented that there had been greater 'traffic' between the statutory and voluntary services, with workers from the statutory services calling in to the voluntary sector, and in fact meeting some of the young people who were part of the Right 2B Safe work but who might have been too anxious to go to meet a social worker. A similar point was made by a social worker in relation to another project, as he commented that he had made a point of visiting the YIAC service to meet staff and find out what was going on.

Greater engagement in local strategic development locally was mentioned by all three projects, although their feelings about its usefulness to their cause were mixed. One was very positive that this has helped them. A second project had also become a representative on a local strategy group, which had given them higher profile in the area. However, as another project noted, there was a huge number of strategy, policy and operational groups that they could join, but they were not terribly confident that increasing their visibility in this way led to any concrete outcomes.

Interestingly, relationships with local CAMHS sometimes seemed more positive and productive than some relationships with children's services. Some good systems were already in place for joint work – in one case CAMHS came in to the project every two weeks for a meeting to discuss cases, and the project felt "...we're on the same page with CAMHS".

From the perspective of the statutory services, all of the representatives interviewed knew about the YIACS in their area that was involved in the Right2BSafe project. Some respondents were only familiar with the organisation at a general level, for example:

"I know we've commissioned services from them, and that they have a good reputation locally, but I don't really know what they do"

"I don't know the details no, I just know they offer some advice services to young people locally. I couldn't say about what they actually do"

Others were more familiar with their local organisation and its work:

"They offer a range of services I think – sexual health, condoms, pregnancy testing, drop in sessions, counselling, the usual range that these sort of organisations do"
"... my team tell me that they have a good reputation, they have good staff and they do excellent work with young people in [area]. The most important thing, I think, is that they enable young people to make choices, hopefully to make good ones. But they are also well aware of the law, and how they have to operate, so they warn young people about making disclosures, letting them know that if they say certain things, it has to be referred. But if that happens, then the worker, the organisation, is there to support them. And that's important"

It is important to note, however, that at the start hardly any of the respondents from the statutory services had heard specifically about the Right2BSafe project, prior to being contacted about the research. In one case, for example, the respondent had never heard of the project although he was very familiar with (and appreciative of) the work of the YIAC undertaking the work. He understood that they had a role in contributing to early intervention, prevention & safeguarding, but was not aware of the separate funding stream shared with Youth Access. As a result a flyer was developed and circulated, and is included in the Appendix at the end of this report.

The statutory service respondents also occasionally voiced some confusion about what the role of the YIACS was in safeguarding, beyond referring and signposting. Thus, for example:

"It did make me feel a bit awkward [reading the flier]. They help and support young people but they're not safeguarding bodies in a formal way, which is what it implies."

From comments made in several interviews it also transpired that there was a fine line to be trodden between pointing out that the YIACS had a role to play in safeguarding, and suggesting that local statutory services were failing in their own duties. As one noted, *"...It's unfair to just say we've failed. My staff work really hard and really care, and it's like, they've dismissed us in one go"*. On the other hand, from the YIAC perspective, it was sometimes felt that some safeguarding cases involved a lot of extra case work that might more appropriately have been done by social care. Being expected to organise multi-agency meetings involving education, CAMHS and social care was given as an example.

Overall, the Right 2B Safe project was set within well-established projects that already had relationships with local services but wanted to enhance them. In terms of increasing the reach of the participating YIACS, the Right 2B Safe project gathered good evidence that they identified and reached more young people with complex needs including safeguarding concerns. Their work complemented that of the statutory agencies, and there was some qualitative evidence of increasing referrals from the statutory sector as a result of increased capacity in the YIACS.

All of the respondents from the statutory sector made positive comments about the role of the voluntary sector in providing help and advice for young people, and contributing to safeguarding. The work of the YIACS was clearly valued although there were some concerns expressed about how all the pieces fitted together. However, success in establishing a separate identity for Right 2B Safe varied across the areas. In the next section we look in a little more detail at some of the cross-cutting themes that emerged as the project unfolded.

4 Cross cutting issues

A number of cross-cutting themes emerged during the project, providing some insight into the complexities of working together around safeguarding, but also highlighting the unique and useful contribution that can be made by the voluntary sector.

- ***The role of the positive relationship & reputation that third sector organisations have with young people***

Respondents often commented on the positive relationships and reputation that third sector organisations have with young people, and how this can complement what is done at a more statutory level. For example:

“... the third sector, it has a unique relationship with young people, the young people see them as being on their side, advocating for them, not part of the system you know. We’re the official side of things, and there’s a stigma, a lot of young people don’t want to know”

This might be particularly relevant for young people who will not or do not want to engage with statutory services, increasing the chance that young people in the local area can be protected. Voluntary sector services can be seen as more trustworthy by young people, and potentially less stigma generating. As one respondent noted, “...for a lot of young people they’re the first place they go, if they’re in trouble or at risk in some way”.

In some cases this increases the ‘ways in’ to the statutory services:

“They are services where some young people, they’ll make disclosures, and then they’ll liaise with us, the statutory services, so it’s like a way in for a young person to get help”

“The staff are generally very good, they communicate well with young people, and they can engage with young people. We [statutory services] can do that but the voluntary sector often gets the young people to come to them first”

- ***The particular contribution of the knowledge and expertise brought by YIACS***

Respondents talked about the skill and expertise that the voluntary sector brings to safeguarding, both because of having good structures and well trained staff, but also being accountable:

“... I think they play a valuable role because they’re accountable to the council through their funding. So, what I mean is that they have to meet various standards in

order to be funded, so the staff have to be trained in confidentiality, safeguarding, the law, and the like. So it means the staff are usually pretty good and experienced"

"Like I said if the staff are well trained and managed in voluntary organisations, then things should work well. They can offer help and support to young people, and I think they do that well, you know they know how to engage young people. And, so, the bigger charities that I mentioned, that have contracts with the council, they do that well. And they refer appropriately if they need to, so for safeguarding cases. So yes, I think they're valuable"

Staff in the statutory sector appreciated the fact that YIACS were "...forward thinking, they have grass roots knowledge about young people and what's happening to them, they can keep us, the statutory services, on our toes... making sure we're providing appropriate services" The voluntary sector was, in some ways, "the sharp end", perhaps closer to the ground as they were embedded in the local community.

As the Right 2B Safe project was partly about increasing capacity in the safeguarding arena, it was to be expected that building up the skill sets would take time, but project staff commented on the positive benefits when these skills reach a critical mass and begin to cascade out to help increase other organisation's learning, and also potentially becoming an income generating activity if formal training could be developed.

- ***Ability of YIACS to do different kinds of work***

As one interviewee noted, the YIACs particular contribution centred on giving young people a unique young-person centred space that social workers could not offer because they were holding the whole case and had to address all elements. He commented that engagement with this group of clients can be very hard to achieve, but that the benefit of the YIACS environment was that it was not regarded as 'therapy' in the same way as a CAMHS appointment, even though it might indeed be therapy. Young people were responding to the fact the settings felt less stigmatising and more youth friendly. In addition, the YIACS were more flexible in being able to offer a number of sessions and could facilitate a longer-term relationship if necessary. As another respondent noted:

"... and really important TSOs (third sector organisations) offer long-term support, they can work with families, with young people, for a long time. You just can't do that in Children's Services now, or at least it's rare. They can develop a relationship and hold on to it... in a way it's what social work used to be like, maybe 20, 25, 30 years ago"

The Right 2B Project staff themselves commented on this in their reflections, with one commenting that *"The Right 2B Safe work feels very important to me. Sometimes this is the only place when accessing support that young people have said 'they feel listened to', and that feels important to me"*. It was possible, for example, in one of the projects to meet the young people before a new group started, giving them time to talk about their hopes and fears of joining the group and giving the staff time to begin to explore issues of child protection and safeguarding and act as appropriate.

YIACS are also by definition organisations that can address multiple issues, and this way of working also brought advantages. In one of the projects, for example, the staff explained that they used a self-harm group as a way of engaging young people when in fact the intention was to provide wider support for young people with domestic violence and child sexual exploitation.

Another advantage of the YIACS way of working is that YIACS have the ability to work with young people at risk but below thresholds, as well as with people already being victimised or meeting the criteria for statutory intervention. In addition, the YIACS could deal with cases that were not as firmly bounded around age; they could, for example, respond to those over 18 no longer eligible for Children's Services.

The YIACS also had the advantage of being distinct from the media furore sometimes surrounding social services provision. As one person commented, *"They have credibility in a way that social workers, social care, don't, if you see what I mean. Because of all the media attention and difficult cases, we're the enemy, you know. But TSOs, they are better at engaging, at building relationships, they have credibility"*

- **Challenges posed by different thresholds for risk and safeguarding**

Joint working is often challenged by issues of shared (or not shared) definitions and thresholds. This was noted on a number of occasions throughout the project, for example:

"This is not necessarily a third sector or statutory sector thing, it's just that people use different thresholds for what triggers a safeguarding alert, and that's difficult sometimes. I think we need to spend more time, everyone in child protection, talking about this issue. Try and get some agreement about the different thresholds. I think that would help us all, you know, sing from exactly the same hymn sheet"

"I think, there's still an issue around the different ways in which the two sectors assess risk, I think that's an issue. We need to talk and discuss this more, so that we're working to the same thresholds and standards"

One of the respondents wondered whether sometimes the charity sector focusses too much on the rights of the child or young person, and not enough on their protection, and the law. This was particularly the case for 17 and 18 year-olds, this respondent felt, where young people were seen to be making their own choices. On the other hand, lack of attendance to young people's independent rights has sometimes been a criticism levied at the statutory sector. The tension between protecting confidentiality and liaising about safety is one that is common in work with this age group.

- **Issues of information sharing**

It was not a surprise that a common theme emerging in the Right 2B Safe project concerned information sharing. As respondents noted, this is always an issue between different

sectors, particularly for clients who are under 18. As one statutory service noted, *“We don’t always know whether a young person has used an external service, a voluntary sector organisation. And that can be a problem, because for young people at risk we should know what they’re doing, and who they’re in touch with.”* The statutory and voluntary sectors can have different approaches that are not always compatible and that can provide a barrier to developing their joint working. As one project noted:

“...it’s always been a good relationship but slightly tricky around confidentiality and referrals. We’re very clear we won’t just hand over young people’s details if they’re affected by CSE. Our safeguarding policy is very clear, but they often just don’t get it. So sometimes it’s a tense relationship, but most of the time it’s fine. But no, I wouldn’t say it’s changed as a result of this project”.

Making sure that everyone has the appropriate information was sometimes a challenge. YIACs noted that they sometimes received referrals from external agencies that did not provide enough historical background, particularly in relation to Children’s Social Care referrals and CAMHS. This could lead to more work getting in touch with the referrer for additional information. Sharing information after cases had been seen was also raised as a challenge. In one example, a young person was looked after at a YIAC for five hours as he was unable to go home as he was at immediate risk of significant harm. Staff were not updated about what happened next until they chased for information several weeks later.

However, information sharing was not always a problem, simply something that had to be considered. Thus, for example:

“I don’t think it particularly matters which sector people are in, ie whether it’s a charity or Children’s Services, it’s about the shared understanding, the protocols, the procedures. On the whole these bigger, more established charities, the ones I mentioned, like [local organisation], with properly trained staff, they understand that. So the procedures are there, and there’s good communication. Because in the end it’s not about, you know, territory or ownership, it’s about the safety and well-being of young people”

Good information sharing often followed good interpersonal relationships between key staff in different organisations. Joined up working, meetings to share information, agreed protocols and mutual trust all facilitated information sharing.

- ***Training and organisational culture***

Despite general confidence in the standards of professional practice, as noted above, some of the statutory organisations raised concerns that smaller YIACS may not be as knowledgeable and experienced in terms of safeguarding and child protection as the statutory services, although this was likely to be mainly a result of lack of information. This was partly the result of awareness that voluntary sector staff turnover may be quite high, and concern that available funds for training might be quite low. Other interviewees said that these sorts of issues could be addressed by having more joint training – *“... to show all*

the staff that they're facing the same issues, no matter what sector they're in", and through more collaborative events.

Clearly youth counselling providers should have comprehensive policies and procedures in place to ensure the safe recruitment of paid and volunteer staff and appropriate checks and vetting procedures. This should also link to the induction and training of staff, line management and clinical supervision. Clear procedures must be in place for identifying, managing and reporting issues of concern and these should be appropriately available to all those who work in or use the service. These are all set out in Youth Access's quality standards for YIACS. Sharing these with partners will improve confidence.

There may also be differences in relation to the ethos and approach of organisations. One participant said that this was *"more of a gut sense than an evidenced issue"*, but stated that:

"It's, it's I suppose about their approach to working with families, in particular families who, well, they're not always honest. And TSOs I think they can sometimes take people at face value, and trust them, because that's their value, that's the organisation's values. But, sadly, of course people lie in this type of work. So we [in the respondent's department] use what we call 'respectful uncertainty', we have to doubt what people say. And TSOs, I think, well for some people, that's alien to their values. And that can be dangerous in terms of safeguarding"

This respondent also added that third sector organisations are sometimes not as perseverant as they should be:

"Because everything's so tight and money driven these days, I think it's hard for some TSO's. We have had to agree in a lot of contracts that [local organisation], or the TSO whoever it is, they'll make three attempts to contact someone that we've referred to them. Which is fine, but, well I think they should push for more visits. A lot of people need more than three contacts before they're case closed so to speak. I realise I've agreed to that, so it may seem unfair, but I'd like to see them push for more proactivity, more push"

- ***Challenges posed by insecure/different funding***

The role played by funding on influencing the relationship between the statutory and voluntary sectors was noted on a number of occasions and proved to be a recurring theme:

"[the key issue] I mean it's funding as you might expect. The third sector always have to have this in mind"

[Interviewer: How does this affect their safeguarding activities, and role?]

"I would say, well, sometimes, it can make them a bit narrow in their focus, because they're having to apply for contracts for specific areas of work. But of course young people's lives aren't like that, they might have a housing issue, and a College issue, and a relationships issue. Sometimes I think it's difficult for the third sector to offer a holistic service like young people need. And I'm not blaming the third sector for this, it's the nature of the funding beast at the moment"

Other respondents saw funding as influencing the type of work that voluntary organisations could provide:

“The current funding arrangements can make things difficult I think... we have to sometimes joint fund a third sector service with organisations that are less stable financially, and you don’t know how long a service will last. That’s really frustrating when you’ve got a service where they’ve built up a good service that young people are using, then it has to close”

Some respondents viewed the ‘contract culture’ as dominating both work and dialogue:

“It’s difficult to say, but I think the fact that the voluntary sector is so contract dependent now, they’re essentially funded by the statutory sector... and, I would say, money reduces, you know, it brings everything down to contracts and indicators and performance standards. Sometimes I feel there’s no time to stop, for reflection on what’s really needed. That’s not the voluntary sectors fault, but because they don’t have ongoing funding, most of them anyway, we just constantly go from talking about a contract to the next one and to the next one. It would be good to come up for air”

Others noted that the rather one way direction of funding contributed to a ‘them and us’ culture, rather than encouraging a more genuine partnership. In addition, some of the activities being offered took some time to build up, and longer-term funding is necessary for sustainability of this kind of provision. It also took time to recognise the new resources that the voluntary sector could potentially bring into an area.

Insecure and vulnerable funding contributed to a vicious cycle, contributing to issues of job security, ability to commit to longer term training, and developing a higher profile in the local community. Voluntary sector funding arrangements were not clear to many people interacting with the sector, yet there was a danger of real loss to the safeguarding landscape if the funding ceased.

- ***Mixed views on how to develop better links***

Some of the respondents had reservations about increasing links between the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board/ child protection and voluntary services in their area. There were so many voluntary sector partners, they wondered how they would choose which ones to be represented. There was a sense that not everyone could be included, and that there was a distinction between those with the statutory duties versus other partners. On the other hand, others did advocate for representation by the voluntary sector on various strategic committees in the local area.

As well as a role for more formal links, such as having robust protocols for information sharing and assessing risk, others also suggested that there was a place for more informal links and generally improved levels and frequency of communication. As one statutory partner noted:

“Maybe it’s not about structures, like someone joining the LSCB or joining us for reviews, maybe it’s more about encouraging a culture of openness and honesty. I think most people do want TSO staff to challenge and help us do things better, I don’t think it would ever effect a future contract if it’s done constructively”

- ***Positive benefit of taking part in a shared project***

It was not an explicit aim of the Right 2B Safe project that the participating charities learned from or supported each other, but for the participants this was a benefit of taking part, working as they all did with particularly difficult and complex client groups. Some of the benefits related to the opportunity to sit back and take time out of the usual routine to reflect on the work that was being undertaken. But there were also practical advantages; things were shared and learned about data management and improvements in assessment procedures, as well as about different ways of working to tackle the particular issue of CSE, including forms of local outreach.

Conclusions

The issue at the heart of the Right 2B Safe project was how to use YIACS to extend the local offer to young people, complementing the activities of the statutory services and ensuring that more vulnerable young people were reached. As a result of new activities undertaken under the Right 2B Safe banner, the three projects involved all reached increasing numbers of very vulnerable young people with complex needs. Working with the Right 2B Safe project made the individual voluntary organisations more visible in the arena of local safeguarding and increased their reach and throughput. All three projects reported that being part of Right 2B Safe allowed them to offer services to young people in a way that would not have been possible without the funding, although they varied on whether this was continuation of existing work or development of new services. Even within organisations there could be a bit of both. The kinds of cases being dealt with appeared to be those with unmet safeguarding needs.

Building relationships and mutual knowledge and understanding takes time. The Right 2B Safe project was two years long; arguably not long enough to make its value quite clear to the local statutory services. Existing relationships with some local services were strengthened as a result of the Right 2B Safe project work. However, improving joint working and building relationships with existing child protection and safeguarding services was quite challenging. There were – as expected – issues of different organisational cultures, different thresholds for intervention, and different funding landscapes. In addition, recognition of the Right 2B Safe specific brand was not high. However some of the differences were also strengths. There was a clear appreciation of the unique way in which the YIACS could build different kinds of relationships with young people, and work in a less stigmatising, more flexible and more inclusive way than was possible within the constraints of some statutory services.

All sectors working with this age group are under pressure. There was evidence of high levels of staff turnover and limited capacity for the joint working on the part of both the YIACS and the statutory sector working in their areas. But ways of improving joint working were suggested and tried; at the heart was the importance of good, frequent and open professional communication between agencies.

There is a larger question for the Department for Education underlying these findings, about whether this kind of short term funding to the voluntary sector is the best way to build capacity. As one respondent noted:

“Having only two years funding is a big issue. We’ve got a really good team, got everything set up, and we’re doing really good work, we know we are. But now the funding ends in eight months. It would be heart-breaking to see it all fold”.

The disadvantage of the expansion of services and increasing reach was that without continued funding, the new work being done was clearly going to have to end at the point when it has just bedded down. As we completed the evaluation, some project staff were losing their jobs. There is an issue with raising awareness and expectations about services for CSE, and then withdrawing services to tackle it. As one project noted, *“If the Right 2B Safe project comes to an end, there’ll be no specialist services in this area, which is an awful thought.”*

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Appendix: Case studies

These brief case studies are intended to be broadly representative of the kinds of cases referred to the Right 2B Safe project, and to illustrate the extensive and complex needs presented by these young people. Names and some details have been changed to protect anonymity.

Charlie was a sixteen year old, white British young woman, living in a foster placement. The referral was made by her social worker. She felt lonely in her current placement and lost in the care system. There was evidence of child sexual exploitation from an older, controlling boyfriend and also issues of substance misuse and mental health problems. She was at risk of dropping out of education and struggling with a new school placement.

She attended 1:1 weekly meetings, received support with the school placement, help with dealing with negative feelings such as anger and anxiety, and education about grooming patterns and rights and responsibilities in relationships. A referral was made to CAMHS, and also to other forms of support such as getting an Independent Visitor, and a child advocate. She was supported in remaining free of drugs for 180 days and ongoing at the time the case study was written. She has also applied for college courses and feels brighter about the outlook for the future.

Jamie was a 17 year old white British young man, estranged from his parents, not in education, training or employment, living in a hostel and struggling to look after himself. He had past involvement with social services, mental health services and youth offending services. There was evidence of self-harm, suicidal ideation and potentially some psychotic symptoms, possibly related to childhood trauma. He was referred from a worker in another project in order to access extra support.

He attended a 12 week group work programme with other young men, and was also fast tracked into a waiting list for more regular counselling support. The group built his confidence and communication with other young men, and his self care and general mood improved. He was also supported in moving out of the hostel and into a more supported environment.

Bea was a 15 year old white British female. She was living at home but suffering from increasingly frequent panic attacks. She had a history of engagement with CAMHS, but this had stopped and she had started using high risk chat rooms and meeting men through online contact, resulting in sexual exploitation and police involvement. She self-referred to the Right 2B Safe project having heard about it at school, and was assessed as being extremely isolated and vulnerable.

She attended a 12 week group programme with other young women, as well as having some 1:1 sessions, and was supported during this time while the police investigation and court case were ongoing. She was helped to develop more positive coping strategies and to be made aware of other support services.

Annie was a 17 year old white British young woman, with poor family relationships at home and possibilities of sexual abuse. She had ongoing long-term chronic health issues that affected her self-esteem. She was referred to the Right 2B Safe team by another in-house project due to domestic violence from her 25 year old partner.

She had refused alternative housing, and 1:1 work started on helping her to understand the difference between a healthy and unhealthy relationship and the impact on her self-esteem, and helping her recognise how the abuse was escalating. A safety plan was developed and she gradually began to engage with the police with the support of the project. This resulted in a conviction and restraining order for her partner. Gradually she felt able to consider moving to her own housing and to rebuild relationships with family and friends.

Judi was an 18 year old young Muslim woman with a British Bangladeshi heritage. She worked part-time, and was suffering from a lifestyle clash with her family's religious and cultural beliefs. Domestic violence results and at times she becomes homeless. The family is known to the statutory services for earlier incidences of domestic violence. Judi was disengaging at college and missing days at work.

Judi attended eight weekly counselling sessions, helping her to explore how to assert herself and accept herself and her wishes. She was helped to reject the abuse she had experienced and given advice about her rights, housing and protecting her physical health. When the family moved to a different area, she was given advice of new services to access.

Appendix: Right 2B Safe project flyer

RIGHT 2B SAFE

Right 2B Safe:

- The First Year
- Who's involved?
- What happened In Year One?
- What's offered?
- What's happening in local areas
- About YIACS
- About Youth Access
- How to get in touch

The Right 2B Safe project

The First Year
 This briefing provides an overview of the work of the Right 2B Safe Project during its first year of operation in 2013-2014, including initial findings from interviews conducted by the independent evaluator.

The Right 2B Safe Project is a national project working in three areas of the country to identify and support young people, particularly 13-18 year olds who have been, or are at risk of abuse and neglect. Working in Hampshire, Leeds and Hackney, London, the Right 2B Safe project has:

- Identified and engaged young people who have been or are at risk of abuse and neglect, including sexual exploitation and violence
- Provided young people with access to timely and appropriate early intervention and prevention support
- Built relationships between voluntary sector Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS) and statutory services to support improvements in local safeguarding and child protection strategies for older adolescents

Who's involved?

The Right 2B Safe Project is a national partnership led by Youth Access in collaboration with:



No Limits
Helping Young People
 Thrive, Everywhere

No Limits, leading work across Hampshire



OFF CENTRE

Off Centre in Hackney



The Market Place
Helping Young People
 Thrive, Everywhere

The Market Place in Leeds

Funded for two years by the Department for Education (April 2013 to March 2015), the project will also work with a range of statutory and other voluntary sector agencies.



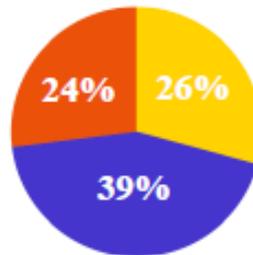
What happened in Year One?

In year one 335 young people were helped by the project.

 **82.5%** of the 335 young people were Female; 16.5% were Male and 0.5% were Transgender

Age range...

13-14 **15-16** **17-18**



70% were of white European heritage; and 30% were from other ethnic groups, including dual heritage.

 **14%** Had a physical or learning disability

 **47%** of referrals were from external agencies including schools, Social and Children Services, GPs and CAMHS.

23% of the young people self-referred to the project and a further 19% were referred by another Internal service within the YIACS.

 **62%** of young people had 3 or more presenting problems; only 10% had a single presenting difficulty.

The most frequently assessed risk factors were emotional abuse, sexual exploitation and neglect

Other assessed risks included witnessing domestic violence, experiencing domestic violence, physical and sexual abuse

Self-harm, suicidal thoughts and attempted suicide were the most frequently presented problems

What's offered?



The local sites have offered a range of support and help, including:

- Case work
- Social welfare advice
- Therapeutic counselling
- Groupwork

What's happening in the local areas?

In Hackney

Off Centre is primarily working with sexually abused or exploited young women and is providing individual counselling and therapeutic group support. Through the Right 2B Safe Project, Off Centre has further promoted its role and contribution to local young people's safety, and has strengthened its relationship with City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Board (CHSCB). This has helped relationship building with School Safeguarding Leads and the creation of a referral pathway with Children's Social Care. Off Centre has also attended various strategic and operational groups on the identification, referral and support of sexually abused young people.

For further information contact: **Thelma Mathews:** thelma.mathews@offcentre.org.uk

In Hampshire

No Limits has led work across various Hampshire YIACS to target help on 11-19 year olds at risk of abuse, neglect and/or sexual exploitation. Through the Right 2B Safe Project, No Limits has offered a package of support, including brief interventions in drop-in settings; one-to-one casework and a programme of groupwork, including a weekly LGBT group. No Limits is also building strategic partnerships across Hampshire, Southampton, Portsmouth and Isle of Wight to improve the identification, referral and support of young people who have been or are at risk of abuse, sexual exploitation and/or trafficking. No Limits has led the design and delivery of training on sexual exploitation to local statutory agencies, including schools, Social Care and the Police.

For further information contact: **Jayne Reeves:** jayne.reeves@nolimitshelp.org.uk or **Ana Brankovic:** ana.brankovic@nolimitshelp.org.uk

In Leeds

The Market Place has offered a 12 week self-harm and safeguarding groupwork programme for groups of young women and young men aged 13-18 years. The programme's focus is on risk taking behaviours, self-harm, anger management and looking after mental health and wellbeing. Young people eligible for the Right 2B Safe Project have also had the option to fast track into counselling for up to a year, or into an 8-12 Individual 'My Plan' solution-focused support sessions. The Market Place has contributed to the development of local self-harm referral pathways with NHS Emergency Departments and CAMHS and strengthened partnerships with specialist sexual exploitation bodies to improve referral pathways.

For further information email: **Sally Dawson:** sally@themarketplaceleeds.org.uk



How to get in touch

If you are based in one of the areas where the Right 2B Safe Project is operating, please get in touch with the agency in the area.

Hackney
contact Off Centre on
020 8986 4016
info@offcentre.org.uk

Hampshire
contact No Limits on
023 8022 4224
enquiries@nolimitshelp.org.uk

Leeds
contact The Market Place on
011 3246 1659
admin@themarketplaceleeds.org.uk

Alternatively, please contact Youth Access on
020 8772 9900
admin@youthaccess.org.uk
<http://youthaccess.org.uk>

What are Youth Information, Advice and Counselling Services (YIACS)

Off Centre, No Limits and The Market Place are part of a national network of Youth Information, Advice, Counselling and Support Services (YIACS). YIACS share the following characteristics:

- A range of interventions delivered 'under one roof'
- Young person-centred
- Open to a wide age range, e.g. 13 to 25
- Holistic approach, meeting multiple and complex needs
- Multi-disciplinary teams, providing wrap-around support
- Flexible access routes, including through open door
- 'Drop-in' sessions
- Free, independent and confidential

The Value of VCS YIACS

During the year, as part of the Independent evaluation a number of statutory sector partners were interviewed on their views of the YIACS and their contribution to local safeguarding. They were overwhelmingly positive about the value of the YIACS, with respondents noting YIACS:

- Positive relationships and reputation with young people.
- Skill and expertise in relation to safeguarding through good structures, well-trained staff and local accountability
- Local knowledge and expertise arising out of its work at the grass roots level and how this can feed into the statutory sector
- Capacity to undertake longer term work with young people

About Youth Access

Youth Access is the national membership body for young people's Information, advice, counselling and support services (YIACS). Youth Access supports and develops the quality and standard of YIACS and helps to shape and influence policy and practice through evidence-based approaches. The organisation offers information, advice, training, research, consultancy and representation

