Bristol Child Exploitation Collaboration

Evidence Report

Believe in children
Barnardo's

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

September 2022

Index

Research background, methodology and sample

Strategic Objective & Background

The work of this collaboration sits within a strategic partnership between Bristol City Council and Barnardo's to *design a specialist service model that meets the needs of children, young people, and families who have experienced high levels of extrafamilial harm and exploitation (including child sexual exploitation (CSE) and child criminal exploitation (CCE)) and prevent further harm.*

Background:

- Bristol was one of the first areas in the country to recognise child sexual exploitation as a child abuse and a safeguarding issue.

- Bristol City Council and Barnardo's have worked successfully together for over 26 years.

- Bristol's Safer Options Hub was established in 2018 concurrently with Barnardo's piloting the Bristol ROUTES service. Bristol City Council and Barnardo's continue to work together to develop a service responding to children who are criminally exploited and seriously harmed through violence.

- Despite this work there are still children who are being sexually and/or criminally exploited, therefore it was necessary to review capacity and current arrangements to inform strategic planning and enable delivery of effective services that meet all children's needs.

- There are a range of services currently being provided through various arrangements across the city, these may benefit from a more coherent offer to ensure children get the support that meets their needs.

- We all want safer childhoods for the children of Bristol and recognise the ever-changing nature of abuse and exploitation.

The Work of the Collaboration

To co-design a **specialist services model for children, young people and families** who have been exploited and/or effected by youth violence we deployed an evidence-based approach, asking:

- How is the current system working?

- Where are the resources? Is this right?

- Are services meeting all children's needs?

By **putting young people and families at the centre** we:

- Focused on the experiences of young people and families by listening to them as well as our partners across the city.

- Ensured an intersectional lens was used to understand the lived experience of young people and families.

- Used ethical research methods to understand who the person is, engaging with them to understand their strengths and what their needs are.

- Held the lived experience of our young people and families in the highest regard.
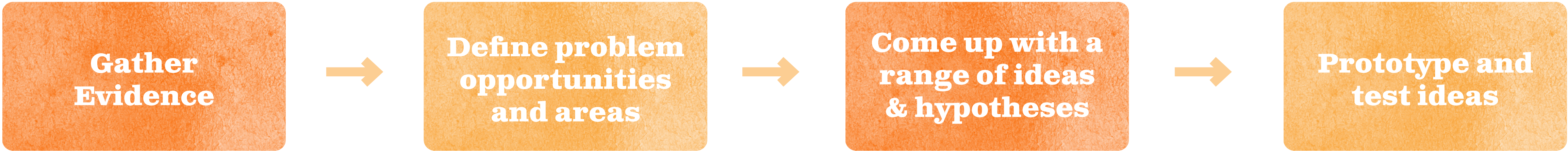
This research forms the foundation for a wider service design project, where learning will be ongoing.

The evidence captured and summarized is from the first stage in a four-step service design process and has been used to identify opportunity areas for the re-designed service model. The service design recommendations can be found here.

The findings in this report have been used by Bristol City Council to inform their decisions around future service provision.

This research has informed early thinking around the service design model, and we will continue working with young people, families and professionals to test ideas and ensure solutions are co-designed to effect system change.
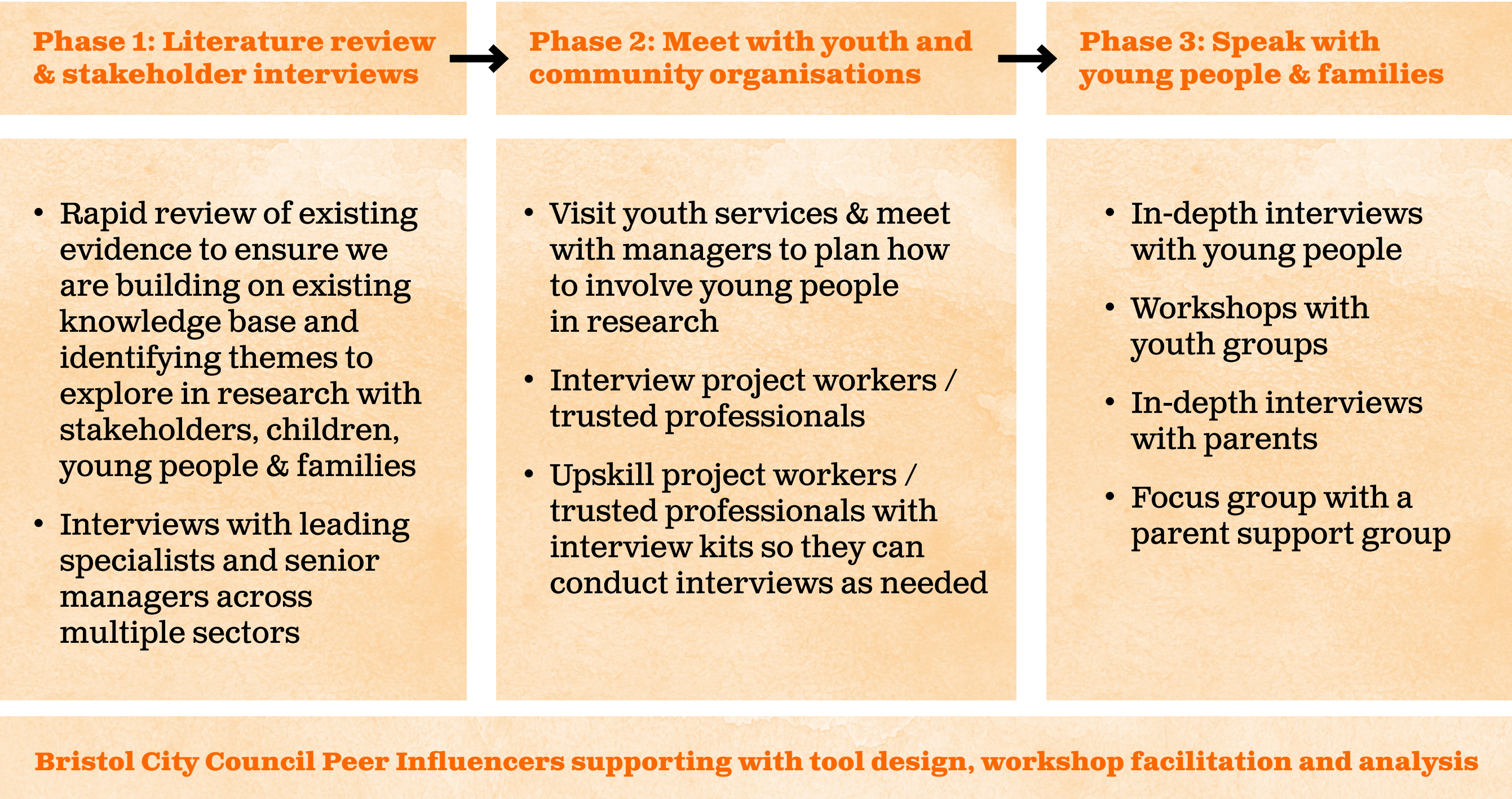
| Gather Evidence | → | Define problem opportunities and areas | → | Come up with a range of ideas & hypotheses | → | Prototype and test ideas |

Research objectives

To inform the re-designed specialist service model, qualitative research was needed to help us understand:

1. What **challenges** are young people who have been exploited, and their families facing?

2. What are the **underlying needs** for young people and families experiencing extra-familial harm?

- How are young people and families meeting these needs? What has helped them, and what are the gaps?

- What do young people, families and local communities need from services?

- How do these needs differ for criminal exploitation vs sexual exploitation?

3. What have young people and families **experiences of the current services** and system been?

- How have they found navigating the system (i.e. referral pathways, experience of practitioners)?

- What do young people and families think is working well and what do they feel needs to change?

4. **How effective is the current system** in meeting the needs of young people, and families?

- How well are current interventions working to help young people to recover from exploitation and prevent further harm?

- How well supported are organisations delivering interventions (i.e. the leading trusted worker) by the safeguarding systems in Bristol?

- How are resources (finances, practitioners' time etc.) currently assigned by the commissioner and commissioned services and are they used effectively – for example, does the current system represent the best use of resources?
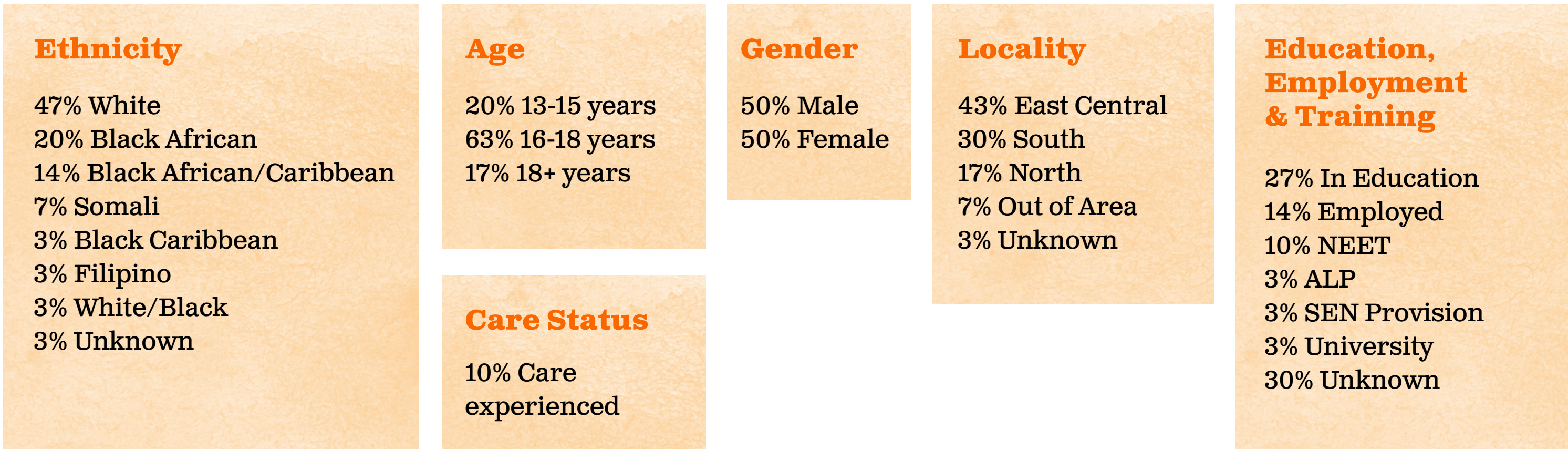
Research methodology

We designed a research approach that would allow us to both learn about the overall system and service model, and capture the in-depth experiences of children, young people and families who use the services. We were mindful about the vulnerability of the children and young people participating so took time to collaborate with local youth organisations and specialist staff on an approach that would enable them to contribute in a comfortable and meaningful way.

Phase 1: Literature review & stakeholder interviews	→	Phase 2: Meet with youth and community organisations	→	Phase 3: Speak with young people & families
• Rapid review of existing evidence to ensure we are building on existing knowledge base and identifying themes to explore in research with stakeholders, children, young people & families • Interviews with leading specialists and senior managers across multiple sectors		• Visit youth services & meet with managers to plan how to involve young people in research • Interview project workers / trusted professionals • Upskill project workers / trusted professionals with interview kits so they can conduct interviews as needed		• In-depth interviews with young people • Workshops with youth groups • In-depth interviews with parents • Focus group with a parent support group

Bristol City Council Peer Influencers supporting with tool design, workshop facilitation and analysis

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Research sample

30 Young people from across Bristol participated in the research
9 Parents and **1** Sibling participated in the research

They gave their views via in depth interviews and focus groups, with some young people participating on more than one occasion.

Ethnicity

47% White
20% Black African
14% Black African/Caribbean
7% Somali
3% Black Caribbean
3% Filipino
3% White/Black
3% Unknown

Age

20% 13-15 years
63% 16-18 years
17% 18+ years

Care Status

10% Care experienced

Gender

50% Male
50% Female

Locality

43% East Central
30% South
17% North
7% Out of Area
3% Unknown

Education, Employment & Training

27% In Education
14% Employed
10% NEET
3% ALP
3% SEN Provision
3% University
30% Unknown

Included young people from:
Barnardo's ROUTES & BASE; Bristol Drugs Project, Bristol Horn Youth Concern, Call In Programme, Creative Youth Network, Youth Moves

Continued

Research sample

58 stakeholders from across Bristol participated in the research

5 visits were made to Youth Organisations who support young people who have been or at risk of exploitation

- Stakeholders included; Children and Families Services, Police, Health, Education Providers, Community Organisations, Charities, University of Bedfordshire and the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse.

- They gave their views via in depth interviews, group interviews and multi agency working groups; with some stakeholders participating on more than one occasion.
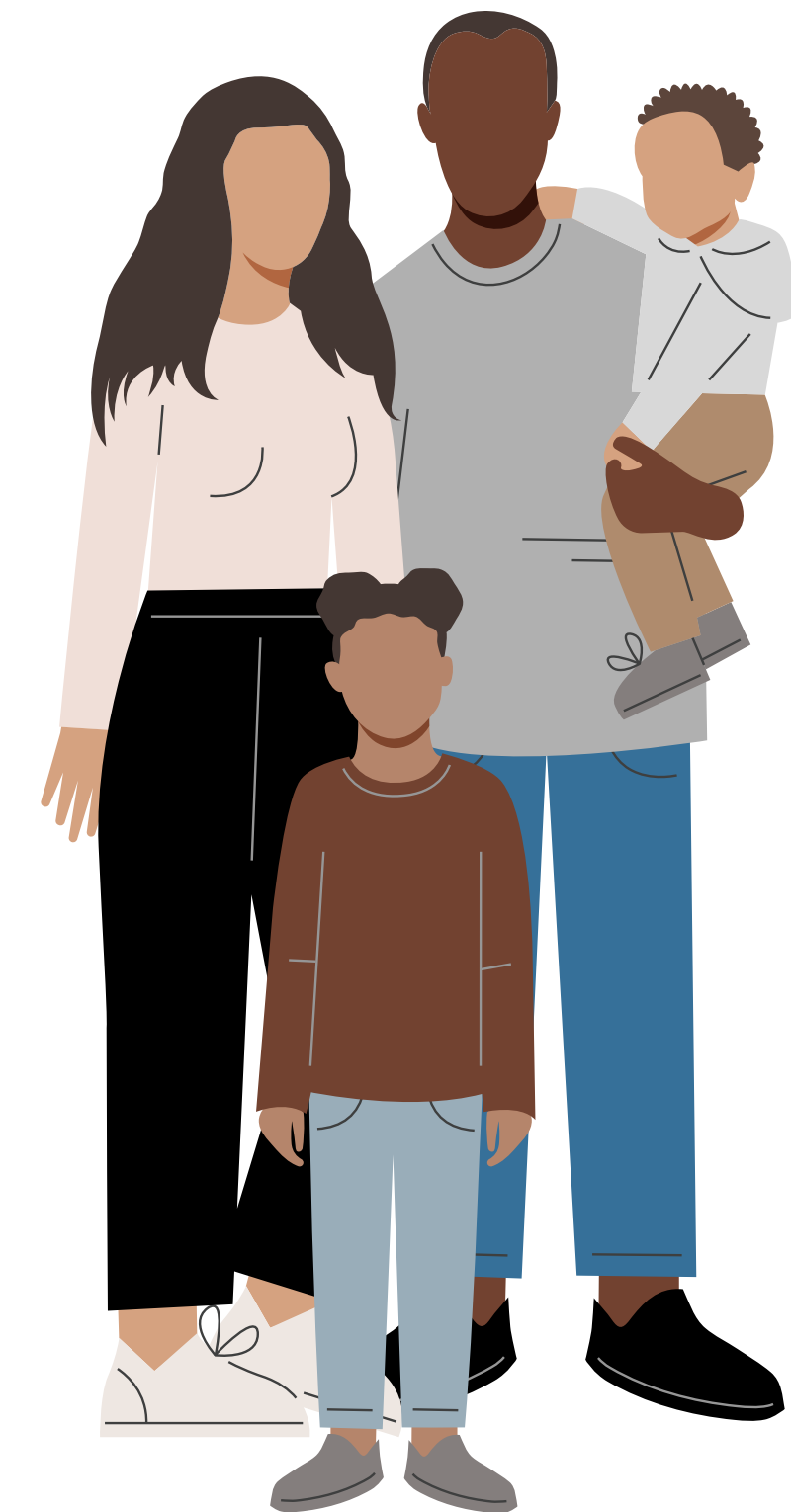
Research limitations

Due to time constraints for this initial piece of research, please note that our research sample isn't fully representative of all groups of people we intended to include.

- Care Experienced Children:

  - We interviewed three children who are care experienced, which we think under-represents this group for exploited children.

- Gender:

  - Most CSE victims were female, and CCE victims were male. We only interviewed one sexually exploited boy and one criminally exploited girl.

- Families:

  - All parents interviewed were Mothers.

  - Fathers and Carers are not represented in our sample.

Low numbers make it hard to draw conclusions from these demographics. Where this is the case, we have substituted the primary research with secondary research; reviewing the existing body of evidence and research studies to build our gaps in knowledge and understanding. These are referenced where relevant.

These above audiences will be **prioritised in further research and testing as the service model is developed further.**
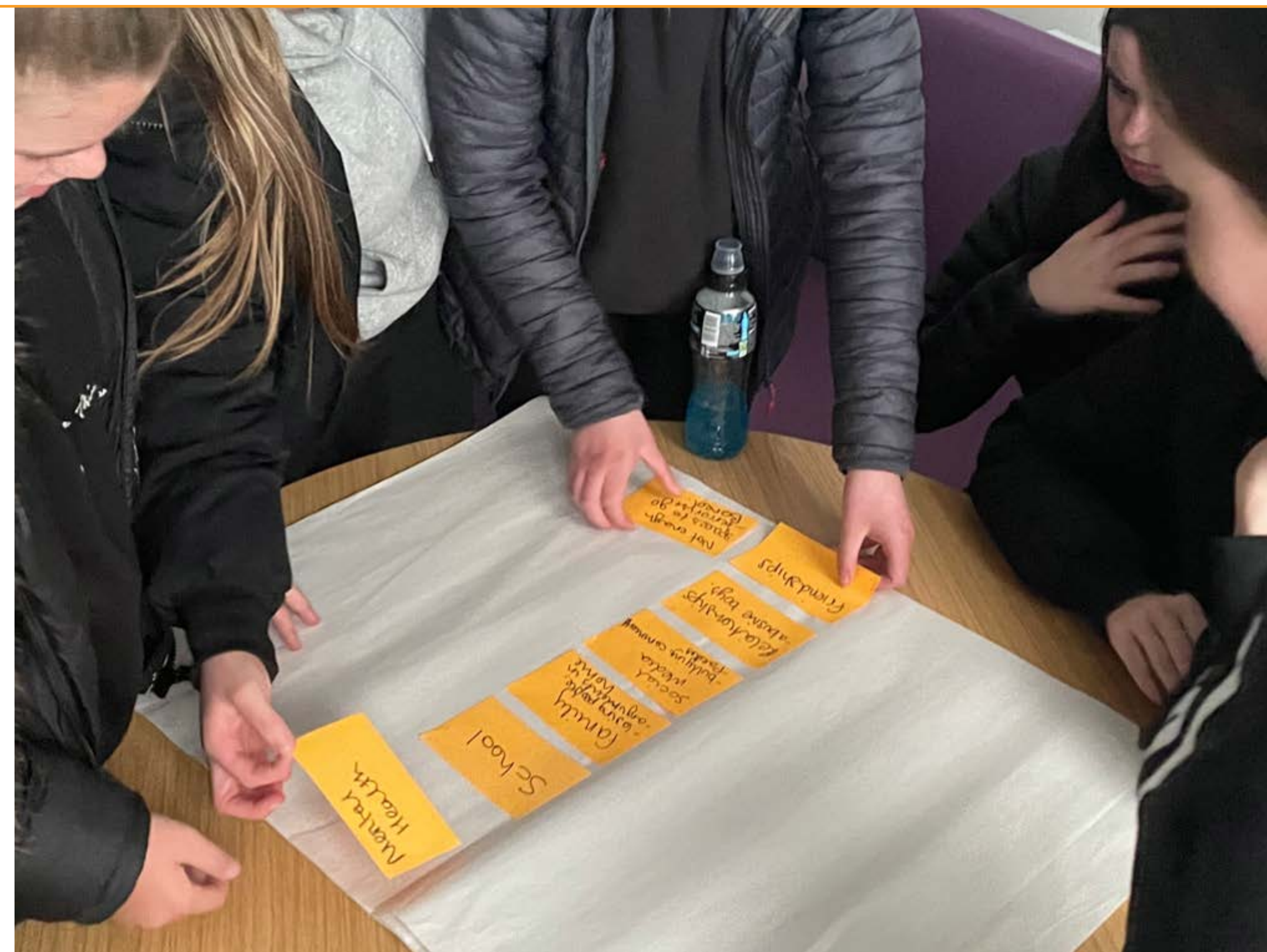
Glossary

Young person	Any person aged 25 or under
BASE	Barnardo's Bristol based sexual exploitation service
ROUTES	Barnardo's Bristol based criminal exploitation service
Safer Options	Bristol Multi-agency Violence Reduction Unit
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
CCE	Child Criminal Exploitation
CAMHS	Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service
FIF	Families in Focus
Care experienced	Incudes Children in Care and Care Leavers
ALP	Alternative Learning Provision

Context: understanding the landscape for exploited children

Exploitation occurs within a context of wider challenges young people are experiencing

Young people experience many interlinking challenges which lead to them being more vulnerable to exploitation. Broader studies reviewed consistently show that children and young people who are exploited or involved in youth violence often have multiple vulnerability factors and complex needs. They may face additional and multiple vulnerabilities as a result of the intersection of socioeconomic disadvantages, ethnicity, gender, disability and immigration.

Young people tell us about challenges in their lives that fall within these three broad themes:

1. High **prevalence of crime** in their community and lack of positive inspiration

2. A longing to **belong and be accepted**

3. Feeling **let down** and unsupported

1. High prevalence of crime in their community

The communities where exploited young people are living often have disproportionately high rates of crime. This surrounding environment somewhat normalizes risky behaviours.

- **Drugs and alcohol** are an ingrained part of daily life.

  - Young people tell us it's 'weird not to' smoke weed. Even if they want to reduce their use it's incredibly hard because it's 'everywhere'.

  - Drug dealers are also 'everywhere' so it's hard to get away from it and drug use is highly normalized.

- **Seeing violence in their area** and the impacts of knife crime on people they know feels scary.

  - **Violent threats** between rival friendship groups leads to young people feeling they need to carry a knife for 'protection'.

  - Girls and young women talk about being verbally harassed on the streets and can feel unsafe walking alone, even when walking home.

- Parents talk about the **challenges raising teenagers** in urban areas where there are many risks their child is exposed to.

"I think people in my community are surrounded by crime - knife crime and loads of people are selling drugs and stuff. If you live where I live, at least one time in your life, you're going to see someone get stabbed. And then that, that really opens your eyes. Cause you got to be kind of on guard, like watching to see if you get stabbed next or, to see what will happen"

Male, 15

"Gangs and drugs are the biggest problem in Bristol. Castle park is an absolute cesspit. My daughter has been beaten up and mugged there, the police know what goes on there but never seem to be in the right place at the right time"

Parent

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"I would say the things I've seen is not good, but that's mostly because where I grew up. If you didn't live where I lived and you seen something for the first time, you'd be scared. Like, you wouldn't know what to do. But once you get used to it, once you just get surrounded by it all your life, it's like normal, that kind of desensitizes someone. Then it just makes you think, well, that's normal because it happens every day"

Male, 15

..and a lack of positive inspiration or role models

- **Criminality is glamorized** within music and culture.

  - In Bristol, drill music is especially popular, and the music lyrics, videos and online influencers portray the 'gang life' as aspirational, portraying large amounts of money.

- Young people talk about a **lack of positive role models** they can relate to and look up to, that come from their area/background. Research shows that having older roles models to aspire to helps builds young people's sense of identity and future ambitions; without this there is a clear gap for these young people.

- There is also a **lack of relationships with safe adults** within their community. Young people talk about having older people around the local area who are a risk and are actively grooming younger people, but there is a lack of safe adults who they can trust.

  - When they do have positive adults they trust and can go to, such as family members, family friends, neighbours or workers, this stands out as being valuable and helpful to them. It gives them a place to go, someone to turn to and someone to look up to.

  - Boys talk about a lack of male family role models and when this is missing boys look to other older males in their community, who may exploit that relationship.

www.rootsofaction.com/role-models-youth-strategies-success

"The way the lifestyle is glorified – county lines and all that – is very hard because yes, the money is nice to have. To sit there counting out £10,000 is lush, but you can't spend it. Kids don't realise you are doing 24 hours 7 days a week work. You can never put it behind you. The one thing I struggled with was the constant phone ringing, the sound of that ring tone sends you crazy after a while. Only 2 hours sleep a night. That's why in my music I refuse to glorify the lifestyle. When you see your best friend who you grew up with die, yeah. That's it. So at the end of the day, if more people would actually speak about the realistic side of the lifestyle, then maybe people would understand, but being truthful, it doesn't make money."

Male, 19

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"I'm sitting in a room and I'm with my mum and I'm with [worker] and [case manager] and it's overwhelming because you can sense that there is so much strong female energy in the room. And like, I can't even explain it. There's just nothing like it, I think that's why it was so emotional because suddenly you realize how important it is for teenage females to kind of be reminded of **how special they are and that you're not what happened to you.** I think when something does happen to teenage girls, it really does lower your self-confidence. And it really does have an effect on, you know, how you treat yourself and how others will treat you. So if your rude to yourself and, you know, you think that you're this and not like that, that will just allow others and give them permission to like put that point of view on you"

Female, 16

..and a lack of positive inspiration or role models

"It's like, most people don't really have a father figure in their life or some people might not have an older brother, but then they could go on the streets and then someone will be at that older brother that they just never got. I have a cousin who's been kicked out of like 10 schools and he's only 13. And he doesn't really have a father figure in his life. So he looks up to the other people in life and stuff. "

Male, 15

"I'd say there is [positive role models], but other people would say nah there's not. I'd say there is but I have people who are better than the bad people, but I do still have the bad people around. I have 2 good people around. They don't do crime. They have families. You go into their house and all you do is smoke, play with their children, and eat food. But when you go to someone else's house it's not that environment. Your there to go make money or to go to work. So you've got to make sure you can do both of those mindsets"

Male, 17

"A lot of older people are a problem. I'm speaking for my people innit. I know people that do get groomed, and are going places selling drugs, making their money. Obviously I can't judge them. I don't think they're bad people for doing it. You've got to do what you got to do. It happens a lot innit. It's not the best thing"

Male, 17

Young people want to hear aspirational stories
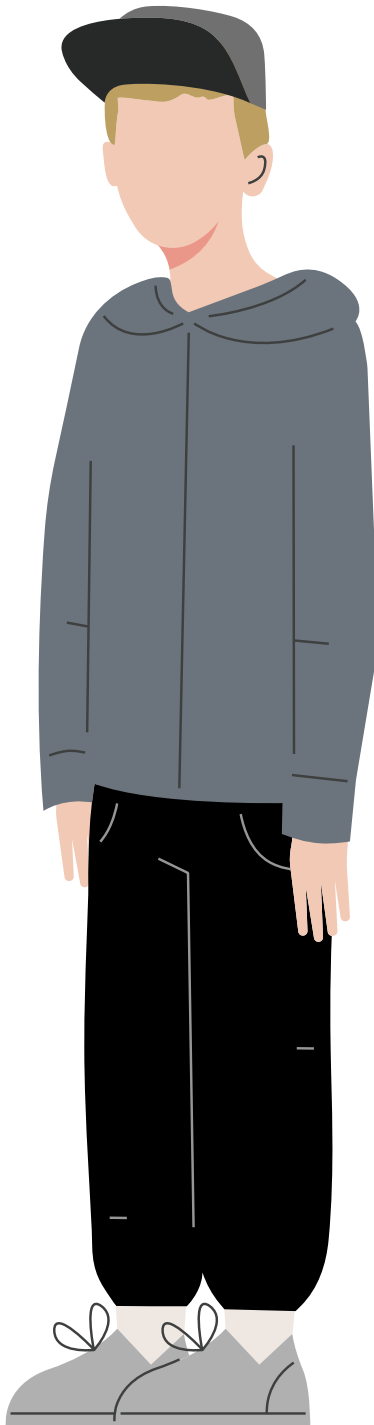
"We're sick of hearing these **fear stories** about what will happen if you stab someone and how you'll end up in jail. I've heard so many of those, **do they not think we know that.** We see it all the time. I want them to **bring us someone inspiring** who's done big things and made something of themselves. That's the stories we want to hear."

Male, 17

2. A longing to belong & be accepted

- For any young person, the **need to be socially accepted** and 'fit in' is exacerbated. Research widely shows that young people spend more time with their peers than with their families and are particularly sensitive to peer rejection (Peake, Dishion, Stormshak, Moore, & Pfeifer, 2013; Sebastian et al., 2011; Somerville, 2013). Social influence is the subject of a large body of research that has demonstrated how readily participants are affected by the opinions, judgments, and behaviour of other people (Klucharev, Hytönen, Rijpkema, Smidts, & Fernández, 2009; Walker & Andrade, 1996; Zaki, Schirmer, & Mitchell, 2011)

- Young people and their parents tell us that the **desire to fit in socially makes young people more vulnerable to manipulation** and **exploitation** as they fear saying no.

- The **fear of being alone** and needing to be part of a social group that accept you, can make those without a good friendship group particularly at risk. Young people highlight the transition to secondary school (year 7, age 11) can be a particularly vulnerable time given the increased need to find social acceptance. This is also true for any transitions such as moving to a new school or leaving school at age 16.

> "He instantly found people... he gravitated towards popular, big people that he felt made him untouchable, probably because he didn't have great social skills... and he fell into the trap of being friends with a gang and they wanted [him] to get involved in mulling drugs from one place to another."
>
> Parent interviewed as part of the Cross-border peer-on-peer abuse and CCE Thematic Child Safeguarding Practice Review, 2021

> "Acceptance is a big thing. If you tell them no, automatically you're going to be seen as the lame one, or as not like them. It doesn't even have to be forced, but if you want to be with them it's so easy to be manipulated without you even knowing it, because you want to be accepted. A lot of people are scared to be alone. If you're in a good group of friends but they kick you out, if a bad group come to you and ask you to do something, you'll do it just because you don't want to be alone"
>
> Male, 21

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..and a priority on making money and status

There is a **focus on status** within youth culture; of being the best, having the best. Young people talk about the chase of this status; of being the most respected among your peer group.

- Young people feel they need to **keep up with social media trends** and are very aware of the social perceptions of them from others online. The fear of missing out or not keeping up causes pressure and anxiety.

- There is a high **priority on making money** yet young people are unclear how they can make the money they need in a safe and legal way.

"Everyone wants to be number one. It's all about status. Everyone has to look up to me, I want to be the best. People need to stop going on social media. If they spend too much time on social media they feel like they have to keep proving themselves to people who don't really care. People are trying to look and act like they have money for social media when really their working hand to mouth. The peer pressure makes people feel like they have to have the best things"

Male, 21

T-Shirt designed by young person in the Barnardo's Ambitions programme

..and a priority on making money and status

"Money is an economic problem. If you working minimum
wage 9-5, you got money to pay your bills, buy food, but
you ain't even got enough for clothes and things like that.
Your broke all the time even though your working"

Male, 21

"I'm able to take care of myself with money. Money is everything, I believe money buys
happiness. I come from no money, a very, very poor household. When I was younger I made
quite a lot of money at one point and then I've gone back on behaviours and had no money
again, and that's really highlighted to me that money is absolutely everything. You can't eat,
sleep properly, electric, heating, travel, clothing, it's all money. In my mind you might as well
be dead. We all walk past many homeless people and we don't notice them. Their broke, they
can't fly. They are almost a part of the scenery. And I do not want to be that."

Male, 19

3. Feeling let down

Young people who have been exploited have often been let down by the system and structures around them in multiple ways. They have often experienced exclusion prior to exploitation occurring e.g. from schools, or from having multiple children's home moves.

These young people feel they have not had adequate support in place to help them. Those interviewed mentioned five key areas where they have felt particularly let down; **schools, home environments, police, lack of safe spaces** to go, and **lack of mental health support** (which upon speaking with professionals, we have expanded out to include broader health services).

For exploitation, there is evidence that victim blaming language has occurred within services. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) gives numerous examples of victim blaming language by different authorities who are responsible for the safety of children, including the police and social services. Historically, there has been a tendency to perceive child criminality as the voluntary lifestyle choice of adolescents (Children's Commissioner, 2019). This has resulted in omissions in safeguarding duties to this group of older children and **victim blaming of exploited children** within institutions and services such as the police, social services and schools.

A local safeguarding review identified a number of vulnerability and risk factors in the context of peer on peer abuse and child criminal exploitation. Of eight named young people with rapid reviews, all were male, seven were from BAME backgrounds, six of the young people identified as having special educational needs, and half of the young people were in or had a history of being in care. For most of the young people, home was not a protective environment. (Harris, 2021).
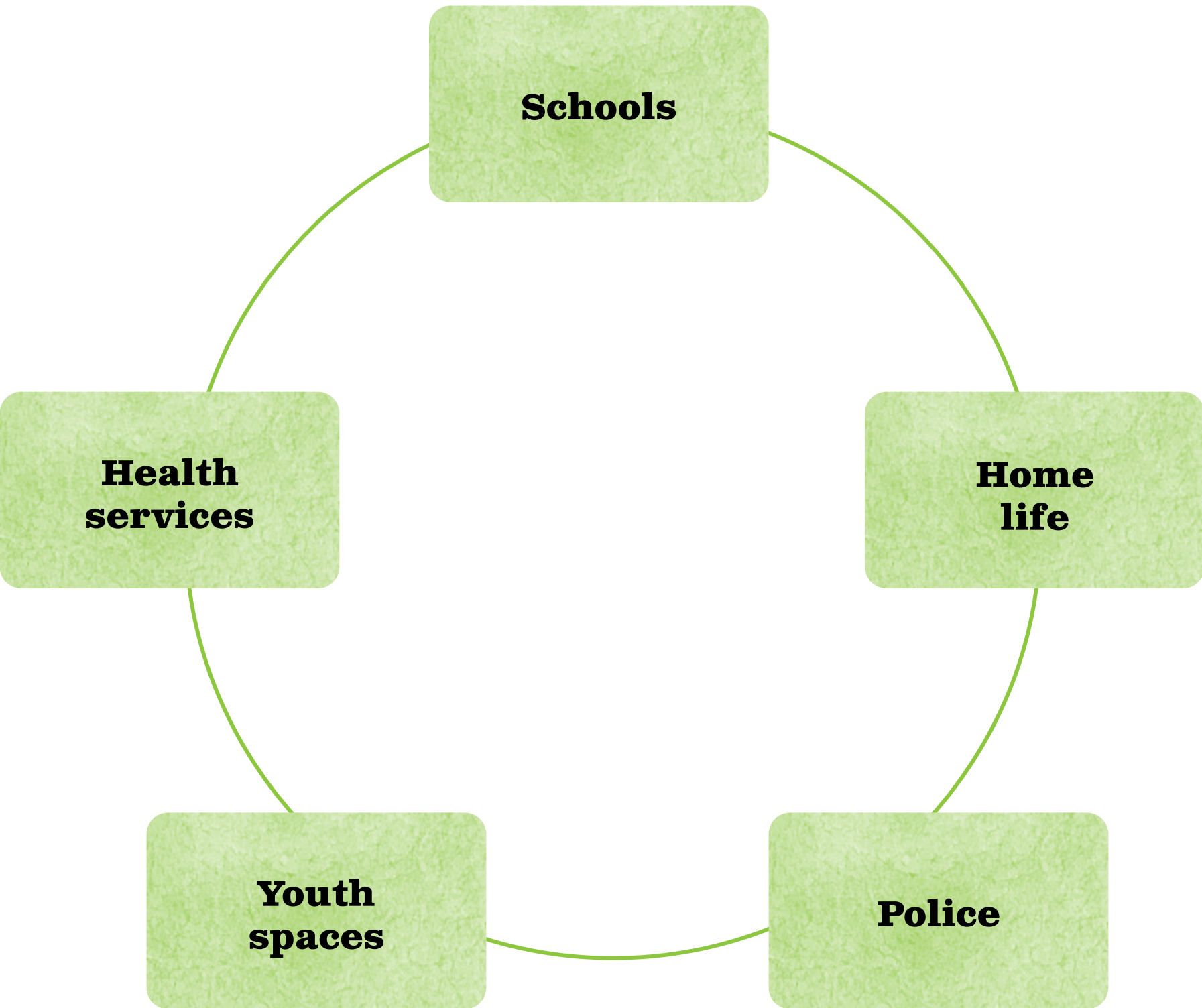
"What as professionals we do is we go 'risk high - no', rather than 'risk high - safety plan. What support do we need?' I've seen that across education, across care settings in some youth settings they've banned young people from youth services because of the trouble they bring to their door"

Stakeholder

"I think that's the kind of adult way we've created a society that has made it so some young people can't get through and transition into an adult successfully. It's not because it's their fault. **It's the system's fault.** The system works in a way that works towards outcomes and goals. And if you can't enable the school to get a good Ofsted and if you can't enable a care home to show that it's giving you good care, then actually we're going to reject you constantly because you're going to impact the way we look as an institution. And that's the problem"

Stakeholder

Feeling let down: schools

Professionals are increasingly frustrated with the **high numbers of school exclusions** across Bristol and recognise the increased risk of exploitation for a child being excluded from school or being moved to an alternative learning provision. Whilst there is work being done by Safer Options to support schools to have a more trauma-informed approach with initiatives such as the Drugs or Weapons in Schools Pathway, **professionals want more to be done to reduce exclusions.** Research shows there is consistent difficulty engaging schools in keeping children safe, particularly around exclusion from school (The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, 2022).

Young people told us just how judged they have felt by schools. Many young people feel like **school doesn't understand them and blames them.** Some talk about school making them feel worse, labelling them as the 'naughty kid', and giving them less opportunities than the 'more clever' children.

- **Changing schools is a source of anxiety,** with young people finding it hard to deal with, but many have had to move schools' multiple times. Young people don't think schools should automatically blame and punish young people for their behaviours by excluding them but should instead offer more support to help them work through their challenges.

- There are positive examples of teachers who stand out as being helpful and trustworthy, and when this is the case **young people value having someone they can talk to at school.** This helps to make school easier for them and feel like a better environment.

> "A lot of people talk about young people being disengaged from education... I put it the other way. **Education is disengaging young people.** And I think the culture needs to change"
>
> Stakeholder

> "I didn't enjoy school. A lot of my friends were like the 'naughty kids'. So I feel like the way they deal with that isn't great because they just chuck them in isolation, then they don't have to see it so there could be more like support for these people"
>
> Female, 19

"Say for example, they would exclude or permanently exclude you for it, but it's not really your fault. Like it might not be their fault that they're drinking or doing whatever necessarily. You've kind of got to **look into the background** of things and see what that mental health and physical side are **before you kind of judge** what they do and stuff"

Male, 16

"There are far too many school exclusions across Bristol. It should be a zero tolerance. All children should be in full-time education. There should never even be a part-time. And then if a child can't be on site, it should be incredibly temporary and there is a plan in place. I think we need to make things a little bit more interesting. It's always been a bugbear of mine that we don't have alternative options for children - just because they can't sit still in a classroom, just because you can't learn your English and Maths doesn't mean you're not going to make a great plumber or a great carpenter or an artist. **If we know what our children are good at, then we should offer them those things"**

Stakeholder

"With school, I really needed to bang on the door, insist on meeting them, they had a new safeguarding person every 6 months so it was hard to get any continuity. Some way of being able to properly interact with the school is needed. She didn't feel like she had anyone she could go to. How do we encourage them safety to be able to talk about the fact they need extra support without having to share everything that has happened to them"

Parent

Feeling let down: youth spaces

Young people feel like there **isn't enough places for them to go** or things for them to do.

- They lack a space where they feel like they belong. They often feel like they face judgement from the community just for 'hanging out' when they don't have anywhere else to go.

- The older ones talk about the missing youth clubs and spaces where they used to be able to go.

- For those that do have a youth-focused space they can go to, this is highly valued and often the highlight of their week.

Some professionals think there is a **correlation between the cuts in youth services,** particularly youth clubs, **and the rise in exploitation and youth violence.**

- They see this as an important part of the 'how we got here' story and are increasingly frustrated to see the negative impacts of the reduction in youth services.

- Some youth professionals feel like there is simply a redistribution of funding, with funds now being spent on 'crisis' high-risk intervention instead of early prevention.

"When we commissioned the youth services out in 2014, we went from having youth centres in every area of Bristol to a really reduced service and the focus changed from having open access sessions to targeted one to one work. So it left a lot of young people who didn't have anywhere to go and it left them vulnerable to then being picked up and groomed. There weren't eyes on them or trusted adults within the community that were working with them all the time. You could see the correlation, a lot of those young people who were being referred into Families in Focus would have been those young people who come to the youth centre. And I didn't think it would have got to that point of one to one referrals if they'd been having that space in youth centres."

Stakeholder

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"Youth Clubs. That's what we need. **Youth club used to be sick and then one day they just disappeared fam.** There was bear youth clubs. I went to after school club in Fishponds and I went to one in Hillfields. Adventure Playgrounds were sick. Everyone went Adventure Playground at St Paul's. They just want the kids to be on the streets now. They don't have nothing. Even the parks are kind of dead. And if anyone's just chilling in the park five minutes later the police come anyway"

Male, 17
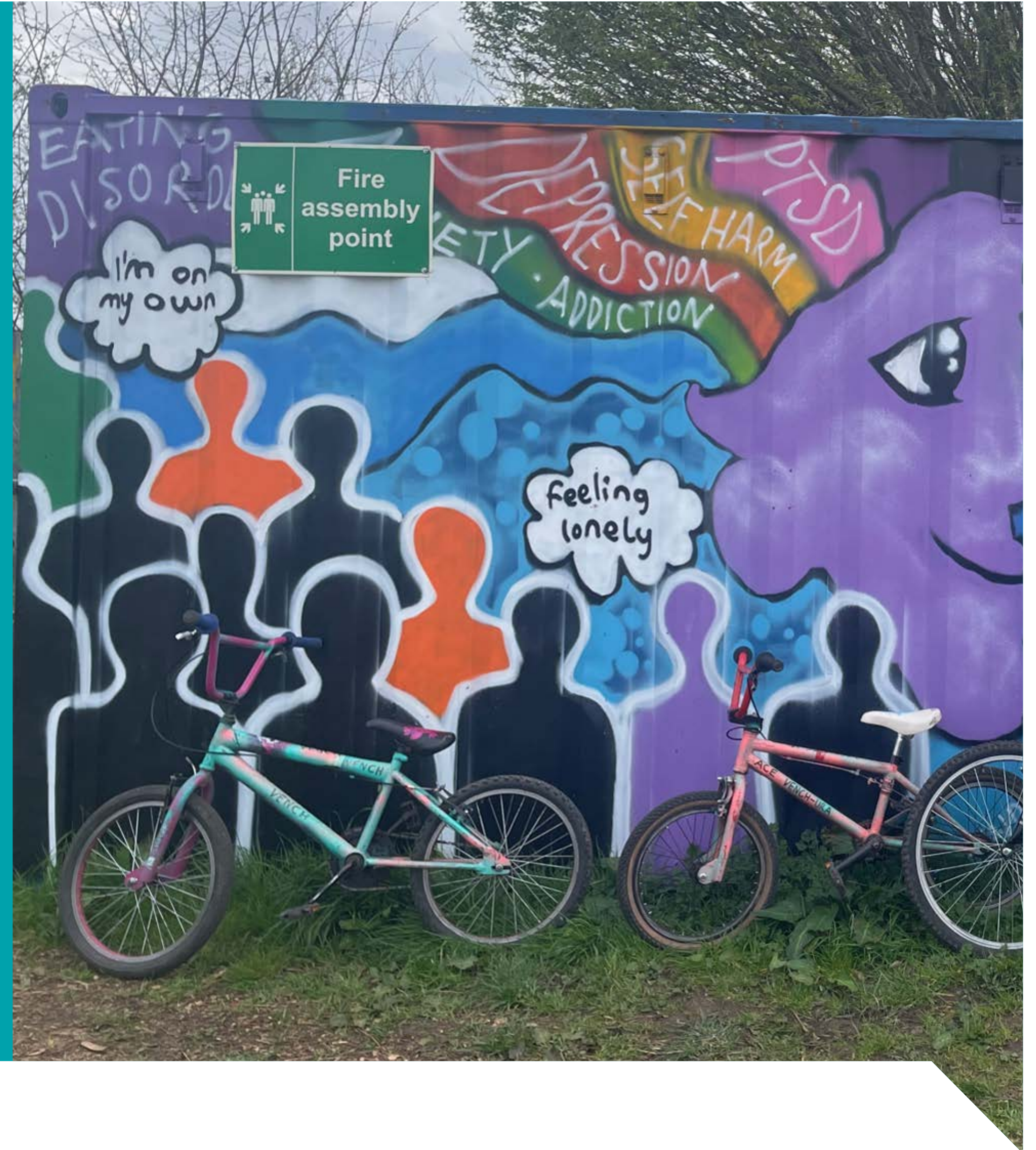
Feeling let down: the police

For young people who have been **criminally exploited, there is extreme distrust of the police** and they don't feel protected by them.

- Reports of **generational tension** with the police and feeling that they are 'against us'.

- There are **fears of corruption and racism,** stemming both from media stories as well as experiences of family and friends.

- Previous studies show that police don't always see young people engaging in group criminal activity as vulnerable and use conventional methods which break trust easily (Children's Commissioner, 2019).

Assumptions made by professionals based on gender and/or stereotypes in relation to vulnerability may impact on the profile of those identified and receiving support in the context of extra-familial (e.g. Adultification bias). In the context of ethnically diverse groups and men, the literature suggests that perceptions and stereotyping has led to young people being criminalised, rather than being seen as victims; the criminalisation and racial profiling of Black and Minority Ethnic communities can lead to a criminal justice response rather than a safeguarding one (The Children's Society, 2018).

From our interviews, sexually exploited **girls generally have had better experiences with the police,** especially when they have dealt with Operation Topaz. Being able to talk to a plain-clothed engagement officer in a less formal setting, who took the time to listen to them, helped them to build trust and feel like the Police were on their side. Some sexually exploited young people did however mention frustrations with inaction or poor communication from the Police.

"I do not trust the police because they don't think about what kind of laws their upholding. They're not thinking about the bigger picture – why their chasing some people for drugs but not others. The hypocrisy – are you trying to better your community or are you trying to work your way up the ranks? Their job isn't to help you get out situations, their job is to catch you in situations. A police officer should protect the public. But they're not, they just want a pay rise. If they caught me, would they really care that I'm getting exploited? No."

Male, 21

"It's a culture shift and one that we're actively working on. I saw a case a couple of weeks back where we had arrested an under 18 for possession, but then we did nothing else with it. So there was no support package put in, there was no referrals to the local authorities to question why has a 16 year old got all of these packages - there's a safeguarding concern there. It was very much focused on the offender - right I've got drugs here and I've got possession and that's my charge. So it definitely is a culture change we are working on - so that case was escalated to me, I went across to a colleague in response. And we shared the learning as a group, because we were able to pick it up on the following day. So it was just that initial stage could have been done differently. So there's learning but on the whole it's improving"

Stakeholder

Feeling let down: the police

"My friend used to want to be a police officer when he was younger. And then like, just cause like where we grew up, he didn't want to become a police officer just because he thought like people would hate him and stuff"

Male, 15

"I had to wait three months when I was being sexually exploited for the police to get a restraining order on him for three weeks. Now he's out of prison and I see him around and I can't get a restraining order because he's been to prison"

Female, 19

"Some of my friends they carry knives, but that's not because they like doing it, it's more solely out of protection because like, they don't know what's going to happen. But sometimes it's not even like they have problems with anyone it's more like the police I would say. Because sometimes people in my community, they're not even scared of other people, they're more scared of the police, just because of how we were raised. It's were 'oh don't talk to the police, don't do this, don't do that, their bad people"

Male, 15

Feeling let down: health services

Young people who have been sexually exploited feel there is a **lack of mental health support,** and it often feels 'too little too late':

- Not having anyone to talk to until being at crisis point and a lack of mental health provision in school.

- **Long waiting lists,** especially from CAMHS. Not getting help when you needed/wanted it leading to poor emotional & mental health escalating.

- They often had difficulty with transitions and changes, for example moving schools or care placements and the anxiety this can bring.

There is **stigma around getting mental health support for criminally exploited boys.**

- Some boys told us about growing up in a family where it wasn't safe to say how they feel, and they now find it difficult to talk about emotions.

- Criminal exploitation workers face resistance from boys being ashamed to talk about how they feel but have also seen a need for mental health support to address post traumatic stress disorder, stress and anxiety.

A local safeguarding review found that **families have faced challenges in accessing health services needed** for their child, which in some cases led to parents not receiving help with speech and language therapy for example. Often, **special educational needs and disability (SEND) are not being identified and diagnosed,** which can be a barrier to supporting young children effectively especially through their education. Stakeholders raised this as being important to consider for a redesigned service model.

"Anxiety was probably on a spike, like, at it's highest peak probably in my first years of secondary and then moving to another school and then kind of in the moment now with how things are, I guess their all changing and all like being different and stuff. It just kind of, I guess, being independent as well. I guess that's kind of like made me feel good, but also like a bit like paranoid about stuff, I guess. And overwhelming"

Male, 16

Feeling let down: health services

"A lot of our young people are coming to us with undiagnosed speech, language and communication needs. So because we've got a Youth Offending Team speech and language therapist, we tried to get all of our young people assessed. And by doing that, she can write to Court to let court know what helps them best and how to best communicate"

Stakeholder

"More and more we're seeing undiagnosed needs. So where they have educational needs, that actually haven't been diagnosed yet, and they should have Education Health Care Plan (EHCP), but they just haven't gone through that process or hasn't been picked up historically. So that's quite challenging in terms of education and the link to services and how that works and how young people are accessing the right services. Because sometimes you need a piece of paper to get the right support. And if that's been undiagnosed or unmet that can be quite challenging"

Stakeholder

Feeling let down: home life

Some young people have an **unstable home life** making it harder for them to recover from exploitation. They may:

- Have family blaming them, making them feel like it's their fault, or just generally not understanding what they are going through.

- Be a child in care and struggle to stay in one place. Project workers shared many examples of children in care being excluded from children's homes due to the risks around exploitation which leads to multiple placement moves. Often the young person will end up being in semi-independent living where there is little support from professionals and the housing is unregulated, leaving the child more vulnerable to further harm.

Young people told us about the **difference in made to them when they were given help to change** their negative home environment e.g. move to a foster home. Others that do have a supportive parent at home value that relationship in their life and having a parent who is looking out for them.

"As soon as I moved out of my Nans and in with my Foster Carer it became a lot easier. I didn't have family cussing at me all the time and I finally realised that it wasn't my fault"

Female, 18

"It's kind of hard because I didn't grow up in a household where you told everyone how you're feeling. Until my dad left. But while my dad was living there. You could not tell no one how you were feeling it. You have to boil it up inside. And then I think that's one of the main reasons why I started smoking weed"

Male, 15

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"The young person I'm working with has been moved around from children's homes because no-one wants him, he lashes out and threatens people so he's too risky for them. He's ended up in a semi-independent shared accommodation but there's no-one there that's helping him. It's completely unregulated. I turn up and he's smoking weed in his room and his room is a complete mess with rubbish piled up all over the floor. When I see him I get him to clear up and tidy his room with me. But there's been times when he's got angry and smashed things and the girl there who's on duty is only 19 and has no experience, she doesn't know what to do"

Project Worker

Service experiences of young people: What's working

What's working

From capturing reflections from young people on a range of different support services across Bristol, we can uncover what aspects they feel most effectively support them to recover from exploitation and prevent further harm from occurring.

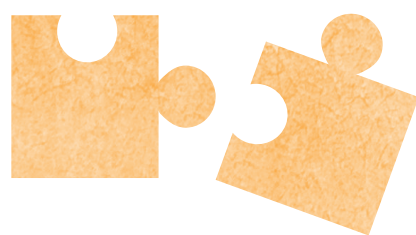There are four elements that young people most value and feel are fundamental for effective support:

Relationships
Have trusted people to talk to

Knowledge
Equipped with information & understand risk

Activities
Engage in meaningful experiences

Environment
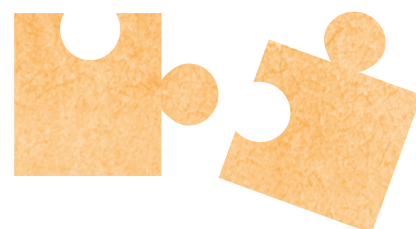Contextual safeguarding

What's working

Relationships

- Connection - someone relatable I can trust who cares about me.
- Consistency - someone who's not going anywhere.
- Feeling understood - someone who gets what I'm going through.

Knowledge

- Learning information that helps me become more aware.
- Learning techniques to help me cope with thoughts and emotions.

Activities

- Fun experiences that help me bond with my worker/peers.
- Finding passions & interests that help me build my confidence / self worth.

Environment

- A space where I feel comfortable.
- A police officer I can talk to.
- Support with my education or home life.
- Accessing health services in an easy way.

Support that fits into their world, instead of the young person having to fit into a system

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Connection

Having a **genuine and connected relationship is the foundation and most valued aspect** of any exploitation service for young people. To form the basis of a connected relationship, young people told us they value:

- Someone who takes the time to get to know them.

- A **two-way relationship** – they want to get to know their worker as well, this helps them trust.

- Someone they can relate to and look up to.

- A worker who gives them time to just be themselves and doesn't push them to open up and talk about harm until their ready. They appreciate 'random chats', 'just driving', 'days out'.

- **Someone who keeps showing up** even when the young person tries to push them away.

- Small **personal actions that feel different from other professionals** that have let them down in the past. E.g. driving them places when they need a lift, knowing their favourate food, finding them opportunities, replying out of hours.

"I would get in her car, get under a blanket and sleep while we drove out of the city. And she just let me sleep as long as I needed. When I woke up she'd buy me some food, and when I was ready, we would talk. I always liked that I didn't have to talk about things, it was just if I was ready. If I didn't feel like talking it was OK, I could just have a sleep and some food."

Female, 18
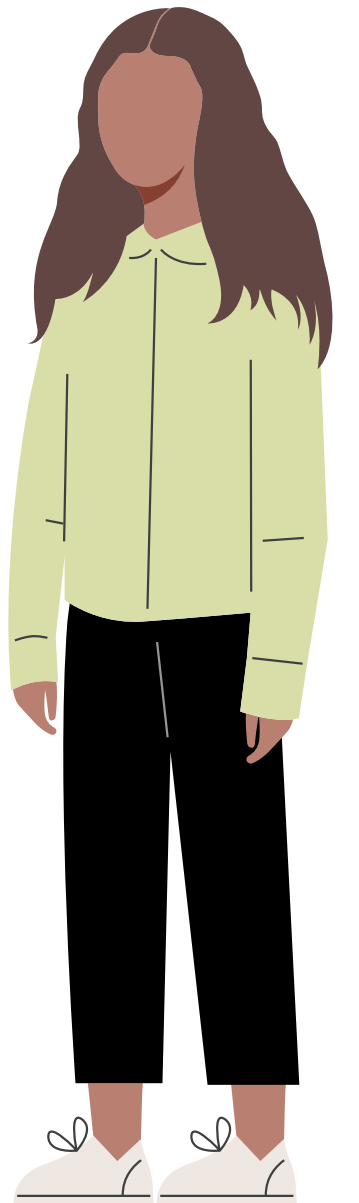
Relationships
Consistency

Young people have often experienced many professionals in their life who they've got to know and have then left. It's therefore important to them to have **someone who will be consistent** in their life. When they have this, which those who had a ROUTES and BASE service often had, it stands out as being incredibly valuable to them.

- When a worker changes, it is disheartening and can trigger the feeling of being let down.

- Young people find it hard to have to re-tell information about themselves and their past to another person.

- Parents notice the impact a change of trusted worker has on their child, causing them visible emotional upset and affecting their behaviour at home.

- However, some young people within ROUTES and BASE did talk about their worker changing and them still being able to build a new bond with their new worker; it helped when there was time to do a handover with their past worker and they had time to build a new relationship.

"Because you've told this one person everything about your life and the time that you've been with them and then you're having to tell the whole story again to someone else, so it's exhausting I suppose"

Female, 16

"Something I always remember, on my first home visit when you met me and my mum, the first thing I asked is how long is this service for? Because I don't want to go to another worker in a couple of weeks time. And you told me there was no end date. And I said good. I've got used to social workers before and then they leave. Now it's been three years, and in that time I've had three or four social workers, 2 YOT workers and 4 schools"

Male, 17

"When my drugs counsellor changed I had to fill all the forms in all over again and it took ages. I didn't really mind when my worker changed because I liked the new one but I would have preferred to just carry on instead of tell them everything all over again"

Female, 17

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Relationships
Understanding

- For a young person to be able to trust an adult, they **need to feel like that adult understands them** and what they have been through. Having someone to talk to who genuinely understands exploitation helps them to feel safe and to be able to speak about their experiences.

- Specialist exploitation workers fulfil this for young people however they mentioned they had felt misunderstood by other workers in the past, e.g. social workers, teachers, CAMHS workers.

- Whilst some young people mentioned that a **worker with lived experience** may have a better understanding of what they have been through, they also thought as long as they feel the worker understands what they are going through this is sufficient for them feeling well understood.
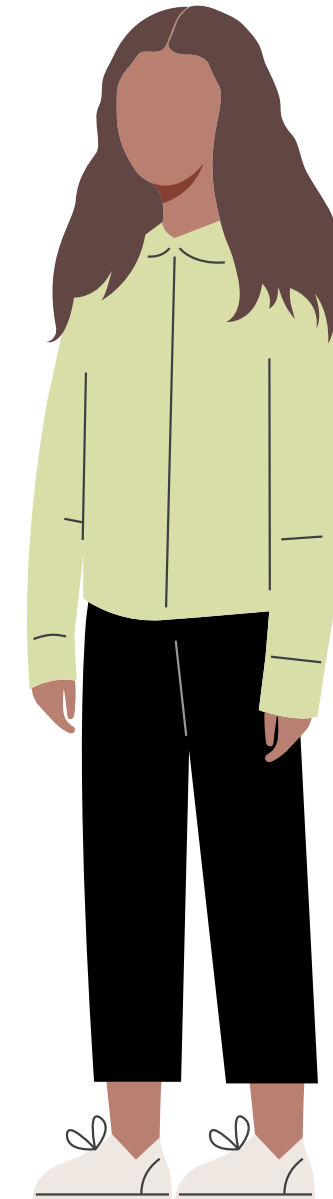
"You as a person are not going to know how to understand that if you have not experienced any type of trauma in your life, so you don't know how that person's going to feel. So I definitely think you lot need to figure out what your doing with your workers and stuff like that because not all workers are suitable to be workers. Like when I confided in [X], even if she hasn't been for what I've been through, she has an understanding of it. If that makes sense. There's some workers that literally don't have any understanding of it"

Female, 18

Knowledge

Learning about exploitation helps young people to become more aware of what's happening. They talk about feeling smarter, learning about risk and understanding behaviours more. They also appreciate being able to get advice from their workers on what to do in certain situations and can find the advice surprisingly helpful.

Young people find it helpful learning coping techniques and strategies to help them with their thoughts and emotions.

- Learning **practical techniques** such as breathing techniques.

- Findings **activities** to do that help them with their mental health such as drawing or boxing.

- Being able to **talk about how they feel** because they have a trusted relationship.

- Being given numbers to call if they need to late at night **(signposting).**

- Learning about substance abuse and effects of cannabis (e.g. through Bristol Drugs Project programmes).

> "The Call In protects me from myself, my own detriment. You guys come in and show me other options, what else I could do like get a job or whatever and help me with my mindset"
>
> Male, 21

Art created by a BASE young person.

Knowledge

"It shows you the bad side and what you need help with. It makes you realise to look out for them (risk). We did a worksheet where we talked about a Netflix series. I went home and watched it and realised how much of it was wrong. Because they were under I8 I realised they weren't prostitutes they were being exploited. Now I look out for the risks more not just for me but for other people as well."

Female, 13

"They give me really good advice. So like I'll tell them about something and then the advice they give is completely different to what I thought they would say, and it would be even better"

Female, 17

Activities

Activities stand out to young people; they **want to do more of what they enjoy.**

- Fun activities help build relationships: sharing fun experiences with their worker helps young people to feel at ease and to bond. Examples given were go-karting, baking, day trips out of Bristol, cinema, getting their nails done.

Finding meaningful activities and passions:

- Some workers have pointed the young person towards activities for them to take part in, for example going to a boxing gym. This has a positive impact giving the young person something fun and meaningful to do with their time, building confidence and creating new social connections. Often the worker organising this encourages them to attend and help them to overcome barriers they may have such as social anxiety or financial.

- Finding a passion that is meaningful to them can be a huge opportunity for building a young person's self worth. The Ambitions programme has enabled some young people within ROUTES and BASE to develop their music or design skills, which has helped them to grow in their confidence and given them an outlet for expression.

"I go to Empire Fighting Chance. The team there are just jokes you can have a laugh with them. And it's a chance to get all my anger out, I feel better and stronger from it"

Female, 19

"We baked a cake while doing a worksheet. The decoration was amazing. It's fun and easy to talk to someone instead of a worker speaking to me like someone's died"

Female, 13

"Remember when we went go karting, that was sick"

Male, 17

Case study: making music

"I've been doing music now for about three years, I started off, at the YMCA. I was bored. I was getting, quite bad anger issues. So one of my support workers gave me a microphone and a laptop and just said, go away. I always had very loud sound systems in my room and was always blasting music loud and he told me you love music, go make music. So I tried it, I enjoyed it. And it's my only form of out lease in my life. So that's why I take this quite seriously. And why I've waited to get any profit, because the fact that it's an out lease means that profit isn't too big of a deal. There's a benefit to me, it makes me feel good"
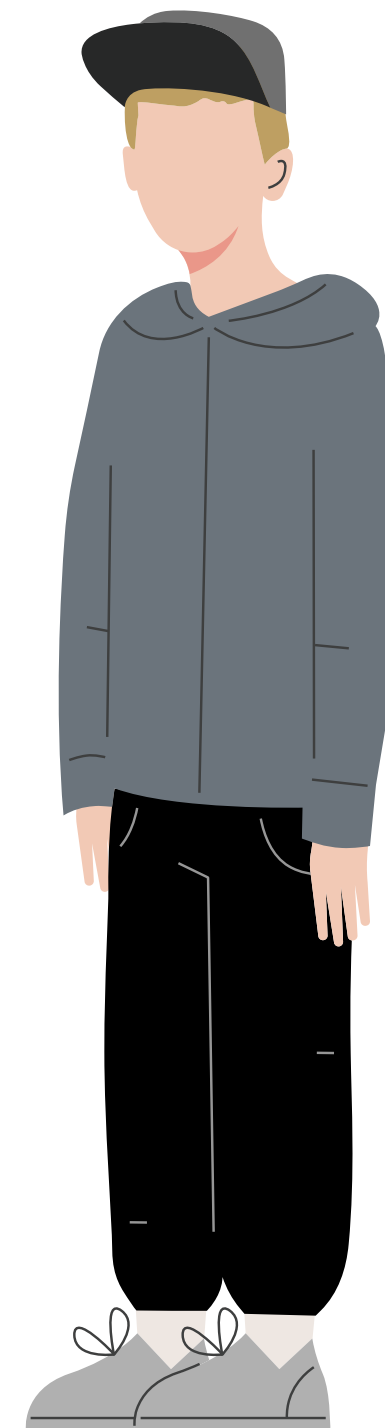
"Now I've made more music with Ambitions and the team have helped me make it better. **I love when people compliment me saying nice things and all of that.** And I know I've got a bit of talent in music so when I play it to people and I see on people's social media and stuff like that, promoting me and saying good stuff about it. So again, it makes me feel good. It's a self appreciation as well as the appreciation from others, which gives you self appreciation as well, which is just nice"

Male, 19
Part of the Ambitions programme

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Environment
Service spaces

Environments matter to young people, and they want to have more spaces in their life where they feel comfortable.

For services, they like to have the balance of both being able to meet a worker out and about (going to different places such as a coffee shop or McDonalds) and having a place they can come to that feels familiar and comfortable.

• Old Market (BASE and ROUTES building) feels comfy to young people, they like the artwork, the sofas, the kitchen, the shower, the friendly people and the fridge filled with drinks and snacks. They feel like they can chat to whoever is about, and they have good banter. This all adds to a positive atmosphere where they don't feel judged.

• When we spoke to young people who were part of other youth clubs, those spaces stood out to them as being places they felt particularly happy, at ease and safe.

"Let's say my confidence has boosted ever since I've gone here. This is where I met my best friend, we've been best mates for like six years now. It's a great place to socialize without the fears you're going to be harmed because everyone here is really chill"

Male, 16

Environment
Education & home life

When workers help young people **to improve their situation with school or college, this has a positive impact.** Many young people found this helpful and told us that their worker helped them be able to stay in school or find a place at college.

Some workers have also **helped to resolve issues at home,** for example through speaking with family members or advocating for the young person with their social worker.

- With their home life, it's important to note that supportive networks for a child can span beyond parents and/or carers. Young people mentioned other adults in their life that they got on well with such as an uncle or a neighbour. Workers sometimes help them to build on those relationships to become safe spaces to go/people to talk to, taking a contextual safeguarding approach.

"I was in a school for about two months, got kicked out. [worker] helped me get back in. I had to go to another school, and I wouldn't have got through it without her, it was a horrible school. Then she helped me get into College. I was there for a week and left but she helped me get in. She helped me find a job too"

Female, 19

Case study: support with housing solution

The young person was having a hard time living at home with her nan and other relatives and wasn't happy there. A friend of her father's had recently fostered a baby, and said she'd be happy to have this girl to live with her. Her social worker and BASE worker worked together speaking to the family members to explore this solution and eventually were able to make this change to her accommodation.

The young person told us what a big difference this made to her and her wellbeing. She had been increasingly frustrated in the past with feeling like social workers and professionals at her school didn't listen to her complaints about her home. She appreciated her worker listening to her and advocating for her to make this happen. Now she goes to her nan's just twice a week and it works much better for her. This solution took the pressure off her home life, and she said when she moved out she realised the exploitation wasn't her fault.
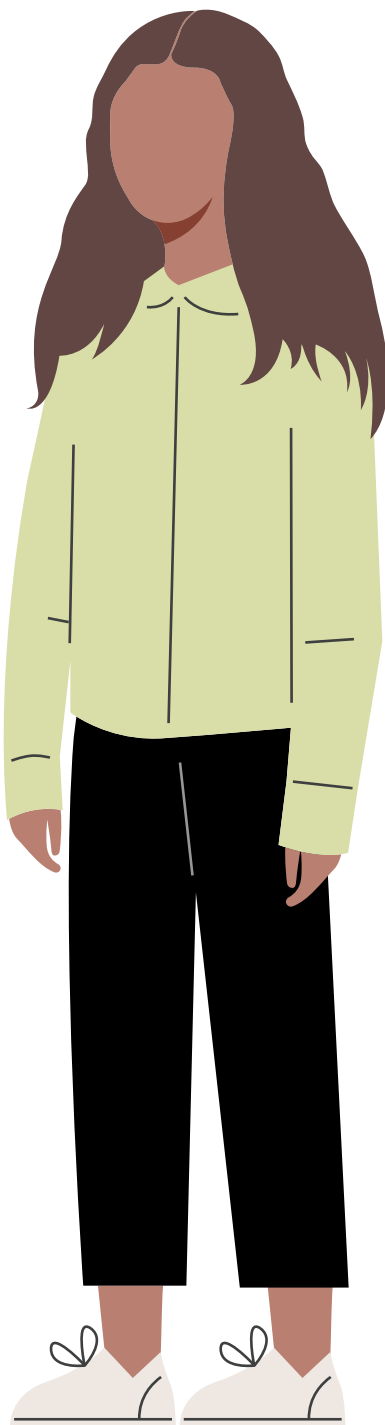
"I used to get really upset and I used to want to leave my house and not have to go back there, but I wouldn't get that option. I would always get sent right back home. So they should take it seriously. When I first got back in touch with the social workers, they sent me straight back home, and this is after I went to school and I said, 'I don't want to go home'"

"When I eventually left I realised it wasn't my fault. It shows, if kids get blamed for a lot of things and then you get taken out of an equation and see that things that you were getting blamed for are still happening, it shows you it's not your fault"

Female, 18
Ex-service user from BASE

Easy access to health services

Having **integrated mental health support,** through a co-located CAMHS nurse, works well for young people who access services from BASE.

- They like being able to receive support through the relationship they already hold with their worker rather than having to see another professional.

- Some young people had met the CAMHS nurse based at Old Market and found that a positive experience as they could meet her with their worker in a familiar place.

Some girls mentioned being unsure where to go to for sexual health support, and where services had integrated this such as BASE workers or Creative Youth Network's Girls group, this helped them be able to access that support easily.

"Probably like the mental health side of things, the help like that I've got for that [through BASE] and stuff to kind of make me realize I guess my worth and giving me back my kind of, or like even improving like my serotonin levels, my hormones, and everything like that I guess, it's kind of like just made me feel better"

Male, 16

"Brook came to talk to us and the lady sorted us out with a free condom card so now we can get free condoms. That's pretty good I wouldn't have known how to do that otherwise"

Female, 19

"I saw the CAMHS nurse here [Old Market], my worker came with me because I was really scared. Having her there made me feel that I can trust this person"

Female, 19

Environment

A police officer I can talk to

Operation Topaz feels different to other police officers and young people who had spoken to a Topaz Engagement Officer mostly found it to be a positive experience due to:

- The young person being assured that the Engagement worker wouldn't arrest them.

- The Engagement worker being plain clothed and sometimes meeting in a neutral place.

- The Engagement worker being a 'good listener' and taking the time to get to know the young person and listen to their whole story.

- The Engagement worker taking action and following up helps the young person feel like they are being taken seriously. However, there were complaints that there is not always enough follow up after the Engagement worker had got the information and it could feel like the relationship ended quite suddenly.

"She's a really nice person I felt like I could trust her. I'd meet her weekly and I could talk to her. She wouldn't arrest me and she didn't wear uniform. But the people above her aren't good. It was like talking to a brick wall trying to get to the outcomes."

Female, 13

"The police officer [Topaz] she was nice, she listened to every detail of what she needed to hear. So I'm glad that she's a really good listener. I felt quite confident to be honest because she's a really nice person. It's just the atmosphere and like the energy she matches my energy. What I wanted done she did. She put my point across to other people that needed to hear it"

Female, 16

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Service experiences of young people: Gaps & opportunities

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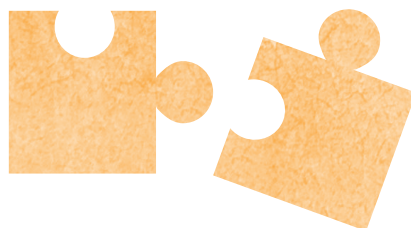Barnardo's

Gaps and opportunities

Young people told us what they would like more support with, and how services they have received could have been improved.

The opportunities for change fall within the same four areas:

Relationships   **Knowledge**   **Activities**   **Environment**

Gaps and opportunities

Relationships

- More availability and consistency of workers.
- More connection to other young people.
- More community guardians and local role models.
- More flexible access to mental health support from their trusted professional.
- Support beyond 18 for CSE.

Knowledge

- More awareness of exploitation from a younger age.
- Better understanding of exploitation from schools.

Activities

- Opportunities for a change of environment.
- More connection to local activities.
- Help to find activities of interest & passions.

Environment

- More support with career opportunities.
- More housing solutions.
- More genuine support from the police.
- More safe spaces.

Relationships

More availability and consistency of workers

- Whilst most respected the times their worker is available for them; some young people spoke about only having certain days of the week they could contact their worker and not knowing who to turn to on the other days. Others would prefer being able to see or speak to their worker in the evenings.

- **Afternoons and evenings** were mentioned as the best time of day for them.

- Young people want to keep the same worker as much as possible.

More connection to other young people

- When there had been group interventions delivered, young people valued the connections they had made to others with similar experiences. There are limited group interventions in Bristol, with most exploitation support being delivered through one-to-one support.

"I would probably go for like, say, for example, 12 to six or seven. That's kind of more my thing. Yeah, so it just like goes from the afternoon right up until the evening. That would be perfect. And if it was to be, even later than that, for example, if it started at 3 finished at like, obviously it would be quite late, but like 10 or something or like 9 or even seven, eight something like that, then obviously that'd be even better"

Male, 16

"She only works Wednesdays. And Tuesdays apart from that, her phone is off. So all the other whole other days and [other worker] has the same thing. So yeah say if I was in danger, it's like, I couldn't call them. And you know, even if I was in danger and I probably should be calling the police, but you know, sometimes you do you want to talk to someone trusted first?"

Female, 16

Relationships
Community Guardians

Young people want more presence of people like their project worker within their communities. This could be:

- Pop up presence of community organisations within spaces where they go e.g. within parks.

- Respected figures within the community talking to them and their friends.

They would also like to see more local role models who they could go to for advice or guidance. This could be:

- Trusted youth workers within their community.

- People who are a bit older who have lived experience or who have knowledge and understanding of what they're going through.

- Older positive peers - the Creative Youth Network's Girls Group gives the opportunity for social connections to be made with varying ages of girls who had been through similar experiences, and this enables them to foster natural role models they feel they could turn to.

"There needs to be a big strong man that's respected figure in the community. I know someone who came out of prison when he was 25 and now he's a youth worker. Someone like that should go an speak to kids in the community 100%. They do it already. There's a guy in London who goes around and confiscates kids knives. He's a big man and goes around taking little boys knives. He says to them 'what's that on your hip – give that to me' and they do."

Female, 18

"Sometimes the community don't really know what the young person's dealing with, that their being exploited and all that. So all they'll see is he's getting in trouble"

Male, 21

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More mental health support through a trusted worker

CAMHS often hasn't worked for these young people; the **clinical setting and having to talk to another unknown professional has felt uncomfortable.** Or they have lost their CAMHS worker due not being able to attend appointments. Many of them, especially those within the BASE service, talked about negative experiences with CAMHS, such as:

• Having to wait too long to be seen.

• Not feeling listened to.

• Not feeling like they could open up as they didn't know the person.

• Being in an unfamiliar environment.

Young people **prefer talking to their trusted worker with mental health support coming from them** rather than from a CAMHS worker.

For criminally exploited young people, we didn't hear as much about mental health and **the workers tell us there is stigma around talking about emotions** so interventions need to be delivered in a more creative way.

• Some mentioned they found **music creation therapeutic,** and a good outlet to talk about thoughts and emotions. They have also found learning facts and knowledge about how the brain works (e.g. the amygdala) interesting.

• ROUTES project workers told us that when a young person is ready to receive mental health support it would be important to be able to take them to **talk to someone right away,** as their situations rapidly evolve. If they are put on a waiting list then they might no longer want that support when appointments become available.

• ROUTES project workers think it would work better to have a **co-located mental health practitioner** that they could take a young person to for direct intervention when they were ready. Particularly, they think support with post traumatic stress disorder is needed so **therapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) or eye movement desensitization reprogramming (EMDR)** could be helpful.

"I don't like CAMHS. I need to be in the right mood to talk to them. The woman there speaks to me like someone's just died. I'm not going to speak to them if they speak to me like someone's just shot them. I just want someone genuine. She repeats herself, and asks me the same things so I have to repeat myself which makes me think she doesn't listen."

Female, 13

"There was this one thing since primary school, I had art therapy there was this one lady that taught me something I've never forgotten about, and that was the amygdala in your brain. Because I was going through a lot of stuff because my house got raided by the police the day after my birthday and then my dad got arrested and stuff. So then I was trying to cope and she just telling me like, if you don't push it back and if you just speak about it, it's going to help you"

Male, 15

Relationships

Support beyond 18 for CSE

BASE ending at 18 years old often feels too soon for the young people using this service, even when the risk has been reduced and a comprehensive plan has been put in place.

- BASE ends at the same time as many other support services and are often the last ones holding a relationship with the young person so it can be emotionally hard when they step away.

- When they have developed a strong relationship over time, the young person can be resistant to other support options they are offered.

However, the young people who has been part of BASE do know that they can still pop in and say hello or give a call to update their worker on key things from time to time, this helps.

One young person told us she would have preferred her contact with her worker to **phase out over time** – so for example to go from weekly to bi-weekly, to monthly.

"It doesn't make sense to me that our CSE service ends at 18, when the CCE goes up to 25. Why do we assume that sexually exploited young people need less time to recover? And then the 18-25 service (transitions) sits separately but they can't continue on to that, they have to get re-referred in later on. It doesn't seem right"

Stakeholder

Support beyond 18 for CSE
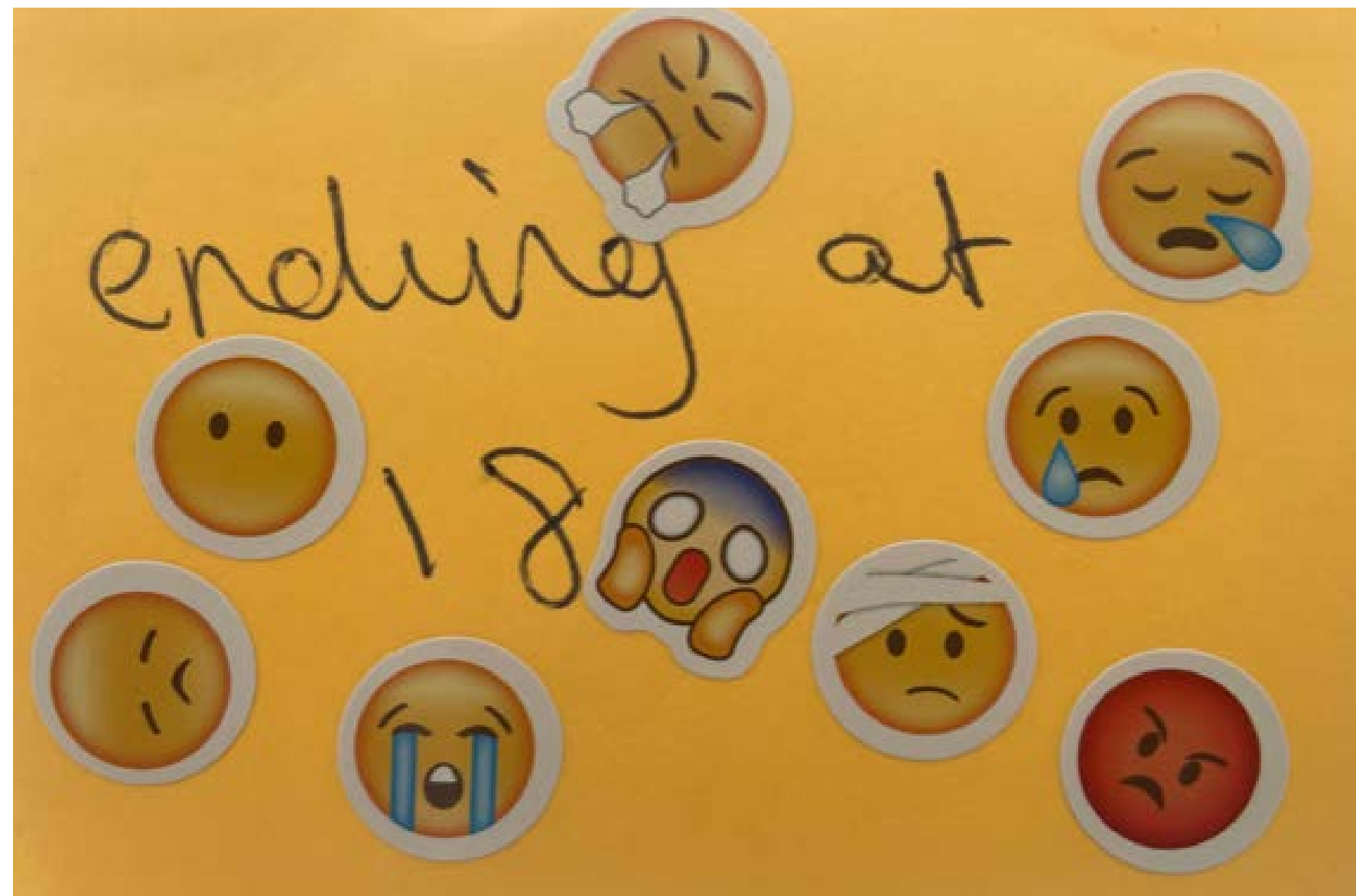
Post-it note written by the young person when interviewed

"**It's scary being on my own** because all my life I've had social services or someone's helped me. I don't want to talk to anyone else because I get anxiety meeting new people. I was horrible to [worker] at first. I didn't want to see her or nothing, but she's just too nice. Now she knows how to work around me with a Dr. Pepper with crisps. I was horrible to her for 2 or 3 weeks. **Usually it takes a whole 3 months for me to let someone in.** She really got to know me, and now she knows me too well.

Seeing her made me feel safe and like I could talk to her about anything. I wanted to keep seeing her when I was 18. I wanted to stay with the same worker because I got to know her, I just felt comfortable - with everyone else you got to get to know them again. And then if you don't like them you go on a waiting list it's horrible. **I didn't trust anyone else because I put my trust in someone and then they leave.** I think I've just given up, I don't talk to anyone anymore. I've got counselling coming up soon but I don't think I'm going to do it"

Female, 19

Knowledge

Awareness of exploitation

- Young people would have found it helpful to have learnt about 'what exploitation is' from a younger age. There's a sense the intervention has come late, and **the support they have from their worker would have been more beneficial earlier on.**

- Youth workers, running open access sessions for young people, who have seen increasing exploitation in their local area would are eager to have exploitation workers come and do some education sessions at their settings.

- Exploitation workers echoed what young people said, stressing that the later they intervene and support a young person being exploited, the harder it is to remove them from that exploitation.

Better understanding of exploitation from schools

- **Young people want schools to be trauma responsive,** looking at what the behaviour is telling us and always holding exploitation in mind when children are struggling at school or facing exclusion.

- Teachers or staff at other youth settings have opportunities to ask questions and give young people the opportunity to share their experiences.

Activity on relationships from a Youth Moves session

"I'm sure it's like happened around me and to people around me. But when you're a young person, I'm not sure you really think of it like that or know what it is to know that it's happening because it's only like within like recent years that I've actually heard of what it is"

Female, 19

Activities

Opportunities for a change of environment

- Young people are keen for opportunities to get out of Bristol as it helps them feel more relaxed, like they can 'think more clearly'. This could either be with their worker, a family trip or with other young people.

More connection to local activities

- Finding easy to access and low-cost local activities that young people enjoy doing can help give young people the opportunity to socialize and have a place where they can safely hangout with their friends, as well as help them to feel good. Supporting young people to find things to do and helping them overcome any individual barriers they may have such as fear of judgement or financial barriers.

- Especially when school ends, young people tell us they feel like they don't have much to do and where they might have had activities through school such as art, drama or sports, these have ended.

Help to find activities of interest & passions

- When a young person finds an activity that is genuinely meaningful to them, this can be a gamechanger for their sense of self worth and identity. Young people want workers to support them to explore what they could be passionate about and help them develop that interest.

"We should be able to do more things like trips or getting out of Bristol. I feel like I can think better when I leave"

Male, 17

"Are art classes even a thing? I love art but I didn't know if I could really do it after school."

Female, 17

"New different environments help change the mentality. So if you got a problem in Bristol, just leaving for a bit"

Male, 21

"We would love nothing more than to take our young people out of the situation. If we could get one or two of them on a bus and take them to the Brecon Beacons for a weekend, you know, and get them out of Bristol. Get them away from the expectation and show them that there's other places they can go, you know, look how fun it is when you don't have signal on your phone. And you're not worried about your dealer calling you, or having to go out and work the streets tonight. We'd love to do stuff like that. That would massively benefit our work. You know, if we could take them away for a weekend, do some life skill building with them. Some of our guys do take them fishing and things like that, which they've never done before, but if we could do some more things like that, that would really help our work. But when you were allowed five pounds a session, because that's what you've got in your budget, it limits what we can do"

Stakeholder

"And then there's the judgment as well. I feel like people would be like, oh, it's a black kid running. Is he chasing someone? Is he getting chased by police? It would look like, if he looked out the window right now and see me jumping over cars, and over roofs, you would think I'm a criminal. If I seen the next black man doing that I would think he's a criminal"

Stakeholder

More support with career opportunities

Older young people (age 16+) often have **difficulty finding jobs.** They feel like schools and colleges don't do enough to help them with this. This is especially the case for those criminally exploited who may hold a criminal record.

- They would like help with CV writing.

- Support with exploring ideas and understanding what their options are.

- Opportunities for internships or apprenticeships where they would be able to learn a practical employable skill.

Young people who had recovered from exploitation and project workers thought it is a good idea to have **a pathway for young people who have been exploited to be able to become youth workers,** using their lived experience to benefit other young people and raise awareness of the issues.

Peer influencers think more needs to be done from Bristol City Council to encourage organisations to **offer apprenticeships to young people** from less privileged backgrounds, through funding and grant schemes. This would help to diversify the workforce, whilst providing employment opportunities to young people who may have struggled with the first steps into employment.

"I want help with my CV. There's a college person but because they just take really long, whereas [worker]'s just there for me straight away"

Female, 17

"The council need to offer grants to incentivise local organisations to offer apprenticeships to young people."

Peer Influencer, Bristol City Council

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More support with career opportunities (2)

Exploitation services find supporting young people with **employability particularly challenging.** Whilst they recognise it as a very important step in recovery from exploitation, they **face multiple barriers** especially for criminally exploited young people who may have a criminal record. They want to see more support for exploitation workers in this area.

If there are initiatives in Bristol to support young people with employability, then more awareness needs to be raised with exploitation workers on how to engage with these services.

"A lot of them are not engaged in education or they're not in work. So we try and reengage them into education or work. And sometimes that can be really difficult because they might have a record for murder, attempted murder.. I don't really know of a service specifically targeting young people that have been criminally exploited to get back into education and work"

Stakeholder

"We personally struggled as a services is you can, you can kind of get them out of being in the middle of a gang or, you know, running County Lines. You'd kind of pull them away from their exploitation. You could put a national, you know, a trafficking referral in, you know, and deem them as being a child who is being exploited. Then you've got a barrier of, right. So now what do we do? Where do we go? Who's going to employ them?"

Stakeholder

Environment
More safe spaces

Young people want somewhere to go if they feel like they are at risk. Some of them **don't feel like they have anywhere they can go if in an emergency.**

- One young person suggested having a local shop keeper you can go to if you are unsafe who you know won't question you and will let you stay there. You could also go to them if you needed immediate help such as to charge your phone or call a parent.

- Another young person suggested having an emergency night stay option, a safe place she could have spent the night when she really needed to and couldn't face going home.

Young people also want to have more **spaces they can go to just hang out** with their friends in a safe environment. Any simple space was felt to be sufficient as long as there is a trusted adult there to keep it safe.

Parents also want to see more youth spaces for their children to go to.

"If an adult there it makes it safe. We just want a space where we can hang out and do our thing but you know there's someone there who's got your back"

Male, 16

"A safe space doesn't have to be a fancy place with table tennis and trampolines. It can just be basic. Having people you trust in a space that's just for you is what's important. People think it takes so much funding but it doesn't have to"

Peer Influencer for Bristol Council

"A place for her to go, a decent youth club for the evenings, a youth worker who can try to help navigate young people through social media, peer pressure, you know, more hands-on grassroots rolling your sleaves up work"

Parent

Believe in children
Barnardo's

"Because in someone's office, I wouldn't say you feel pressure, but you would feel like you need to be the best possible you. But like if your **in your community, you could just be you, how you normally are.** Like you could talk to them like how you would want to be talked to and just be respectful. Then I would say like you can grow a closer bond with someone in your community than in the office because in a office you feel like you have to finish at a certain time"

Male, 15
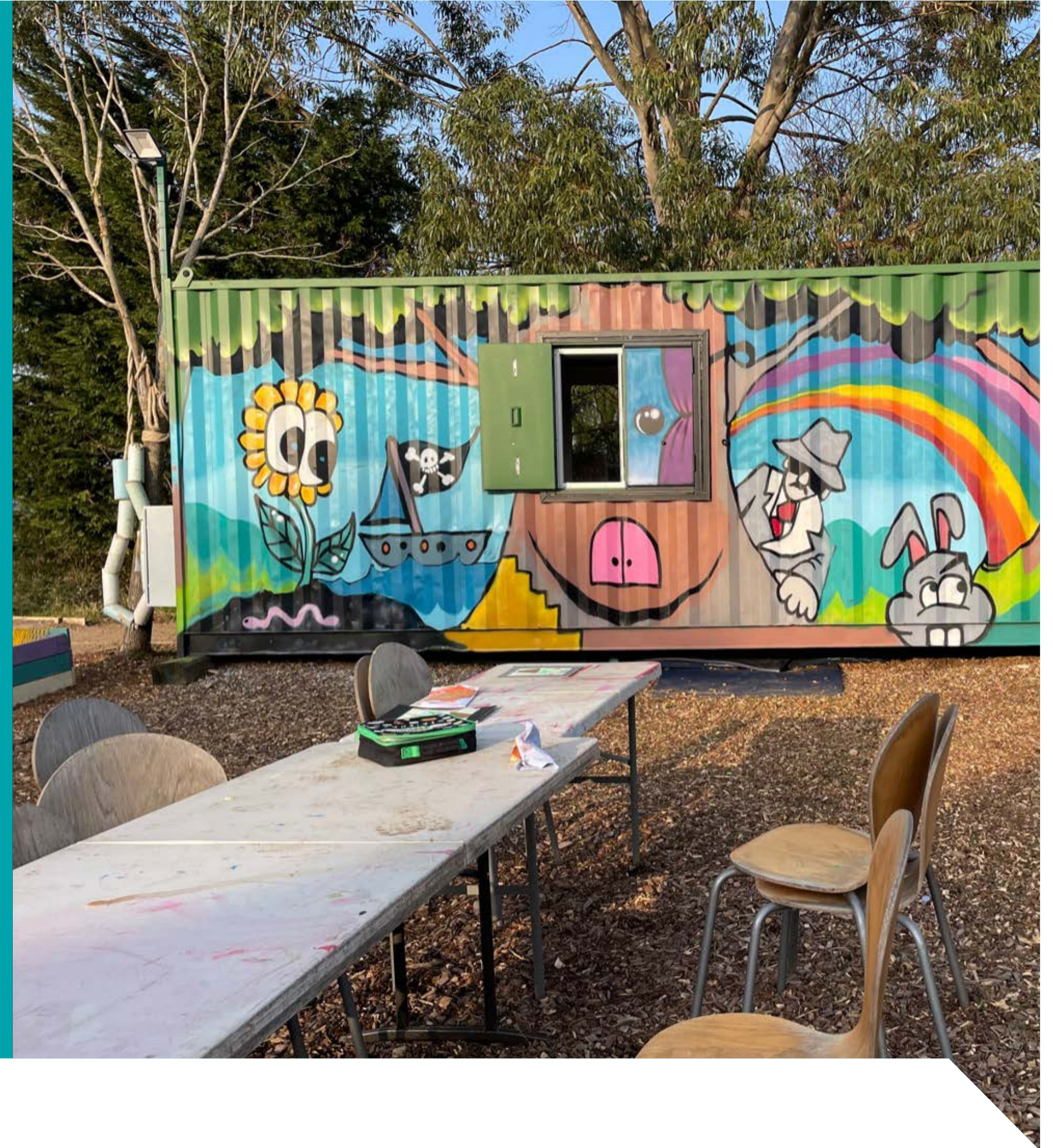
More genuine support from the police

Young people told us they want the police to...

- **Not be prejudiced.**
- **Take them seriously.**
- **Not blame young people** (especially in the case of CCE).
- To **communicate and follow up** on what young people have told them (especially in the case of CSE).
- Listen to them properly.
- **Understand exploitation.**

Families also mentioned wanting to see the justice system improve and act more quickly, which would help their child be able to move on from what's happened.

"Police officers need to respond with the same level of urgency no matter what race. The other day I was in danger and they didn't come fast enough. They should come immediately when your in danger. Do you know how many times I've seen them come within 2 seconds when it's a black person. We were in genuine danger and the police took ages, funny that the person we were reporting was white"

Female, 19

"The justice system needs sorting out so victims aren't sitting around so long waiting to be processed, part of the trauma is about how long it is taking"

Parent

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Better housing solutions

Young people told us that they want to see more solutions for housing for young people who are exploited. They suggested ideas such as:

- **An emergency night stay** option would have helped them, so for instance where there is extremely high risk and the young person doesn't want to go home there is somewhere they can go. Young people thought this would prevent them from going missing.

- **Easy-to-access advice on housing** for young people. Even for young people who aren't in the care system, this is still important for them to understand their housing options as they become older as they may want to leave home. There is a service called Youth MAPS that helps with this, but workers and young people didn't seem aware of it.

"You lot should have emergency night stays. Not having anything like that it impacts people a lot. See me. I had to go home. I had to get cussed. It was horrible when I went home that night. My nan has 9 kids so there's a lot of people all cussing me. I think it would have made it easier for them to actually understand what I'm going through myself not just what they think they're going through. If that makes sense. Cause when you were putting that kid back into that solution, the person that their with isn't actually thinking this isn't right. They need a scare. And if that is putting your kid in a place for that one night, then maybe it has to be that. But either way, it just needs to be done"

Female, 18

"There should be someone who can give advice to young people on housing - on what all the options are and how to apply. Especially if a young person doesn't live at home and isn't in the care system it's very hard so someone to explain options like sheltered accommodation"

Peer Influencer, Bristol Council

Better housing solutions (2)

Professionals within Bristol City Council were very clear about the **lack of options that work for exploited young people** in care around housing. They highlight a need to:

- Keep young people being exploited in settings where they are settled, and work with Foster Carers to ensure this can happen.

- Have better staffing and regulation for those living semi-independently or another option of housing that is more structured.

- Have better resources in the city when young people need to be moved for emergency safety reasons.

- Include exploitation and recovery in the Care Act Assessment so young people can be considered for adult care support.

"Lots of these young people would also be young people who are living in less supported housing provisions pre-18. So they're not the young people that are living in foster homes, their living in semi independence because those foster homes and things, arrangements have broken down. So for me if we were being proactive and thinking about how to better transition as of 18, we need to go back and be thinking about how do we spot early warning signs of some significant behaviours and at that point what could we do to keep their foster care? Because actually the pattern afterwards spirals"

Stakeholder

"We shouldn't have these children living semi-independently. In various setups, they should be in accommodation that's fully staffed with people who understand them and that they have very structured worlds and an oversight of them, but what's happening is these children very often ended up in unstructured accommodation that they have control of. They can come and go as they want; they can do what they want"

Stakeholder

"For young people that are being exploited - our housing offer in the city is big group living and a lot of people either can't live with other young people or the housing providers don't want them to live with other young people, so we find housing particularly tricky for this cohort of young people. There is an adult safeguarding team, and we're just trying to build links with them to try and work out where this cohort of young people fit"

Stakeholder

Service needs of families and support networks

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Families are important to ensuring a child's recovery from exploitation, but are often missed out of specialist services

Evidence shows that while family-focused interventions aimed at awareness raising and practical guidance for parents can be used as preventative tools, once children have become exploited families require additional support. Across multiple studies and literature reviewed, family support is noted as a key part of recommended holistic approaches and needs to be provided alongside other interventions.

Currently, families and support networks for young people in Bristol feel like they are not fully supported through exploitation:

- Families & support networks are **under an immense amount of pressure to keep their child safe** and they are anxious about risks.
- The **system feels overwhelming** and hard to navigate, and thresholds feel too high.
- They **appreciate the in-depth and long-term support BASE & ROUTES** offer their child, but also see **a need for longer-term psychotherapeutic interventions** for their child and family.
- **Family support workers are helpful,** but in some cases, families told us they would like to see a more flexible and in-depth package of support.
- Families feel there is **not enough support for siblings and wider family support networks** to understand the impact of exploitation and recover.
- Parents **want more connection to others** who are currently going through or have had similar experiences.
- Families want to see **equal and fair access being given to services** across the city.

"I had to be the friend, the enemy and the guardian"

Parent

Families & support networks feel an immense amount of pressure and anxiety

Parents and carers are **living with constant fear** about the risks their child is exposed to when they leave the house. It feels out of their control, and it is **hard for them to know the best way to protect their child** from harm.

The **complexity of social media** exacerbates this further; even when their child is at home, they worry about what online communications they have with those that harm and again feel unable to protect them from potential harm.

Parents and carers talk about continuously **battling between empathy and frustration;** on one hand they empathise with what their child is going through, on the other hand they get frustrated with their behaviours and want to safeguard them.

It is hard for them to know what to do, especially with other children to look after and some parents and carers may be juggling work and may not always be home. One mother spoke about leaving work early to pick her child up from school and protect her from gangs of boys grooming her. Another mother told us how working from home had enabled her to keep a closer eye on what was happening and speak to necessary services etc.

"I am always stressed, every time he walks out the door I worry if he is being stabbed, is he ok, what has he done now, I struggle to live like that. I do have empathy, I don't know what it's like to be exploited but he knows right from wrong… no one talks about the impact this has on families"

Parent

"I work full time but I'm lucky enough to work from home because if there's an issue, I can deal with it there and then, but if I didn't work from home it would have been horrific. And I'm lucky that I've got a good relationship with the school and their safeguarding lead and their pastoral team, I can speak to them, they know me they know (my child). So I sort of do things myself to be honest with you"

Parent

"I had to stop work and pick up my daughter early so I could fish her out of the gangs, groups of lads would be waiting at the school gates. I have to be invasive and tactical"

Parent

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"You can't close the door to the outside world anymore, it follows you in through **social media.** They can't even close their bedroom door to it. There could be people verbally beating them up and you as a parent don't know as its all on the phone. **There is no escape for the younger generation,** it fills their life, seeing what people are saying about them"

Parent

The system feels overwhelming

Families feel like it's an **overwhelming system** supporting their child through exploitation. Learning the language and how to navigate the system it feels hard, especially when there are multiple services/agencies involved with their child.

- Parents would appreciate **practical guidance** on who various services are, their roles, how procedures work and who they should go to for different situations.

- **Referral pathways can feel messy and confusing.** Reports of not hearing back, or not understanding how/who their child has been put touch with and why. There are also frustrations for repeating the same information to different professionals; parents think that information needs to be better shared between organisations.

- Whilst there are often many agencies involved, families become fatigued at the effort it takes to get a response after they flag concerns about their child. This echo's a local thematic review that cited families feeling let down by professionals who didn't respond to their concerns and anxieties about peer violence adequately. Parents didn't feel they were taken seriously, or listened to, **indicating that thresholds for services are too high.**

"I think it disrupted our family more than it helped because we felt that it's not streamlined in that there were too many people involved. So she had Helping School, she had CAMHS, BASE, Social Care, Topaz and Families in Focus. There was just too many people involved all at the same time"

Parent

"I've had so many workers introduced to me like, 'oh, I'm doing this' and there's like a thousand parts to one bit and I don't understand it"

Parent

"It would be helpful to be given knowledge about different services and what you could potentially get access to and how, and what their procedures are because I've never dealt with social care. I don't know why they're asking me certain questions. You know, they were saying go to First Response, but I don't know who First Response are, you're talking to somebody who has never had dealings with social care, **it can be really overwhelming not knowing the procedures and the next steps.** So, someone guiding you through the process or just help familiarising yourself with how the agencies work and what they can offer and a comprehensive guide to that would be helpful"

Parent

Families appreciate the in-depth & long-term support BASE & ROUTES offer

Parents can see the in-depth relationship their child has with the worker and the positive impact that has on them.

- They appreciate that the support is **consistent** and there isn't an end date, so there are no fears about abandonment and what will happen when that service ends.

- They find it helpful that they have a **nurturing relationship** as this allows them to take more of a safeguarding role without feeling like their child is missing out of the empathy.

- Parents would have **preferred to have seen this level of support for their child earlier,** before they had been exploited to the extent of definite harm having happened.

"[BASE Worker] is the most amazing person at providing the love and softness [child] needs when I am not able to because I am too focused on keeping her safe"

Parent

"After seeing [ROUTES worker] the other day, I feel confident that this could really work for my child…I told [ROUTES worker] this is our last hope"

Parent

Case study

"I think for her it's getting used to somebody and then someone changing. With social care, there were two people then there was one then that got changed. [Topaz] is very much, well, you can't give me any intel so I cut my ties. So [child] felt a bit dumped. [child]'s had about four different people in CAMHS, sitting down, asking her all over again and she doesn't want to go over it all over again. She just doesn't want the disruption or having to go through it all **because she's embarrassed of having to talk about it all over again.** The police have massively failed her. She did a police video interview in the week between Christmas and New Year, just gone. And we've still not had contact from a police person to see what's happening with the case and it's June."

Mother of 13 year old girl who has been criminally and sexually exploited. Currently part of BASE.
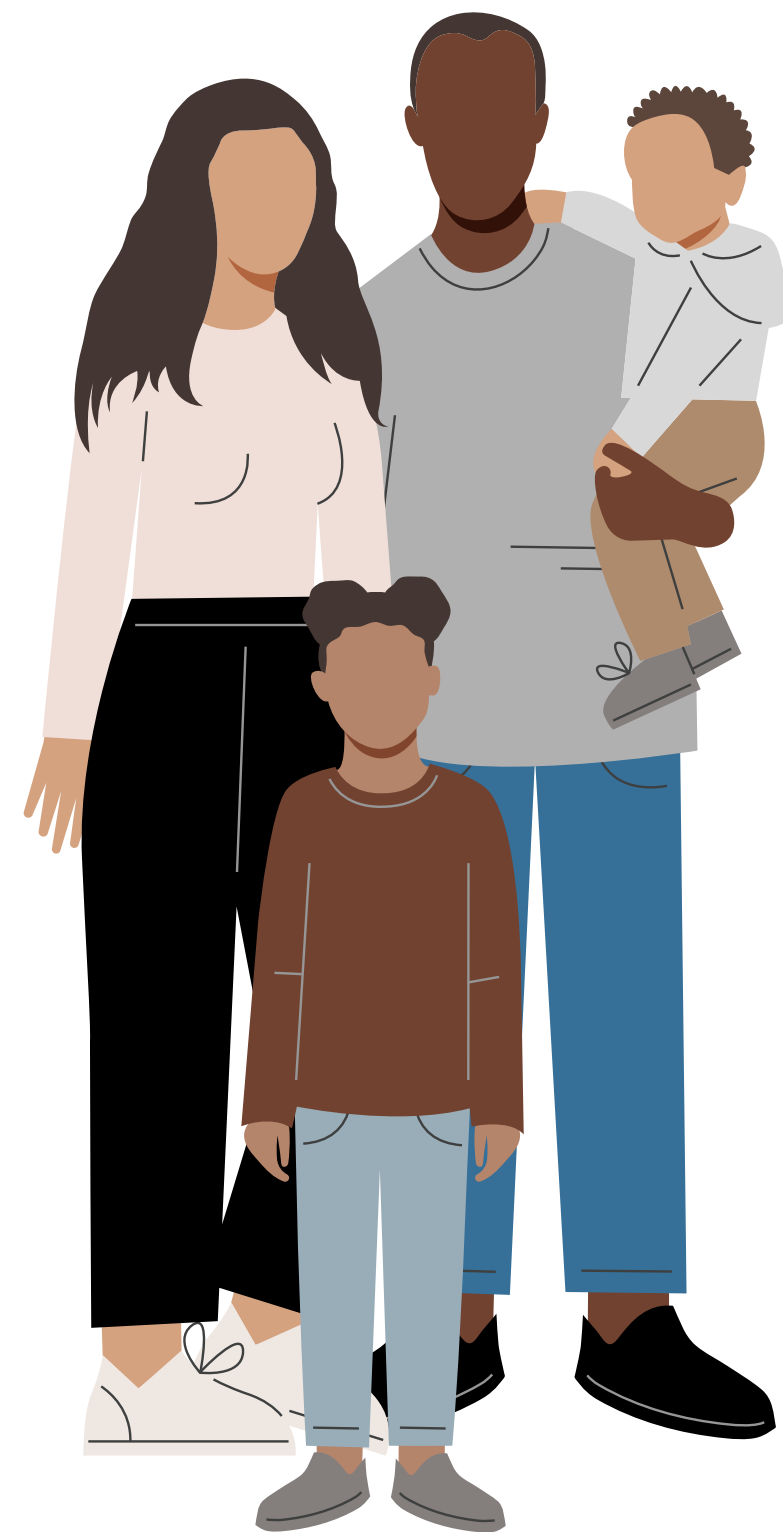
"The impact is she doesn't want to open up, she doesn't want to engage with that person. So that new person has got a bigger task to try and win her over, let alone get into what she needs to talk about or to discuss. **I just think it's a lot for a person to, you know, give a bit of themselves away to someone and then for that person to be replaced.** It makes her feel unsteady and not willing to open up."

"Having **someone consistent from BASE has been massively positive.** She knows it's on the calendar, she knows what's going to happen. It's someone in her life for her and I think that's what she values the most. It's not me, she knows there's that element of privacy of what she discusses and I think it helps a hundred percent that it's consistent. And that's **the main thing with [child] is the consistency of the people involved now.**"

But some families also see a need for longer term targeted therapeutic intervention

- Families see the **detrimental emotional impact** that exploitation has on their child and want them to have support in place to help them **work through and heal the trauma they have experienced.**

- Whilst they find exploitation services such as BASE or ROUTES incredibly helpful, some think their child **also needs a specialist psychotherapist / mental health practitioner** to work with them more in depth on their trauma and recovery.

- Even when they have had support from programmes like CAMHS or The Green House, some parents think the limited time for these interventions (e.g. 12 weeks or 6 months) is not reflective of what is needed. Some **want to see long term specialist mental health support** to help their child fully work through their trauma and recover.

- They mentioned the often long timeframe of the justice system; **Court cases can be retraumatizing** and sometimes happen as much as 3 years later when support has dropped off.

- Families would also like to see an offer of **therapeutic support for the family such as counselling** to help them work through emotions and anxieties, this could either be one-to-one or a family intervention involving parents and siblings.

> "When the sessions with The Green House stopped, she still needed intensive psychotherapy. The trauma of a young teenager is still with her, we can't heal her because the end is never there, we are still waiting for closure. The biggest bit of support with The Green House finished 6 months before the first Court date so when it was needed it wasn't there [BASE worker].
>
> The deep psychotherapy as apposed to [BASE Worker] who is on a different level of counselling. [BASE worker] is lovely but she doesn't give me what [The Green House practitioner] did. When having an anxiety fit, hitting the wall, she doesn't know how to manage it. There is an emotional ball inside her she just can't control and no one is able to help her with."
>
> Parent

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Families in Focus (FIF) is helpful, although there is a need for longer term family support

- Most families **spoke highly of their FIF worker and found them helpful.** They found it helpful to speak to someone about the challenges their child was going through, learn parenting techniques and find out about online parenting courses they could attends to help them communicate with their child.

- However, Families in Focus is offered in 12 week blocks and families **want to see more of an open-ended offer of support.**

- Families report the way the services and referrals are structured can make it feel like a vicious cycle; a crisis happens, they receive a service, risk is reduced and the service stops. Then there is another crisis, and they are then put back into a service. This cycle leaves families feeling frustrated and they **would prefer a more flexible form of support that would be there for them as and when they needed it, rather than having to fit into a structured programme.**

"A lot of services give you up to 12 weeks, but I thought this is really good that this can take as long as it takes… Up until now nothing has actually worked, as a parent you feel under pressure if there is a time limit on these things, after 12 weeks there is no way those problems are going to be rectified, I understand the pressure on services but don't see putting things in place that are not going to work"

Parent

"My FIF worker was lovely and helped me learn about how to help my child with emotional resilience. She also sent me on a online parenting course that was really helpful "

Parent

"I did have a lady from families in focus. She was doing emotional resilience, but that was centred around [child]. But for me individually then no, it was how I would manage with her, it wasn't directed at me like, oh, how are you doing? So, it was just a case of reading as much as I could, I went on a parenting course you know, because I don't know how to parent a 15-year-old child. It was really helpful; it was a different approach to parenting and I still use things. I would suggest that every parent goes on it as it teaches you approaches to take with young people that aren't confrontational, but it does work"

Parent

Not enough support for siblings and wider family support networks to recover

Families have seen a **detrimental impact on the siblings** of exploited children. They can struggle to understand what is happening and are growing up in a challenging environment where there might be arguments and a lot of attention is on the sibling who has experienced harm.

Parents spoke about how **exploitation affects the entire family and family dynamics.** They think that services should look at how to support the entire family to recover and build back up again, rather than focus solely on the exploited child.

"The other person this has really impacted is her sister. She has seen me broken in pieces. Our house bares the scars of the last 3 years and her sister lives amongst this. She (sister) is playing a role she didn't volunteer for, the conversations around her are quite toxic. There is no conversation around how this impacts our family unit. We need help to work through the impact on the family unit but also helping [sister] navigate the aftermath of this. Helping her understand why her sister is so angry sometimes and that how she manages that. There is a gap supporting those around the child, especially other siblings who living through this"

Parent

"There is no recognition that we as a family have to live past this and move on from this, so **excluding one or other of us from support won't allow us to heal.** How do we all process this together and make it a safe topic for us to talk about? We as a family now have a skeleton in our cupboard, **we are making things up as we go along and hoping it work.** Things that are in the cupboard eventually jump out"

Parent

Parents value local connection with others

Parents want to be connected to other local parents of teenagers to share experiences and offer support.

Where this happens, parents value the support group for:

- Having a forum to ask questions about services and procedures and seek advice from others who have been in similar situations e.g. if a child is being excluded from school who they can contact / what their rights are.

- Connecting them to local parents who understand their worries, so they have someone to talk to.

- Building friendships and a sense of community.

Some parents are also interested in the idea of **Community Guardians;** having adults who look for signs of young people being exploited in the area and a pathway for them to report any concerns. This would enable them to use their lived experience and increased understanding of exploitation to benefit their wider community.

"Everyone's on the same page so it's easy to have even hard discussions that you don't really want to speak about. It's a safe place to have those conversations. Because at the end of the day everyone's so scattered and fractured, at least you know everyone in the group is on the same page"

Member of Parent Support Group

"We get to hear what everyone else is thinking. We get to share views, we get to be enlightened on what's out there. Even if I can't make it to the meetings we have a WhatsApp group and lots of things are shared in there that help my household.. It's a sharing forum. For me it's a support system, because I do believe with grown children, one mum can't do this. It takes a village, you need that support. It helps to hear how others do things, hear different views and ideas "

Member of Parent Support Group

"For parents I think there needs to be a forum or something where parents get together for coffee, getting people together so they don't feel on their own. There are people sitting there alone thinking 'why is my child going through this' when there's actually probably 30 other parents in Bristol sitting there scratching their heads with the same problem. So, you can sort of team together, and something where you can vent instead of it all building up"

Parent

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Equal access to services

From speaking with families, there was a sense that there needs to be **more transparency of services and equality of access.**

- Parents are frustrated that schools don't pro-actively offer the support their child needs as standard. For the school to take action it has required a parent to have a loud voice in advocating for their child and multiple attempts or requests to obtain the support their child needed. They feel this leads to those children who have parents who are able to advocate for them have better support than others; whereas if the needs and warning signs of risk of exploitation were being picked up by teachers this would enable more equal access to support.

- Additionally, there were concerns about professionals such as social workers or teachers making unconscious biases/judgments on families and this impacting their child's support offer, and worries about **parent blaming** when it comes to exploitation.

- Some also mentioned the consideration of different **cultural backgrounds** and ensuring that any services have outreach and a pathway into different communities, considering any cultural barriers or needs such as language.

- Professionals pointed out that there is inconsistency across the city, with more youth services being offered in East Central than in North or South Bristol.

- It's important for families to see that Bristol City Council are giving **fair and equal access to services for young people across the city** to tackle exploitation, regardless of socio-economic background, culture or home life.

- Any new service model should therefore consider the question **'are these services and the level of support universal for all families where there is concern for exploitation?'**

- On considering this question, there should also be thought given to the overall awareness and understanding of exploitation by other professional services.

"For example, the 'Call In' programme is available for young people that live in East Central. So if there's two young people who commit the same crimes and one's in south and one's in East Central - one gets a criminal record and the other one gets to go to the programme"

Stakeholder

# System reflections from multi-agency professionals

Stakeholders highlight key opportunities for system change

From interviews with professionals working across the children's safeguarding systems in Bristol, we were able to capture specific **elements of system change that stakeholders think would help improve outcomes for children,** young people and families.

Most stakeholder reflections have been captured in the above chapters interwoven with what we heard from young people and families. However, four additional areas stand out as being important to address and consider in depth for the service model recommendations:

1. **Stronger multi-agency collaboration** to ensure a better service for children, young people and families.

2. **Lower thresholds** to support young people earlier to prevent significant harm.

3. **Taking an intersectional lens** and addressing disproportionality.

4. Continue to **raise understanding of exploitation within professional networks** to reduce victim blaming.
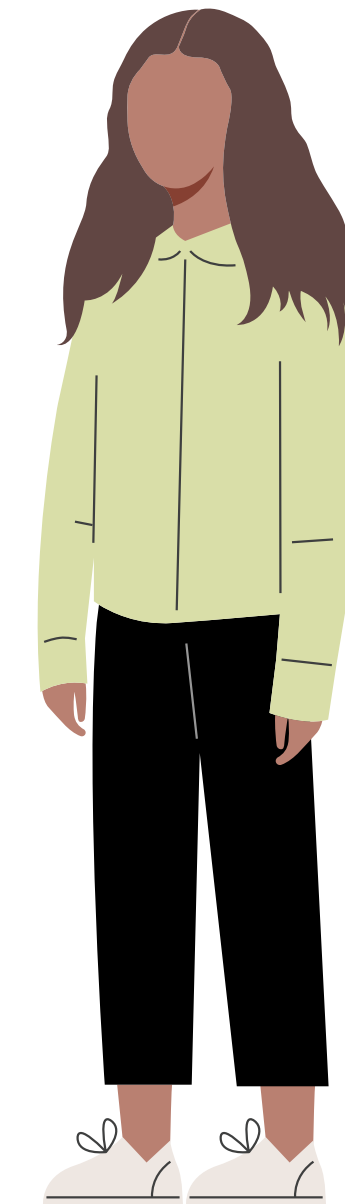
1. Stronger multi-agency collaboration

Consistently across multiple reviews and briefings on best practice for exploitation models, as well as included within the Contextual Safeguarding approach, a multi-agency approach is needed to best support the complex needs of children, young people and families.

The Independent Inquiry Care Review 2022 stresses that whilst multi-agency working is a challenge for all of children's social care, **when harm is in the community and parents have limited power, the role of other agencies becomes even more important.** The review highlighted fragmented action and a lack of accountability from agencies involved with cases involving extra familial harm.

- Whist there are many good examples of multi-agency approaches in Bristol, in general the multi-agency working is variable across localities.

- Stakeholders told us that the success of multi-agency working largely depends on personalities and individual relationships, so varies from case to case. Consequently, it's important to **ensure the right people are in the room bringing the experience and knowledge needed to decide a suitable intervention** for a young person.

- The system feels complex and fragmented even for professionals within it, and the multi-agency response takes time to mobilise. Considering how quickly the landscape for exploitation is evolving, especially with online abuse and social media platforms, the **system needs to allow for a quicker and more nimble multi-agency response.**

- There are reports of overlapping working and too many people being involved with a child at one time; there needs to be a **clear lead professional and streamlined processes.**

- There are some frustrations around data-sharing, especially with Police. There needs to be **clear expectations and consistency around sharing information** between statutory and voluntary sectors.

> "I use the word cluttered because people can move around these processes quite quickly. It could be that somebody has a MARAC meeting, has a MASH meeting, has a Safer Options meeting, and then also a Strategy meeting, all looking at a similar thing, but all involving different professionals and it can get quite confusing, but they're all looking at different things around the same person"
>
> Stakeholder

1. Stronger multi-agency collaboration

"It just moves slowly. And it is risk averse and it's reputational based. And we're working with young people who we had never seen anything like this before or with, so we have to kind of be flexible and nimble in our movements and take risks"

Stakeholder

"I do worry that it's just quite a complex landscape and I wonder whether there's anyway of doing it better by keeping it slightly more simple"

Stakeholder

2. Lower thresholds

Professionals from across the system share concerns that thresholds for specialist services are too high. Referrals are only made after harm has occurred and offer little intervention when there are clear warning signs of harm.

- Some highlighted that most services focus on high-risk children or early intervention and there is a gap for young people who are at a lower level of risk, but still face risk of serious harm.

- **They would like to see these children being considered in the service re-design.**

Exploitation workers and youth organisations find the high thresholds frustrating, as it is increasingly difficult to help a young person out of exploitation the longer they have been exploited.

- From their experience they have noticed that the earlier you can intervene the more effective any intervention is likely to be. The longer a young person is exploited the more resource-intensive and complex the intervention will need to be.

- **They would like to be able to offer a lighter touch intervention option for children earlier on.**

"It's like, okay, well, how do they, have they beat anyone up, in the street? You know, have they been seen selling drugs at the cycle path? No. Okay. Well then, well just wait until we see in a couple of weeks and then see what they've done. I'm being very cynical, but that's how I feel sometimes that we're just waiting for them to get worse before we can offer them support"

Stakeholder

"I think there's probably gaps in our practice or children that are being missed and don't get a service of any kind essentially. So, you know, I know that we do really good job for children of really high risk of harm. Or I think we do, what about the other children that might not come in to us, what's happening with these children and how do we know that they are getting a same good level of service and might not need the police, but how are we making sure for me we're not missing any children and that they're getting the appropriate response that they need for their particular circumstances or situation"

Stakeholder

3. Intersectional lens & addressing disproportionality

Evidence shows that **addressing the disproportionality in the system needs a holistic approach** and greater collaboration across different agencies. Most successful approaches are those which view the child as a whole person, consider the role of the intersectional factors, seek to address the often multiple vulnerabilities of the child/young person, tailored to meet specific needs of the child and family, and work within communities to establish trust (The Children's Society, 2018; IICSA and Race Equality Foundation, 2020; Helpingstine et al, 2021).

Professionals in Bristol therefore think that any service model needs to:

- **Understand the intersectional lens:** trusted professionals needs to be aware of how different factors interplay and impact a young person. For example, considers how a young black disabled woman from an LGBTQ+ community is supported by a service.

- **Have a diverse team** both in terms of workers delivering interventions with young people but also ensuring representation at the management/decision making level.

- **Adopt a 'cultural humility' stance:** creating a service and working culture that allows staff to be humble enough to express any lack of knowledge on certain communities, and willingness to learn and increase cultural understanding.

- **Build relationships with diverse communities** and grassroots workers / organisations to listen and learn about exploitation issues that may be occurring.

"You've got certain schools who will call the police and it's very disproportionate about who they call the police on. So the ones who decide that white peer will get away with something that the black boy won't get away with and the police will be called immediately."

Stakeholder

"We don't have enough representation across our workforce that connects with these young people. And then part of that is culture part of that is race but part of it is just about being able to work with young people"

Stakeholder

3. Intersectional lens & addressing disproportionality

"I suppose the thing is, is that this is, this is really, this is a really tricky problem and it's not solved overnight, and it's not easy because it, it stems from, you know, the poverty and the marginalization of many young people. You know, there's not much of a gang culture in Clifton really is there, but, you know, so you've, you've got, you've got a sense for many young people that, you know, in terms of their life chances, they don't start out too well to start with really. And so this is something about how you, how you can put in enough breaks in that trajectory to be able to divert young people away"

Stakeholder

"You could do collaboration with the police and the community, but that's a big systemic issue - you've got black young men and how they feel about the police. I think that's bigger than just giving a one to one and having a quick catch up in the community"

Stakeholder

4. Raise understanding of exploitation within professional networks

Exploitation is an issue rooted in tension between vulnerability and criminality, and has had an evolving perception over recent years.

Whilst sexual exploitation is thought to be better understood by professionals now, criminal exploitation has only been recognised as an issue in recent years. Awareness and understanding of CCE is still being raised even across statutory services.

Whilst culture is shifting, victim blaming language is still present and professionals recognise **a need to further educate around the right language to use,** especially across the police force, education and social care. Stakeholders thought it was **important to do this in a non-shameful way, careful not to undermine the hard work and experience of statutory workers.**

Professionals recognise that the Safer Options Hub are working on raising understanding of exploitation, how to spot the signs and refer to exploitation services for children and young people, and think this is important to continue to prioritise.

"A strand that we're dealing with with criminal exploitation rather than sexual exploitation is the narrative around it. With sexual exploitation young people are very much now seen as victims. I know that certainly wasn't the case necessarily when I started my career, but we've definitely moved into that place. But we're not in that place with criminal exploitation. And I think particularly because it involves lots of boys and whether there's a race element or not, I don't know, I'd be curious about that, but they're very much not always seen as victims"

Stakeholder

"We're trying better to be more aware. There was a lot of talk of language with the use of signs of safety, if people do use it properly, the concept behind that is you should, you know, put it into everyday language, not professional jargon. And I've seen some pretty decent uses, but there still can be the shorthand of 'they're putting themselves at risk' - that type of thing.

But there's too many people I think who are there to give advice and guide who haven't done much so they can talk about the ideal thing, but they've not got that practical experience and it can really turn people off if they are getting lectures or been shamed about using the wrong language. So, I think what is **important is to always think about how to do that in a way that doesn't shame people for getting it wrong and allows people to really understand it.**"

Stakeholder

Summary of considerations for the service design

Summary of considerations for the service design

- Exploitation intersects with wider inequalities, harms and challenges young people face. Interventions should **consider the need for cultural understanding and creative delivery options to allow for the bespoke needs of each young person and their family.**
- Young people who have been exploited have often been let down by the system many times so have a general distrust of services.
  - Services should offer **consistent support** and allow time for relationships to build trust, without a cut off date (age or reduction in harm).
  - Services should **offer integrated and holistic support** for young people, through the trusted relationship they have with their worker. The trusted worker therefore needs to be supported by relevant wider multi-agency professionals to meet **young people's holistic needs, e.g. health, substance abuse, employability, education, housing, criminal justice.**
  - Services should **offer fast and flexible access to emotional and mental health support** for young people when they are ready to access this.
- Service design should consider the environment where interventions are delivered.
  - Informal settings that feel homely and inviting work best, a relaxed and friendly atmosphere helps them to feel comfortable to spend time and be themselves .
  - The times services are available should be inline with young people and families needs.
  - Groups activities and peer support should be considered.
- Services should consider the importance of giving young people access to **meaningful experiences.**
  - Allocate budget for trips outside of Bristol, and help to find local activities young people can regularly take part in.
  - More pathways for the workers to help young people find and develop passions. The Ambitions Programme has been successful in doing this for music, consider expanding the creative options for this programme.
- **Aspirational stories and relatable role models** help young people build hope for the future.
  - Services should continue to have a diverse team of relatable workers that can become personal role models for the young people.
  - Consider how to work with communities to find and empower local role models and Community Guardians.
  - Services should consider how to leverage social media platforms to challenge harmful content and perceptions, and reach young people with inspiring stories.

Summary of considerations for the service design

- Young people's families and their support networks **need more support to help them understand the system** around child exploitation and help them to navigate it effectively. They would like to see systems change to enable more **in-depth and longer term emotional support** for the whole family to help them build resilience and recover together from the exploitation.

    - Consider connecting parents to others with similar experiences to help to build a supportive community for families.

- It's important for the service model to ensure the level of support is **universal for all families** where there is concern of exploitation, regardless of their background or location in Bristol.

- The service model should **consider the thresholds for intervention,** and how to support a young person earlier when there are warning signs they may be at risk of harm from exploitation.

- Taking a contextual safeguarding lens, there are **wider systemic changes** that are needed to support young people through recovery from exploitation and reduce harm. The system should consider how to effect change with:

    - **Schools:** more pro-active support for young people and trauma-informed responses to the warning signs of exploitation and professionals understanding behaviour as a form of communication, resulting in less exclusions.

    - **Children in Care and Care Leavers:** better and more supportive housing solutions that have been codesigned with young people who have been exploited.

    - **Youth settings / safe spaces:** consideration of safe spaces for exploited young people to go and spend time. This could be looking at gaps in youth provisions in certain areas, or creatively looking wider at leveraging their support networks or local activities/clubs and helping a young person find spaces that are safe and comfortable for them to go.

    - **Police:** building trust between the police and communities effected by exploitation and violence. Better communication and giving young people who are criminally exploited more opportunities to be heard and understood by police officers.

    - **Prevention:** young people want to see more education to build their knowledge around exploitation and abusive relationships starting at a younger age.

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