# EMERALD
## CONSULTING GROUP

# Breaking the Cycle Project Evaluation

April 2023

**West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit**

**West Yorkshire Combined Authority**

# Executive summary

## The purpose

Emerald Consulting Group were commissioned by the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) to produce an impact evaluation of Breaking the Cycle project, one of the violence reduction interventions they fund across West Yorkshire. Breaking the Cycle is a project working with young people involved or at risk of serious organised and violent crime, urban street gang involvement, county lines, criminal exploitation, or the exploitation of others, who have a moderate anti-social behaviour sanction, linked to drugs and weapons (including users, possession, or suppliers), and have missing episodes.

## The research and data

This evaluation undertook two activities: a rapid evidence assessment of the existing evidence base with a focus on the use of consistent outreach and service connectivity; and empirical research comprising surveys, secondary data requests, interviews, and focus groups. The stakeholders who participated in this evaluation included:

- Young People who are part of Breaking the Cycle, 24 of whom responded to the survey.
- Professionals from a range of organisations that either deliver the project, provide services that interface with Breaking the Cycle, refer young people to the project, work with Breaking the Cycle, or support young people once they are stepped up or down from Breaking the Cycle (i.e., supported into or out of the project). 21 responded to the survey, and 26 were interviewed either individually or in focus groups.

The research is informed by ethical best practices, abiding by the core principles of respect, competence, responsibility, and integrity. Our procedural ethics adhere to the British Sociological Association statement of Ethical practice (2017); British Society of Criminology Statement of Ethics for Researchers in the Field of Criminology (2022); and British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018).

## Key findings from the research

### The key findings from the Rapid Evidence Assessment

The findings in this section are from the desk-based rapid evidence assessment and represent a summary of key learning from published academic and sector material.

a. Police should prioritise community engagement and multi-agency collaboration to implement successful outreach projects that address youth involvement in violence and organised crime. Outreach workers need to be reputable and aware of the community and the contexts they work in; their work needs to be sensitive to the needs of a specific community; and it needs to be connected to local grassroots organisations through continuous, circular feedback and collaboration.

b. It is difficult to compare projects that take place in different contexts as communities and their needs are different. However, although understanding the local context of a

community is important, on its own it is not enough. Outreach teams should engage in specific training and education on trauma-informed approaches. This includes an understanding of the complex inter-personal and individual factors that contribute to the genesis of offending behaviour and ensures appropriate on-site responses that ultimately contribute to de-escalating violence. Outreach teams should be trained in culturally competent practices to better serve and engage with diverse communities and reach young people from marginalised communities.

c. Outreach workers need to be credible, hence rooted in the communities they work in; their credibility improves the chances of starting a dialogue with young people who might be otherwise resistant to service engagement and sustain with them a satisfying, trusting relationship. Grassroots, community-based organisations have been proven to be effective in providing support and projects to at-risk youth.

d. Young people's engagement with outreach teams is ultimately based on trust. Funding needs to be ring-fenced and consistent for these multifaceted programmes as it is fundamental that projects foster long-term relationships and that outreach activities happen consistently.

## *Key findings from the empirical research*

a. The overwhelming finding is that Breaking the Cycle is an effective approach to supporting young people who are being exploited (or at risk of exploitation) and its continuation and even expansion are both wanted and needed by other agencies.

b. Young people and professionals feel very positive about Breaking the Cycle and its impact.

c. Although distance travelled is hard to evaluate from one data point, there is strong evidence to suggest that Breaking the Cycle has a large impact on the young people involved in the project.

d. There are clear benefits when it comes to reducing violent behaviours and improving decision-making and emotional intelligence.

e. Breaking the Cycle is particularly good at developing trust in the young people and professionals with whom it works, including improving the trust of other agencies.

f. Breaking the Cycle is deeply embedded within the casework of other organisations and its absence would cause significant challenges relating to effective engagement with at-risk children, who would otherwise not be identified early enough.

g. 'Mission creep' (the gradual broadening of objectives and functions) is causing capacity issues for Breaking the Cycle.

h. Ease of referral means the service is seen as a 'path of least resistance' by some other organizations when deciding where to refer young people.

i. There is limited capacity for increasing workloads among Breaking the Cycle youth workers, yet the case load is increasing year on year.

j. Information/case recording by Breaking the Cycle is sometimes ad-hoc and not as easily accessible as needed by other services and even Breaking the Cycle workers.

k. If Breaking the Cycle stopped operating this would cause significant and immediate strain on police and social care.

## Recommendations

These recommendations reflect on the processes and impacts of Breaking the Cycle. They have been orgsanised according to their potential impact on Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Legitimacy.

1. **Formalise workflows for referral**: To consider developing a set of formal workflows for referral, case management, and step up/down (entry into and support out of) for Breaking the Cycle. This would help to minimize unsuitable referrals; improve understanding of the project across partners; and provide internal consistency on processes. A portion of this work could be coproduced with interfacing services, thus increasing buy-in and supporting awareness.

2. **Re-visit the formal risk assessment processes in line with partner agencies**: To consider re-visiting and re-developing the formal risk assessment for young people entering Breaking the Cycle, particularly in relation to lover risk cases. Although there are various forms of risk assessment currently used, these do not always map onto the requirements of partner and referring agencies. A revised risk assessment process that is coproduced with social care, police, and other key agency requirements would ensure greater transferability of knowledge. These should also be recorded in a place that can allow them to be more easily reviewed by social care if needed.

3. **Track service users across partner systems**: Breaking the Cycle, social care, and the police could work on more consistent ways to track young people accessing the services. For instance, this might include the use of 'flags' (system tags/identifiers) on social care/police systems to indicate when a young person is engaged with Breaking the Cycle, which would allow other agencies to be more consistently aware of when Breaking the Cycle are working with a young person, even if they are regarded as below and emerging threshold. More consistent use of this kind of data would allow agencies to access important additional information being held on Breaking the Cycle systems. Flags would also allow analysts in the police/social care to track Breaking the Cycle service users across a range of systems and to use this information in building an analytical picture of a young person's engagement across services, including Breaking the Cycle.

4. **Consider co-location of Breaking the Cycle representation within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Hub**: To consider more permanent co-location of a small part of the Breaking the Cycle management/supervisory team the MASH. This would aid information sharing and workflow development.

5. **Improve information storage and access**: To consider using a single data recording and storage system for all Breaking the Cycle case work, risk assessments, and referrals. This will make accessing information easier for Breaking the Cycle workers, reduce time needed back at the office for data input, and support data sharing and engagement with other interfacing partners when engaged in casework or case reviews.

1. **Increase the impact of support on young people**: One of the strengths of Breaking the Cycle is the tailored/bespoke support and intervention that they develop for each young person. This does mean it can be difficult to track the impact and effectiveness of bespoke support plans, particularly when seeking to compare cases through performance data. It is recommended that Breaking the Cycle considers the potential of a more formalized approach to support plans, which uses a systematic framework with a fixed number of key areas for improvement for each young person. This would allow impact data to be generated to track effectiveness and allow more structured decision making about when to disengage with service users. For example, a framework for each service user could include key areas such as:

- o Increasing safety and feelings of safety
- o Reducing risk
- o Increasing employability
- o Improving physical and mental wellbeing

Such a framework could be the basis of an action plan that still uses a tailored list of support measures and interventions for each young person while offering more structure to understand impact, including distance travelled.

2. **Increasing impact and capacity by focusing on early intervention**: Currently, Breaking the Cycle is taking a key, and at times leading, role in some serious safeguarding cases that would usually be worked on solely by MASH staff (police and social care). These cases are taking up a substantial amount of Breaking the Cycle time and resources because they are complex, often urgent, and often occurring outside of traditional office hours.  It is recommended that Breaking the Cycle consider the impact of focusing their casework on sub-safeguarding 'early intervention' cases rather than the most serious, acute cases (which the other statutory partners can manage effectively within their existing robust statutory processes). Doing so would allow Breaking the Cycle to reduce their caseload and focus on those young people who are below or on the cusp of serious safeguarding crises. Research evidence suggests this is the most cost-effective way to deploy staff such as those within Breaking the Cycle, because they can then focus on preventing upstream safeguarding incidents later in the life-course of young people, which reduces demand across all agencies and improves the lives of the young people involved before crises occur.

3. **Increase impact and capacity by structuring the Breaking the Cycle service offer**: Breaking the Cycle staff and managers work hard to engage with and support other agencies, offering the expertise and capacity of the team. Although this helps to create an effective cooperative environment, there are challenges this brings in both volume and complexity of case referrals. This means that Breaking the Cycle often becomes involved in complex cases that are being managed by social care and police, but do not have the same structures or processes governing their involvement. Breaking the Cycle also becomes involved in these cases with no control over the time and effort they might require, and no clearly defined exit point. To help manage this, it is recommended that Breaking the Cycle consider adopting a tiered approach to support they provide for other services. For example, they could offer a range of services, clearly communicated to other partners, of increasing involvement/complexity. But these would be based on an assessment of need, available resources and risk in a more systematic way. An example tiered approach might be:
   - o Telephone/email advice to partners managing a serious case
   - o Attending and giving advice at case/strategy meetings
   - o Providing clearly defined, one-off outreach support for a particular case (such as intelligence gathering)
   - o Joint leadership on cases
   - o Leading cases

A more structured approach to taking on work would allow Breaking the Cycle to have more control over their resources, improve worker caseloads and help to manage the expectations of other partners in a more systematic way.

4. **Improve performance data collection to understand impact and effectiveness**: To consider developing an analytical system or process that uses police and social care data to capture and track a series of key metrics relating to outcomes for young people engaged with Breaking the Cycle. For example, this might include arrests, missing reports, crimes, referrals to social care, and other key points.

5. **Increase impact for the service through better capture of data on 'distance travelled'**: To consider the development of a set of formal distance-travelled measures for young people engaged with Breaking the Cycle. This would provide more information on the impact of the project on young people; differences in impact achieved across the various issues and challenges young people present as part of their work with the project; and the best points at which to disengage with young people after support work is completed. Such data could include measures provided by questionnaires completed with service users on entry to Breaking the Cycle, at key milestones, and at exit from the project. There are 'off the shelf' questionnaires that could be used as an interim measure, for example Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The surveys used as part of this project evaluation could also be used for this purpose.

6. **Reduce inappropriate referrals to improve capacity**: To consider the creation of a flowchart for referring practitioners who can follow the chart and determine for themselves whether a referral should be made to Breaking the Cycle, social care, or other services, before making contact.

*Legitimacy*

1. **Ensure current information handling approaches are compliant:** A review of how data is currently being held/recorded by Breaking the Cycle should be undertaken to ensure that GDPR/data protection laws and regulations are being followed.

2. **To support stakeholders in better understanding what Breaking the Cycle offers and to whom:** The work of Breaking the Cycle is complex and specialized. Many referring partners do not fully understand what Breaking the Cycle can and cannot do, which can lead to inappropriate referrals being made and received. To ensure that the service is well understood by all stakeholders, Breaking the Cycle could consider a simple communication campaign that highlights and celebrates the work they do and its effectiveness.

3. **To co-produce developments in Breaking the Cycle with young people:** Nearly all the young people worked with by Breaking the Cycle are very positive about the work of the project, which should be seen as a significant success for the program and its funders. Consideration should be given to asking young people who have successfully worked with Breaking the Cycle to engage in helping to improve the offering. In other places, service users/ex-service users of similar projects have formed part of an improvement board that meets to coproduce improvement ideas on a rolling basis, and this approach could be a useful tool for Breaking the Cycle.

# Contents

# 1. Introduction: Breaking the Cycle project evaluation

## 1.1 Purpose of this report

This research was funded by the West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) to produce an impact evaluation of Breaking the Cycle. The VRU funds a wide range of violence reduction interventions across West Yorkshire and seeks to build and develop the evidence base as to 'what works' to reduce violence and the potential for sustainability of promising interventions. One of these initiatives is Breaking the Cycle, a project working with young people who are involved or at risk of:

- serious organised and violent crime;
- urban street gangs;
- county lines;
- criminal exploitation or exploiting others;
- having a higher than yellow anti-social behaviour sanction;
- links to drugs and weapons (including users, possession or suppliers);
- and missing episodes.

The aims of Breaking the Cycle revolve around harm reduction, protection and breaking the cycle of criminality, with interventions starting where the young person is. This means engagement often begins in street-based locations and through detached work sessions. Out-of-hours support is available alongside the Emergency Duty Team in Children's Social Care, this includes locating high-risk missing young people and welfare visits. This evaluation seeks to examine those elements and provide:

- an understanding of how many young people Breaking the Cycle supports and the extent of the project reach;
- an understanding of the distance travelled so far by young people;
- an understanding of the views of key stakeholders, including service users, staff members and schools;
- an overview of the existing evidence base around having a consistent outreach team across several projects;
- an understanding of how the service connectivity can increase the success of the project;
- an understanding of the impact of working at the 'crisis end', providing wraparound support with other provisions and out-of-hours responses at critical moments;
- an understanding of how the service could be made more impactive and recommendations on how this could be achieved;
- and exploration around how to expand the service and the future potential.

To address those requirements, this evaluation undertook two activities: firstly, a rapid evidence assessment of the existing evidence base with a focus on the use of consistent outreach and service connectivity; second, an empirical research process that comprised surveys, secondary data requests, interviews and focus groups. Details on the methods for each of these elements follow.

## 1.2 The Rapid Evidence Assessment

The rapid evidence assessment examines some of the key academic, policy, and practice literature around multi-agency, multi-setting interventions for young people at risk of violence and gang involvement. The approach we took involved a broad range of material, which was synthesised and analysed in two parts: firstly, a contextual overview of youth violence and gang involvement; secondly, a more specific analysis focusing on the benefits and challenges of multi-agency, multi-setting interventions for young people at risk of violence and gang involvement. A total of 76 reports, papers, and website pages were accessed in their full text and screened for inclusion; 38 of those were included in the analysis portions of the review. A summary of and key findings from the Rapid Evidence Assessment can be found in section 2 of this report; the full Rapid Evidence Assessment can be found in Appendix 1.

## 1.3 The empirical evaluation

For this independent evaluation of the Breaking the Cycle project, we sought to understand perceptions of the service from a range of stakeholders alongside objective data provided to the evaluation team relating to metrics being recorded about Breaking the Cycle. Therefore, we undertook a mixed methods approach to collecting data in the following ways:

*Surveys*

As part of the data collection, we designed and deployed two surveys: one to the young people accessing Breaking the Cycle, and one to the practitioners involved in either delivering the programme, working for other agencies or organisations that feed into the programme, or those that have some strategic or oversight responsibility for the programme. Both surveys were designed to ask questions about engagement with the project, perceptions of the project, and the impact of the project.

The surveys were entirely voluntary, and each contained a clear briefing that included a description of the work, assurance of how we would maintain anonymity, information on whom to contact should respondents have any questions or wish to withdraw their data, and information on other support services should participants find that of use.

In total, we received 21 responses from the surveys sent to the professionals and other key stakeholders; and 24 surveys sent to the young people engaged in the project. Breakdowns of each group are as follows:

**Professionals**
- N = 21
- Gender: Female = 10; Male = 10; Prefer not to say = 1
- Years in role: Mean = 5.89 (standard deviation = 5.037), minimum = 1, maximum = 15.

**Young People**
- N = 24
- Gender: Female = 7, Male = 17
- Age: Mean = 15.46 (standard deviation = 2.11) minimum = 10, maximum = 19.

Figures 1 and 2 provide some breakdowns of respondents.

Figure 1: Young People's responses to 'What part of Bradford do you live in?'
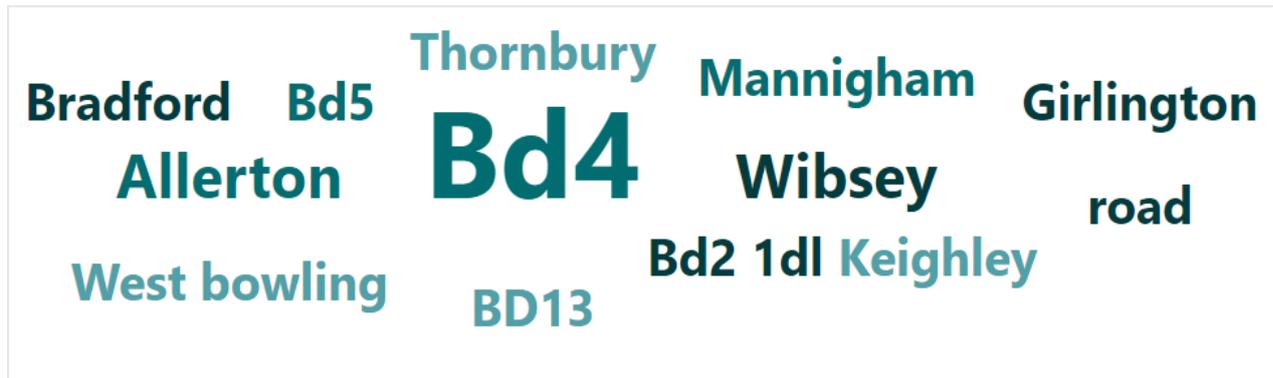


Figure 2: Practitioner responses to 'What organisation do you work for?'



*Secondary data requests*

As part of the research, data requests were made to the VRU delivery team, and to the Breaking the Cycle team. These requests included:

- Anonymised data on referral volume and type, broken down by month/year
- Examples of forms uses (such as the referral form)
- Other process forms, documents, and blank record documents
- Any other forms, processes or documents that the teams feel may be of use.

Both the VRU and Breaking the Cycle were forthcoming in providing this data.

*Interviews and focus groups*

As part of the research, we conducted a range of interviews across different agencies and key stakeholders that have some involvement with Breaking the Cycle.

The interviews were conducted either face-to-face, during a visit from the research team to the locations in which the project works, or in some cases virtually, over Microsoft Teams. All interviewees were over 18 years of age.

Each participant was provided with a briefing and debriefing sheet, that made clear that participation was entirely voluntary, and each contained a clear briefing that included a description

of the work, assurance of how we would maintain anonymity, information on whom to contact should respondents have any questions or wish to withdraw their data, and information on other support services should participants find that of use.

The interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy by the research team.

In total 26 people were interviewed, either individually or in focus groups. Table 1, following shows these groups and the identifiers we use when we quote from the interviews in the report.

Table 1: Interview participants and signifiers in the data

| No. | Organisation | Identifier for quotes |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Children Vulnerable to Exploitation team | Children's Social Care Lead Professional |
| 2. | Child Exploitation Team | |
| 3. | Leaving Care Service | Children's Social Care Professional |
| 4. | Emergency Duty Team Manager / out of hours | |
| 5. | CSE social worker | |
| 6. | Specialist Nurse, Child exploitation team | Health Care Professional |
| 7. | Deterrent Car Sgt | Police – Exploitation |
| 8. | Neighbourhood Policing Team / Focused Deterrent Car | |
| 9. | Police officer in Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) | Police – MASH |
| 10. | Community Safety Coordinator at Bradford Council | Community Safety Professional |
| 11. | Breaking the Cycle staff working with a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) | BtC – PRU |
| 12. | Breaking the Cycle staff working with a Pupil Referral Unit | |
| 13. | Breaking the Cycle hospital youth worker | BtC – hospital |
| 14. | Breaking the Cycle hospital youth worker | |
| 15. | Breaking the Cycle staff youth worker | BtC – Youth Worker |
| 16. | Breaking the Cycle staff youth worker | |
| 17. | Breaking the Cycle staff youth worker | |
| 18. | Breaking the Cycle staff youth worker | |
| 19. | Breaking the Cycle staff youth worker | |
| 20. | Breaking the Cycle staff youth worker | |
| 21. | Breaking the Cycle staff youth worker | |
| 22. | Breaking the Cycle staff youth worker | |
| 23. | Breaking the Cycle administrator | BtC – other staff |
| 24. | Breaking the Cycle – service support | |
| 25. | Breaking the Cycle manager | |
| 26. | Breaking the Cycle workforce trainees and apprenticeships | |

## Ethics

We work to ethical best practices, abiding by the core principles of respect, competence, responsibility, and integrity. Our procedural ethics abide by the following standards:

- British Sociological Association statement of Ethical practice (2017)

- British Society of Criminology Statement of Ethics for Researchers in the Field of Criminology (2022)
- British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018).

In practice, this includes:

- Informed consent
- Confidentiality
- Privacy
- Voluntary participation and right to withdraw
- Protection from harm
- Debriefing
- Data protection
- Scientific integrity and social responsibility

Ethical approval and oversight were undertaken by an Independent Ethics Panel, which comprises two senior academics experienced in ethical reviews of research. The panel assessed and approved the work in terms of the research instruments and methods to provide approval, guidance, and reflection.

## 1.4 Structure of the report

This report comprises 8 sections in total, in the 7 following this introduction we present the evidence and analysis from this research:

**Section 2: Rapid Evidence Assessment** examines some of the academic and sector literature on multi-agency, multi-setting interventions for young people at risk of violence and gang involvement.

**Section 3:** I**mpact and distance travelled**, uses data from the surveys to examine some of the key impacts of the service.

**Sections 4, 5, 6, and 7: SWOT analysis** presents the bulk of the analysis from the interviews and surveys, organised under Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. In each case, we present a series of themes from the analysis with supporting evidence where suitable.

**Section 8**: **Summary and recommendations** provide the key suggestions from the preceding chapters.

# 2. Rapid Evidence Assessment summary: multi-agency, multi-setting interventions for young people at risk of violence and gang involvement

## 2.1 The Rapid Evidence Assessment approach

A Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) search strategy was used to review and identify key learning from a broad range of material on multi-agency, multi-setting interventions for young people at risk of violence and gang involvement. For the REA, a total of 76 reports, papers, and website pages were accessed in their full text and screened for inclusion; 38 of those were included in the analysis portions of the review. Interventions where outreach happened only in one place or that did not involve outreach work for youth at risk of criminal exploitation, were excluded from the analysis portion but where relevant were used in the context portion of this review.

The Full REA can be found in Appendix 1; in this section of the report, we summarise the key findings from this work.

## 2.2 Youth violence and gang involvement

Youth violence and gang involvement are pressing social issues, and significant progress has been made over the years in understanding the causes and consequences of these phenomena. According to the World Health Organisation (2020), youth violence is "a global public health problem. It includes a range of acts from bullying and physical fighting to more severe sexual and physical assault to homicide." The emphasis is strong on addressing youth violence as a public health issue, which requires a multi-systemic public health response.

Gang involvement is often associated with youth violence, and research has shown that gang membership is associated with an increased likelihood of engaging in violent and antisocial behaviour (Harris et al., 2011; Medina et al., 2013). In the year ending September 2022, there were 50,434 recorded offences involving knives or sharp instruments in England and Wales, and 3,500 offences were committed by children in the year ending March 2022 (ONS, 2022b; Youth Justice Board, 2023). The Office for National Statistics does not collect statistics related to the number of active gangs or crimes related to street gangs. However, according to a 2019 report from the Children's Commissioner, there were more than 27,000 children in England believed to be experiencing gang violence but not identified by the authorities, in stark contrast with 6,560 gang members or associates known to children's services or youth offending teams (ONS, 2015; The Children's Commissioner for England, 2019).

More recent estimates from the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for the year ending December 2021 show an increase of 9% in the number of potential child victims referred for modern slavery in the UK compared with the previous year (from 5,028 to 5,468) – modern slavery being an umbrella term for all forms of slavery, human trafficking, and criminal and sexual exploitation (ONS, 2022a). Although knife crime statistics have shown a decrease from pre-pandemic times (-8%), and the latest youth justice statistics show hopeful reductions in the numbers of children entering the system and

in custody, youth violence and involvement in criminal exploitation remain serious issues in the United Kingdom (ONS, 2022b; Youth Justice Board, 2023).

## Drivers for Youth violence and gang involvement

The causes of youth violence and involvement in gangs are multifaceted and complex. A combination of individual, family and community-level risk or protective factors influence the likelihood of youth involvement in violence and crime (Lösel & Farrington, 2012; Bushman et al., 2016; David-Ferdon et al., 2016; Haylock et al., 2020). Risk factors include exposure to violence, poverty, lack of educational and employment opportunities, substance misuse, poor mental health, disabilities, family breakdown, and social exclusion; on the other hand, protective factors include positive familial and extra-familial relationships, of which community support, school bonding and academic achievement, and a non-deviant neighbourhood environment (Lösel & Farrington, 2012; Bushman et al., 2016; David-Ferdon et al., 2016; Haylock et al., 2020; Winstanley et al., 2021). The summer months can also pose a higher risk, with the twin issues of boredom and alienation due to the lack of usual networks of support contributing to an increased likelihood of young people's involvement in crime, especially in deprived areas (Heller, 2014; StreetGames UK, n.d.).

## Preventative interventions for youth violence and gangs

Preventative interventions for youth involved in crime and gangs include mentoring programmes, family therapy, cognitive-behavioural therapy, and restorative justice practices (Petrosino et al., 2013; Higginson et al., 2015; O'Connor et al., 2015; David-Ferdon et al., 2016; Andell & Pitts, 2017; Waddell & Jones, 2018). Firstly, mentoring programmes provide youth at risk or involved in crime with positive role models who can guide them towards healthy behaviours and activities. Secondly, family therapy can improve family relationships and communication, addressing underlying issues that may have led to the young person's involvement in crime or gangs. Moving on, cognitive-behavioural therapy can help youth develop problem-solving and coping skills and teach them to understand the consequences of their actions. Finally, restorative justice practices focus on repairing the harm caused by the young person's actions, which can help build empathy and encourage pro-social behaviour. These interventions effectively reduce juvenile delinquency and gang involvement (Petrosino et al., 2013; Higginson et al., 2015; O'Connor et al., 2015; David-Ferdon et al., 2016; Andell & Pitts, 2017; Waddell & Jones, 2018).

Programmes that target specifically young people at risk of exploitation or already involved in gang crime may also involve the use of outreach teams. These teams typically work in public spaces to engage with these individuals and build positive relationships with them (Frattaroli et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2012; Heinze et al., 2016; Gornall et al., 2017; Sefton Council, 2019; Roca Inc, 2022). Outreach teams typically provide information and facilitate access to a range of services, including mentoring, counselling, support services, access to sportive activities or artistic workshops, and help with life skills development, education, and employment; they may also provide temporary housing or shelter for homeless populations, or provide support to those struggling with mental health or addiction (McMahon & Belur, 2013; Heller, 2014; Heinze et al., 2016; Slesnick et al., 2016; Boys and Girls Club of America, 2022; Boys and Girls Club of Canada, 2022; Big Brothers Big Sisters, n.d.; YMCA, n.d.).

Outreach teams might be based in one or more settings, such as in the streets, targeting the hotspots of highest risk of youth crime, but also in hospitals, schools, or in the wider community, partnering with neighbours and local organisations to engage with young people at risk and participate in conjoined community safety efforts (Morrel-Samuels et al., 2016; College of Policing

2019; Paterson, 2021; Butler et al., 2022; Communities in Schools, n.d.; Osmani Trust, n.d.; Safe Place for Youth, n.d.; The City of Boston, n.d.).

## 2.3 Multi-agency, multi-setting interventions

The REA found evidence of impact from most of these complex, and often ground-breaking programmes. This impact varied, but many programmes showed positive outcomes in reducing harm and vulnerability, promoting positive behaviour, and improving outcomes for young people involved in the criminal justice system or at risk of involvement. Wherever these programmes specifically aimed to reduce reoffending rates, there were often significant reductions in recidivism; on the other hand, longer-term outcomes such as health, education, and employment were more challenging to track.

A range of factors were identified as pivotal for the success of these interventions:

- the quality of implementation,
- level of community engagement,
- availability of resources,
- and the cultural sensitivity of the approach.

Overall, young people who received multi-agency, wraparound interventions were more likely to experience improved outcomes in terms of education, mental health, and employment. These programmes also had a positive impact on their recidivism rates; what emerged as essential was the use of highly structured and organised approaches that could make use of a range of resources (Knoll et al., 2012; Rogers et al., 2012; Heartland Alliance National Initiatives on Poverty & Economic Opportunity, 2018; YOS 2020; Safe and Sound Group, 2021; St Giles, 2021; Cure Violence, 2022; Roca Inc, 2022; Pearson et al., 2023; Act as 1, n.d.; St Basil's, n.d.; YAP Inc., n.d.).

Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of targeted and intensive approaches to tackle youth violence and reoffending. Strong evidence backed the effectiveness of the Cure Violence approach, which was associated with a significant reduction in shootings and gang-related homicides in a multi-site evaluation across the United States, showing that timely outreach work has the potential to divert young people away from dangerous situations (Cure Violence, 2022). Similarly, the evaluation of the impact of the Roca model suggests that a targeted, localised, and relentless model reduces violent behaviour and, ultimately, the risk of reoffending (Roca Inc., 2022).

The success of wraparound, flexible models is attributed to their ability to provide targeted and intensive support to high-risk individuals by identifying and addressing the underlying issues contributing to young people's offending behaviour. However, the success of this type of approach also depends on the quality and consistency of the support provided, as well as the willingness of individuals to engage with the programmes; in fact, one challenge of this approach is the difficulty in identifying and engaging high-risk individuals, particularly those who are not already known to the criminal justice system. Furthermore, significant resources are required to provide the necessary intensive support, an effort which may be difficult to sustain in the long term. Moreover, most of the interventions considered in this review could not rely on consistent funding but only on short-term grants or donations.

## 2.4 Delivery considerations drawn from the evidence.

Some delivery considerations can be drawn from this Rapid Evidence Review:

I. **Prioritisation should be given to community engagement and multi-agency collaboration to implement successful outreach interventions that address youth involvement in violence and organised crime**. Outreach workers need to be reputable and aware of the community and the contexts they work in; their work needs to be sensitive to the needs of a specific community; and it needs to be connected to local grassroots organisations through continuous, circular feedback and collaboration.

II. **It is difficult to compare interventions that take place in different contexts – communities and their needs are different**. However, although understanding the local context of a community is important, on its own it is not enough. Outreach teams should engage in specific training and education on trauma-informed approaches. This includes an understanding of the complex inter-personal and individual factors that contribute to the genesis of offending behaviour and ensures appropriate on-site responses that ultimately contribute to de-escalating violence. Outreach teams should be trained in culturally competent practices to better serve and engage with diverse communities and reach young people from marginalised communities.

III. **Outreach workers need to be credible, hence rooted in the communities in which they work.** Their credibility improves the chances of starting a dialogue with young people who might be otherwise resistant to service engagement and sustain with them a satisfying, trusting relationship. Grassroots, community-based organisations have been proven to be effective in providing support and interventions to at-risk youth. For example, in the United Kingdom, an evaluation of St. Giles Trust's county lines pilot project found that it was associated with a significant reduction in criminal activity among the young people involved (Hudek, 2018).

IV. **Young people's engagement with outreach teams is ultimately based on trust**. Funding needs to be ring-fenced and consistent for these multifaceted programmes as it is fundamental that interventions foster long-term relationships and that outreach activities happen consistently, that they follow the pace of the young people, and that they find them where they are. In the words of the Covenant House (n.d.), a multi-national programme providing help to young people with experience of homelessness or trafficking: "unconditional love, absolute respect, and relentless support" are the bases for a commitment to young people's empowerment and safety from crime and exploitation.

# 3. Impact and distance travelled

## 3.1 Section introduction

What follows, is a multi-perspective evaluation of Breaking the Cycle. The discussion of findings has been structured according to a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) model. It should be noted, that when taking an overview of the entire evaluation:

- The overwhelming finding is that Breaking the Cycle is an effective approach to supporting young people who are being exploited (or at risk of exploitation) and its continuation and even expansion are both wanted and needed by other agencies.
- Young people and Professionals feel very positive about Breaking the Cycle and its impact.
- Although distance travelled is hard to evaluate from one data point, there is strong evidence to suggest that Breaking the Cycle has a large impact on the young people involved in the project.
- There are particularly clear benefits when it comes to reducing violent behaviours and improving decision-making and emotional intelligence.
- Breaking the Cycle is particularly good at developing trust in the young people and professionals with whom it works, including improving the trust of other agencies.

## 3.2 Overall satisfaction with Breaking the Cycle

It is clear from the survey data that both the young people and the practitioners felt they were getting what they wanted from their participation in Breaking the Cycle. The data from the survey was clear in this regard for both young people and professionals:

**Responses to questions in the survey 'Are you getting what you want from Breaking the Cycle?'**
- Young people: 'a bit' or 'a lot' = 79.2%
- Professionals: 'a bit' or 'a lot' = 90.5%
- Combined: 'a bit' or 'a lot' = 84.5%

Figure 3, below, illustrates the high level of satisfaction from both young people and professionals.

Figure 3: are you getting what you want from Breaking the Cycle?
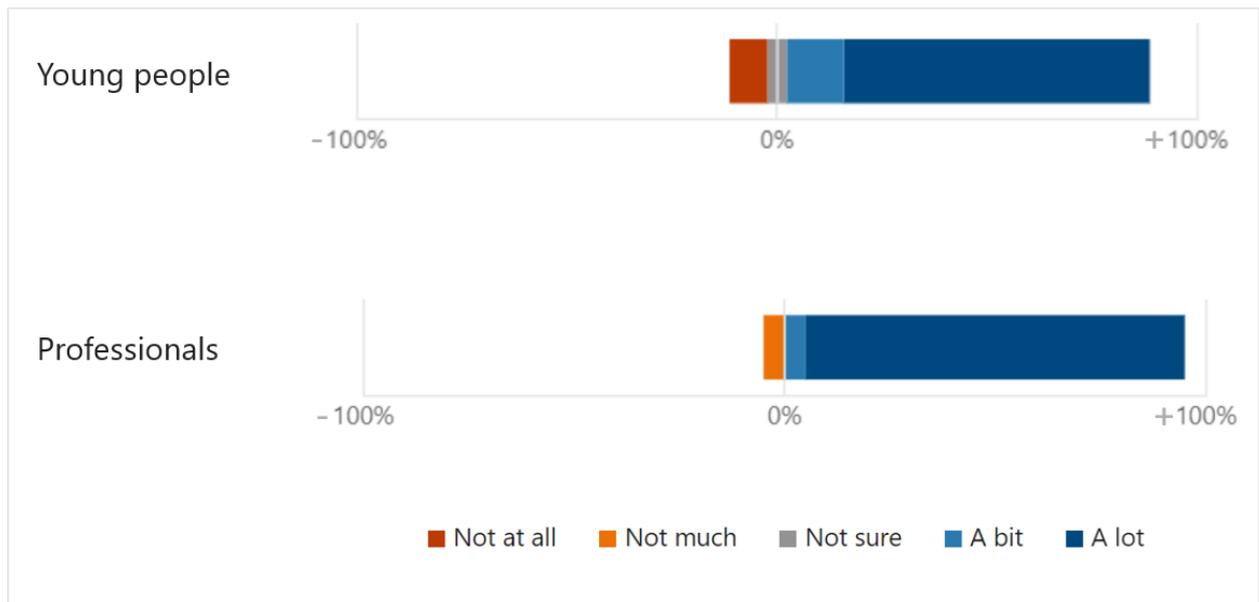


These findings were supported by the survey free-text comments from both groups when asked what they thought was good about Breaking the Cycle, and what they thought could be done better by Breaking the Cycle. Figure 4, following, provides a selection of the young people's comments. As can be seen, these were overwhelmingly positive, particularly in the areas of reflecting on positive relationships, support, and trust. There were very few comments that could be construed as negative, the closest was a request for more contact from Breaking the Cycle youth workers during the intervention period.

Figure 4: Young people's reflections on Breaking the Cycle
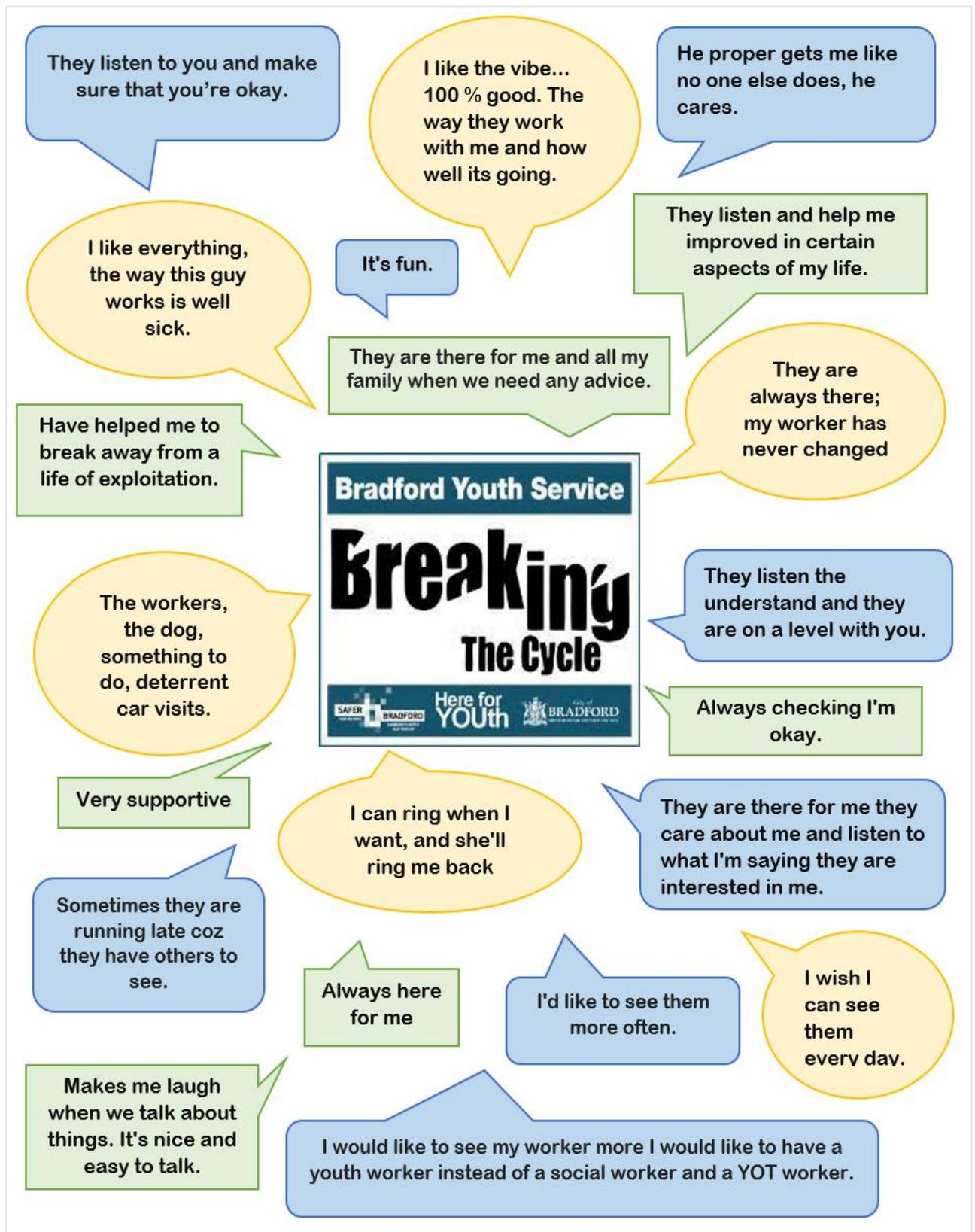
The professionals that responded to the survey were similarly positive about Breaking the Cycle. Both professional's and young people's comments mention the positive interaction with Breaking the Cycle staff and how much they value the commitment and support provided. For example:

*Staff are really helpful and solution-focused - responsive when I am stuck.* (Survey - Bradford Council)

*The professionalism of the team. Their flexible and caring approach to all young people who they work with. A can do attitude and going the extra mile when many other services are not open or working. Working in a very volatile and dangerous environment and doing this with care and consideration for all involved from parents to partners services.* (Survey - Breaking the Cycle staff)

*Very understanding and empathetic to family's needs Very supportive.* (Survey - No organisation stated)

Professionals working with Breaking the Cycle also identified some challenges, particularly relating to what could be done better by Breaking the Cycle:

*More of them [Breaking the Cycle youth workers] to extend the work.* (Survey - Youth Justice Service)

*Communicate with the referring agency. Keep others updated of what subjects have been approached if they were able to, or if this hasn't been successful.* (Survey - District Youth Services)

*Technology to help youth workers and back-office staff in fulfilling their job more efficiently. Increase in resources and have job roles in the team with specialty such as a drugs & alcohol worker, careers person, counsellor. To have these people on hand to offer a wraparound to young people would be ideal.* (Survey - Childrens Services)

*Although we are able to contact breaking the cycle for updates and they respond well. There is limited feedback in terms of updating young people's CE risk assessments when they do not have an allocated social worker.* (Survey – Childrens Services)

Figure 5 presents these perspectives from young people and professionals. Following this, Figure 6 presents the number of young people that would use the project in the future, and the number of both young people and professionals that would recommend the project to others.

Figure 5: Summaries of what the Young People and Professionals feel about Breaking the Cycle.



Figure 6: Using and recommending Breaking the Cycle in the future
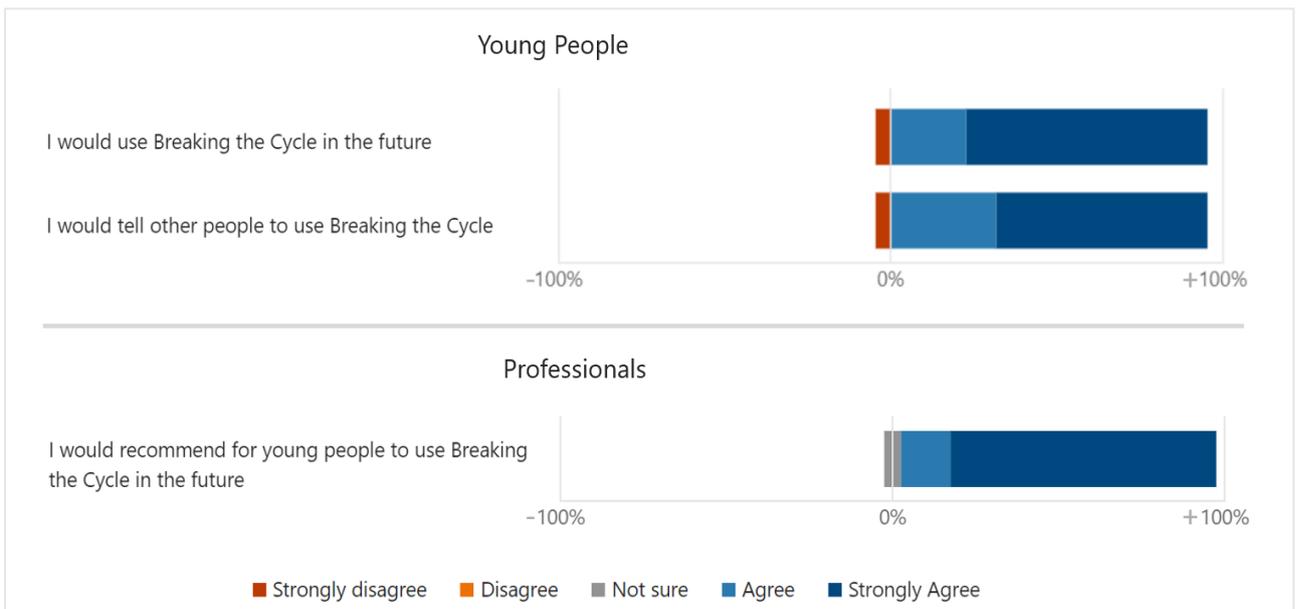
## 3.3 Referrals

The volume of cases being managed by Breaking the Cycle has steadily increased since its launch, year on year. If the trend of referrals increases year on year at the current rate, then Breaking the Cycle can expect approximately 680 referrals in the year 2025 (an approximate increase of 30% per year). This is likely to continue because other organisations proactively make use of the straightforward referral processes and effective interventions that Breaking the Cycle provides, as part of their demand management strategy. The figures and tables that follow provide some evidence of referrals. Table 2 shows the demographic data for Breaking the Cycle referrals (2019 to 2022); Table 3 shows Breaking the Cycle aggregated monthly referral rates (2019 to 2022); and Figure 7 shows the change in Breaking the cycle referrals year on year.

| Table 2: Demographic data for Breaking the Cycle referrals (2019 to 2022) | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Total number of referrals** | | 1521 |
| **The mean age of young people being referred** | | 14.49 (standard deviation = 1.89) |
| **Self-reported Gender** | **Female** | 185 (12.2%) |
| | **Male** | 1333 (87.6%) |
| | **Transgender** | 1 |
| | **Not stated** | 2 |

| Table 3: Breaking the Cycle aggregated monthly referral rates (2019 to 2022) | |
|---|---|
| January | 137 |
| February | 95 |
| March | 106 |
| March | 1 |
| April | 78 |
| May | 113 |
| June | 159 |
| July | 157 |
| August | 104 |
| September | 96 |
| October | 151 |
| November | 159 |
| December | 143 |
| *Frequency of referrals by months – double entries are an artefact of the Breaking the Cycle coding process – are not included.* | |

Figure 7: Breaking the Cycle referrals by year
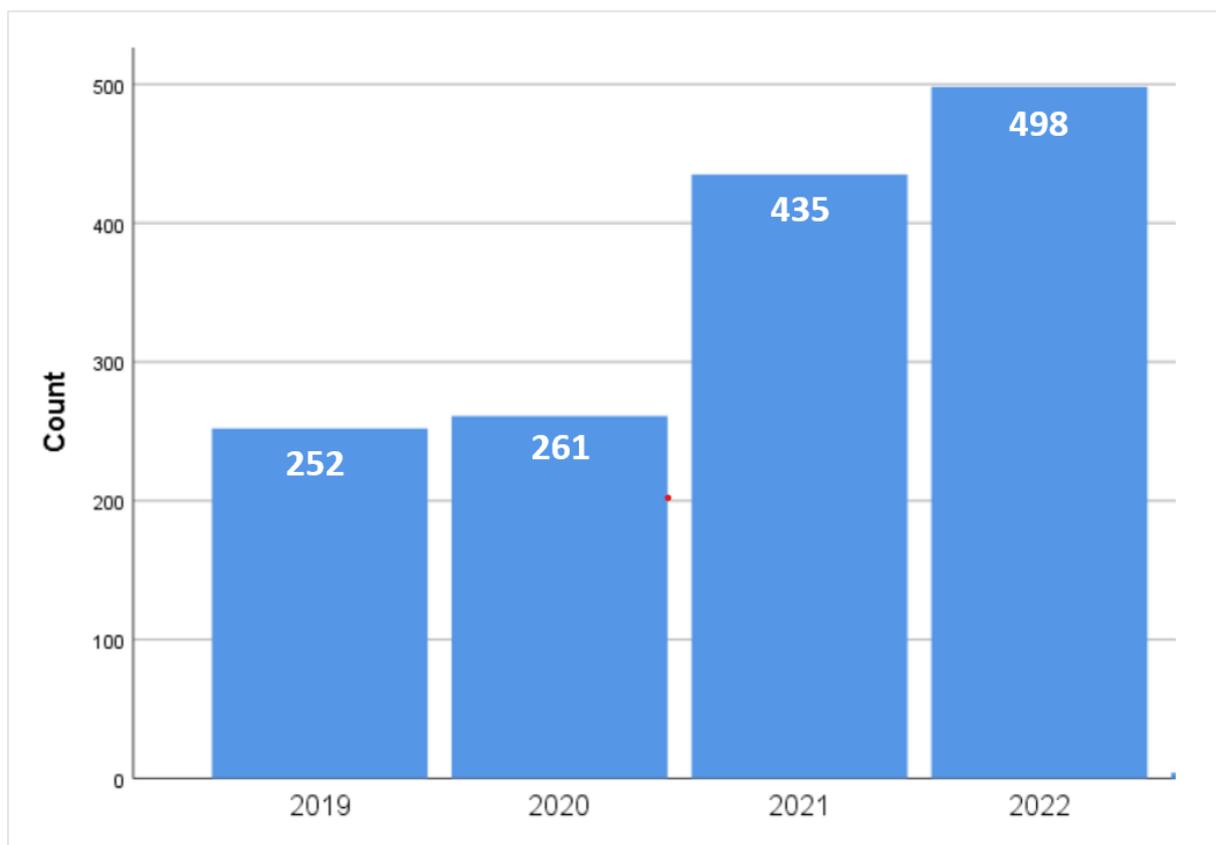


To service this growing caseload without service delivery suffering, more investment is likely to be needed. There are opportunities to improve the service through efficiency or process/systems development, thereby further reducing the demand for other services. However, this is likely to require additional investment, financially and politically, including the further embedding of Breaking the Cycle within a more formalised process and workflow structure.

## 3.4 Distance travelled for young people participating in Breaking the Cycle.

It is difficult to provide accurate measures of 'distance travelled' (i.e., the actual change in behaviours, perspectives and outcomes of young people engaged with the service) without access to data from the young people before, during, and after their engagement period. However, indices of distance travelled can be inferred by asking young people about their perspectives on how they feel they have changed by engaging with the programme. Although these do not give the full picture of distance travelled in an objective sense, increased trust, improved decision-making, and better emotional intelligence are proxies that can be used for distance travelled. As such, they offer valuable insight into how young people feel they have changed through their involvement with Breaking the Cycle. There are several measures in the surveys from which we can draw this data, some of which are represented in the following figures.

Firstly, Figure 8 summarises responses to questions about the impact of Breaking the Cycle on the decision-making and emotional intelligence of young people. The questions asked both young people and professionals how they think the programme has helped to develop positive decision-making and emotional skills. Decision-making includes aspects of self-efficacy, goal setting, and

problem-solving; these skills are important in helping young people to develop agency and resist negative influences. Emotional intelligence items assess understanding of self and others; these skills are important when helping young people to develop emotional regulation, empathy, and compassion for the self and others. These skills help young people manage their emotions and understand that their behaviour impacts others. Empathy also facilitates non-aggressive responses. Survey responses show both young people and professionals agree or strongly agree that Breaking the Cycle has produced positive outcomes in young people's decision-making and emotional intelligence.

Secondly, Figure 9 illustrates responses from both young people and professionals on the impact that Breaking the Cycle has on the challenges young people face. The professionals are more positive than young people. One reason for this may be the broader perspective professionals have on the project. Another may be that the young people were responding only to issues pertinent to their circumstances. In both cases, the results are more positive for issues related to behavioural change than for drugs and substance-misuse.

Finally, Figure 10 shows the changes in trust that Breaking the Cycle engenders within different organisations. Trust is a psychological state where an individual accepts vulnerability based on the expectations that a trusted other has positive intentions and is credible and reliable. Developing trust is a precursor for the disclosure of personal or sensitive information and facilitates positive personal and professional relationships. Conversely, a lack of trust impedes the development of relationships. Increased trust is pertinent to many of the topics discussed within the report such as intelligence gathering, sharing of personal information, professional synergies and intention to continue interacting with Breaking the Cycle. One of the key findings from this research is Breaking the Cycle has earned the trust of young people and professionals.

Figure 8: perspectives on the impact of Breaking the Cycle for decision making and emotional intelligence:
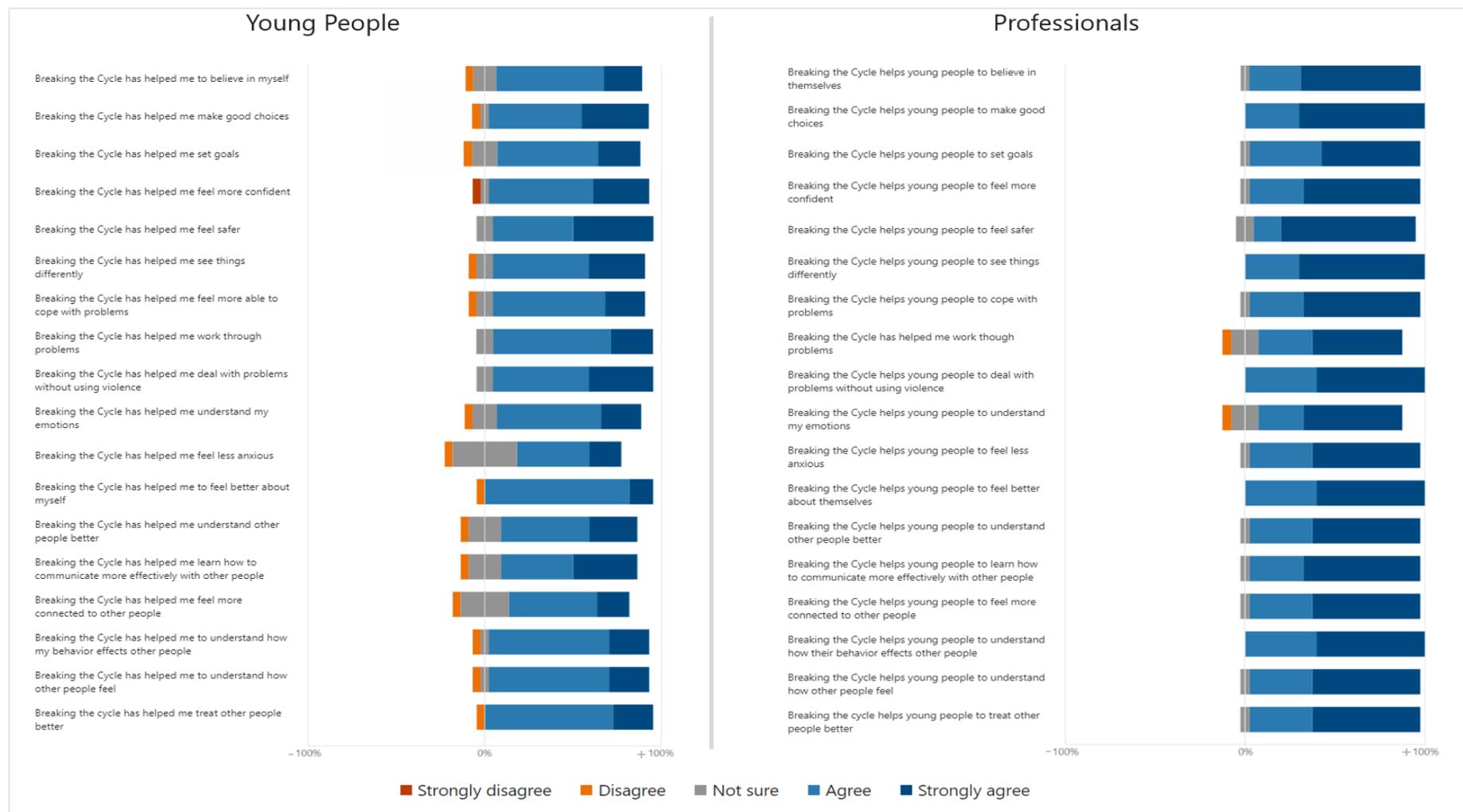
Figure 9: Perspective on how Breaking the Cycle helps with different challenges the young people face



Young People | Professionals

Alcohol
Violence
Controlling your anger
Problems at school with teachers
Problems at School other young people
Problems with your mental health
Problems on the street
Knife Crime
Cannabis
Class A drugs
Nitrous Oxide (Ballons)
Lean
Spice
Other drugs
Problems with relationships at home
Problems with violence at home
Gambling
Other

-100%   0%   +100%     -100%   0%   +100%

■ Not at all   ■ Not much   ■ Not changed   ■ A bit   ■ A lot

West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit

West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Figure 10: Changes in young peoples trust and confidence in different groups since working with Breaking the Cycle
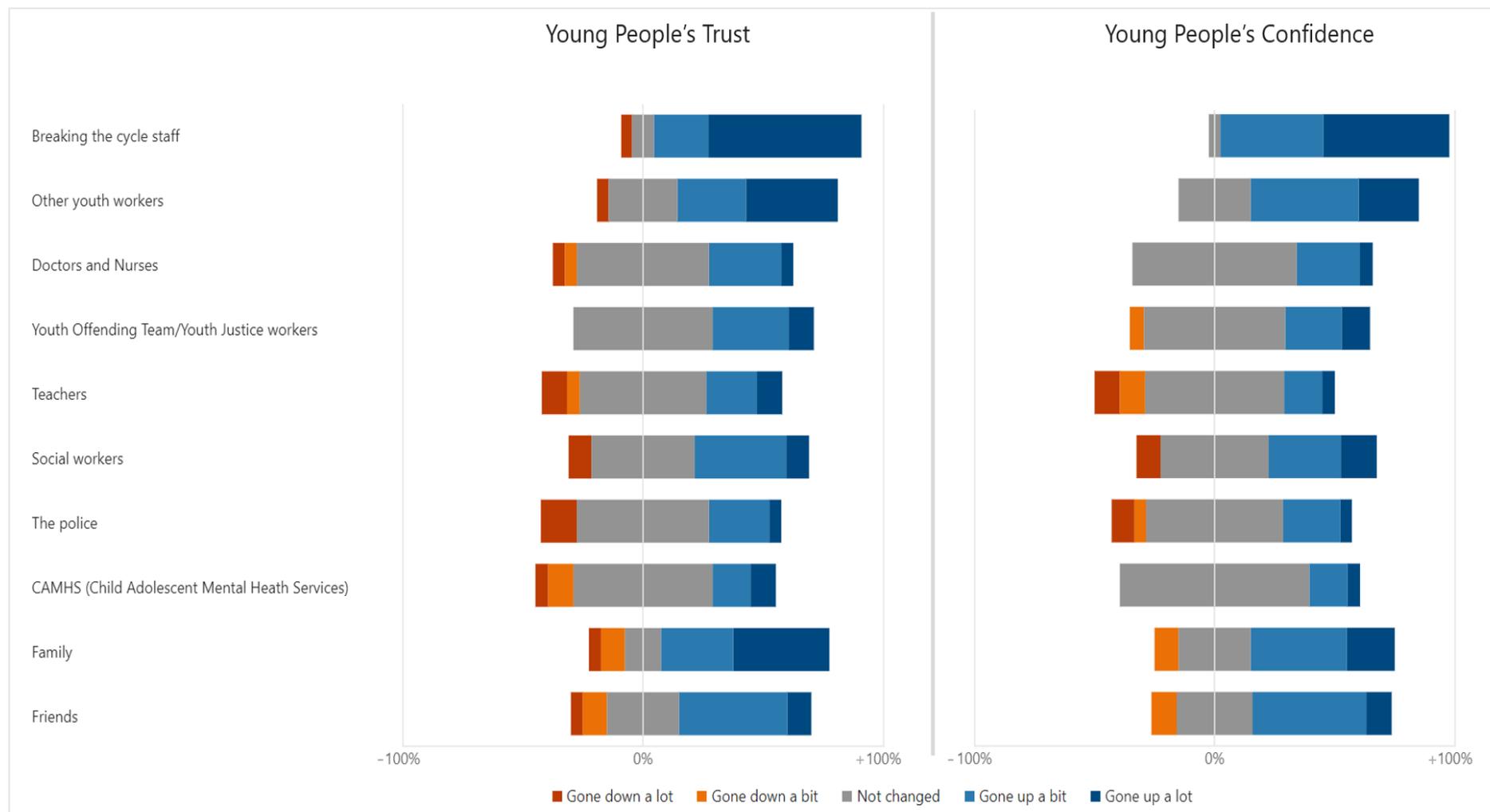
The data shows some clear impacts for young people in their involvement with Breaking the Cycle. There are impacts when it comes to violence and anger-related issues, specifically:

**Breaking the Cycle has helped me deal with problems without using violence** (22 responses)
- Agree = 12 (50%)
- Strongly agree = 8 (33.3%)
- Agree or strongly agree = 83.3%

This can then be broken down into constituent aspects of violence:

**Breaking the Cycle has helped with Violent behaviour** (21 responses)
- Agree = 7 (29.2%)
- Strongly agree = 11 (45.8%) (21 responses)
- Agree or strongly agree = 75%

**Breaking the Cycle has helped with controlling anger** (21 responses)
- Agree = 9 (37.5%)
- Strongly agree = 9 (37.5%)
- Agree or strongly agree = 75%

**Breaking the Cycle has helped reduce Knife crime** (22 responses)
- Agree = 8 (33.3%)
- Strongly agree = 8 (33.3%)
- Agree or strongly agree = 66.6%

## 3.4 What Works for Young People and Professionals?

The S.W.O.T. analysis in the later sections provides a detailed analysis of Breaking the Cycle, however there are also useful reflections from the survey that provide some overall perspectives on which elements of the project are most effective.  Firstly, it is clear from the survey that both young people and professionals understand what it is that Breaking the Cycle does:

**Survey Question: I know what Breaking the Cycle does:**
- Young People and Professionals combined data: Agree or strongly agree = 90.4%

In terms of what it is like to work with Breaking the Cycle, both the young people and the professionals were overwhelmingly positive. Figure 11 illustrates the young people's responses to questions on the support they were offered as part of the project; and Figure 12 illustrates responses from the professionals on their perspective of the efficacy of different elements of Breaking the Cycle.

Figure 11: Young people's perspectives on what is it like working with Breaking the Cycle.
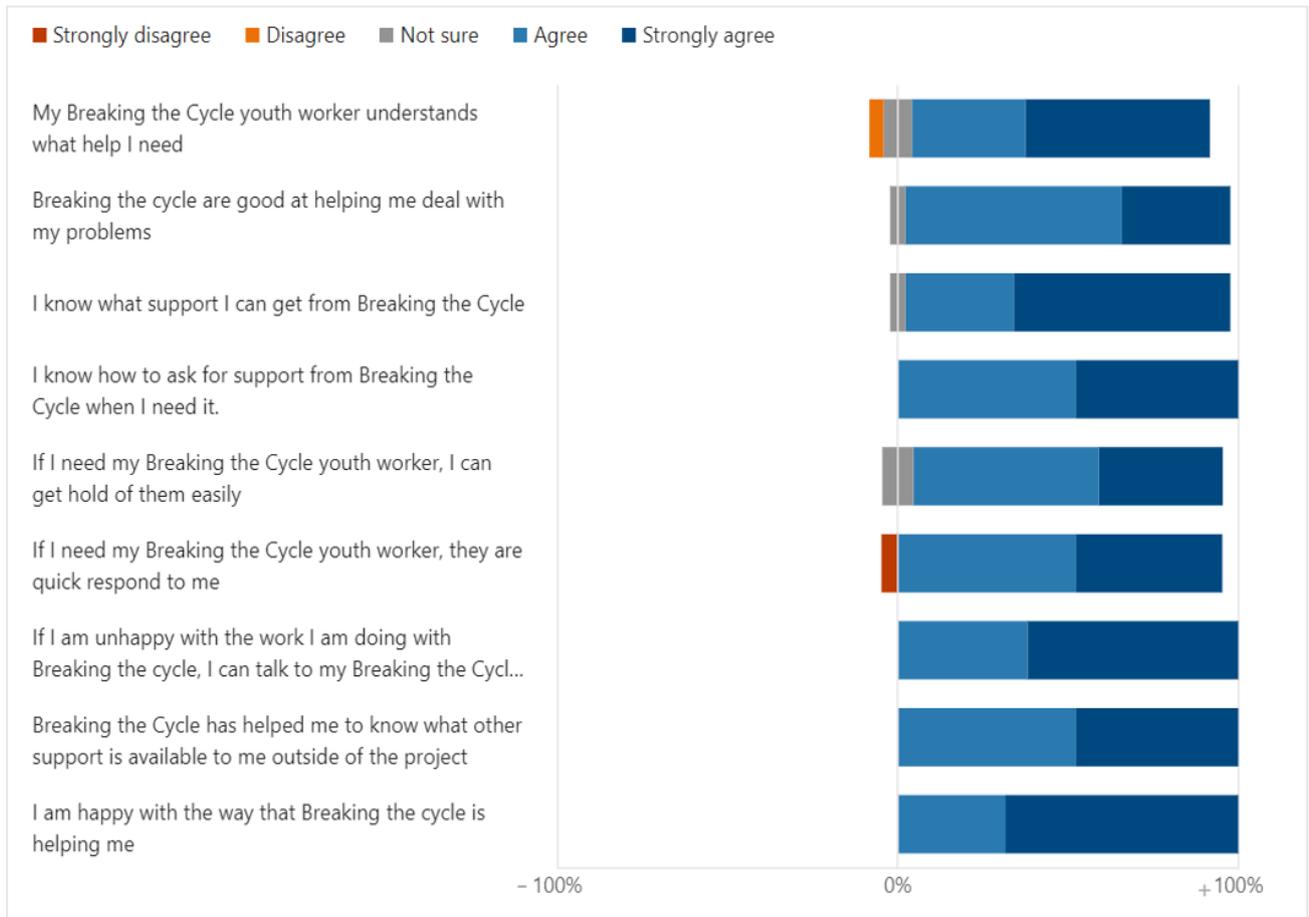
Figure 12: Professional's perspectives on how each aspect of Breaking the Cycle works
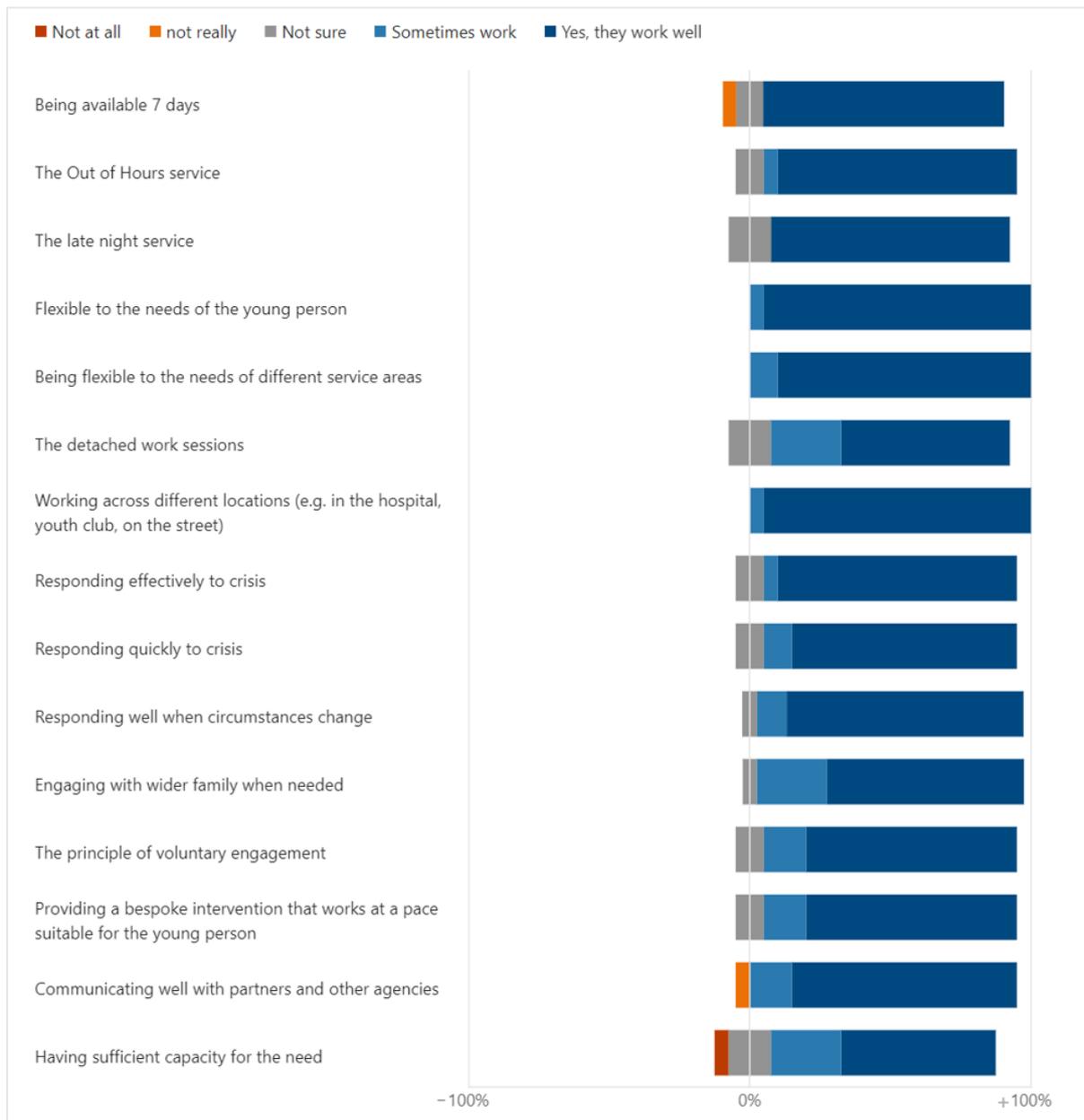


## 3.5 Statistical analysis of survey data

Percentages are useful descriptions of data; however, statistical tests are required to understand if patterns in data result from specific influences, or if those patterns have occurred by chance. Significant results are deemed to be results that have occurred beyond a chance level, and as such, significant results can be used to inform project design and inform policy decisions. Non-significant results can also be informative when addressing specific research questions.

*Trust*

Trust is an important predictor of relationship success and the quality of relationships. To help understand the distance travelled, increases in trust following contact with Breaking the Cycle for

specific groups (Breaking the Cycle staff, other youth workers, doctors and nurses, teachers, social workers, police, CAMHS) was assessed. We used the following question:

*Since working with Breaking the Cycle, how has your trust in the following people changed?*

To produce an overall measure of trust, the responses for each target group were combined to produce an overall measure of increased trust for young people and professionals. The intention was to establish if there was a meaningful difference in increased trust between these groups – in other words, how, if at all, involvement in Breaking the Cycle increased young people's and/or professionals' trust in the other groups they encounter.

A T-test produced no significant difference between Young People and Professionals t(41) .26, p = .80 in the level of increased trust [young people, mean = 25.55 (standard deviation = 7.28), professionals, mean = 24.90 (standard deviation = 9.10)].

Given the high scores reported in increased trust, this result suggests that Breaking the Cycle evokes increased trust in both young people and professionals and that these groups do not differ in their degree of increased trust. This is important because the result suggests that increased trust is evoked by the working practices of Breaking the Cycle, regardless of whether survey participants were young people or professionals.

## Future use of Breaking the cycle: Young People and Professionals – REGRESSIONS

In these tests, we wanted to identify predictors of future use of Breaking the Cycle. Using the logic above, we created composite score variables for Breaking the Cycle: POSITIVITY, TRUST, CONFIDENCE and HELP WITH PROBLEMS. This is important because if Breaking the Cycle wishes to retain engagement (and reduce attrition), the programme could develop strategies that target statistically significant predictors: that is, predictors that influence future use beyond chance.

Table 4: Criterion – Use Breaking the Cycle in future

Regression significant ($p < .001$): Adjusted $R^2$ = .76

Coefficients[a]

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients B | Std. Error | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. | 95.0% Confidence Interval for B Lower Bound | Upper Bound | Correlations Zero-order | Partial | Part | Collinearity Statistics Tolerance | VIF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | (Constant) | -2.249 | 1.063 | | -2.116 | .051 | -4.515 | .016 | | | | | |
| | BtC_POSITIVITY | .051 | .010 | .682 | 5.123 | .000 | .030 | .073 | .814 | .798 | .548 | .645 | 1.551 |
| | TRUST | .084 | .027 | .505 | 3.079 | .008 | .026 | .142 | .689 | .622 | .329 | .425 | 2.352 |
| | CONFIDENCE | .001 | .026 | .006 | .041 | .968 | -.053 | .056 | .256 | .011 | .004 | .610 | 1.638 |
| | HELP_WITH_PROBLEMS | -.026 | .011 | -.328 | -2.502 | .024 | -.049 | -.004 | .231 | -.543 | -.267 | .663 | 1.507 |

a. Dependent Variable: I would use Breaking the Cycle in the future

Table 4 shows that for Breaking the Cycle:

- POSITIVITY was a **significant** predictor.
- TRUST was a **significant** predictor.
- HELP WITH PROBLEM was a **significant** predictor.
- CONFIDENCE was a **non-significant** predictor.

Given peer to peer recommendations might encourage the use of Breaking the Cycle, we went on to identify predictors of a personal recommendation to use Breaking the Cycle.

Table 5: Criterion – Recommend Breaking the Cycle to others

Regression significant ($p < .001$): Adjusted $R^2$ = .78

**Coefficients**

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients B | Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. | 95.0% Confidence Interval for B Lower Bound | 95.0% Confidence Interval for B Upper Bound | Correlations Zero-order | Correlations Partial | Correlations Part | Collinearity Statistics Tolerance | Collinearity Statistics VIF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | (Constant) | -1.950 | 1.140 | | -1.710 | .108 | -4.380 | .480 | | | | | |
| | BtC_POSITIVITY | .042 | .011 | .557 | 3.948 | .001 | .020 | .065 | .767 | .714 | .447 | .645 | 1.551 |
| | TRUST | .108 | .029 | .639 | 3.678 | .002 | .045 | .170 | .741 | .689 | .417 | .425 | 2.352 |
| | CONFIDENCE | -.011 | .027 | -.060 | -.416 | .683 | -.070 | .047 | .267 | -.107 | -.047 | .610 | 1.638 |
| | HELP_WITH_PROBLEMS | -.024 | .011 | -.289 | -2.080 | .055 | -.048 | .001 | .266 | -.473 | -.236 | .663 | 1.507 |

Table 5 shows that for Breaking the Cycle:

- POSITIVITY was a **significant** predictor.
- TRUST was a **significant** predictor.
- HELP WITH PROBLEMS was a **significant** predictor.
- CONFIDENCE was a **non-significant** predictor.

*Overall*

Overall, these results suggest:

- Both Young People and Professionals have positive attitudes towards Breaking the Cycle. These positive attitudes predict future use of Breaking the Cycle services and a personal recommendation to others to use Breaking the Cycle.
- Both Young People and Professionals perceive Breaking the Cycle as evoking trust, and these positive perceptions predict future use of Breaking the Cycle services and a personal recommendation to others to use Breaking the Cycle.
- Both Young People and Professionals perceive Breaking the Cycle as helpful, and these positive perceptions predict future use of Breaking the Cycle services and a personal recommendation to others to use Breaking the Cycle.
- CONFIDENCE was a non-significant predictor. This implies that those that interact with Breaking the Cycle may not have confidence in positive outcomes, but they value other aspects of engagement with Breaking the Cycle. This may be because definite positive outcomes are potentially difficult to visualise or too distal.

## 3.6 Summary

In summary, at this point working practices appear to be fit for purpose. That is, they evoke continued use of Breaking the Cycle from both the Young People that use the service and the professionals that operate within, or alongside the service.

The following sections represent a more detailed SWOT analysis that makes use of data from both the surveys with young people and practitioners, along with in-depth interviews with Breaking the Cycle staff and professionals from interfacing organizations.

# 4. SWOT: Strengths

The Strengths section identified themes from the research that are concerned with areas of success and impact in the work of Breaking the Cycle. The themes here include:

- A bespoke and unique service.
- Operationally effective and adaptable.
- Building trust with young people.
- Professional, knowledgeable, and committed staff that build trust with other services.
- A diverse range of services.
- Impactful approach to outreach.
- Responsive to young people and other services.
- A significant source of detailed intelligence about 'at risk' children.

## 4.1 A bespoke and unique service

Breaking the Cycle, in every sense, is a unique and bespoke service that has significant reach across Bradford among ostensibly hard-to-reach young people in need of its services. The project is deeply embedded among other statutory services to the point where it undertakes a large proportion of casework, fieldwork and referral processes that would otherwise fall to social care, police practitioners, schools, and other allied organisations.

The service is designed to support young people who are at risk of exploitation by gangs and other individuals, but the effects of Breaking the Cycle go far beyond this core purpose. From the data collected for this evaluation, Breaking the Cycle is having a broader positive impact on the lives of young people engaged with the project.

The way that Breaking the Cycle has been designed fosters a relationship with its service users that is collaborative and flexible – the solutions and interventions are coproduced and fitted to the young person's needs, which are often complex and do not fit a simple 'off the shelf' solution.

> *We make sure that we've got the right flag on the kids in the system. Our education, health and police colleagues will all be in their systems and ensure that the child is flagged as being a victim. That means that children who are attending A and E or children, who get arrested, children who are found in particular circumstances, or referrals that have come through children's social care, all of those children are flagged and tracked. We'll look at that and then draw the resource and the plans around that to make sure that coordinates with child protection plans or child need plans or what other plans they may be on education, health and care plans. Yeah. So it starts to coordinate all of those around it then to make sure that they're all going in the right direction.* (BtC – other staff)

Although Breaking the Cycle is not a statutory service, it provides capacity to statutory services by working with young people that would otherwise not be identified before reaching a higher level of safeguarding need. Because more serious safeguarding issues are relatively expensive in time cost, and resourcing implications, Breaking the Cycle is an efficient and effective approach to reducing demand on statutory services.

Police and social care professionals have been very clear in their assessment of Breaking the Cycle and its place among the multi-agency picture – it works - and without it, a large proportion of the young people in need of help would not be identified until they were in crisis or committing offences.  Many professionals said Breaking the Cycle is "the eyes and ears" of the other partner agencies and an important source of ongoing intelligence about exploitation and criminal activity across the whole of Bradford.

> *Without Breaking the Cycle we would not be as effective at criminal exploitation disruption and prevention. Breaking the Cycle is the link.*  (Police – exploitation)

During the evaluation, professionals showed concern that the value and impact of Breaking the Cycle were not fully understood or appreciated by elected or senior leaders within the Local Authorities, particularly those responsible for wards not directly covered by Breaking the Cycle. However, the reach of Breaking the Cycle goes beyond the places it operates and referrals to the service come from across the whole of Bradford rather than specific wards. The work undertaken by Breaking the Cycle has an impact beyond the boundaries of the places where it operates.

Police and social care consider Breaking the Cycle as well-established and relatively well-funded, although many felt that with the rapid and continuing expansion of the project, there should be an increase in funding to support their work to mitigate any risk of the service becoming diluted.

> *I know they've got a heck of a lot of young people on the books. And you know what? What? What should they be thinking about in terms of the capacity of the team and the number of people they're supporting?* (Community Safety Professional)

In comparison with other similar projects across the UK, Breaking the Cycle stands out as a success because of its integration among other services and its full support from the local authority and police, rather than the service being the primary domain or concern of one service or the other.  It is clear in the academic and professional literature that where services such as Breaking the Cycle are set up in other local authority areas as a joint venture or to fill a gap between services, they are often less effective when there isn't full buy-in from key partners.  In Bradford, Breaking the Cycle is viewed by other organisations as vital for the continued support of their work with young people for the reduction of violence and exploitation.  It is the success of Breaking the Cycle in providing tangible and effective support to other organisations that naturally produce buy-in for its services.

> *I've never worked in a local authority where they have got such a well-established, well-funded youth provision. To have youths so greatly involved and as equal partners is really unusual. It's ground-breaking. The investment is extremely important and it has played dividends in Bradford's successes. I've never worked anywhere that's got such a fabulous investment.* (Children's Social Care lead Professional)

## 4.2 Operationally effective and adaptable

At the heart of its success are the relationships between the Breaking the Cycle staff and other services, and the operational effectiveness and responsiveness of service. Part of the Breaking the Cycle model is a quasi-emergency service that reacts directly to young people in need and requests for support from other services. Other service providers believe that Breaking the Cycle staff are pro-active and responsive when called upon to act.

*it's the true model of working together. They don't just attend meetings, they roll up their sleeves and do.* (Children's Social Care Lead Professional)

The professionalism of Breaking the Cycle workers was often cited by evaluation participants as being a driving factor in the success of the project. Their flexible and caring approach towards all young people whom they work with was particularly noteworthy;

*They go the extra mile when many other services are not open or working. The work they undertake is in a volatile and dangerous, high-trauma environment, yet it is undertaken with care and compassion.* (Children's Social Care, Professional)

The flexibility of the Breaking the Cycle referral process was a strong finding among referring partners.

*There is a referral form to use, but it is straight forward because we can put all the info in one place, on one form. Other services have lengthy referral forms or processes. It puts off agencies referring – Breaking the Cycle makes it easy to refer cases.* (Children's Social Care Lead Professional)

*It's not a lengthy form. I think it's only one or two pages, maximum - I can complete it within 10 minutes.* (Children's Social Care Professional)

*The referral process is fit for purpose. You put in a referral and you get a reply very quickly*. (BtC - PRU)

*The ability to task manage and support those in crisis. Their willingness to put the clients first and to be as proactive in the prevention as much as dealing with the issues they face.* (Survey response – College)

## 4.3 Building trust with young people

Breaking the Cycle continues to work with young people post-18 until early adulthood. This was seen as a particular strength in bridging the gap left by other services when they are discontinued at 18 years of age, allowing for a continuation of support where there is a continuing need rather than according to a set age limit criteria.

*I can only be a statutory social worker until the child is 18. But those needs and issues, those risks, don't just disappear on their 18th birthday. So it's really good in terms of breaking the cycle being able to continue post 18 and up until 24, 25 years of age*. (Children's Social Care Professional)

In the literature, an important part of a young person's experience of engaging with what they might define as a successful intervention is a feeling of safety; which is also a key component to trauma-informed guidance. For young people, safety goes beyond the concept of physical safety and includes knowing whom to turn to when having difficulties, understanding what help is available, how to access help, and feeling supported in a wide range of facets of life, including relating to their emotional wellbeing. Young people that feel safe and supported can then self-actualise and look to the future in areas such as education, employment, and training. As part of their project, Breaking the Cycle supports young people in all these areas once they have been made to feel safe.

*A young man who was repeatedly missing - criminal exploitation, antisocial behaviour, very much on a trajectory to having an offending lifestyle - and he was constantly on the run from drug dealers he was picked up somewhere, taken to a place of safety by breaking the cycle and when he got there because he'd been beaten up several times in the week preceding this by very nasty characters. When he got there, he said 'I feel safe'.* (Children's Social Care Lead Professional)

Within the survey conducted with young people, 83.4% felt that working with Breaking the Cycle had made them feel safer and 54.2% felt that Breaking the Cycle had made them feel less anxious. The lower percentage of young people feeling less anxious perhaps speaks to the broader and more complex causative factors that feed into anxiousness and the fact that not all young people surveyed had been working with Breaking the Cycle for a long period. Anxiety is also often focused on concerns about future outcomes. Anxiousness can take time to settle and often requires the unpacking of deeper routed trauma and dysregulation that require more long-term engagement to improve. Whereas feelings of safety can be more immediately felt through engagement with Breaking the Cycle staff because of the professional, caring, and compassionate approach they are taking alongside their rapid response to more immediate situational and crisis-related issues that might make a young person feel unsafe. When young people feel physically and emotionally safe, they are more responsive to professional engagement which then sets the scene for improvements in longer-term issues such as mental well-being challenges.

*Making kids feel safe, doing work with them to change their behaviours. You know, disclosures from them.* (BtC - PRU)

Breaking the Cycle seeks to meet young people where they are on their journey and their engagement is voluntary. This means that young people using the service are given some agency in their life by having the choice to engage, whereas previously, many of them have felt helpless to change their situation and life trajectory. Notwithstanding this voluntary approach, Breaking the Cycle use assertive outreach techniques to engage seldom-heard groups of young people when their professional experience and intelligence picture indicate that a young person needs support, even if they perhaps do not initially see it themselves.

By encouraging voluntary engagement, Breaking the Cycle also provokes less stigma associated with engagement with 'social care' and other services, thereby increasing engagement more broadly.

*Breaking the Cycle is a genuine offer of support rather than something you must do because your social worker is telling you that you must do it. I think that's the USP (unique selling point) for me.* (Community Safety Professional)

*Young People don't want to engage with social workers sometimes because of the stigma – the same with the police. But Breaking the Cycle are on the streets, so they are more respected by young people.* (Children's Social Care Lead Professional)

*The police sometimes can't get to speak with young people because they don't like us! – Breaking the Cycle are better at engagement – they are less threatening.* (Police – Exploitation)

Both social care and police professionals felt that Breaking the Cycle is so effective at engagement and so embedded within the work of other services that they view Breaking the Cycle as a lead agency when engaging with hard-to-reach young people.

*It is a way of us having a professional involved with young people that otherwise would not engage. They become the lead agency because of this – social care or the police can't get a foot in door.* (Police - MASH)

Nearly all young people, once they have engaged with Breaking the Cycle, have an extremely positive view of the service and, if given the choice, 88.5% would use the service in the future and 87.5% would tell other young people to engage with Breaking the Cycle. Bearing in mind that engagement is voluntary, this level of satisfaction is particularly noteworthy.

## 4.4 Professional, knowledgeable, and committed staff that build trust with other services

It was clear from the evaluation that Breaking the Cycle workers are trusted by other professionals in interfacing services to manage complex cases, sometimes as the lead agency. This trust is a significant factor in the success of the project. The interpersonal, planning skills and action-orientated approach of the Breaking the Cycle workers were highlighted as a key strength by agencies that are working with, and in some cases referring to, Breaking the Cycle.

*They have negotiation skills like no other professional or practitioner within the partnership agencies, they can prevent people making really dumb mistakes. They are really good at strong risk planning. So they are extremely skilled and they are stable and they really do know what they're doing and they know Bradford. They roll up the sleeves and do.* (Children's Social Care Lead Professional)

*I mean the best bit about Breaking the Cycle is the quality of the staff. You know they are phenomenally good.* (BtC - PRU)

*Incredibly hard working and committed - going above and beyond to support young people, regardless of the time of day/night. We are very lucky to have such an amazing team in Bradford.* (Survey – Bradford Council)

From a social care and policing perspective, professionals are clear that Breaking the Cycle is a vital and embedded process and service amongst the other statutory services and non-statutory support services. Particularly, those statutory services trust Breaking the Cycle staff to take a lead role in many cases, particularly when engaging with young people and their families. This level of trust is high and is particularly noteworthy within what is often a risk-averse multiagency environment when dealing with high levels of risk and complex cases. This speaks to the value of Breaking the Cycle to other services, young people and their families.

*Breaking the Cycle has lots of experience, connections, and networks within the areas of Bradford, and I think that's one thing that makes it unique.* (BtC - youth worker)

These views were supported by responses to the survey from professionals on questions related to engagement and response. For instance:

**Breaking the Cycle Communicates well with other partners** (20 responses)
- Yes, they work well = 80% (16 responses)

**Breaking the Cycle respond quickly to crisis** (20 responses)
- Yes, they work well = 80% (16 responses)

**Breaking the Cycle respond effectively to crisis** (20 responses)
- Yes, they work well = 85% (17 responses)

**Breaking the Cycle respond well when circumstances change** (19 responses)
- Yes, they work well = 84% (16 responses)

**Trust in Breaking the Cycle staff** (21 responses)
- Gone up a bit = 2
- Gone up a lot = 14
- Gone up a bit or a lot = 76%

## 4.5 Diverse range of services

Breaking the Cycle offers a range of interventions for young people, for example, as well as locational detached youth workers, they have staff engaged in hospitals; schools/Pupil Referral Units; and a police-led Deterrence car. The team offer 24/7 support and have the use of a therapy dog. The activities the team run, or support include (but are not limited to) things such as bike workshops, bike riding, employment projects and work experience with local businesses; walking the therapy dog; boxing; baking/cookery skills, and many others as are useful for the young people with which they work.

> *Breaking the Cycle offer activities for young people to do that divert them where there is a lack in the area of this type of intervention. They do fun stuff with kids and this can be a way to access young people and then lead the exploitation team into better and more meaningful engagement.* (Children's Social Care Professional)

The young people that Breaking the Cycle works with or seeks to reach are often living chaotic or unregulated lifestyles. Therefore, Breaking the Cycle has adopted an approach of taking the work to young people at times outside of the traditional office or weekday hours. The youth workers work at different times of the day and across each weekday and weekend. Many of the workers take a flexible approach to work whereby they will change shifts working times to accommodate the young person's needs within their caseload. This is particularly effective for young people who are being exploited and need help for an acute emerging problem outside of office hours.

The out-of-hours provision that Breaking the Cycle provides was also flagged by external professionals as being a unique and fundamental aspect of the service. Professionals across the sectors discussed the benefits of having an out-of-hours provision that they could utilise when necessary and at short notice. It is interesting to note that social workers have viewed Breaking the Cycle as more effective at providing urgent and high-risk support than the emergency duty team.

> *It's amazing that I ring on weekends. Yeah. I ring eight, nine o'clock at night and I'm speaking to breaking the cycle if I'm dealing with a missing person and I'm reporting them. If I get a case and I have serious concerns, instead of making a referral to the emergency duty team, I would hold onto that case and work with Breaking the Cycle. I've done that several times with some of my high-risk cases and Breaking the Cycle have always been there to help.* (Children's Social Care Professional)

Breaking the Cycle does not remain within the county boundaries, and they will travel long distances to locate young people at risk of exploitation resulting from such issues as County Lines involvement.

> *They've done some miraculous work, locating children in other parts of the country, even if it's 3:00 o'clock in the morning - they do intensive, round-the-clock work.* (Children's Social Care Lead Professional)

Breaking the Cycle work across a range of settings, including homes, schools, hospital and the streets to identify and work flexibly with young people in need.

> *There are different ways to engage with a family. So, I might notice a lack of furniture in a house and I'll just go on Facebook and do a shout out and get someone to provide a bed. We do all the work ourselves because we've got a background in getting things done. The team's extremely skilled in providing unique support.* (BtC - youth worker)

> *We respond to what their needs are, not according to a set structure. So I could have a meeting booked in here at one o'clock this afternoon. And then I might get a call or something to provide help. We can respond immediately no matter what time of the day it is.* (BtC - youth worker).

Breaking the Cycle is adaptable and works well for young people who don't fit the mould and need bespoke services to fit their often-chaotic lifestyles and complex needs.

> *They are unique – we would be massively impacted without them. They have a good presence across our service. There is nothing to compare it to – they are extremely valuable. If more services ran like that – exploitation would be significantly reduced.* (Children's Social Care Professional)

Part of the array of approaches deployed by Breaking the Cycle is the 'deterrence car'. This car is staffed by plainclothes police and Breaking the Cycle youth workers who work in partnership to undertake casework and patrol the streets where they expect at-risk young people to be. A particular strength of the deterrence car is the rich information sharing that occurs between youth workers and police.

> *The Breaking the Cycle deterrence car is a good idea because it helps with engagement on the street where these young people spend most of their time. Breaking the cycle is adaptable and works well for young people who don't fit the mould and need bespoke services to fit their often chaotic lifestyles and complex needs.* (Children's Social Care Lead Professional)

In the survey responses, professionals also identified that Breaking the Cycle offered an important, and accessible range of services. For professionals that responded, 85.7% felt that it was important that Breaking the Cycle is available 7 days a week and 85% thought that the Breaking the Cycle of hours service provision worked well. For young people being surveyed, 83.3% felt that being able to obtain a quick response from their Breaking the Cycle workers was important to them.

## 4.6 Impactful approach to outreach

One of the key strengths of the Breaking the Cycle project is the relationship that is developed by the project youth workers with the young people they are engaging with. They have a unique approach that could be characterised as 'assertive outreach' whereby they identify young people on the streets or through referrals and they actively engage with them in a persistent yet supportive way.

*What they do (Breaking the Cycle) is they're persistent. They'll just keep going. Throughout the weeks they'll just keep their youth work in particular. Kind of own that child if you like, and go keep going back to them and back to 'em and back to 'em until they eventually talk to 'em. And, that has very good payoffs, it works quite well.* (Police - Exploitation)

For example, youth workers might engage with a young person on the street multiple times without initially successfully drawing them into the project. By continuing to go back to them, they begin to develop trust and a relationship with them, which means that many of the young people eventually do decide to work with the team after several weeks of engagement on the streets.

*We don't give up. Yeah. We keep going.* (BtC, youth worker).

*We're extremely tenacious and very persistent. But that is our, one of our traits really that we have to be, you can't just go away cos' you've been told to because otherwise you know they could be dead in the ditch. It's really serious stuff that these kids are involved in.* (BtC – Other Staff)

Breaking the Cycle is bridging the gap between young people and professionals in ways that cannot be achieved by other services.

*They are the eyes and ears for us where we can't be present. I have cases now where young people won't engage with me – Breaking the Cycle step in and manage those for me.* (Police – Exploitation)

Breaking the Cycle tries to maintain consistency for young people by retaining staff so that there isn't a continuous churn of new workers. This promotes trust and confidence among young people compared to other services that often have a high turnover of staff.

*Our workers have to work really hard in terms of building that relationship. But it does mean that they then, when they build that relationship, it's really solid and therefore it's most influential.* (BtC- Other Staff)

For the young people surveyed, it is clear that working with Breaking the Cycle helps them to break away from a life of exploitation. Through multiple contacts with young people, Breaking the Cycle youth workers collect a large amount of information and intelligence about the young people themselves, their networks, their lifestyles, and their problems. This information is fed back into some existing systems within the project and shared with other professionals. However, the systems and processes that support this type of information gathering and sharing could be developed further (see the threats and opportunities sections for further detail).

This type of repeated or prolonged and unstructured engagement at the initial stages of the relationship between breaking the cycle and the young person is a big part of the success of this project.

*Our action plans are quite fluid because their [young people's] life experiences mean that they don't have loads of experience to draw on from their childhood experiences. Do you want to go, you know, riding on the bike, they've probably never ridden a bike. Yeah. So do I want to do that? I don't know. Do you wanna go to [name of activity]? I don't know whether I wanna go to cause I dunno what it's about. I don't know whether I like it or not. I haven't had the chance to, so sometimes we just have to do bits of taster sort of things So we can't, I can't plan 12 weeks of the work, what it's gonna look like for [young person].*

*When she does this particular program with us. Because it's just so bespoke for each individual depending on what it is that we're actually working on.* (BtC – Other Staff)

Breaking the Cycle has set up some in-house processes, data recording approaches and meeting cycles to monitor and manage cases, and they have a reasonable understanding of caseload volumes. Each case is considered on its own merits and part of understanding the distance travelled by each young person is asking them about the effect that it has had on them and their life, alongside the completion of work set out in the engagement plan. This bespoke approach to understanding each young person as an individual is a strength of Breaking the Cycle, which is supported by the good interpersonal relationships developed by the youth workers and young people. Youth workers seem to have a very good understanding of what is going well and what is challenging for young people. For many young people, communication with youth workers improves the longer they are engaged and helps youth workers to better understand the distance travelled.

## 4.7 Responsive to Young People and other services

Breaking the Cycle has adopted a very straightforward short-form referral process that is accessible, clear to understand and has very straightforward pathways.

*Breaking the Cycle is fit for purpose. You put a referral in, and it's pretty easy to do. You know, you get a reply very quickly* (BtC - PRU)

This was highlighted as a strength of the project compared to other more elaborate and time-consuming referral processes used by other services. This allows referring partners to quickly refer young people to Breaking the Cycle, which is then quick to respond. Typically, within one or two days, Breaking the Cycle evaluates the referral and then immediately starts working with those young people that they accept as cases.

*Young people can engage them far quicker and more effectively than a social worker that's got many other families they are trying to balance. They can do intensive round-the-clock work. They will take a lead role wherever possible from a family point of view.* (Children's Social Care Lead Professional)

This contrasts with other services, particularly statutory services, that can have excessively long waiting times for sub-safeguarding casework to begin.

## 4.8 A significant source of detailed intelligence and action for 'at risk' young people

Representatives from referring, statutory services that work closely with Breaking the Cycle often referred to the project (in one way or another) as their "eyes and ears". By this, they meant that Breaking the Cycle often provided an important source of additional information on young people, particularly 'at-risk' young people, that those statutory services were otherwise unable to access. These were also at times felt to be young people that were not reachable by the police or social care services.

*They seem to get more information as a youth provision as opposed to a statutory social work interventional police intervention, which is then coming back up to the locality teams and the exploitation hub. I think without them we would not have the mapping intelligence for things like serious organised crime. They can tell us where the hotspots are, what the latest issue is if there's a particular prominent drug dealer or county lines that are*

*emerging or new recruits for soldiers. If you like. They keep us up to date in the latest Lingo language, you know, things to look out for.* (Children's Social Care Lead Professional)

*Without Breaking the Cycle we would not be able to be effective at crime exploitation disruption and prevention. Breaking the Cycle bring us the link – they are the eyes and ears for us where we can't be present.* (Police Officer - MASH)

*They are our eyes and ears with young people on the ground. We don't have the capacity as a team to be on the ground) […] Breaking the Cycle are good at linking young people – intel-wise. Breaking the Cycle make our job easier – they provide context to the different info we have and add to it.* (Children's Social Care Lead Professional)

Professionals within social care felt able to have conversations with Breaking the Cycle and will refer cases to the project, including those relating to serious high-risk exploitation while the case is in the acute phase. Social care professionals trust Breaking the Cycle to provide unique support that they are, for whatever reason, unable to provide themselves. For example, Breaking the Cycle will often leave the town or county borders to collect young people who are stranded or at risk of exploitation and bring them to a safe place. This level of service is simply not available through social care itself and Breaking the Cycle could therefore be considered as a de facto 'assertive outreach' arm of the social care safeguarding function, even though it is not part of the statutory services. This speaks to the intrinsic value of Breaking the Cycle for bridging the gap between statutory services by providing bespoke services in support of other organisations.

*Sometimes if I get a case and I have serious concerns, instead of making a referral to the emergency duty team, which I can do and go home, I would hold onto that case, follow the issue all the way through till if it's 10, 11 o'clock at night and liaise with the Breaking the Cycle team at the same time. I've done that several times actually with some of my high risk cases. And they've always been there. There's always somebody to help from Breaking the Cycle.* (Children's Social Care Professional)

*Now it's got to a point where people are relying on each other and the partnerships and the connections that we have are very, very strong.* (BtC - youth worker)

# 5. SWOT: Weaknesses

The weaknesses section identified themes from the research that are concerned with areas in which Breaking the Cycle might consider addressing working patterns and approaches. The themes here include:

- The need for better success and formal distance travelled measures.
- The lack of formal workflows/approaches to engaging service users.
- Data recording and storage challenges.
- Lack of formal risk assessments with young people.
- Not always clear what the core group of young people is for Breaking the Cycle.

## 5.1 Need for better success and formal distance travelled measures

One of the challenges for a bespoke and unique service like Breaking the Cycle is how they measure success and report that success to stakeholders and commissioners.  It is well documented in the literature, that providing young people with a bespoke service to support and manage their needs is a route to successful outcomes. However, a bespoke service often deals with difficult-to-define targets, with no clear or easily identified milestones or measures of success. While there are good structures in place to provide external oversight for Breaking the Cycle such as the Community Safety Board and Violence Reduction Unit, among others, that oversight is only as good as the available information provided to them.

While the subjective views of young people, Breaking the Cycle workers and other professionals are useful and instructive, they do not lend themselves to being regularly collected or presented in an easy-to-digest and measurable format for continual service provision or process and outcome monitoring.

There is currently a lack of a broader analytic performance data framework that combines data from a range of organisations and key areas of business for example. data on service demands for police/social care. That is not to say that the data which could form such a framework does not exist – rather, the data is not available in an automated single report.

> *Well, I haven't seen or understand the proper breakdown of how the whole service works and how they cover all of those different … [before when] We've had specialist CSE support in place. We would receive a closing summary when they've finished their work of what worked after they completed it, and you then know what level of risk they thought they were at by the end of that. I don't see that from breaking the cycle. We get updates in the meeting … but you don't see the detail of what?* (Health Care Professional)

Similarly, there is a lack of formal 'objective' measures available to understand the distance travelled by young people being engaged with Breaking the Cycle. Specifically, data currently being collected/utilised by Breaking the Cycle consists of categorical information. For example, in response to the use of 'violence/ weapons,' the possible entries in this category are yes, no, or question marks. Such categorical responses do not allow for a more nuanced understanding when reviewing the data. If the response is 'yes' this does not distinguish between single or multiple incidences. The same is true for other entries such as missing incidents.

This information could be useful in understanding a young person's journey and help professionals decide on appropriate action. This might include, for instance, statistics facilitating analysis work that provides objective measures of distance travelled by calculating, for example, tests of difference (ANOVA) or regression (prediction), This means numerical data needs to be collected for category indices. As an example, where it is identified that a young person has been reported as a missing person on multiple occasions, the volume and frequency of missing reports, are plotted/timestamped against a timeline of other events including engagement with Breaking the Cycle and other services. This would then provide insights into distance travelled and whether certain interventions can promote reductions in missing incidents.

## 5.2 Lack of formal workflows/approaches to engaging service users

There is currently a lack of more formal workflows/approaches to engaging service users and recording and managing cases. This is problematic for several reasons.

It is clear that Breaking the Cycle is accessing a significant number of young people collecting information on their circumstances, the problems they face and the risks involved. They are also building up a rich picture of intelligence about criminal activity and networks in Bradford that is vital to police and social care in delivering their services. However, Breaking the Cycle collects information using several databases, with most being locally held and much of it within files and spreadsheets on local servers. This information is not easily accessible remotely (particularly outside of office hours). Also, Breaking the Cycle youth workers do not have the facility to easily input data into the databases when in the field and sometimes rely on Breaking the Cycle administrators to provide information on cases.

> *It can be challenging to get the paperwork done and sorted [and find the] time to do paperwork and the many forms and spreadsheets. [We need a] system that makes it easier to access information.* (BtC - other staff)

## 5.3 Data recording and storage challenges

There is no formal protocol (i.e., an agreed format/procedure) on how and when data is recorded or stored. If Breaking the Cycle were a relatively self-contained project with limited reach beyond its caseload or workers, then this arrangement would be less problematic. However, because Breaking the Cycle is so successful, and therefore becoming integrated into the statutory multi-agency landscape in Bradford, the lack of more formal data recording, sharing and management processes and systems is a risk to the successful expansion of the service.

Also, as identified by other interfacing agencies, there are risks associated with young people that are not always being recorded or they are recorded in a format that does not contain what other services need to make an informed risk assessment with a young person. While this does not change the risk level associated with a young person, it does change the way that other services engage with young people known to Breaking the Cycle. As one senior social worker stated:

> *An unknown risk is usually treated as high risk until we are satisfied that we understand the situation. If Breaking the Cycle holds risk information that we can't access quickly, then that makes risk assessment a challenge and can raise the risk for us if we get things wrong based on an already known (to Breaking the Cycle) set of risks.* (Children's Social Care Professional)

Because Breaking the Cycle does not use a standardised software solution, for their data needs, collecting and inputting information by Breaking the Cycle workers is time-consuming or sometimes incomplete. Risk information is often not shared in a timely fashion with other organisations and the sharing of case progress is not automatic via, for example, a digital solution.

Ordinarily, interventions or services operating outside of the statutory bodies would have their separate systems, but it is clear from this evaluation, that Breaking the Cycle is so deeply embedded within that multi-agency environment, taking on cases and significant volumes of statutory service workloads, that information sharing about cases is vital for reducing risk and increasing efficiency within this arrangement for all organisations.

## 5.4 Lack of formal risk assessment with Young People by Breaking the Cycle (of the type expected or used by statutory agencies).

Breaking the Cycle conduct risk assessments with the young people they work with, but they are not always structured in a way that other services would undertake them, and those assessments are not always shared at a time or in a way that other interfacing services require.  Other services voiced concerns that this is creating potential areas of unknown or increased risk for service users and the services themselves. Breaking the Cycle staff state that these risk assessments are conducted and can be 'dynamic' in nature, sometimes these 'dynamic' risk assessments are conducted due to a lack of 'concrete' background information being provided in the initial referral to Breaking the Cycle. However, it is not clear whether there is a standardised risk assessment process in place and how frequently risk assessments are reviewed.

> *Possibly with [other professionals] not giving us enough information. We've connected up with as many organisations in Bradford to find out information ourselves. It's just helpful in the initial referral form if the information is there. If it's somebody we feel that's gonna be at high risk or is high risk then what we'll do is we'll go in with two workers initially. So we'll do that sort of risk assessment ourselves to make sure… We do dynamic needs assessments and dynamic risk assessments all the time with the work that we do.* (BtC - youth worker)

## 5.5 Not always clear what the core group of young people is for Breaking the Cycle

Interfacing services are sometimes not clear which young people Breaking the Cycle are working with, how Breaking the Cycle case churn is managed, and how decisions are made to accept referrals or step-down cases.  That is not to say that Breaking the Cycle does not have a functioning, reasonable and defensible decision-making process or in-house recording processes to manage these elements. Rather, the process is sometimes perceived as opaque from an outside perspective and the step-down approach for young people leaving the service is not as clearly defined as other statutory service approaches.

> *I don't know all the young people that they're working with, so I'll only find that out from sitting in the RAM and having those discussions. Or if I were to ring up and speak to and ask if a young person was known to them.* (Health Care Professional)

# 6. SWOT: Opportunities:

The Opportunities section identified themes from the research that are concerned with areas where there are ways in which Breaking the Cycle might adapt, develop, and expand its offering. These include:

- The use of bespoke or existing case management software.
- Formalised workflows.
- The co-location of Breaking the Cycle with MASH.
- Improved data collection.

## 6.1 Use of bespoke or existing case management system that is accessible and updatable by Breaking the Cycle workers and other agencies

The use of a standardised, proprietary software solution that is available on various mobile platforms with access control functions that is fully GDPR compliant would be an obvious solution to these issues and would increase the efficiency of Breaking the Cycle, because it would allow workers to input and access data more easily, including other organisations. The VRU might wish to consider exploring options in this regard, including the use of existing solutions being used by other organisations, such as social care, if they wish to better integrate Breaking the Cycle with other services and improve information and intelligence handling.

As part of this evaluation, the team sought as much objective data as possible in the form of statistics or performance data, to understand the efficiency and effectiveness of Breaking the Cycle. However, there is a paucity of available information of this type in an easily accessible framework or as part of an analytic product. This has implications beyond this evaluation concerning stakeholder and service provider understanding of Breaking the Cycle effectiveness. Improving case management could also provide evidence for securing continuing support and funding.

A framework would help to provide a clear set of indicators that shows the effectiveness of breaking the cycle concerning, for example:

- Reduction in exploitation
- Reduction in violence
- Reduction in negative life outcomes for young people (for example, arrests, missing reports, acute hospital admissions)
- Reductions in demand on other services like the police and social care resulting from Breaking the Cycle project work

The information to build an analytical product exists within Breaking the Cycle, police, social care, and health databases, but it needs to be drawn together and where possible automated as a regular set of operational and strategic products. With the support of police/social care analysts, such a product could be produced using existing skills among analysts, and it would support the continuation and improvement of Breaking the Cycle while providing new insights to create efficiencies and better manage risk across all interfacing organisations.

## 6.2 Formalised workflows

Although Breaking the Cycle has a set of workflows that are followed by their staff when engaging young people, these workflows and processes could be significantly improved by further integrating them with the workflows of other agencies. A set of clearly defined and publicised (with other orgs.) workflows and processes would also help to improve intelligence/information collection and sharing, even without an upgrade to a new software system as a solution.

Formalised referral criteria and processes could protect Breaking the Cycle from being overwhelmed with "unsuitable" referrals or picking up young people when other services lack capacity. This does not mean that the referral process needs to be overly complex (indeed, the simple referral system is praised by other professionals) - it needs to provide some clarity as to which young people can be taken on by Breaking the Cycle and which should be retained as cases across other agencies.

This could be achieved by mapping out referral routes from the various agencies through a co-produced mapping exercise. Such a mapping exercise should not just be done from a perspective of identifying pathways of referral – it should also include a discussion about predicted volumes of referrals, including seasonal fluctuations, as well as agreed capacity limits across all services. This would provide evidence for commissioners as to the true picture of need and allow for an evidence-based discussion about how best to help those service users and how Breaking the Cycle is expected to support other services, and whether funding is going to the right places based on volumes and need.

Improved data collection by Breaking the Cycle workers when deployed in the field could improve efficiency and oversight, e.g. a mobile app to input and read case notes and manage referrals in the field would increase efficiency.

If asked, most services would always like to have more staff and additional funding, and Breaking the Cycle is no different in this regard. However, there is an opportunity, by mapping services and volumes of work, for evidence-based funding decisions to be made if the service is to be expanded. It is overwhelmingly clear that Breaking the Cycle is taking on a significant caseload that is increasing year on year, so discussions about funding are perhaps more pressing than they might appear.

Breaking the Cycle worker caseloads are high, steadily increasing and becoming more diverse. Additional staffing and resources would enable Breaking the Cycle to reduce individual youth workers' caseload, which in turn would result in staff being able to fulfil all aspects of their role, including the increased need to record risk assessments and case information.

Co-production of a Breaking the Cycle strategy across the partnership would provide clear direction and aims/goals for Breaking the Cycle and reduce the risk of continual mission creep, which is a risk to the quality of Breaking the Cycle work.

## 6.3 Colocation of Breaking the Cycle with MASH

Breaking the Cycle staff have a presence on an informal basis within other multiagency working spaces, such as their attendance at Risk Assessment Meetings (RAM) or visits to discuss cases, or keeping in daily contact with other staff from the police and social care. However, professionals from other organisations have suggested that having a more permanent co-location arrangement with at least some Breaking the Cycle staff within existing multi-agency spaces would greatly benefit information sharing and the use of shared systems and processes.

*Breaking the Cycle is built into the system now; we hope that Breaking the Cycle would be able to come here and co-locate to improve information flow.  Breaking the Cycle doesn't have anyone working from here [it] would be good to do this. Co-location builds trust and info exchange away from email and calls. Builds relationships.* (Children's Social Care)

*Would be better if we all co-located with Breaking the Cycle and other organisations like Barnados […]We need closer contact with Breaking the Cycle to make the arrangement even more effective. The more you see people face to face the more info flows and builds professional relationships.* (Police - MASH)

However, at the same time, it has also been recognised that part of what makes Breaking the Cycle work is having a large presence of Breaking the Cycle staff near the streets, where the young people need them. Moving Breaking the Cycle into the multi-agency environment could be a threat to its effectiveness and Breaking the Cycle risks then being seen by service users as an extension of social care. This is problematic for many young people and their families because of the associated stigma surrounding engagement with statutory services. Furthermore, moving Breaking the Cycle into a formal space could reduce the capacity of workers by making it more difficult for them to spend large amounts of their time on the street.

Therefore, whilst we acknowledge the benefits of co-location for improving service integration and information sharing, we also recognize that there is a tension between having some form of co-location with the need to be on the ground doing the youth work that is so central to the Breaking the Cycle formula of success.

## 6.4 Improved data collection

As we have discussed elsewhere in this report, there is an opportunity to collect more effective data that would generate a greater level of intelligence on the young people entering the service and the responses of the service, and its referring partners, to those young people. For example:

- The current system uses categorical responses; this does not facilitate complex analyses e.g. regression (prediction) and tests of difference (ANOVA).
- The current system does not allow for multiple entries for the same young person. Later entries are made alongside earlier entries; this produces issues when analyzing the data.
- The current system allows different formats of data entries for the same category; this produces issues when analyzing the data.
- The current system allows entries that state 'case closed' but the information as to why this is the cases is on a different part of the log.

# 7. SWOT: Threats

The Threats section identified themes from the research that are concerned with areas in which there are changes to the efficacy and sustainability of Breaking the Cycle.  These include:

- Mission creep causing capacity issues
- Ease of referral means the service is seen as a path of least resistance
- There is limited capacity for increasing workloads
- Information and case recording by Breaking the Cycle is ad hoc
- If Breaking the Cycle stopped operating this would cause significant and immediate strain on police and social care

## 7.1 Mission creep causing capacity issues

One of the most pressing threats to the continued success of Breaking the Cycle is that of 'mission creep'.  The service takes up the slack from other services and fills gaps in provision.  They are so deeply embedded within other statutory partner workflows that they are viewed as an essential service, particularly by the police and social care.  Many professionals and Breaking the Service workers raised serious concerns about this issue.

Breaking the Cycle is at risk of being overwhelmed due to them taking on casework from other services because they are viewed in many cases to be more effective at undertaking casework in many cases, even involving high-risk occurrences. This issue is compounded by how easy it has become to successfully refer a case to Breaking the Cycle. While it was seen as a strength that Breaking the Cycle takes on nearly all referrals made to their service, this is an existential threat because an expanding workload is creating strain among the staff delivering the service.  Several key individuals within the Breaking the Cycle team go above and beyond what should be reasonably expected of them - working long and unsociable hours in a high-trauma environment, being available for calls when not on duty, and managing an ever-increasing caseload (and the associated risks). This situation will soon become unsustainable, and action needs to be taken to address this threat.

## 7.2 Ease of referral means the service is seen as a 'path of least resistance'

The ease of referral and responsiveness of Breaking the Cycle when picking up referrals means that Breaking the Cycle is being used as a path of least resistance by referring agencies rather than using the often more onerous and more cautious complex referral/acceptance processes of other services.

Often, other services will make referrals that lack the information needed for Breaking the Cycle to assess need. Rather than sending those referrals back to the referrer, Breaking the Cycle will often spend significant time doing 'background' work to bring the referral up to standard.  This is a drain on Breaking the Cycle time and resources and is unsustainable in the medium and long term.

> *We get lots of information from other organisations but it can be disorganised or limited in certain regards. What we tend to do is go back, we'll go back to school to get more information. We'll try to get it off the police officers in the meeting to see if we build up a*

*better case or get more information, but it varies. It varies from thorough to very little information*. (BtC - youth worker)

Because of the ease of referral, organisations are prematurely or inappropriately referring young people to the service. Examples include when young people are displaying problematic behaviours at school and school staff are then assuming that this is an indicator of vulnerability to exploitation - referring to Breaking the Cycle. However, both academic and professional literature shows that many young people exhibiting problematic behaviours also have several protective factors present that make exploitation unlikely. Hence, referring partners need a more structured referral process to help them understand when to refer cases based on a set of criteria that filter inappropriate or premature referrals themselves, before referring to Breaking the Cycle.

*They're just ticking these boxes and what they've done is they've referred really prematurely so that when we go and do that work, it's like, it's not applicable at all.* (BtC - youth worker).

*They've taken all my referrals and I think they allocate people within seven to 10 days. … they're quite flexible because the information on the form … if you don't want to give those details, it doesn't mean that they're not gonna accept that referral… They're not gonna turn around and say, well, we're not taking the referral because it's incomplete. They're gonna still take the referral, and treat it as accepted.* (Children's Social Care Professional)

## 7.3 Limited Breaking the Cycle capacity to service increasing workload

Breaking the Cycle lack resources for the workload they are carrying. This is primarily caused by there being a very low threshold for case acceptance and the extremely time-intensive work over many weeks that is needed to engage young people. Case volumes continue to increase, and this means that the significant complexity of cases, the bespoke service offered, and the unclear step-down approach all contribute to a caseload that requires more work and management than most social care cases. Hence, with a growing and complex caseload, Breaking the Cycle is increasingly seeing a reduction in its capacity to service cases.

*They seem to take on a lot of cases and I wonder how they can manage and I worry about the dilution of service which could impact effectiveness.* (Children's Social Care Lead Professional)

*I think there are some challenges in my personal view - I would like to see Breaking the Cycle better staffed.* (Social Care)

Breaking the Cycle rarely decline cases and this seems to encourage other organisations, like schools, to take the path of least resistance to hand off young people who have, for example, problematic behaviour, but aren't necessarily at risk of exploitation, gang involvement or violence.

*You know, over the years it's well known that small caseloads, trusted relationships, long term work, are what's needed for these kids to affect positive change and for that change to be maintained…I worry about the caseload level that the workers have; I don't know how they do that work... Because of just got so many that they're trying to see.* (Health Care Professional)

## 7.4 Information and case recording by Breaking the Cycle is ad hoc

Information and case recording by Breaking the Cycle is ad hoc and, as a consequence, not always in a suitable format for other services, accessible by other services or easily accessible. Although the support and administration team at Breaking the Cycle do a very good job of managing this as best they can, gaps remain. For example, one of the overriding themes that emerged from professionals in other services that interface with Breaking the Cycle was the problem of information sharing relating to casework. This could perhaps best be characterised as a lack of formal systems for information recording being available for Breaking the Cycle Staff, ad hoc risk assessment, and no fully formalised recording and sharing system or workflows.

Breaking the Cycle does engage with the more formal daily risk assessment meetings, and their staff are well trained to spot risks and act on them. However, because Breaking the Cycle is taking on the work of other statutory services, they need a more formal approach to risk assessment, recording and dissemination to match the approaches of other services they interface with.

> *There is always a rep from Breaking the Cycle in our risk assessment meeting (RAM) – which happens every day.* (Children's Social Care Professional)

However, problems seem to arise outside of these set pieces, formalised meeting structures when information needs to be shared relating to risk.

> *One of our weaknesses is getting written work back from Breaking the Cycle staff to document what has happened with referrals and intervention and risk assessments – youth workers at Breaking the Cycle are not always referring info back into systems and this is an information gap… Breaking the Cycle needs to be better at completing them and because we have serious safeguarding responsibilities – we need to understand whether to change service levels based on recorded risk – if written documentation is not coming from Breaking the Cycle it makes this difficult.* (Children's Social Care Lead Professional)

> *One of our weaknesses is getting written work back from Breaking the Cycle staff to document what has happened with referrals and intervention and risk assessments – youth workers at Breaking the Cycle are not always referring info back into systems and this is an information gap.* (Health Care Professional)

Other organisations view risk assessments as the starting point of any casework. However, because the Breaking the Cycle workers are using unconventional engagement methods that are often prolonged, relatively unstructured and difficult to capture without significant bureaucratic burdens, capturing all information that could feed into a potential risk assessment is likely to be unrealistic. However, the police have similar situations where they are involved in complex engagement processes with members of the public, and they are supported by clear workflows and processes that support timely risk assessment, which can then be shared with other partners.

For example, one of the issues raised was that because Breaking the Cycle is essentially a 24/7 service, out-of-hours and timely sharing of risk issues may be delayed because other services are working at different times. Hence, it is important, from the perspective of other professionals, that a clear and understandable risk assessment is recorded in an accessible place in an agreed format, which doesn't only rely on telephone conversations between Breaking the Cycle workers and other professionals.

*Data sharing can be a complication sometimes – as much as we communicate with Breaking the Cycle, they work different hours to us, so sometimes info sharing is difficult and probably a bit delayed*. (Children's Social Care Professional)

Because Breaking the Cycle is now such an intrinsic and embedded part of the safeguarding arrangements in Bradford, other professionals see a pressing need for a more structured process around how Breaking the Cycle identifies, manages, and reports risk as part of their engagement with young people. The worry for other services, particularly the statutory services, is that if a serious incident occurred and the correct process of risk assessment had not been followed, then they may be criticised and held to account for failures in managing risk with young people who are engaged with Breaking the Cycle.

*I don't know all the young people that they working with, so I'll only find that out from sitting in the RAM and having those discussions. Or if I were to ring up and … ask if a young person was known to them.* (Health Care Professional)

Information sharing and data management are significant issues and a threat/risk. This is a two-way issue. Breaking the Cycle does not always receive the information they require to effectively manage cases. The threat caused by this situation requires joined-up thinking and agreement among all services about how they share risk information.

*So I think that could be improved… they don't record on the hospital systems … They're recorded on their own systems and just feedback that I've heard from other health professionals within the hospital is that they don't always know that they've seen young people in the hospital when they've been in there.* (Health Care professional)

*If a young person is allocated to social care we expect the social worker to engage with Breaking the Cycle – we have to push that sometimes because social work is very busy so they sometimes they don't info share as well with Breaking the Cycle as we would like. This is a gap.* (Children's Social Care Lead Professional)

*We've got different systems recording information. You've got the police who have their systems. Education theirs, health theirs. Cause it's always that challenge "do I have information"? But you know what; I think we've worked out the people we can go to get information.* (BtC - youth worker)

Much of the information collected about young people by Breaking the Cycle staff is nuanced and voluminous concerning their 'story' and situation.  This information would naturally feed risk assessments and action plans to manage identified issues.  However, information about service users is being held in multiple places with no clear framework that shows where information can be found and there is a lack of formal standardisation in the way that data is inputted, recorded or retrieved. All these factors are risks concerning effective case management, information sharing, and risk reduction/mitigation. This may also represent a challenge concerning GDPR requirements on data collection, storage, deletion and sharing, including the servicing of freedom of information requests.

With information not being codified consistently, there is an information gap when trying to objectively understand how Breaking the Cycle impacts areas of business and demand across services, and whether it is achieving success with young people. A key finding from other successful early intervention approaches adopted in the UK indicates that the lack of an analytic framework that spans the demand measures of interfacing services means that the efficacy of an project such as

Breaking the Cycle to reduce demand across other services, is not clear. This is a risk for the continual political and financial support for Breaking the Cycle among policymakers in organisations such as police and social care and among elected members of the Local Authorities.

## 7.5 If Breaking the Cycle stopped operating this would cause significant and immediate strain on police and social care

Breaking the Cycle takes up a high proportion of the caseload and provides capacity to other agencies that are stretched. Therefore, if decisions are made relating to the future of the project (e.g. if it was decided to stop funding the project), and those decisions do not take into account the deep integration of Breaking the Cycle among the work of other statutory services, it could be a threat to the continuity of risk and case management efforts of other services and leave young people at risk of harm.

> *The impact that they [Breaking the Cycle] have is, it supports me with my case management of complex young people. Because if I had to do all the things that Breaking the Cycle support me with, I wouldn't be able to meet the needs of my young people. Say for example, you got rid of Breaking the Cycle today. You know, in as much as [I'm] trained I'm only one human being. I wouldn't be able to do it when I've got so many other young people on my caseload who have various needs, I won't be able to do it without their help.* (Children's Social Care Professional)

> *I would love to grow them, but I doubt the Council will ever see that as a good investment of 'hard to find' funds.* (Children's Social Care Lead Professional)

> *We would be screwed if Breaking the Cycle wasn't there.* (Children's Social Care Professional)

# 8. Key findings and recommendations

## 8.1 Key findings from the research

Following is a summary of the key findings from the Rapid Evidence Assessment and the empirical research.

*The key findings from the Rapid Evidence Assessment*

a. Police should prioritise community engagement and multi-agency collaboration to implement successful outreach projects that address youth involvement in violence and organised crime. Outreach workers need to be reputable and aware of the community and the contexts they work in; their work needs to be sensitive to the needs of a specific community; and it needs to be connected to local grassroots organisations through continuous, circular feedback and collaboration.

b. It is difficult to compare projects that take place in different contexts as communities and their needs are different. However, although understanding the local context of a community is important, on its own it is not enough. Outreach teams should engage in specific training and education on trauma-informed approaches. This includes an understanding of the complex inter-personal and individual factors that contribute to the genesis of offending behaviour and ensures appropriate on-site responses that ultimately contribute to de-escalating violence. Outreach teams should be trained in culturally competent practices to better serve and engage with diverse communities and reach young people from marginalised communities.

c. Outreach workers need to be credible, hence rooted in the communities they work in; their credibility improves the chances of starting a dialogue with young people who might be otherwise resistant to service engagement and sustain with them a satisfying, trusting relationship. Grassroots, community-based organisations have been proven to be effective in providing support and projects to at-risk youth.

d. Young people's engagement with outreach teams is ultimately based on trust. Funding needs to be ring-fenced and consistent for these multifaceted programmes as it is fundamental that projects foster long-term relationships and that outreach activities happen consistently.

*Key findings from the empirical research*

a. The overwhelming finding is that Breaking the Cycle is an effective approach to supporting young people who are being exploited (or at risk of exploitation) and its continuation and even expansion are both wanted and needed by other agencies.

b. Young people and professionals feel very positive about Breaking the Cycle and its impact.

c. Although distance travelled is hard to evaluate from one data point, there is strong evidence to suggest that Breaking the Cycle has a large impact on the young people involved in the project.

d. There are clear benefits when it comes to reducing violent behaviours and improving decision-making and emotional intelligence.

e. Breaking the Cycle is particularly good at developing trust in the young people and professionals with whom it works, including improving the trust of other agencies.

f. Breaking the Cycle is deeply embedded within the casework of other organisations and its absence would cause significant challenges relating to effective engagement with at-risk children, who would otherwise not be identified early enough.

g. 'Mission creep' (the gradual broadening of objectives and functions) is causing capacity issues for Breaking the Cycle.

h. Ease of referral means the service is seen as a 'path of least resistance' by some other organizations when deciding where to refer young people.

i. There is limited capacity for increasing workloads among Breaking the Cycle youth workers, yet the case load is increasing year on year.

j. Information/case recording by Breaking the Cycle is sometimes ad-hoc and not as easily accessible as needed by other services and even Breaking the Cycle workers.

k. If Breaking the Cycle stopped operating this would cause significant and immediate strain on police and social care.

## 8.2 Recommendations

These recommendations reflect on the processes and impacts of Breaking the Cycle. They have been orgsanised according to their potential impact on Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Legitimacy.

*Efficiency*

1. **Formalise workflows for referral**: To consider developing a set of formal workflows for referral, case management, and step up/down (entry into and support out of) for Breaking the Cycle. This would help to minimize unsuitable referrals; improve understanding of the project across partners; and provide internal consistency on processes. A portion of this work could be coproduced with interfacing services, thus increasing buy-in and supporting awareness.

2. **Re-visit the formal risk assessment processes in line with partner agencies**: To consider re-visiting and re-developing of a formal risk assessment for young people entering Breaking the Cycle, particularly in relation to lover risk cases. Although there are various forms of risk assessment currently used, these do not always map onto the requirements of partner and referring agencies. A revised risk assessment process that is coproduced with social care, police, and other key agency requirements would ensure greater transferability of knowledge. These should also be recorded.

3. **Track service users across partner systems**: Breaking the Cycle, social care, and the police could work on more consistent ways to track young people accessing the services. For instance, this might include the use of 'flags' (system tags/identifiers) on social care/police systems to indicate when a young person is engaged with Breaking the Cycle, which would allow other agencies to be more consistently aware of when Breaking the Cycle are working with a young person, even if they are regarded as below and emerging threshold. More consistent use of this kind of data would allow agencies to access important additional information being held on Breaking the Cycle systems. Flags would also allow analysts in the police/social care to track Breaking the Cycle service users across a range of systems and to use this information in building an analytical picture of a young person's engagement across services, including Breaking the Cycle.

4. **Consider co-location of Breaking the Cycle representation within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Hub**: To consider more permanent co-location of a small part of

the Breaking the Cycle management/supervisory team the MASH. This would aid information sharing and workflow development.

5. **Improve information storage and access**: To consider using a single data recording and storage system for all Breaking the Cycle case work, risk assessments, and referrals. This will make accessing information easier for Breaking the Cycle workers, reduce time needed back at the office for data input, and support data sharing and engagement with other interfacing partners when engaged in casework or case reviews.

*Effectiveness*

1. **Increase the impact of support on young people**: One of the strengths of Breaking the Cycle is the tailored/bespoke support and intervention that they develop for each young person. This does mean it can be difficult to track the impact and effectiveness of bespoke support plans, particularly when seeking to compare cases through performance data. It is recommended that Breaking the Cycle considers the potential of a more formalized approach to support plans, which uses a systematic framework with a fixed number of key areas for improvement for each young person. This would allow impact data to be generated to track effectiveness and allow more structured decision making about when to disengage with service users. For example, a framework for each service user could include key areas such as:
   o Increasing safety and feelings of safety
   o Reducing risk
   o Increasing employability
   o Improving physical and mental wellbeing

   Such a framework could be the basis of an action plan that still uses a tailored list of support measures and interventions for each young person while offering more structure to understand impact, including distance travelled.

2. **Increasing impact and capacity by focusing on early intervention**: Currently, Breaking the Cycle is taking a key, and at times leading, role in some serious safeguarding cases that would usually be worked on solely by MASH staff (police and social care). These cases are taking up a substantial amount of Breaking the Cycle time and resources because they are complex, often urgent, and often occurring outside of traditional office hours. It is recommended that Breaking the Cycle consider the impact of focusing their casework on sub-safeguarding 'early intervention' cases rather than the most serious, acute cases (which the other statutory partners can manage effectively within their existing robust statutory processes). Doing so would allow Breaking the Cycle to reduce their caseload and focus on those young people who are below or on the cusp of serious safeguarding crises. Research evidence suggests this is the most cost-effective way to deploy staff such as those within Breaking the Cycle, because they can then focus on preventing upstream safeguarding incidents later in the life-course of young people, which reduces demand across all agencies and improves the lives of the young people involved before crises occur.

3. **Increase impact and capacity by structuring the Breaking the Cycle service offer**: Breaking the Cycle staff and managers work hard to engage with and support other agencies, offering the expertise and capacity of the team. Although this helps to create an effective cooperative environment, there are challenges this brings in both volume and complexity of case referrals. This means that Breaking the Cycle often becomes involved in complex cases that are being managed by social care and police, but do not have the same structures or processes governing their involvement. Breaking the Cycle also becomes involved in these cases with no control over the time and effort they might require, and no clearly defined exit

point. To help manage this, it is recommended that Breaking the Cycle consider adopting a tiered approach to support they provide for other services. For example, they could offer a range of services, clearly communicated to other partners, of increasing involvement/complexity. But these would be based on an assessment of need, available resources and risk in a more systematic way. An example tiered approach might be:

- o Telephone/email advice to partners managing a serious case
- o Attending and giving advice at case/strategy meetings
- o Providing clearly defined, one-off outreach support for a particular case (such as intelligence gathering)
- o Joint leadership on cases
- o Leading cases

A more structured approach to taking on work would allow Breaking the Cycle to have more control over their resources, improve worker caseloads and help to manage the expectations of other partners in a more systematic way.

4. **Improve performance data collection to understand impact and effectiveness**: To consider developing an analytical system or process that uses police and social care data to capture and track a series of key metrics relating to outcomes for young people engaged with Breaking the Cycle. For example, this might include arrests, missing reports, crimes, referrals to social care, and other key points.

5. **Increase impact for the service through better capture of data on 'distance travelled'**: To consider the development of a set of formal distance-travelled measures for young people engaged with Breaking the Cycle. This would provide more information on the impact of the project on young people; differences in impact achieved across the various issues and challenges young people present as part of their work with the project; and the best points at which to disengage with young people after support work is completed. Such data could include measures provided by questionnaires completed with service users on entry to Breaking the Cycle, at key milestones, and at exit from the project. There are 'off the shelf' questionnaires that could be used as an interim measure, for example Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The surveys used as part of this project evaluation could also be used for this purpose.

6. **Reduce inappropriate referrals to improve capacity**: To consider the creation of a flowchart for referring practitioners who can follow the chart and determine for themselves whether a referral should be made to Breaking the Cycle, social care, or other services, before making contact.

*Legitimacy*

1. **Ensure current information handling approaches are compliant:** A review of how data is currently being held/recorded by Breaking the Cycle should be undertaken to ensure that GDPR/data protection laws and regulations are being followed.

2. **To support stakeholders in better understanding what Breaking the Cycle offers and to whom:** The work of Breaking the Cycle is complex and specialized. Many referring partners do not fully understand what Breaking the Cycle can and cannot do, which can lead to inappropriate referrals being made and received. To ensure that the service is well understood by all stakeholders, Breaking the Cycle could consider a simple communication campaign that highlights and celebrates the work they do and its effectiveness.

3. **To co-produce developments in Breaking the Cycle with young people:** Nearly all the young people worked with by Breaking the Cycle are very positive about the work of the project, which should be seen as a significant success for the program and its funders. Consideration

should be given to asking young people who have successfully worked with Breaking the Cycle to engage in helping to improve the offering. In other places, service users/ex-service users of similar projects have formed part of an improvement board that meets to coproduce improvement ideas on a rolling basis, and this approach could be a useful tool for Breaking the Cycle.

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# Appendix 1: Rapid Evidence Assessment: multi-agency, multi-setting interventions for young people at risk of violence and gang involvement

## The Rapid Evidence Assessment approach

This is the full Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), the key findings of which are summarised in 2. The REA considered a broad range of material to identify key learning relevant to the overall evaluation. The following review is in two parts. The first is a contextual overview of youth violence and gang involvement using a mix of academic, government, and sector sources. The second is an analysis of multi-agency, multi-setting interventions, based on the material identified as part of the Rapid Evidence Search process.

A total of 76 reports, papers, and website pages were accessed in their full text and screened for inclusion; 38 of those were included in the analysis portions of the review. Interventions where outreach happened only in one place or that did not involve outreach work for youth at risk of criminal exploitation, were excluded from the analysis portion but where relevant were used in the context portion of this review. The search and analysis phases for the work were as follows:

### Stage 1: Key industry data base searches

The following websites were screened thoroughly for relevant and up-to-date documents: Early Intervention Foundation, College of Policing, GOV.UK, and Office for National Statistics.

### Stage 2: Broad searches:

A database search was conducted on Social Care Online, Bing, and Google Scholar by using the following database-specific keywords, consequently screening grey literature and academic papers by title and abstract or executive summary up to 10 database pages, with no geographic limitations, pre-excluding sources published before 2010: *"Intervention; Police; Multi-agency; Street intervention; Comprehensive; Youth street work; Early intervention; Flexible intervention; Exploited; Criminal exploitation; Youth crime; Outreach; Social care; Support; Employability; Disruption; Health; Violence; Drugs; Overdose; County lines; Flexible; Gangs; Risk; Vulnerable; Community; Patrols; Deterrent; Juvenile offenders; Not punitive."* A further search was conducted in the same databases with the same strategy by narrowing the focus to the following keywords: "Outreach youth street intervention".

### Stage 3: Synthesis

Once the algorithm identified interventions, the relevant websites were checked by the research team, and if relevant, the papers were retrieved for analysis. In this synthesis phase, the lead researcher for this portion of the work read through each piece, extracting and compiling the key evidence.

## Context: Youth violence and gang involvement

Youth violence and gang involvement are pressing social issues, and significant progress has been made over the years in understanding the causes and consequences of these phenomena. According to the World Health Organisation (2020), youth violence is "a global public health problem. It includes a range of acts from bullying and physical fighting to more severe sexual and physical assault to homicide." The emphasis is strong on addressing youth violence as a public health issue, which requires a multi-systemic public health response.

Gang involvement is often associated with youth violence, and research has shown that gang membership is associated with an increased likelihood of engaging in violent and antisocial behaviour (Harris et al., 2011; Medina et al., 2013). In the year ending September 2022, there were 50,434 recorded offences involving knives or sharp instruments in England and Wales, and 3,500 offences were committed by children in the year ending March 2022 (ONS, 2022b; Youth Justice Board, 2023). The Office for National Statistics does not collect statistics related to the number of active gangs or crimes related to street gangs. However, according to a 2019 report from the Children's Commissioner, there were more than 27,000 children in England believed to be experiencing gang violence but not identified by the authorities, in stark contrast with 6,560 gang members or associates known to children's services or youth offending teams (ONS, 2015; The Children's Commissioner for England, 2019).

More recent estimates from the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for the year ending December 2021 show an increase of 9% in the number of potential child victims referred for modern slavery in the UK compared with the previous year (from 5,028 to 5,468) – modern slavery being an umbrella term for all forms of slavery, human trafficking, and criminal and sexual exploitation (ONS, 2022a). Although knife crime statistics have shown a decrease from pre-pandemic times (-8%), and the latest youth justice statistics show hopeful reductions in the numbers of children entering the system and in custody, youth violence and involvement in criminal exploitation remain serious issues in the United Kingdom (ONS, 2022b; Youth Justice Board, 2023).

### *Drivers for Youth violence and gang involvement*

The causes of youth violence and involvement in gangs are multifaceted and complex. A combination of individual, family and community-level risk or protective factors influence the likelihood of youth involvement in violence and crime (Lösel & Farrington, 2012; Bushman et al., 2016; David-Ferdon et al., 2016; Haylock et al., 2020). Risk factors include exposure to violence, poverty, lack of educational and employment opportunities, substance misuse, poor mental health, disabilities, family breakdown, and social exclusion; on the other hand, protective factors include positive familial and extra-familial relationships, of which community support, school bonding and academic achievement, and a non-deviant neighbourhood environment (Lösel & Farrington, 2012; Bushman et al., 2016; David-Ferdon et al., 2016; Haylock et al., 2020; Winstanley et al., 2021). The summer months can also pose a higher risk, with the twin issues of boredom and alienation due to the lack of usual networks of support contributing to an increased likelihood of young people's involvement in crime, especially in deprived areas (Heller, 2014; StreetGames UK, n.d.).

### *Preventative interventions for youth violence and gangs*

Preventative interventions for youth involved in crime and gangs include mentoring programmes, family therapy, cognitive-behavioural therapy, and restorative justice practices (Petrosino et al., 2013; Higginson et al., 2015; O'Connor et al., 2015; David-Ferdon et al., 2016; Andell & Pitts, 2017; Waddell & Jones, 2018). Firstly, mentoring programmes provide youth at risk or involved in crime

with positive role models who can guide them towards healthy behaviours and activities. Secondly, family therapy can improve family relationships and communication, addressing underlying issues that may have led to the young person's involvement in crime or gangs. Moving on, cognitive-behavioural therapy can help youth develop problem-solving and coping skills and teach them to understand the consequences of their actions. Finally, restorative justice practices focus on repairing the harm caused by the young person's actions, which can help build empathy and encourage pro-social behaviour. These interventions effectively reduce juvenile delinquency and gang involvement (Petrosino et al., 2013; Higginson et al., 2015; O'Connor et al., 2015; David-Ferdon et al., 2016; Andell & Pitts, 2017; Waddell & Jones, 2018).

Programmes that target specifically young people at risk of exploitation or already involved in gang crime may also involve the use of outreach teams. These teams typically work in public spaces to engage with these individuals and build positive relationships with them (Frattaroli et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2012; Heinze et al., 2016; Gornall et al., 2017; Sefton Council, 2019; Roca Inc, 2022). Outreach teams typically provide information and facilitate access to a range of services, including mentoring, counselling, support services, access to sportive activities or artistic workshops, and help with life skills development, education, and employment; they may also provide temporary housing or shelter for homeless populations, or provide support to those struggling with mental health or addiction (McMahon & Belur, 2013; Heller, 2014; Heinze et al., 2016; Slesnick et al., 2016; Boys and Girls Club of America, 2022; Boys and Girls Club of Canada, 2022; Big Brothers Big Sisters, n.d.; YMCA, n.d.).

Outreach teams might be based in one or more settings, such as in the streets, targeting the hotspots of highest risk of youth crime, but also in hospitals, schools, or in the wider community, partnering with neighbours and local organisations to engage with young people at risk and participate in conjoined community safety efforts (Morrel-Samuels et al., 2016; College of Policing 2019; Paterson, 2021; Butler et al., 2022; Communities in Schools, n.d.; Osmani Trust, n.d.; Safe Place for Youth, n.d.; The City of Boston, n.d.).

## Analysis: multi-agency, multi-setting interventions

A review of the literature found evidence of the existence of numerous programmes that address youth involvement in violence and gangs, based in the United Kingdom or other countries, which make use of a consistent outreach team across several projects amongst other services.

The search of academic and grey literature found evidence of the impact of most of these complex, and often ground-breaking programmes. This impact varied, but many programmes showed positive outcomes in reducing harm and vulnerability, promoting positive behaviour, and improving outcomes for young people involved in the criminal justice system or at risk of involvement. Wherever these programmes specifically aimed to reduce reoffending rates, there were often significant reductions in recidivism; on the other hand, longer-term outcomes such as health, education, and employment were more challenging to track.

Most outcomes were measured using quantitative data, such as crime and re-offending rates and school attendance records; qualitative data were also used, such as sample participant interviews and surveys, to measure changes in attitudes and behaviours, and some evaluations made use of both methods (mixed methods evaluations). While some programmes used external evaluations conducted by third-party organisations, others relied on internal assessments only, potentially challenging the impartiality of results.

Several interventions meeting the criteria were identified from within the United Kingdom:

- **Bristol's Safer Options Approach** is a whole system response to child criminal and sexual exploitation, missing children, serious violence and knife crime concerns; it includes community guardianship, localised prevention and diversion for children and young adults, protection for those being harmed, prosecution and disruption of perpetrators (Bristol City Council, n.d.). Outreach work is undertaken in schools, hospitals, and street "hot spots", including late-night outreach (Bristol City Council, n.d.).

- The **Reducing Reoffending Pathway (RRP)** and **Reducing Substance Misuse Intervention (RSI)** are whole system approaches aiming to end rough sleeping in Nottinghamshire. They involve wraparound support for at-risk individuals, substance misuse outreach and outreach work in streets, prisons, and mental health hospitals (Rogers et al., 2012).

- **St Basil's** is a charity based in Birmingham that supports young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness by offering "Floating Support", reaching young people at risk directly in their homes, and a multi-disciplinary "Young Person's Outreach Navigation Service" active in the streets and the community (St Basil's, n.d.). They offer a range of advice, support, accommodation, employability and engagement services to break the cycle of homelessness (St Basil's, n.d.).

- The **Safe and Sound Group**, based in Derbyshire, offers one-on-one support and resilience-building activities to children and young people affected by or at risk of criminal and sexual exploitation (Safe and Sound Group, 2021). This group provides school and community outreach, with an active focus on disrupting those patterns that might lead a young person to be involved in exploitation (Safe and Sound Group, 2021).

- **Catch22** is a national social business that works across four hubs: Justice (offender management, violence reduction interventions, rehabilitation and victim services); Education (alternative provision schools); Employability and Skills (learning and training opportunities); and Young People and Families (child sexual and criminal exploitation services, mental health support, family intervention services) (Catch22, n.d.; Catch22, 2022). Their offer includes early intervention, targeted and specialist support services to young people in crisis, leaving care, missing from home or with substance misuse or mental health problems, outreach in schools, in the community, and custody (Catch22, n.d.; Catch22, 2022).

- The **St. Giles Trust**, active across the United Kingdom, provides support (including employment support), advice, training, and advocacy to children and families in situations of vulnerability, including young people who are criminally exploited and those leaving the prison system (St Giles Trust, n.d.). They operate on the frontline in hospitals, custody suites, schools, and the community (St Giles Trust, n.d.).

- **Branching Out**, in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, is a pilot programme that uses school-based social and emotional development classes, detached youth work and targeted activities to reduce antisocial behaviour and children's risk of offending (Pearson et al., 2023). Outreach happens in schools and streets, in identified hotspots of antisocial behaviour (Pearson et al., 2023).

- Finally, **Act as 1** is a highly localised programme implemented in Newham, London, focussing on reducing youth violence and promoting positive development among young people (Act

As 1, n.d.; Fight for Peace, n.d.). They use a range of interventions, including boxing and martial arts training, mentoring, education and employment support, and community engagement; their outreach work happens in the community and schools (Act As 1, n.d.; Fight for Peace, n.d.).

*Outside the United Kingdom:*

Several interventions meeting the criteria were identified from outside of the United Kingdom:

- **Roca** is a US-based programme that addresses the needs of high-risk youth and young adults through an intensive intervention model that entails cognitive-behavioural therapy, education and job training, and case management services (Roca Inc., n.d.; Roca Inc., 2022). Their approach is based on the power of transformational relationships and is defined as a "relentless outreach", as young people involved in crime or a situation of crisis are tracked down with insistence by reaching them through a variety of means and in several locations (Roca Inc., n.d.; Roca Inc., 2022).

- The **Toronto Youth Outreach Worker Program (YOP)** is a resilience-oriented mental health service providing outreach in a range of community spaces in Toronto, Canada; it aims to address mental health issues, substance abuse, and other challenges faced by marginalised youth by offering a range of services such as counselling, crisis intervention, and advocacy (Knoll et al., 2012). Although they do not focus specifically on crime involvement, they tackle their root causes by providing referrals to community resources and services as needed (Knoll et al., 2012).

- The **Youth Outreach Services (YOS)** in Chicago works with at-risk youth through various child welfare, counselling, juvenile justice, and prevention services to help overcome challenges such as mental illness, substance use, abuse, and homelessness (YOS, 2020). They work flexibly in a variety of settings to offer personalised, tailored support to the young person in a cultural-sensitive manner (YOS, 2020).

- **LifeWorks**, based in Austin, Texas, uses an approach named Targeted Assertive Outreach, which is an intervention designed to engage individuals who are seldom-heard and have complex needs, such as homelessness or substance misuse (Heartland Alliance National Initiatives on Poverty & Economic Opportunity, 2018; Schoenfeld & Farnish, 2020). The intervention involves intensive case management, outreach, and wraparound support to address the individuals' needs; online outreach is the first choice before attempting an in-person approach in the community (Heartland Alliance National Initiatives on Poverty & Economic Opportunity, 2018; Schoenfeld & Farnish, 2020).

- **Cure Violence** is a tested model developed in Chicago that addresses community violence as a learned, transmissible behaviour by intervening in various settings such as community spaces, public areas, and hospitals (Cure Violence, 2022). This model involves identifying and interrupting potentially violent conflicts before they escalate, changing social norms around violence through community mobilisation and education, and providing support and services to high-risk individuals to help them break the cycle of violence (Cure Violence, 2022).

- Finally, the **Youth Advocate Programs (YAP)**, active across the United States, is a non-profit organisation that provides community-based alternatives to youth incarceration and institutionalisation, including wraparound, individualised support to young people at risk or involved in the juvenile justice system and advocacy (Youth Advocate Programs Inc, n.d.).

## Key learning: multi-agency, multi-setting interventions

Although much of the work presents good evidence for impact, there are some limitations to the quality of that evidence. The commonplace use of relatively small samples limits the generalisability of the findings. The lack of randomised controlled trials or the use of control groups impairs the rigorousness of the evaluations - a common issue in social sciences because of the difficulties tracking participants or collecting data. Evaluations of long-term impact on outcomes such as education, employment, and mental health were also lacking, preferring shorter-term assessment of crime and re-offending rates. Another issue is the lack of consistency in outcome measures across studies, making comparison challenging. However, some patterns could be identified across the studies examined.

A range of factors were identified as pivotal for the success of these interventions:

- the quality of implementation,
- level of community engagement,
- availability of resources,
- and the cultural sensitivity of the approach.

Overall, young people who received multi-agency, wraparound interventions were more likely to experience improved outcomes in terms of education, mental health, and employment. These programmes also had a positive impact on their recidivism rates; what emerged as essential was the use of highly structured and organised approaches that could make use of a range of resources (Knoll et al., 2012; Rogers et al., 2012; Heartland Alliance National Initiatives on Poverty & Economic Opportunity, 2018; YOS 2020; Safe and Sound Group, 2021; St Giles, 2021; Cure Violence, 2022; Roca Inc, 2022; Pearson et al., 2023; Act as 1, n.d.; St Basil's, n.d.; YAP Inc., n.d.).

Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of targeted and intensive approaches to tackle youth violence and reoffending. Strong evidence backed the effectiveness of the Cure Violence approach, which was associated with a significant reduction in shootings and gang-related homicides in a multi-site evaluation across the United States, showing that timely outreach work has the potential to divert young people away from dangerous situations (Cure Violence, 2022). Similarly, the evaluation of the impact of the Roca model suggests that a targeted, localised, and relentless model reduces violent behaviour and, ultimately, the risk of reoffending (Roca Inc., 2022).

The success of wraparound, flexible models is attributed to their ability to provide targeted and intensive support to high-risk individuals by identifying and addressing the underlying issues contributing to young people's offending behaviour. However, the success of this type of approach also depends on the quality and consistency of the support provided, as well as the willingness of individuals to engage with the programmes; in fact, one challenge of this approach is the difficulty in identifying and engaging high-risk individuals, particularly those who are not already known to the criminal justice system. Furthermore, significant resources are required to provide the necessary intensive support, an effort which may be difficult to sustain in the long term. Moreover, most of the interventions considered in this review could not rely on consistent funding but only on short-term grants or donations.

## Delivery considerations drawn from the evidence.

Some delivery considerations can be drawn from this Rapid Evidence Review:

I. **Prioritisation should be given to community engagement and multi-agency collaboration to implement successful outreach interventions that address youth involvement in violence and organised crime**. Outreach workers need to be reputable and aware of the community and the contexts they work in; their work needs to be sensitive to the needs of a specific community; and it needs to be connected to local grassroots organisations through continuous, circular feedback and collaboration.

II. **It is difficult to compare interventions that take place in different contexts – communities and their needs are different**. However, although understanding the local context of a community is important, on its own it is not enough. Outreach teams should engage in specific training and education on trauma-informed approaches. This includes an understanding of the complex inter-personal and individual factors that contribute to the genesis of offending behaviour and ensures appropriate on-site responses that ultimately contribute to de-escalating violence. Outreach teams should be trained in culturally competent practices to better serve and engage with diverse communities and reach young people from marginalised communities.

III. **Outreach workers need to be credible, hence rooted in the communities in which they work.** Their credibility improves the chances of starting a dialogue with young people who might be otherwise resistant to service engagement and sustain with them a satisfying, trusting relationship. Grassroots, community-based organisations have been proven to be effective in providing support and interventions to at-risk youth. For example, in the United Kingdom, an evaluation of St. Giles Trust's county lines pilot project found that it was associated with a significant reduction in criminal activity among the young people involved (Hudek, 2018).

IV. **Young people's engagement with outreach teams is ultimately based on trust**. Funding needs to be ring-fenced and consistent for these multifaceted programmes as it is fundamental that interventions foster long-term relationships and that outreach activities happen consistently, that they follow the pace of the young people, and that they find them where they are. In the words of the Covenant House (n.d.), a multi-national programme providing help to young people with experience of homelessness or trafficking: "unconditional love, absolute respect, and relentless support" are the bases for a commitment to young people's empowerment and safety from crime and exploitation.

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