Improving the Hope of Young People impacted by Serious Violence and Child Criminal Exploitation: Full Report

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Contents

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Glossary

ACE	Adverse Childhood Experiences
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CCE	Child Criminal Exploitation
CIC	Children in Care
CSC	Children's Social Care
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
CYPS	Children and Young People's Service
FTE	First Time Entrants
LAC	Looked After Children
LSOA	Layer Super Output Areas
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
OCG	Organised Crime Group
SYV	Serious Youth Violence
TCS	The Children's Society
YJB	Youth Justice Board
YJS	Youth Justice System
VRU	Violence Reduction Unit

1. Executive Summary

In the Spring of 2023, The Children's Society, Newcastle (TCS) commissioned Northumbria University to conduct an evaluation of their SCARPA (Safeguarding Children at Risk – Prevention and Action) services. SCARPA supports children and young people between the ages of 10 and 18 who go missing and/or are at risk of or are victims of exploitation. This includes both child sexual exploitation (CSE) and child criminal exploitation (CCE). Children and young people who experience exploitation are at high risk of harm, including becoming victims and/or perpetrators of serious youth violence (SYV). They also face being subject to human trafficking. Consequently, exploited young people should also be considered victims of a form of modern slavery in line with the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Recognising this, SCARPA provides targeted non-time limited one-to-one support to young people to identify the young person's underlying needs and the risks that they face due to exploitation, to promote their welfare and wellbeing, and to support them to feel safer. SCARPA works across the whole of the Northeast region, offering specific services for CCE, CSE and Missing young people including specific targeted services for boys and young men. The primary aim of this evaluation was to understand the effectiveness of the SCARPA service's current practice in supporting young people affected by SYV and CCE. The research also focused on how to further develop best practice in these areas and develop the setting of standards across the sector more broadly.

This project was developed to compliment the Youth Justice Board (YJB) '*Pathfinder Serious Youth Violence and First Time Entrants to the Youth Justice Service in Newcastle upon Tyne, 2022*' research, which involved analysis of a large aggregation of data from across statutory agencies in the Newcastle-upon-Tyne local authority area, as well as interviews with practitioners from third sector and statutory agencies and young people involved with Youth Justice (focusing on first time entrants and those involved in serious youth violence). Further information on the Pathfinder project can be found on the YJB Resource Hub. Building upon this previous work, the findings in the present report are more discretely focused on the work of SCARPA but are contextualised against this wider learning. The study combined a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. These included a detailed review of academic literature and government reports concerning the areas of SYV, CCE and effective interventions for these issues, semi-structured interviews with TCS (SCARPA) staff and other relevant

stakeholders (7 respondents), interviews with service users who had been victims of CCE (4 respondents) and analysis of TCS (SCARPA) data (including quantitative and qualitative data pertaining to 27 service users who had engaged with the service from 2020-23). While the number of respondents for the interviews was lower than hoped for, this was not unexpected given the environments these young people are living in, and their issues associated with trust and intervention fatigue (discussed later in the report). The timeline for the fieldwork was extended to allow for further service user interviews to take place however due to several factors (recall to prison, moving from the area, fear of talking to 'outsiders') this was not possible. The data for 27 service users were therefore used to supplement evidence from interviews in the report.

It is acknowledged that the findings presented here are drawn from a comparatively small number of young people accessing SCARPA and stakeholders and therefore cannot be generalised to the study population within the wider geographical area in isolation. However, these findings provide a rich and in-depth insight into the lives of some of the most vulnerable and marginalised young people across the region; a population known to be less likely to engage with services. When contextualised against the Pathfinder research, these findings provide for a more comprehensive understanding of SYV and CCE in the North East region.

The project findings can be summarised as follows:

1) The changing picture of serious youth violence and child criminal exploitation in the Northeast of England:

- Interviews with stakeholders and service users in this study indicate that, while neither 'gangs' nor criminal exploitation are new issues to the area, the **picture of SYV and CCE** in Newcastle and the Northeast is one that **is evolving**. Further, while the level, frequency, and severity of SYV appears to be lower than other metropolitan areas such as London and Manchester, there is an overall **perception that levels of SYV are increasing** within Newcastle and the Northeast. Specifically, there are concerns that the **average age of children being targeted for CCE and SYV is decreasing**, as perpetrators seek to target groups most vulnerable for grooming and exploitation to avoid detection. Interviews further suggest that more young people in the region may be carrying knives and/or weapons. This was a similar picture to the findings of a previous

study focused on SYV in Newcastle-upon-Tyne by Soppitt et al. in 2022. Interviews with stakeholders and service users also highlighted concerns around **young unaccompanied asylum-seeking males** who **are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation**.

- Newcastle and the Northeast of England have some of the highest levels of child poverty, looked after children, and permanently excluded pupils in the country, resulting in many children being particularly vulnerable to exploitation (Soppitt et al., 2022). Nonetheless, stakeholders in this research explained that the picture of SYV and CCE in Newcastle and the Northeast remains fairly distinct when compared to other core cities in the UK. In particular, perceptions are that, while evolving, Northeast gang networks **may be less organised** and more 'fractured' and drug distribution **may be more localised** than what is seen in other cities and regions. Furthermore, this research suggests that while young people are often exploited at the hands of adults, exploitation can and does also take place between young people, particularly in the confines of the 'gang' environment and the hierarchical relationship between 'youngers' and 'olders'. This highlights the **need to be mindful of the victim-offender dichotomy** that is often used to frame crime and serious violence, and the need instead to recognise that young people involved in SYV and CCE may be both.

- Interviews with service users and stakeholders indicated that many young people carrying knives and/or weapons in the region do not intend to use these but rather do so for a sense of protection. Overall, it appears that **most violence used by young people in Newcastle and the Northeast is instrumental**. For those young people who are being criminally exploited, violence is commonly associated with the high-risk situations in which they have been placed by their exploiters. For many young people, it appears that there is often a pressure to engage in acts of **violence to gain status, respect and belonging** within 'gangs'.

- The **issues which feed into young people's involvement in SYV and CCE are multiple and complex**. This research supports broader national research by highlighting that young people who are victims of CCE are often highly vulnerable and experience a combination of factors including: poverty, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), mental illness, learning difficulties, school

exclusions, bullying, hate crimes, and discrimination. Due to such factors, young people can feel a strong sense of not 'mattering', and as a result, become isolated and disconnected with families, wider communities, and/or society. These marginalised and isolated young people are therefore often **seeking a sense of belonging in their lives** – a need that exploiters can take advantage of.

- While little is known about the digital lives of many vulnerable young people, the advent of **social media appears to act as a source of recruitment into CCE and 'gang' activities and a catalyst for SYV** across the city with many young people aspiring to the 'celebrity' status of gang 'olders'. This was a key theme in interviews and was also reflected in the recent high profile murder case of Gordon Gault in the city (BBC News, 2024). For many young people and 'gangs', the image and reputation that they create and portray on the 'digital street' is seen to be as meaningful and important as in the physical world or 'concrete street'. In addition to a potential source of recruitment, then, the internet and social media platforms often act as 'convergence spaces' through old conflicts are intensified and new ones generated.

2) The principles, approaches, models, and methods used by The Children's Society's SCARPA service to engage with young people and the effectiveness of these:

- SCARPA have a **distinctive approach to case management** which is not defined by the legal definition of the age of a child (under 18) and will instead ensure appropriate support is in place which is flexible, and needs driven, as young people transition to adulthood. The service recognises that rigid timeframes are often counterproductive, particular for those many young people with whom they work who have experienced ACEs and CCE. As such the SCARPA service team emphasise and ensure that the support they deliver is tailored to the individual service user.

- SCARPA's approach to case management is built on **respect and trust**. The young people they work with are not treated as offenders, but rather young people who need support for sustainable change so that they can live a long-term safer life. They work with young people to understand the 'triggers' and the 'risks' that they face, and to develop a way of living that reduces both. They are not idealistic in their approach that these will be completely removed, but rather view that each small step is a step towards risk reduction and that, over time, the cumulative effect will be

substantial. The basis of this, however, is that a two-way relationship of respect and trust needs to develop. Many young people have experienced negative relationships where they have been misled, manipulated, and coerced. While most have engaged with multiple agencies and frontline stakeholders, many of these relationships have been based upon short-term support, often withdrawn before young people were ready (intervention fatigue). This has left many young people with a sense that their trust and respect has been misplaced and a subsequent reluctance to (re)engage with other frontline agencies. The levels of engagement and subsequent feedback from service users identifies relationship building as a clear strength of SCARPA – there is a clear sense of trust and respect for the case mangers that is quite remarkable given the environment they are working in.

- Key to SCARPA's ability to build high levels of trust with young people is transparency, consistency, flexibility, and high levels of contact in addition to the skill of the practitioner in engaging and listening to young people. Indeed, young people in interviews primarily referred to the **value they placed upon the relationship with the individual case manager** rather than SCARPA as a whole. While the numbers of young people directly interviewed was small, this does raise concerns over how central the individual practitioner might be to the success of the service, especially as there is currently only one case manager conducting this work with young people who are victims of CCE. A key **recommendation** is therefore that SCARPA should examine the sustainability of their service, in particular there should be long-term planning and resourcing around the case manager role.

- **'Child First' principles.** 'Children first and offenders second' and aims to challenge traditional adult-centric youth justice and the 'offenderisation' of children. Initially from the interviews with service users and stakeholders, this would appear to be the approach that SCARPA were taking, however, this isn't a true and accurate reflection of SCARPA's approach. The young people engaging with TCS (SCARPA), who have been impacted by SYV and CCE, have experienced and endured things that many adults will never experience. As such, for the services users we spoke to, to view them simply as 'a child' is in danger of misunderstanding them and the environments they live and operate within. Indeed, while the young people spoke of a need, and in many cases, have an absence of the support a child would receive, these needs must be carefully nuanced

against the unique adult world that has exploited and manipulated them, the harm they may have experienced and that they themselves may have partaken in. What TCS (SCARPA) approach has managed to do very effectively, is avoid the offenderisation of the young people, without also negating this harm.

- **Mesology and Respair.** When evaluating the work of TCS (SCARPA), the case file data and feedback from service users and stakeholders gives a sense of a distinctive and unique approach that is hard to define. Jeremy Bentham, in his early work, discussed *mesology*, that is how social institutions and organisations could help people achieve happiness. Slightly earlier, in the 1500s, the word *respair* was used to refer to a sense of fresh hope and recovery from despair. Mesology and Respair would seem to best define the underlying philosophy of TCS (SCARPA) and was reflected in the interviews with service users and stakeholders alike.

3) The impact of the work of The Children's Society's SCARPA service on young people, families, communities, and services:

- TCS (SCARPA) **engage 'hard to reach' young people** who other services and practitioners (both statutory and third sector) have often struggled to engage with and, as such, many have not received the support that they vitally need. Of the victims of CCE introduced to the service, 89% (24 young people) have engaged and the average length of their engagement is 330 days. Furthermore, the credibility and trust young people have in TCS (SCARPA) has led to 33% (9 young people) of their service users being referred into the service by peers. This is both particularly impressive and vitally important in TCS's (SCARPA's) potential ability to reach a wider pool of vulnerable young people who may not have engaged with or been identified by other statutory agencies.

- As noted, engaging with TCS (SCARPA) helps to **keep young people safe** by reducing some of the key 'triggers' and 'risk factors' associated with CCE and SYV. Crucial is the targeted work TCS (SCARPA) do with young people where, working at a pace and using methods suited to the individual young person, they gradually help them become aware of the grooming and

exploitation they have experienced. This knowledge serves to empower young people to make safer choices. Outcome data indicates that following engagement with TCS (SCARPA):

- 100% (24 young people) reported having greater awareness for grooming and exploitation and enhanced awareness of their own risk and safety planning.
- 96% (23 young people) have identified more positive strategies for managing emotions.
- 92% (22 young people) have been supported to explore issues around identity.
- 79% (19 young people) have improved conflict resolution strategies.
- 79% (19 young people) have reduced substance misuse/are using harm reduction strategies.

- TCS (SCARPA) provides valuable **support for the families** of young people impacted by CCE and SYV. This involves providing practical assistance (for example, support in accessing hardship funds and housing, assistance in navigating the CJS, and referrals for parents struggling with the asylum-seeking process) that can relieve some of the pressures that families face, as well as mediation work between young people and their families. Outcome data shows that 67% (16 young people) of participants report improved family relationships following their engagement with TCS (SCARPA). The resultant strengthening of family bonds can serve as a protective factor against greater involvement in 'gangs' and SYV.

- The work of TCS (SCARPA) **assists other services**. The level of trust TCS (SCARPA) has built with young people allows them to encourage young people to be more open to trusting and confiding in other professionals too. Furthermore, where necessary to safeguard a young person, TCS (SCARPA) will share information provided by young people with other services to aid in risk management planning. This is vital as statutory services do not often have the flexibility and time to do the intensive targeted work with the young people that TCS (SCARPA) can offer and therefore may not necessarily gain the same insights into the challenges and risks young people are facing.

- As noted, the success of TCS (SCARPA) lies in their intensive approach with young people, with a significant amount of time and resources directed towards building trust and taking a flexible

approach to working with that young person, centred on their individual needs. However, it was acknowledged by stakeholders that TCS (SCARPA) is **not keeping pace with the breadth of exploitation and violence** that is occurring in Newcastle and the Northeast. Yet, to work with higher numbers of young people would prevent TCS (SCARPA) from doing the time-intensive work that is essential for young people who have faced years of grooming, exploitation, and trauma. A key **recommendation** is therefore that TCS (SCARPA) should explore how they can expand the breadth of their intervention without losing quality. This will likely rely on **additional funding and resources.**

4) Broader practice lessons about supporting young people affected by serious violence (practice standards)

- It is vital that **a coherent safeguarding approach** is taken by the many agencies that work with young people who are impacted by SYV and CCE. Such an approach must recognise the significant levels of harm, exploitation, grooming, and trauma they have experienced. TCS (SCARPA) strongly advocate for young people to be treated with respect, with the avoidance of victim-blaming language. This is also supported by the broader academic literature. However, there is evidence of an enduring 'adultification bias' being present across other frontline agencies within the North East and further afield, where young males – and particularly those from an ethnic minority background – are often held responsible and criminalised for their involvement in situations that are beyond their control.

- Organisations working with young victims of CCE need to have a **collective commitment to the governance of information sharing.** One of the key principles that TCS (SCARPA) adopt in their work with young people is to be transparent around how and when their information will be shared. This is vital considering the sensitive information that young people may disclose and the serious risks of violence to young people that may arise should they become known as an 'informant'. However, this research indicates that these quality standards are not always replicated across the sector. This could serve to severely undermine the trust TCS (SCARPA) practitioners have built with young people and act as a barrier to greater sharing of information and collaborative working in this area. It is particularly important that multi-agency forums, where

sensitive information is often shared, are tightly governed, and led by those who prioritise the safeguarding of young people who have been exploited.

- The **contribution of the voluntary sector** to tackling issues of SYV and CCE should not be underestimated. Substantial real-terms cuts to funding, as well as increasing managerialism and bureaucracy, have limited the extent to which statutory services can undertake the detailed case management work that is vital to supporting exploited young people. As the work of TCS (SCARPA) demonstrates, third sector organisations often have greater flexibility to work in more creative ways and can therefore build levels of trust and credibility with young victims of CCE that might not be achievable for many statutory agencies. Where victims of CCE trust practitioners (and information can be safely shared between agencies – see points above), practitioners can develop a deeper understanding of the context in which young people exist. This can also create a safer and more collaborative environment between agencies and with young people so that a more coordinated approach to preventing and reducing the harms of SYV and CCE can be developed.

- It is essential that interventions to tackle CCE and SYV **are not time limited, and are evidence-informed**, and monitored for their effectiveness. When working with young people who may have faced years of grooming, exploitation, and trauma, there is no easy or quick fix. Gathering more knowledge about what is effective in reducing exploitation is essential and should be a continued and ongoing process of learning. Priority should be given to the co-production of knowledge between stakeholders and young people as to the interventions that are most helpful in reducing the 'triggers' and risk factors associated with CCE and SYV. Interventions need to be of the highest quality, targeted around addressing the root causes of young people's exploitation, and recognition should be given to the time and investment needed to effectively develop these.

2. Introduction

TCS is a national charity that works with children and young people who have been the victims of various forms of exploitation, and/or face other challenges such as poverty, substance addictions and poor mental health and wellbeing. Many of the young people that TCS works with are caught up in problematic situations beyond their control and have either been victims or perpetrators (often both) of risk-taking and criminal behaviours, including SYV. Through a range of approaches including individual and small group sessions, TCS works with young people affected by these issues with a view to transform their hopes and happiness.

In Newcastle TCS, their expertise in CSE and CCE led to the development of the SCARPA (Safeguarding Children at Risk - Prevention and Action) project. The SCARPA project supports children and young people at risk of or affected by exploitation including CSE and CCE. SCARPA also supports children and young people who go missing through the offer of a Return Home Interview. The children and young people supported by SCARPA face numerous risk factors. They may have experienced abuse including physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse and may have disordered attachments that can impact on their ability to form safe attachments later in life. Adverse childhood experiences and the ongoing trauma of these are often a frequent occurrence in the referrals received for the service. Domestic abuse, financial exploitation, family breakdown, and poverty are also contributing factors as well as poor parental mental health. SCARPA provides targeted one-to-one support with young people to identify the young person's underlying needs and the risks that they face due to exploitation, to promote their welfare and wellbeing, and to support them to feel safer. Crucially, this support is not time limited. SCARPA work across the whole of the Northeast region, offering specific services for CCE, CSE and missing young people as well as specific targeted intervention work for boys and young men. This research project focuses exclusively on the work Newcastle TCS SCARPA project do with young people who are victims of CCE. This intensive, targeted work is primarily carried out by a single practitioner or case manager who has a caseload of a maximum of 10 young people at any one time.

The four specific aims agreed with SCARPA were as follows:

1. To develop a greater understanding of the changing picture of SYV/CCE in Newcastle and the Northeast of England.

2. To evaluate the principles, approaches, models, and methods used by the Children's Society's SCARPA service to engage with young people affected by SYV/CCE.

3. To assess the impact of the work of The Children's Society's SCARPA service on young people, families, communities, and services.

4. To establish broader practice lessons about supporting young people affected by serious violence (practice standards in the North East).

This project was developed to compliment the Youth Justice Board (YJB) '*Pathfinder Serious Youth Violence and First Time Entrants to the Youth Justice Service in Newcastle upon Tyne, 2022*' research, which involved analysis of a large aggregation of data from across statutory agencies in the Newcastle-upon-Tyne local authority area, as well as interviews with practitioners from third sector and statutory agencies and young people involved with Youth Justice (focusing on first time entrants and those involved in serious youth violence). Further information on the Pathfinder project can be found on the YJB Resource Hub. Building upon this previous work, the findings in the present report are more discretely focused on the work of SCARPA but are contextualised against this wider learning.

In contextualising the national picture of serious violence, government data suggests violence overall has decreased over the past 25 years, yet conversely some of the most serious forms of violence – including homicide and knife crime – have risen significantly in England and Wales. Indeed, police recorded knife crime and homicides have increased by 86% and 24% respectively since 2014 (Office for National Statistics, 2023). SYV also appears to be rising, with a growing number of young people featuring in statistics as both victim and/or perpetrator (HM Government, 2018). This appears to be supported by a range of data related to England and Wales. For instance, sentencing statistics from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) shows that in the year ending March 2022, there were 19,555 disposals given for possession of a knife or offensive weapon and that juveniles (aged 10-17) were the offenders in 18% of cases (Allen, Carthew and Zayed, 2023). Furthermore, the proportion of children in youth custody for violence against the person offences has increased in each of the last ten years and accounted for over two thirds (68%) of the youth custody population in the latest year (YJB, 2023). Moreover, while the number of victims of assaults with a sharp object aged 19+ has decreased by 9% since 2012/13, the number of victims who are aged under 16 and 16-18 has increased by 84% and

20% respectively (Allen, Carthew and Zayed, 2023). It is important to recognise that victimisation is much higher within this age group, and that those who are involved in criminal and deviant behaviour are also themselves more likely to have been a victim of crime. Indeed, as is further explored throughout this research (see 5.1.3), victim and offender are not mutually exclusive categories, and a simple victim-offender dichotomy cannot be used to categorise the complex experiences of young people's engagement with crime and criminality.

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) (2023) data highlighted that for the year ending March 2022:

- The number of proven offences committed by children fell by 14% from the previous year to around 33,000, the lowest number of proven offences in the time series.
- Acquisitive offences saw the biggest year on year decreases of all offence types with burglary, theft and robbery falling by 32%, 24% and 22% respectively.
- While the amount of violence against the person offences has followed an overall downward trend, this offence group has been steadily increasing as a proportion of all offences over the last ten years, and now accounts for 35% of all proven offences.
- There were just under 3,500 knife or offensive weapon offences resulting in a caution or sentence committed by children. This is a fall of 2% compared with the previous year.

These patterns indicate that there is not a more general shift towards younger offending, rather it is particularly serious violent crime committed by young people that is increasing. The proportion of children as first-time entrants (FTE) committing possession of weapon offences, for example, has increased by 17 percentage points over the last ten years and is the only offence group to see a real term increase in that period. This further demonstrates that there is a change in the type and nature of criminal activity young people are involved in.

For the purposes of this project, we will be applying the definition of SYV established by the YJB, which includes any drug, robbery or violence against the person offence that has a gravity score of five or more. In recent years, there has been a shift in the way in which some children involved in these most serious crimes are positioned within the youth justice system (YJS). Indeed, the introduction of the term 'Child Criminal Exploitation' (CCE) is in part a reconceptualisation of children previously viewed and categorised as offenders, as *victims* of exploitation and abuse (Marshall, 2023). When looking

specifically at CCE, a formal definition is somewhat lacking, however the definition we will be applying is that introduced by the Serious Violence Strategy (HM Government, 2018: 48) which noted that CCE occurs where:

> "[A]n individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual".

CCE is heavily associated with other forms of vulnerability, and wider risk factors which are explored further throughout this project (see section 5.1.3), but critically the exploitation seen in relation to the national picture is that the harm young people experience in relation to CCE typically – although by no means exclusively – occurs outside the home environment, and as such is extra familial. This places additional dimensions as to how young people ought to be safeguarded (TCS, 2021; Llyod and Firmin, 2019; Orr, 2021).

Marshall (2023) highlights that while the exploitation of children to commit crime has a long history, the consolidation of the category of 'CCE' can be connected to a rise in concerns over modern slavery in the UK, the increasing recognition and prevalence of forms of CSE, and to a broader shift in youth justice policy towards 'Child First' principles. A 'Child First' approach was first introduced into mainstream policy discourse following Lord Charlie Taylor's (2016) review of the YJS. The 'Child First' approach, which now forms the YJB's overarching 'vision' for youth justice (YJB, 2022) is premised on the notion that children should be viewed and treated as 'children first and offenders second' (Taylor, 2016: 48) and aims to challenge traditional adult-centric youth justice and the 'offenderisation' of children (Case and Bateman, 2020). Despite this rhetoric, and as will be explored further throughout this report (see section 5.4.1), research suggests that in practice children involved in SYV continue to be viewed within a criminogenic lens and the levels of social harm they have often experienced are overlooked (Day, 2023; Billingham and Irwin-Rogers, 2022; Marshall, 2023).

A county lines drug dealing model is commonly referred to in recent policy and discourse surrounding the issues of SYV and CCE. County Lines is defined by HM Government (2018: 48) as:

> "A term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line". They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move [and store] the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons".

While there is little consensus of how to define 'gangs', a legal definition of 'gang-related violence/ drug dealing' exists within the Policing and Crime Act 2009 (s.34) and is used by the courts when issuing gang injunctions.[1] Under this act, violence and/or drug dealing is defined as being 'gang related' when it is conducted by a group consisting of at least three people that has "one or more characteristics that enable its members to be identified by others as a group". The Children's Commissioner (2019) further distinguishes between (a) 'peer groups' – a relatively small and transient social grouping which may or may not describe themselves as a gang depending on the context, (b) 'street gangs' – groups of young people who see themselves, and are seen by others, as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the group's identity, and (c) 'organised criminal gangs' (OCGs) – a group of individuals for whom involvement in crime is for personal gain, whether financial or otherwise, and is usually their occupation.

[1] Due to the potentially contentious nature of defining what constitutes a gang, within this report where we use the term we do so in inverted commas.

3. Methods

The study combined a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods to address the above aims and objectives of the research and included frontline stakeholder interviews (7 respondents), interviews with service users who had been victims of CCE (4 respondents) and analysis of TCS (SCARPA) data (including quantitative and qualitative data pertaining 27 service users who had engaged with the service from 2020-23). The research was developed around three key stages which are: (a) literature review, (b) data study, (c) stakeholder and service-user interviews. Ethical approval was sought from Northumbria University and was continuously reviewed to ensure it aligned to the research aims and the potential vulnerable nature of the participants in this study.

3.1 Literature Review

The literature review was the first stage of the research and informed the subsequent stages of this project. A rigorous and 'systematic' review of the academic and policy literature relating to young people's engagement with SYV and CCE allowed us to develop the rationale and context and provided supporting evidence for this study. It also allowed the research team to establish the work that has already been done in the subject area and what research methods and theories are currently being used.

3.2 The Data Study

The data study was established to produce benchmark data which became the platform for the research. The data was provided by TCS (SCARPA), which aligned to the following themes: (a) case management, (b) accommodation, (c) education, training, and employment, (d) health, (e) substance misuse, (f) families, and (g) finance and benefits and debt. The purpose of the data analysis was to establish more detail as to who and why, people engage with TCS (SCARPA), and to what value.

TCS (SCARPA) provided researchers with access to qualitative and quantitative data demonstrating their approach and processes used with service users who are victims of CCE, including:

a) Processes of referral into TCS (SCARPA).

b) Session recordings.
c) Action plans for service users.
d) Review plans for service users.
e) Outcomes achieved by service users.
f) Case closure processes.

Anonymised referral forms, action plans, session recordings, review forms, and case closure forms were supplied by TCS (SCARPA) as part of a 'deep dive' sample of 3 service users (1 of whom was also interviewed directly by researchers, and an additional 2 young people who could not be interviewed during the research project). This provided researchers with qualitative data regarding additional service users' experience of SYV and CCE and their engagement with TCS (SCARPA) and somewhat alleviated the potentially negative impact of the comparatively small number of service users directly interviewed. Moreover, TCS (SCARPA) provided qualitative data regarding the outcomes achieved by the 27 young people who had previously engaged and/or are currently engaging with the service relating to concerns around CCE from 2020-23. To further supplement the data gathered from interviews with young people and provide additional context, TCS (SCARPA) provided researchers with data demonstrating the demographics of service users (ethnicity, age, and gender), their levels of engagement with TCS (SCARPA), and the other agencies also working with these young people.

3.3 Service User and Stakeholder interviews.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 4 young people who were currently engaging with TCS (SCARPA) due to concerns around CCE. While, as noted above, the additional 'deep dive' qualitative in session recordings supplied by TCS (SCARPA) supplemented this data (see above), it is acknowledged that the number of individuals directly interviewed remains small. While this somewhat limits the conclusions that can be drawn from this study regarding the experiences of young people who are victims of CCE in Newcastle and the Northeast, and how they engage with services at TCS (SCARPA) more generally, it is important to contextualise that the pool of service users available is also comparatively small. Indeed, the SCARPA project currently works with a maximum of 10 young people who are being criminally exploited at any one time. This number is kept small due to the nature of the interventions undertaken with these young people which, as is explored in greater detail in the

findings section below (see section 5.2), often involves intensive one-to-one targeted work that adapts to the needs of the young person and is not time limited.

The high-risk activities that many of these young people are involved in also contributes to the small number of young people interviewed as part of this project. The SCARPA project works with those who are victims of CCE. Many of these individuals are involved in 'gangs', drug distribution, and have been both perpetrators and victims of SYV. As such, for these young people there are often high levels of fear at the repercussions of speaking to researchers. This fear is rooted not only in that their illegal activities may come to the attention of criminal justice agencies, but also how their exploiters may react if they are known to be talking to 'professionals'. As such, only 4 young people agreed to participate in face-to-face interviews with researchers, and of these 4, only 1 consented to being audio recorded.

The methodological approach for this project was developed around several unique aspects of the research which included firstly, the partnership approach with TCS (SCARPA). This enabled us to ensure that the research process could be easily navigated and was not seen as daunting or a source of anxiety for the participants. For the 4 service users who agreed to be interviewed – all of whom were particularly vulnerable – ensuring that they felt comfortable and willing to engage with all aspects of the research was vital in allowing us to produce an accurate, timely and honest reflections of their experiences. The team designed the project with the awareness that many of the young people involved in this study, while engaged with TCS (SCARPA), were also known to other statutory and third sector agencies due to wider ACEs and vulnerabilities.

To ensure that the young person was as comfortable as possible, the case worker would discuss with them the research project and it's aims in advance of any contact from the research team. If, having been provided with an overview of the purpose of the research and what engagement would entail, the young person stated they were willing to be involved, a user-friendly and age-appropriate information sheet and consent form was provided. An appropriate place for the interview to take place was also then agreed. In the main, and at the request of the young people, this was at TCS (SCARPA) premises. While this could be seen to be a conflict of interest due to the nature of the evaluative research, as noted above, there were often wider concerns for the young person's safety and wellbeing should they be seen in public being interviewed by a 'professional'. To further ensure

the wellbeing of the young participant, prior to each interview, a meeting took place between the researcher and TCS (SCARPA) case manager to ensure that the interviewer was aware of any sensitive or potential problematical areas to avoid to not trigger any problematic emotions. The interviews, while developed around several key themes, where conducted in a semi-structured manner allowing the researcher some flexibility as to which questions to ask and in what order. Conducting these interviews on TCS (SCARPA) premises also ensured that the young person's case worker was on hand to 'debrief' post interview in case any problematic emotions were inadvertently triggered.

Online, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 7 key frontline stakeholders. Focus here was on interviewing those central to the SCARPA project or not already captured during interviews as part of the Pathfinder project. Frontline stakeholders encompassed staff directly involved with the SCARPA project (n=3), and wider TCS (SCARPA) professionals (n=2). In addition, Children's Social Care (CSC) workers (n=2) were interviewed who work in partnership with TCS (SCARPA) and had referred their young clients into TCS (SCARPA) due to concerns over CCE. All interviews with stakeholders were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Again, it is acknowledged that the numbers of stakeholders interviewed in this project, especially those outside TCS organisation, were small. This was largely a result of the confines of the resources and time allocated to this project. Nevertheless, the research team undertook a previous YJB-funded study (2020-22) into SYV in Newcastle-upon-Tyne focusing on both the changing landscape of SYV in the city as well as the effective responses in this area. This early research drew upon interviews with a significant number of youth justice practitioners, police, and other relevant stakeholders. Therefore, where appropriate, this 'Newcastle Pathfinder' study has been referred to throughout this report (Soppitt et al., 2022) to further strengthen some of the conclusions which are drawn.

It is acknowledged that the findings presented here are drawn from a comparatively small number of young people accessing SCARPA and stakeholders and therefore cannot be generalised to the study population within the wider geographical area in isolation. However, these findings provide a rich and in-depth insight into the lives of some of the most vulnerable and marginalised young people across the region; a population known to be less likely to engage with services. When contextualised against the Pathfinder research, these findings provide for a more comprehensive understanding of SYV and CCE in the North East region.

4. Literature Review

The review of the literature conducted for this project demonstrates that there are several factors that have been identified by academic research and various government reports as playing a key role in explaining the rise of SYV in the UK. However, our previous research in this area, and review of other relevant literature, highlights that understanding the local context of Newcastle and the Northeast – its history, demographics, geography and culture – is also important in trying to identify the drivers of CCE and SYV in the region (Soppitt et al., 2022). There has also been significant research into the types of responses and interventions that can help tackle and prevent SYV and CCE. This report will review the literature in each of these areas in turn.

4.1 SYV and CCE: what are the explanations and causal factors?

As indicated, SYV appears to be rising with a growing number of young people featuring in statistics as both victims and/or perpetrators. Most of this violence is male-on-male rather than against women and girls. Indeed, for homicide the rise has been driven almost exclusively by street homicide rather than domestic violence (Densley, Deuchar and Harding, 2020). There is also no strong evidence that this current increase is connected to the night-time economy (HM Government, 2018). Instead, it is widely recognised that the changing drug market, together with a growing number of young people who are vulnerable to CCE, is contributing to this rise (Disley and Liddle, 2016; HM Government, 2018; Home Affairs Committee, 2019; Densley, Deuchar and Harding, 2020; Windle, Moyle and Coomber, 2020). These areas are explored in greater detail below.

4.1.1 A move to county lines drug dealing and CCE.

Over the last decade we have seen the perceived growth in activity referred to as 'county lines'. County lines involves illegal drugs being transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries. A distinctive aspect of the county lines model is its frequent use of vulnerable populations to facilitate this kind of illicit distribution and approximately 20% of those identified as being involved in county lines exploitation are children (Harvard, 2022). The average age of children involved in county lines drug dealing in 15.8 years old. This includes youths who are

economically insecure, have disruptive/chaotic home lives, are in the care system, have drug addictions, drug debts, welfare needs and/or mental health issues (Coomber and Moyle, 2012; Sturrock and Holmes, 2015; National Crime Agency, 2016; HM Government, 2016; Andell and Pitts, 2018; Moyle, 2019; Robinson, McLean and Densley, 2019). As Windle, Moyle and Coomber (2020: 67) report, these children are selected and groomed for this sort of activity because "they represent a cheap, easily recruited workforce who can absorb the risks related to street-level sales and are considered disposable". Children associated with county lines are often exploited to act as 'runners' to transport and sell drugs and/or weapons to new markets across the country (Association of Directors of Children's Services, 2019). Out of town dealers – usually organised criminals and/or gang members – from large urban areas 'employ' vulnerable young people to deliver and distribute drugs to smaller locations such as rural or coastal areas. These are frequently high-value class A drugs such as crack cocaine and heroin (National Crime Agency, 2017). While undoubtedly exploitation of young people existed prior to the last decade – often referred to informally as 'going country' 'or going cunch' – there is little mention of 'county lines' prior to 2019 where in a speech, the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, attributed much of the activity to the cuts in police numbers and youth provision (London Assembly, 2019).

For young people there is a rapid escalation of risk when they join a county lines operation. In using children to move and store drugs, out of town dealers will "often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons" (Home Affairs Committee, 2019: 30). Furthermore, street level distribution frequently involves violent disputes over territory, drug debts, and supply (Disley and Liddle, 2016; Hobart, 2018). As any grievances in illicit drug markets cannot be settled through legal channels, the use of violence to settle disputes becomes far more likely. Drug dealers may seek to appear excessively violent, for example by carrying weapons, to bolster their overall status and strengthen their position within the market (HM Government, 2018). Young people are likely to become both perpetrators and victims of violence as they engage in this high-risk activity. Yet, given their involvement in the perpetration of violence, young people are often viewed by police and other frontline professionals as criminals rather than vulnerable children in need of protection (Llyod and Firmin, 2019; Windle, Moyle and Coomber, 2020). As noted, young people are often groomed by older gang members into criminal activity and may either be unaware of the abusive and coercive nature of this relationship or fearful of speaking out against older gang members and out of town dealers. Often

this can make it even more difficult for practitioners to recognise the child's own vulnerabilities and employ appropriate safeguarding measures that could prevent further coerced involvement in such activities.

In 2020 the NCA stated that exploitation in county lines dealing was "the most frequently identified form of coerced criminality, with children representing the vast majority of victims" (NCA, 2020). While traditionally, local dealers would distribute drugs within their communities, an increasing demand for class A drugs, the development of a 24/7 'dial a dealer' culture, and a growth in the number of vulnerable individuals has created and sustained a 'county lines' model of drug supply (Home Affairs Committee, 2019). County lines drug dealing 'gangs' – akin to the OCGs described above – tend to be more violent than the local dealers who controlled the market previously (Coomber and Moyle, 2017) and have been associated with an overall rise in knife crime (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime, 2019b).

4.1.2 A growth in numbers of vulnerable young people

The Home Office (2023) identifies economic vulnerability as a key risk factor for CCE, county lines and gang activity. Given the often-desperate situation of many vulnerable young people who lack legitimate financial alternatives, individuals are often recruited by exploiters under the promise of material possessions and/or money. Indeed, as The Centre for Social Justice (2019) emphasise, the greatest prevalence of 'gangs' and subsequent violence are found in areas with the highest levels of youth unemployment. These impoverished youths can be drawn to the high profits and trappings of consumer culture displayed by country lines drug dealers (Briggs, 2013; Windle and Briggs, 2015a; 2015b) or in some instances, just simply want "to have their basic needs met" (Raby and Jones, 2016: 601). The Centre for Social Justice (2019) further detail how, in recent decades, we have seen an increasing socio-economic divide between the richest and poorest in society. With a decline in industrialism and a growth in a service or information economy (Crutchfield, 2014; Lloyd, 2018), "such de-industrial restructuring has fundamentally altered the nature of work available" resulting in "high rates of unemployment and in-work poverty" (Soppitt, Oswald and Walker, 2022: 470-71). The impact of this economic restructuring has been felt particularly acutely in areas previously known for manufacturing and heavy industry. This has been accompanied by increasingly intense propagations

of consumerism. As Densley (2013) explains, gang membership and violent crime becomes an attractive option when there is a significant disparity between valued goals and the available legitimate means of achieving these goals. Furthermore, Billingham and Irwin-Rogers (2022) discuss how the illusion of living in a meritocratic society attaches significant stigma to those who are materially deprived, resulting in their structural humiliation and feelings of shame, rage, and powerlessness – all of which can make involvement in 'gangs', violence and drug dealing more appealing as a means of mattering.

A significant body of research also identifies ACEs as a significant risk factor for involvement in SYV (HM Government, 2018; Hobart, 2018; Home Affairs Committee, 2019; Association of Directors of Children's Services, 2019). ACEs can encompass physical, emotional, or sexual abuse; physical or emotional neglect; and household dysfunction – such as mental illness, household criminality, domestic abuse, substance abuse, divorce, or death of a relative (Hobart, 2018). Windle, Moyle and Coomber (2020) explain how young people with welfare needs and/or disruptive or chaotic home lives are more likely to be targeted for recruitment by county lines 'gangs' because they are more vulnerable to exploitation.

Furthermore, research suggests that the consequences of ACEs such as mental health difficulties (including anxiety and depression), low-self-esteem, conduct problems, and emotional maladjustment, may motivate young people to become involved with 'gangs' (Dmitrieva et al., 2014; Watkins and Melde, 2016; Fribsy-Osman and Wood, 2020). Schore (2005) explain that youths exposed to early trauma can face difficulties in learning pro-social interpersonal skills and emotional regulation which can lead to early rejection by pro-social peers. Thus, these young people may be drawn to 'gangs' – including OCGs – to fulfil their fundamental need to belong (Raby and Jones, 2016). Indeed, Melde, Taylor, and Esbensen (2009) and Grant and Feimer (2007) considered that 'gangs' act as an alternative socialisation process for many young people by providing this sense of acceptance and belonging. Moreover, the youths interviewed in research by the All-Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime (2019b) described how the members of their gang would protect each other and how carrying a knife gave a sense of belonging to a community. Unfortunately, as Barnes et al. (2010) and DeLisi et al. (2009) found, once young people are involved in 'gangs', they face much greater risks of exposure to violence and can be encouraged to partake in violent assaults which ultimately only serves to

increase their psychological harm. The Home Office (2023) further identifies social isolation and social difficulties as a risk factor for prolonged CCE, as young people typically lack pro-social support networks through which they can obtain help.

Likewise, young people who have been excluded from mainstream school are identified as more at risk for involvement in serious violent crime (HM Government, 2018; Hobart, 2018; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime, 2019a; 2019b; Association of Directors of Children's Services, 2019). Although statistics are invariably impacted upon by the COVID-19 pandemic, it appears that the numbers of children excluded overall appears to be increasing. Pre-pandemic statistics in England, for example, show that in the year 2018/19 there were 7,894 permanent school exclusions which represents an increase of 70% since 2012/13 (Department for Education 2014; 2020). Such an increase has, at least in part, been linked to increased pressures placed upon institutions to achieve good Ofsted inspection results. Indeed, for those children identified and labelled as 'problematic', 'challenging' and unlikely to achieve academic success, exclusion is potentially viewed as a simpler option to avoid lowering the school's academic outcome (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime, 2019a). Yet, the increase in permanently excluded pupils has also placed significant strain upon the alternative provision sector with many alternative providers to mainstream school now so stretched that they cannot provide full-time education for these excluded youths. With many only able to access part-time alternative provisions, excluded young people spend more time on the streets, without adult supervision, and are at greater risk of being drawn into exploitation or risky behaviour.

Several studies further report a connection between serious violent crime and homelessness, insecure housing, and being in or leaving care (Dobash et al., 2007; Pritchard and Williams, 2009; HM Government, 2016; HM Government, 2018; Hobart, 2018; Home Office, 2023; Andell and Pitts, 2018; Home Affairs Committee, 2019; Windle, Moyle and Coomber, 2020). Young people in these circumstances are often targeted and recruited by county lines groups because they are less likely to have a protective guardian looking after them and may spend more time unsupervised. As already noted, they are also less likely to have access to pro-social support networks. Looked after children are also more likely to have had ACEs which further increases the vulnerability of these young people to exploitation. The Home Office (2023) further identifies insecure immigration status as another

factor which can increase vulnerability to exploitation, with many of these young people socially and culturally isolated on arrival to the country, having had potential links to organised crime as part of their journey.

4.2 SYV and CCE in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the Northeast

As outlined above, the picture of SYV is a complex one. The true extent of youth violence is often difficult to establish due to limitations with data collection and recording practices (Caulfield et al., 2023). As previously discussed, however, despite decreasing during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, it appears that incidents of SYV – particularly those involving a knife and/or weapon – are on the rise. Yet, while serious violent crime appears to be rising across virtually all police force areas in England and Wales (ONS, 2023a), there appears to be a greater concentration in metropolitan areas such as London, where a third of all knife crime occurs (Home Affairs Committee, 2019). A closer examination of existing data shows considerable regional variation even across these metropolitan areas. For the year ending March 2023, for example, knife enabled offences were found to be highest across the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, and Metropolitan police force areas (ONS, 2023a). Data obtained as part of the Newcastle 'Pathfinder' project (Soppitt et al., 2022) supports this finding by highlighting considerable variation in the 5-year average rates of SYV between the UK's core cities.

Evidence suggests that, when compared to the broader national picture, the SYV landscape in Newcastle is somewhat distinctive to the other core cities (Soppitt et al., 2022). Indeed, while Newcastle is certainly not immune to incidents of SYV – as cases such as the tragic death of 14-year-old Gordon Gault in 2022 highlight – it has been suggested by some that at least historically, rates of SYV including 'gang' violence are comparatively lower than other metropolitan areas (Lambert, 2016). Many of the reasons proposed for this perceived variation are socio-cultural, although the geography of the city is also identified as being significant. While the region has witnessed significant industrial change since the late 1970s, as a city with a rich socio-economic history rooted in heavy industry, manual labour and engineering, Newcastle – as with the Northeast more widely – is well known for its traditional white-working class identity (Nayak, 2006). Such roots, and the subsequent collective suffering of de-industrialisation across the region, are seen as responsible for the creation of strong local identities and sense of community cohesion (Nayak, 2006; Lambert, 2016). While the city has a

history of violence linked to notorious organised crime families of the 'East' and 'West' ends of the city – for example, the Conroy's and the Sayer's – Lambert (2016) argues that this strong local identity operates as an informal social control which has restricted the emergence of wider 'gang' culture witnessed in other urban cities. Moreso, such a localised violent legacy may also contribute towards 'cultures of silence' within such communities in which, when incidents of violence do occur, there is a tendency to deal with matters internally and avoid involving police and other external stakeholders (Jones and Lister, 2014).

A further point which has been used to explain Newcastle and the Northeast's apparent lower levels of SYV are that neither the city nor the wider region have seen the levels of migration of other metropolitan cities. This appears to be supported by official statistics which show that, excluding the student population, over the past five years Newcastle has the lowest number of people migrating in from other parts of the country of any other English core city (ONS, 2021b). Subsequently, while other cities have reported seeing an increase in inter-group conflict between OCGs, Newcastle and the Northeast, which remain comparatively static white working-class areas, are believed to lack the same levels of diversity associated with such an increase (Lambert, 2016). Soppitt et al. (2022) further suggest that the smaller, geographically isolated nature of the city has prevented the infrastructure and demand to support the same levels of development of OCGs and associated county lines activities seen in other areas – issues which, as noted, are seen as key 'drivers' of the subsequent rise in violent youth crime (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime, 2019; Home Office, 2018). In other words, the socio-cultural and geographical nature of Newcastle and the Northeast are regarded as somewhat 'sheltering' it from many of the issues commonly attributed to a rise in SYV.

Yet, while the factors discussed above are often viewed as 'protecting' the city and Northeast from the full impact of SYV witnessed in other metropolitan areas, the city experiences a high number of factors which, as noted, increase the risk of a young person's experience of both CCE and serious violence. Indeed, as observed, the root cause of young people's engagement in and experiences of crime, criminality and victimisation – including CCE and SYV – are multiple and complex and often deep-rooted in broader structural harms (Billingham and Irwin-Rogers, 2022; Densley, Deuchar, and Harding, 2020). As emphasised in section 4.1.2 above, there is a strong association between multiple

forms of disadvantage, such as poverty, inequality, low socio-economic status, school exclusion, youth unemployment, early exposure to trauma and/or ACEs, and pathways towards CCE and SYV.

As areas which feature amongst the most income deprived regions of the UK and/or have some of the largest gaps in inequality (ONS, 2021a), the growing prevalence of knife crime and SYV in other metropolitan areas like London, Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool appears to reinforce the correlation between deprivation, vulnerability and SYV. Conversely, however, given the regions de-industrial past, it is perhaps surprising that incidents of SYV appear comparatively low in Newcastle. As part of the Newcastle 'Pathfinder' project, for example, Soppitt et al. (2022) observed that, when compared against the other core cities, Newcastle has (a) above average unemployment rates, with a disproportionately high number of 16- and 17-year-olds across the city not in education, employment or training (NEET), (b) a disproportionately high number of children in care (CIC) at almost 50% higher than the national average, and (c) double the average of CIC who are offending. Indeed, as the 278 victims and over 400 perpetrators of CSE uncovered in Newcastle as part of Operation Sanctuary in 2014 demonstrate, such demographics create the perfect conditions for exploitation.

Yet, despite such indicators of youth marginalisation and vulnerability, while Newcastle has been identified as having a comparatively high rate of FTEs into the YJS existing data suggests that relatively few go on to commit SYV (Soppitt et al., 2022). From 2016-2021, for example, Soppitt and colleagues found that, while 20% of offences by young people were classified as violence against the person, only 3% were identified as *serious* violence offences. Subsequently such data suggests that, while youth violence certainly occurs in Newcastle, of those incidents identified by the YJS, most appear to be less violent and/or grave than in other areas and less likely to result in serious injury. Despite these figures, however, caution should be exercised when drawing conclusions that SYV is either not a problem or less of a problem in Newcastle and the Northeast. As noted, for example, the tight cohesion within local communities in the Northeast may create and reinforce cultures of silence in which incidents of violence are perceived as normal and are not reported to authorities. Additionally, given the apparent reduced likeliness of serious injury, incidents in Newcastle may simply be less likely to be classified under the category of *serious* youth violence (Soppitt et al., 2022).

Moreover, emerging statistics appear to indicate that serious violence may be a growing issue in the Northeast. Indeed, while changes to police recorded crime can be linked at least in part to greater

awareness of particular issues and/or improvements in recording practices, a House of Commons report published in 2021 does indicate a rise in knife or sharp instrument offences recorded by the police within the Northeast. The report shows that between the years 2010/11 to 2020/21 there was a 92.7% increase in recorded knife crime offences per 100,000 capita in the Northeast region (Allen and Harding, 2021) – a figure which is representative of the third highest rise in England and Wales, second only to the East of England and Wales. Although the data presented as part of this report is representative of knife crime as a whole and shows concentration to certain areas of the region – particularly Cleveland – as will be shown within this report, there exists a general sense amongst many frontline stakeholders that SYV is a key driver of these increased numbers and that it is a problem which may be on the rise.

4.3 'What works' in tackling SYV and CCE?

This review will now explore the research surrounding the interventions that are frequently used in tackling and preventing these SYV and CCE. This will provide useful context when investigating and evaluating the interventions delivered by TCS (SCARPA) and other agencies in Newcastle and the Northeast. In the proceeding sections we examine a range of perspectives including co-production, public health, desistance-focused, and trauma-informed approaches, as well as looking at specific forms of intervention including skills development, family support and support for looked after children, psychological interventions, school interventions, extra-curricular provision, and mentoring.

4.3.1 Co-production

It is frequently reported that successful interventions for SYV involve young people, their families, and communities in their design and implementation (The Centre for Social Justice, 2019; Big Lottery Fund, 2018; Brooks et al., 2019; RECLAIM, 2020). The Ahmun and Wood Review (2016) articles how communities that experience violence often feel excluded from decision-making processes and are not consulted in devising solutions to SYV. The review argues that without their participation, current strategies cannot respond effectively to violence or its causes, as they fail to fully understand the problem and its impact on the lives of individuals and communities. Brown, Ware and Cassimally (2019) for example, describe the importance of community-based policing to building trust within and

between local communities. Collaboration with young people and encouraging their active participation in youth justice responses and decision making is also one of the four tenets of the 'Child First' principles underpinning current approaches to youth justice (YJB, 2022).

4.3.2 Public health approach

A 'public health' approach in addressing SYV has been widely advocated (Neville et al., 2015; Gebo, 2016; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime, 2019b; Home Affairs Committee, 2019; Frisby-Osman and Wood, 2020) and a commitment to such an approach to tackling SYV in England and Wales is outlined in the government's Serious Violence Strategy (HM Government, 2018). Effectively, a public health approach views violence in a similar fashion to any biological disease and data and evidence are used to understand and treat not just the symptoms of the problem but the root causes of violence. In doing so, the aim is to develop solutions that can prevent its occurrence in the first instance. Within a public health approach, violence becomes a problem that requires solutions at a societal level, not simply a criminal justice level. Thus, interventions can be targeted at individuals, communities, and at a wider society.

A key component of a public health approach to tackling SYV is early intervention. Several reviews have found early intervention to be effective in reducing violent behaviour (Hahn et al., 2007; Matjasko et al., 2012; Fagan and Catalano, 2013; Farrington et al., 2017; HM Government, 2018). Waddell (2015) suggests that strong signals of risk for involvement in 'gangs'/violence can be identified in children as early as aged 7. These children and their families are identified as needing support that strengthens the protective factors around the child. Essential to early intervention, then, is effective multi-agency information sharing and co-ordinated services – for example, between education, health, and youth justice services – so that signs of risk can be identified, and action taken as early as possible (RECLAIM, 2020).

A public health approach to tackling SYV was inspired by the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in Scotland and its approach in tackling violent crime across the country. The VRU is directly funded by the Scottish government and involves criminal justice, health, education, and social work sectors working together to address the problem. Due to its apparent success in reducing levels of violence (see further Fraser and Gillon, 2023), we have subsequently seen the development of VRUs emerging across the rest of

the UK – including the Northumbria police force area – with significant funding aligned to these developments. Irwin-Rogers, Muthoo and Billingham (2020) highlight, however, that due to insufficient, short-term funding, pressure has often been placed upon regional VRUs to spend money hastily to achieve immediate rather than long-lasting results. Ultimately, an effective, evidence-informed public health approach to reducing violence requires long-term interventions and funding commitments.

There are many interventions for SYV that follow a public health approach. The Early Intervention Foundation in 2015 conducted an evaluation of 67 early intervention and prevention programmes and reported that targeted approaches for those who are at high-risk of involvement in, or who are already involved in 'gangs', youth crime and violence, are more effective at reducing violence than programmes aimed at youths collectively.

4.3.3 Hope, desistance, and identity

While early intervention *before* a young person becomes substantially involved in 'gangs', violence and/or exploitation is important in addressing rising levels of SYV, it is also vital that support is provided to young people who are *already* persistently involved in crime and violence to help them to change their behaviours and 'desist'. Desistance can be defined as the process of abstaining from crime over time (Maruna and Farrall, 2004). Where crime has become an embedded pattern of behaviour, this can be a complex and difficult process for individuals and setbacks and relapses are common (Halsey, Armstrong and Wright, 2017). Indeed, desistance can be painful; potentially involving isolation from previous social networks, loneliness, goal failure and stigma (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016; Patton and Farrall, 2021). As an individual may need to build up the coping skills, resilience, and self-efficacy to deal with such adversities, the process of desistence is usually a long one (Best, 2019). Desistance is also particularly difficult for those who are or have been exploited into criminal activities. Indeed, and as already observed, for many young people involved in CCE and SYV, there has often been a gradual process of grooming and young people may have limited agency to safely exit such activities.

Desistance is often difficult to measure, and success in this area is often defined by short term 'primary' desistance targets (Maguire et al., 2019). Yet, this is often neither attainable nor sustainable

for young people at this stage of their lives. As noted in the wider literature, successful desistance can necessitate a change in internal mindsets and self-perception and is often accompanied by the formation of a more pro-social identity (Copp et al., 2020; Farrall and Calverley, 2006; Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph, 2002). Research suggests that those who cannot undergo this change in identity are more likely to persist in offending behaviours (Maruna, 2001). It is widely recognised, however, that to reconstruct one's identity takes time is a gradual process rather than a sudden 'epiphany' (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009). As Maguire et al. (2019) assert, primary desistance measures often ignore the more positive 'intermediate outcomes' that may lead to a gradual reduction in offending behaviour changes even when an individual in question has yet to stop offending entirely. The latest findings from the large scale, longitudinal, Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime recommends therefore, that interventions to promote desistance for young people should not be time limited and recognise that offending over the life course will have different starting and stopping points (McAra and McVie, 2022).

'Hope' is crucial to pro-social identity formation as without hope, any envisioned future law-abiding self will lose all credibility (Burnett and Maruna, 2004). Feelings of hope can motivate people to seek out and engage with opportunities for change and remain resilient in the face of disappointments (LeBel et al., 2008). As Maruna (2001) identifies, those who feel they can take control over their futures and 'actively work' to change who they are more likely to desist. Conversely, those who experience feelings of hopelessness, feel like they are victims of forces outside of their control, and struggle to conceive of an alternative identity for themselves, are more likely to persist in offending behaviours (Maruna, 2001).

It is necessary to recognise how levels of hope are often impacted upon by wider structural factors. Indeed, if opportunities that might support a new identity – for example, gaining legitimate employment and/or the formation of supportive pro-social relationships – are limited within an individual's immediate environment, then this necessarily restricts feelings of hope and limits the pro-social identity they can envision for themselves (Rumgay, 2004; Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph, 2002). As children have less ability than adults to influence their lives, they may feel less able to access the opportunities that could promote positive identity change and desistance (Munford and Sanders, 2015). Young people are therefore more likely to require external support to aid a change in attitudes

and behaviours (Haigh, 2009). In terms of tackling SYV and CCE then, it is essential that young people impacted have access to support and opportunities that might help them build their sense of hope for the future and envision a more pro-social self.

4.3.4 Trauma-informed approaches

Young people impacted by SYV and CCE have often experienced trauma. As previously detailed (see section 4.1.2), not only can experiences of ACEs heighten the risk that young people will be targeted for CCE, but children can be further traumatised by their involvement in crime and violence both as perpetrators and victims. Involvement in the criminal justice system (CJS), experiences of being 'criminalised', and imprisonment at a young age, for example, are all associated with an increased risk of trauma and mental health difficulties (Barnert et al., 2017; Dye, 2010). A trauma-informed approach to interventions that work with young people impacted by CCE and/or SYV is therefore strongly advocated in the literature (see, for example, Gray, Smithson and Jump, 2021).

Trauma-informed practice is defined as any approach to health and care interventions which are "grounded in the understanding that trauma exposure can impact an individual's neurological, biological, psychological and social development" (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022). A trauma-informed approach to care recognises the importance of having a complete picture of the young person's background, recognising the signs and symptoms of trauma, and providing appropriate support to that person. This may involve the provision of safe environments and working sensitively with children reducing the scope for re-traumatisation, together with the coordination of provision designed to increase resilience and support (Wright, Liddle and Goodfellow, 2016). It also necessarily involves young people building a trusting relationship with their support worker to the extent that they feel they can disclose their past traumas and ACE's. Indeed, when practitioners have this knowledge, they can make interventions and support more evidence-informed and bespoke to that individual young person. As a result of the need for this trusting relationship, trauma-informed approaches take time.

4.3.5 Skills development

Many studies highlight the importance of building young people's interpersonal, emotional, and behavioural skills – for example, the ability to manage conflict and negative peer pressure – at an early age to both prevent and address SYV (Waddell, 2015; Big Lottery Fund, 2018; HM Government, 2018; Brooks et al., 2019; RECLAIM, 2020). Indeed, the Early Intervention Foundation (2015) report that most effective programmes for SYV are skills-based programmes where young people learn character-based skills such as anger management, or better lifestyle choices and non-violent norms. The Youth Endowment Fund (2023a) particularly highlights the value of social skills training that supports children to think before they act, understand other people's perspectives, communicate effectively, and use strategies for managing impulsiveness or aggression. This research suggests that the impact of social skills training on preventing violence is likely to be high with programmes reducing the number of children involved in crime by 32% (Youth Endowment Fund, 2023a).

4.3.6 Family Support and support for CIC

Another approach to tackling SYV and CCE requires interventions that "work to strengthen family ties and improve home lives for young children" including home visits, parenting classes, and family therapy (Brooks et al., 2019: 5). The Home Office (2015) reports that the most successful programmes for reducing SYV are those that are family-focused such as group/family-based counselling. Similarly, citing good family management, stable family structure and infrequent parent-child conflict as protective factors, Waddell (2015) suggests that family-focused programmes are amongst the most robustly evaluated and effective types of programmes in preventing youth violence. Furthermore, Multisystemic Therapy (MST), in which therapists work with families to improve parenting skills, support children's academic and vocational performance, and enhance family support-networks, has also been reported as reducing violent offending by approximately a third (Schaeffer and Borduin, 2005). Nonetheless, while international studies report strong evidence of the impact of MST, further evidence may be required from settings in England and Wales, particularly given that a large UK study published in 2018 found that MST was not more effective when compared to usual practice (Fornagy et al., 2018).

A disproportionate number of those involved in SYV/CCE are CIC and care leavers. Therefore, the government's *Serious Violence Strategy* advocates the development of a National Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Looked after Children and Care Leavers (HM Government, 2018). This seeks to promote broader understanding that challenging behaviour amongst this group can be associated with ACEs. Again, rather than criminal justice-based responses – which can increase the likelihood of future offending and leave the young person more vulnerable to engagement in CCE and SYV – it advocates the use of restorative practices for this population and encourages multi-agency collaboration between police and residential homes.

4.3.7 Psychological interventions

As detailed above, young people who have experienced ACEs and/or may suffer from poor mental health may be more vulnerable to grooming and CCE and have a greater chance of being impacted by SYV. Evidence also suggests that they are more likely to turn to gang membership for emotional support. Indeed, Frisby-Osman and Wood (2020) found that gang-involved adolescents have significantly higher levels of mental health difficulties than non-gang involved youths. Furthermore, HM Government (2018: 59) reports that 40% of those arrested, gang members were found to have severe behaviour problems compared to non-gang members (13%). Consequently, research emphasises the need for psychological and mental health support for these young people (The Centre for Social Justice, 2009; Big Lottery Fund, 2018; Home Affairs Committee, 2019). Evidence presented by the Youth Endowment Fund (2023b) demonstrates the value of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) in violence prevention. For young people impacted by/at risk of SYV/CCE, negative thought patterns are often related to accumulated trauma. This can result in a tendency for the young person to misconstrue comments as disrespectful or provocative, to become hypervigilant and always 'on guard', or to seek revenge. CBT aims to help young people become more aware of these negative or impulsive thoughts and the way in which they can increase their tendency to 'lash out' or act aggressively. Indeed, the Youth Endowment Fund (2023b) suggests that on average CBT reduces the prevalence of behavioural difficulties and reduces crime by 27%.

4.3.8 School interventions

As communicated above, children excluded from mainstream school are much more vulnerable to SYV and CCE. As a consequence, several studies advocate schools reducing the number of exclusions as a preventative measure (Big Lottery Fund, 2018; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime, 2019a; Association of Directors of Children's Services, 2019; Brown, Ware and Cassimally, 2019). The Centre for Social Justice (2009) recommends that instead of excluding students, disruptive pupil behaviour can be better addressed through on-site therapeutic programmes, by supporting students with their mental health, by pairing students with mentors, by providing additional academic support, and resolving conflict through restorative justice sessions.

As the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime (2019a) acknowledges, there are common threads of experience in children who are excluded that can cause long-term psychological damage. These include, but are not limited to, exposure to violence and abuse and/or neglect. When young people attend school, the impact of these issues can present as withdrawn behaviour and confrontation. Successful interventions for SYV are seen to be those that act on early warning signs of such behaviour *before* it develops and becomes entrenched to the point of exclusion. As the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime (2019a: 14) continues, the education sector is a key partner in helping to keep youths safe from violent crime and/or exploitation and should be involved in multi-agency working with the police, social services and family support. This is seen to be vital in sharing information about who might be vulnerable to involvement in serious violent crime.

Brooks et al. (2019) also stress the need for the provision of high-quality early years education to ensure that more children stay involved in school and achieve academic success. Academic achievement is a protective factor for youth violence (Waddell, 2015). The Centre for Social Justice (2009) states that local authorities and schools should look to reform class content and teaching methods to better engage even the most 'unteachable' pupils.

4.3.9 Provision of extra-curricular activities

Time spent outside of school is when a large proportion of violence between children occurs, and when young people are most vulnerable to being groomed for CCE. Engagement in after-school

programmes and enrichment activities such as sport or art is therefore seen as another way of preventing young people from being exposed to crime, criminality and violence (Brooks et al., 2019; Brown, Ware and Cassimally, 2019). These kinds of activities are frequently combined with life coaching and other interventions to reduce risk of involvement in serious violent crime. For example, de-escalation and conflict management skills can be incorporated as part of sporting activities (RECLAIM, 2020). Involvement in such activities can also expose young people – particularly those vulnerable to grooming and exploitation – to a network of positive community members and pro-social networks where they can go for support.

Research suggests, however, that organised programmes which take place after school for children who would otherwise be unsupervised may have a relatively low impact on violent crime. A review of available evidence by the Youth Endowment Fund (2023c) suggests that after-school programmes that only include recreation or non-academic activities are less effective than programmes which aim to develop academic or other personal and/or social skills. Furthermore, it is particularly important that there is a continuity of staff in such programmes, as the relationship between adults running the sessions and the children involved is likely to be an important driver of impact.

4.3.10 Mentoring

The value of providing mentors for young people has been strongly emphasised (Big Lottery Fund, 2018; Brooks et al., 2018; Home Affairs Committee, 2019; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime, 2019b; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs, 2019). Many young people who are impacted by SYV/CCE have a deep mistrust of statutory agencies and practitioners but are more likely to build trust with someone who is outside of the system (Big Lottery Fund, 2018). Indeed, the absence of trusted relationships with pro-social adults is consistently cited in reviews of failures around child exploitation (Early Intervention Foundation, 2018). Vulnerable young people require support from relatable adults who they can confide in if they have fears around violence/exploitation and who can help them find alternative pathways. Mentors can help children and young people impacted by CCE/SYV develop their social skills and academic abilities, can provide emotional support, and encourage positive behaviours and aspirations. Mentors are most often adults but can be older peers. While certainly not essential, a shared 'lived experience' is often regarded as being beneficial, with

mentors who have lived experience of SYV/CCE acting as role models for young people by showing that change is indeed possible. This is seen to help youths to envision a credible law-abiding future-self removed from involvement in 'gangs' and/or violence.

Nevertheless, a review of available evidence by the Youth Endowment Fund (2023d) concludes that overall, mentoring has a 'moderate' impact on reducing violence. Rather than a shared lived experience, they highlighted the importance of mentors having the right qualities and motivations in becoming a mentor. They further emphasise the importance of mentors receiving the necessary training and supervision; something which can be hampered by high attrition and lack of resources (Dolan et al., 2011; McMellon et al., 2016). Short and 'one-off' programmes are not well regarded as these are seen as less likely to make a significant impact due to needs developing as young people age (James-Roberts et al., 2005). As well as the relationship between mentor and mentee, parents and/or carers being supportive and encouraging young people to attend is seen as beneficial. Mentoring relationships are reported to be more successful when they are built on trust and respect rather than authority. However, termination of mentoring relationships needs to be carefully managed to avoid feelings of abandonment or loss (Philip et al., 2004).

4.4 Summary of literature review

In summary, this review of literature demonstrates that SYV, CCE and county lines are of increasing concern across the UK. While models of drug dealing and structures of 'gangs' appear to take slightly different forms in Newcastle and the Northeast, the fundamental issues remain the same. Young people with the highest levels of vulnerability are being targeted and groomed. They are being exploited to transport and distribute drugs and to engage in activities – including SYV – which can result in high levels of physical harm and associated trauma. Such activities also have serious criminal justice consequences which can greatly limit young people's future life opportunities. It is therefore vital that effective interventions are found which address these issues and reduce the levels of harm experienced by vulnerable young people.

Existing research suggests that the most successful interventions for SYV and CCE collaborate with young people, their families, and communities in their design and implementation. Aligning with the 'Child First' policy, interventions for SYV and CCE should allow young people's active participation and

decision making. Furthermore, interventions should be rooted in a public health approach which recognises the importance of tackling the root causes of violence and exploitation and is targeted at those who are at the highest risk or are already involved in these activities. Interventions to support young people to move away from 'gangs' and violence will need to help young people form a more pro-social identity and encourage them to access opportunities that can support this. This is vital in providing young people with 'hope' for their future. Furthermore, when working with those who have been impacted by SYV and CCE, a trauma informed approach is strongly advocated. Such an approach must recognise the high levels of harm these young people have experienced and seek to safeguard them from further harm. Interventions that deliver social skills training, are family-focused, provide psychological and emotional support, direct young people towards engagement in school, training and/or employment, and can provide a trusted relationship with a pro-social adult have also received empirical support in reducing young people's involvement in 'gangs', crime, and violence.

Crucially therefore, existing research indicates that interventions to support young people who have been groomed, exploited, and/or have experienced high levels of trauma will take significant time and investment in individual young people. This report will now turn to the empirical findings of this study with TCS (SCARPA), which extend the findings of existing research into the causes of, and successful interventions for, CCE and SYV.

5. Results

The results of the data study, service user and stakeholder interviews are presented in this chapter. Findings are centred on the project's research aims: 1) the changing picture of SYV and CCE in the Northeast of England; 2) the principles, approaches, models and methods used by SCARPA to engage with young people and the effectiveness of these; 3) the impact of the work of SCARPA on young people, families, communities and services; and 4) broader practice lessons about supporting young people affected by SYV (practice standards). It should be acknowledged that the results provided are based upon interviews with a small number of service users (n=4) and stakeholders (n=7). The number of face-to-face interviews is lower than hoped however given the often transient and chaotic nature of these young people's lifestyle, this was somewhat anticipated. The data presented here is therefore supplemented by case file reviews and quantitative data.

5.1 The changing picture of serious youth violence (SYV) and child criminal exploitation (CCE) in the *Northeast* of England

5.1.1 CCE and SYV as an evolving picture

As discussed within the literature review, while the conditions for CCE certainly exist within Newcastle and the Northeast region, and serious incidents of violence between youths do occur, evidence suggests that levels of SYV in Newcastle are comparatively low when measured against the other core cities across the country (Soppitt et al., 2022). This was a common acknowledgement during interviews with frontline stakeholders. Frequently discussed in the specific context of 'gang' related violence, stakeholders referred to the fact that both the level, frequency, and severity of SYV *appeared* to be lower than other metropolitan areas such as London and Manchester. As one Stakeholder reasoned:

> "While there is obviously conflict between different groups of people, we are not having drive-by shootings or anything in the same way" – Stakeholder 5.

While extreme in its comparison, this sentiment was also evident during conversations with some of the young people interviewed. One young person, for example, who was moved into the area as part of broader efforts to safeguard him against violence and CCE, explained that while he thought SYV in Newcastle was "bad", he didn't feel it was "quite as bad" as where he had relocated from (Service user 1).

While his sentiments help to support the positive notion that Newcastle falls behind other areas in terms of levels of SYV, this young person further explained that although he felt it was 'less bad' in Newcastle, he still felt very unsafe here. Indeed, despite the overall perception that Newcastle and the Northeast had a comparatively low level of violence, there was a general sense amongst the frontline stakeholders interviewed that the picture across the region was evolving. Interviews with stakeholders highlighted growing concerns about levels of SYV across Newcastle and the Northeast. While references were made to recent national police recorded statistics, which suggest that knife crime in the Northeast – particularly the Cleveland area – is increasing rapidly (Allen and Harding, 2021), others drew upon their experience and the mediatisation of youth crime. As one stakeholder explained, for example:

> "I know that there's been a real growth [in SYV]. I know that from The Children's Society contacting me that there's a real growing demand. I can see from the local media, there's growing issues" – Stakeholder 6.

While SCARPA stakeholders explained that many of the presenting issues had remained the same over recent years, during interviews they expressed that what they felt seemed to be changing was both the ages of those involved and the levels of violence and exploitation being seen across the city. There was an overall sense amongst wider frontline stakeholders that younger people are becoming more involved in 'gangs' and/or 'gang-like' activities. Indeed, while SCARPA reports primarily working with 15–18-year-olds, stakeholders described how in more recent times they had seen an increasing number of younger people including some as young as 13-years-old. During interviews frontline stakeholders also described feeling as though there was an overall increase in young people carrying knives and/or weapons in the North East. Often this was seen as a desire from young people to "emulate" older gang members (Stakeholder 1).

Although comparatively little is known about the digital lives of many of these vulnerable young people – something which feeds into both the challenges of keeping young people safe and the importance of adopting a contextual approach to safeguarding (see further section 5.4.1) – stakeholders described seeing social media as a key tool in facilitating 'gang' activities and SYV. While this is discussed further in the next section, stakeholder 1, for example, explained how social media could be used to expand the status and notoriety of 'gangs' and individual members and how one localised "street franchise" had utilised social media to extend their subsequent reach:

> "They are almost local celebrities, you can go on YouTube and see them, it's not hidden, and they've got tens of thousands of followers on Instagram, and their YouTube channel has hundreds of thousands of hits. That celebrity aspect wasn't there before and I think that filters down to the youngers… without the social media you wouldn't be reaching ten miles away, you'd just be notorious in a very small area" – Stakeholder 1.

The social media effect was seen to manifest both in the creation of smaller 'copy-cat' style youth groups/'gangs' and/or in a growing number of young people aspiring to be part of these notorious 'gangs'. Stakeholders expressed their belief that some 'gangs' were aiming to recruit younger children who were seen as being more vulnerable to exploitation and less likely to 'speak out' against their victimisation. A similar sentiment was shared with regards to gender and the involvement of young women and girls. Indeed, although the literature highlights that young men and boys are often perceived at greater risk of CCE and engagement in SYV – both as victims and perpetrators of violence (Disley and Liddle, 2016; HM Government, 2018; Home Affairs Committee, 2019; Densley, Deuchar and Harding, 2020; Windle, Moyle and Coomber, 2020), stakeholders were keen to stress that this stereotypical view of CCE could act as a barrier to identifying children at risk of CCE and SYV. Indeed, as one stakeholder explained:

> "The drug dealers, the 'gangs' are really good at diversifying, they see that girls are not necessarily stopped by the police as much as young boys are… I think they just use these children in whatever way they see fit, in whatever way is most profitable" – Stakeholder 4.

As observed previously, in addition to the levels of exploitation, stakeholders also described feeling that the levels of violence being seen in Newcastle and the Northeast were also increasing. This

changing nature of violence was alluded to during an interview with one service user. Although he was keen to differentiate between what he regarded as "proper gangs" and "just youngsters fucking about", he also went on to explain that he felt the situation was intensifying:

> "When I was a 'kid' I don't think it was like this. But now I feel like the youngers are getting crazier and crazier every day… I feel like, I don't know what's going on with them, but now this place is gonna be like London. Because I can see what's happening. Every time I come in town, there's police everywhere. I come in town just with my friend to go play pool or to go for a drink, there's police everywhere. You see gang members everywhere. You see what's going on" – Service user 2.

The perceived growth of SYV within the city and North East region was often framed in relation to a broader increase in OCG activity, drug markets, and so-called county lines activity. Neither 'gangs' nor criminal exploitation were regarded as new issues to the area. Those stakeholders who had worked in the criminal and/or social justice context in Newcastle and the wider region for a number of years, for example, talked about how historically 'gangs' and organised criminality had primarily been situated within the context of localised "traditional crime families" (Stakeholder 1). However, again, there was generally a sense amongst stakeholders that the nature of 'gangs' was changing.

Although many street franchise 'gangs' remain rooted in the legacy of these 'crime family' structures and the postcode regions to which they resided, stakeholders discussed witnessing an increase in transnational gang activities across the city and wider Northeast region. In particular, and as discussed below (section 5.1.2), frequent reference was made to growing numbers of young Albanian and Eastern European migrants to the country and Northeast region and their experiences of CCE and SYV. Crucially, then, despite being seen as a traditionally white-working class area with comparatively and historically low levels of migration (Lambert, 2016), discussions with frontline stakeholders suggest that this perception is unhelpful in recognising the broader emerging picture of CCE and SYV across Newcastle and the Northeast.

5.1.2 Gang structures and violence

As suggested, and somewhat contrary to the broader national picture which suggests Newcastle has comparatively lower rates of 'gang' activity and SYV, the overall perception amongst those interviewed appeared to be that 'gang' activities, in their various forms, are quite extensive across the city and Northeast. Generally speaking, however, frontline stakeholders expressed feeling as though the Northeast 'gang' networks appeared somewhat less organised and "more fractured" (Stakeholder 5) than is seen in other cities and regions. Indeed, there was a sense amongst some stakeholders that 'gangs' and their criminal activities existed and operated on "very different levels" (Stakeholder 2). While noting considerable cross over between groups operating within the area, a distinction was made between the previously mentioned localised 'street franchise' groups and OCGs with transnational links. Crucially, however, the largest group TCS (SCARPA) deal with on a daily basis is a localised street franchise 'gang' which is comprised of two historical groups: one Black British and one White British that had later merged (Stakeholder 1).

Both street franchise groups and transnational groups were identified as being linked to crime, criminality, and subsequent violence within the city and stakeholders discussed how there appeared to be a 'hierarchical' nature to these 'gangs'. This was something seen both internally – between so called 'youngers' and 'olders', and externally between different 'gangs'. Indeed, conflicts and tensions between opposition 'gangs' – or 'opps' – was believed to be a contributing factor for an increase in knife and weapon carrying amongst young people. Interestingly, however, despite the general sense amongst frontline stakeholders that the levels of violence and the numbers of young people carrying knives and/or weapons was on the increase, this was often viewed as being rooted in the broader context of protection and/or self-defence:

> "The intention is not usually to use this weapon unless they had to, they are viewing it as a way to maintain their safety" – Stakeholder 1.

> "The most common reason I get is self-defence, I don't know if that's just because that comes across as the most legitimate reason, because they don't want to say – 'I use it to threaten other people, to get whatever off them' - or if that is a legitimate worry there" – Stakeholder 4.

Similar protectionist narratives were shared by one young service user. What was evident in this interview, however, was that in addition to physical self-defence, weapon carrying and/or being ready and willing to fight more generally, was also connected to reputational self-defence:

> "Obviously I can't let people walk all over me, innit? So, if I let someone ruin my reputation I'm going to look like an idiot, then everyone's going to try and do it […] you need to take care of yourself, you need to be smart. Even if police … don't know, you have to learn yourself how to fight, how to protect yourself" – Service user 2.

The use of violence was also frequently discussed in the context of "maintaining status and territory" (Stakeholder 2) and was often connected to a sense of territoriality within the geographical environment. This was discussed primarily in relation to street franchise 'gangs' who, as noted, often had their roots in the legacy of 'crime family' structures and the postcode regions to which they resided. Being associated with these 'gangs' – whether true members or not – was, according to stakeholders, something seen to provide young people with a sense of status. Again, this was often exacerbated by social media:

> "A lot of groups make and record music, and they have a large following, and that acts as a pull factor for other youths, seeing the status these youths are getting" – Stakeholder 2.

The importance of status and respect were described as being particularly important for young men and boys for whom their masculine identity hinges largely upon their physicality and ability to provide:

> "They talk about wanting to help out their families, they want to help mum and make sure she's not struggling, they want to help younger siblings have nice clothes, so they aren't bullied at school […] There is a lot of stuff about masculinity in there" – Stakeholder 1.

Subsequently, while conflict between 'opps' could centre around drugs and county lines activity, it was most commonly framed as being linked to the importance of collective status within a particular geographical area and challenges between groups were often seen "as a way to get status or a reputation" (Stakeholder 2).

Such 'defensive localism' (White, 2013) between young people is not new, and rivalries between postcode areas have been well documented in other cities including Manchester (Gray, Smithson and Jump, 2019), Bradford, and Bristol (Kintrea, Bannister and Pickering, 2011). Interestingly however, while often framed in terms of longstanding rivalries between these postcode areas, with the advent of social media, stakeholders described how many members of these postcode 'gangs' – at least those on the periphery – no longer physically resided within those areas:

> "We definitely get the postcode rivalries in the groups we are working with but what we would be thinking is… is it just a postcode? Or is there something sitting behind that...? Because sometimes, the group might have a name that is linked to a postcode but actually several members of that group aren't from that postcode." (Stakeholder 2).

As noted, while social media could be used as a source of 'recruitment' of young people into 'gangs' and building individual/collective status, it was also seen as a method of intensifying conflicts between groups – even in periods of lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. As stakeholder 2 further explained:

> "Online is huge for the young people. They use the word clout a lot. And they say that people challenge them online for clout... sometimes this can lead to direct conflict in the real world".

It appears from conversations with stakeholders that for many young people and 'gangs', the 'digital street' is seen to be "as meaningful and consequential as the concrete street" (Irwin-Rogers, Densley, and Pinkney, 2018: 12) and that the internet and social media acts as a 'convergence space' through which to intensify old conflicts and generate new ones (Henry and Mullings-Lawrence, 2017).

As well as conflict between groups or 'opps', stakeholders discussed how SYV could also be connected to inter-group conflict. Often this was framed as 'youngers' seeking greater status to move up the internal 'gang' hierarchy:

> "They all want status, or to be the one making the most money, the youngers want to be olders […] they are going to think what do I need to do for people to give me the respect I need to be viewed as a leader?" – Stakeholder 1.

Concern was also expressed at the size of one of the largest street franchise 'gangs' in the area. Stakeholders observed seeing tensions escalating between key members of this group and believed that this may cause the group to fracture into two rival 'gangs'. Although this was discussed as hypothetical at this stage, there was a sense that this may also increase levels of SYV between subsequent 'opps' groups in the future.

Despite being the largest group that TCS (SCARPA) work with, and the growing concerns over inter-group tensions mentioned above, stakeholders often perceived these street franchise groups as sitting below other transnational groups such as Albanian 'gangs' within the area. Indeed, these groups were said to be at the top and are believed to be:

> "Much closer to the seats of power […] running the drug supply and distribution in this country" – Stakeholder 1.

While the young Albanian boys surveyed in this project had all experienced CCE and serious violent victimisation, as with street franchise groups connections to these transnational groups and the older men within them was identified as providing them with status, respect and protection from external violence and attacks from other young people and/or 'gangs'.

Confirming what is known within the literature therefore, SYV and CCE should not regarded as mutually exclusive issues in Newcastle and the Northeast, but rather can be viewed as co-existing problems. Furthermore, the use of violence was largely conceptualised by frontline stakeholders as being "instrumental" (Stakeholder 1). Indeed, as this stakeholder went on to surmise, despite the tendency for young people involved in SYV to be demonised, "we are not dealing with psychopaths" and violence is "completely transactional" (Stakeholder 1). Stakeholder 2 further explained how, "in terms of the serious violence, I would see that as an offset of the criminal exploitation that is going on". As noted, while many young people carry knives within the city and region, most have no intention to use these (see section 5.1.1). However, for young people who are being criminally exploited, violence is often associated with the high-risk situations in which they are being placed by exploiters. Furthermore, and as will be explored in the next section, involvement in 'gangs' and/or the willingness to engage in violent altercations, is also regarded as providing young people with a sense of identity and belonging.

5.1.3 Vulnerability, risk, and exploitation

There was a general view amongst the small number of frontline stakeholders interviewed for this project that CCE in Newcastle and the Northeast was likely to be "a much bigger problem than what we are aware of" (Stakeholder 4). At the same time, there was a belief that the 'county lines' picture in the region was different to the national picture and that drug distribution appears to be more "localised" (stakeholder 1), often involving movement across the city facilitated by the local public transport (metro) rather than across county lines.

> "They are trying to avoid using the trains because the British transport police and train staff are very vigilant… they are staying more local because it is less conspicuous just dotting around the Northeast" – Stakeholder 4.

> "Newcastle is different in terms of county lines – drugs may be being transported, and young people exploited, but sometimes just across Newcastle rather than to different areas of the county. The scene is more localised" – Stakeholder 1.

Stakeholder 2 also discussed how they perceived the regional picture to be quite different to other areas. Furthermore, as demonstrated in the interview extract below, they problematised how, where young peoples' involvement in the sale and distribution of drugs across the region is often, although not always, *within* the area, this has led to challenges in terms of recognising the vulnerability and harm this poses to young people:

> "Young people don't often use the term county lines, it's a very professional term.... There's also misconceptions; professionals/parents think it's to do with long distances, but it's the phone line – and that phone line could be arranging deals across the local area, there doesn't need to be a long distance that the child is trafficked over for it to be county lines" – Stakeholder 2.

The belief that SYV and broader 'gang' related activities in Newcastle is often underestimated was also evident during stakeholder interviews. While historically serious violence and 'gang' activity in the city has been largely dominated by crime families (see 5.1.2), there was a sense that because the picture in Newcastle didn't reflect broader patterns seen in other core cities, these issues were less visible

and/or overlooked. Importantly, despite such apparent national disparities, stakeholders emphasised that although caution is needed in order not to *over*estimate the scope of county lines or 'gang' activity in Newcastle and other parts of the Northeast, it remains crucial that such issues are not dismissed as problems here and the levels of harm facing young people in the city and region are not subsequently underestimated:

> "But not all drugs being sold in Newcastle are being sold due to county lines… I wouldn't question that there might be less county lines in Newcastle than in other parts of the country, but it doesn't mean the problems are less, it becomes a definitional question – how you define it! People can be trafficked from one end of Newcastle to another… it's not a particularly helpful phrase or definition at the moment county lines" – Stakeholder 1.

Stakeholders further emphasised how "any child could be groomed into this [CCE]" and that "any child is vulnerable" (stakeholder 2). This was seen as being particularly evident with advent of social media and the extent to which young people identify with and have their value base shaped by this. The size and scale of these 'virtual communities', the impact they can exert over every aspect of a young person's life, and the extent to which young people were able to 'escape' these virtual communities can often be ignored or misunderstood by mainstream agencies supporting young people. For example, service users who had moved locality to escape previous 'gang' activities spoke of still being 'found' through social media.

Yet, while all children were regarded as being vulnerable to CCE and SYV, supporting what is known within the wider literature there was a sense amongst stakeholders that certain socio-cultural and socio-economic factors increased this risk. Key factors that seem to 'push' the young people into this very challenging environment centred around their levels of vulnerability. Evident amongst the service users interviewed and as demonstrated in the wider SCARPA cohort, at times these levels of vulnerability are quite extreme. Stakeholder 4 observed, for example, that many of the young people SCARP) have worked with are marginalised on multiple fronts. These can include, but are not limited to, factors such as not being born in the UK, that they and their families had cultural and language barriers, non-attendance at school, and experiences of hate crime, racist abuse, and bullying. Again, these factors were seen to 'push' young people towards an increased risk of 'gang' activity, criminality, weapon carrying, and potential violence:

> "With their families being targeted they felt quite powerless like they couldn't really do anything and getting in with the gang violence they feel they've got a bit more power now, a group of friends to back them up, or no-one's going to mess with me because now I carry a knife… I think being targeted for that hate crime has played a massive part" – Stakeholder 4.

The impact of marginalisation and discrimination were particularly apparent for young people from minority ethnic backgrounds who are often moved into low economic areas in the region. There was a clear sense that a young persons' ethnicity, nationality and/or status as a migrant/asylum-seeker, combined with things such as language and/or cultural barriers, added to their marginalised status and made them more vulnerable to CCE. Indeed, some of the young people that TCS SCARPA work with, including some of those interviewed as part of this study, have been trafficked into the UK.

Although reference was made to the historical arrival of Black African migrant groups within the area, as a country which has exceptionally high rates of unemployment, poverty, political insecurity, and corruption, Albania has seen a surge in emigration (The Borgen Project, 2023) and is a key "source, transit and destination country" (Asylos, 2019: 14) for the trafficking and criminal exploitation of young men and boys. This was reflected in stakeholder interviews in which reference was made to a growing number of young Albanian and Eastern European migrants entering the country and region and their links to transnational OCGs and criminal exploitation:

> "There are increasingly a lot of Albanians going through, who are going through the asylum process. […] They don't identify as being members [of local 'postcode' gangs], they do talk about having been invited, but they are quite happy doing their own thing […] [they] talk a lot about the links the Albanians have nationally" – Stakeholder 2.

> "The lads coming across in small boats across the channel are being dispersed throughout the county and Gateshead are about to see a 900% increase in young unaccompanied asylum-seeking males, and that's just Gateshead, it will happen across the region. Seventy-five percent will be Albanian lads, and those lads have been trafficked for the purposes of criminal exploitation... by putting them in flats on their own they are just setting up a load of trap houses" – Stakeholder 1.

An increased awareness of the trafficking and exploitation of many of these migrant young people appears to suggest current UK dispersal policies are failing to protect vulnerable young people from further criminal exploitation. This is supported by figures presented by Sinoruka (2023) which suggest that "of 4,600 child asylum seekers who had arrived in the UK since 2021, 440 had gone missing and only about half had returned". This issue was also raised by Stakeholder 2 who explained:

> "Some of the Albanian young men that we've worked with, local authorities weren't even aware they were here. One young man was only discovered when there was a raid of a cannabis factory, no one knew he was in the country. Another [was discovered] when he was stopped in a car with three Albanian men. They are then put in inappropriate housing and go missing again" – Stakeholder 2

The above quote highlights two key issues which were raised by stakeholders during interviews. The first of these relates to the challenge of monitoring the movement of vulnerable young people not just within the city, but between cities and regions (see also 5.2.4). Indeed, stakeholders discussed the challenges of information sharing and safeguarding these young people (see also 5.4.2) particularly when their presence may not be known and/or where they have been moved before a supportive intervention could be put in place. Secondly, and again relating to broader safeguarding concerns and challenges, stakeholders raised concerns that many of the vulnerable young migrants they work with are typically relocated into areas of the city with high deprivation, poor social housing, and high crime rates. Not only was this seen as further exacerbating their vulnerability to CCE and SYV by creating a sense of 'hyper-precarity' (Lewis and Waite, 2015) but in doing so, it was seen as creating an almost self-fulfilling prophecy. Indeed, as another stakeholder described:

> "It's a lot of the children of Black African migrants who were dispersed to Newcastle that we are now seeing. But where they tend to live are exactly the areas of the city that had a crime problem, they put them in areas where a lot of people had moved out, so there were a lot of empty properties there…. It's not so much the people it's the area… in some ways there's nothing new about it, it's just that the faces have changed, and some of the outward manifestations in terms of the culture" – Stakeholder 1.

Again, supporting the wider literature, other forms of disadvantage discussed by stakeholders and service users that made some young people more vulnerable to CCE were ACEs, trauma, and poor mental health. These were strong themes throughout many interviews and undoubtedly were a very real underlying factor that underpinned the resulting position of the young people in relation to their experiences of SYV and CCE. The research identified that young people want to feel like they have a place in the world and someone to trust. They were seeking the actors that contributed to developing their identity, significance, and belonging, to be able to create a sense of 'mattering' (Billingham and Irwin-Rogers, 2021). Where this couldn't be found through legitimate means, with family, peers, and positive role models, young people would look for alternative routes. There were an extensive number of extracts that could be used to highlight this from stakeholders, all of which discussed the various factors that had made some young people more vulnerable to exploitation as they searched for a fundamental need to belong somewhere:

> "There's also some young people who are not drawn to the organised crime elements, its more about an underlying mental health need or trauma, I think what's really difficult is when those young people get involved in the serious violence, because there's maybe not the rationalization of 'I use x, y, z weapon, this thing will happen'" – Stakeholder 5.

> "I mean nobody knows that they're being exploited at the point at which it starts. That's not what young people think is happening. It's not what young people are experiencing at the beginning. They're experiencing being given opportunities, a sense of belonging, friendship, community" – Stakeholder 7.

> "The gang gives young people belonging – especially for those with conflict at home or are going through the asylum process" – Stakeholder 1.

> "This organised crime or gangs are giving them somewhere to feel like they belong, that sense of family that they are not getting at home" - Stakeholder 4

> "Definitely some form of early life trauma or difficulty, ongoing vulnerabilities at home, lack of parental supervision, out of education, not having that support network" - Stakeholder 5

What this alludes to – and supporting existing research from within the city (see Soppitt et al. 2022) – is that there is considerable deprivation, poverty, and multiple forms of vulnerability that co-exist and make young people particularly vulnerable to CCE and SYV. Indeed, many of these factors and an absence of more legitimate means of 'mattering' (Billingham and Irwin-Rogers, 2021; Soppitt et al., 2021) make the financial gains from drugs and other criminal activities incredibly attractive. As highlighted in the literature review above (see 4.2.3), young people can be drawn to the high profits and trappings of consumer culture displayed by exploiters and gang members (Briggs, 2013; Windle and Briggs, 2015a; 2015b). This can lead to young people becoming involved in both crime and gang related activity as a direct result of the desire to improve their financial situation.

Existing data shows that the Northeast local economic partnership areas are home to 207 of the 10% most deprived Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in England, and consequently Newcastle is not immune to incidents of SYV and exploitation.

> "I think the Northeast is seen as a really good place to recruit, because of the poverty, children are not able to walk around with the designer coat, designer trainers that other children are… because we do have quite good transport networks, it is easier to get kids around the Northeast, its fare less conspicuous to be heading to the beach for the day then heading down to Manchester" – Stakeholder 4.

> "But poverty without doubts. I mean we're seeing those combined kind of pressures of poverty, mental ill health, parents and potentially parents being not available for one reason or another. That might be because they're working a lot, it might be because they've got several children, it might be because of mental health problems, physical health problems, young carers that kind of stuff. So, anything that means that the resources and support around the child, whether they're family resources or statutory resources, where they're depleted or removed - then you'll see children more vulnerable to being exploited because they've got less resilience and less alternatives I guess" – Stakeholder 7.

These kinds of 'pull' factors were evident in the narrative of service user 3 who explained that while he wasn't interested in 'gang' activities if they centred primarily on violence, if they were based upon

selling drugs and socialising, he would be more inclined to become involved. Of course, invariably the violence would then follow.

During interviews with the small numbers of both stakeholders and young people what became ever more apparent is that exploitation can also often occur *between* young people. As explained in the previous section (5.1.2), in the large street gang SCARPA typically work with in the Northeast there is an internal hierarchy based upon 'olders' and 'youngers'. As the terminology implies, these hierarchies are primarily, though not exclusively, based upon age, with 'olders' sitting at the top of localised 'gangs'. In addition to taking a leadership role, these individuals are often viewed as role models for 'youngers' who aspire to become like them by gaining status and moving up the gang. These 'olders', who are often but not always older relatives, teach the 'youngers' how to deal drugs. As such, it is important to recognise that criminal exploitation exists between children as well as well as between adults and children and, as emphasised in this research, is often cyclical and/or generational. In other words, young people who are victims of exploitation themselves subsequently go on to exploit other young people.

Crucially, these findings indicate that while there are many push and pull factors towards involvement with 'gangs' and associated illegal activities, underpinning all of these is vulnerability. Those young people who have experienced loneliness, trauma, a breakdown in family relationships, hate crimes, poverty, and/or marginalisation, may find the opportunities presented by 'gangs' as initially very appealing. This appeal may be heightened when 'gang' members are family or close peers. Nonetheless, it is vital to remember the grooming, exploitation, and levels of harm these young people face, and their status as a victim needs to be acknowledged and appropriately responded to.

5.2 The principles, approaches, models, and methods used by The Children's Society's *SCARPA service* to engage with young people and the effectiveness of these.

5.2.1 Case management – small scale and individualised

Analysis of the files pertaining to the 27 young people referred into the SCARPA project (since its inception) due to concerns relating to CCE established that:

- The age of the service users ranges from 12 – 22 years with the average of 15 years and nine months.
- All were male.
- In terms of ethnicity, 12 identified as white British, 6 white other, 1 other ethnic group, 2 mixed/multiple ethnic groups, 5 black African, and 1 black British.

Young people involved with SCARPA can be referred from several routes. Of the 27 files analysed, 41% (11 young people) were referred by CSC, 33% (9 young people) were peer referrals, 7.4% (2 young people) were referred internally by other TCS services, 7.4% (2 young people) by other voluntary sector organisations and 3.7% (one young person) were referred by the police, youth justice and housing providers. However, when the number and range of other agencies involved with the young people was reviewed, a more diverse picture emerged.

Table 1: Other agencies involved with TCS (SCARPA) service users.

Other agencies involved	Number of service users	Percentage of service users
Adults Safeguarding	1	3.7%
Adults Social Care	1	3.7%
Prison	3	11.11%
Probation	2	7.4%

CSC	22	81.38%
Personal Advisor/ advocates	3	11.11%
Mental Health/CYPS	6	22.22%
Unaccompanied Minors CSC	3	11.11%
Other Voluntary Sector	2	7.4%
Youth Justice	13	48.14%
School Nurse	1	3.7%
Looked After Children (LAC) Nurse	1	3.7%
Young Carers	1	3.7%

Most notable among this group is the over representation of children involved with social care (22 of 27 young people), which further highlights the vulnerabilities of the young people that SCARPA support. Also significant, is that less than half of the young people are involved with youth justice. This raises questions as to the extent to which the activity and the environment the young people are operating in is fully understood by statutory agencies.

The data above identifies that there are several complex vulnerabilities surrounding the service users who require specialist case management: 7 of the 27 are involved with adult safeguarding or children's mental health services, 22 of the 27 were already known to CSC and 13 of the 27 to youth justice as well as others to prison and probation services. The analysis of the data highlights the importance of the approach adopted by SCARPA which recognises and prioritises transitional safeguarding as young people move from youth to adult services, with a particular focus on criminal exploitation and including the experiences of young people involved in SYV. SCARPA has several distinctive aspects to their approach that allows for a unique, dynamic, and child centred approach to develop with the young people they are supporting. As Soppitt et al. (2014) have previously noted, for many criminal justice-led interventions, a significant challenge is ensuring that the most appropriate methods are used which are flexible and needs-driven irrespective of age. Many criminal justice interventions for example, are time constrained, rarely extending beyond six months. SCARPA however, have

recognised that for young people it is not appropriate to have a rigid time limit placed on their support, and that their position as independent to the CJS is critical. This has allowed them to develop an approach to service users which will support brokerage and clinical case management (linking in with other agencies to support the young person, and where required appropriate medical support), but which primarily advocates a needs-led, strengths-based approach to supporting services users in achieving their goals and developing positive life changes. For young people impacted by SYV and CCE, SCARPA recognise the importance of advocating and delivering an approach that is child centred and very different to that which young people would experience with a justice-led intervention. Equally this model which SCARPA have adopted is quite different from many which are based on desistance – that is, the process of abstaining from crime over time (Maruna and Farrall, 2004). The approach adopted by SCARPA more accurately reflects the service user's status as a victim as well as someone who has either willingly or through manipulation, pressure, or deception become involved in criminal activity. The model SCARPA have developed promotes 'respair' – that is a return to hope after a period of despair. Respair, and the sense of hope, encourages service users to acknowledge that there are alternative lifestyles to the one they are currently living.

The small number of service users interviewed talked of the support they were receiving and the trust they had with their case worker: "*I 100% trust her"* (service user 3). Furthermore, they stated how they felt the support given was non-judgemental, provided advice when it was needed, as well as offering practical support. Primarily, though, they discussed the value of having someone to talk to either due to a lack of a significant other, or the concern that it would cause additional stress for family members. Service users talked of how their lives had changed, and for some who had made steps away from 'gangs', while the support they needed wasn't the same as when they first got involved with SCARPA, they continued to keep in regular albeit less frequent contact with their case manager.

5.2.2 Trust and relationships

The discussion with stakeholders, staff, and service users identified that the value of SCARPA comes not only from its independence from the justice sector – although this should not be ignored, but also its ability to provide intensive, longer-term work which is unique to the case management approach adopted by many others operating in this sector. As explained in the introduction, the SCARPA project usually work with a caseload of no more than 10 young victims of CCE, building their trust and

confidence to address some of the more pervasive and challenging aspects of their lives, and does so at a pace and timeframe that works for individual service users. Feedback from stakeholders recognised that the model adopted by SCARPA could function as a potential 'turning point' where motivated young people would receive the support needed to reduce personal risks and their involvement in risky behaviour (Elder,1985; Sampson and Laub, 1993). This was seen as a particularly relevant where the young person had engaged with SCARPA through a peer referral. Critically, all stakeholders highlighted in their interviews how the approach adopted by SCARPA recognised and developed motivation and engagement as distinct yet interrelated aspects of their work with young people and how both are seen to be dependent upon an element of trust. Given that many of the service users have ACEs, and/or experiences of trauma, the importance of relationships that are authentic and built on trust is critical in encouraging respair. As stakeholder 2 explains, the targeted work TCS (SCARPA) undertake, needs to be built on a positive, engaged relationship and a sense of trust:

> "It takes a long time for young people to recognise the grooming, exploitation, and power imbalances. Just telling them that it's a bad relationship won't work they have to come to see it for themselves. Other organisations working in this area often don't do the targeted work, they might just do diversionary activities or generic youth work, rather than focused on the exploitation and SYV" – Stakeholder 2.

> "I see my young people face-to-face at least once a week, sometimes more if there's an issue, and there's a lot of contact by phone between sessions Once the relationship is built that's when they would move on to the targeted work. We focus on managing emotions – some have harmful coping strategies – cannabis comes up a lot – and ease them into conversations without it feeling threatening" – Stakeholder 2.

Importantly, given the vulnerability and anxieties that the young people display, the case manager also works hard to consider the physical and social environment and how this could be used to make the young person more at ease:

> "I might use the music as a way in – using a medium they feel comfortable with can talk about more difficult emotions and experiences – important particularly for males who might present as very hyper-masculine. […] These young people often present as hyper-

> masculine, but when you get your relationship with them, they're not, they are struggling with their emotional wellbeing, their self-image and identity... and a lot of times they just need someone to say it's not you, it's what's happened to you or going on for you" – Stakeholder 2.

The case manager discussed several other factors that are important in terms of building a trusting relationship. These include being predicable, listening, offering advice but not judging, and ensuring that the location for meetings is a place the young person feels comfortable and safe. Indeed, for many young people, there are considerable concerns about taking public transport into the city:

> "A lot of services avoid using the car for young people, but actually for the majority of the young men I've got open, my car is their safe space, that's where they want to be, because they know no-one's going to approach the car, we can drive wherever, they feel more comfortable having conversations in the car because they haven't got that direct eye contact, and that's actually where we get a lot of disclosures from the young people" – Stakeholder 2.

The extracts below further identify that gaining trust from a young person involved in SYV/CCE is central to developing a model of support which promotes sustainable rather than short-term change. SCARPA staff carefully navigate complex relationships to address the factors related to CCE and encourage the young person to recognise their victim status with a clear path to respond to these experiences. For many, the absence of a person they can trust who is able to offer them appropriate support has been a factor in the exploitation they have experienced. Many young people may not recognise themselves as 'groomed' but this is very much the reality of their journey to SCARPA. Grooming involves building a relationship, trust, and emotional connection with the child or young person for the sole purpose of taking advantage of and exploiting them. For those young people who have been groomed and exploited, it can be difficult to subsequently allow themselves to build new relationships or connections which are viewed upon with a high level of cynicism. Furthermore, it can be difficult for those young people to disclose and discuss their issues and needs.

> "Often the young people, they don't feel safe, they are worried about what's going on in the community or at home, they are hyper-vigilant, they are on edge because they've seen

so much violence or are on a freeze response, so you are getting one-word answers in the beginning, so the focus is on building that physical and emotional safety" – Stakeholder 2.

"These issues are around emotions, mental health, relationships, and you will only discuss this with someone you trust. TCS take their time and want to do things the right way" – Stakeholder 3.

When reflecting on the support that was given to young people by other agencies/people, the sense was that it was never quite enough to allow the complexities of the young people's lives to be addressed.

"A lot of focus on diversionary activities which might just be a quick fix, signing them up to a football club is not tackling the underlying factors. It's a positive factor for the young person, it absolutely has its benefits, but it won't stop them from being exploited. It's not addressing the underlying factors of what is really going on, which is what we try to focus on" – Stakeholder 2.

"There might not be someone at home who can give them that undivided attention" – Stakeholder 3.

It was clear that the strong relationship developed between SCARPA case worker and service user, once established, provides the service users with a positive adult relationship and/or role model that may be missing or absent from their life. Critically, young people developed a sense of trust with the case manager which, given how their trust had been previously misplaced or abused, is even more impressive. Some spoke of referring their friends to their case manager; others believed that their friends might be 'too much' and didn't want this to reflect on them and their relationship with the case manager.

5.2.3 Duration of support

One of the notable features of SCARPA commented on by the small number of practitioners, service users, and stakeholders interviewed alike, is the extent to which the level and duration of the support offered to young people was flexible, needs-driven, outcome focused, and significantly longer and more intensive than interventions and support offered by youth justice or other third sector

organisations. There has been considerable discussion and recognition that many of these young people will have been involved with, or had some engagement with, previous and/or concurrent criminal justice interventions. However, for many of these interventions, the scope and nature of the activity undertaken will be tied up with the funding rather than the needs of the young people. As one stakeholder noted, this can have a direct impact on the services user's engagement, as not all young people will be initially open or receptive to SCARPA's approach and building a relationship and trust can take time:

> "I think that fact that it is not time-limited is a huge positive because sometimes you can get funding or time placed on projects/interventions, but sometimes it can take that time just to get your relationship with that young person, just for them to feel comfortable" – Stakeholder 2.

> "Even when the targeted work is completed the young person can come back if they have difficulties later down the line" – Stakeholder 1.

SCARPA seek to develop an approach that allows service users to develop social capital while simultaneously re-imagining themselves as a person not defined by anti-social, criminal behaviour or the exploitation they have experienced. As such their approach is also not defined by the CJS and other statutory agencies, and transcends the hard line so often drawn between childhood and adulthood. Indeed, SCARPA services and support goes beyond the statutory frameworks that are defined by age (under and over eighteen) and instead recognises the challenges that young people are experiencing. This may mean that they start working with someone in their teens and could still be supporting them into their early twenties.

> "They can engage for as long as needed, one youth is now 21/22 and has been engaging for 4 years" – Stakeholder 1.

> "Sometimes the timescales are quite short – up to one year, but we've worked with one young man for four years, because the risks are so high" – Stakeholder 2.

One stakeholder noted that the intensive, longer-term, and service user led approach meant that SCARPA could build relationships with young people over a longer duration, often resulting in the

young person being more likely to open-up and trust their caseworker. The sentiment behind this was evident in many of the other interviews. For example:

> "It's frustrating because if they could tell us more about what's happening, we could do a lot more to help… but that's the beauty of having the TCS, is that they can go and do that more intensive work, I would love to have the time to do the weekly sessions, but it's unfortunate we don't" – Stakeholder 4.

There is a clear sense that the time and approach adopted by SCARPA is one other agencies would like to adopt should the resourcing allow. However, success would be dependent not only upon the length of time an agency can invest in working with the young person, but also the underlying philosophy of the agency and their approach to the young person.

5.2.4 'Child First'

During interviews with a small number of external partners, it was noted how they see a 'Child First' approach adopted and implemented by SCARPA. Stakeholder interviews considered the extent to which other statutory agencies advocated a 'Child First' approach, however, some noted that they were unable to implement such a model in practice. For example, one respondent noted that:

> "Other services set the appointment time, location, but actually what SCARPA try to do is ensure its all fit around the young persons' individual needs, giving them choices wherever possible… during the exploitation process young people have so much control taken away from them, and when services get involved they continue that and try to manipulate the young person's actions… they aren't listened to" – Stakeholder 2.

A 'Child First' approach, which advocates putting children at the heart of service provision by tackling factors which can lead to offending behaviours and seeing the 'whole child', is difficult to implement for this group of young people for several reasons. Many in the sample had relocated into the area and CCE is often based upon a 'county lines' model where young people are moved around the country (see 4.1.1). There is a danger, therefore, that statutory agencies are only supporting those young people that they *know* about – the more static local population – and that young people who are moving around the county are not being supported by the appropriate agencies (see also 5.1.3). The data presented above (see 5.2.1.) would suggest that SCARPA are able, through their peer referral and

other mechanisms, to support young people who may not be known to or receiving the support of other agencies. For example, while there are a relatively high number of young people known to children services, only around 20% (8 young people) are receiving support from mental health teams, and two young people from a school or LAC nurse. Conversely, outcome data demonstrates that having worked with SCARPA, all (100%) service users had a greater awareness of grooming and exploitation and 19 young people reduced substance misuse/employed harm reduction strategies. Improved conflict resolution and other positive indicators were also visible. SCARPA largely see this because of their co-production approach where they work with the young people to agree the purpose and focus of their relationship. In contrast, for many of the statutory agencies, there are pre-set objectives that they must adhere and report to.

> "Ultimately, it's up to young people what areas they want to focus on and where they want to meet – somewhere they feel they can speak freely. They jointly decide on goals and when they are ready to finish... It is quite unique in being very value-led and young people led... we don't see this approach in all agencies... Both young people and practitioners work together to set goals" – Stakeholder 3.

When discussing with a stakeholder from SCARPA, it was clear that while they were advocating for and ensuring an approach to safeguarding the young person, they were also empowering them to set the agenda and pace of the meetings and their overall engagement with SCARPA. Given the very high engagement levels, it would suggest that this model is effective.

> "We can truly come from... 'what is it you want to talk to me about today, what's happening to you, where are you?'. We can go with much less of an agenda to our relationships with young people that is a hugely beneficial thing" – Stakeholder 7.

5.2.5 Transparency around information sharing

The final area relating to the approach of SCARPA concerns how they explain and are transparent around what information they must share and when. The idea of informed consent is explained to young people working with TCS (SCARPA), and a consent form is subsequently signed. To ensure consent remains informed, consent is reviewed approximately every 3 months. SCARPA also record all their meetings and phone calls and ensure that the young person is aware that they can see this

information at any time. Clarity around confidentiality and boundaries are seen as key aspects of SCARPA's work from the outset. A young person must understand that information could be shared with the police, children services, or other key stakeholders, as well as the circumstances that would lead to this form of disclosure. As stakeholder one noted:

> "In theory that should be an obstacle, explaining to a young person… 'what you tell me is going to be confidential unless you say this'… And other agencies don't do this... they don't tell them what they are sharing… there is an assumption that that is the only way to get engagement" – Stakeholder 1.

Stakeholder 2 developed this further, explaining how they see the transparency around information sharing as a powerful tool allowing the young person to be clear as to what they want and don't want to share. It follows that when young people do make a disclosure it is because they want to, and because they have the trust in the case manager to ensure the appropriate action or support is taken.

> "Whereas other services sometimes view that as a barrier to engagement – telling that young person you're going to share their information – but I view it as putting that young person in control of what they tell me… It gives that young person a sense of safety because they know what will happen... If I think that a young person is going to make a disclosure I will remind them about confidentiality, so they've got that control at it helps them to feel safe… It means they are telling you because they want you to do something... The predictability and transparency helps to alleviate some of that fear that young people experience in terms of making disclosures" – Stakeholder 2.

> "She used to ask me about it. She used to ask me are you alright? Before someone had to know something about me; before she told them she used to ask me 'are you alright if I tell them this and this?' And I used to tell her, 'Yeah I'm alright'… Well as long as I know about it, I'm alright with it. Like as long as I get in my head what's happening, I'm alright." – Service user 1.

Stakeholder 7 described how maintaining a balance between ensuring the young person is comfortable with the course of action that they are undertaking as part of their legal obligations, and ensuring that the young person's safety is protected, can be challenging:

> "And that weighing up between needing to take the action that we're legally required to do – we can't just go well we'll hold that for a while – and to make sure that other people know that to make sure that it doesn't compromise relationships with children. But I have to say – and I think that's something SCARPA is pretty good at – I think it's something that our practitioners work harder with young people to help them understand that this is about caring for them, this isn't about being the police, this isn't about being investigators. This is about how we don't want bad shit to happen to them." – Stakeholder 7.

Undoubtedly, however, stakeholders, case managers, and service users are clear that they understand SCARPA's approach to information sharing and that it is transparent and proportionate in how it is enacted.

5.3 The impacts of the work of The Children's Society *(SCARPA)* on young people, families, communities, and services

5.3.1 Young people

Quantitative and qualitative data supplied by SCARPA in addition to interviews with service users and stakeholders suggests that TCS SCARPA has very high levels of engagement from young people who have been victims of CCE. Of the 27 young people introduced to TCS Newcastle's SCARPA project, 24 engaged with the services (89%) and the average length of engagement was 330 days. Stakeholders explained how the high-risk young people who were engaging with SCARPA had struggled to engage with other services and practitioners (both statutory and third sector):

> "Some of these young people are ones who have declined to work with other services… It's not that they don't want to engage with services, they are just fearful, there are a lot of barriers, they are often experiencing physical/sexual harm, they are being trafficked, there's threats not just to them but to their family members, people they care about, they are fearful of what will happen if they do share information" – Stakeholder 2.

> "(TCS) They're a great resource to have with the young people, especially as social workers are sometimes seen as the enemy… you've got a lot more time to build up really good

relationships with them and the children and young people feel a lot more confident and comfortable sharing with them" – Stakeholder 4.

Stakeholders described that the stigma surrounding the work of social workers and police officers could act as a barrier to young people trusting them, and that young people impacted by CCE were unlikely to be in regular contact with health or education services. Indeed, some young people themselves expressed that the only professional they trusted and would confide in was their case manager at SCARPA. That SCARPA has over an extended period of time, been able to sustain engagement with young people who potentially would not have engaged with, and therefore not received help from, any other services. This is testament to the quality of the relationships and trust the case worker builds with young people. Even though the positionality of SCARPA case manager is different from their service users, the skill of the practitioner is in being relatable to these young people despite their different lived experiences as well as in being consistent, reliable, and transparent. As such, SCARPA staff described receiving disclosures from young people concerning 'gangs', wider criminal networks, and concerns over their safety and the safety of others which they had not felt comfortable sharing with any other practitioners. Once SCARPA have this information they can then put the necessary safeguards in place to protect and minimise harm for young people.

Also key to SCARPA securing high levels of engagement from young people, is that a third of their service users (33% or n=9 young people) are referred into the service by peers. From initially establishing a high level of trust with a young person who was deeply embedded in a 'gang', a network of other young people associated with this individual/'gang' have been referred into the service by peers. Service users speak highly to their peers of the help provided by the SCARPA case manager, and indeed it should be acknowledged that in most cases it was the individual practitioner that was recommended to peers rather than TCS as an organisation (the implications of this are discussed further in section 6). Stakeholders described the huge benefits of peer referral, as young people are often more willing to engage and will do so more quickly if they have been introduced by a person they trust:

"The self-referrals and how that gives us credibility amongst the peer network, we've seen that be really effective… it can get young people to engage who won't engage elsewhere…" – Stakeholder 1.

The extent of the peer referrals into the SCARPA project is fairly unique when compared to TCS in other localities in the UK. Again, this is testament to the quality of the relationships and the trust that practitioners build with the young people. Young people spoke of the value of having someone to speak to who they can trust and also of some of the practical support provided by SCARPA. For example, reference was made to help in accessing education and/or employment opportunities, in accompanying them for various appointments, and in accessing funds for them to engage in wider pro-social leisure activities. Many of these young people subsequently expressed that they would refer their friends to SCARPA on this basis.

By engaging with young people for significant periods of time, SCARPA can have a considerable impact on young people's lives and reduce some of the key risk factors associated with CCE and SYV. Most notable are the greater awareness of grooming and exploitation, and enhanced awareness of their own risk and safety planning (all of young people who engaged), positive strategies for managing emotions (23 young people), support to explore issues around identity/belonging (22 young people), improved conflict resolution strategies (19 young people), and reduced substance misuse/harm reduction strategies (19 young people).

Table 2: Outcomes achieved with TCS (SCARPA) service users:

Outcomes – calculated from those who engaged (24/27).	Total 24	Percentage
Missing episodes reduced/ceased	8	33.33%
Identified positive strategies for managing emotions	23	95.83%
Supported with conflict resolution techniques	19	79.17%
Improved family relationships	16	66.67%
Increased awareness of grooming/exploitation	24	100.00%
Enhanced awareness of risk/safety planning	24	100.00%
Reduced substance misuse/harm reduction strategies	19	79.17%

Supported to access educational opportunities	11	45.83%
Supported to access employment opportunities	11	45.83%
Supported to access more appropriate housing	8	33.33%
Ceased/reduced carrying weapons	11	45.83%
Access to positive activities	15	62.50%
Support to navigate CJS	9	37.50%
Enhanced understanding of status issues within a Peer Crime Group setting	15	62.50%
Supported to explore issues around identity/belonging	22	91.67%
Supported to share disclosures/safeguarding/intelligence	12	50.00%
Supported to submit National Referral Mechanism (NRM)	5	20.83%
Increased awareness of sexual health	10	41.67%

SCARPA practitioners aim to empower young people to make better decisions that will keep them safe. Through their targeted work with young people, at a pace and using methods suited to the individual young person, they gradually help them become aware of the grooming and exploitation they have experienced. SCARPA seek to progressively challenge young people's views on crime and violence that have been developed as part of their grooming, as well as encouraging young people to see the realities of their situation:

> "They all talk about the money that they make, the designer clothing… but we have conversations, yes you can get money, you can get material items, but what impact is it having on your relationships? Has it impacted on your connections with your family, what about your future opportunities … they've been groomed into thinking a certain way… you

> got to be really consistent and persistent in the messages we give, and they are still getting the opposite messages from their peers/groomers" – Stakeholder 2.

> "He (young person) is showing really great insights into the dangers of exploitation… he is a lot more aware of what could be risky situations… he used to see it very much as a choice but now he recognises more the coercive control" – Stakeholder 4.

By helping young people gain more knowledge and understanding of the power imbalances in their relationships and the realities and costs of involvement in 'gangs' and violence, SCARPA aims to provide young people with information and tools they can use to make better decisions and manage their own safety and risks. This includes knowing how they can manage their emotions more effectively. Stakeholders reported numerous young people making safer choices following their engagement with SCARPA. This included keeping parents informed of their whereabouts, choosing to walk away from confrontations and/or deescalating a situation, no longer carrying weapons, re-engaging with education and other positive or pro-social activities, and cutting down on substance abuse. One young person himself described "stopping sitting around in crack houses" and instead "using his time to chill". He further discussed how he no longer carries a knife as he realises "it's pointless" (service user 3). Another young person explained:

> "I asked for help because I was in gang activities and I wanted to get out of it, I wanted to leave basically, and after I moved, I stopped everything. [SCARPA case manager] helped me to stop it" – Service user 2.

SCARPA were, however, also realistic in what the service could achieve. While ideally, they would like all young people to leave their 'gangs' and exploiters during their involvement with the service, this is not always possible:

> "It does happen, we have got young people who have exited the gangs and groups they have been part of, they've recognised the risk to themselves, the risks of criminalisation, the wider opportunities... so it does happen... but you've also got to recognise that those gangs can be meeting a need for that young person, and we've got to find alternative ways to meet that need... and that takes a lot of time to figure that out" – Stakeholder 2.

> "We don't fix people… it's not a linear process… years later they might look back on what we've told them and realise aha that makes sense now" – Stakeholder 1.

> "There isn't necessarily a switch on/off thing they might still have some affiliation but alongside that be able to do an apprenticeship and eventually that becomes the more important thing. It's not necessarily binary you know, you're totally involved in a world of drug dealing violence or what have you, or you're absolutely not" – Stakeholder 5.

What this demonstrates is that the case management approach undertaken by SCARPA, over an extended period, allows them to make significant changes with the young people relating to how they understand and navigate the environment in which they live and importantly, how this limit the risks and negative external pressures they face. The small cohort SCARPA engage with over this period, allows them to work with young people to better understand and reduce their risks and where appropriate, work with statutory and third sector organisations to ensure a more holistic 'wrap around' model of support is in place.

Furthermore, beyond improving the physical safety of young people who were victims of CCE, SCARPA also provide young people with considerable emotional support. Young people discussed having sometimes felt judged and looked upon negatively by other professionals, and in some instances had been criminalised for their exploitation. SCARPA sought to assist young people in developing a more pro-social identity. Central to this is building upon young peoples' strengths rather than shaming them for past behaviours, many of which took place in circumstances that were out with their control:

> "We are showing that someone understands them and it's not coming from a place of judgement... it's about letting them know that they're not their behaviour... it's not what you've done, we are focused on what you can be. It helps a young person develop a sense of self-esteem again... and a lot of times they just need someone to say it's not you, it's what's happened to you or going on for you" – Stakeholder 2.

The small number of young people interviewed emphasised the value of having SCARPA case manager to talk to and the way in which they would treat them as an equal whilst listening to the challenges they were experiencing without judgment:

> "I don't really get on with that many people, but [SCARPA case manager] is just like calm…. Like for example my social worker – he raises his voice because of his job. That's what I don't like. I don't like people who think they are [powerful] because they have a job or something in their life. I don't like when they think, like 'he's done nothing in his life'." – Service user 2.

Critically therefore young people have a model of support which is appropriate to responding to the range of exploitation and victimisation they have experienced, rather than a model which focuses on their transgressions. This is a model which is more akin to the Estonia 'Child Friendly' approach than the U.K. 'Child First' rhetoric.[2]

5.3.2 Families, communities, and other services

SCARPA also engage with the families of young people impacted by CCE and SYV. This can involve providing practical support that can help take some of the pressures off families. For example, SCARPA may support families in accessing hardship funds and/or finding appropriate housing; they can assist the young people to navigate the CJS and/or take children for medical appointments; provide vouchers for birthday presents and/or funding for participation in family activities; and can aid with advice, and referrals for those parents' seeking asylum and struggling with this process. Furthermore, SCARPA's case manager can visit the family home to carry out mediation work between young people and their families. This is particularly important where relationships become strained due to the young person's exploitation and involvement in crime and violence. SCARPA also help young people to communicate more with families, manage anger/frustration, and utilise positive coping strategies. As such, reduced conflict within the family home is often reported as a key output. This is vital given that, as identified in the literature review above (see 4.3.6), family-focused programmes that improve family bonds and relationships are amongst the most robustly evaluated and effective in preventing youth violence. Indeed, following engagement with SCARPA, some young people returned to the family home after

[2] Toros et al (2013) discuss the Estonia approach to child centred/Child Friendly justice stating that firstly, taking the needs of the child into account, stemming from the child's interests when making decisions about the child is paramount. It also includes active involvement of the child in planning the activities concerning him/her and inclusion in the decision-making process.

having left due to previous conflict. Young people themselves expressed family members gratitude for the work that SCARPA case manager was doing/had done. One young man reported having less arguments with parents and siblings since working with SCARPA, and that SCARPA's case manager was helping him with "what to say to others, particularly family, to help improve those relationships" (service user 3).

Moreover, SCARPA's targeted work to help young people realise their exploitation and improve their safety could have a wider impact upon their families. The exploitation of their children to be involved in drug distribution and violence increases families at risk of serious harm from 'gangs' and/or other individuals. This could impact their sense of safety in their homes, heighten anxieties surrounding their own welfare, that of the young people being exploited, and potentially other siblings, and ultimately, it can lead to negative mental and emotional wellbeing. SCARPA work to empower young people to keep themselves safe and encourage communication with their families about where they are going and who they are spending time with to reduce their levels of anxiety. As a stakeholder described:

> "We've had cases where people have attended the doors with weapons looking for the young people... what the parents talk about most is seeing the benefits of the change in their young person, seeing the young person more relaxed at home, learning how to keep themselves safer, learning to manage their emotions... and from that you hear about improvements in the family relationships the child being more open to spending more time and sharing things with their family... and them having more safety in their home address" – Stakeholder 2.

Given that in many cases families often have very little knowledge of what their children are involved with due to breakdowns in relationships, stakeholders also acknowledged the value in the engagement work SCARPA do with parents to educate them about exploitation, grooming, CCE and 'gangs'. SCARPA also help families understand the importance of reporting their children's missing episodes and the related risks associate with this.

The work of TCS (SCARPA) can also impact on other services. As highlighted above (see 5.3.1), some young people reported preferring to confide in SCARPA case manager as opposed to other services because of the level of trust that had been built. Again, this was often aided by instances where they

had been referred into the service by peers. Nevertheless, SCARPA recognised the limitations of young people solely engaging with their service and would encourage young people to place greater trust in other services and professionals. SCARPA work to explain more about the roles of these other organisations and why they might not be able to offer the same interventions and flexibility that SCARPA can:

> "In their work they've done a little bit of work around what my role is, and this has opened the door for them to speak a bit more with me, they are willing to spend a bit more time with me… I think having that trusted person say you know they are ok you can speak to them, it's really helpful" – Stakeholder 4.

> "There's no way a social worker could see a person three or four times a week, it's just not going to happen. Their caseload is three times ours. So, it's… helping young people understand that really" – Stakeholder 7.

SCARPA can also refer young people to relevant services to support them, for example around mental health and emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, where necessary to safeguard a young person (and with their informed consent from the outset of their engagement with the service) SCARPA can share information provided by young people with other services to aid in risk management planning. Statutory agencies reported that, despite wishing they had the flexibility and time to do the intensive targeted work with the young people that SCARPA offered, this was just not possible within the confines of their role. Nonetheless, having SCARPA dedicate this time to young people was seen as useful:

> "Having someone from TCS work with them is great, you get the extra pair of eyes. They can use those weekly sessions to build good relationships, while also teaching them, arming them with a bit of information, knowledge is power, any concerns they have they can feed back. It means we can alert other services; we can plan better…" – Stakeholder 4.

Although the work of SCARPA could have a positive impact on young people's engagement with other services as well as the safety, relationships, and wellbeing of young people and their immediate family and social networks, it was acknowledged by stakeholders that their impact on tackling the scale of CCE and SYV in Newcastle and the Northeast was limited. Despite the value placed upon the service

and the intervention work that SCARPA engage in, this limitation was attributed to be the small numbers of young people SCARPA could offer the intensive targeted work to at any one time. Greater resources would be required to offer this method of intervention to a wider range of young people in the city to offer any substantial reduction in the levels of CCE and SYV in the region's communities.

5.4 Broader practice lessons about supporting young people affected by serious violence (practice standards in the North East)

5.4.1 Promoting safeguarding and avoiding criminalising young people.

Interviews and analysis of the data pertaining to the young people engaging with SCARPA illustrates the high levels of trauma and exploitation they have experienced. This includes incidences of violence, trafficking, 'working' 15-hour days, robberies from drug dealers and users, and threats to families from exploiters. As demonstrated above (see section 5.2), SCARPA take a 'Child First' and trauma-informed approach in their work with young people and prioritise their safety and wellbeing. However, while undoubtedly tackling SYV and CCE requires a strong multi-agency approach, the small number of stakeholders interviewed described there being a disjoint in the sector between those who approached cases of CCE as a safeguarding issue and those who approached it from a purely criminal justice approach. While the former tries to emphasise young peoples' vulnerability and victimisation, the latter approach often leads to the criminalisation of young people for their involvement in situations that were beyond their control. This reverberates with the findings of others that emphasise that children involved in SYV are continuing to be viewed within a criminogenic lens with the levels of social harm they have experienced being overlooked (Day, 2023; Billingham and Irwin-Rogers, 2022; Marshall, 2023). Yet, criminalising young people is seen as ineffective in tackling SYV and CCE. As stakeholders explained:

> "Trying to arrest your way out of it, you won't learn anything, it won't help society putting them in prison, it won't help them, because someone else will just come along and take their place" – Stakeholder 1.

> "When you look at things like safety planning, child protection plans, a lot of the focus is on the young person changing what they are doing and actually they've got very little control over the situations they are in, they are not making choices, they feel threatened, they are being controlled and coerced" – Stakeholder 2.

Marshall (2023) discusses the inadequacy of the current tools available to respond to CCE as an issue of victimisation in combination with criminal justice agencies' narrow expectations of who can be classified as an 'victim'. These sentiments were similarly shared with stakeholders:

> "There's some real struggles in terms of getting those agencies to see young people as victims when they are the ones holding the knife for example, when they're the ones who are being arrested for serious youth violence… it is hard to hold that this is a child too and that this child is being exploited, and this child is being hurt, this child has been traumatized, and the very fact that they can do this kind of stuff without, any kind of emotional impact is evidence of the trauma they've experienced" – Stakeholder 7.

Stakeholders emphasised that the issues and vulnerabilities of young people impacted by CCE were very similar to those who are victims of CSE, however a criminalising approach could be more likely to be taken with this group because the typical gender of CCE victims as male makes it more difficult for their victim status to recognised.[3] This appears to be particularly significant for young men from black and/or ethnic minority backgrounds. Stakeholders expressed concerns that groups of young ethnic minority males in Newcastle were more likely to be given the label of 'gangs' by criminal justice agencies than all-white groups and can be subject to 'adultification' bias whereby they are held more responsible for their actions:

> "It seems that once you start talking about the criminal exploitation and the particular service user group, something changes… but the work is not that different from what we've been doing before, it should be still seen as safeguarding" – Stakeholder 1.

[3] It should acknowledged however, that throughout this research it was emphasised by stakeholders that the stereotypical view of young males being more likely to be victims of CCE, and young females of CSE, can be misleading and lead to the harms both genders face from these different forms of exploitation being underestimated.

> "We are still without a doubt seeing across the country a real disparity in terms of the way that young people are viewed and so certain groups of young people without doubt are much more – if we're talking about young black or Asian men for example – much more likely to receive custodial sentences or a criminal response to their exploitation" – Stakeholder 7.

It is therefore key that the many agencies that work with young people impacted by SYV and CCE provide a coherent approach that not only recognises the significant levels of harm, exploitation, grooming, and trauma that these young people have experienced, but also the lack of control they have over the situations they are involved in. It is vital that victim-blaming language is avoided, and that young people are treated with respect. Furthermore, services need to recognise the risks to young people and children beyond the familial setting and ensure appropriate structures and interventions are in place to support a contextual safeguarding approach. The NRM and defence available under s.45 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 needs to be employed where appropriate to avoid criminalising exploited young people.

5.4.2 Governance around information sharing

As discussed in section 5.2.5, one of the key principles that SCARPA adopt in their work with young people who have been victims of CCE, is to be transparent around how they share their information. It is imperative when working with young people who have become involved in high-stakes, illegal activities that they are made fully aware of how the information they share with practitioners will be used. Should they become known to other gang members as an 'informant', the risks of violence and harm to young people are huge. However, stakeholders reported that a collective commitment to the governance of information sharing is lacking among the agencies that work with victims of CCE. In some instances, sensitive information pertaining to young people and their activities were not being adequately protected and shared inappropriately, and without the informed consent of young victims.

As demonstrated above (see 5.3.1), the trust SCARPA have formed with young people is paramount to the success of their work. This is evident both in how they engage young people who would rarely engage with other services, and in the levels of credibility that they have built amongst young people. Stakeholders explained that when other agencies take a criminalising approach with the intel shared

with them regarding young people and their peers, it could severely undermine the trust they had built up with young people and even put frontline workers at risk. Due to the lack of confidence in other agencies to approach information shared with them with safeguarding as a priority, this acts as a barrier to greater sharing of information in this area and more collaborative working:

> "It's a barrier because it's not done right… (if it was) we would have the confidence to know that we were working in an environment when we could do our safeguarding work, but it wouldn't result in young people being criminalized or information that we were sharing, which is frequently soft intelligence" – Stakeholder 1.

> "Information sharing needs to be happening more… sometimes I feel like we are not working as one big team" – Stakeholder 4.

> "I think sometimes if information isn't shared back so we don't know the context in which we're putting information… For example, if we know that a youngster has access to weapons, storing weapons or hiding weapons or something, and by sharing that information to protect that child, you also run the risk that that child's gonna be criminalized. Because we're not in control of the steps that are taken by those agencies afterwards" – Stakeholder 7.

The small number of stakeholders interviewed also mentioned that although third sector organisations do not have a statutory right to be in attendance and any multi-agency forums, it is important that statutory agencies recognise the value of their contributions:

> "The voluntary sector doesn't have any power. We are only there at the table because we were invited to be there... But also, I think when those safeguarding hubs, those complex safeguarding hubs work well, that is because they've recognized that actually the voluntary sector brings something that the statutory services simply couldn't. So, this is particularly true for the Northeast. It's very well trusted by young people largely compared to statutory services like the police or social care… So, I think that when that's appreciated by those kinds of multiagency hubs, then the voluntary sector has a really useful role to play" – Stakeholder 7.

To effectively tackle SYV and CCE therefore, it is of vital importance that all agencies working with victims of CCE take a unified approach. This necessitates being transparent with young people around how their information will be shared, protecting that information with high standards of confidentiality, and ensuring that any information that is shared is used in a way that safeguards and protects young people. Furthermore, it is important that multi-agency forums where information is shared are tightly governed, and led by those who prioritise the safeguarding of young people who have been exploited. A commitment to a public health approach to tackling SYV is required by all. The flexibility in the way in which charities such as TCS and their services like SCARPA can work with young people enables them to build strong relationships and levels of trust that may be difficult for statutory agencies to achieve. As noted, (see 5.3.1) this can result in information being disclosed to SCARPA that would be less likely to be revealed to social workers, police officers and other statutory agencies. It is vital therefore, that third sector organisations can work in a multi-agency sphere where they feel confident about sharing information. Better sharing of information can ensure both statutory and third sector workers understand more about the context in which they are working. Furthermore, it can help to keep both young people and practitioners safer and ultimately allow agencies to work collaboratively together to prevent and reduce the harms SYV and CCE have on young people, their families, and communities.

5.4.3 Taking an evidence-informed approach.

Stakeholders emphasised in interviews that it is essential that interventions to tackle CCE and SYV are evidence-informed and monitored for their effectiveness. They expressed concerns that across the sector, bold claims were being made about the effectiveness of interventions such as lived experience mentoring where, as the literature review presented above (see 4.3.10) indicates, the evidence base for this is mixed. Research highlights the need for lived-experience mentors to have the right qualities and motivations to become a mentor, and that they receive the necessary training and supervision (Youth Endowment Fund, 2023d; Dolan et al., 2011; McMellon et al., 2016). Furthermore, the complexity of needs of victims of CCE, as is illustrated by the young people engaging with SCARPA, could indicate that a specialist practitioner in this area would be necessary. SCARPA Newcastle demonstrates that strong levels of trust can be built between professionals and young people even when they are very differently positioned in terms of race, religion, gender, and experiences of

violence and exploitation. Indeed, this was recognised as sometimes being an advantage, particularly in relation to gender:

> "A lot of them struggle with men and authority and communicating effectively with them… they definitely feel safer with women, in schools they are much better with female members of staff… with county lines, exploitation, its predominantly men" – Stakeholder 4.

The findings in this study challenge claims that have been made in prior research about the importance of matching mentors and mentees based on shared background factors (Gaffney, Jolliffe and White, 2022). The research with SCARPA indicates that it is the *quality* of the engagement with the young person that is critical rather than the positionality of the mentor/practitioner. Quality engagement can be achieved even with the 'hardest to reach' young people, although it requires transparency, consistency, flexibility, high levels of contact, and a considerable amount of time.

Concerns were also voiced around the extensive use of diversionary activities with young people who are impacted by SYV and CCE and the overstatement of what these can achieve:

> "A lot of focus on diversionary activities which might just be a quick fix, signing them up to a football club is not tackling the underlying factors, it's a positive factor for the young person, it absolutely has its benefits, but it won't stop them from being exploited, it's not addressing the underlying factors of what is really going on, which is what we try to focus on" – Stakeholder 2.

> "If you put quick fixes in you might see some success and them not being part of those groups for a short period of time but then what you might see is them attach onto a new group, because the needs are still there" – Stakeholder 2.

As demonstrated in the literature review above (see 4.3.9), existing research and evidence around the effectiveness of leisure/enrichment/sporting activities for young people impacted by CCE and SYV is mixed. Indeed, stakeholders emphasised the importance of avoiding unsubstantiated claims being made in this area as well as the gathering of more knowledge about what is effective in responding to

and reducing exploitation and violence. Stakeholders stressed how this needs to be an ongoing process of learning from young people about the interventions that are most helpful for them.

Furthermore, the findings in this project made clear that when working with young people who may have faced years of grooming, exploitation, and trauma, there is no easy or 'quick fix' solution. Interventions need to be of the highest quality and targeted around addressing the root causes of young people's exploitation. Yet, these kinds of interventions take significant amounts of time and investment in individual young people. It is crucial therefore, that interventions in this area are not time limited. This presents a significant challenge to voluntary sector agencies however, who often only receive funding for one year at a time and are expected to demonstrate measurable outcomes for young people during this time frame:

> "Three years of funding would be a lot better, but even that, if you think that it can take one year to get a relationship, its hard being in the voluntary sector and managing that" – Stakeholder 1.

> "You want to save them, you want them out of the 'gangs', you want them in education, but it just doesn't work like that, well it can, but it takes a long time, and I think you've just got to be conscious this isn't quick work, you've got to have that long-term view… It's just little steps, and people want the big steps really quickly" – Stakeholder 2.

It also necessarily limits the numbers of young people SCARPA can work with at any one time. Indeed, due to the intensive nature of the intervention work, to work with higher numbers of young people without a considerable increase in funding would likely reduce the quality of support provided to service users. While emphasising its value, stakeholders acknowledged that with its current approach, SCARPA was not "keeping up with the scale of the problem" – Stakeholder 3.

Stakeholders reasoned that the intensive work SCARPA does with young people who are already involved in 'gangs', CCE and SYV, needs to be supplemented by more preventative work with those young people who are on the periphery of these activities and/or are at risk of exploitation. Intensive one-to-one support is also effective with this group to prevent their engagement with 'gangs' and illegal activities and direct them towards more positive activities. Stakeholders were critical that the work in the sector overall was still too reactive, and that more investment was required in youth

services and early interventions. Undoubtedly, this would need to be combined with a range of structural changes for young people. As one stakeholder summarised:

> "Social mobility being something that exists, meaningful opportunities for young people, mental health services without huge waiting lists, more youth work. If young people had support with early life vulnerabilities, they wouldn't necessarily be seeking out gangs" – Stakeholder 5.

6. Conclusions

SYV and CCE are of huge national concern. While the criminal exploitation of children is nothing new, a rapidly changing drug market, together with austerity, cuts to public services and a cost-of-living crisis have created a 'perfect storm' where there is a growing pool of extremely vulnerable young people who are being targeted for exploitation. This research, while limited in the number of respondents, has provided insight into the local drivers of SYV and CCE in Newcastle and the Northeast of England. It has also evaluated the work of The Children's Society's SCARPA service in supporting young people impacted by SYV and CCE. In the process, and when contextualised against the Pathfinder research, it has allowed a more detailed understanding of the best approaches to tackling these issues and how practice across the sector can be further developed.

This research indicates that while drug dealing models might be more localised in Newcastle and surrounding areas and may not therefore always meet the definition of 'county lines', it should not be assumed that there are not significant issues around CCE in the region. Even if they are not crossing county boundaries, young people are being exploited to transport and distribute drugs within the region and are experiencing high levels of harm and violence associated with these activities. Newcastle and the Northeast of England have some of the highest levels of child poverty, looked after children, and permanently excluded pupils in the country (Soppitt et al., 2022; ONS, 2023b), resulting in many children being vulnerable to exploitation. Exploitation of vulnerable young people in Newcastle was also exposed through operation Sanctuary, which in 2014 identified 278 victims and over 400 perpetrators of CSE. While significant progress has been made in uncovering and recognising exploitation in the city, it is notable that some of the findings from operation Sanctuary correlate with the current picture of CCE activity in the city.

Indeed, the small number of stakeholders interviewed for this study expressed concerns regarding the numbers of very young children being targeted for exploitation in the region, as well as the increasingly online dimension to these activities where young people become drawn to 'gangs' and violence through glamourised images through social media (this was also evidenced in Soppitt et al.'s 2022 study). Research in the Northeast confirms data from national research which demonstrates that those young people who are victims of CCE are often those who have experienced poverty, ACEs.

Furthermore, through experiences of mental illness, learning difficulties, hate crimes, disconnect with families and wider communities, and/or some other form of isolation, many young people are seeking a sense of belonging in their lives which is something that exploiters can take advantage of. This research highlights that young unaccompanied asylum-seeking males can be particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation and increases in the numbers resettling in the Northeast could potentially influence the current picture of CCE and SYV in the region.

6.1. Good practices

Throughout this project we have witnessed firsthand some of the excellent work undertaken by SCARPA) with young people experiencing CCE/CSE and involved in SYV and as a result, have identified several good practice areas:

Good Practice 1: Approach to case management – SCARPA's case management approach, which builds trust and confidence with service users who are particularly hard to engage with given the level of exploitation, coercion, control, manipulation, and abuse of trust many have experienced, should be applauded. In addition, there are a high number of service users who have experienced trauma and/or ACEs. The service users have often developed a considerable level of cynicism of professional agencies – either because of what they perceive as their controlling behaviour, or as a result of feeling let down by previous engagement (or lack thereof). This context makes the achievements of SCARPA even more impressive, the most significant of which is that the young people working with them have such trust in the case manager and wider team that they feel comfortable to make peer referrals.

Good Practice 2: Peer referral – Following on from the above, the level of trust and confidence that the young people have developed with SCARPA has led to several peer referrals. Again, peer referrals, and SCARPA's willingness to embed this model of referrals should be applauded**.** For young people to have an avenue to seek help and support for their peers which avoids engagement with statutory agencies – many of whom have a particular limited agenda, time scale/capacity, and/or long waiting lists – is undoubtedly helping vulnerable young people who otherwise may not have received the timely support they need.

Good Practice 3: Approach to information sharing – SCARPA have developed a way of working with young people which allows them to understand the implications of any disclosures, and how and where this information may be shared. Importantly they involve young people from the outset in discussions around informed consent and information sharing, which is both valued by service users, and identified as good practice by other frontline stakeholders.

Good Practice 4: Approach to Age – The transition from childhood to adulthood is particularly challenging for many young people. This challenge is exacerbated by a system in which young people are typically moved to adult services and/or are no longer supported, once they turn 18. Yet, the factors affecting the young person at 17 maybe no different at 19. SCARPA recognise this and while in the main, are working with young people under the age of 18, they don't stop working with them once they reach this pivotal age. By ensuring that they continue working with young people until the time is right for that individual, rather than the arbitrary 'line in the sand' of a birthday, this becomes a real strength in their approach and in maintaining the trust and relationships that are so evident between young people and their case manager.

Good Practice 5: Time – Building on from GP4, SCARPA's case management approach makes clear to service users that they will invest the amount of time necessary and proportionate to supporting them. Most interventions from the statutory and third sector, are time sensitive and rarely extend beyond six months. Yet for young service users, the complexities of their lives and the wider challenges they face often require more time that existing funding models are rarely able to accommodate. While undoubtedly an intensive and potentially more expensive model in the short-term, the long-term benefits of putting in more time at the outset, will reduce the 'yo-yo-ing' in and out of interventions that we often witness with service users of this kind.

Good Practice 6: Targeted work – SCARPA recognise that diversionary activities and generic youth work are unlikely to result in long-term change for those young people who have already been exploited, groomed, and traumatised. Consequently, once they have built a relationship with young people, they prioritise targeting young people's exploitation, grooming and involvement in violence. Utilising a 'knowledge is power' approach, SCARPA practitioners help young people gain more knowledge and understanding of the power imbalances within their personal relationships and the realities and costs of involvement in 'gangs' and violence. This helps to empower young people to

make better decisions that will keep them safe or at least significantly lower their risks of further harm and exploitation. SCARPA are realistic about young people's situations and recognise that imposing unrealistic goals could be counter-productive and set young people up to fail. Subsequently, while many young people do eventually leave 'gangs' and criminality behind following involvement with TCS (SCARPA), they work collaboratively with young people to set goals focused on *harm reduction* in their current situations. Ultimately this approach keeps young people safer in the short-term.

Good Practice 7: Approach to 'Child First' – SCARPA treat young people with respect and their approach to any criminal activities young people have been involved in, is to condemn the *actions* rather than the *individual*, by recognising that these have often taken place in situations over which young people have very little control. They take a trauma-informed approach which accurately reflects the young person's status as a victim of grooming and exploitation, and protection of the individual young person is their ultimate priority. While this certainly demonstrates a commitment to a 'Child First' approach, SCARPA manage to achieve this while still respecting that the young people, they work with certainly do not see themselves as children and might find this patronising. Indeed, many are close to transitioning to adulthood, and all having inhabited a world of coercion, control, and violence, experiencing, and dealing with hardships that most adults have never had to face. SCARPA seeks to empower young people by giving them choices as to such things as where they want to engage with SCARPA, what activities they'd like to do, what they'd like to discuss, what goals they want to set, if/when they want to make a disclosure that SCARPA would act upon, and when they'd like to end their engagement. As well as being hugely important for building trusting relationships, such emphasis on working *with* and not *on behalf* of the young person appears to be particularly valued by young people who feel a sense of being able to regain some of the control they have lost.

Good Practice 8: Support for families – Young people's experiences of exploitation and violence also impact upon parents/guardians, other siblings, and/or wider family members. Consequently, SCARPA exemplify good practice in also seeking to enhance family members' knowledge and understanding of processes of grooming and exploitation and the situations young people may have found themselves in. As well as working with young people and their families to mitigate the risks young people are facing, SCARPA help to provide greater understanding of these risks and *why* young people may be exhibiting challenging behaviours through which family relationships can be improved. Furthermore,

SCARPA provides emotional and practical support that can relieve some of the pressure's families face, which can also contribute to strengthening family relationships. Again, this acts as a key protective factor against further exploitation and involvement in 'gang' activities including SYV.

6.2. Recommendations

This research demonstrates that the work of the SCARPA service has considerable impact on the lives of the small number of young service users it supports. It provides valuable emotional and practical support to young people and their families who often would not engage with other services. Through their targeted work with young people, and at a pace and using methods suited to the individual young person, they gradually help them become aware of the grooming and exploitation they have experienced. As such, these young people become empowered to make safer choices. Examples of this include choosing to walk away from confrontations, reducing drug use, no longer carrying weapons, and exiting 'gangs'. However, as stakeholders acknowledge, despite the impact on individual young people, their peers and families, this small scale, targeted work is not addressing the sheer scale of the issues surrounding CCE and SYV in the Northeast region. Yet to work with larger numbers of young people would prevent SCARPA from carrying out the time-intensive, needs-directed work that is essential for young people who have faced years of grooming, exploitation, and trauma.

Recommendation 1: SCARPA should explore how they can expand the breadth of their intervention without losing quality. This will likely rely on additional funding and resources.

SCARPA puts significant emphasis on taking time to build quality, trusting relationships with young people testament to which is the number of peer referrals into the service. The difference in positionality between the SCARPA case manager and young service users challenges the assumption that a successful mentor-mentee relationship requires a shared background. Instead, key to building these relationships is transparency, consistency, flexibility, and high levels of contact in addition to the skill of the practitioner in engaging and listening to young people. Indeed, it should be acknowledged that in interviews with a small number of young people when discussing what they liked about the service, they primarily referred to value they placed upon the relationship with the individual case manager rather than SCARPA as a whole. While the numbers of young people directly interviewed was small in this study, this does raise concerns over how central the individual practitioner might be to

the success of the service, especially as there is currently only one case manager conducting this work with young people who are victims of CCE.

Recommendation 2: SCARPA should examine the sustainability of their service, in particular there should be long-term planning and resourcing around the case manager role.

Engagement with SCARPA helped young people to recognise their exploitation and make safer choices. The few young people interviewed by researchers could clearly articulate this and had become more sceptical about the value of being part of 'gangs', selling drugs, and carrying weapons. However, while they seemed to be increasingly sure that their future did not involve being a 'gang' member and participating in illegal activities, what would form the basis of their identity instead was less clear. As research has found, if opportunities that might support a new identity such as gaining legitimate employment and/or the formation of supportive pro-social relationships are limited within an individual's immediate environment, then this necessarily restricts feelings of hope and limits the pro-social identity they can envision (Rumgay, 2004; Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph, 2002). In addition to empowering young people to realise the dangers of basing their identity upon 'gangs' and violence, it is also crucial therefore, that they can find legitimate opportunities upon which to base a different identity. While the case manager explores education and employment opportunities with every young person engaged with SCARPA, as shown within this research, there are often a range of wider personal and/or structural factors which act as significant barriers. These can include, but are not limited to, factors such as immigration status and criminal records. Outcomes data indicates, therefore, that only 11 service users were successfully supported to access employment or educational opportunities during their time with SCARPA. Other organisations specially focused on helping young people to access employment, training and education might be better placed to help young people identify these opportunities. However, many young people expressed only wanting to engage with TCS (SCARPA). This might therefore be an area SCARPA could consider developing further.

Recommendation 3: SCARPA should explore how they might further assist young people to access opportunities upon which to build a pro-social identity and a sense of 'hope' for the future.

The approach adopted by SCARPA accurately reflects the service user's status as a victim. A strong child-centred, trauma-informed approach is taken which involves collaboration with young people. At

the same time, SCARPA aims to recognise the very adult world young people have often been inhabiting and the conflict this brings to their identity as a child to help them regain some of the control that they have lost from their exploitation. It is promoting a sense of respair in young people who have known considerable despair. The 'Child First' approach, which now forms the YJB's overarching 'vision' for youth justice, is fraught with contradictions. While many statutory agencies are advocating a 'Child First' approach, few can deliver upon its core principles in practice given the tight legal parameters in which they operate. However, there is clearly more that could be done. SCARPA, have carefully navigated this space, recognising how many of the young people, while transitioning to adulthood and adult services, have not had a childhood. The level of coercion, exploitation, and control many of these vulnerable young people have experienced has meant their ability to make decisions, make new friends, and build pro-social relationships has been severely limited and in effect their innocence cut short. Consequently, their barometers as to what is 'acceptable' and 'normal' has become increasingly shaped by the older peers and 'gang' members who recruited or coerced them into this life.

This research indicates that this approach is not currently being replicated across the sector and there is evidence that victims of exploitation are still being criminalised for their involvement in situations which are beyond their control. Furthermore, the high levels of harm they have experienced continue to be ignored. Criminalising young people in these situations is ineffective and does not adhere to a public health approach to tackling the root causes of SYV. Furthermore, a key element of this safeguarding approach, as identified by SCARPA, is to be transparent with young people around how their information will be shared and to ensure that sensitive data/intel is protected. However, this research indicates that these quality standards are not always replicated across the sector and in some instances, information being shared between agencies is being used to subsequently criminalise vulnerable young people. Not only can this serve as a barrier to building trust with young people, but it can prevent greater sharing of information and collaborative working in this area.

Recommendation 4: Agencies working with young victims of CCE need to take a coherent 'Child First'/'Friendly' approach which aims to safeguard these young people from further harm.

This recommendation is probably the most challenging and beyond the direct reach of SCARPA. Indeed, until all agencies adopt an approach that recognises the vulnerability and victimisation that

many young people involved in SYV have experienced, the sector will continue to be challenged. This necessitates a collective understanding of and a sector-wide implementation of 'Child First' principles. A 'Child First' approach needs to also reflect the very adult style life and environment these young people have experienced while also ensuring the appropriate safeguarding measures. Currently agencies are working to many different objectives and even when they profess to be 'Child First', their frequent position as a justice-led intervention often conflicts with this philosophy. If we want young people to come forward and engage, they must believe they will be supported, their victimisation recognised, and appropriate inventions put in place prior to considering any criminal or anti-social behaviour they have engaged in. First and foremost, young people need to be protected.

Recommendation 5: Multi-agency forums where information is shared need to be tightly governed and led by those who prioritise the safeguarding of young people who have been exploited.

If agencies could develop a clear operating model to be used across services and with all young people who have been affected by SYV and CCE, which refrains from the criminalisation and adultification of young people and rather recognises their vulnerability and victimisation, it would reduce the risks of further harm. There is much that could be learnt from international models such as the Estonian 'Child Friendly' approach. A new model would also require a radical review of safeguarding and the specific contextual risks. For young people currently, models of safeguarding typically operate in schools, in the home, in youth clubs, and organised public events. What is lacking is a safeguarding approach that adequately protects young people when they are with their friends playing in the streets, walking home from school, and particularly when they are online. In other words, we have left young people vulnerable in the public spaces that surround their everyday life; in the digital, as well as the concrete streets.

This research project with SCARPA supports conclusions at the end of the literature review that, to help young people who are victims of exploitation and may have been involved with 'gangs', violence, and crime, requires significant time and investment in individual young people. It is important therefore, that interventions are not time or age limited. Indeed, young people can still be victims of exploitation beyond the age of 18. When compared to statutory agencies, the third sector is particularly far more well-placed to deliver flexible, needs-driven, and intensive interventions. This work can make a powerful contribution to tackling issues of SYV and CCE. The trust that can be built

with victims of CCE by third sector practitioners can allow them greater understanding of the context in which they are working and, where information can be shared *safely*, this can allow both statutory and third sector agencies to work more effectively together to make a difference in this area. Caution must be exercised, however, as evidence shows that not all interventions being offered by third sector organisations are currently taking such a strong approach as SCARPA and may have a weaker evidence base.

What is very clear is that the nature and type of harm these young people have experienced can be very damaging and have significant, long-term impacts. For this reason, it is crucial that any interventions and approaches adopted or introduced to work with victims of CCE and/or young people involved in SYV are carefully monitored and evaluated. There is potential for interventions to cause further harm should they not be well planned and considerate of the experiences of service users. Equally, they have the potential to be truly life changing. We would advocate a co-production model where service users' voices are evident in the design, development, and delivery of any interventions. Ensuring that an on-going evaluation strategy is introduced alongside work with young people impacted by SYV/CCE would allow SCARPA to ensure the currency and value of their work and that that this continues to appropriately respond to the needs of the service users. This is particularly important in an arena that is constantly evolving and changing.

Recommendation 6: Interventions in the areas of SYV and CCE should be evidence-informed, monitored for their effectiveness, and driven by the needs of service users.

The evidence collected for this research suggests the model that SCARPA have developed and crafted is having considerable impact on the lives of the small number of young service users it support. Success, in this area is often defined by short term 'primary' desistance measures. Yet, as demonstrated, this is often neither attainable nor sustainable for young people at this stage of their lives. What TCS have achieved is identifying realistic and more intermediate goals for the young people they work with which help them to move towards a deeper and more personal changes. This involves developing individual support plans which are cognisant of young persons lived experiences, and ones that are not time sensitive. They are promoting and developing a model that encourages respair. We would encourage SCARPA to promote and celebrate this further and to challenge some of the time-sensitive, age restrained models that exist.

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