

*'We have only just got started, do you know what  
I mean, that's what it feels like to us'*

An evaluation of 'Your Own Enterprise': an  
intervention for young people on the edge of  
serious and organised crime

Final report

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## Acknowledgements

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*Children as young as 12 are being exploited by gangs to transport drugs into county markets, store and distribute them to customers (NCA, 2017, p.33)*

### 1.1: Background

The Government strategy, which aims to tackle the threat of serious and organised crime, was launched in 2013 (HM Government, 2013). The strategy has four objectives including Prevent ‘preventing people from engaging in serious and organised crime’ (HM Government, 2015, p.3)

As part of a preventative strategy, existing local interventions such as Troubled Families programmes can be used to divert and support young people who are at risk of becoming involved in serious and organised crime. It is of importance that the local response is tailored to local problems, makes use of existing programmes of intervention and involves all relevant partners working together (HM Government, 2015, p.4).

The Prevent Guide (HM Government, 2015) sets out identified risk factors for involvement in serious and organised crime:

Criminality – including prolific offending at a young age and gang involvement

Ability – individuals with specialist skills and access to information, goods and services

Networks – family members involved in crime, intimate relationships with criminals, incarceration

Identity – lacking sense of belonging (especially for young people with disruptive upbringing), transitional periods, pro-criminal attitudes, power and status.

#### Young people as victims of exploitation

More recent publications focus on county lines *exploitation*, recognising that many of the young people involved are in an exploitative situation (Home Office, 2017; 2018). Young people vulnerable to exploitation share some of the risk factors set out above:

- Prior experience of neglect and physical and/or sexual abuse
- Lack of a stable home environment
- Social isolation and social difficulties
- Economic vulnerability
- Insecure accommodation
- Connections with other people in gangs
- Physical or intellectual disability
- Mental health and substance misuse issues
- Being in care – disrupted placements

The independent anti-slavery Commissioner Kevin Hyland suggests that county lines exploitation should be recognised and young people involved in the trafficking of drugs should be seen as victims and offered support accordingly (Home Office, 2018). A pen portrait of criminal exploitation where young people are forced to take part in gang-related criminality is set out in a typology of modern slavery offences based on analysis of 328 confirmed UK cases (Cooper et al, 2017; p.36):

## **PEN PORTRAIT**

Victims are forced to take part in gang-related criminality, most commonly relating to drugs but also including knives and firearms. This involves what is known as ‘county lines’, which is the police term for urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas and market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone lines or “deal lines”. Gangs force victims who are often children and vulnerable young people to move drugs and money to and from the urban area. Victims generally do not live with offenders and are often missing from their home area. Victims are often groomed, meaning that offenders have a high degree of emotional control over them. Other forms of control used are violence and/or threats of violence. Victims may also be forced into child sexual exploitation.

In the cases of criminal exploitation, offenders were usually adult males and the victims predominantly a mix of male and female children mostly from the UK. It is thought that White British children are most likely to be targeted because gangs consider them more likely to evade police attention (Home Office, 2017).

### [Employment and enterprise skills](#)

According to a study by Harris and colleagues (2011, p.i), one of four key motivating factors for gang involvement is ‘the need and/or desire to make money’. The opportunity to make money through legitimate means may therefore provide an alternative to, and potential exit from, gang membership. However, gangs can also provide a sense of belonging, in some cases even a surrogate family, so attention needs to be on both aspects if young people are to be encouraged to desist (Young, Fitzgibbon and Silverstone, 2013).

A criminal record and incarceration can limit employment opportunities outside a gang. In addition, labelling young people as criminals can affect the perception of them by others (van der Geest, 2016). For young people who have been involved with the criminal justice system, there may be interruption to their education, which further disadvantages them. Opportunities to develop skills relevant to employment will be essential for such young people.

## [1.2: Interventions – protecting vulnerable young people](#)

Successful violence prevention programmes identified by Cox et al (2016) involved enhancement of protective factors, particularly skill development. However, group programmes targeting high-risk young people were ineffective in reducing violent behaviour supporting findings that peer influences can reduce the intended outcomes of interventions and in some cases lead to negative outcomes (Dishion, Dodge and Lansford, 2008). It is perhaps not surprising that placing troubled and vulnerable young people together reduces the benefits of interventions, yet many services and agencies do just that as they remove young people from the mainstream and segregate them in groups. For example, young offender institutions or alternative education. Hemphill and Smith (2010, p. vi) write in their overview of evidence on approaches to prevent violence among young people in Australia:

*Consistently negative effects have been found for prevention approaches that involve grouping high-risk antisocial youth together in groups, programs or classrooms.*

Group work with vulnerable young people needs to consider the ages of the individuals, the mix of the group and the setting. Ang and Hughes’ (2002) meta-analysis of group-based interventions found that skills training provided in groups composed exclusively of antisocial participants produced

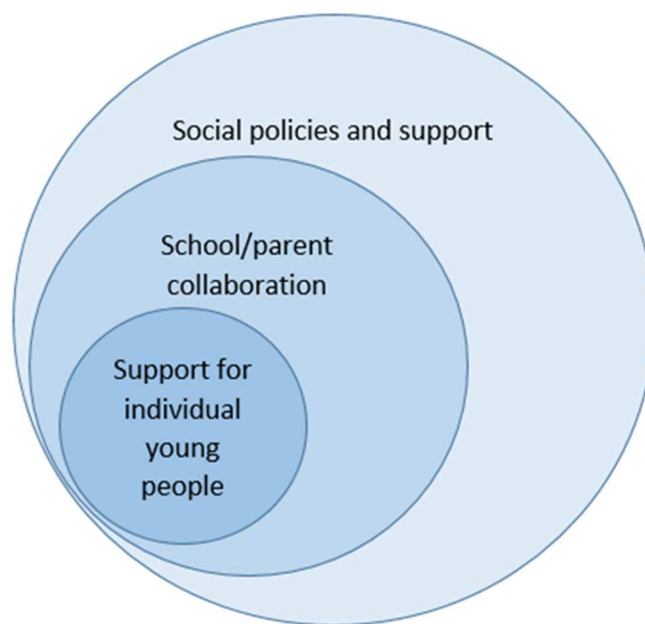
smaller benefits. The length of time spent within a group and the expertise of the facilitator can also influence opportunities for ‘peer contagion’ (Dishion et al, 2008, p.8).

Interventions appear to be most effective when risks and protective factors are targeted at multiple levels, i.e. taking an ecological view of the behaviour. This entails targeting the individual young person, the family, peer group, school, neighbourhood and wider social policy and legal frameworks (Hemphill and Smith, 2010).

Starting at the macro-level, reduction of poverty and marginalisation can be effective in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour (Toumbourou et al., 2007). Within schools, increased communication between teachers and parents or carers to avoid exclusions, offer of structured activities, social development training and bullying prevention can all help divert young people from crime and violence (Farrell & Flannery, 2006). Within families the quality of relationships influence a young person’s behaviour. Parenting courses can support carers to build positive relationships with the young people in their care and encourage wider social ties. Finally, individual young people should be supported to develop a sense of belonging, self-efficacy and self-worth (Figure 1).

The aim of the ‘Your Own Enterprise’ does just that. Through a programme of support and learning, vulnerable young people who are at the edge of involvement in serious and organised crime and are involved with YOT, are encouraged to develop new skills, thereby increasing their sense of self-worth as they see the benefits of achieving, pro-social behaviour and interaction with business partners.

*Figure 1 Interventions need to be targeted at multiple levels*



### 1.3: The ‘Your Own Enterprise’ project

Through funding from the Home Office, Your Own Place, a community interest company, developed an intervention for young people in Norfolk who were at risk of being drawn into or who were

already involved in serious and organised crime. Your Own Place commissioned The Participation People<sup>1</sup> to deliver and manage the work with young people.

The project's strategy was to support young people to develop enterprise skills in collaboration with local business partners. Young people aged 16-20 years were referred to and identified as suitable through a multiagency panel. Links were developed with business partners through social networking by the project manager. There were, therefore, several aspects to the project proposed including:

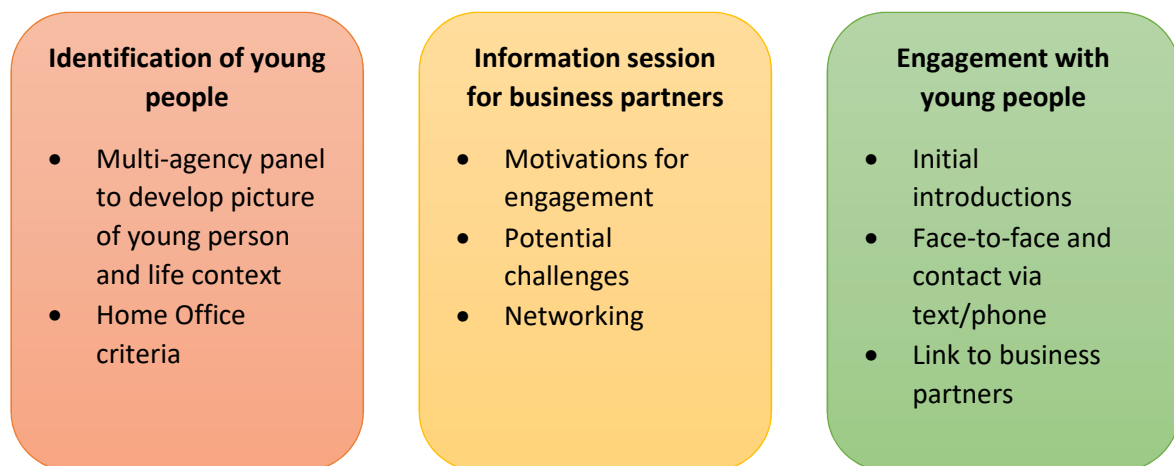
- Initial identification of the right young people for the project through multiagency panels and information sharing (police, youth offending team, children's services, Home Office and project team)
- Identification of suitable local business partners
- Build relationship with individual young people through support
- Workshops with young people and business partners

#### 1.4: The project stages

Prior to the first multiagency panel selection meeting, partners worked to develop an information sharing agreement which was essential to obtain enough information both for selecting the right young people for the project but also in order to manage risks.

The project aim was then to progress in stages as demonstrated below (Figure 2). The multi-agency panel continued to meet until October, in order to continue to recruit young people to the project.

Figure 2 The project stages



#### The identification of young people at multiagency panels

Selection of potential participants to the programme involved a multi-agency deep-dive panel that included representation from the Home Office, Children's Services, The Youth Offending Team, Your Own Place, The Participation People, and police.

Twelve young people were referred to the panel from the Youth Offending Team (YOT) and the panel collaborated to determine the risk of involvement in serious and organised crime or those

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<sup>1</sup> The Participation people is a specialist youth participation company which delivers training for young people through collaboration and empowerment <http://www.participationpeople.com/>

already involved in serious and organised crime. For confidentiality, each young person was given a letter of the alphabet so that names were not used.

Four deep-dive panels were held and ten<sup>2</sup> young people identified as suitable for the intervention.

Each young person was discussed in relation to the following:

- Social care involvement
- Offending history
- Aspirations and motivations
- Mental health issues
- Education, training and experience
- Friends and family networks
- Housing

With input from all agencies present at the panel, it was possible to build a picture of the young person's life experiences and current circumstances, including involvement in serious and organised crime. Panel participants then discussed each young person's eligibility for the project against nine criteria. The criteria were based on the Home Office (2017; 2018) identified risk factors:

1. Young person in transition period
2. Part of a sub-culture
3. Seeking status due to sense of disempowerment
4. Being victim of exploitation
5. Financial difficulties
6. Exhibits pro-criminal attitudes
7. Criminal associates through family and peers
8. Known to YOT, probation and/or children's services
9. Housing difficulties

It is salient to note that young people did not have to be assessed to meet a certain number of the criteria as the project aimed to be bespoke enough to fit if only some criteria were met. However, it was important that the criteria defined by the Home Office were met (involvement or at risk of involvement in serious and organised crime). Initially, the age limit was 16 years but due to a lack of suitable young people referred for the project the age was lowered to 15 years and one young person aged 15 was recruited.

Once a young person's suitability for the project had been agreed the participation worker made contact with the young person, usually with the help of their social worker or YOT worker, and met with them jointly to explain the project. If the young person was interested in engaging with the project, the participation worker would meet with them on a one-to-one basis initially with a view to engaging them in group work once a relationship had been built. As part of the engagement strategy, different activities were offered including support with moped training (Compulsory Basic Training), gym sessions and social activities such as meals out.

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<sup>2</sup> An additional young person joined the project later but not as a referral through the youth offending team and was therefore not discussed with the multi-agency panel. However, the Information Sharing Agreement was used to liaise with police and YOT to gain relevant information and assess risks.



## Information and training session for business partners

There was one introductory workshop for business partners run by The Participation People. Six participants attended and they were able to explore their motivations for involvement as well as the challenges they anticipated. There were group discussions about possible solutions to challenges and activities to bring to the fore assumptions they may have about the young people and an exercise in active listening. In addition, business partners had opportunities to ask questions and network.

Several business partners had experience of starting up a business. For some that was a recent experience but others had started up some time ago. There were various motivations for the business partners' involvement in the project. Likewise, there were also different challenges anticipated, some due to their own circumstances and others due to the vulnerability and life experiences of the young people they hoped to engage with (Table 1).

Table 1 Motivations and challenges (business partners)

Motivations	Challenges
'Realising untapped potential'	'Lack of engagement'
'Creating new businesses'	'Poor previous engagement'
'Fun and laughter'	'Integrity'
'Meeting new people'	'Boundaries in relationships'
'Sharing experiences'	'Life getting in the way'
'Caring'	'Lack of empathy/connection'
'Being an active citizen'	'Behaviour'
'Empowering others'	'Managing expectations'
'A new challenge'	'How to excite young people about business'
'Turning ideas into reality'	

## 1.5: The evaluation

The aim of the evaluation was to provide a deeper analysis of if, and how, vulnerable young people can be encouraged to engage in developing enterprise skills and whether such newly gained skills can divert them from the criminal justice system. Furthermore, it aimed to explore how an intense intervention can lead to young people's increased self-esteem and wellbeing. An additional aim was an exploration of multi-agency working and the views of stakeholders who worked alongside the young people (e.g. social workers, youth offending and probation workers) and local business partners.

The research questions were as follows:

- Does an intensive intervention which teaches enterprise skills result in overall positive employment and housing outcomes for young people at risk of involvement in serious crime?
  - Does the intervention impact on young people's self-esteem and wellbeing?
- What do young people think of the intervention?
- Do young people get diverted from crime during the intervention?
- Do stakeholders notice any qualitative differences in behaviours of the young people?

- Is there a perceived increase in partnership working and intelligence sharing between agencies during the intervention?

## Methodology

The mixed methods study took place over nine months between July 2017 and March 2018.

The study methodology included:

### *Interviews with stakeholders*

The views of eight business partners were accessed during either the business workshop or one-to-one interviews, two of those via telephone. In addition, telephone interviews were undertaken with six practitioners from different agencies involved in either referrals to the multi-agency selection panel, attending the panel or working with the young people.

### *Interviews with young people*

Four of the eleven young people who had been offered participation in the intervention were interviewed face-to-face.

### *Participant observation*

Researchers attended project board meetings, multi-agency deep-dive panels and a business workshop. Written notes were recorded.

### *Data analysis*

All transcribed data from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Wherever possible, direct quotes have been used to ensure rigour and present the voices of the participants. Analysis was aided by NVivo 11 software.

### *Ethical considerations*

The study abided by the guidelines for ethical practice from the British Sociological Association ([British Sociological Association, 2002](#)) and ethical approval was obtained from the School of Social Work, University of East Anglia ethics committee. All participants received clear information about the study, consented and all young people were debriefed and appropriate helplines were provided. In addition, young people were offered a £20 store voucher to compensate for their time.

### *Reporting the findings*

Steps were taken to preserve the anonymity of participants:

- Direct quotes do not identify the agency or business of the participants (identifiers are 'stakeholder' and 'business' respectively)
- Young people have not been identified by age, engagement level or any other characteristic (identifier is 'YP')

The following chapters present the findings of the current study and the report concludes with our recommendations:

**Chapter 2:** Your Own Enterprise – an evolving project

**Chapter 3:** Business partner involvement

**Chapter 4:** The young people

**Chapter 5:** Working together to support vulnerable young people

## Chapter 2: Your Own Enterprise – an evolving project

The findings presented in the following chapters are based on analysis of data from interviews and participant observation. Extensive use has been made of direct quotes from participants to add authenticity to the findings so that a clearer picture of the intervention process may emerge.

### 2.1: Understanding of the project

Stakeholders and young people differed in their understanding of the project. Referrers to the project understood that the focus would be on engagement between young people and business partners, including group work and mentoring. The young people viewed the project in terms of supportive mentoring and valued opportunities to try something different whilst being supported:

*I never really listened about it until I met them and they took me out for a meal, told me the things we can do and that. Then after that we went just looking at jobs and looking at this and that and I never thought I could do it by myself, it is hard but as I have got someone to help me, do you know what I mean, I will be able to get through it I reckon if I learn a bit more (YP)*

The process of referring to the panel was seen as thorough and the selection of appropriate young people robust due to the multi-agency approach (see section 1.4). As panel members expressed:

*I liked it; I thought it was very thorough. They gathered a lot of information; they sort of weighed it up. I thought it gave everyone an opportunity. It was nice to have everybody sat round the table to talk it through and to share, because obviously there were other agencies who were involved. So that was good, that sort of multi-agency approach to it and obviously we have a lot of information but there are other agencies that can also contribute to that so I thought it was really a very sound idea. I didn't really know what to expect. I knew that umm I was going to have to share information umm but, and I liked the way everyone was sort of given an opportunity to kind of share their thoughts about whether they thought this young person was right and it was very kind of yeah interactive and just made a nice difference... (Stakeholder)*

*Interesting at a lot of levels...it was interesting to hear the whole picture. The process was quite effective in getting all of those different strands together (Stakeholder)*

The initial project plan, as described above, proved difficult to deliver and the project organisers were sensitive to the need for the project to evolve to suit the young people and address potential risks to staff and other young people:

*I referred some of my young people on to sort of group work projects but those didn't happen just because I think from my understanding of the group dynamics it was better that some of them were worked in smaller groups. So I think it sort of changed a little bit as the project has gone on and maybe gone in a slightly different direction possibly... (Stakeholder)*

There was a sense of disappointment from one stakeholder that group work was not possible whilst acknowledging that bringing together a group of young people with such complex lives presented particular difficulties:

*...we had an idea that I thought the group work way of doing it would be good. I mean it has its own challenges when you get in that kind of, a group of young people who have those*

*kinds of issues in one small room kind of thing but it would have been, yeah it would have been good I suppose (Stakeholder)*

Stakeholders also recognised that there might be delays with the project as agencies become familiar with the remit of a new intervention:

*It always takes time I think with new projects or new ways of doing things to establish it with obviously like partners like ourselves, so if we all get to know, like front line workers get to know what it is and 'oh yes I know so and so would be right for that' (Stakeholder)*

It was at times difficult for stakeholders who referred young people to the project to keep up with changes:

*I feel a little bit like at some point things have been, promised is not the right word because nothing has been promised but things have been offered that haven't as yet umm – materialised. The project looks very different now to when we were first selling it to the young people and saying 'you know you will work with business partners and then they will be -' you know. For my young people that hasn't happened and it has been a bit sort of unclear at times and I have been unclear which means I haven't been able to share (Stakeholder)*

When little is happening, young people can become impatient, as described by a stakeholder:

*There was a period where nothing happened, and I think that can be really dangerous when you have got young people because if nothing is happening they go 'well what is the point' you know and they lose interest (Stakeholder)*

Young people also hear about projects from peers and can influence future take-up as one stakeholder noted:

*Word goes round among young people about what's on offer and what was good (Stakeholder)*

There were some communication issues and one stakeholder suggested that better communication with both stakeholders and young people would have made it easier to manage the young people's expectations. Such communication could be delivered through regular email updates or newsletters to everyone, even those marginally involved in the project:

*My concern was the project started and then there was a time where not a lot happened because I think it needed revisiting and maybe looking and doing things in a slightly different way. There was sort of a period where it went quiet and the young people were saying 'well actually what is happening?' and I couldn't answer that for them so umm that was a little bit frustrating in the middle (Stakeholder)*

Informing other professionals working with the young people could also benefit each young person as a positive record with the youth offending team would ultimately be an advantage for the young people. It would also mean that there was less duplication of activities:

*It would be good if we had slightly more information about what our young people were actually doing on a kind of weekly basis so you know whether we could have some kind of, not reporting system because that makes it sound like they are, you know Your Own Enterprise is reporting to us. Just kind of information...that helps with our plan and with our*

*aims towards persistence and just make sure that we are not doing the same thing as well*  
(Stakeholder)

In an attempt to improve information sharing and joint working, the project worker spent one day a week at the offices of the youth offending team.

There was an unavoidable change of project worker during the intervention period:

*There was the change of worker at short notice as well and that was a bit sort of like 'oh okay that's fine never mind you know things change'* (Stakeholder)

*So [first worker]<sup>3</sup> brought [new worker] in and introduced him and said that she was leaving and that [he] was taking over so it was a bit sort of like 'oh hello!'* (Stakeholder)

However, the new worker was well received by the young people and stakeholders and the change was ultimately seen as positive:

*The new worker, he is a hundred percent clear* (Stakeholder)

*We got along with him as soon as we met him* (YP)

It was also helpful that the worker who was organising the business partner involvement remained with the project and the young people had that continuity:

*[First worker], yes she was nice but [business partner worker] has been there for the stay as well so she is safe as fuck isn't it and yeah [new worker] has come on new and yeah [he] is safe as well* (YP)

It is interesting that all of the young people were male. Previous research has identified that young men value workers who have had similar experiences or come from similar areas as them (Featherstone et al, 2017). We also found that to be of some importance and it may have contributed to a smoother transition when the worker changed:

*He is from a similar area to me as well...so like, I get on with them, like they are from [city] and that and that is where I am from so I mean I get on with that, when we are talking about things and that so we can talk about places and weird stuff like that* (YP)

## 2.2: The evolving project

The project initially anticipated that 16 young people would be identified and invited to participate. However, it soon became clear that using the original referral and selection criteria the number would be smaller than 16. In the end, 13 young people were referred and eleven were considered suitable for the project. Ultimately, four young people, all male, engaged fully with the project (see Figure 3 below)

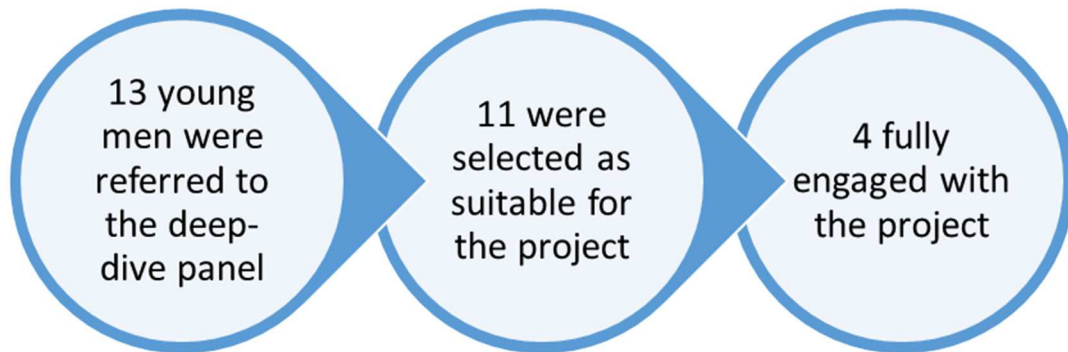
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<sup>3</sup> **First worker** – the project worker who was working on the project for the first six months.

**New worker** – the project worker who replaced the first worker and worked on the project for the final three months. **Business partner worker** – the worker who worked with the young people and the business partners throughout the project.

There were many reasons for non-engagement, including moving away from the area and being remanded in custody.

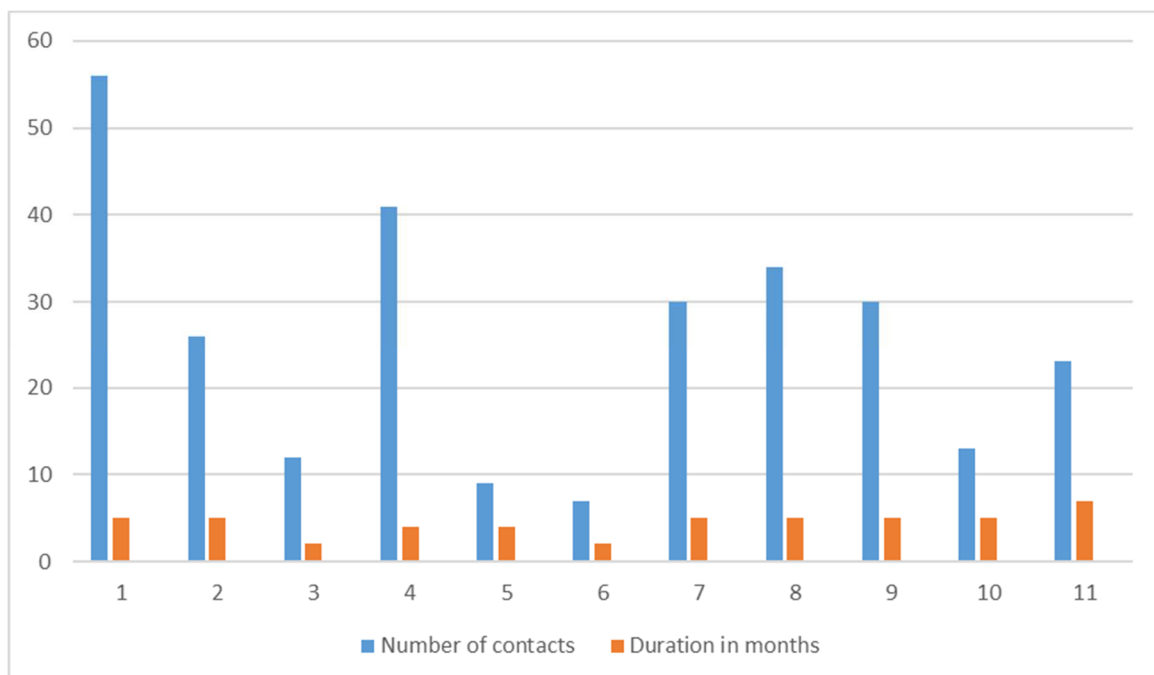
Figure 3 Referral, selection and engagement



The process of engagement with the young person usually started with a joint meeting with the young person, their main worker (from YOT or Children’s Services) and a Your Own Enterprise project worker. One-to-one engagement then and regular communication via text or phone calls followed.

The figure below (Figure 4) indicates the intensity of contact by the project worker related to the intervention. Some contacts were with social workers and other staff working with the young person and part of encouraging engagement. Recorded contacts range from 56 with one young person to just seven with another young person (mean 26 contacts). There is no clear link between the length of engagement (number of months) and the number of contacts. The highest number of contacts per month was eleven. The young people still engaging with the project had some of the highest contacts per month. It is not possible to ascertain if the higher number of contacts was because of engagement or if more intense contact had led to engagement.

Figure 4 Number of contacts during period of involvement



One of the planned workshops with young people took place with a view to subsequent workshops involving young people and the business partners. The initial workshop did not go as well as the project staff had hoped with just three young people attending. Some of the young people were under the influence of drugs and appeared intimidating to staff at the venue. It was not possible to have any meaningful engagement and the workshop was abandoned soon after it began. Previous research has found similar negative effects when grouping high-risk young people together (Hemphill and Smith, 2010). The stress of the workshop had an effect on one of the young people as he later disclosed to a worker:

*It was a big thing for him to go on. I think he was quite cross because he had said, you know 'I put myself out, I went along' and then it wasn't, you know, the other two young people, I think, were very disruptive and it all sort of went wrong... and he said 'I am not sitting here on my own I don't, you know this isn't what I signed up for' (Stakeholder)*

Speaking to some of the young people it was clear that workshops did not appeal to them and smaller group work was preferable as some lacked confidence when participating in larger groups. They had no interest in meeting other young people who participated in the project who they did not know:

*We don't really want to meet them [other young people] that's the truth (YP)*

*We are all doing our thing, we are getting something out of it, do you know what I mean? It might mess things up really wouldn't it, do you know what I mean if we don't get on with a boy or a person? (YP)*

Bearing in mind that many of the young people were involved in gangs and serious and organised crime it is not surprising that they did not want to risk meeting up with potential rivals. Workers were also aware that bringing vulnerable young people together in groups could have negative consequences both for individual young people but also for overall engagement:

*There are some young people that, especially with regards to the County Lines offending, are really concerned about meeting up with other young people and that they have kind of issues. [Young person] is one of those young people who is quite worried about umm bumping into other young people and people that know other people if you like (Stakeholder)*

Perhaps a more thorough initial consultation with young people can help projects deliver their intervention in a way that feels comfortable for the project participants.

In view of the difficulties encountered, a decision was made to work with smaller groups of young people who were known to each other and got on together and to undertake more one-to-one work. Some stakeholders felt that the initial aim of the project had been abandoned:

*I think it has almost turned into sort of a mentoring umm – and positive activities rather than the whole sort of business partners getting involved... (Stakeholder)*

*I am not sure that it matches exactly how we sold it to our young people so I think that has been why a couple of them have potentially disengaged because they have not had what they thought they were going to get from it (Stakeholder)*

The change from workshops to small group and individual work to strengthen relationships and engagement meant that the nature of involvement changed for business partners.

## Chapter 3: Business partner involvement

Interested business partners were invited to a workshop to explore the project and raise potential issues which may be of concern (see section 1.4). After the initial workshop, business partners waited to become engaged through liaison with the business partner worker on the project. Some of the business partners became involved with the project later and did not attend the initial workshop.

### 3.1: Becoming involved

As indicated above, there were many reasons why business partners wanted to be involved with the project and many were excited by the enthusiasm of the project lead and the opportunity to offer support to young people who may not have the same opportunities as they had:

*I am lucky I have a job that allows me to do it as well and so [business partner worker] came out to meet me, to talk to me a little more about it and as soon as I met her, I wanted to do it. She was sort of infectious and just made it sound, well it is such a fantastic idea so I thought 'well give it a go, why not?'* (Business)

The project ethos was particularly appealing:

*Their ethos is 'trying to help people to help themselves', yeah it is not about charity, it is not just about giving money to people or helping them, it is actually about giving them the means to build a better future for themselves and I think that is fantastic* (Business)

Previous enjoyable experiences in working with children or young people had also encouraged business partners to get involved with a new project:

*I have volunteered before and still do with the various sort of skills projects, so going into schools, in fact I have just been at a school talking about sort of setting up debating clubs and stuff like that, so I like to do that kind of thing* (Business)

*I am younger myself so I can respond to them quite well, I can also, I can relate to them* (Business)

In addition, reflecting on their own childhood and support business partners commented:

*I am very lucky. I grew up in a family where they did care where I was. They did care what I did at school, they encouraged me to go to University and you know I think now when you get a little bit older you realise how lucky you were and that is only by the grace of not being born into a different household really* (Business)

*I had issues through my childhood and through being maybe a little bit naughty and err [activity] helped me to get out of that and into sort of work and stopping me being silly so I sort of can see how it can change people* (Business)

Hence, a sense of wanting to give opportunities to young people who may not otherwise have access to work experience and environments was a strong motivator:

*I had parents who got me Saturday jobs where they worked and I, you learnt, you sort of learnt it by osmosis from your parents kind of thing but if you don't have that then...well you don't really stand a chance. You are not just going to magic it up overnight are you?* (Business)



The business workshop was the first formal introduction to the project for the business partners. They considered it useful and interesting, and it allowed some networking to take place:

*I thought it was really interesting...I thought there was a really interesting, really nice bunch of people. People with very different skills to mine...in fact I met a couple of contacts through that, so a chap who was there who I sort of know through work but I have kept in touch with since, so that was useful (Business)*

The workshop served to reassure business partners about the extent of their involvement with young people:

*They always made it very clear that they would be there, you know they would facilitate anything, it wasn't going to be someone left in a room with them or meeting them by yourself kind of thing which I think was a good thing. I perhaps wouldn't have been that comfortable with that as much (Business)*

### 3.2: Continued involvement

After the initial workshop, the business partners did not meet again as a group. It was therefore not possible to share any experiences of engagement and there was uncertainty as to whether anyone had started engaging with the young people:

*I think it would have been nice for like as a business partner to see the other business partners again and hear a bit more about how they were getting involved but as I say I am not sure that anyone has actually managed to get that involved that there would have been a huge amount to share I suppose (Business)*

Business partners waited patiently for involvement and while they were waiting, they were asked by the project organisers to produce a short video introducing themselves to the young people:

*I made a little video just outside shooting myself and sent it to her and she showed it to a couple of them who sort of said 'oh no she looks nice' (Business)*

The aim was to reassure the young people that the business partners were approachable and they hoped that a visual introduction might overcome any apprehension before they met in person. Business partners were sensitive to potential power imbalances when engaging with young people and did their best to reduce those:

*[Young person] is probably too young, naive to realise that this man in a suit suddenly paraded in front of him - albeit I deliberately, I don't think I wore a tie deliberately you know just to try and relax - umm you see the people he has seen in suits probably are the people that are imposed upon him (Business)*

Where engagement with business partners had taken place, business partners had seen a change in the young people:

*They have gone from people that are quite insecure, they lack confidence, they are quite err street chavvy...you know they came in and you could see them as sort of being a bit yobbie but actually you work with them, I talk to them and week on week they are here, they actually turn up earlier than their case workers. I mean there is still a long way to go and they still have a myriad of things that they need to overcome but it is, I have seen a massive difference in them so it has been good (Business)*

Business partners realised that their willing engagement with young people may have benefits that they did not initially consider – both for them and for the young people. Feedback from the project to the business partners suggested that the young people found it surprising that someone would take time to support them and help them develop new skills:

*I just genuinely think he couldn't quite get why, he was like 'but I have never met her, why does, why is she interested, why would she want to give up time to help?' and I think perhaps they are a bit cynical because they have not really encountered that before (Business)*

A stakeholder saw the skills that business partners were able to support young people with as essential if young people were to become re-engaged with education or training and diverted from their engagement with crime:

*I think this is first steps. This is what I would call 're-engagement' type provision where actually it is more about helping them with the skills such as being in an environment, or you know that social skills and softer skills stuff isn't it? Where it is actually about just the basics of turning up to somewhere at a certain time, all those kind of things of being able to self-regulate or manage behaviours (Stakeholder)*

For some business partners, involvement was a revelation and increased their social awareness. Involvement also increased their own sense of wellbeing:

*When they talk about these young people being in Norwich I think probably more people and more businesses and more individuals in cities like this need to actually look at what is happening in the city. You think it is a very sort of affluent place and you know low crime and stuff like that and then you meet these young people who have got real genuine serious issues and I don't think people know that happens here because for me it has actually been quite an eye-opener (Business)*

*I suppose it opened my eyes up to something I had never realised was a problem and that is that if you take a young person out of a broken family, or out of care, at a point where they should be standing on their own two feet, then they probably don't know how to write a cheque or how to pay a gas bill or how to pay an electricity bill. I find it an eye opener, you know, and I just thought yeah Christ it is something that you never think is needed (Business)*

*When I can interact with youngsters and see them get that passion for it and inspiration from it and from me delivering that is just like the best feeling in the world really (Business)*

One business partner expressed surprise at the lack of expectations project staff had from the young people and felt that higher expectations might lead to more productive engagement:

*Everyone was walking on eggshells around the young person – 'Be careful he's going to be like this and we can't expose him to that and he can't do that day because...' And I am thinking that I want to speak to the young person as he needs a little bit of a push...I do find it a bit strange because if we are preparing these young people for a future positive, productive life...is that the only way of engaging them? (Business)*

Putting some demands on the young people was a beneficial way of engaging them as expressed by another business partner:

*It doesn't give them time to mess around or think about doing anything because they are constantly engaged and by the end of it they are tired, they are knackered...they have to get used to that but once they know they are here to get on and work, and pretty much in my*

*experience of the youngsters I have worked with, it is a good way of engaging them so yeah that's how it works (Business)*

Overall, business partners appeared to be satisfied with the flexible approach to engagement. They felt that the project organisers were considerate and valued the supported engagement on offer. They were also keen to continue their involvement with young people, providing support and access to skills as required by the young people moving forward.

## Chapter 4: The young people

The young people were selected as suitable for the intervention based on the criteria set out above (section 1.4) and therefore shared many characteristics. Whilst there were similarities, it is important to acknowledge the complex vulnerabilities and poly-victimisation of each young person. Table 2 below demonstrates the diversity as well as the similarities within the group of young men who were selected and engaged, albeit minimally in some cases, with the project.

Table 2 Some characteristics of the young people selected for the intervention

Young person	Drugs/ alcohol	Violence	Carrying weapons	Motoring offences	Theft/fraud/ robbery	Criminal damage	Looked after/CiN	Insecure housing	Parental separation/ death	Parental substance misuse/DV/family criminal behaviour
1	x	x		x			x	x	x	
2	x	x			x		x	x	x	x
3		x			x	x	x		x	x
4	x	x			x	x	x		x	x
5	x	x	x	x			x		x	x
6	x						x	x	x	
7					x	x	x	x	x	x
8		x		x	x	x	x		x	x
9	x	x	x	x					x	x
10	x	x			x	x	x		x	x

The above table is based on information from practitioners working with young people and not a search of the case notes by researchers. It is, therefore, likely that the researchers were not fully aware of family backgrounds and circumstances of the young people hence the table cannot be seen as complete. However, it is a useful reminder and indication of the difficulties and vulnerabilities of this group of young men. Please note that information about one young person was not available to the researchers and therefore the table only refers to ten of the eleven young people.

The detail of the information received varied but it was clear that there were many commonalities. Mainly parental separation, looked after or child in need, criminal attitudes and behaviour within the family or close social network, and drugs and violence. The latter two being consistent with County Lines behaviour whilst other factors (looked after, insecure housing, family conflict) consistent with the risk factors shared by young people vulnerable to exploitation (Home Office, 2017; 2018).

It is striking that all of the young people had experienced disruptions in their family lives and had experienced either the death or separation from a parent. Most of the young people had also experienced abuse and neglect, which had led to either becoming looked after or a child in need. Their childhoods were, therefore, complicated and disrupted.

### 4.1: Engaging with the project

The young people talked about the stress they experienced day-to-day partly due to their involvement with YOT but also as young people involved in criminal behaviour, not attending school and lacking support from family and wider networks:

*But like YOT it is just hard and loads of stress and that – (YP)*

*...sometimes it feels like not depression, that is not the word, it is stress isn't it, do you know what I mean? (YP)*

*I mean no one to talk to is stressful isn't it? (YP)*

Their everyday spaces could also appear stressful and involvement in the intervention removed them from familiar yet uncomfortable spaces:

*I mean God knows where I would be and what I would be doing now isn't it? I don't know I would probably be going out or something like that, having a drink or something like I shouldn't be doing (YP)*

*...at least it has kept me out of trouble like got me things to do and that, like what [other young person] said before we would all just be sitting in the park taking drugs (YP)*

*I was always going to parties and that and occasionally I would still go to a few but I don't go to them anymore I would rather go to the gym, gym is the one for me (YP)*

Their relationship with the project worker meant that they were able to relax and open up. Perhaps surprisingly, they enjoyed just talking and being in the company of new people who felt safe:

*I mean this is a one in a blue moon chance do you know what I mean to get a personal trainer and all this and that and like welcome, like talks and conversations, cups of tea, that is just nice isn't it? (YP)*

This is contrary to their views of YOT where they also had opportunities to talk:

*I don't feel comfortable at YOT... just talk about our life and that (YP)*

*Everyone I know gets like miffed off with YOT (YP)*

Clearly the voluntary basis on which the project is based and the flexibility and freedom of arranging their own times to meet with the worker and the ability to engage on their own terms makes a difference to the way support is experienced 'we are doing it in our own time' (YP). This is despite some of the young people engaging in the project as part of the fulfilment of their Youth Rehabilitation Orders. The difference was clearly articulated by one young man:

*I wake up stressed because I know I have got to go there [YOT], to be there where like with [project worker] and that I wake up, I have been ready the whole week to get in the gym...I have been buzzing (YP)*

Another young person was also clear about the differences and the added benefits of the project compared to their engagement with YOT:

*Well YOT is like you have to trek all the way there and when you get there, they just give you a bit of paper and tell you to come back, with here like they actually interact with you and stuff. If I can't make it then they will be fine with it, if I say I can't make it to a YOT meeting they are like make you get a stripe or something like that (YP)*

There was a sense of something novel and, with support, they felt able to enjoy trying something new and different:

*It is something we haven't done before and that, it is something new isn't it? It is always that shiny new thing (YP)*

As vulnerable young people with experience of the care system, they had been offered activities and support before but the current intervention particularly appealed to them:

*YP: I have been offered things and that and done things but this is mad<sup>4</sup>, I reckon this is the maddest, it is good*

**Researcher: This is mad?**

*YP: Yes it's mad but it's good!*

Meeting in a small group made the young people feel special:

*[B]ecause it is just like us three really, it is not like they are telling it to a lot of people, it is just us three really (YP)*

They sensed that the worker cared about them and went out of the way to support them whilst making any less desirable activities (mostly writing) fun:

*Without [worker] we wouldn't have found it fun (YP)*

*They come and support us and that and we need their support really, I know we have got other support but this is like helpful, if we have got someone there helping us like every week and that or like someone nice to talk to (YP)*

*We do stuff, like I know we have to do stuff that we don't enjoy with [worker] and that like writing and that but it is easy to get it done and that do you know what I mean? (YP)*

The young people who participated in the research clearly valued the intervention and expressed some clear benefits from engagement with the project.

## 4.2: Relationships matter

The relationships with the workers were key and it had not gone unnoticed by the young people that one of the workers had on an occasion worked an extra day in order to support them:

*[Worker] stayed down another day and done that extra day with us so we could go down the Job Centre on a Tuesday, so he is all right really (YP)*

In fact, the young people's time spent with the workers was so enjoyable that they indicated that they would like more contact:

*I mean a couple more hours a day would be good (YP)*

*Meet up a bit more yeah like yeah definitely (YP)*

In one case, the trusting relationship with the worker meant that one young person had engaged with another opportunity at Your Own Place which had led to successful completion of their Tenancy and Independent Living Skills course.

Professionals echoed the importance of relationships when working with young people, particularly sustained involvement of trusted individuals:

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<sup>4</sup> The phrase "mad shit" is used in slang vocabulary to describe something that is favourable or out of the ordinary. It is usually used among males in their teens to denote something which they see as awesome or cool (see <https://www.urbandictionary.com/>)

*The relationships are key, if you haven't got that positive relationship and you know you haven't got that trust with them I think it's really difficult to sort of make any changes umm so building a relationship is key (Stakeholder)*

Building good relationships with young people could ultimately lead to engagement with education or training. Workers felt that they could use the example of good engagement when they attempted to find training or education providers for the young people:

*Routines of building a relationship with an adult and all that kind of stuff, that is where I kind of in my head saw this fitting and hopefully then the next step will be for some of them to progress into a more educational sort of intervention (Stakeholder)*

*If they have been engaging successfully with Your Own Enterprise then that kind of gives me more confidence in referring them for other training courses and kind of education based courses. It also means that when I am having those conversations with Providers of those I have got something concrete that I could say that they are engaging with (Stakeholder)*

These vulnerable young people had experienced many changes within both family and professional relationships, causing them to be weary of starting afresh with relationship building. As one professional expressed:

*He takes a long time to trust professionals. He feels he has been let down by a lot of professionals in the past. I have been working with him since June last year and I think it is only since December that I really feel that we have got to a place where he feels he can really trust me and he can start to open up about things and share information and see that I am still here I haven't gone anywhere (Stakeholder)*

Building relationships with young people is a complex process and young people bring their own previous experiences of relationships, which in turn influences their ability, and interest, in building new relationships. As the Care Inquiry (2013, p.2) stated:

*The weight of evidence, from all quarters, convinces us that the relationships with people who care for and about children are the golden thread in children's lives, and that the quality of a child's relationships is the lens through which we should view what we do and plan to do.*

What is clear, both from this evaluation and from previous research (e.g. Bastiaanssen et al, 2014; Sanders et al, 2017) is that relationships must be positive, sustained and empowering. One stakeholder worried that the nature of short-term projects means that young people will be disappointed when relationships disappear:

*And that is just the thing about the short-termness of the project isn't it? That now that relationship is now going to be 'Oops sorry project is over, off you trot' yeah and that is the difficulty and it is nobody's fault as such (Stakeholder)*

The following section will look in more detail at the views on the duration of the project and how the exit may be managed positively for the young people.

### 4.3: Duration of project and exit

There is no doubt that the young people involved in this intervention felt empowered and experienced positive relationships with the workers but they felt worried about the limited time of the intervention:

*I have had a few struggles and I just think it would help me, a couple more months would be nice or something, it might help me and that, in a few weeks I will be eighteen and I will be an adult then do you know what I mean? (YP)*

*Well we got told that in March it is ending and I really don't think that should happen because I reckon that it is not ready, we are not ready yet to stop, like there are a lot more things to do (YP)*

*[Workers] are so good a couple more months I think would help though because do you know what I mean, it has gone so quick recently (YP)*

However, they were realistic and aware that projects could not go on forever:

*Now we have got our trust with them and that we can start doing more things and that like, do you know what I mean? A couple of months on we might be all in a shop or somewhere working or something, do you know what I mean? Temporary or something, you never know (YP)*

*Not like I want it to go on forever, I just think like a couple more months would be better isn't it? (YP)*

They were also clear that without support and continued engagement, they would return to their previous way of life:

*Back as, do you know what I mean, how we used to be yes... (YP)*

Professionals and business partners were also concerned about the project ending:

*There is not long left of the project and with some of our young people who have been let down a lot in the past, I think it is going to be harder for them...I think it is going to be important to have an exit strategy at the end about where they can pass that support on to. Other places the young people can go I suppose because if they have built that relationship with the worker and then suddenly they are not there anymore that, you know – (Stakeholder)*

*In an ideal world, you would keep the relationship going until it was a natural sort of 'I can step away because you are stepping off to the next whatever' isn't it? (Stakeholder)*

*He might lose his confidence again because it doesn't matter what we tell these young people if someone comes into their life and they build a good relationship with them and then they leave they are going to think that that is their fault (Stakeholder)*

*Somehow we have got the choice, we can either try and provide support for them or suffer the consequences of a young adult becoming an adult who clearly lives within no boundaries and umm yeah I think, I think it is money well spent to prevent rather than try and cure at some later date (Business)*



Some participants felt that although it was disappointing that the project had to end, it could be seen as a stepping stone for some young people as long as their confidence and self-esteem had increased and they had become more used to engaging in positive activities:

*I think for others it could just be a stepping stone like [young person] has done some work experience with [worker] which was truly positive for him...this is a good transitional time anyway, so it is a good time for him to kind of start something fresh, start something new so I think for him it will be less troublesome to lose that support because he will be starting new things anyway but I think again it just depends on the young person really (Stakeholder)*

*I think it is good in inspiring, I think they need a little bit more time probably just to get to that stage maybe of actually doing but yeah inspiring definitely (Business)*

In view of the slow start of the project and the time-limited nature due to the funding, the project organisers managed to continue the project for two additional months. However, even with the additional months, the time of engagement was less than six months, which made it difficult for stakeholders to see a difference for the young people:

*I think we know that probably this has been a quality intervention but for me it is like the 'well so what' factor. We know this intervention was good, has it, what difference has it made, what impact, have we moved them on or you know have they gone into a study programme or something or taken up an apprenticeship whatever it might be or just reduced or ceased the offending behaviours or anything? (Stakeholder)*

In order to ensure continued support for the young people engaging with the project, detailed exit plans were developed, in collaboration with each young person, with the aim of linking them into other services. In addition, all of the young people will continue to receive support from Your Own Place and will work with their Employment Project Coordinator. This will allow the young people to remain in contact with business partners and gain further work taster sessions. The opportunities created in the gym will also remain available to the young people.

Although the availability and offers of other support is commendable, the project worker will not remain. Thus, the project has inadvertently reinforced that professionals come and go and this may have an impact on the young people's perceptions of the point of forming future relationships.

## Chapter 5: Working together to support vulnerable young people

Previous research has suggested that a strong commitment by professionals to multi-agency work is key in facilitating effective and holistic assessment and interventions (Dodsworth and Sorensen, 2016). The project relied on agencies working together and sharing information. In that way, young people were identified as suitable and risks were safely managed. Working together to explore the circumstances of the young people more fully was a strength of the project:

*I think that is really good. I think that is one of the main strengths in a way. Getting us all from different bits of the world and actually sitting round a table and talking about a specific young person with all our, bringing all our bits of knowledge and then getting that whole picture because we don't often get that (Stakeholder)*

Unfortunately, stakeholders did not think that regular meetings where individual young people were discussed was a sustainable way of working under current resource pressures:

*We have such limited resources. It is difficult because in an ideal world probably having some more multi-agency working would be beneficial but my mind is immediately going to the logistics and the time and how that would work. We would have to be really clear about what the benefits of it would be and the impact it would have and all that kind of stuff (Stakeholder)*

The organisation involved in delivering the intervention clearly worked. It was possible, for the duration of the project, to engage the majority of relevant agencies as well as business partners. Moving forward, business partners clearly indicated that they would like continued involvement and although some stakeholders did not feel that there were resources to support continued multi-agency panel meetings, good relationships were built which can be drawn upon for future partner engagement. An essential component of the successful working together throughout the project is likely to be attributable to the social capital cultivated by the project organiser.

### 5.1: Achieving the project aims

With any new and innovative project, it is important to assess if the project aims have been met. The intended outcomes that the intervention hoped to achieve for participants included:

1. Job skills and experience gained through a social enterprise and an opportunity to use skills in the legitimate economy to achieve financial independence
2. Positive relationships with peers and other partners
3. Increased confidence and development of positive ambitions and goals
4. Greater trust in working with professionals
5. Increased motivation and engagement with community-based support and activities, education, training and employment
6. Reduced association with adult offenders/gangs
7. Reduced offending/re-offending linked to serious and organised crime offences
8. Diversion from a pathway into serious and organised crime

Some outcomes are impossible to measure and determine in the short term and will require ongoing exploration. Stakeholders were aware of this:

*You would need projects to be running for much longer periods of time for like two or three years wouldn't you? You could have a proper longitudinal study, see several cohorts come through... (Stakeholder)*

However, there is evidence from interviews with the young people that some outcomes were achieved, at least in the short term. The young people felt more confident, had more positive ambitions, felt more motivated to engage with education, work or training and developed some good relationships with peers:

*I think this Your Own Enterprise thing is working for me as well, like before I was getting into like a bit of trouble and that but now I think this is like sorting me out and that, helping me get into college... (YP)*

*This course has helped me a lot, like it has took away a lot of stress. Seeing [workers] for a while has been a success...you can have a laugh with them, it is not awkward about them, they made us feel welcome (YP)*

For the older participants there was a positive view of steady work or training and the possibility of a 'clean job':

*What are we going to do when we are twenty-four? Do you know what I mean, Job Centre, signing on, No! I will be having a job mate, a nice clean job making money myself (YP)*

*This is keeping us out of trouble isn't it and not like other people, mixing with one crowd and that sticking to each other, before you know it we will be working, maybe doing a course together so since we are doing gym and Own Enterprise, it is helping isn't it? (YP)*

Being engaged in positive activities had the additional benefit of increased wellbeing and, as demonstrated below, increased confidence. It was also clear from the interviews that the young people had respect for the project workers and trusted them:

*In a weird way, it does make you feel more happy and that. You have got something to look forward to. Do you know what I mean? I mean everything is different, we are doing something where I could be looking for a job this week and next week I could either have one do you know because next week I could find one, I could have a course next week, do you know what I mean? It is just waiting on the phone calls and that. I mean if [workers] weren't here I wouldn't have been trying, truthfully missing the opportunity, I would be sitting probably in the park smoking drugs and that, that is probably what I would be doing (YP)*

Assessing reduction in criminal behaviour is more difficult. Young people can engage in criminal behaviour without coming to the attention of the authorities. Past criminal behaviour can also catch up with young people some time after the event. Indeed, several of the young people came to the end of Youth Rehabilitation Orders during the project, some had court appearances and some remanded in custody for behaviour prior to the intervention. Some young people committed new offences during the time of the intervention but determining whether one offence during the short intervention constituted a reduction for a particular young person who may have committed in excess of 40 offences during their adolescence is not possible.

Despite the difficulties in providing quantifiable outcomes, the voices of the young people engaged with the project clearly demonstrate the many positive 'soft' outcomes that the project has managed to achieve through building relationships with young people, which clearly signal the caring, interested attitudes of the workers.

## Conclusion

*If in the course of development we feel loved, encouraged to concentrate and persist with difficult tasks, and are helped to make sense of our own and other people's emotional and social behaviour, our self-esteem and social intelligence, and hence resilience are likely to be high. (Howe, 2008, p.109)*

The Your Own Enterprise project has taken an innovative approach to local community support for vulnerable young people. Local business partners enjoyed their involvement and found that it increased their social awareness and improved their wellbeing through giving something back to the community.

Stakeholders who usually supported the young people valued the extra resource and saw the benefits of a more voluntary model of intervention that gave back some control to young people. The multi-agency work was a specific benefit for both practitioners and young people.

Where young people engaged they espoused real benefits from the intervention, including diversion from their usual negative activities and lifestyle. That immediate effect was thus clear and other outcomes were also noted, such as increased self-esteem, confidence around other people, motivation and wellbeing.

Productive relationships were sensitively built with young people who had previous experiences of fractured relationships and families. For the duration of their engagement, the young people felt safer, valued, cared for and empowered. Although all of the referrals to the project came from the local youth offending team, some of the young people were at early stages of their criminal careers and this preventative project clearly had the resources to pause that criminal trajectory, albeit for the short duration of the project. In addition, we must remember that these are vulnerable young people who may be victims of crime as well as perpetrators of crime. Indeed, there is evidence from London to suggest that young people in gangs are almost twice as likely to be victims of crime (MOPAC, 2016).

It is clear from other recent research that young people who have experienced abuse lack a designated adult outside the family system who is able to provide consistent support or a 'trusted relationship' (EIF, 2018, p.5). The young people participating in this project all had experience of being vulnerable to or experiences of abuse in its widest form. It is also clear that one of the strongest soft outcomes was their appreciation of the embryonic formation of a trusted relationship with the project workers.

The very positive outcomes for young people as a consequence of involvement should be replicated as part of a larger, sustained intervention using the current model but with some changes as suggested here. At a time when serious youth violence and crime is rising and increasingly reported in the media, the flexible intervention reported here is likely to meet the demands of the dynamic approach required when working with vulnerable young people in an ever-changing environment (LAPCC, 2016). The project allows young people to deal with the real issues of their lives such as lack of supportive relationships, access to skills that are useful for employment, feelings of safety and empowerment. However, for this style of intervention to work successfully, further resources are required to provide on-going support out of crime.

Long-term outcomes, for example, a real change in attitude, self-worth and skills, cannot be determined from this short intervention and this speaks to the need for longer-term interventions and longitudinal evaluation.

## Recommendations

- Consideration is given to the development of a longer term 'trusted adult' mentoring type scheme for young people vulnerable to serious and organised crime including County Lines activity and child sexual exploitation. The timescale must take account of the complex referral/selection procedure due to the risks and vulnerabilities associated with this group of young people.
- That consideration is given to the continued development of multi-agency panels to discuss individual young people. The cost of these in terms of resources may be offset by early and effective intervention in a young person's potential criminal/victim pathway.
- That consideration is given to the development of projects which are not associated with punishment and have a strengths based approach and a focus on developing self-worth, self-efficacy and self-esteem.

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