

Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service Interim Evaluation Report

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Summary

The Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service is a pioneering service from Action for Children aimed at 11-18 year olds who are on the cusp of involvement in Serious and Organised Crime or are at risk of future involvement. The Service model was established in Glasgow in 2013. Following its success, Action for Children secured funding from the National Lottery Community to test the model in four sites across three nations: Cardiff, Dundee, Edinburgh and Newcastle.

An independent evaluation was commissioned by Action for Children to examine the implementation, delivery and impact of the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service. In doing so, the evaluation had four objectives:

1. To capture information relating to the key components of the Service
2. To provide insight into young people's entry and journey through the Service
3. To examine the views of young people, parents, partners, practitioners and peer mentors of 'what works'
4. To explore the feasibility of using police data to assess Service outcomes

This interim report presents findings from year one of the two-year evaluation. Due to the phased implementation of the Service, the evaluation includes data from three of the four sites (Cardiff, Edinburgh and Newcastle). Findings from Dundee will be presented in the final report.

Method

The evaluation adopted a programme theory approach to identify the core components of the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service. The logic model was developed from documentary analysis, comprising Service manuals, reports, and other site documentation. The logic model will be refined and adapted based on emerging findings from the evaluation.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted in year one, consisting of quantitative analysis of service data and qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with 25 respondents.

Service data was extrapolated from referral forms, risk assessments, intervention plans and contextual safeguarding forms. The aim was to provide an insight into young people's entry to the service.

Interviews were conducted with representatives from organisations who were working partnership with the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service and key service staff, including managers, practitioners and peer mentors. The aim was to capture partner and practitioner views about the Service.

Service data referral and engagement

Most referrals to the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service came from either Children's Services or the police. The most common reason for referral was due to offending behaviour or gang association. Further analysis revealed slight variations across the sites. In Newcastle, most referrals arose from family-related factors, such as family offending or substance misuse. In Edinburgh, most referrals arose from concerns around a young person's missing incidents. Whereas in Cardiff, most referrals arose from concerns around substance misuse or weapon use.

Just under half of young people were in some form of education, including mainstream school, college, pupil referral units, or other provision. On average, two agencies were working with young people in addition to the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service. These were most often Children's Services and the Youth Justice Service.

Service data revealed that the most common interventions delivered by the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service related to emotional regulation, thinking and behaviour, relationships, and improving self-esteem.

The views of partners and practitioners

Partner organisations reported that the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service was a valued addition to the existing provision. This was strengthened by the perceived need for the Service in all three sites due to increasing recognition of problems with serious and organised crime. There was evidence that the Service had site-specific modifications to tailor interventions to the needs of the local area.

Information sharing emerged as a strength. This included ensuring that partner organisations received timely updates about each young person. At a more strategic level, there was evidence that the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service was strengthening information sharing across agencies.

The need for a shared language using simple jargon-free terminology emerged as a key facilitator for partnership working. Partners particularly welcomed the child-centred nature of the service. This included ensuring that young people's voices were heard, and they were involved in decision making.

Despite the perceived challenges of engaging young people, the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service was perceived as successful at engaging most young people. This was supported by the inclusion of staff with lived experience of youth offending ('peer mentors').

Peer mentors were perceived to be a crucial aspect of the Service. Peer mentors were deemed to have increased credibility and legitimacy with young people than other staff members. This facilitated engagement, relationship building and direct communication with young people. Peer mentors may also be role models.

The Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service benefited from having highly skilled, 'handpicked' staff who had small caseloads and open-ended casework. This enabled the Service to adopt a persistent, consistent approach which meant they could step back when appropriate or offer support when the young person was ready to accept help.

Partners championed the Service's ability to provide crisis intervention and intensive support to young people. Being situated within Action for Children was viewed favourably by young people and families. This enabled the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service to demonstrate its independence from statutory services and draw upon the organisation's positive reputation.

Bespoke interventions were further reinforced using strengths-based assessments of young people's needs. Moreover, young people were viewed through a safeguarding rather than a criminal lens. This meant they were provided with a programme of support aimed at addressing their underlying needs rather than focusing on their offending behaviour.

Parents often served as gatekeepers to young people. This meant that developing positive relationships with parents determined their child's initial engagement and future involvement.

Practitioners provided parents with practical support, e.g., help with housing issues, financial support, e.g., purchasing clothes, furniture and help with food parcels, and emotional support, e.g., being listened to.

In addition to intensive one-to-one support, practitioners helped young people with arranging and attending appointments such as medical appointments and help with job or college applications.

Relationship-building was a crucial underlying mechanism for service engagement. At the individual level, this fostered trust while at the community level there was evidence that the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service was viewed as a valued source of support to young people and their families.

Outcomes

The Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service was associated with smaller successes such as fostering engagement with young people and families who were reluctant to engage, unwilling to engage due to previous bad experiences with services or with young people who did not perceive themselves to have been exploited or in need of help.

Smaller successes included engaging with the Service, completing the one-to-one support, returning to education and/or identifying a training course. These successes were perceived as important in instilling a sense of pride in young people and encouraging them to see past their current situation.

There were early indications that the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service was successful in supporting young people away from serious and organised crime and into education, employment, and training.

1.0 Introduction

The Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service is a pioneering service for 11-18 year olds who are on the cusp of involvement in Serious and Organised Crime or are at risk of future involvement. The Service was established in Glasgow in 2013 following the realisation that organised crime groups were recruiting young people to serve as ‘runners’ who deliver drugs to end users (Barter et al., 2020). Since then, the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service in Glasgow has attracted positive evaluation results. For example, a qualitative study of 16 young people found that most had been diverted away from organised crime groups onto more positive pathways with a clear sense of future direction (Menezes and Whyte, 2016). While in 2018, quantitative analysis of police data for a sample of 22 young people found a 31% decrease in monthly offending (Alderson, 2018). Based on these findings, Action for Children successfully obtained funding from the National Lottery Community to explore the wider feasibility and replicability of the model in three nations (Cardiff, Dundee, Edinburgh, and Newcastle). This proof-of-concept study began in 2020. An independent evaluation of the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service was commissioned by Action for Children in 2021. The aim of the evaluation was to examine the implementation, delivery and impact of the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service in the three nations on diverting children and young people from Serious and Organised Crime. In doing so, the evaluation had four objectives:

5. To capture information relating to the key components of the Service
6. To provide insight into young people’s entry and journey through the Service
7. To examine the views of young people, parents, partners, practitioners and peer mentors of ‘what works’
8. To explore the feasibility of using police data to assess Service outcomes

1.1 Background

Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) has a larger impact on UK communities than any other national threat (National Crime Agency, 2020). It has been estimated that there are currently 350,000 individuals and 4,772 organised crime groups across the UK (National Crime Agency, 2020). The annual cost to the UK economy is over £37 billion each year, with SOC rapidly growing and becoming increasingly complex as digital technologies are used to communicate and hide SOC activities. This evaluation draws upon the international shared definition of SOC provided by the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime and the European Union,

A group of three or more persons existing over a period of time acting in concert with the aim of committing crimes for financial or material benefit (Europol, undated)

Organised crime groups can be characterised by the ‘level of criminality, organisation, planning, and control’ (Home Office, 2013:14) of their activities. Such professionalisation differs them from other peer groups, such as street-based groups or gangs (Hallsworth and Young, 2004). Serious Organised Crime offenders operate as part of large networks across multiple countries (Home Office, 2018). Offences include acquisitive crime, cybercrime, drug and human trafficking, fraud, firearms, child sexual exploitation, and money laundering. According to Densley et al. (2018) over half of organised crime groups embed illegal activities within legal enterprises such as building or construction companies, nail bars, car washes or cleaning services. More recently there have been

growing concerns about the county lines model of drug-dealing, which is underpinned by the criminal exploitation of children and young people up to the age of 25.

The UK has adopted a cross-government approach to addressing SOC, with both Scotland and Northern Ireland contributing to the development of the Home Office Serious and Organised Crime Strategy published in 2018. This strategy identified SOC as a national security threat and outlined the approach adopted and actions needed to achieve its four overarching objectives: Pursue, Prepare, Protect, Prevent. This includes prosecuting and disrupting SOC offenders and their activities (Pursue), mitigating SOC impact through whole system approaches at the local, regional, national and international levels (Prepare), safeguarding vulnerable people, businesses and systems from SOC by strengthening individual resilience and information raising about how these groups operate (Protect). Finally, the fourth objective was to ‘prevent’ children, young people and adults from becoming involved in SOC, and divert those already involved away from re-offending. This is particularly pertinent given that, unlike other forms of crime there are mixed findings in relation to whether children and young people mature away from their involvement (Van Koppen et al., 2010). In practice, the reasons children and young people fall victim to such manipulation and exploitation are complex. Findings from a small case study of SOC in Northern Ireland (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2016) showed that young people were manipulated through the notion of friendship. They were then persuaded to commit criminal activities for the organised crime networks through fear of losing this perceived friendship. Conversely, some children and young people may be forced to comply due to their physical proximity to the organised crime group while others may be searching for kudos and status or a place they belong (ibid). Yet it is often children and young people with unmet needs who fall victim to the manipulation, coercion or force used by these groups (Radcliffe et al., 2020).

Numerous studies have highlighted the risk factors for vulnerable young people (World Health Organisation, 2015, Cordis Bright, 2015). Yet Johns et al. (2017:4) warn against adopting an individualistic ‘risk-focused, responsabilising narrative’, as this fails to account for the impact of wider social, cultural and community factors. Indeed, findings from a literature review (Scottish Government, 2017) highlighted that there are multiple pathways into SOC broadly grouped as criminality, ability, networks and identity. This includes children and young people who are involved in early prolific offending, those with specific skills or networks wanted by the SOC, and those with particular vulnerabilities across the individual, interpersonal and community levels. At the individual level, children and young people’s vulnerability to serious organised crime grooming tends to be linked to adolescent males aged between 12 and 14 years, those with low self-esteem, and confidence (Radcliffe et al., 2020). At the interpersonal level, children and young people with family members involved in criminality are particularly susceptible to grooming into SOC. The case study of ‘Greentown’ – a fictional place in Northern Ireland – highlighted the deeply embedded family and kinship groups which used their power and influence to develop relationships and extend their network (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2016). For children and young people, associating with negative peers and/or gang membership are key risk factors, as are school exclusion, substance misuse and family factors such as poor supervision, abuse, neglect, parental substance misuse, or domestic violence (World Health Organisation, 2012; 2016). However recent research by Hood et al. (2021) has questioned the extent to which socio-economic factors impact parenting capacity, such as poverty, housing instability, and the influence of the wider community. This is particularly pertinent given the increased influence of peers during adolescence (Spencer et al, 2019; Andell and Pitts, 2017). Research by Maxwell and Wallace (2021:25) revealed how older males became role models for young people,

So young kids are always looking at them as their idols. Some of them, they even give the youngsters some money. Some little change. So when they grow up, it's like they have this respect and love for that person. It could be as little as one pound, two pound or five or ten ('Jordan')

At the community level, findings from the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime with 4300 young people highlighted the impact of deprivation on children and young people's feelings of self-worth and confidence (McAra and McVie, 2016). Conversely, protective factors have been less well documented. Findings from a mapping review for the prevention of youth violence (Maxwell and Corliss, 2020) revealed that youth employment can protect young people from serious organised crime involvement as it keeps young people, 'off the street and out of trouble' (Modestino, 2019:3).

Following the Serious and Organised Crime Strategy, efforts aimed at diverting children and young people away from SOC are focused on prevention. The Home Office Practitioner Toolkit (2021) recommends that SOC interventions should be trauma-informed and adopt a holistic approach to address the child or young person's unmet needs through effective partnership working. The toolkit cites Action for Children's Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service as an example of good practice as it acknowledges that the Service,

*...must be creative and catch the attention of the young person. And that's just one thing because then you've got to keep it. His world will be pulling at him 24/7 so you can't think you've got a chance doing 9-5. It's no good to have workers changing all the time. Do what you say you will. Kids like me don't forget and we're fresh out of patience for bullsh*t by the time you normally pitch up ('J', an ex-SOC offender and peer mentor for Action for Children, cited by Home Office, 2021:30).*

The independent evaluation of the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service began in February 2021. At the outset, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Newcastle were in operation. While preliminary work was undertaken in Northern Ireland, implementation proved unfeasible. Therefore, Dundee was selected as an alternative area based on the level of need and support from local partners. Due to Dundee's delayed launch, data was only available from Cardiff, Edinburgh and Newcastle. The final report will also present findings from Dundee. This interim report presents preliminary findings in relation to two of the four evaluation objectives: to capture information relating to the key components of the Service and to examine the views of partners, practitioners and peer mentors of 'what works'. The interim report begins by presenting the methodology for year one of the evaluation. It is structured around the main evaluation objectives. Chapter three outlines the development of the Service logic model based on analysis of service documentation. Chapter four presents preliminary findings from the service data analysis. Chapter five is structured around the logic model and presents findings from semi-structured interviews with partners and staff from the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service. This included managers, practitioners, peer mentors, as well as representatives from statutory and third sector partner organisations. Finally, chapter six summarises the main findings.

2.0 Method

Year one of the evaluation of the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service consisted of two main phases of data collection: service data and semi-structured interviews with service partners, practitioners, and peer mentors. The evaluation began with analysis of key service documentation to facilitate the development of a logic model to identify the core components of the service model.

2.1 To capture information relating to the key components of the Service

The evaluation adopted a programme theory approach to identify the core components of the Service. To do this, a logic model was created to enable visual representation of programme components, including the desired implementation model, referral routes, programme pathways and key features of the external environment, such as engagement with partner organisations. The logic model was developed with reference to programme manuals, reports and documentation from each of the four sites.

Documentary analysis was undertaken between February and April 2021. Documents were provided by the National Manager for the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service and Service Managers. Documents included the grant application, programme manuals, reports, and documentation from each of the four sites, including:

- UK Lottery: SOCIS Proof of Concept Initial Scoping Paper
- Annual Report: Year one
- Communication and Engagement Strategies
- Information Sharing Protocols
- Referral Process Map
- Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service: Implementation Guidance
- Terms of reference for Steering Groups

The logic model represents initial findings from the documentary analysis. It will be refined throughout the evaluation in an iterative manner so that the initial assumptions of how the programme will achieve the intended outcomes will be enhanced on evaluation of findings in an ongoing manner. Hence, the evaluation adopts a formative stance, so that emerging findings will be shared with the National Manager in order to inform refinement of the programme. Consideration will be given to how the programme is implemented, programme quality, partnership engagement and outcomes across the varying contexts.

2.2 To provide insight into young people's entry and journey through the Service

To provide insight into young people's entry and journey through the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service, service data was obtained from May to June 2021. It should be noted that the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service adopted a phased start beginning with Edinburgh (February 2020), then followed by Cardiff (April 2020), Newcastle (June 2020) and then

Dundee (July 2020). This led to variation in the time period for which data was collected. As noted, Dundee has been omitted from the year one evaluation. However, updated information and data from Dundee will be collated and presented in the final evaluation report.

Data consisted of referral forms, risk assessments, intervention plans and contextual safeguarding forms. Quantitative data was extrapolated from these forms onto a spreadsheet to collate information pertaining to demographic data (date of birth, gender, ethnicity and disability), the reason for referral, referral organisation and agency involvement. Due to variation in form completion, not all information was available for each young person, and there were some differences in the way data was recorded across the different sites.

2.3 To examine the views of partners, practitioners and peer mentors or ‘what works’

To examine the views of representatives from partner organisations Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service managers, practitioners and peer mentors, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 25 participants. The inclusion of interviews reflects a departure from the proposed measures at this stage of the evaluation. So rather than disseminating an online survey to project partners, Action for Children requested that interviews be conducted to obtain richer data regarding partner experiences and perspectives of the service. This was based on the notion that partnership working was a core component of the service. Therefore, the evaluation timetable was altered so that practitioner interviews were brought forward to year one. Interviews scheduled for year two will be used to capture follow-up data from partners, practitioners and peer mentors.

Interviews with young people and parents remain scheduled for year two for two main reasons. First, retaining the original timetable enabled the collection of data from young people with longer engagement with the Service. Second, given the COVID-19 pandemic and associated regulations, it was not possible to undertake in-person interviews at that time. This was deemed preferable to remote interviewing as in-person interviews give young people and parents an opportunity to meet the researcher and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in an interview. They also provide more scope to include creative participatory methods so that young people have a choice of how they wish to participate. Third, challenges with evaluation team staffing and associated recruitment issues during the pandemic resulted in the inclusion of multiple part-time researchers. It was deemed preferable to recruit a full-time researcher for the duration of the project to facilitate relationship building with young people and parents.

Table 1: Participant breakdown

| | <i>Cardiff</i> | <i>Edinburgh</i> | <i>Newcastle</i> | Total |
|-----------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Managers | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Partner organisations | 4 | 5 | 1 | 10 |
| Practitioners | 5 | 4 | 2 | 11 |
| Peer mentors* | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 11 | 10 | 4 | 25 |

*It should be noted that several staff in the ‘Practitioner’ role had lived experience of youth offending and/or had been peer mentors prior to promotion.

As the evaluation has undertaken a formative stance, all interviewees were invited to comment on what works well and what could be improved for their Service. This data will be used to contribute

to Service development in an ongoing manner. Service Managers (n = 3) were interviewed in September 2020. Prior to the interviews, an interview schedule was agreed between two of the researchers and this was sent to each manager, along with a consent form. All interviews were conducted online using Zoom teleconferencing software and took between 40 and 50 minutes to complete. In advance of the interviews the managers were given the opportunity to ask questions about the consent form and the interview process. The aim of the interview was to garner insight into how the Service had been implemented in each area, including recruitment of staff, identifying and engaging young people and establishing relationships with partner organisations. Managers were also asked to share details of partner organisations and Service practitioners and peer mentors.

Email invitations were sent to representatives from all partner organisations (n = 24). Of these, five email addresses were invalid and seven did not respond. Of the remaining twelve partners, ten were interviewed between October and December 2021. Representatives from partner organisations were asked about their current role and relationship with the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service, the perceived need for the Service, referral processes, and their views of the Service.

Email invitations were sent to Service practitioners (n = 11) and peer mentors (n = 2). Of these, eleven practitioners and one peer mentor were interviewed between October and December 2021. However, it should be noted that prior to interview, two peer mentors had been promoted to the practitioner role. It was also highlighted that several practitioners had lived experience. Service practitioners and peer mentors were asked to provide detailed information about their caseloads, an average day, working with partner organisations and implementing the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service.

Table A provides a breakdown of participants according to their role. To preserve anonymity, all respondents have been assigned a pseudonym.

| Name | Role | Name | Role |
|-----------|--------------|----------|----------------------|
| Christine | Staff member | Alastair | Statutory partner |
| Darren | Staff member | Craig | Third sector partner |
| Duncan | Staff member | Hayley | Statutory partner |
| Gillian | Staff member | Helen | Statutory partner |
| Laura | Staff member | Ian | Third sector partner |
| Leanne | Staff member | Jason | Statutory partner |
| Lucy | Staff member | Kate | Statutory partner |
| Marie | Staff member | Kim | Statutory partner |
| Natasha | Staff member | Kirsty | Statutory partner |
| Neil | Staff member | | |
| Rob | Staff member | | |
| Ross | Staff member | | |
| Ruth | Staff member | | |
| Ryan | Staff member | | |
| Will | Staff member | | |

Table A: Breakdown of participants

3.0 The service model

The evaluation drew upon programme theory to identify the core components of the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service model and the mechanisms by which the intended behaviour change should occur. Programme theory enabled examination of how the proposed resources and activities were expected to result in the intended outcomes using if-then statements (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999). This was visually represented in a logic model (Figure 1) to present the core components and the causal linkages between components (Kellogg Foundation, 2004; McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999). According to Manzano and Pawson (2014), the success of interventions depends upon the multiplicative function of the core components rather than one crucial component. The logic model adopted three main elements: inputs, activities and outcomes across three dimensions 1) system-level enablers (inputs), 2) engagement and delivery (activities), and 3) facilitators that influence the relationship between the service model and its outcomes (mechanisms). This section provides an overview of the core components of the service model.

3.1 Assumptions

The service was developed to address the causes of criminality and improve young people's resilience and critical thinking skills through the provision of bespoke support and coaching in positive choices to obtain healthy, supportive home and education, training or employment. In doing so, the model is based on the assumption that having a positive influence in a young person's life is sufficient to initiate positive change and to counteract negative influences (Menezes and Whyte, 2018). Further, the service model is based on the premise that access to intensive one-to-one support, help and support to access education, training or employment, in addition to specialist provision, is an effective approach to prevent those on the cusp or involved from further engagement in SOC. This premise is supported by research findings. For example, Boulton et al. (2020) found that the most effective interventions provide a bespoke package of support directed at the child or young person's needs (Boulton, 2019). While research findings (e.g. Maxwell and Wallace, 2021; Barter et al., 2020) have highlighted the significant role of youth workers who adopt a persistent, consistent approach to develop relationships and build trust with children and young people.

3.2 System-level enablers (Inputs)

The first dimension identified within the programme logic was the need for national and local support to operationalise the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service surrounding each of the four sites. At the national level, the service proposed to establish a National Programme Board to ensure fidelity to the model and strategic input in each of the three nations. At the local level, two main components were identified. First, the identification of Steering Group members responsible for the strategic governance and oversight of the service in each site area. The convening of the Steering Group was also aimed at ensuring that delivery models were responsive to local needs. A key gap in the existing documentation relates to the Steering Group's role in influencing policy in each nation and practice within partner organisations. This will be explored in year two through stakeholder interviews. The second component was related to the identification of partner organisations. Establishing relationships with partner organisations in each area emerged as vital to service implementation. The role of partner organisations included the provision of service referrals, information sharing and capacity building to develop effective

responses to young people on the edge of or involved in SOC. The documentation alludes to a more strategic component of partnership working which requires further examination in year two. Recruitment was also identified as crucial to the operationalisation of the service. This included recruitment of practitioners, peer mentors and local volunteers. The achievement of the proposed outcomes are dependent upon having access to staff with the necessary skills and experience to engage young people, maintain relationships and provide the intensive support outlined in their bespoke intervention plans.

3.2 Engagement and delivery (Activities)

The second dimension of the programme logic related to youth engagement and service delivery. This included activities at the individual, interpersonal and community levels. At the individual level, the core components of the service included referral, engagement and delivery. Regarding referral, to achieve the aim of targeting young people who meet service criteria, processes must be established to garner referrals from community pathways and key partners. This criteria includes young people who are deemed vulnerable to SOC either because they have known vulnerabilities, they represent young people who are targeted by organised crime groups or because they have an increased risk due to the existing SOC links and involvement by family members.

Regarding engagement, the service is premised upon assertive outreach work and street work. Undertaken by peer mentors, this element will be facilitated by the recruitment of people with lived experience of youth offending. It is suggested that peer mentors will emerge as a 'powerful motivator' and role model for young people that positive change is attainable. This suggests that peer mentors may be a mechanism that links engagement and service provision with anticipated service outcomes.

Regarding delivery, the service documentation indicated that bespoke provision will be identified from strengths-based assessments and recorded in an intervention plan for each young person. Hence, intervention plans will be important documents that outline service provision, record individual drivers and causes of young people's offending and state how these factors will be addressed through intensive one-to-one support. Intervention plans will include knowledge and skills training, and mentoring around personal development, skills building, and cognitive behavioural change activities. The service will utilise partner organisations to broker access to specialist support such as substance misuse services and provide positive opportunities including access to resources, services, and networks. Service delivery will also be undertaken with siblings to raise awareness of the risk of SOC.

At the interpersonal level, the programme logic outlined the importance of family support to achieve the proposed outcomes. The service model includes whole family approaches aimed at empowering family members to support the young person's journey away from SOC onto more positive pathways. At the community level, the service will lead to strategic capacity building across agencies, multi-agency working and developing community forums to build expertise and capacity aimed at reducing the root causes of offending. For the latter, the service will raise awareness across community groups about SOC and build their capacity to respond based on evidence regarding what works. In addition, the service will enhance the gathering of data about potential harms from the wider community so that communities can work together to address the contextual factors that exacerbate the risk of SOC. In relation to collaborative multi-agency working, the

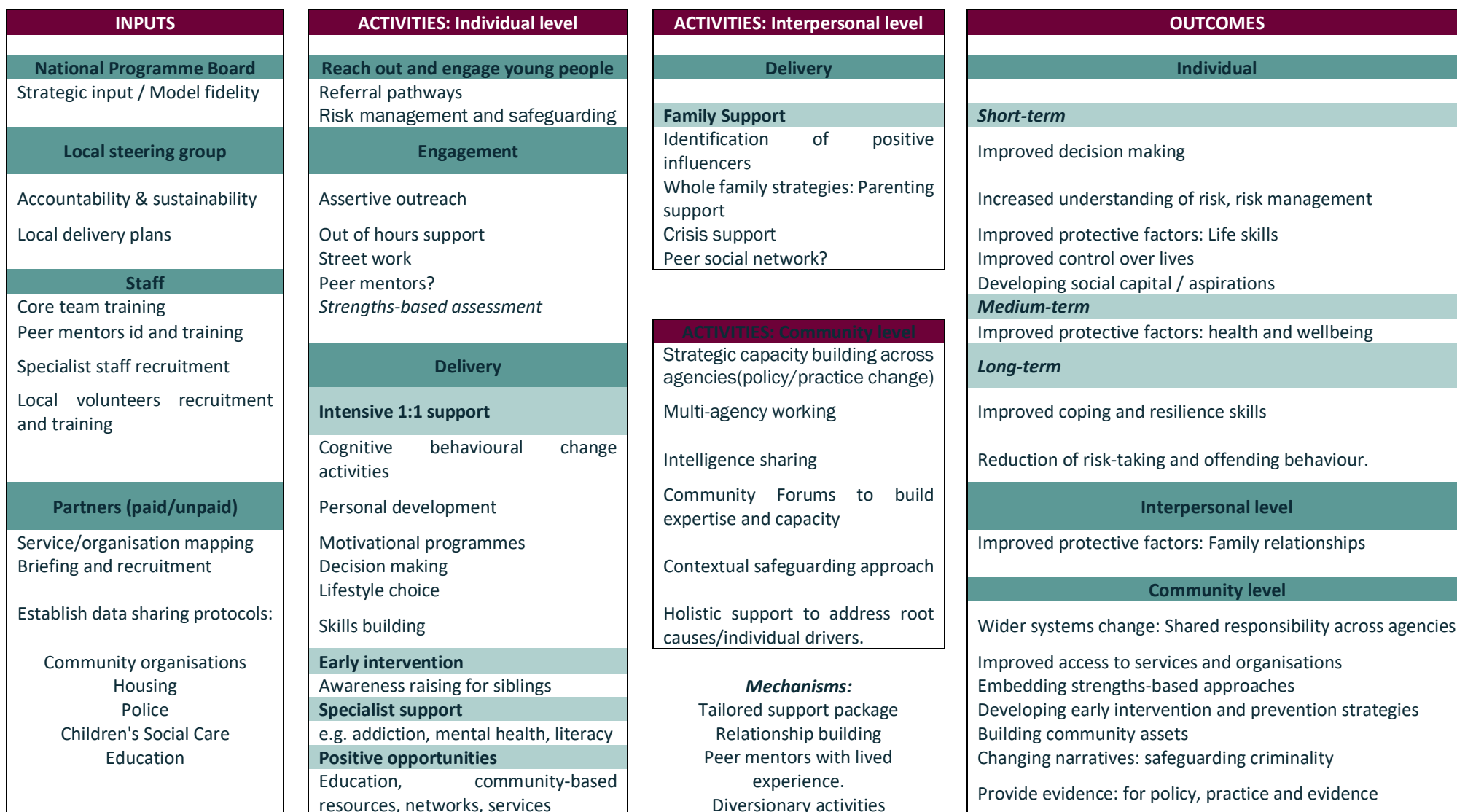


Figure 1: Multi-agency Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service logic model

programme theory includes the development of local delivery plans which adopt an integrated approach. This includes mapping services and support and sharing expertise across agencies.

3.3 Facilitators (Mechanisms)

The relationship between the core components of the service model, namely system-level enablers, referral, engagement and delivery were facilitated by four mechanisms: bespoke intervention, relationship building, peer mentors, and diversionary activities. While more information is needed regarding the nature of diversionary activities, it is these causal mechanisms that reflect the processes through which the service model achieves the intended change. In other words, the effectiveness of the service model will depend on the extent to which these mechanisms are acceptable to young people (Moore et al., 2014). This is particularly pertinent given that a previous qualitative evaluation of the Glasgow model found that the service was effective in engaging young people who were known to statutory services as ‘perennial non-engagers’ and where previous attempts at diversion away from SOC have been unsuccessful (Menezes and Whyte, 2016:21). The inclusion of peer mentors is based on the assertion that they have lived experience to help young people overcome the barriers they experience from the organised crime group. Such barriers include safely exiting from organised crime groups and the associated fear of negative repercussions towards the young person or their family members especially if they are perceived as going against the code of the group and ‘snitching’ (Ashton and Bussu, 2020). It is anticipated that peer mentors will understand these fears and the realities of the challenges associated with desisting involvement.

3.4 Proposed outcomes

According to the programme theory, if the Steering Group and project partners fulfil their roles for the service then the activities at the individual, interpersonal and community levels will lead to outcomes at the short, medium and long term. The logic model (Figure one) identifies five main short-term outcomes for young people which align with outcome one from the original proof of concept application (to provide holistic support to address the root causes and individual drivers for offending). Short-term outcomes included young people’s increased knowledge regarding risk and risk management, increased capacity to make decisions and improved access to protective factors, and social capital and aspirations. At the medium-term level, youth outcomes included improved health and well-being. Finally, the service should lead to long-term outcomes for the individual, family and community which align to outcomes two, three and four contained within the proof of concept funding application (to harness the unique skills, insight and knowledge of local people and embed strengths-based approaches; community assets and social capital; to improve youth decision making and entry onto positive pathways with a reduction in offending behaviour; and to embed the service model through shared intelligence, integrated working, capacity building and knowledge sharing). Long-term outcomes included improved coping and resilience, improved family relationships and access to support. Moreover, the service should lead to improved systems for early identification and prevention of youth offending which are embedded in policy and practice across partner organisations. This includes embedding strengths-based approaches aligned with the safeguarding of young people rather than criminalisation and greater multiagency working across the statutory and non-statutory sectors.

4.0 Service referral and engagement

The Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service had 61 recorded referrals during the period May 2021 to August 2021. Young people with an open case were 17 years old on average, ranging from 13 to 22 years (see Table 2). All young people were male and where known, over half of young people were white (64%).

Table 2: Demographics of young people using the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service.

| | Cardiff | Edinburgh | Newcastle | Overall |
|-------------------|---------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Average age* | 17 | 17 | 16 | 17 |
| Min. | 13 | 15 | 13 | 14 |
| Max. | 22 | 18 | 17 | 19 |
| Male | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| White ethnicity** | - | 50% | 79% | 64% |

*Missing age for two young people in Cardiff and Edinburgh and six young people in Newcastle.

**Missing ethnicity for 20 young people in Cardiff.

Referrals were evenly split between the Cardiff, Edinburgh and Newcastle services (see Table 3). Most referrals were submitted by Children's Services (43%) and the police (26%). Nearly 80% of referrals remained open and 23% were closed. Where known, cases were closed because the young person had declined support, or practitioners felt that the support was no longer required because the young person's behaviour had improved.

Table 3: Referrals to Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service and case status.

| | Cardiff | | Edinburgh | | Newcastle | | Overall | |
|--------------------------------|---------|-----|-----------|-----|-----------|-----|---------|-----|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Referrals | | | | | | | | |
| Children's Services | 9 | 41 | 13 | 65 | 4 | 21 | 26 | 43 |
| Police | 0 | 0 | 6 | 30 | 10 | 53 | 16 | 26 |
| Youth Justice Service | 7 | 32 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 11 | 9 | 15 |
| Third Sector Agency | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 16 | 4 | 7 |
| NHS | 3 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 5 |
| Probation | 2 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| Not known | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 22 | 100 | 20 | 100 | 19 | 100 | 61 | 100 |
| Case status | | | | | | | | |
| Open | 22 | 100 | 13 | 65 | 12 | 63 | 47 | 77 |
| Closed | 0 | 0 | 7 | 35 | 7 | 37 | 14 | 23 |
| Reason for case closure | | | | | | | | |
| Declined support | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 57 | 4 | 29 |
| Support no longer required | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 29 | 2 | 14 |
| Not known | 0 | 0 | 7 | 100 | 1 | 14 | 8 | 57 |

Young people were referred to the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service for a range of reasons (see Table 4). The most common reason was regarding a young person's offending behaviour or association with a gang(s). All young people in Edinburgh and Newcastle were referred

for this reason. In Cardiff, 77% of young people were referred for offending or gang association, followed by substance misuse primarily in relation to cannabis use (41%) and weapon use (36%).

Findings showed that young people were referred due to family-related factors including family offending and substance misuse, and less frequently, family bereavement, and strained family relationships. Concerns around family offending and cannabis use were more commonly reported by professionals in Newcastle. In Edinburgh, professionals were more likely to note concerns around substance misuse and missing incidents. Whereas in Cardiff, professionals were more likely to refer a young person due to concerns around substance misuse, weapon use, and because they needed support with their education.

Table 4: Reasons for referral to the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service

| | Cardiff (n = 22) | | Edinburgh (n = 13) | | Newcastle (n = 12) | | Overall (n = 47) | |
|---|---------------------|----|-----------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|---------------------|----|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Offending or gang association | 17 | 77 | 13 | 100 | 12 | 100 | 42 | 89 |
| Substance misuse | 9 | 41 | 5 | 38 | 3 | 25 | 17 | 36 |
| Support needed with education* | 7 | 32 | 3 | 23 | 2 | 17 | 12 | 26 |
| Weapon use | 8 | 36 | 2 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 21 |
| Family offending | 3 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 58 | 10 | 21 |
| Victim of an offence/unexplained injury | 3 | 14 | 2 | 15 | 3 | 25 | 8 | 17 |
| Missing incidents | 4 | 18 | 4 | 31 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 17 |
| Family substance misuse | 3 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 25 | 6 | 13 |
| Mental health/managing emotions | 3 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 6 |
| Risk of homelessness | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 2 |
| Strained family relationships | 0 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Family bereavement | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 2 |

Totals do not add up to 100 as several reasons for referral could be cited.

*Support needed due to disengagement, low attendance, inadequate education placement, or risk of placement breakdown.

4.1 Engagement with education

According to information recorded on the referral form and the contextual safeguarding assessment, 40% of young people were reported to be engaged in some form of education. Further analysis revealed that young people attended a range of education settings, including mainstream schools, pupil referral units, and colleges (see Table 5). Young people's attendance at these settings varied. Some young people were reported to enjoy attending whereas others had low motivation to engage in education and required intensive support to attend.

Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service practitioners reported concerns about young people who were not in education and had a large amount of unstructured time. Practitioners also recorded concerns in the service data about young people who had missed a large proportion of their formal education and as a result, missed opportunities to develop their numeracy and literacy skills and create positive peer relationships. Some young people had expressed an interest in enrolling in education courses since starting work with Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service and were being supported to do so.

Table 5: Young people's engagement in education

| | Cardiff (n = 22) | | Edinburgh (n = 13) | | Newcastle (n = 12) | | Overall (n = 47) | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|----|-----------------------|----|---------------------|----|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| College | 1 | 5 | 2 | 15 | 1 | 8 | 4 | 9 |
| Provisions at Secure Unit | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 2 |
| Pupil Referral Unit | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 25 | 3 | 6 |
| School - Full timetable | 4 | 18 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 8 | 6 | 13 |
| School - Reduced timetable | 2 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Special School | 2 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Tutor | 0 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 9 | 41 | 4 | 31 | 6 | 50 | 19 | 40 |

4.2 Multi-agency working

On average, two agencies were working with young people alongside the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service (range = 0-5). Children's Services and the Youth Justice Service were involved most often (see Table 6). In Cardiff and Edinburgh, a greater range of agencies were documented to be working with young people, this included education, third sector organisations, police, and physical and mental health services.

Table 6. Agencies working with the young people

| | Cardiff (n = 22) | | Edinburgh (n = 13) | | Newcastle (n = 12) | | Overall (n = 47) | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|----|-----------------------|----|---------------------|----|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Children's Services | 13 | 59 | 11 | 85 | 10 | 83 | 34 | 72 |
| Youth Justice Service | 8 | 36 | 3 | 23 | 5 | 42 | 16 | 34 |
| Education | 4 | 18 | 8 | 62 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 26 |
| Third sector | 7 | 32 | 1 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 17 |
| Police | 3 | 14 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 8 | 5 | 11 |
| Mental health | 0 | 0 | 2 | 15 | 1 | 8 | 3 | 6 |
| Physical health | 1 | 5 | 1 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Substance misuse | 2 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Sports club | 1 | 5 | 1 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Council hub | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |

4.3 Intervention plans

Intervention plans were cited in the contextual assessments for 30 young people. In around half of the plans, Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service practitioners had recorded direct support frequency. This ranged from once to three times a week. Some practitioners also specified that they would be available for additional ad hoc, or crisis support where needed.

According to service data, practitioners regularly provided information and support on eighteen topics (see Table 7). The most prevalent topics were emotional regulation, thinking and behaviour, and relationships. Emotional regulation work focused on improving a young person's skills around

managing distress, mindfulness, and relaxation. Thinking and behaviour work used scenario planning to help young people consider their actions, emotions, and decision making, and it encouraged them to consider the longer-term impact of actions. Relationship work was centred around identifying and building healthy relationships with peers and family members.

Practitioners also frequently recorded plans to provide emotional and practical support to the young person's family. This included building relationships with family members and understanding where support was required, helping family members with challenges around a young person's behaviour, and providing updates on the work completed by the young person.

Table 7: Key topics in young people's intervention plans

| | Cardiff (n = 9) | | Edinburgh (n = 11) | | Newcastle (n = 10) | | Overall (n = 30) | |
|---|--------------------|-----|-----------------------|----|-----------------------|-----|---------------------|----|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Emotional regulation | 8 | 89 | 4 | 36 | 10 | 100 | 22 | 73 |
| Thinking and behaviour | 9 | 100 | 4 | 36 | 9 | 90 | 22 | 73 |
| Relationships | 9 | 100 | 2 | 18 | 5 | 50 | 16 | 53 |
| Self esteem | 9 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 60 | 15 | 50 |
| Emotional and practical support for parents | 8 | 89 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 60 | 14 | 47 |
| Education and employability | 0 | 0 | 9 | 82 | 2 | 20 | 11 | 37 |
| Exploitation | 8 | 89 | 3 | 27 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 37 |
| Contextual safeguarding | 0 | 0 | 10 | 91 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 33 |
| Peer mapping | 8 | 89 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 20 | 10 | 33 |
| Family support | 5 | 56 | 2 | 18 | 2 | 20 | 9 | 30 |
| Identifying and managing risky situations | 8 | 89 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 27 |
| Offending | 0 | 0 | 8 | 73 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 27 |
| Safety planning | 6 | 67 | 1 | 9 | 1 | 10 | 8 | 27 |
| Substance misuse | 0 | 0 | 3 | 27 | 2 | 20 | 5 | 17 |
| Peer mentoring | 0 | 0 | 4 | 36 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 13 |
| Counselling | 0 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 2 | 20 | 3 | 10 |
| Daily routine | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 20 | 2 | 7 |
| Housing | 0 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |

5.0 The views of partners and practitioners

5.1 System-level inputs

The vast majority of respondents described the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service as a relevant, pertinent service for the prevention of youth involvement in SOC. The service was perceived as a valued addition to already established intervention programmes in the three areas. Findings supported the rationale for implementing the service in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Newcastle as all three cities were perceived as having increasing problems with SOC. In some respects, the introduction of the service came before representatives from partner organisations (hereafter ‘partners’) were aware the issue was increasing,

over recent years there’s been significant concern around children becoming involved in more serious violent crime, links to potential organised crime groups, concerns around lots of children being exploited by those more criminally sophisticated, for want of a better word (Kate)

There was also emerging acknowledgment of activity surrounding the county lines model of child criminal exploitation and what Cullen et al. (2020) call ‘blurred lines’ where existing organised crime groups have started to imitate the county lines model including the levels of violence and exploitation.

In support of the service remit, partners reported that there are groups of young people on the cusp of SOC involvement. According to one partner working in Youth Justice, this highlighted the suitability of the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service as a preventative service,

I think we just tend to have a lot of young people who are on the periphery of potentially becoming involved. And for us, those are the young people who tend to be the kind of identified as engaging with SOCIS as a referral. They’re more at risk of, than actually involved. (Kim)

In this regard, the service model complements existing provision as it provides specialist knowledge and support around SOC. So, while there was a slight suggestion that there could be tension between competing services, this positioned the service as a specialist service that brought added value to current services. This was noted by Duncan who said that,

clearly what we do, has to fit with what the issues are within our area, i.e. drugs, motorcycle theft, robberies, just what... you know, whatever the sort of core things are, because there's no point in doing something that doesn't fit with the area you're trying to implement it in.

To this end, there was evidence that while all three services embedded the core service model, each site was able to address the local context.

5.1.1 Partner organisations

Effective partnership working was based on clear governance and service remit. Once this had been determined, partners reported that the service added value to current provision and facilitated information sharing that improved local intelligence gathering. One partner described the benefits of co-working cases, where the service works alongside existing statutory provision,

The communication between the two services is really good, we get a lot of feedback, we get detailed events from them so we can upload them to our systems, so we know what kind of conversations have taken place, that all forms part of our assessment in the reviewing process. (Kim)

The extent to which service practitioners updated partner organisations emerged as a particular strength of the service. In addition, the need for a shared language using simple terminology and omitting jargon, emerged as a key facilitator for partnership working. This was associated with a need for information raising across agencies regarding SOC, child criminal exploitation and the service remit. This was based on partner reports that some referrals demonstrated a lack of understanding about what these terms mean. This resonates with findings from a study into child criminal exploitation in Wales where professionals differed in what they deemed to be child criminal exploitation (Maxwell and Wallace, 2021). While young people trafficked into Wales from England were perceived as having been criminally exploited, there was less consensus amongst practitioners as to whether those involved in ‘blurred lines’ (Cullen et al., 2020) (where local organised crime groups mimic the county lines model) and traditional family-led drug dealing models constituted criminal exploitation. So, despite having what was described as a ‘fantastic information sheet’ (Kirsty), it was suggested that the service should undertake information raising across different agencies.

Regarding service provision, partners particularly valued the child-centred nature of the service. This included ensuring that young people’s voices were heard, and they were involved in decision making. This is reflective of a child rights approach, which is incorporated within the law of Scotland and Wales and protected in England, and enshrined in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (1989) as ‘every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them’. According to partners, this was enhanced by staff expertise.

Staff expertise extended beyond engagement and service provision as they provided additional expert oversight and perspectives which were perceived as adding strength to service referrals and provision,

it’s really helped to work with another professional from another agency that can help put weight behind my argument when things, I feel, can be missed sometimes. It just really helps, and obviously, to share that clear communication and offer updates between one another, and it gives the young person another professional that is there to help them. (Jason)

As noted above, several partners talked about the value of having regular feedback from the service. This was viewed as improving safeguarding as the informal, flexible nature of the service was associated with both enhanced disclosures as well as expertise in addressing risk in order to protect young people,

it just helps having that external agency come in who are capable of identifying a young person’s needs and as I said, they’ll do the activities but also, they’ll raise concerns, have those discussions with the young people around healthy relationships, non-healthy relationships, and sometimes just baby step them through the process if the young person is not fully ready to hear the hard truth of, ‘You know what, he’s not your mate, he’s exploiting you’. (Jason)

Therefore, partners reported a range of benefits posited by the service. These included having a service specifically aimed at working with young people at an earlier age and stage than existing provision, the inclusion of peer mentors (see section 5.4.1), and the provision of a safe space for young people to talk openly and honestly about their lives, especially if they were socially isolated or excluded from school as they,

...get them early and do you know prevention and reducing crime and reducing offending and reducing substance usage you know, the paradox in that is you're not just reducing you're actually increasing life expectancy and positive relationships and employment you know, all that stuff. (Ian)

As well as early intervention, the ability to provide crisis intervention and intensive support to young people was valued by partners. This was seen as a vital element that statutory services do not have the time to address. Moreover, partners noted that the service can work with groups of young people who are deemed to be at risk as opposed to those who have met service thresholds or been in contact with the police through their offending behaviours.

When asked what could be improved about the service, four themes emerged. First, several partners wanted the service to increase its capacity to accept more referrals. This was particularly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent social isolation measures. While this had an adverse impact across all sectors, partners reported that staff absence had a detrimental impact on service provision due to its relatively low number of staff members. Second, at a community level, some partners wanted the service to explore options for supporting homeless young people. While it was acknowledged that this reflects a wider strategic issue, partners wanted the provision of housing and a secure base for young people,

we have had a couple of really complex cases where kids have been sofa surfing or have been homeless, and trying to support them when they've not got a stable and secure base is really tricky (Kirsty)

Third, it was suggested that the service should expand into more preventative work for those young people at lower levels of risk of SOC involvement. This was perceived as a viable route of preventing escalation as well as providing service continuity for those young people who went on to become exploited. Fourth, the notion of brokering access to specialist services was suggested in relation to independent living skills.

5.2 Activities at the individual level

5.2.1 Engagement

As a core component of the service, interview findings emphasised the significance of adopting appropriate strategies for engaging with young people and their families. This was particularly challenging when young people were involved in SOC, as they were earning large sums of money and embedded within peer groups. Practitioners were candid about their inability to provide a comparable counteroffer, even with the support of peer mentors (see section 5.4.1),

I mean these guys earn £500 a week, how do you convince them? So that's where our biggest struggle comes in, do you know, like, what have we got to offer these guys? I mean [we] could share our experience all day long, we can meet these guys, two, three times a week for a few hours at a time, but

ultimately they have to go back and live in this community where the peer groups are. (Ross)

This highlighted the influence of contextual factors within the communities in which young people live. This includes the tension between young people's aspirations and the poverty and deprivation in which they live (Young, 1999). Hence, Craig lamented on the limited offer that services can make to young people to re-engage them with education, training, and employment,

there's relative poverty in play that, that makes the draw of serious organised crime quite an attractive one. And that's probably actually the biggest thing, you know, in terms of seeing, you know, seeing somebody running about the, the housing estate in a, you know, in a blingy Range Rover with a nice looking partner and all the things that seem to be easy to get. And that's something that they feel that they can aspire to. (Craig)

This supports findings from a qualitative review of the service in Glasgow (Menezes and Whyte, 2015) which reported that young people's perceived invisibility and invincibility along with the instant gratification offered by SOC emerged as key factors for their involvement. Interview findings revealed that this was also associated with risk factors such as parental mental health, substance misuse, domestic abuse and 'a ton of adverse childhood experiences' (Alastair). The cyclical nature of exploitation was also alluded to where those who have been exploited go on to exploit others. This highlighted the need to break the cycle. Indeed, the service embeds contextual safeguarding within its initial assessment of young people's needs and the development of intervention plans. Service managers noted that the process facilitated initial communication with young people as they were able to engage in a conversation about the young person's needs rather than confronting their offending behaviour. This was supported by the production of a timeline so the managers and practitioners could gain a comprehensive picture of the young person's journey from first getting into trouble to becoming involved with the police. This was associated with more general information gathering as the conversation 'seems to throw other things up' (Duncan) that can then be explored with the young person. Similarly, Rob described this as a process that enabled the team to begin working with the young person and addressing their vulnerabilities,

we start engaging with the individuals, so making contact with the young person, making contact with the family, building that trusting relationship and going in and trying to focus on what their vulnerabilities are rather than just going say, 'well, I hear you've been involved in criminal exploitation', you know, 'why are you doing that?' because they'll probably tell us where to go straightaway. (Rob)

In this sense, establishing contact with young people and their parents emerged as a process that was by two main elements: time and perseverance, and perceived need. The first element referred to the allocation of sufficient time to engage young people and their families. This differentiated the service from existing provision as Neil emphasised in relation to their previous local authority role,

...you'd give them three knocks and if they didn't answer, if they just didn't wanna, then we wouldn't work with them. So, I think a lot of young people sort of can get lost through the system sort of thing like then, so I think it's just... where Action for Children, it gives you that flexibility where you can sort of keep on trying. (Neil)

Neil's quote highlights that rather than recording young people as 'non-engagers', the service model benefits from having dedicated time to undertake initial engagement. This follows findings from Urry et al. (2015) which showed that engagement with vulnerable groups has to take place at the right time for them, as opposed to the right time for service providers. Although it should be noted that as a non-statutory service, the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service does not have legal duties to complete time-limited assessments or preventative work.

In some cases, initial engagement could take many months due to the bad experiences young people and parents had encountered with other professionals and services in the past. Findings have shown this can be exacerbated if young people are sceptical about whether services are able to intervene and improve their situation (Andell and Pitts, 2017). Reluctance to engage posed challenges for practitioners as they sometimes had difficulties physically finding young people and establishing an initial conversation. For the latter, Laura described the difficulties practitioners encountered just 'to get through the door',

They don't want another worker, so it's... it's really difficult sometimes to get through the door, but I actually think if we can separate, which we do try to do. Like, we'll say, we're not social work, you know. We're Action for Children. Sometimes that helps a bit, you know. (Laura)

This highlighted the benefit of having the service situated within Action for Children. Practitioners were able to demonstrate their independence from statutory services and draw upon Action for Children's existing reputation. Rob felt that levels of engagement were enhanced where practitioners had spent many months tracking down young people. This may be because the effort placed on finding young people provides evidence of their interest and willingness to provide help and support.

The second theme highlighted the perceived need for help and support. Practitioners noted that young people were often unaware they had been exploited. Further, Thompson (2019) has noted that even when young people are aware, they are often on the edge of these groups and so do not understand the full extent of their involvement. In some respects, this reflects the way young people are groomed as this is often through the initiation of supposed friendships or where young people are made to feel part of the group,

It's trying to get through the door with the young people. They don't recognise they've been exploited. (Laura)

This was particularly difficult given that the service is trying to engage 'the hardest to reach teenagers who have been exploited' (Ross). However, the adoption of a consistent, persistent approach was aligned with the need to engage with young people at the right time. This was supported through collaborative working where practitioners liaised with partners organisations to determine the best strategy as Kate described,

...that question around whether they should keep trying, or whether we think it's appropriate they close and whether they try it at a later point. (Kate)

Interview findings demonstrated that practitioners employed a range of techniques to engage young people. This meant that practitioners were particularly skilled in establishing engagement, even where other services had failed to do so. Further, there was some evidence that some of the sites were engaging with young people who were unknown to other services. Consequently, the service was identifying and working with young people involved or on the periphery of SOC yet who

were not on the police or social care radar. Termed ‘ghost children’ by Ruth, this supports findings that the county lines model of drug dealing has turned its attention to the criminal exploitation of ‘clean skins’ as they are less likely to attract police attention (Maxwell and Wallace, 2021, Ministry of Justice, 2019, The Children’s Society, 2019). In these instances, appropriate safeguarding referrals were made to ensure that young people received support and intervention from statutory services.

5.2.2 Delivery

In support of the programme theory, the delivery model adopted by the service emerged as a core component of the service. This aspect was facilitated by structural aspects of the service model such as small caseloads and open-ended casework, and operationalised by the highly skilled workforce employed by the service. The notion of staff having been ‘handpicked’ emerged across interviews as a key strength of the service model,

... the level of concern and care for the young people is really, it's, it's definitely there, so they feel like they are supported, like, you know, they have someone a lot of the time, they maybe feel like they didn't have someone, if a social worker has like 30 kids on their caseload, and they see them once a month, that's not really support. (Leanne)

The delivery of bespoke interventions was further strengthened by the inclusion of a strengths-based assessment of young people’s needs. In doing so, the service captures young people’s voices regarding their needs so that their voices are at the centre of intervention planning,

That's the general idea really, just building that interest in them, making sure we're listening to their needs, trying to build a provision around them, they're at the centre of it, and that we're not just building a provision that they should just be involved in which they don't want a say in, so that's the general idea. (Rob)

This embodies the proposed service outcomes where young people are viewed through a safeguarding rather than a criminal lens. In doing so, young people are provided with a programme of support aimed at addressing their underlying needs rather than focusing on their offending behaviour,

And you can take them out of their home setting as well, which I like to do, and just start speaking to them about who they are. That's the biggest thing, is really not just focusing on the incident. Yes, we talk about that, but it's a big thing about getting to know them and then we do, start doing the other work that we need to do. (Ruth)

In terms of underlying needs, interview findings revealed a range of needs with which young people wanted support. These needs extended beyond support away from criminality and reflected wider personal needs associated with normal adolescent development,

...we booked him into the doctors, because he was, he just had a few concerns around his body image and we just wanted to make sure that those concerns, that he was able to voice them and they were heard. (Ruth)

Yet it was noted that if left unaddressed, these needs could be detrimental to the development of self-esteem and confidence. Indeed, practitioners in a qualitative study undertaken in three English coastal towns found that low self-esteem was associated with increased vulnerability to child

sexual exploitation regardless of family dysfunction and economic status (Radcliffe et al., 2020). Moreover, these findings highlighted that these are young people first, and offenders second (Haines and Case, 2015).

Specifically, in relation to the adoption of a child-centred approach it was noted that young people responded positively to the informal style adopted by the service. This served to differentiate practitioners from statutory staff and foster engagement. However, they could be negatively impacted by other professionals where other agencies are involved. In one example, the formality and structured nature of a statutory meeting impacted upon the practitioner's relationship with a young person,

So [the social worker] came out and because of [their] manner and the way it was just so formal and so uncomfortable, the young person then wouldn't work with me after that for about six weeks. And then I had to rebuild that whole trust and that relationship again. (Marie)

This placed the onus upon service staff to both persevere with the young person and endeavour to re-establish their relationship.

Reiterating sensitivity to the young person, partners and managers commented on the use of techniques such as engaging in conversations in the car rather than sitting across from them,

It's the way to get the relationship. I mean, even like spending 15 minutes in the car with a young person, you're not face to face with them. You're driving, the conversations you get out of a young person and just slowly building a relationship. (Laura)

Such informality was further noted in relation to the spaces that peer mentors and practitioners used to reinforce relationships and deliver interventions and with young people. Laura joked that staff should have loyalty cards for McDonalds as it was a commonly used venue. Although they noted that 'some would argue' that taking a young person out for food is not an appropriate way of delivering support. However, wider research findings suggest that young people feel empowered and valued when someone older takes them out to buy them food. Hence this is an often-used tool that exploiters use to groom young people into exploitative relationships (Maxwell and Wallace, 2021). Therefore, it could be argued that practitioners are actively addressing the grooming tool by using the same method but role modelling positive engagement.

5.2.3 Intensive one-to-one support

Where young people had been excluded from school or placed on reduced school timetables, they had a considerable amount of unstructured leisure time. Indeed, Clarke's (2019) analysis revealed that young people in gangs were more likely to be in alternative provision and absent from school. Therefore, practitioners and peer mentors used this time to deliver intensive one-to-one support, including support around managing emotions and developing coping strategies. Reiterating earlier findings, this work was delivered in informal settings such as during car drives, at the beach, or in cafes as it was noted that practitioners were in 'danger of putting them off' (Natasha). The strategic use of peer mentor-practitioner co-working was also used to reduce the intensity of one-to-one working and relieve potential awkwardness, especially where practitioners were much older than the young person,

Would a 15 year old young man really wanna go for a sit down with a meal with a 55 year old woman? Do you know what I mean? You kind of have to be aware of how they feel about that. Is that potentially intimidating, or is it the fact that another worker is there or another young person is there, that helps it? It helps build it. So really that's kind of probably how we tend to be doing that [2-to-1 engagement] a bit more than we did at the beginning. (Natasha)

These techniques enabled the service to balance the delivery of preventative work with retaining young people's attention, interest and ultimately their engagement with the service. This was especially useful where young people were thought to be immature,

So there's, that, a lot of the time, it's very informal and with them two, because they're quite immature, so they struggle [with] long amounts of focused work. So their progress with them is a bit slower than it has been with the other people, the other guys. (Leanne)

Hence, intervention work was delivered using informal activities divided into manageable blocks. This included finding hooks to attract young people's attention. For example, Duncan described using music as an intervention tool,

But when they do their [rapping] stuff, you need to explain to them the significance of what they're saying, and how other people perceive what they're saying. So, it's all about education and things like that (Duncan)

Several examples were given where intensive one-to-one support helped young people to re-engage with formal education,

This young person wasn't going to school when we first started working with him, he wasn't interested, he was getting in trouble. So since he's started working with [the service] he's not received one single charge, he's back at school, he's doing his Nat threes and Nat fours, which is all positive, you know what I mean. (Ross)

Nevertheless, interview findings revealed that some young people continued to engage in behaviours that maintained a level of risk for SOC involvement. These findings supported the inclusion of an open-ended service so that young people did not lose their support as soon as they showed signs of entering onto a positive pathway. This demonstrated the ongoing risk factors within young people's wider communities.

5.2.4 Groupwork

Respondents from partner organisations described the range of group work undertaken by the service. This included sessions aimed at enhancing school attendance, accessing employment training and those specifically for young people deemed to be embedded in child criminal exploitation. Such work enabled practitioners to observe group dynamics although they were cautious about facilitating continued criminality,

you're able to see what the dynamic is between them, what's going on between them and if they're doing criminality together, out there, sometimes I think we need to be ahead of the game and if they're already together, you're not facilitating any criminal behaviour, you're just working with them where they're comfortable as well. (Ruth)

Group work was aimed at fostering conversations about risk and risk management as well as an opportunity for young people to relax and have fun. Reiterating previous findings, the flexibility of the service was highlighted as this enabled practitioners and peer mentors to be creative, dynamic and adapt sessions to young people's needs and interests,

So, they seem to be really creative, but they are also mindful of the group and the dynamics that we have at any given time and what's going to work for them. So, they really adapt it to suit the needs of the group, as opposed to it being a prescriptive programme that they have to follow from start to finish. (Kirsty)

In doing so, the creative nature with which practitioners identify informal activities and match them with young people is an acknowledged tool for re-igniting young people's interests and persuading them to access leisure activities within their local communities (Barter et al., 2020).

5.3 Activities at the interpersonal level

According to interview findings, the developmental stage at which young people are targeted by organised crime groups presented challenges as this is the stage where young people challenge authority and move away from the family unit and spend more time with their peers. Craig described the importance of friendships and being part of a group, and the extent to which these friendship groups can be part of the problem. Conversely, some young people were being drawn into criminality due to the offending behaviours of family members,

it's just trying to break that cycle of well that, my mum and dad did that so that's my, that's gonna be my life. Or my brother did that so I, I look up to my brother, so that's what I'm gonna do too. It's just trying to make them see that that's not, it doesn't have to be that way. (Leanne)

Despite embedding whole family approaches within the service model, several respondents stated that this constitutes informal rather than formal intensive support or direct work with parents and the wider families,

We've not got any, like, intensive support for the parents. It's kinda just linked in with the support that we give to the kids. (Darren)

Mixed findings emerged in relation to family engagement. Respondents were clear that the service is aimed at young people and preventing them from SOC involvement. Hence, consideration was given to ensuring that parent engagement did not deter, detract or prevent engagement with young people. For some young people whose family members were involved in SOC, the challenge was how to present an alternative pathway to the young person while also reassuring them that they would retain relationships with their families or continue to be accepted by a social network. It also added the additional challenge of family involvement in SOC constituting a recognised risk factor for young people (Densley et al., 2019).

For a small group of young people, their families did not engage with the service. However, for the most part, families did engage, even when they were 'set in their ways',

not every mum will accept the support, some of them are quite stubborn and set in their ways, which is fine, you know what I mean, we're not there to pry or try and change anything in that sense. But it's just letting them know, look, we're here for you, we want to support you as well, it's not just about your kid, it's

about you as well. We need you to be on board. But most are pretty accepting of that. (Ross)

As with youth engagement, the non-statutory nature of the service facilitated relationship building. This supports wider findings where non-statutory services are able to position themselves away from the decision-making processes and professionals that 'governed many of the young people's lives' (Barter et al., 2020:76). This was especially apparent for the third group of parents. This group felt judged, overlooked, or wary about requesting help. This necessitated a slow approach where practitioners called parents to see how they were or made an informal visit to listen to their concerns,

Many of the young people's parents will quite often say "no-one asks us how we feel", so it sometimes goes just that long way to say "how are you doing, are you okay?", so yeah, all of them get offered that. Nine times out of ten a lot of them will go, "no, I'm fine". So we negotiate our own sort of relationship with them, just like ringing them every now and again and just build it slowly. (Rob)

Relationship building with parents was deemed vital to the service. Parents were often gatekeepers to young people meaning that their support for the service determined their child's initial engagement and future involvement. As noted earlier (see section 4.1), in some cases practitioners initiated contact with parents as a precursor to youth engagement. So rather than dismissing a young person as not engaging, this gave practitioners a new approach that could be used to foster youth engagement. Despite being an effective approach, this took time, sometimes many months.

The inclusion of whole family approaches was also perceived to be an effective tool in encouraging young people to see the effects of their offending. In some respects, this is reflective of a restorative justice approach where offenders are brought together with the victims of their crimes to discuss the consequences of their crime and how to make amends for their actions (Johnstone, 2013; Van Ness and Strong, 2014). Hence, by working with all family members young people were confronted with the impact of their actions,

these would be the consequences, not only for you, but like, look what would happen to your family, if you decide to go down that route, because you're trying to be loyal and not be a snitch and things like that. We've, we've cooked with them, where young people have never really cooked before and then allowed that to take it home to their parents were that's been a massive thing, where Mum was like, he's never done anything. And so that, that creates a positive and breaks a barrier then between the family as well. (Ruth)

There is good evidence of the effectiveness of restorative justice in youth violence prevention (O'Connor and Waddell, 2015).

5.3.1 Practical and emotional support

Interview findings highlighted that the delivery of practical support was omitted from the initial programme theory. The offer of practical support was facilitated by the Action for Children emergency fund which was established in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to support families who were struggling financially. The need for financial support emerged in relation to purchasing furniture and help with food parcels,

You can just give really practical kinda support like getting cookers for their mams or helping them get new carpets if they move house. It's quite practical

stuff really. I think that's the beauty of Action for Children...access to an emergency fund and it just, it helps build your relationship with the young person and with the family. (Natasha)

This highlighted the wider deprivation in which young people and their families live. The offer of practical support was associated with relationship building and the development of trust. Such support was deemed vital as addressing practical issues can help to support young people and their families with the emotional issues arising from SOC involvement. It was suggested that many young people were living in single-parent homes and so the provision of practical and emotional support had a huge impact on the parental ability to cope. This included providing support with the home, food shopping and supporting their other children. In this regard, interview findings highlighted a current gap in service provision as some parents felt helpless and did not know how to respond and support their child once they were involved in SOC. Although, it was suggested that the potential for establishing parent support groups is an area the service is currently exploring for future development.

Preventative work with siblings included identifying and accessing appropriate support services as well as taking them for days out so that practitioners could help them devise safety plans, identify sources of support and give them a safe space to talk about how this was affecting their lives,

they're kids and people think oh, you know, they, they don't understand, but they do and sometimes you just need to take them out of that setting and give them a bit of time for themselves. So, for me, that is like an early intervention of giving them that time and if you notice things, actually feeding that back to the social worker and saying, oh, have you noticed this or have you picked up on that, or can you offer words with like, your team manager about maybe some finances for this for these young, for the siblings, so yeah, just little things like that. (Ruth)

Interview findings also highlighted the practical support to siblings, such as helping them to buy school uniforms, or obtain college places or legitimate employment,

we sorted out the job interview. We even got her funding so she could go in a... smart to the interview. Like I say, there's three parents we've got on parental courses, and that's worked out really well. (Duncan)

This flexibility to meet the whole family needs was valued by practitioners. This included the provision of out-of-hours support as practitioners reported that there could be 'issues over the weekend' (Leanne) as well as ensuring that the young person and family had access to support when they were on annual leave.

5.4 Mechanisms

Of the four mechanisms outlined in programme logic, findings emerged in relation to two service facilitators: peer mentors and relationship building. Diversionary activities and young people and parent perceptions of bespoke delivery will be explored in year two of the evaluation. Therefore, this section outlines findings in relation to how peer mentors and relationship building are used to engage and deliver the service in order to achieve the proposed outcomes.

5.4.1 Peer mentors

Peer mentors were posited as a central tenet of the service model within the service documentation, emerging as a key mechanism through which change occurs. Most respondents stated that the inclusion of peer mentors was a key strength of the service model. Statutory partners described peer mentors as fundamental to the service model, increasing the credibility and authority the service has in comparison to other professionals,

So, I mean, the kind of core of their module is the inclusion of lived experience mentors you know, ... those guys speak with a kind of authority incredibly, that frankly social workers don't have. (Alastair)

While peer mentors were recruited to the service based on their lived experience of youth offending, this posed practical challenges in identifying suitable candidates and ensuring that their role in the service would not be detrimental to their own recovery,

Peer mentors haven't been easy to get hold of, but then, why would it be, you know? When you're trying to recruit people who have got a criminal background and they've been in prison and had all those things in their life, it's not going to be a straightforward situation, because you've got to make sure you do it right. (Rob)

In this respect, parallels were drawn with how young people are engaged and supported and the way peer mentors should be supported in order to enable them to succeed and remain away from offending. To counteract the challenges of identification and suitability, one project partner, Helen, reported that young people who had been through the system and successfully moved away from SOC could then be supported into a role with the service. Indeed, Nixon (2020) has discussed the reciprocal benefits for both peer mentors and mentees, as Darren commented,

that's kinda why we get up every morning and stay clean and sober, like, to give them hope. So something like [this service], like, I just think it could change so many lives. (Darren)

While some managers reported having initial reservations about supporting peer mentors to accept a formal employment role, they noted that in practice they had 'absolutely exceeded my expectations' (Laura). Indeed, the use of peer mentors has been increasing in the UK, either embedded within programmes or as a standalone intervention (Creaney, 2020; Maxwell and Corliss, 2020).

Throughout the interviews, respondents spoke about the role peer mentors played in engaging with 'unreachable' young people,

I think being able to reach these kids, that are unreachable to a lot of other organisations, is our main strength. Like, some of these kids will not work with anybody and then they send one of us [peer mentors] along with one of the practitioners or whatever and then they agree to work with us. (Darren)

Slight variation was noted between the service sites as to whether peer mentors worked independently or co-worked cases with practitioners. An evolutionary approach emerged where peer mentors began by co-working with practitioners to learn safeguarding procedures and the structural service processes. They were then assigned independent work with young people who were assessed to be at a lower risk. Finally, there was evidence of peer mentors having been

promoted to the practitioner role. Nevertheless, findings demonstrated that peer mentors were most valued for their lived experience, and promoting them to take on more formal responsibilities did not necessarily negate this,

It's not changed anything at all, because both [peer mentors]... so we kind of joke with them and say, well, you're not a peer mentor now, you're a practitioner, but you're like a lived experience practitioner, which they... they enjoy. Like, they like that, so we still have that... they still have that wealth of knowledge, that's not really changed that much at all." (Laura)

This provides tentative evidence that service staff were able and willing to support peer mentors into the practitioner role. This is particularly pertinent given the concept of 'liminality' where people with lived experience of prior offending can experience frustration when colleagues are reluctant or unable to accept their new pro-social identities. Findings from Nixon's (2020) probation study showed that ex-offenders experienced increased emotional toil in their work due to their previous lived experience which was exacerbated when they were not accepted by their colleagues. Yet the findings presented here suggest that practitioners valued their 'professional vision' as staff with lived experience who had increased insight and ability to identify early warning signs (Goodwin 1994),

So peer mentors will be going out with the youth workers, so we want them obviously to be the eyes and ears as well, because obviously they've got life experiences from being involved in that lifestyle years ago, so they're obviously going to pick up on stuff that we might not pick up on because that's always going to be the case, that will always happen. (Rob)

As noted earlier, some practitioners noted the age difference between themselves and the young people they were supporting. The addition of peer mentors not only provided the credibility that arose from their lived experience but also because they 'looked the part',

They don't look like a middle-aged man like me, so that's another thing that's a good starter for ten. You know, our peer mentor, even how he looks, how he dresses, things like that, he's very much from the... he does a lot of outreach work, things like that. He does a lot of youth work, so he's got a good background, but he's got credibility. (Duncan)

The notion of credibility was a vital component emerging from the findings. Interview findings from practitioners suggested that young people perceived peer mentors as having the knowledge and understanding needed to guide them,

Yeah, no, that [having peer mentors] is a major asset. Like they can give advice and guidance to the kids that I, you know... I can give them things that they'll say like 'Leanne, you've never lived in care, or you've never been to prison' so you can't comment like, but the guys know what it feels like, they know what the emotions are, you know, so it's, that's really good. (Leanne)

This notion of credible role models who embody hope for the future is supported by previous findings (Creaney, 2020; Kavanagh and Borril, 2013). In doing so, peer mentors brought an additional dynamic to the service as they had 'walked the walk' (Kirsty). This provided them with credibility that other practitioners were unable to demonstrate,

I could say to a young person or other practitioners say, you know, 'I really feel you're at crisis point'. 'You're... we can tell that you're at your wits end'. You know, we can't actually say, 'I know how you must be feeling'. You know, 'we know you're getting pulled from this person and you're earning money from...' you know, from doing whatever, but actually, the peer mentors can say that. They have lived it, they can give them their experience, they can tell them where it's leading to. We... we can't. We've never been there so we can't really share... (Laura)

Hence, peer mentors were perceived as catalysts for offending desistance and role models for recovery as they enabled the visualisation of a new prosocial self-identity and social capital (Nixon, 2020),

these young folk look at us and although they might not admit it and that, 'cause it might not be cool to admit it, but they must get hope, they must see that, again, 'Darren's been in the jail 20 times, 20 odd times, he's been sectioned under the Mental Health Act and look at him now, like. He walks about, he's got his routine, he's got a full-time job'. (Darren)

Alongside their credibility, peer mentors were able to adopt a more direct approach with young people without fear of jeopardising their relationship. In some cases, peer mentors reported that they adopted a 'good cop, bad cop' style of co-working with the peer mentors adopting the harder line,

But she's a soft one, so I'm the hard one, so I won't tolerate the bullshit, I'm like no, no, you're trying to manipulate, this isn't good. And I'm alright with that, we all need that, you know what I mean, the good cop, bad cop almost. (Ross)

In this respect, peer mentors addressed potential manipulation from young people, confronted the realities of offending and exploitation and set standards they expected young to meet,

he puts it on the table early doors, that anybody who doesn't listen or doesn't sort of participate or does something that isn't acceptable, that they will not... they won't be part of... you know, there's consequences. And he's done that in the past where somebody was playing up and they didn't go [on a fun activity trip]. (Duncan)

In doing so, peer mentors encouraged and motivated young people while also supporting them to add structure to their lives. In doing so, the service gave young people a new 'sense of purpose' (Kirsty) while peer mentors provided real-life evidence that it was possible to embark upon a more positive pathway.

5.4.2 Relationship building

A consistent theme throughout the interview findings was the significance of establishing trust and developing relationships. It has been noted elsewhere that where young people live in challenging or complex situations, they may lack positive role models and strengths-based relationships with adults (Barter et al., 2020). Interview findings revealed a range of strategies used for relationship building. This included engaging with parents as a precursor to youth engagement. This offered young people the opportunity to stand back and observe practitioners without having to commit themselves to entering into a relationship or engaging with the service,

Sometimes with young people, if they see you helping their family, they know you're the real deal. They're like, okay, she's legit, she's helping my family, she doesn't need to. She's, really, she's there for me, but she's there for my mum, or she's doing that for my brother. (Ruth)

Relationship building was facilitated by establishing trust which was demonstrated by visiting young people at the time and date they had scheduled, calling young people in the morning to confirm that they would be there and adopting a trauma-informed stance so that practitioners and peer mentors continued to attend even when young people had not opened the door on previous occasions. Such consistency reinforced practitioner and peer mentor interest for the young person and sensitivity to their needs. Allied to relationship building was adopting a non-judgemental stance, as Ruth goes on to explain,

...or, like, I've been really horrible to my parents, and they can't actually express themselves that they feel sorry, but they know that I've turned up when they've like trashed the house and I've helped Mum put the house back together. And although they've done that, and they know it's bad, they appreciate that I've then gone in and supported the parents, and it just breaks down those barriers. (Ruth)

According to practitioners, the provision of non-judgemental support and remaining with young people even when they have done something 'they know is bad' is an important aspect of the service. This included supporting young people in the role of 'appropriate adult' if they are arrested. This was perceived as helping to build trust and create a safe space where young people can disclose what is happening. Moreover, it suggested that by remaining with the young person through challenges or setbacks, practitioners may reinforce trust and strengthen the relationship. In doing so, practitioners were able to provide reassurance and support,

So, I guess what we're doing is, we're reassuring, we are working with vulnerable young people and families rather than them getting lost in the system, whereas a lot of young people we're finding have been lost for quite a few years and they've come to us, which makes our job harder, but we're able to give them that support, and that's the key fit for me. (Rob)

While relationship-building emerged as an underlying mechanism that was vital for service engagement at the individual level, there was some evidence that the service was building a positive reputation within the wider communities in which they are based,

I had a referral for another young person who was from, like, a crime family, and I was dreading kind of ringing them up and I was thinking, oh, God, how are they going to respond to us? I'm going to have to go out with the meeting. And when I actually rang her up, she said, 'Oh, do you work with such and such and such and such?' And I said, 'Yeah.' She went, 'Oh I'm happy you're working with me now and our family.' (Marie)

While further examination is needed, there are tentative findings that the service is becoming established as a source of support for young people and their families when they are in difficult or challenging circumstances.

5.5 Outcomes

Interview findings revealed two main themes in relation to outcomes. According to the logic model, short-term outcomes at the individual level included improved understanding of risk and risk management, appropriate decision making, more protective factors, social capital, and control over their lives. However, partners stated that in practice the service works with young people to celebrate smaller outcomes. This was perceived as instilling a sense of pride in young people and encouraging them to see past their current situation,

I think giving them something to work towards is really important, you know, some sort of certificate. Because any kind of certificate, whether it's accredited or not, can be vocational and I think that in terms of goal setting and trying to broaden their outlook a little bit and see a little bit further than, you know, the end of the week, is something that's really, really positive. (Craig)

In this respect, the service was deemed to 'plant seeds' (Ian) so they could grow. According to this perspective, positive outcomes may not be immediate but may occur much later,

don't think because people didn't engage with [the service] that it was unsuccessful, actually the success was done because they were approached and intervention was done then, you know and the evidence I've got for that is, in the work that I do. (Ian)

The notion of broadening their outlook a 'little bit' was reinforced by Duncan who reported that while there are key ages and stages for young people, the service supports them onto a positive pathway rather than directing them to a specific goal,

...we need that young person has to be independent of our service, so I look at key ages, you know, like 16/18, where that young person knows where they're going. And again, I accept that young people don't really know what they want to do, but from what we do and the group work we do, the young person should have an idea of whether or not they want to still be in education or if they want to be on some sort of training, things like that. (Duncan)

This suggests that at this interim stage, the service has been successful in planting the seeds and giving young people a new sense of purpose. Moreover, there were several examples provided where young people had secured employment, moved away from offending pathways and made positive steps onto a new pathway.

In addition to supporting young people on their short-term journeys, there was some evidence that the service is enhancing the protective role of the family,

One of the other outcomes can be about improving communication within families. They don't just work with children, they try and get alongside parents to encourage them to communicate and engage with the kids. (Kirsty)

This can result in improved access to service entitlements and increased willingness to engage in preventative services. This emerged as an important 'soft outcome' in Boulton et al.'s (2019) qualitative study of a six-month police-led SOC diversion intervention. Many families did not trust services and as such were not engaging with the services to which they were entitled. However, the re-establishment of trust between young people, families and service providers was associated

with increased access to help and support aimed at improving the young person's resilience (Boulton et al., 2019).

6.0 Conclusion

Based on an existing model in Glasgow, the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service was implemented in four sites across the three nations of England, Scotland and Wales in 2020. This represents a proof-of-concept study aimed at ascertaining whether the previously successful model adopted in Glasgow can be transferred to other areas of the UK. There are early indications that the service has been successful in establishing links with partner organisations and complementing existing service delivery. Findings showed that there were 47 open cases across the three sites during the period May to August 2021. Most young people were referred to the service due to concerns from children's services or the police about their offending behaviour, association with gangs or substance misuse. Several partners recommended that the referral process could be facilitated by increasing the knowledge and skills of referral staff regarding how SOC is defined, understood and identified. Although it should be noted that it was also suggested that the service currently has a waiting list and so careful consideration is needed to ensure that the Service has the capacity to accept new or increasing referrals. To this end, several partners wanted service capacity to be increased. This aligns with other partner recommendations to extend the service by including earlier intervention to young people who may be at risk of SOC, and longer-term involvement to support young people with independent living skills.

Despite encountering significant challenges in engaging with young people on the cusp or involved in SOC, findings showed that the service established relationships and engaged with most young people. These challenges included the lack of an offer comparable to the perceived easy money that can be made from SOC involvement. This has been identified as a key challenge for work in this area. Findings from Boulton et al. (2019) showed that young people were so entrenched in SOC and organised crime groups that practitioners experienced problems in establishing contact with young people. This was compounded where young people had previously had bad experiences with service providers.

Most young people were male, and most were not attending school or another educational establishment at referral. Increased risk for youth violence and child criminal exploitation have been linked with school exclusion, although there is no evidence that this is a causative relationship (Timpson, 2019; Children's Society, 2019). However, as noted by practitioners, school exclusion increased a young person's free time and posed the risk of prolonged exposure to delinquent peers (Children's Commissioner, 2019; Youth Violence Commission, 2018). To mitigate this risk, the service used extended leisure time in creative ways to provide intensive interventions that were delivered according to the young person's developmental needs. Practitioners also utilised informal activities to retain young people's interest and motivation.

Findings highlighted that peer mentor and practitioner experience and skills were a core component of the service model. The inclusion of peer mentors emerged as a vital component of the service as they were able to establish credibility and legitimacy based on their lived experience of youth offending. This gave them increased insight and understanding that was used in two main ways. First, peer mentors were able to build relationships and develop trust with young people. This included being direct with young people about the consequences of their actions. Second, peer mentors were able to identify warning signs and potential indicators that are less well known to practitioners. This enhanced safeguarding practices.

In support of wider findings, service engagement was fostered by the quality of relationships, open-ended nature of the service, where cases were not closed but rather placed on hold until such times that the young person did want to engage, and the extent to which the relationship is led by the young person (LKMco, 2018). Staff expertise and knowledge aligned with the risk-need-responsivity model (Andrews, Bonta and Wormith, 2011) which is the leading assessment and treatment model in Canada, the UK, New Zealand and Australia (Loomen and Abracen, 2013). According to this model, staff expertise can be used to identify the level of risk so that service intensity can be adjusted to the needs of the young person. This includes undertaking a needs assessment to enable the design of bespoke interventions and matching service delivery modes with the strengths of the young person. Adherence to all three aspects has been linked to reduced re-offending (Loomen and Abracen, 2013). However, as Menezes and Whyte (2015) note, this model should not be separated from personal and social development as these are important protective factors for desistance from offending. While there was some evidence of the service increasing young people's community engagement and social capital, more research is needed to explore the development of resilience to recidivism.

After one year of operation, findings suggested that rather than the specified outcomes of improved decision making, more control over their lives and enhanced aspirations, in practice it is difficult to challenge the limited opportunities available to young people. This meant that the service has developed innovative methods of engaging young people who may not perceive themselves as being at risk of SOC or exploitation. This necessitated a different way of communicating with young people to 'plant the seeds' that the path they are on may not lead to positive outcomes. In this sense, the service is working with young people to address their immediate needs. For some young people, this involved supporting them back into education or training, re-establishing relationships with their families and helping them to see beyond SOC. However, for other young people, the success of the service may only be evidenced by the establishment or maintenance of communication with the young person. Findings demonstrated that it could take many months to establish intensive work with young people. In these cases, the service appears to be using the time effectively to strengthen the resilience of families to support young people. This was achieved through practical and emotional support to bolster their ability to cope. Moreover, findings showed that the service provides a positive service experience to young people and their families and counteracts previous negative experiences. In doing so, it opens the door for future involvement when the young person is ready to accept help and support. In this sense, some of the positive outcomes of involvement with the Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service may only emerge over time.

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