Disrupting Exploitation

Annual Report

The Children's Society

The Disrupting Exploitation Programme received funding from the National Lottery Community Fund in May 2018, and fully mobilised in September 2018. This report covers the year from 1 September 2018 to end of July 2019.

The programme works with children who are vulnerable to or victims of child exploitation, with a focus on child criminal exploitation, including exploitation along county lines. **The programme operates on two fronts:**

1. Working one-to-one directly with vulnerable young people and through targeted group work.
2. Working on systems change focused on transforming the policies, procedures, contexts and cultures around young people to improve the response to children in comparable situations in the future.

'System changes' are changes to the people, organisations, policies, processes, cultures, beliefs and environment that make up the system.

They are:

- Beneficial.
- Sustainable in the long-term (ie resilient to future shifts in the environment).
- Transformational.

They are not:

- Tokenistic.
- Doing the same thing under a different name.
- Overly reliant on key individuals.

Flexing the system (eg making a one-off exception) is not systems change in its own right, but a good first step towards sustainable systems change.

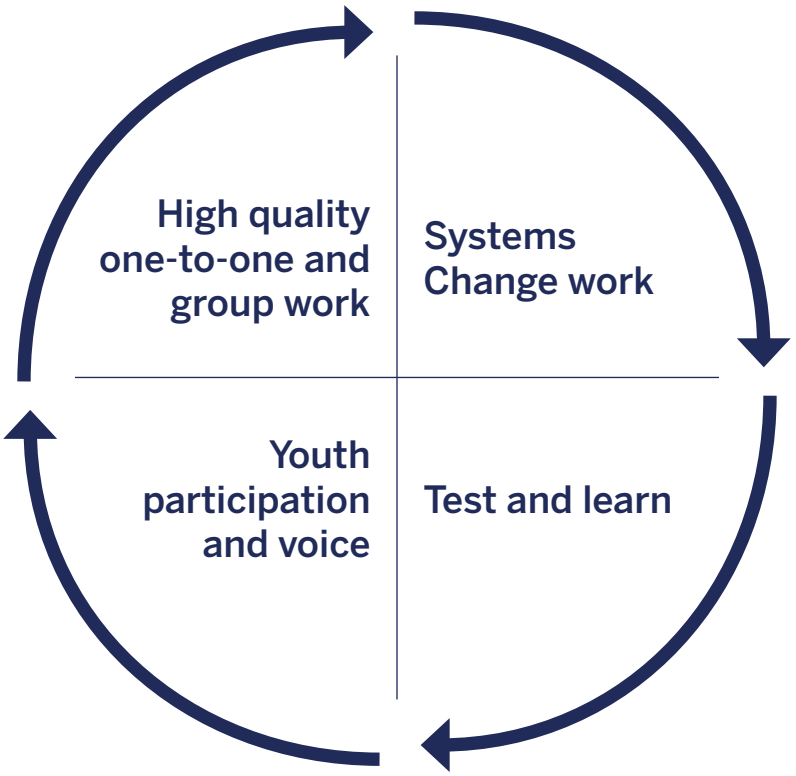
Definition adopted from the Fulfilling Lives Programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Setting the scheme: Key programme components

The programme works nationally and regionally and is delivered by The Children's Society through a dedicated team of 14 staff. Two national roles manage and administer the programme. The Programme Manager leads a dispersed national delivery team within three local areas (Birmingham, Greater Manchester and London). Each local team comprises a Service Manager, an Insight and Engagement Officer and two caseworkers. In London one of the caseworkers is replaced by a therapist. Our programme components are outlined below:

- Three multi-disciplinary response teams established in Birmingham, Greater Manchester and London.
- Each team includes one-to-one caseworkers and intelligence and insight capability.
- The teams are co-located across the system, and we're led and guided by local partnership boards.
- We adopt the principle of generous leadership by sharing insight widely and communicating our learning.
- The team can accept two different types of referrals: for one-to-one work and for systems change tasks including contextual safeguarding interventions.
- We support young people to change the system of exploitation through our participation work.
- We put the power to test and innovate in the hands of our workers, with dedicated funding for practitioners to design and innovate to develop solutions to support young people.
- The learning from the programme is shared nationally and with our policy and influencing team to inform the external agenda.

There are four elements to the programme, which are continually evolving and feeding each other. These components have solidified over our first year of delivery and across the programme as we have taken the vision of disrupting exploitation and pursued and developed new and exciting areas of need.



High quality one-to-one and group work

Each programme of work is tailored to the young person and includes topics such as knowledge and understanding of exploitation, healthy relationships, safety and family, building confidence, improved well-being and gender norms and expectations. Our work with young people also includes advocacy and working in a multi-agency way to ensure that all partners are working together to protect young people and see their vulnerability. This is particularly vital when the young person may be forced to commit crimes linked to their exploitation.

Our targeted group work has developed throughout the first year of delivery. Through this we provide six-week targeted interventions to support young people who are vulnerable to child criminal exploitation. The six-week programme includes sessions on contextual safeguarding and youth voice, knowledge of exploitation and healthy relationships, staying safe and where to go for support.

The therapeutic part of the programme is trauma informed and uses an integrative model. It is designed to be flexible and creative in approach. The duration of the sessions is aimed at meeting the needs of the young people, giving room for long term therapy or short term if preferred.

Key statistics from Year One

350

young people have been involved in participation opportunities across the programme. 17 young people have interviewed staff and over 300 children have been involved in insight gathering sessions to help shape the priorities of the programme.

26

young people have been worked with intensively on a one-to-one basis through the programme.

50%

of children and young people report having a greater understanding of child exploitation.

45

young people have received targeted group work on the programme.

The team has had a combined media reach of

68.4 million

people, helping to shape the narrative of child criminal exploitation and support parents and carers in spotting the signs of child criminal exploitation. Highlights include ITV News, World at One, BBC News, Sky News, BBC 5Live and ITV Granada.

75%

of children and young people report having better relationships with family and friends and report being safer.

We have worked on

136 systems change tasks

and reached over 9,300 people: 5,800 professionals and 3,500 children and young people.

Systems change work

The programme is not solely working directly with young people – it's also about improving the system response to young people to ensure long term change for children who are victims of child exploitation in the future. This work is undertaken in partnership with others, such as police and social services colleagues. It is driven by our commitment to leave a lasting legacy from the programme, both in the areas we directly operate, and more widely through the materials, knowledge and experience we proactive share as our work progresses.

As our work on the programme has developed, we have expanded our definition of systems change into four core areas of focus. These core foci have allowed the team to target their energy on parts of the system we operate within to generate the most change for young people. These areas are continually under review and in development, so may take a different form as time progresses.

The four core areas are:

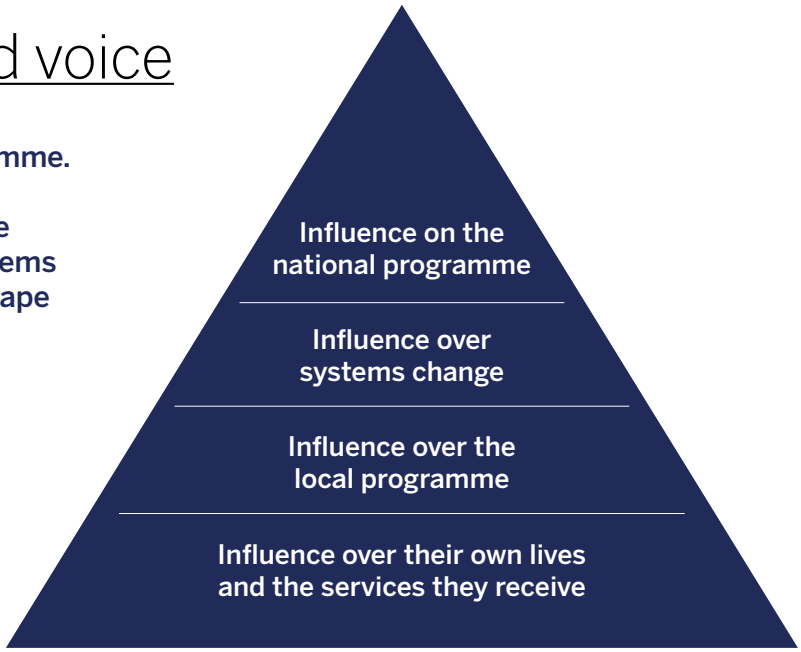
- Delivering contextual interventions.
- Supporting culture change, training and resources.
- Redesigning policy and practice approaches.
- Improving information and intelligence flows.

Further on in this report, we highlight some systems change examples to bring this to life.

Photos from our Systems Changers Showcase event in Birmingham

Youth participation and voice

Young people are at the heart of this programme. From its inception they were involved in recruitment, and their voices and experience shape the support they receive and our systems change work and priorities. Young people shape our programme at different levels, and over the course of the next year we will focus our participation work on young people leading and influencing the national programme and national systems change agenda.



Our Participation Triangle across the Disrupting Exploitation Programme

Test and Learn

Our test and learn approach gives practitioners on the frontline the coaching, guidance, permission and budget to test and trial new projects. This is designed to incubate potential new services and solutions to some of the systemic issues which young people face.

Problems being worked on across the programme include:

- The point of arrest being a potential teachable/reachable moment for young people at risk of exploitation. **Tests being progressed that seek to 'solve' this problem include:**
  - Piloting a multi-agency risk assessment 'safeguarding conversation' in a London custody suite to better share vulnerability information at the point of arrest.
  - Co-delivering with The Children's Society's London hub services, Appropriate Adult provision during Notting Hill Carnival to support young people who were arrested during the event.
- Developing an approach in a local area to trigger considering gender during risk assessments of exploitation by social workers and other multi-agency professionals. This is in response to our gender bias observations whereby girls primarily are considered and risk assessed for child sexual exploitation, and boys for child criminal exploitation.

Across the programme we have supported a range of children who have already been excluded from school or are at risk of exclusions. **Tests being progressed here include:**

- Working with a school to review their exclusions and inclusion policy, to disrupt school exclusions in Greater Manchester.
- Developing and testing a proposal from our national participation group on school exclusions to introduce an 'explanation box' where discourse around behaviours and potential incidents would be encouraged between young people and teachers. The intention of this proposal is that both sides are more aware of one another's needs and expectations within the classroom.

Case study of our work with young people

15 year old young man "Bobby" (not his real name) was picked up with class A drugs in a trap-house raid by Wales Police. Bobby had been driven back to his home by Police Officers, who had questioned him alone in the car and used that information to submit an National Referral Mechanism (NRM) which did not highlight Bobby's vulnerability, instead it read like a crime report. Bobby had subsequently been to court in Wales and – because his NRM failed and his barrister did not understand the NRM process – had been advised to plead 'guilty', which he did. At this time in June 2019 he was referred to our Disrupting Exploitation programme.

Our worker engaged Bobby through weekly sessions by explaining the legal processes to him and how we could help. At the initial meeting we conducted a My Wheel assessment with Bobby, upon which he scored low on:

1. **Safety**
2. **Where I live**
3. **Education, employment and skills**

During Bobby's sessions, we undertook the following interventions with him:

Legal – We challenged the NRM decision to be changed to a positive outcome. We continue to attend court sessions with Bobby to ensure his vulnerability is represented and that he is recognised as a victim instead of an offender, enabling him to retract his plea of 'guilty'.

Vulnerability/safety – Bobby did not see himself as a victim, so we supported him to recognise this by going through the grooming line to make him aware of the stages of grooming. To support Bobby to come to the realisation that he had been groomed, we used language that Bobby used and could identify with to explain a scenario that related to Bobby's life, to enable him to recognise the situation. Bobby can now recognise the signs of grooming - including what people might say and how it would manifest – to keep him safe in the future.

As the drugs had been confiscated by the Police, there was an element of debt bondage with Bobby's case as he now owed the groomer money for the drugs that had been lost, which resulted in threats of harm to him/his family. We worked with the Police to complete intelligence forms and ensure Bobby's safety by putting markers on his home so the Police were aware of the situation and would respond quickly.

Family – We delivered family sessions with Bobby's parents, which included explaining the grooming line to enable them to identify grooming e.g. signs to look out for with Bobby and his five siblings. We also explained the legal process to the parents so they understood what was happening.

Where he lives – Bobby lives in an area known for criminality and exploitation where there is a lot of crime; his exploiter was a local drug-dealer. Bobby shared information with us, including local names and online links, which we shared with the Police to enable them to identify the exploiter and support longer-term disruption of exploitation.

Education – We supported Bobby to identify and engage with education. Bobby's new understanding of risk and how to keep himself safe has been made evident in his decision to go to a college that is out of borough to remove himself from potential exploitative situations. We sometimes go with Bobby to college classes, and meets with his teacher to ensure he is progressing well and identify any further areas where he may need support.

Employment – More recently in his support we have supported Bobby to find employment to engage him in positive activities through meaningful work, this has been done through:

- Taking Bobby to a youth club to sign-up to a youth employment scheme
- Writing a CV
- Applying for jobs
- Practice interviews

Wider work – As Bobby is on bail he is known to the Youth Offending Team. We have joined Bobby's sessions, giving him a sense of empowerment, and are working with the YOT to keep them up to date with the case and his NRM status.

We have worked with Bobby's Probation Officer to help him recognise that he was trafficked so his pre-sentence report reflects the truth.

We believe that without our support Bobby would still be viewed as a perpetrator and not a victim, and would now be in prison in Wales. Although the legal case is still ongoing, Bobby is now in full-time education and has recently attended his first interview for part-time work. He now understands that he was groomed, and he and his parents are able to identify the signs of exploitation and how it can manifest.

**False names have been used to protect identities.*

Case studies of systems change

Custody as a teachable/ reachable moment for young people and professionals

The programme received an original referral to investigate the role of the 'Appropriate Adult' when a child is arrested and in a police station. It quickly became clear there was more to do in custody, and our systems change task widened to include how custody can be a teachable/reachable moment for young people and professionals, and become the beginning of the end of exploitation.

Across Disrupting Exploitation and wider services in The Children's Society, we support young people who have been arrested for crimes linked to their exploitation. If custody staff knew more about young people's vulnerability then improved safety planning and safeguarding would be available in custody.

Two members of the team shadowed custody staff for 12 hours to understand the systems and processes in custody. Bespoke training was then delivered for MET detention as part of their professional development. The training followed a young person through custody and finished with a call to update the system with information about vulnerability and information for children's services to support longer term safeguarding of the child. We have reached over 1,000 custody staff through our training. Custody staff commented on the importance of what they'd learnt during the training:

- 'A greater determination to try to break down the initial barriers + establish a relationship with child detainees.'

This slide is the key message from our training delivered to custody officers about how to identify exploitation in the young people in their custody.

- 'Building a rapport with young children in custody + thinking outside the box about their needs and life after custody.'
- 'Communication and look beyond what is in front of you at the custody desk.'

Our systems change task has also included launching an information sharing pilot in a London borough. For every child that comes through custody, a set of standard safeguarding questions are asked of local children's services. The aim of the pilot is that a safeguarding conversation will take place for all of these young people, and risks and vulnerabilities are identified early.

This work has recently won a commendation from the Howard League.

Changing the language of youth justice

Our programme received a referral for training for youth justice teams in Greater Manchester. The programme identified our systems change task as changing the language of pre-sentence reports and how that language was impacting on the assessment of the child as a victim of child criminal exploitation.

The programme delivered training on the impact of language on young people. It also trained the youth justice team to understand the methods of systems change so they can take forward working on their own issues.

This peer map was used in Greater Manchester to highlight how assumptions can be made about young people and their relationships. The language used in this map could suggest negative connections between the young people, although this is actually a peer map of all the characters in the TV show Friends.

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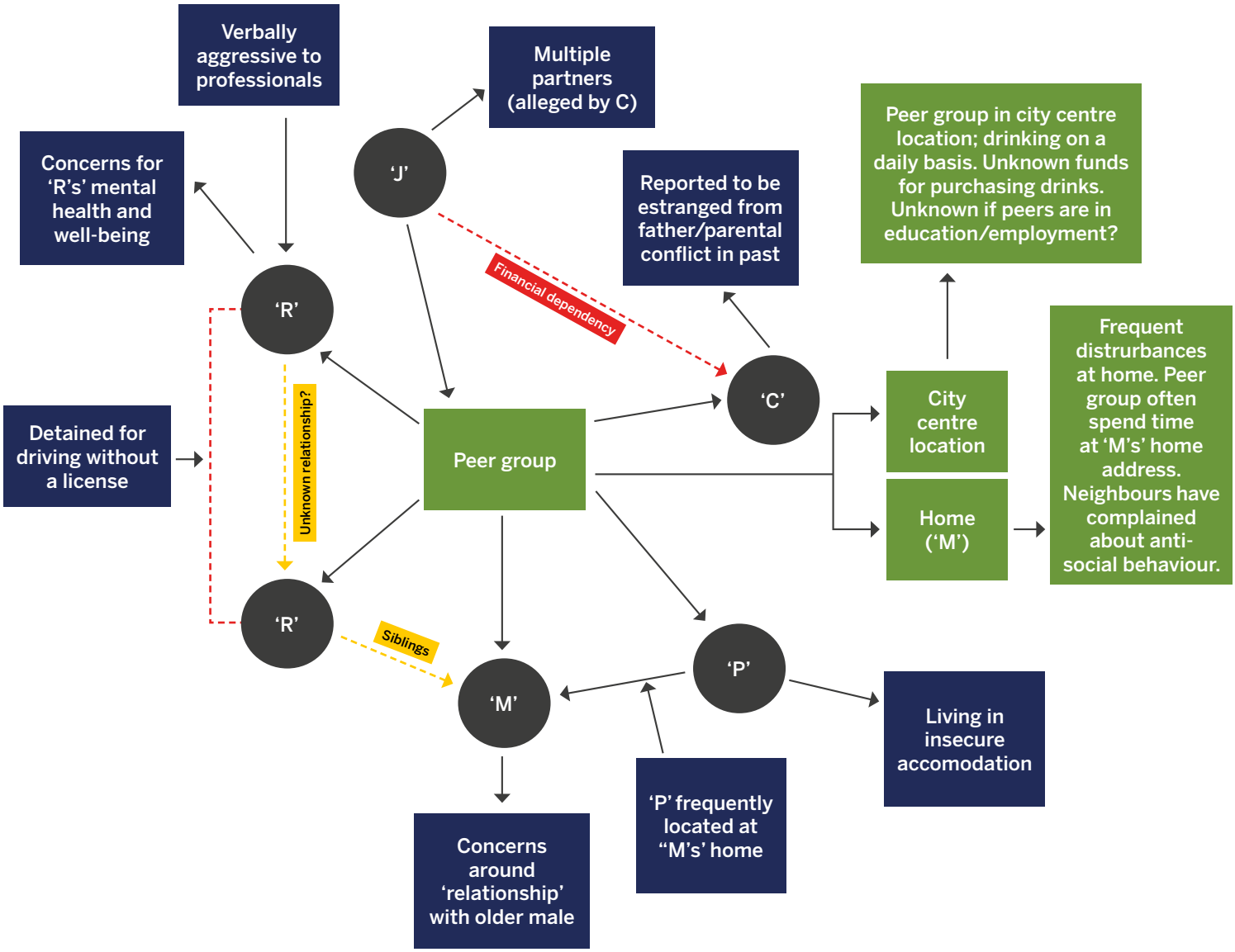

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Contextual safeguarding in the community – Training future beauticians

The London College of Beauty Therapy (LCBT) approached the Disrupting Exploitation, as it recognised that its central role in the community could be used to support young people and disrupt exploitation. Through our early consultation work when we set up Disrupting Exploitation we recognised that beauty salons and nail bars can and should be part of how we disrupt exploitation. Young people learning this skill may be vulnerable to exploitation in their childhood, but will then grow up to potentially run businesses of their own, which could act as community eyes and ears to disrupt exploitation.

The programme worked with the college to train students to notice signs of exploitation and how they can respond to this. Lecturers at the college also completed contextual safeguarding training and exploitation training, leading to long term effects as they can share this knowledge with their students.

Over 100 learners completed the training on exploitation and healthy relationships. All lecturers completed contextual safeguarding training and exploitation training delivered by Disrupting Exploitation. This was also filmed so that all lecturers employed at LCBT completed training, and following this five staff members have become champions – including LCBT's Head of Safeguarding who has been very supportive of the Disrupting Exploitation Programme.

Our core learning to date is summarised below:

Going where the energy is: Parents and partnerships

Systems change cannot be undertaken in isolation. 'System actors' are required – they must be ambitious, think things can be done differently and be willing to work collaboratively on shared problems. This is not always possible and some projects just don't have that spark. All systems change requires individuals to be involved and drive it forward.

We started to look at custody as a teachable/reachable moment when children who are victims of exploitation could be better safeguarded. Crucially we saw it not just as a teachable/reachable moment for the young people but also for the system, which needed to do things differently. What started as a meeting with colleagues in Metropolitan Police detention has turned into an opportunity to shadow custody and to deliver training to over 1,000 custody staff in the Met (bespoke training which critically was about them: their roles, their systems and what they might be able to do differently). Now we are planning the direction our partnership will take in Year Two.

Similarly we identified a growing need for parent support in the programme, with a number of parents contacting us proactively for support with extra-familial safeguarding and advocacy in the child protection system. This year we have worked to interview parents and professionals to better understand their needs, and will be expanding this new part of the programme as we move into Year Two.

Lessons learnt from our first year of delivery

The mobilisation of the Disrupting Exploitation Programme has yielded significant organisational learning. We remain committed to sharing this learning as the programme progresses. The programme is also being independently evaluated by Cordis Bright, who will be producing their own independent report to mark the end of our first year.

Going wide before narrowing

When we first started the programme we were saying yes to everything. Lots of systems change tasks were heading our way and we took them on with enthusiasm and began working to find appropriate and innovative responses. The team worked widely in lots of different settings and on lots of different problems, always driven by a commitment to 'fix' as much as was possible.

In quarter four we've been preparing our focus for the second year, and in doing so we have set systems change priorities. These have narrowed our focus, and are based on insight we have gathered from young people and system failings that we have seen through our one-to-one casework. Our systems change priorities for Year Two are detailed in the next section. Our learning here is that this process takes time – we need to go wide and consider the depth of issues in the section, before we could legitimately narrow our focus to create greater impact.

Recruiting the right people and training them in the right way

Our programme is ambitious. We work one-to-one with children who are exploited (with a particular focus on child criminal exploitation) and we work on changing the systems around young people so they work better in the future. Delivering both in the same programme is tough – it means employing talented people, working in multi-disciplinary teams, and giving all the programme staff the space to challenge and the permission to try new things.

The language of systems change

We've been growing in confidence in how we talk about systems change since programme mobilisation commenced in September 2018. At the first programme staff away day in January 2019, a session was run to identify our 'helpful' and 'unhelpful' words that we use when describing and talking about systems change.

The words generated by staff were developed into a systems change word cloud. Our understanding of systems change was increasing, but we were heavily reliant on examples and could not quite see how we put young people front and centre of our systems change work.

The team have progressed their thinking through the development of the programme. When we repeated the word cloud exercise with the team six months later, much greater emphasis was placed on young people being at the centre of our systems change work (as can be seen in the images below). This is a key development area for the programme in Year Two.

Our systems change word clouds in January 2019 and again in June 2019.

Our next year

The opportunities to develop the programme in Year Two are an exciting prospect. In developing our systems change priorities for the year ahead, we have worked with partners and built on the systems we see not working as well as they could to support young people. This focus aims to achieve a greater lasting impact on the systems that surround young people, and on the individual young people we support through our one-to-one and group work.

Our systems change priorities for the next year are listed below. To increase our impact, we will now only be working on systems change tasks that relate to one of more of this list.

- Young people's voices are heard when creating change and their voices shape their own support.
- Young people's voices and insight are recognised, seen and heard as important by statutory agencies.
- A journey through custody is the beginning of the end of exploitation, with a recognition that children could be victims of exploitation, support offered and safety plans implemented.
- The National Referral Mechanism is well understood and used, and children are recognised as victims of trafficking.
- Preventing school exclusions good practice is developed, designed, trialled and promoted.
- Debt safety planning and debt bondage for child criminal exploitation is better understood, tools developed and approaches adopted.
- Gender is not a limiting factor in how children are protected and safeguarded from exploitation.
- Contextual safeguarding as an approach is further embedded across child safeguarding practice.
- Policies affecting the context around a family recognise their exploitation, for example poverty and fining families eg council tax and school non-attendance.
- More creative and accessible therapeutic spaces or approaches are available for boys and young men.
- Systems change methods are embedded across our partners and the organisation, and The Children's Society has improved workforce development to tackle systems change.
- Systems change evaluation tools and methods are improved, and The Children's Society is a generous leader in this field.

Working in partnership with colleagues across The Children's Society, the programme will be expanding our youth participation offer, building on the first national participation group which has recently started to meet with a focus on school exclusions. We also specifically want to help embed young people's voices and influence to shape our systems change work.

We will build on our work with parents, following the user-design with parents and professionals undertaken in Year One. We recognise this is a significant gap in the support available to tackle and disrupt child criminal exploitation. In addition we want to work strategically with businesses to support them to have a role in disrupting exploitation now and in the future.

In Year Two we aim to work with 90 young people through our one-to-one casework, therapy and targeted group work. We plan to work on 120 systems change tasks, reaching over 4,500 professionals and young people. We will seek opportunity for 100 young people to have the chance to share their insight into their own lives to help shape our programme, and support 20 young people to participate in longer term participation opportunities with The Children's Society.

Finally, if you're interested in working with us on these issues, or would like to know more about the Disrupting Exploitation Programme please get in touch with our National Programme Manager Lucy Dacey on **lucy.dacey@childrenssociety.org.uk.**

The Children's Society and our supporters have been there for vulnerable children and young people for more than 130 years.

We believe that every young person should have the support they need in order to enjoy a safe, happy childhood.

That's why we run services and campaigns to make children's lives better and change the systems that are placing them in danger.

Together with our supporters, we're improving the lives of children today and long into the future.

The Children's Society

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