



# Prevention Programme evaluation 2023 to 2025

The Children's Society  
summary report

December 2025

**The  
Children's  
Society**

# Executive summary

## About Prevention

The Prevention Programme is delivered by The Children's Society and has been funded by the Home Office since 2019. The programme works in England and Wales to tackle child exploitation through a blend of national campaigning and deep local partnership working. It supports professionals in flexible ways to identify and better respond to exploitation.

## The focus of this report

This report is a summary, written by The Children's Society, of the evaluation conducted by **SocialQual** for the 2023 to 2025 delivery period. For this evaluation, the focus was on the evolution of the programme's activities over time, emerging impact, and its targeted work with businesses in the night-time economy.

During this time period, the Prevention Programme delivered **730 activities**, with the highest number relating to the #LookCloser campaign. These activities were commonly delivered in partnership with the police and focused on influencing systems, knowledge mobilisation, and building evidence.

## The evaluation

The evaluation analysed monitoring data, survey responses, interviews and focus groups to explore the following questions:

- How has the scale, nature and focus of activities delivered by the Prevention Programme evolved over time?
- What does this tell us about the programme's emerging impact?
- What mechanisms or factors in the programme's work on the night-time economy are enabling change and what barriers are limiting its impact?

Overall, the evaluation found that the programme:

- **increased professionals' knowledge and confidence** in identifying signs of exploitation, through the #LookCloser campaign
- engaged most effectively with businesses in the night-time economy when work was **tailored to the individual needs and safeguarding risks of different sectors and businesses**, particularly for those who had limited understanding of child exploitation
- **evolved over time** from a model focused on delivering training to professionals, to a **more strategic approach** focused on **centring young people's voices** and **improving the wider systems** in which exploitation can take place.

# About Prevention

The Prevention Programme is delivered by The Children's Society and has been funded by the Home Office since 2019. The programme works in England and Wales to tackle child exploitation through a blend of national awareness raising and deep local partnership working. It supports professionals in flexible ways to identify and better respond to exploitation. For the 2023 to 2025 period, the programme delivered a range of activities focused on eight priorities:

Deliver targeted, systems-focused work with businesses in the **night-time economy** to improve their response to child exploitation and abuse

Support better responses to young people impacted by child exploitation as they **transition to adulthood**

Embed **equity and inclusion** in tackling child exploitation and abuse

Develop and deliver a programme of **youth consultation** to amplify the voices of young people and inform both the work of the programme and the wider sector

Identify and respond to **emerging and under-recognised**<sup>1</sup> forms of child exploitation and the links between exploitation and children going missing

Improve awareness of and responses to **child financial exploitation** at the national level

Raise awareness of child exploitation through The Children's Society's **#LookCloser campaign**<sup>2</sup>

Embed **disruption**<sup>3</sup> within safeguarding practice

In addition to funding the programme itself, the Home Office also funds programme evaluations. SocialQual were commissioned to conduct an independent, summative evaluation of the latest delivery period which ran between April 2023 and March 2025. Here, we present a summary of SocialQual's evaluation findings. For more information, read the full evaluation report [here](#).

1 Previous examples of emerging forms include financial exploitation, children exploited to commit retail theft, and coerced internal concealment. Under-recognised forms include boys' experiences of sexual exploitation, girls' experiences of criminal exploitation and trans young people's experiences overall.

2 #LookCloser is a national campaign delivered by the Prevention Programme with the support of the British Transport Police and National County Lines Coordination Centre. It delivers both public awareness raising activities and learning sessions open to any professional or service who may interact with children and young people, to raise awareness of the signs of child exploitation and how to take action to prevent it. Find out more here: <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/lookcloser>.

3 Disruption measures can be statutory powers which arise from both civil and criminal law, in addition to non-legislative actions, such as increasing police patrols around an area of concern. They provide an opportunity to prevent, reduce or stop exploitation from occurring or re-occurring through targeting of a suspected perpetrator.

# Evaluation approach

This evaluation explored the following key questions:

- How has the scale, nature and focus of activities delivered by the Prevention Programme evolved over time?
- What does this tell us about the programme's emerging impact?
- What mechanisms or factors in the programme's work on the night-time economy are enabling change and what barriers are limiting its impact?

These questions were explored through analysis of:

## Survey data of:

- 3,189 responses from professionals following attendance at the Prevention Programme's #LookCloser learning sessions.<sup>4</sup> Sessions covered a range of topics such as transitions to adulthood, disrupting exploitation, financial exploitation, and safeguarding transgender young people from exploitation
- 1,887 responses from professionals attending other types of training provided by the Prevention Programme team.

## Whole-programme internal monitoring data recorded on:

- the number of partners engaged with
- the number and type of activities delivered
- feedback received.

Six interviews and two focus groups with Prevention Programme team members

Eight interviews with external partners

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<sup>4</sup> Professionals may have attended more than one learning session.

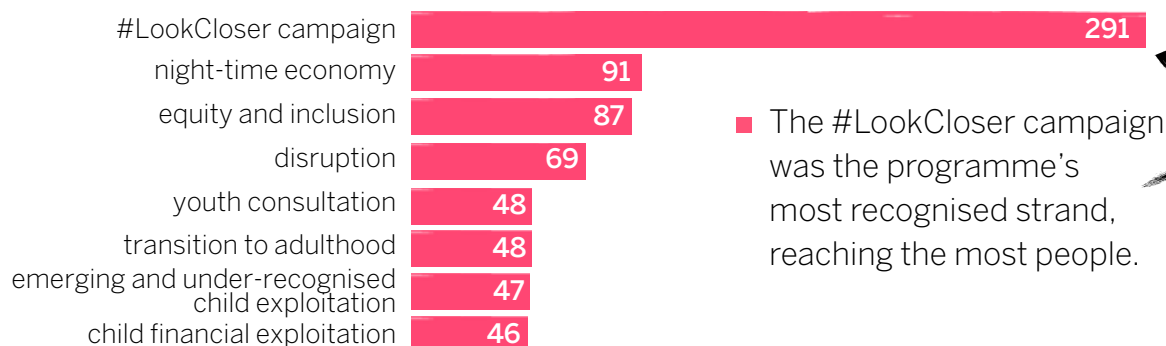
# Summary of findings

## Scale, nature and focus of activities

What is the scale, nature and focus of activities delivered by the Prevention Programme?

**Between April 2023 and March 2025, the Prevention Programme delivered 730 activities, particularly as part of its #LookCloser campaign, and commonly in partnership with the police. Activities focused on influencing systems, knowledge mobilisation, and building evidence.**

The Prevention Programme delivered 730 activities to support its eight priority areas:<sup>5</sup>



**680,000**  
engagements  
with the  
programme

- The delivery approach focused on influencing practice through professional learning and knowledge mobilisation, with frequent sharing of resources via newsletters, learning sessions and events.

**97**  
activities related  
to building  
evidence

- The Prevention Programme team consulted young people and professionals, to increase the evidence base and strengthen their ability to build credibility with partners and influence systems.

**59%**  
of all activities  
focused on  
systems change

- Activities identified opportunities to learn, adapt and innovate to redesign the structures, processes and power dynamics that shape young people's lives. For example, the programme equipped partners with tools to improve their systems to disrupt perpetrators of child exploitation and improve safeguarding processes.

**Over a third**  
of activities delivered  
in partnership with  
police

- The Prevention Programme partnered most often with the police to deliver activities.

<sup>5</sup> Three of the 730 activities were not categorised under one of the priority areas.

## Programme evolution over time

How have the activities delivered by the Prevention Programme evolved over time?

**Since its inception in 2019, the Prevention Programme evolved over time from a model focused on delivering training to professionals to a more strategic approach which focuses on centring young people's voices and improving the wider systems in which exploitation can take place.**

This evolution is reflected in activities which:

- placed greater value on building evidence
- more intentionally centred the experiences of young people in the programme's work and integrating their experiences to improve systems
- developed more sustainable partnerships.

"There has definitely been a significant improvement in ensuring that young people's voice is included in our delivery ... we never want to look at youth voice in silo."

**National youth voice worker**

"In the early years we probably saw evidence-building as a by-product ... something nice to have rather than part of the core offer. But we've shifted to seeing it as a key method in itself, both to improve our work and to influence others."

**Prevention team member**

In the 2023 to 2025 period, a dedicated youth voice role was introduced, which offered an opportunity to directly capture young people's experiences of services delivered by partners. They carried out consultations with over 300 young people which were then published in the Prevention Programme's first Youth Voice report.<sup>6</sup>

### Case study: Collaboration with the London Borough of Kingston's Community Safety Team

The Prevention Programme had a three-year collaboration with the London Borough of Kingston's Community Safety Team, demonstrating a move away from one-off training sessions to more strategic working. Prevention Programme team members described the longer delivery period<sup>7</sup> helped them invest more time in developing such partnerships and offer more meaningful support.

#### The partnership involved:

- delivering training
- contributing to the Borough's Transitional Safeguarding Panel
- knowledge sharing e.g. providing the latest research insights and practice recommendations
- participating in the Borough's Modern Slavery working group.

"The Prevention Programme has provided us with a valuable external perspective on our projects. Their input and insights have been instrumental in reviewing our approach and learning from national best practices."

**Kingston Community Safety Team member**

The partnership improved the Borough's confidence and approach to safeguarding and exploitation.

<sup>6</sup> Adler M, Riley D, Simmonds-Reid J. Everyone has a role to play in preventing child exploitation 2024. The Children's Society: London; 2024. <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-01/Youth%20Voice%20Report-v2.pdf>.

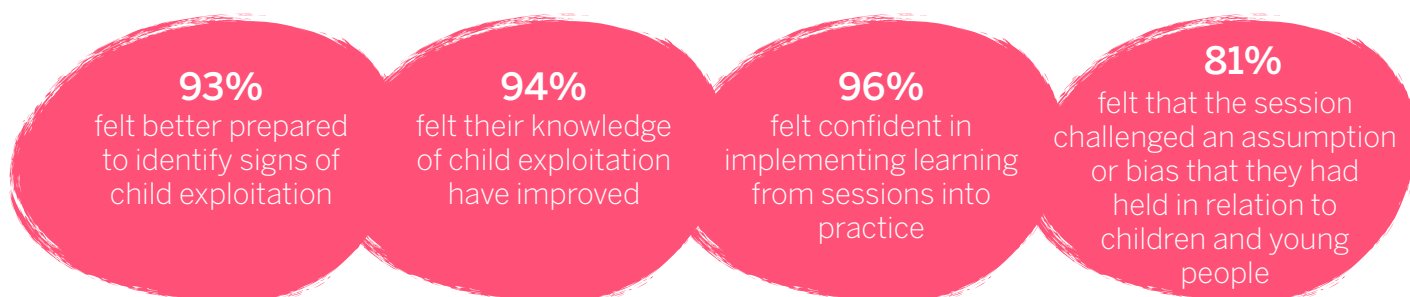
<sup>7</sup> Previous delivery periods have been one year long.

## Emerging impact

What do the Prevention Programme activities and evolution over time tell us about the programme's emerging impact?

**The #LookCloser campaign increased professionals' knowledge and confidence in identifying signs of exploitation. Other Prevention Programme activities also appeared to have an impact on influencing systems and safeguarding practices.**

Survey responses from professionals who attended the Prevention Programme's #LookCloser learning sessions found that:<sup>8</sup>



In addition to training and learning, other areas of the programme appeared to also be making an impact. For example, external partners described the impact of the team's insights and critique on decision-making structures related to safeguarding (see earlier case study).

"I will make the team more aware of the legislation available especially regarding use of civil orders and NRMs [National Referral Mechanism.<sup>9</sup>]"

**Partner exploitation project worker who attended a 'disrupting exploitation' learning session**

## Barriers to impact

While **89%** of professionals intended to make a change to their practice following a learning session, only **35%** reported implementing learnings from past sessions into their practice.

Some participants suggested this was due to systemic barriers:

"The attitude and culture of the wider workforce and commissioners service [are] limitations. The systems aren't built with trans young people in mind."

**Nurse who attended a 'safeguarding transgender young people from exploitation' learning session**

"Other organisations being on board [is a barrier], such as education, social care or the police."

**Youth offending service officer who attended an 'anti-racist practice and tackling child exploitation' learning session**

<sup>8</sup> Survey responses from other Prevention Programme training sessions indicated similar findings to the #LookCloser learning sessions.

<sup>9</sup> The National Referral Mechanism is a referral framework to support professionals from designated organisations to refer potential victims of modern slavery to the Home Office.

## The night-time economy

What mechanisms or factors in the programme's work on the night-time economy are enabling change, and what barriers are limiting its impact?

**The Prevention Programme's work in the night-time economy was felt by the team to be most effective when tailored to the individual needs and safeguarding risks of different sectors and businesses. The design and delivery of practical resources have helped establish engagement and overcome some of the challenges of working with businesses who had limited understanding of child exploitation.**

The Prevention Programme identified a range of businesses in the night-time economy, including taxi drivers, takeaway outlets, hotels and bars, and delivered **91** activities against this priority area.

Interviews and focus groups with Prevention Programme team members and external partners identified barriers to making an impact in this sector and highlighted some critical success factors to working with businesses.

### Factors that enable change:

- **having a known regional Prevention lead** to help develop credibility and trust with local networks, such as Pub Watch
- approaching partners with a **practical offer**, such as a contextual safeguarding assessment or other tool, which clarifies the purpose of the programme
- **aligning the programme with other campaigns**, such as Operation Makesafe.<sup>10</sup> The Prevention Programme's night-time economy activity helped bridge this national programme to safeguarding work at a local level.

"The timing was perfect. We already wanted to revisit our Makesafe work, so the [Prevention Programme] gave us the structure and motivation to do it properly. It felt like part of a bigger movement, not just us on our own."

**Sussex police**

### Barriers to impact:

- commercial partners were less incentivised to engage compared to statutory partners, which required different strategies to encourage engagement, such as adapting to concerns around brand reputation and demand on staff capacity
- the Prevention Programme team described a need to continually raise awareness, particularly in sectors with high staff turnover.

"When we say we want to talk about child exploitation, the automatic response of somebody like [name of organisation] is, 'Well we don't serve under eighteens, so why are you here?'"

**Prevention Programme team member**

"It was an eye opener for a lot of the partners – they [partners] use the term of exploitation with an assumption that people know what it is – but there is a lack of understanding among businesses around child exploitation."

**Sefton council worker**

<sup>10</sup> Operation Makesafe is a national campaign, overseen by the Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce, to support businesses to identify child exploitation, particularly in the hotel and hospitality industry. More info available here: <https://www.hydrantprogramme.co.uk/cse-taskforce/operation-makesafe>.

# Conclusions and opportunities for development

It is important to note that this was not a full evaluation of the whole Prevention Programme. The monitoring data analysed for this evaluation only paints a partial picture of the activity being delivered. It does not capture the quality and depth of activities nor describe in full the impact of the activity on partners. The spotlight on the night-time economy was largely described from the perspective of the Prevention Programme team, which limited the evaluation's ability to paint a more holistic picture of delivery of the programme with businesses.

With this in mind, SocialQual highlighted further opportunities for development for the Prevention Programme to consider going forwards:

## For the programme

- introduce thematic, skills-based or sector-specific Prevention leads, to help engage businesses, drive strategy with national partners, and contribute to sector-wide coherence on tackling child exploitation
- build upon the dedicated youth voice role by making it a more prominent feature of the programme's offer, to help engage more partners.

## For funders and commissioners

- provide longer-term funding (of at least three years) to help unlock the programme's full potential. Until the 2023 to 2025 period, the programme operated on yearly delivery periods. This two-year period helped improve stability, sustain partnerships, and trial new approaches
- prioritise learning about programme contribution and enable collection of data on outcomes, including longer term and impact outcomes, to facilitate a full impact evaluation.

Overall, the evaluation conducted by SocialQual demonstrates that, between April 2023 and March 2025, the **Prevention Programme delivered activities that influenced change, developed knowledge and built evidence of child exploitation**. It has evolved over time into a credible, well-performing initiative, delivering meaningful work across varying delivery contexts. Evidence, particularly from the #LookCloser campaign, suggests the programme made an impact on professionals' ability to identify signs of exploitation and worked collaboratively with partners to have wider strategic influence.

**Across the country, young people's needs are being ignored, with those facing abuse, exploitation or mental health struggles only receiving help at crisis point.**

At The Children's Society, we know a brighter future is possible. That's why we've been working for more than 140 years to reach children where they are to tackle the struggles they face today. We provide complete support that's specific to them and challenge the government to deliver policies that will continue to protect them.

A future of hope and happiness belongs to every child. Together, we can make sure that no child has to face life alone.

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