

# **The Children's Society Prevention Programme**

**Year 1 Evaluation Report:  
April 2019 – March 2020**

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Society

**The  
Children's  
Society**

**No child  
should feel  
alone**

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## Key Findings Summary

Throughout the first year of delivery, the Prevention Programme has:

- Completed **371** tasks, with an additional **12** currently ongoing; and
- Reached approximately **13,363 professionals**, and **1,183 young people** across England and Wales.

There is evidence to suggest that professionals have increased awareness and knowledge of abuse and exploitation, **are more confident in both spotting the signs of abuse and exploitation and responding to this, and have increased skills to react to suspected cases of abuse or exploitation:**

- **94%** of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their **knowledge about** CYP at risk of or being exploited has increased
- **93%** of respondents said that they felt more **confident in identifying** CYP at risk of or being exploited
- **93%** said that they had **increased skills to support** children and young people at risk of at risk of or being exploited

There is evidence to suggest that those with whom the Prevention Programme has worked **have changed the way in which they might respond to vulnerable young people at risk of abuse or exploitation.** This includes changes in language, being more proactive in looking for signs of abuse or exploitation, and changing viewpoints. Examples from qualitative feedback gathered through the survey and interviews of how their work may or has changed include:

- Listening more to young people and their experiences;
- Use of the NRM;
- Being aware of the risk of exploitation when working with young people, making referrals; and
- Working differently in sessions with young people.

There is evidence that systems are changing, with particular examples of how this is happening locally. These are provided in case studies throughout the report.

*“The expertise and resources have been fundamental to improving the local authority approach to dealing with exploitation of children, as well as allow me to signpost/reference relevant material and guidance to support this.”*

***(Survey respondent from Local Government in the East of England)***

## **Impact on children and young people**

As a result of the outcomes achieved above, there is evidence to suggest that children and young people may:

- Be identified sooner if at risk of abuse or exploitation;
- Referred to appropriate support;
- Have their voices heard and experiences understood;
- Have access to and receive better support; and
- Ultimately, be protected and safer.

## **What are the Critical Success Factors?**

The evaluation has identified the critical success factors in achieving these outcomes. Understanding why these changes might have occurred will inform future delivery and best practice. Importantly, it will help to inform about how best to achieve our goals in improving the way in which systems respond to young people at risk of abuse and exploitation. The following factors have emerged:

### 'Getting through the door'

- Achieving the buy in from the right people, in the right places, has been critical to ensuring that the team has been able to work with a wide range of partners and organisations.

### Strong partnership working

- Working collaboratively with partnership organisations to achieve a common goal, building supportive relationships, and a driving force.

### Flexibility and responsiveness

- The ability of the programme to be adaptive, flexible, and respond to the needs and demands of local areas and organisations.

### Enabling and supportive

- Focusing on positive steps and actions to build an effective and appropriate response, not punishing or 'telling off'. Providing a productive and respectful environment for people to ask questions.

### Relying on expertise

- The skills and experience of the team, and the expertise within The Children's Society. Staff were described as approachable and knowledgeable.
- Drawing conversations to young people's experiences, and bringing out their voices in sessions was powerful in enabling change.

### Understanding the system

- The skills of staff and ability to talk to professionals from a wide range of organisations 'on their level', with an understanding of their experiences.

## 1. Background and Introduction

### The Programme

The Children's Society national child exploitation Prevention Programme is funded by the Home Office through Norfolk Police and Crime Commissioner. The Programme works nationally to, tackle and prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation, Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking on a regional and national basis across England and Wales.

The programme was commissioned with a 12-month contract, in late March 2019, and began to mobilise from April 2019. The evaluation framework was agreed in August 2019.

The programme consists of a network of 10 specialist prevention officers, each covering a designated policing region across England and Wales, alongside a management team supporting tasking and leading national partnership and strategic work. The prevention officers work in partnership with multi-agency professionals including Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU), Health, Education, Social Care and other Voluntary, Community and Faith sector organisations to:

- Identify hot spot locations, priority areas and specific threats in each region
- Deliver targeted activities using contextual safeguarding approaches
- Provide tactical advice to safeguarding and disrupting abuse, exploitation, modern day slavery and human trafficking
- Co-ordinate the involvement of relevant organisations to avoid duplication when undertaking preventative activity
- Collect intelligence and bring insight on the current nature of these threats through partnership engagement
- Help bridge gaps in evidence based knowledge

The programme operates on the basis of delivering ‘tasks’ to prevent the abuse and exploitation of children and young people. A task is defined as a distinct piece of work, led by intelligence, and delivered by a prevention officer. It can vary in scale, size or resource and range from providing a one off training session, creating a resource, or providing feedback to a larger, coordinated jointly delivered intervention. These tasks relate specifically to the objectives for the programme, and are delivered in partnership with, and to a range of partners across regions or in some cases, nationally. They are based on intelligence and insight about needs in the local areas, and how to effectively respond to these.

## **Programme Activities**

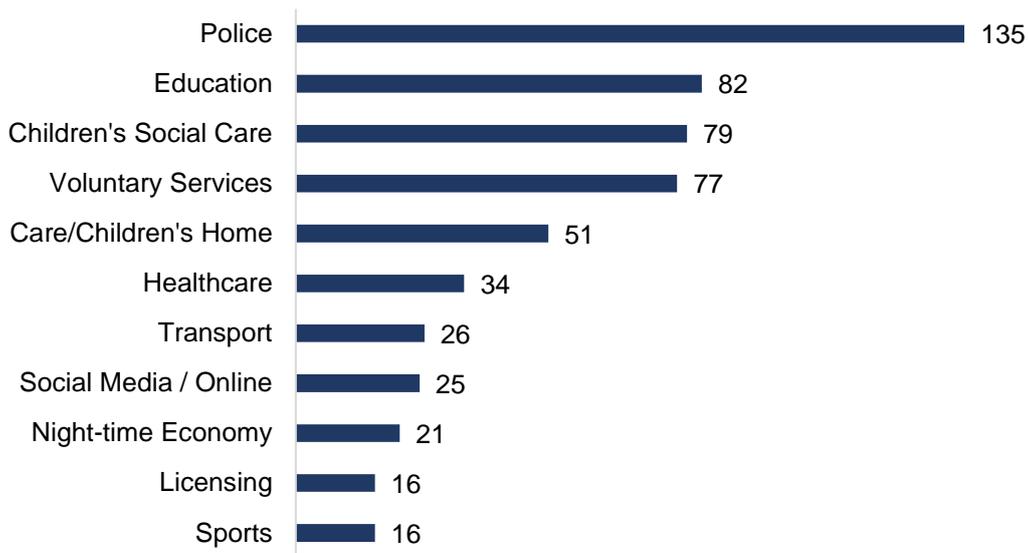
The programme has completed 371 tasks, against a target of 400. There are 12 tasks currently ongoing, and there have also been 85 tasks that have not been completed, of these: 31 were cancelled as the team were unable to engage relevant partners; 26 due to funding / capacity issues; 22 were cancelled or rescheduled due to Covid-19; and for the final 6 the decision was not recorded.

Each task, when recorded, is tagged with one or more theme(s). These themes demonstrate the focus of each task, and give an indication of the types of organisations with whom the team is working. The graph below shows the number of themes associated with these tasks.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that because more than one theme can be added to a task, the total number of themes is larger than the total number of tasks.

**Graph 1: Themes associated with tasks**



Task recording includes an estimate of the total number of professionals and/or young people that each task has directly reached. For example, after delivering a training session or presentation, they may record the number of attendees, or when presenting within a school, the number of young people present at the session.

Estimates attached to tasks indicate that the Prevention Programme has directly reached approximately **13,300 professionals**, and **1,200 young people** across England and Wales. There were also an additional 3,100 who were recorded as 'other'. This may include members of the public or families.

The programme's Theory of Change is contained in Appendix A. Developed at the start of the programme; it sets out activities delivered by the programme, and their anticipated outcomes and impact. It is important to note that within systems change evaluations, a Theory of Change is often considered as more of a guiding representation of a programme and its aims, rather than a rigid set of outcomes to be evidenced. The outcomes specified within the Theory of Change for the programme fall under the main questions explored by the evaluation, as outlined in the next section. The Theory of Change will be reviewed at the start of year 2

## 2. Evaluation Details and Methodology

The central aim of the evaluation is to **evidence the extent to which the Prevention Programme has changed systems that surround young people for the better**, and highlight the critical success factors and learning from the programme. Within this, the key evaluation questions are:

**Impact:** The programme's indirect impact on children and young people achieved through systems change, i.e. to what extent has the programme changed systems that surround young people for the better? Specifically:

- Do professionals within these systems feel more confident in identifying and supporting young people at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)/Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)/Modern Slavery?
- Have professionals within these systems changed the way in which they respond to young people at risk of CCE/CSE/Modern Slavery?
- Are systems better at identifying young people at risk of CCE/CSE/Modern Slavery? Do systems respond better to young people at risk of CCE/CSE/Modern Slavery?

**Critical Success Factors:** providing learning to inform how best to achieve our goals to prevent and improve the way in which we respond to young people at risk of CCE/CSE/Modern Slavery.

These evaluation questions are a mechanism by which to understand the common impact of the wide range of activities delivered by the programme under the tasking approach. As the activities, and associated aims, of the programme are broad and wide ranging, across a large range of partners, the evaluation questions aim to capture common goals and intentions at a high level.

The evaluation utilises a mixed methods approach, with both quantitative and qualitative data collected across the programme. In order to understand whether the Prevention Programme has impacted on those with whom the delivery team have worked, the evaluation has gathered feedback from a wide range of professionals within key systems. Learning from other projects has made clear that it is important to hear directly from those we are trying to influence. Importantly, this evidence has been gathered *after* the programme has worked with them, in order to understand whether working with the Prevention network has changed the way in which they are operating.

## Limitations

When measuring systems change, it is important to note that:

- Systems change can take a long time to materialise, and attribution can be difficult. In particular, it is important to note that the Prevention Programme so far has been delivered over a relatively short period of time. When trying to evidence changes within systems, including how professionals work with young people, it can be difficult to evidence significant change within a short time period.
- This is compounded by the fact that it is also often unknown when these changes will occur. Changes may only become relevant at certain times (i.e. when a professional interacts with a young person who may be at risk of exploitation). It is important, therefore, to recognise the relatively short period of time for evidence to be gathered, to demonstrate change within systems the teams have interacted with.
- Due to these factors, it is important to measure the steps towards systems change, rather than just looking for the 'end goal'. These steps towards systems change may be considered as '**changes within the system**', as opposed to the complete change of an entire system. In traditional evaluation, this could be considered as the difference between 'Outcomes' and 'Long-term Impact' (as within a Theory of Change). The evaluation seeks evidence of both 'changes within the system' as well as examples of 'system changes'.

It is also important to be aware that:

- It is usually not possible within systems change or complex evaluation to utilise a control, or even comparison, group.<sup>2</sup> This is especially the case at the outset, when activities are not defined or set, and so measures themselves cannot be defined. To mitigate this, all evaluation questions ask respondents to attribute any changes to the programme. This means that conclusions are likely to rely more on assumptions and individual respondent's beliefs of attribution.
- The evaluation had a limited and small budget of £8,000, and has been provided at significantly reduced cost as an added value offer. This small budget means that evaluation activities are limited, which affects the reach and depth of the evaluation. To mitigate this, the evaluators have tried to reach as wide an audience as possible, utilising the same mechanism to do so.
- However, this limited resource has meant that the evaluation has only been able to reach a relatively small sample size of professionals (73), compared to the overall estimated reach of the programme as a whole (over 3,000).

Further details about the evaluation methodology can be found in Appendix B, including how it is informed by other evaluations considering complexity in large-scale programmes.

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<sup>2</sup> See The Magenta Book Supplementary Guidance 'Handling complexity in policy evaluation', 2020.

## Evaluation Data

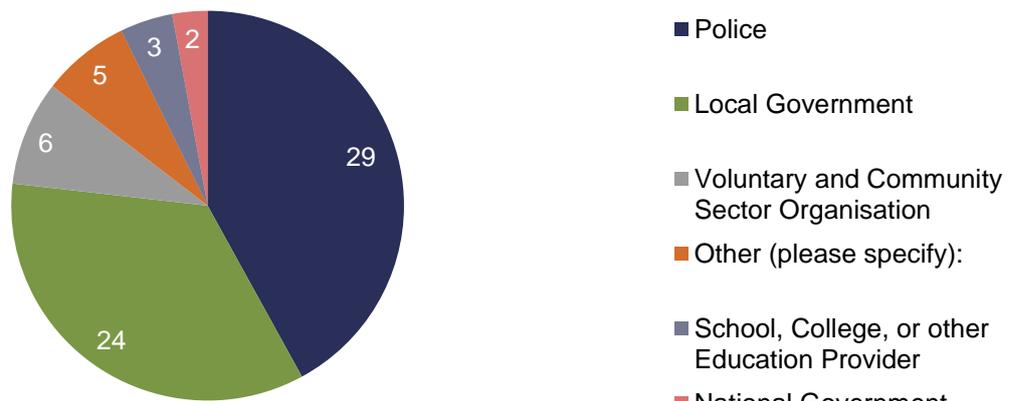
A survey was shared with a wide variety of professionals, across a range of organisations and roles.

Evaluation data relies on the following:

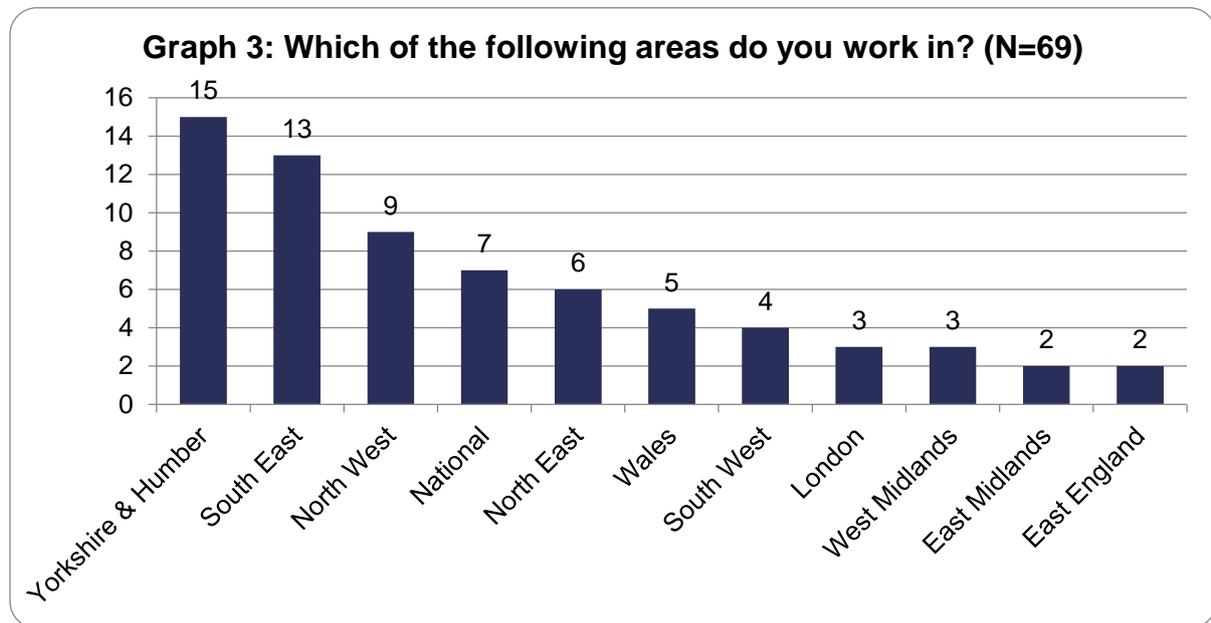
- 73 responses to the survey (51 complete, 22 partial) from external stakeholders, completed after working with the programme
- 6 interviews with external stakeholders
- 395 feedback forms from events
- Ad-hoc feedback provided via email or other mechanisms
- 12 interviews with staff on the Prevention Programme

Graph 2 shows that the majority of those who responded were from the Police (42%) or Local Government (34%):

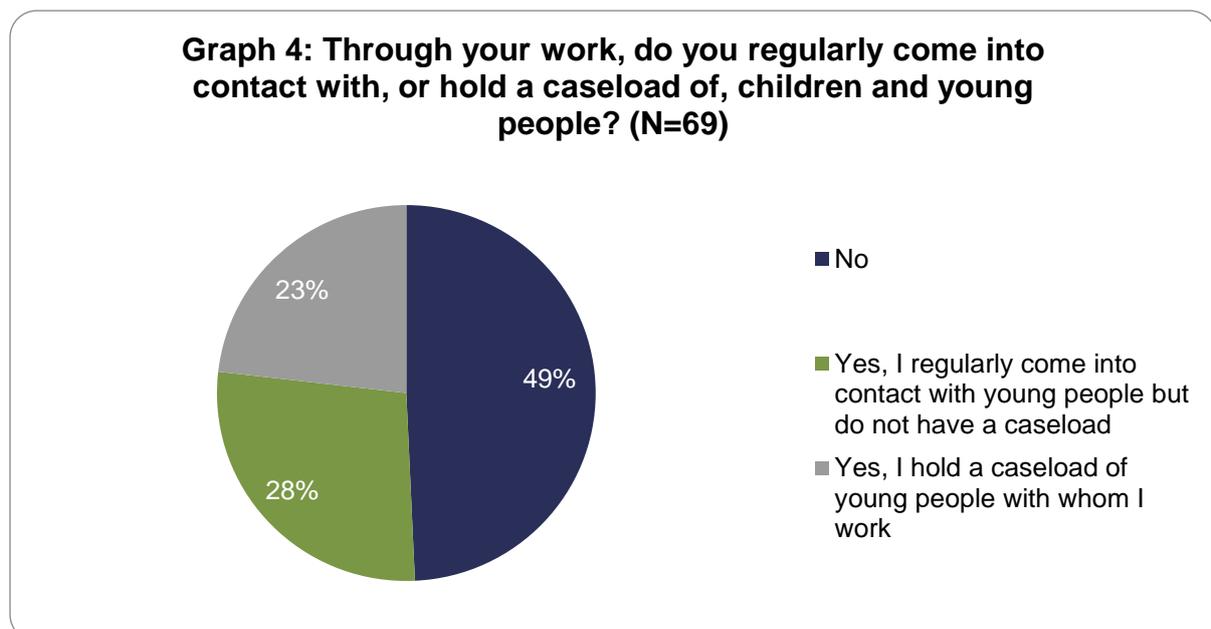
**Graph 2: Which of these best describes the organisation you work for? (N=69)**



All areas of the programme were represented within the survey, as shown in Graph 3. The majority of respondents were from Yorkshire and the Humber (22%), followed by the South East (19%):



As seen in graph 4 below, that of those who responded to the survey, 23% (16) hold a caseload of children and young people (CYP), and 28% (19) regularly come into contact with CYP in a professional capacity but do not hold a caseload, and 49% (34) do not hold a caseload or come into contact regularly with CYP. This is a varied mix of professionals, with around half coming into direct contact with CYP through their work.



Respondents to the survey worked with the Prevention Programme in a variety of ways, including:

- Coordinating and/or attending training sessions, workshops, or presentations delivered by the programme team;
- Having prevention officers work on task and finish groups to progress particular areas of work;
- Receiving input from TCS on local and regional strategies to tackle exploitation;
- Working with TCS to coordinate local, regional and national responses to abuse and exploitation within their organisations or sectors; and
- Working with TCS to create resources for schools, parents, social workers, NHS colleagues, and other key stakeholders about identifying and tackling exploitation.

*“An officer from The Children's Society came to our local authority to deliver a bite size training/awareness session on Child Exploitation and Modern Slavery - this was well attended by council employees, councillors, voluntary sector and other organisations.”*  
**(Survey Respondent from Local Government in the South East)**

It is clear there is widespread demand across the country for the type of support and insight offered by the programme. This is evidenced by the large number of tasks generated across the programme, and the wide and varied nature of these. Many stakeholders who were interviewed and completed the survey expressed how invaluable the support received had been. The impact of the work is explored in the following section.

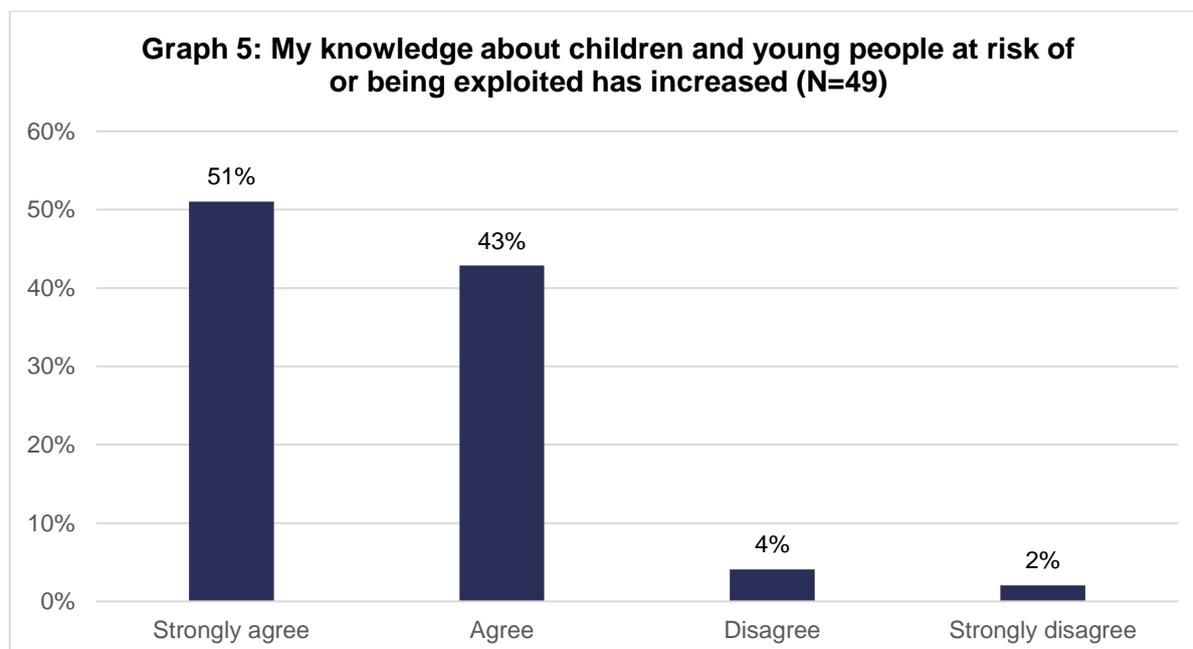
### 3. Impact

The evaluation primarily aims to understand the Prevention Programme’s indirect impact on children and young people achieved through systems change, i.e. to what extent has the programme changed systems that surround young people for the better. In particular, it looks to do this by understanding progress made within the key questions outlined in the previous section, as well as perspectives on how the programme may have impacted children and young people.

#### 3.1. Professionals within systems feel more confident in identifying and supporting young people at risk of abuse and exploitation

The Prevention Programme works to increase the confidence of professionals in identifying and supporting young people at risk of abuse and exploitation to increase prevention. It aims to do this by raising awareness and increasing knowledge about abuse and exploitation, and equipping professionals with the skills to respond to it. Increasing knowledge about exploitation is the first step towards changing responses to, and preventing, abuse and exploitation. Our experience within The Children’s Society tells us that it is important to ensure that professionals understand the scale and nature of abuse and exploitation, and how it manifests or presents within a young person’s experience. This includes building the awareness of professionals about how to spot the signs of abuse and exploitation, and building their confidence in responding to this.

In response to the survey emailed to professionals after working with the programme, **94% (46) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed** that their **knowledge about children and young people at risk of or being exploited has increased**.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Please note that sample sizes are lower than the 75 for some questions, as ‘Not Applicable’ responses have been removed so as not to misrepresent answers. Additionally, all questions are optional so some respondents may not have answered all questions.

When interviewed, all staff felt that they had significantly raised awareness about abuse and exploitation, particularly child criminal exploitation, with key professionals through their work. This is also reaffirmed by qualitative feedback received from professionals within the survey, who discussed that they had increased awareness about the extent of the issue, a better understanding of how abuse and exploitation interact with trauma and young people's life experiences, and were clearer on how to spot the signs of exploitation. They also discussed being more aware of how social media, the internet, and apps can be used to abuse and exploit young people:

*"The more awareness that can be raised, the more we are likely to be able to safeguard young people. If we hadn't had this informative talk from The Children's Society then it wouldn't be as clear in terms of spotting signs and how to get help. It's been really positive and helped my confidence in an area that is hugely important."*

**(Survey Respondent from Voluntary and Community Sector Organisation in Wales)**

*"The session raised awareness of the complexity of exploitation and modern slavery and the fact that many children who are trafficked do not receive an appropriate child protection response- this will impact on my and my staff's future work in terms of recognition of good and poor practice."*

**(Survey Respondent from National Government)**

*"Staff are definitely more aware of the signs of exploitation and how to identify a child at risk- also have a much better understanding of the stages of grooming and the important role of the NRM."*

**(Survey Respondent from National Government)**

The following case study demonstrates the importance of raising awareness about the vulnerability of young people to abuse and exploitation, and in particular about how information available online can be used for the purposes of exploitation. It shows how simply raising awareness can lead to changes that will help to safeguard children and young people within a setting or system and prevent further abuse and/or exploitation.

### **Case Study: Improving the safety of children placed in residential care**

Research<sup>4</sup> indicates that children placed in residential care can be at significant risk of exploitation and abuse, and are regularly targeted by organised crime groups for this purpose.

Intelligence from a former exploiter showed that those looking to target new young people for exploitation regularly perform internet searches on local children's homes to identify potential victims. With this knowledge in mind, and in preparation for delivering awareness raising sessions on child criminal exploitation in Northumberland, the local prevention officer carried out a simple google search ('Northumberland children's homes') to explore what information is publically available about children's residential homes in the area.

Within a very short space of time, the prevention officer found the names of all the Local Authority children's homes in the area, the ages of the children at each home, the exact address of each home, information relating to the finances allocated to the young people residing in the homes, and where the CCTV is located at these homes.

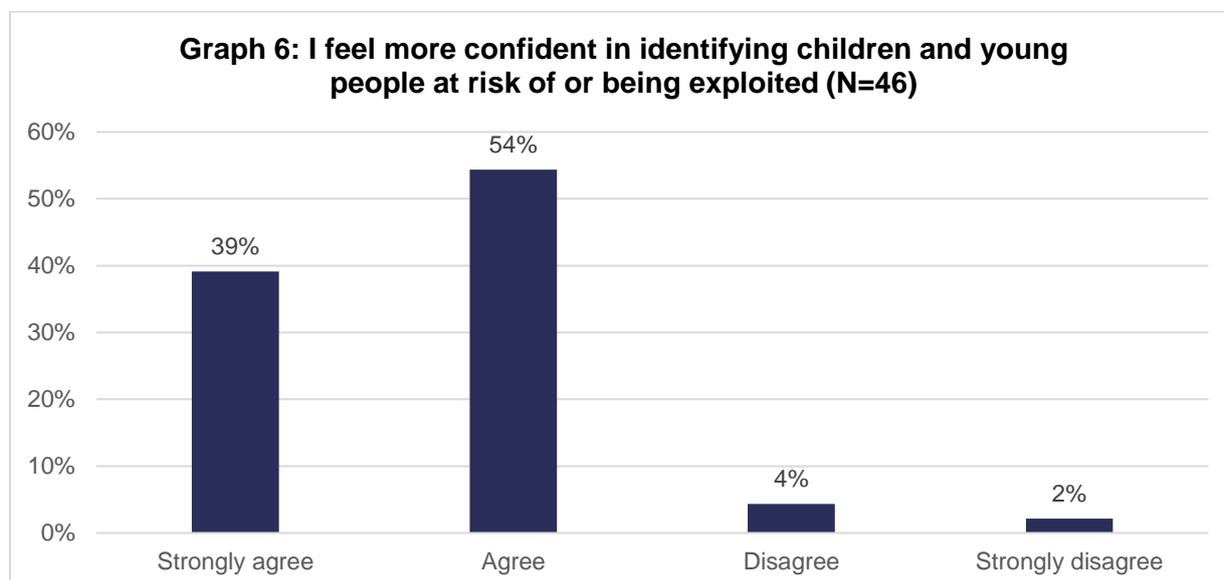
Alongside other information, these findings were shared by the prevention officer with professionals who attended the awareness sessions. The findings were used as an example of how information can be maliciously used by perpetrators to enable grooming and exploitation. Following the training, a further meeting was arranged with the local authority with the aim of changing the information available to the public. An immediate decision was taken to remove the addresses of local children's homes from the internet, and the Local Authority is currently reviewing their Statement of Purpose. As local authorities are required to make certain information available to the public, the team have raised this with Ofsted, and will continue to work with them in year two to ensure improved messaging is provided to all residential placements on what information should be made publically available.

This case study shows how the programme has highlighted how simple descriptive information, when made available publically, can be used to exploit children and young people on both a local and national level. In future, it will help to safeguard children and young people in care. It is estimated that this work immediately reached 20 young people within the first care home, with many more expected in future as this approach is rolled out.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Ending-the-criminalisation-of-children-in-residential-care-Briefing-one.pdf>  
[https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/u32/joint\\_appg\\_inquiry\\_-\\_report...pdf](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/u32/joint_appg_inquiry_-_report...pdf)  
<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/appg-inquiry-into-children-missing-from-out-of-area-placements>

Alongside increasing awareness of abuse and exploitation in order to drive its prevention, it is important to equip professionals with the confidence to identify and respond to suspected abuse and exploitation. Graph 6 below shows that in response to the survey, **93% (43) of respondents** said that they **felt more confident in identifying children or young people at risk of or being exploited**.



Within staff interviews, staff felt strongly that enabling professional curiosity, and giving them permission to investigate further, was a key component of this outcome. This was described as the ‘lightbulb moment’ in the room:

*“It’s seeing that lightbulb moment... knowing that a person suspected something was wrong but didn’t know what to do about it. Now, through the training, we’ve given them the confidence that their gut instinct was right, and that they can do something about it.”*  
**(Prevention staff interview)**

Stakeholder interviews were mostly completed with those who had played a co-ordination role, such as facilitating others within their organisation to attend sessions. These interviewees felt that staff who had attended Prevention Programme sessions:

- Felt more confident;
- were better able to spot the signs of exploitation; and
- were more likely to consider young people’s experiences and vulnerabilities in this process.

Within the survey comments, stakeholders described feeling confident to spot the signs of abuse and exploitation, having a greater understanding of language, feeling confident about how and where to make a referral, and increased confidence in the use of the National Referral Mechanism:

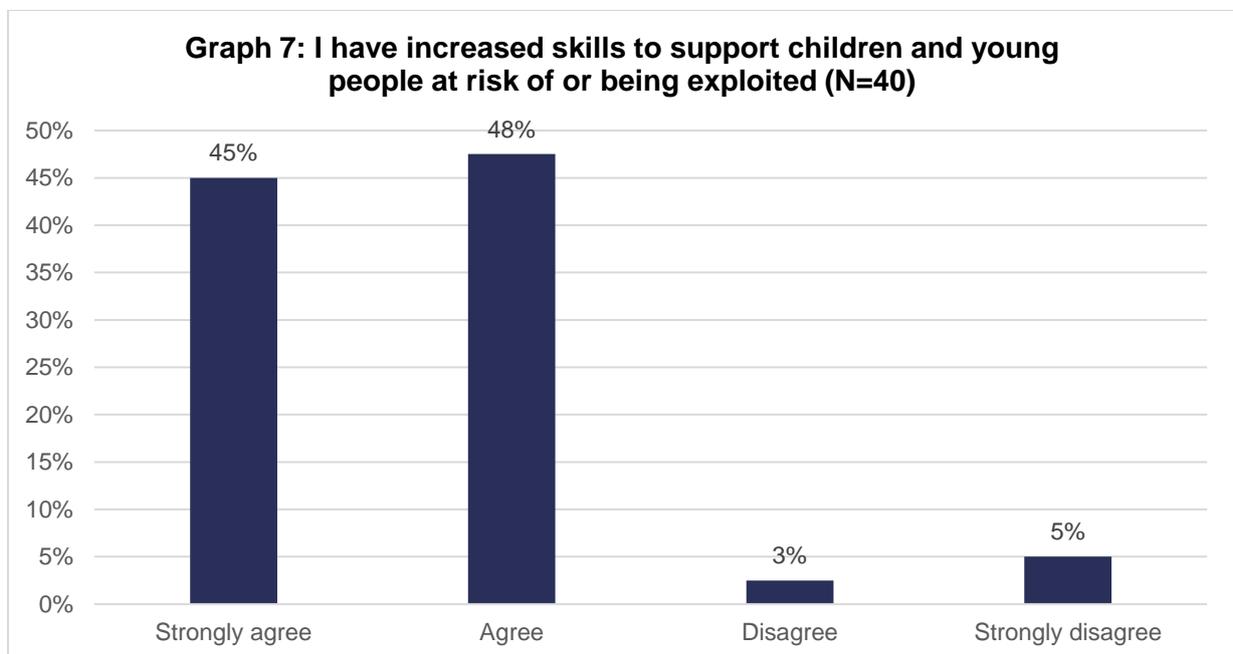
*“I would have more confidence in spotting the signs, hearing the language used and know how to make a referral or seek help.”*  
**(Survey Respondent from Voluntary and Community Sector Organisation in Wales)**

*“I now have more confidence and information about what to do and who to report to.”  
(Survey respondent from the Police in the South East)*

*“[I have] more awareness, and confidence to challenge and raise concerns.”  
(Survey respondent from Voluntary and Community Sector Organisation in the North West)*

*“I know the signs to look for and have the knowledge of who to refer to for further help.”  
(Survey respondent from Education in the East of England)*

In order to feel confident in identifying and supporting young people at risk, professionals also need to be equipped with skills to support this. An aim of the programme is to introduce professionals to resources, tools, and skillsets to enable them to respond effectively to abuse and exploitation. Graph 7 shows that of those who responded to the survey, **93% (37) agreed or strongly agreed** that they **had increased skills to support children and young people at risk of, or being exploited**.



*“I understand the best approaches to take if I was in a position where a child/young person disclosed about being exploited and what other factors there are to consider as to why they may be at further risk if information is disclosed.”  
(Survey respondent from Local Government in the South East)*

*“It has given me a different perspective on exploitation. I was able to consider different ways of working with young people as a result of the training that I have been on.”  
(Survey respondent from Local Government in Yorkshire & Humber)*

A key goal for the Prevention Programme was to work with organisations that do not operate within the public sector, do not deliver directly to young people, or may not have previously been as exposed to safeguarding children and young people at risk. This is because evidence and intelligence gathered by the programme shows that public transport such as trams, coaches, trains and buses are used to facilitate the movement of young people being exploited, that fast food outlets and roadside services may be used for amenities and food stops and hotels may be places where exploitation is occurring 'behind closed doors'. However, members of staff working in these sectors may be unaware of the signs of abuse or exploitation. Our #LookCloser partnership campaign is an example of our work targeting bystanders:

### **#LookCloser**

The Prevention Programme co-ordinated and developed the #LookCloser campaign in the East Midlands region with East Midlands ROCU, the British Transport Police, and local forces. The campaign focused on how public spaces like bus and train stations, fast food outlets, shopping centres, roadside services and hotels may be places where young victims of exploitation are visible.

During the week 9-13 March 2020, the partnership ran a week of awareness raising activities targeting train stations throughout the East Midlands and delivering training to Coach Station managers at the National Express (Leicester) and hotel staff (Northamptonshire). The Prevention team also developed police briefings for their intranet, which focused on how to engage young people and identify victims of exploitation alongside best practice in effective use of the NRM and Modern Slavery Act.

Officers from the British Transport Police (BTP) and all of the East Midlands forces were also out in communities, engaging with everyone from daily commuters, café workers, coach drivers and hotel receptionists. On the launch day, TCS and BTP engaged with railway staff at one station who shared their concerns about two young people they see regularly. Those young people passed through the station later that day and railway staff alerted BTP. It is believed that these were two young people possibly being exploited, and safeguarding measures were subsequently put in place.

The Prevention Programme sought to ensure that the staff and organisations the team worked with in these sectors are able to spot the signs of abuse and exploitation, and know how to respond if they suspect that a young person is at risk of or being abused or exploited. Respondents from these sectors in the survey could clearly identify how the support would enable them to better safeguard children and young people. This was in relation to being able to spot the signs of abuse and exploitation, knowing what to do about this, and enabling earlier intervention. For example, as part of a wider education programme around the risks of online exploitation, the team decided to trial a pilot around disseminating safety messages at the point of sale. The following case study highlights how the programme has raised awareness in private sector organisations:

### **Case Study: Currys PC World**

The Internet Watch Foundation raised concerns over seeing a 26% increase in online child sexual abuse content in 2019.<sup>5</sup> Responding to this figure, The Children's Society's Prevention Programme planned to engage with Currys PC World, Currys PC World are the largest high street retailer of electronic goods in the UK. In the run up to Christmas 2019, the Prevention team approached stores and successfully pitched the idea of a pop-up stall.

The team designed briefings for staff working in stores and produced a variety of resources. The team delivered a joint exercise in stores initially in Wales and Yorkshire with local police to highlight the dangers of online grooming and exploitation at the point of sale.

Prevention officers and local PCSOs spoke to parents, carers, other family members, and staff about the importance of online safety, and how to safeguard children and young people against online abuse and exploitation. The team made this relevant to their experiences by asking about the most prevalent games with internet access, and trying to understand what and how young people use streaming and social media platforms. As well as raising awareness of how these platforms can be abused, the prevention officers tailored conversations with customers to ensure that advice was relevant and useful, including suggesting blockers and parental settings when downloading apps, and limited screen time.

The task reached 220 parents and families, who were all interested and pleased that this advice was being given. It is hoped that family members and staff working in stores will continue to take this forward and be mindful of their role in safeguarding children and young people. By acknowledging the dangers early, the hope is that we can take important steps in preventing exploitation. Feedback from staff in store, and management at Currys PC World, indicate that the programme has raised awareness of their responsibility to disseminate safeguarding messages. Currys PC World continue to distribute leaflets produced by the team to continue to raise awareness.

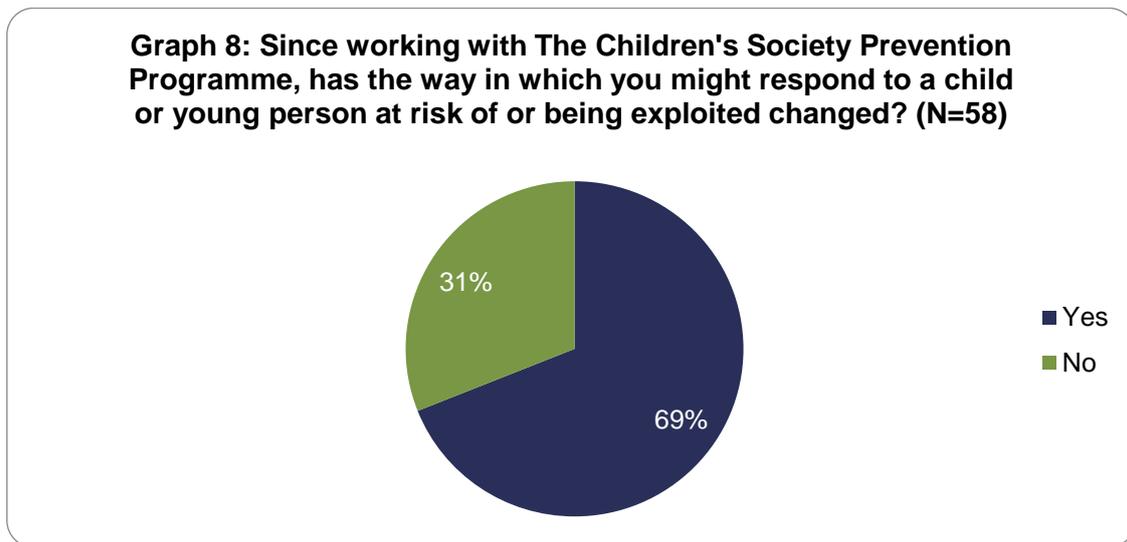
On Safer Internet Day in February 2020, the initiative was rolled out to two more stores across England and Wales. The team aim to strengthen and build this relationship strategically with Currys PC World nationally, during year two.

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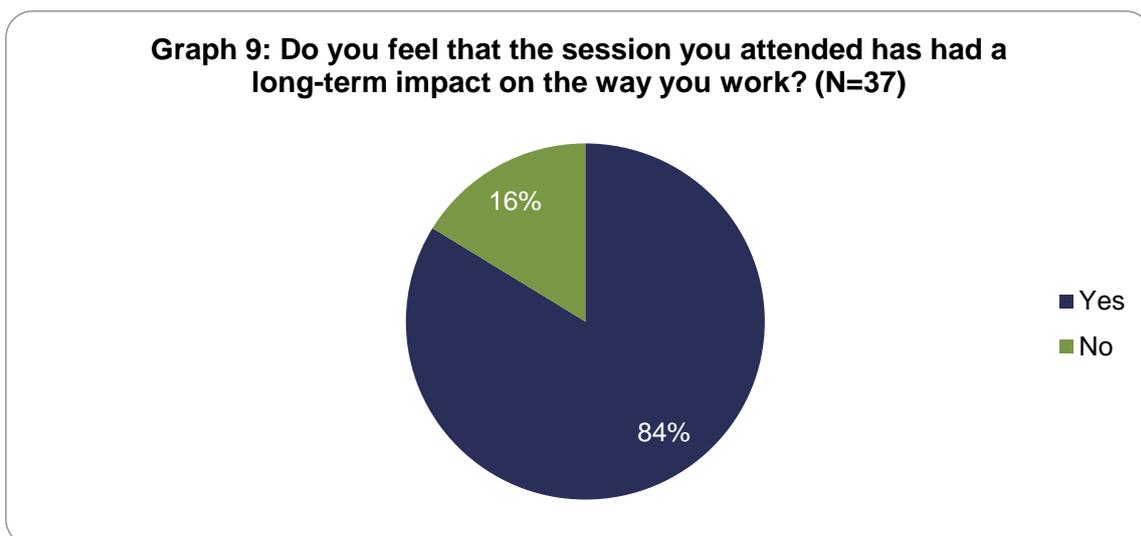
<sup>5</sup> <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/blog/iwf-sees-record-number-reports-online-child-sexual-abuse-material-2019>

### 3.2 Professionals within these systems have changed the way in which they respond to young people at risk of abuse and exploitation

It is important to understand whether the self-reported increase in knowledge, confidence, and skills shown in the previous section, leads to changes in the way in which these professionals operate and facilitate the prevention of abuse and exploitation. Graph 8 below shows that **69% (40) of survey respondents said that the way in which they might respond to a child or young person at risk of or being exploited had changed.**



However, the number of respondents who feel that they have changed the way in which they work as a result of prevention programme involvement is higher for those who had specifically attended a training session, presentation, or workshop with the team. Of those who said that they had attended a session, **87% said that they had implemented or planned to implement learning from the session into their work.** Graph 9 shows that **84% (31)<sup>6</sup> said that the session had a long-term impact on the way that they work.**



<sup>6</sup> Please note that sample sizes are smaller for this question as it is a filtered option (whereby respondents are asked to state if they attended a training session or workshop). This is compared to having worked with the programme in another way, such as receiving feedback from an officer on strategies and plans.

Examples from qualitative feedback gathered through the survey and interviews of how their work may or has changed include:

- Listening more to young people and their experiences;
- Use of the NRM;
- Changing their previous viewpoint of the young person (from potential criminal to potential victim of exploitation);
- Being aware of the risk of exploitation when working with young people, making referrals; and
- Working differently in sessions with young people, for example by using different resources, including new approaches to navigating conversations regarding their experiences, and addressing risks and safety planning. and working through experiences and risks.

*“I will be able to know the appropriate authorities to liaise with in order to safeguard the Young People. I’ll also be better able to spot Young People who are at risk of CSE much earlier and engage them in meaningful sessions that can ultimately prevent them from being exploited.”*

**(Survey respondent from Voluntary and Community Sector in the South East)**

*“Knowing about the NRM and using it if appropriate. Knowing what questions to ask as young person about their experience being able to piece together what stage of the grooming process they are in from these responses, looking out for vital evidence such as train tickets and being able to skill up parents and carers in what to look out for and to keep a record of.”*

**(Survey respondent from Local Government in Yorkshire and Humber)**

*“I have better awareness of how to communicate with young people and how they are communicating with each other.”*

**(Survey respondent from the Police in North West)**

Feedback from staff interviews indicates that they have also regularly seen significant shifts in language, particularly within the police, and the way in which young people who are victims or at risk might be described. Reaching those who are from organisations that may not be traditionally delivering services to children and young people, such as transport organisations or private sector companies, but who may come into contact with young people at risk, is a key programme goal. The previous section highlighted how awareness and confidence had increased in staff from these organisations. Feedback from these professionals indicates that as a result of involvement in the Prevention Programme, they also feel able to change the way they may respond to young people, and feel able to make referrals to appropriate support services:

*“Private landlords have tenants from all walks of life... it will allow them to be more aware of suspicious activity.”*

**(Survey respondent from National Landlords Association in the North West)**

For example, the team have worked closely with British Transport Police throughout the year to enable custody settings to be more protective of vulnerable children and young people, upskill officers, highlight the prevalence of abuse and exploitation, and empower staff to respond. This has also involved changing the environment, such as a custody suite, so that it enables them to change the way that they work.

## Case Study: British Transport Police

The Children's Society had strong existing relationships with British Transport Police, and utilised these to build a strong offer as part of the current programme. BTP demonstrated significant interest in utilising the Prevention Programme to improve practice in responding to exploitation concerns across their national workforce. Due to this appetite and active engagement from senior managers in the BTP Public Protection and Vulnerability team, the Prevention team subsequently delivered extensive pieces of work in partnership during the first year of the programme.

To meet the need for national training and guidance the Prevention Programme developed a plan to deliver eight 'vulnerability roadshows' in different locations across the country during February and March 2020. The Programme delivered these workshops in Liverpool, Leeds, Birmingham and London to a total of 200 BTP staff from across England. These included representatives from response, intelligence, CID and vulnerability teams within BTP. A key focus of these events was to transform BTP staff's perspective on child victimhood and their use of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Although the British Transport Police stand as a first responder many officers recognised that they had either not heard of the NRM or did not know how to utilise it effectively. Through feedback from the roadshows officers felt their knowledge in this area had improved significantly.

*"I think we have seen an increase in NRM referrals, and [I] would attribute some of this to the work [with the Prevention Programme]. [This] has a positive result or conclusion for CYP. [They will be] accepted into the system, and will hopefully get support they need"*  
**(Interview with BTP representative).**

Alongside these roadshows, the Prevention Programme was also invited to train the new BTP county lines workforce, providing support to around 30 officers who have responsibility for leading the BTP response to county lines. Through providing input during the initial months of this team's induction, the programme team worked to ensure that BTP officers are taking forward a victim informed approach from the outset. The Prevention team also delivered learning around effective use of the Modern Slavery Act and other disruption powers to target higher-level perpetrators, rather than those exploited at the bottom.

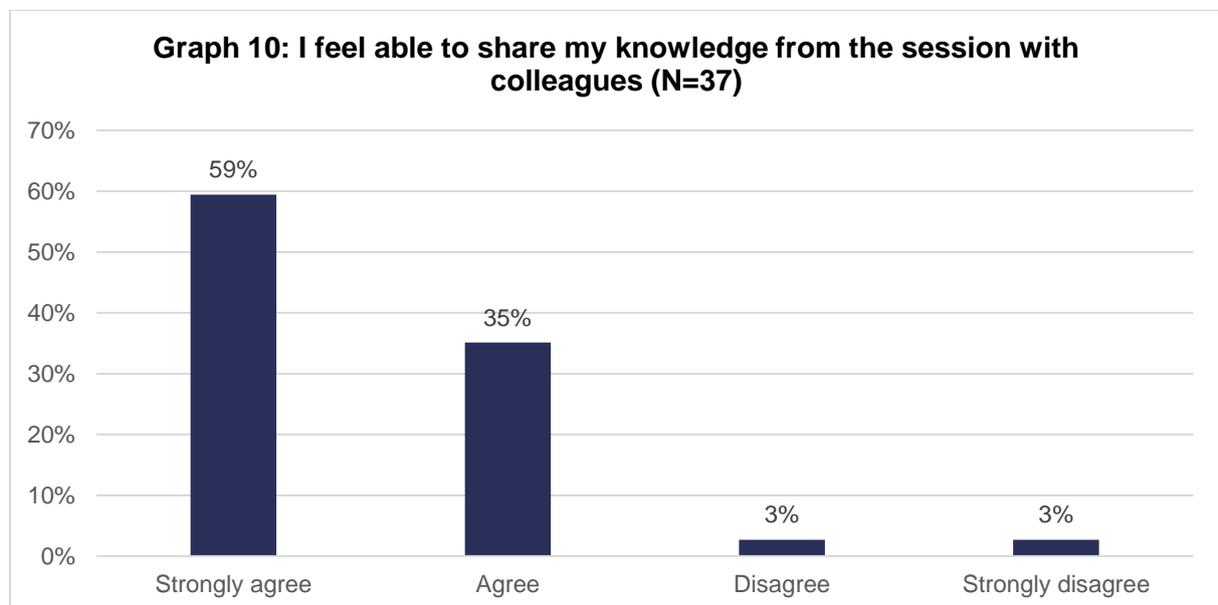
The Prevention team were then invited to support the BTP custody suite in London. BTP had identified that improving their interventions with young people at the point of arrest, and within custody settings, was a priority. Through a model of shadowing, feedback and tailored training The Children's Society supported BTP to identify a number of areas for systemic change which are currently being taken forward. This included reviewing the risk assessment used when children and young people enter and leave custody, and reviewing processes for custody officers to record and share vulnerability concerns.

BTP subsequently received an inspection from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), which included inspecting their custody work. Initial feedback suggests that the areas of systemic change proposed by The Children's Society were also identified by HMICFRS as areas for improvement. BTP were able to demonstrate that they were already working to improve these areas following the support of the Prevention Programme, establishing that the programme's input was in line with national policy and good practice guidance. Following these interventions, BTP expressed an intention to review their NRM data to track improvements. The Programme aims to progress this as it continues to work together positively and effectively with BTP to ensure its impact on changing BTP systems is effectively monitored.

### 3.3. Systems are improving their ability to identify and better respond to young people at risk of abuse and exploitation

The previous section highlighted an increase in awareness, confidence, and skills, and a subsequent identified change in practice for those that had worked alongside the Prevention Programme. It is also important to understand whether or not these changes experienced by individual professionals cascade into wider systems. This may include whether or not those professionals with whom the team have directly worked have subsequently passed this knowledge onto colleagues, or when the programme has reached a large enough amount of professionals within a system that it begins to influence culture change. It also includes wider system changes, such as changes in structures, processes, or pathways.

There is evidence to suggest that professionals with whom the Prevention Programme have worked, have or plan to cascade their learning and knowledge within their organisations and colleagues. Graph 10 shows that of those who said that they had attended a training session, presentation, or workshop with the Prevention Programme, **95% (35) said that they feel confident to share their knowledge from the session with colleagues.**



Within the comments received, a couple of respondents stated that the information would also go into training sessions or presentations that they themselves facilitate/deliver. Others mentioned how the evidence provided by the programme would be useful in enabling them to continue to work in this area, advocating within their own systems and organisation on the topic.

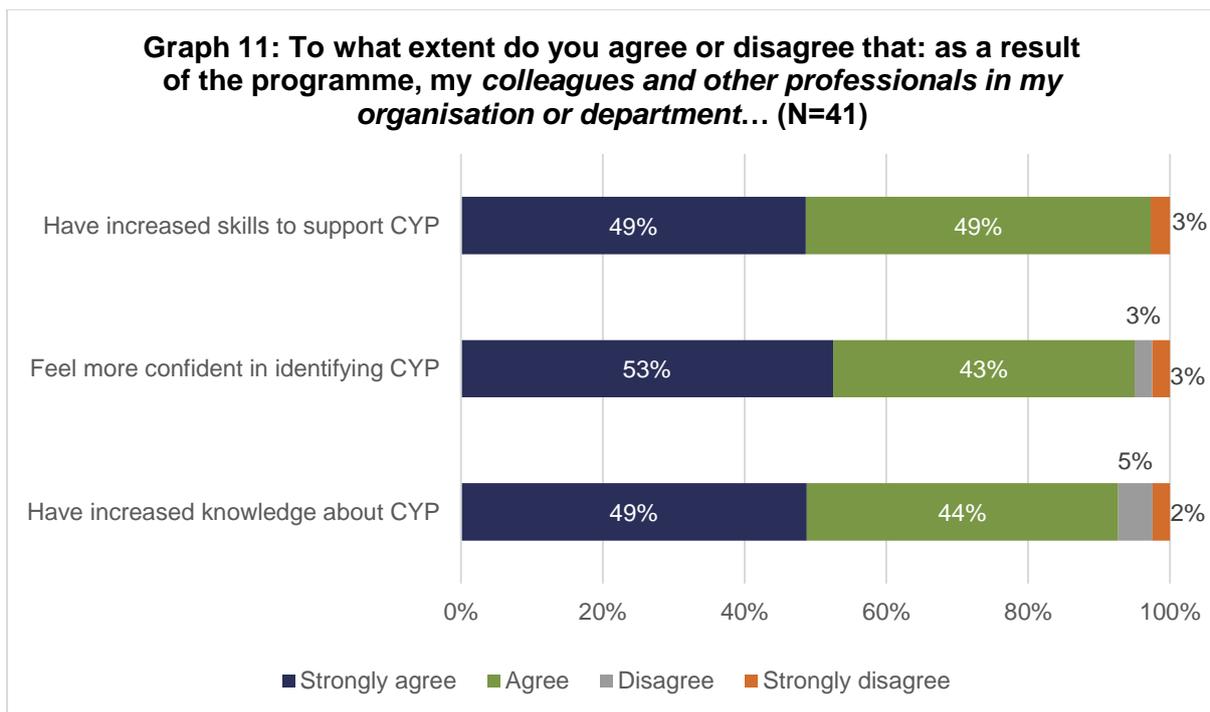
*“In my role at work I share information with 100 + volunteers and about 30 staff. The information I have learnt and heard about will be shared with them so that I can help others identify at risk young people.”*

*(Survey respondent from Voluntary and Community Sector Organisation in Wales)*

*“It has provided me with the impetus to increase the County Council voice for more attention to be paid to the issue of county lines, and particularly to ensure it is not just seen as an ‘urban’ issue, but one which is exporting traditionally urban problems into the smaller towns and rural and coastal areas of shire counties.”*

**(Survey respondent from Local Government (unknown location))**

To understand whether these outcomes have cascaded within systems, the survey also asks respondents to comment on the extent to which they think change has occurred within their wider organisation, as well as for them as individuals. Graph 11 shows that the majority of respondents felt that their colleagues had increased skills, confidence, and knowledge about children and young people at risk of or experiencing abuse or exploitation:



An example of a task that aims to reach widely into the education system is the work undertaken by the programme with The Key<sup>7</sup>, outlined below.

### **Case Study: The Key**

The Key is an organisation supporting school leaders and governors with knowledge and resources to act effectively across all school issues. They support 100,000 school leaders nationwide across issues of governance, leadership, compliance and safeguarding. This includes through training, reports, podcasts, and whitepapers providing specialist advice and information to enable schools to deliver best practice.

The Key had a capability gap to deliver training and guidance for schools responding to the County Lines model of Child Criminal Exploitation.

The Prevention Programme agreed to co-produce a wide range of resources for school staff at all levels. Through The Key's model, this content was created for school designated safeguarding leads to deliver themselves with an intended reach to all staff within their school.

Resources produced include a training video, a PowerPoint presentation, a detailed handout and an FAQ guide to answer wide-ranging questions about County Lines exploitation. These resources provided accessible messaging to schools on understanding County Lines and why it is an essential issue requiring a response from all schools across the UK. They also provided guidance on exploitation indicators to look out for in school settings, a language guide, myth busting information and links to relevant national policy and guidance. These resources have now gone live to all schools leaders that have membership with The Key.

The Prevention Programme drew in support and expertise from The Children's Society frontline practitioners, particularly from the STRIDE service in London, which specialises in supporting young males exploited through the County Lines model in London.

It is estimated that this work could reach up to 2,000 schools and support the prevention of wider exploitation.

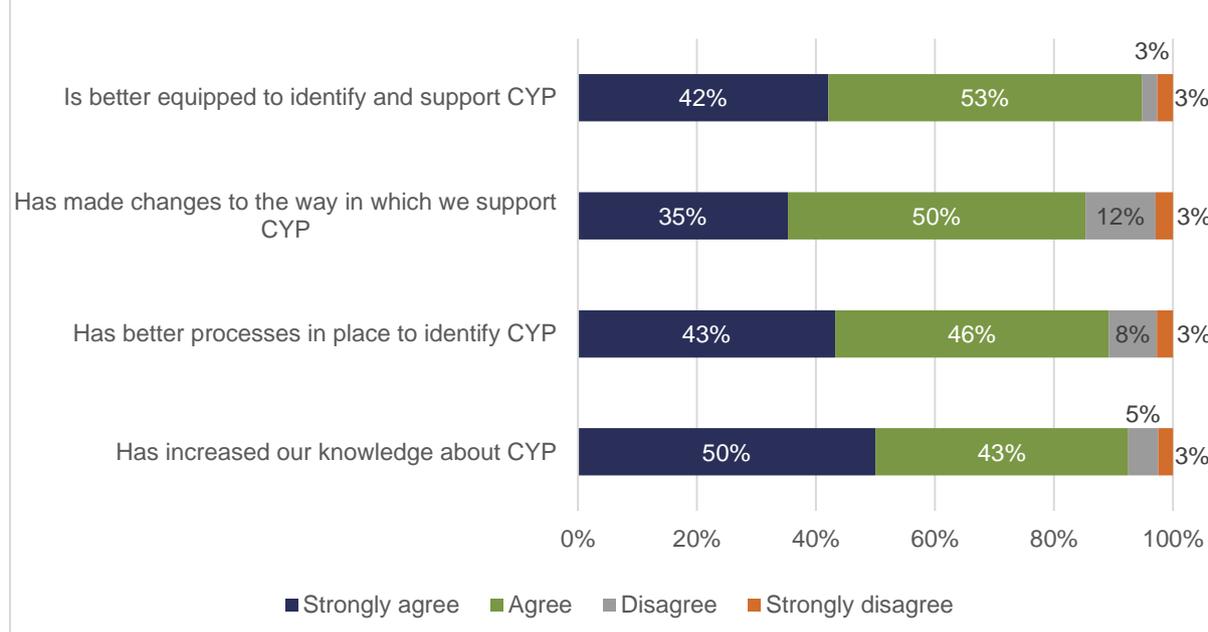
The evaluation also sought examples of where changes to the system have happened as a result of the Prevention Programme, such as changes in structures, processes, or pathways. It is important to note that achieving this type of change is much harder to achieve than individual change. However, making these changes is likely to be most beneficial to prevent the threat of abuse and exploitation for many young people into the future, which is the ultimate goal for the programme.

To inform this, the survey asks respondents whether they feel that their whole organisation has made systemic changes as a result of the programme. Graph 12 shows that the majority of respondents felt that their organisation or service had made positive changes as a result of the programme:

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<sup>7</sup> <https://thekeysupport.com/>

**Graph 12: To what extent do you agree or disagree that: since working with the programme *my organisation or service...* (N=40)**



Within the comments, some examples were provided of how the Prevention Programme has benefited whole-organisations or services, as opposed to just individual professionals within these. Within interviews, professionals gave examples such as officers providing feedback on strategies, action plans, and other types of guiding documents within public sector organisations.

This feedback had led to, or was expected to lead to changes within these documents that interviewees felt would be for the benefit of their organisation’s approach to tackling exploitation. In particular, they felt that these strategies and approaches better considered vulnerability, took a more holistic approach to exploitation, and laid out more explicit plans for tackling abuse and exploitation:

*“The expertise and resources have been fundamental to improving the local authority approach to dealing with exploitation of children, as well as allow me to signpost/reference relevant material and guidance to support this.”*

***(Survey respondent from Local Government in the East of England)***

*“Ultimately our strategy drives our planning, and our planning if it’s effective makes a difference to CYP’s lives. It will shape the next 2-3 years of delivery around exploitation. Actually the strategy has a significant long-term impact... getting it right is important. As a result, the feedback and the process has been helpful.”*

***(Interview with Local Authority representative in the South East)***

An example of a structural change to a system pathway is highlighted through the following case study, where the team worked with Victim Support in the West Midlands to enable them to support young people within the criminal justice system who had been exploited.

### Case Study: Victim Support

Evidence<sup>8</sup> suggests that many young people who are victims of criminal exploitation, are often criminalised as a result of this. Many end up in contact with the criminal justice system after being forced to commit crimes for their perpetrators.

In the West Midlands the team worked with the Regional Victim Support Manager to enable young people who had been criminalised to receive support. Young people who had been victims of criminal exploitation were not entitled to receive support from Victim Support if they had also been criminalised through this process, as they were classed as offenders.

The prevention officer worked with Victim Support and the Police in the region to highlight how young people are exploited and forced to commit crimes, and enabled them to understand young people's experiences through this process. The team highlighted how many of these young people are vulnerable, and often the most in need of support from organisations such as Victim Support, but were not able to access it under existing structures.

As a result of the Prevention Programme task, Victim Support regional managers changed their organisational policy and worked with local policing colleagues to update referral processes for young people who were victims of exploitation, yet were criminalised at the same time. This new process enables these young people to be eligible to receive support from Victim Support in the West Midlands. In year two of the programme, the team aim to build the relationship with Victim Support further to explore and develop a national policy and practice change.

This is a clear example of how a process and pathway within an existing system have changed as a result of the Prevention Programme, and this will benefit young people with similar experiences in future by ensuring that those who have been criminalised through exploitation receive access to appropriate support.

Additionally, the Prevention Programme has benefitted from in-kind support from and links to The Children's Society's national policy and campaigns team. As a national programme with a large reach, the Prevention network team has provided insight and feedback to inform The Children's Society policy and campaigns, and make recommendations on issues that require larger-scale efforts to change systems. For example, at a County Lines Hydra exercise in the Eastern region, prevention officers had an insightful discussion with Detective Inspectors about whether the issue of 'plugging'<sup>9</sup> is or could be recognised as sexual assault. The programme's original perspective was that this should be classed as sexual assault, as these young people are forced or coerced into carrying drugs internally. However, police colleagues outlined that under current legislation there is no element of 'sexual intention' within this, so it would not meet the definition of sexual assault within the law. As a result, the police are currently unable to pursue such cases on the grounds of sexual assault. This legislative context limited the programme's ability to influence an alternative response in these situations. This issue is now being explored by The Children's Society national policy team with a view to influencing and campaigning to change legislation.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/counting-lives-report>

<sup>9</sup> Plugging is when a young person (or adult) is forced by others to carry drugs internally.

### 3.4 Impact on children and young people

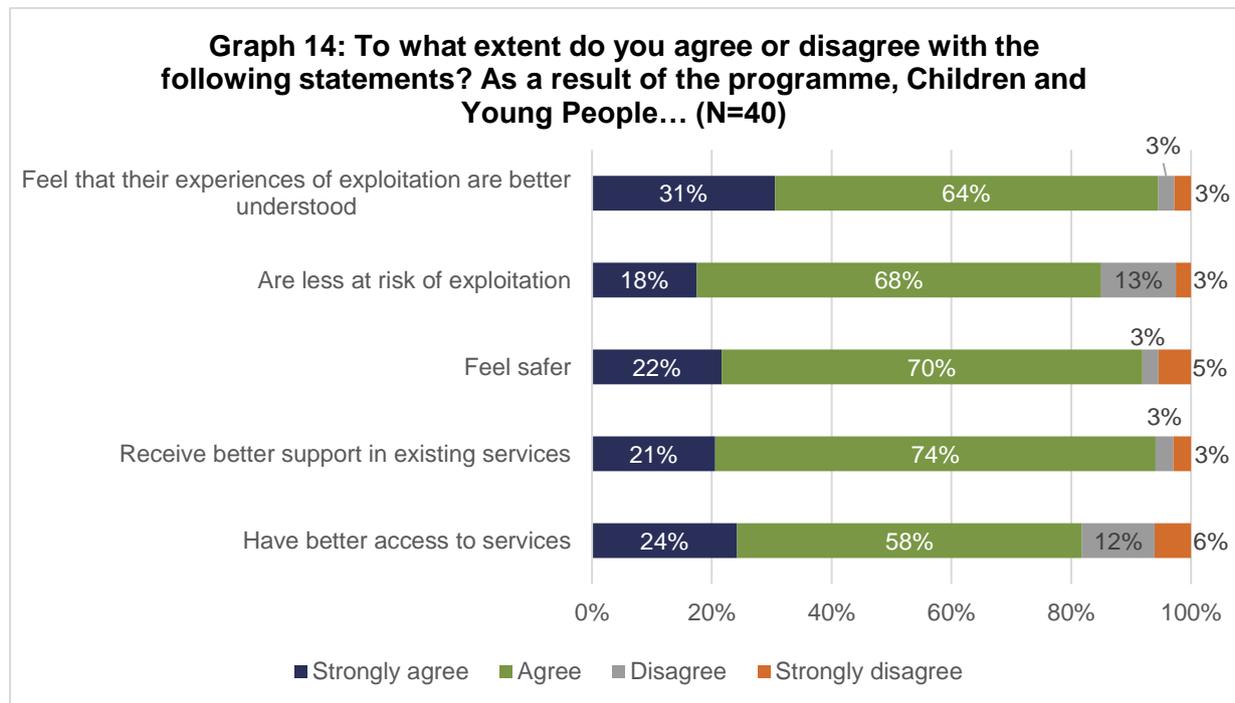
The overall aim of the Prevention Programme is to ensure that children and young people at risk of or experiencing abuse or exploitation receive an appropriate and safe response to this from the systems surrounding them.

There is evidence to suggest that as a result of the work of the Prevention Programme, that children and young people may:

- Be identified sooner if at risk of abuse or exploitation;
- Referred to appropriate support;
- Have their voices heard and experiences understood;
- Have access to and receive better support; and
- Ultimately be protected and safer.

Whilst the programme has primarily delivered to professionals, there have also been tasks delivered directly to young people based on intelligence. For example, the CSE/A coordinator in the Wales ROCU shared intelligence with the local prevention officer regarding the online targeting and grooming of primary and secondary school children for sexual abuse. This intelligence identified concerns regarding increased sexting in a number of schools in South Wales. In response, the Prevention Programme worked in partnership with the ROCU to co-deliver sessions focusing on online safety in these schools. The sessions were delivered to primary school children, and college students, with tailored content to suite each age range alongside separate sessions for school staff and leadership. This is estimated to have reached just over 400 young people.

The survey asked professionals directly if and how they felt the programme had an impact on children and young people. Graph 14 shows that the majority of respondents felt that the programme had positively impacted children and young people:



*“It has made me aware of the gravity of risks being faced by young people suffering from this form of abuse and the trauma they are their family are subject to while the abuse is going on and even if/when it ends. It has inspired me to look further into trauma based practice.”*  
**(Survey respondent from Local Government in Yorkshire and Humber)**

*“Police knowledge of abuse and vulnerabilities has increased so I'd like to think that this has improved their targeting and support of vulnerable children.”*  
**(Survey respondent from the Police in the North East)**

The following example demonstrates how the programme is working in partnership to make young people safer:

### **Case Study: Supporting Modern Slavery Operations in London**

Since late 2019 the Metropolitan Police have been carrying out regular Modern Slavery operations targeting nail bars and barbers shops in a range of London locations. During these operations, potential trafficking victims were identified including a number of children who were then taken into care.

Following reflection on these operations, the Met asked the Prevention Programme to support them with responding to the needs of these internationally trafficked children including providing guidance on understanding their cultural backgrounds, effective relationship building and preventing their going missing as some had done so after being placed in care. The Children's Society then provided consultation expertise, briefing papers and in person training to the Met police responding to these issues.

This training also included learning from The Children's Society's '72 hours guidance'.<sup>10</sup> This guide focuses on effective relationship building and safeguarding potential child victims of Modern Slavery as they enter care in response to the high numbers of internationally trafficked children who do so as set out in Missing People and ECPAT UK's Still in Harms Way report.<sup>11</sup>

Alongside work with the Police, we further supported Southwark Local Authority who accommodated the children found in these operations. This involved co-authoring a new child trafficking policy and providing guidance on a range of good practice improvements. Southwark have already begun implementing these changes while their new trafficking policy awaits final sign off. We continue to work with them to review and improve practice around Modern Slavery moving forwards and to then share this good practice nationally.

However, it is important to note that it is beyond the scope of the evaluation to speak to these children and young people directly to hear if this ties in with their experiences. Additionally, any conclusions drawn from data on children and young people in the local/regional areas in which we have worked, could not be reasonably linked to the programme, and there would be many difficulties with attribution in this method.<sup>12</sup>

The next section will explore the critical success factors for achieving the changes highlighted.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/the-first-72-hours-resource.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/latest-news/1061-still-in-harm-s-way-a-report-by-missing-people-and-ecpat-uk.html>

<sup>12</sup> For example, the difficulty in attributing a fall in exploitation cases in an area to the Prevention Programme. Additionally, in many areas this data is not collected or available.

## 4. Critical Success Factors

The programme, within the space of a year, has clearly made significant progress towards achieving its outcomes and changing systems to drive preventative action to tackle child exploitation and abuse. Understanding why these changes might have occurred (the critical success factors) will inform future delivery and best practice. Importantly, it will help to inform about how best to achieve our goals in improving the way in which systems respond to the threat of exploitation and abuse, and those young people who are deemed to be directly at risk of abuse and exploitation. Through interviews with staff and stakeholders, the themes that follow, emerged as critical to the success of the programme.

### ‘Getting through the door’

Achieving the programme outcomes would not be possible without what staff members described as the first outcome of **‘getting through the door’**. Achieving the buy in from the right people, in the right places, has been critical to ensuring that the team has been able to work with a wide range of partners and organisations to deliver preventative tasks. At the beginning of the programme, staff dedicated time to networking, attending meetings, and building relationships with key stakeholders. This time was important, and necessary, to ensure that the subsequent tasks were meaningful and had buy-in. It is important to recognise that this is critical to the achievement of outcomes in programmes with systems change goals.

The buy-in from partners has also been enabled by the fact that the programme is funded by the Home Office and championed by Chief Constable Bailey. This has added a significant level of validation and buy-in to the programme. Staff felt that this had led to a greater level of access, particularly within police forces, that they might not have otherwise had.

### Strong partnership working

Linked to this, getting through the door, and the work itself would not be possible without the strong, productive, and important relationships with key partners across the sector. Working collaboratively with partnership organisations to achieve a common goal has been identified as fundamental to the programme. Building supportive relationships has been crucial to both ensuring that officers are able to deliver tasks, and the subsequent longevity of these tasks.

Staff identified that where there has been an ‘independent driving force’ within partner organisations, this has been particularly successful in driving the work forwards, and is also more likely to ensure the sustainability of tasks. This means someone who is able to drive the work forwards within an organisation, and champion the programme. This links to learning from The Children’s Society Disrupting Exploitation programme<sup>13</sup>, which focuses on ‘going where the energy is’ in systems change. Additionally, securing buy-in from the right people in the right positions is also important, including from the ‘bottom-up and top down’. Staff also highlighted that a huge number of positive and productive working relationships had been built between The Children’s Society and organisations such as the ROCUs and Police forces, which will continue to be of benefit for both parties into year 2 and beyond the lifetime of the programme. However, there have been variation in the strength of the relationships across the prevention network, as outlined in the next section (Learning and Recommendations).

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/helping-children/disrupting-exploitation>

It is important to note that staff felt it was also likely that the demand for support has also been influenced by the recent and growing publicity that issues such as criminal exploitation have received.

## **Flexibility and responsiveness**

The ability of the programme to be adaptive, flexible, and respond to the needs of local areas and organisations was highly valued by stakeholders. The work completed by the programme is varied and differs across regions, organisations, sectors, and individuals. Stakeholders valued this, as it meant they could receive support in the form of tasks from the prevention officers in line with their needs, priorities, and local intelligence. Staff also felt that this was a key component of the success of the programme, as they were able to pursue tasks led by intelligence, and most appropriate to demand in their areas. Staff were also able to focus on areas that were within their individual areas of subject matter expertise, and deliver work based on their strengths, which stakeholders also recognised.

*“The best thing is having someone at your disposal with no limit on what they can do and available to support with tasks e.g. reviewing docs, contributing to discussion, offering inputs, providing resources. Anything and everything I need help with.”*  
*(Interview with Local Government representative in the East of England)*

Additionally, because of the flexibility of the programme, officers were able to follow up with specific ‘asks’ after training sessions or workshops, where this fits within task criteria. In many cases, ideas and subsequent tasks originated out of these sessions, and it was identified as beneficial that the prevention officers were able to work further with local areas on these to deepen the impact of the Prevention Programme. Whilst this is a national programme, it is important to remember that many tasks have been locally-driven. Some of the clearest examples of system changes appear to have developed locally. The case studies of work with Victim Support, which started in the West Midlands, and a local children’s home in Northumberland (subsequently highlighted to Ofsted), are good examples of this. Having a prevention officer with local and regional knowledge and the flexibility to respond to local tasks, has been incredibly valuable for local and regional areas.

## **Enabling and supportive**

When asked why they felt sessions were able to change perspectives and enable different ways of working, staff and stakeholders felt that the support provided by the programme focused on ‘supporting’ rather than ‘punishing’. Stakeholders felt that the information provided was delivered in a supportive and enabling manner, which meant that audiences were responsive and open to the information. For example, instead of advising areas that their current or previous response had been ‘wrong’ or ‘inadequate’, the team focused instead on positive steps and actions to build an effective and appropriate response.

Giving professionals’ time out of their busy day jobs - specifically to step back and reflect was also identified as very positive. Professionals valued having dedicated time for the sessions, and felt that it was beneficial that these were delivered face-to-face with experts (as opposed to, for example, an online e-learning package). Being able to come together to learn and share experiences was highlighted as especially useful. This is reaffirmed in the survey responses whereby those who had attended a training session were more likely to positively state that they have or would change the way that they work as a result of the programme.

*“That face to face interaction in a room with people goes a long way. That for me is the real positive effect. Being available for people to ask tricky questions. The [Prevention] team were asked challenging questions, and they asked challenging questions back. [It] was a positive, constructive environment.”*

***(Interview with national stakeholder)***

## **Relying on expertise and led by intelligence**

Linked to this, the reputation and expertise of The Children’s Society is respected by professionals across the sector. As a result, the support provided was felt to come from a trusted, informed and evidence based position, from an organisation with significant experience of working on behalf of children and young people. Programme staff were able to draw on their experiences of working with this area, and relate these to professionals. Additionally, staff were able to draw on links to other programmes delivered by The Children’s Society, as well as the national research, policy, and campaigns teams. Stakeholders also fed back that because the programme was national, it enabled them to hear about learning, evidence and experiences across the country, which was very beneficial. Stakeholders valued having a dedicated resource able to coordinate the sharing of the best and most up-to-date practice in the area:

*“It is clear that the training is based on expertise that can be trusted, with practical tools that enable local authorities to put theory into practice.”*

***(Survey respondent from Voluntary and Community Sector Organisation in London)***

*“Without this input we wouldn’t have had specific reference to other areas... learning from other areas and knowing what they are doing, knowing best practice. That comes from being embedded in a region and going to lots of places. You don’t know what you don’t know, and you don’t get that from being in one local authority. To have someone to facilitate the dissemination of that information is really helpful.”*

***(Interview with Local Authority representative in the South East)***

The skills and expertise within the team, with a diverse range of specialisms, was also highlighted. Stakeholders described staff as approachable and knowledgeable. As a large team, staff were able to learn from and draw on each other’s experiences and knowledge. Staff also felt that they had benefitted from links to other The Children’s Society (TCS) national programmes, including Disrupting Exploitation and Tackling Child Exploitation. These teams were able to regularly come together to share skills, learning, knowledge, and experiences. Alongside this, the ability to draw in expertise from local delivery services working directly with young people, ensured that the programme could draw on and benefit from a wide range of expertise within TCS. Stakeholders overwhelmingly had significantly positive feedback on the prevention officers with whom they had worked.

*“[They] are a credit to TCS... Their passion is dripping. Delivering to cops is hard enough, but delivering something meaningful to cops who are really challenging is something else. [They] were absolutely amazing.”*

***(Interview with national stakeholder)***

Staff and stakeholders who were interviewed also felt that drawing conversations to young people’s experiences, and bringing out their voices when undertaking tasks, had been powerful in enabling change. Using case study approaches, describing exploitation from a young person’s perspective, and drawing in real-life examples was highlighted as effective.

Focusing on the voice of young people is also apolitical, and brings the conversation back to the victim and their circumstances.

*“I forgot what it was like years ago... you forget the life experiences that some young people have. My approach was ‘just walk away and don’t do it’. I didn’t understand the push and the pull because I’d never experienced it in my life.”*

***(Interview with Police representative in the North West)***

## **Understanding the system**

For staff and stakeholders, it was also important that they understood the contexts and situations in which those they were trying to influence operate within. This enabled staff to take the best approach to each task. The skills of staff and ability to talk to professionals from a wide range of organisations ‘on their level’, with an understanding of their experiences and unique pressures, was highlighted by stakeholders as beneficial. Staff also outlined that learning more about these systems had been a significant outcome for them personally as part of the programme.

*“[The prevention officer] really understood the audience of the police, and understood the conflict between... catch and convict, and recognising and dealing with vulnerability.”*

***(Interview with Police representative in the North West)***

*“I had a small glimpse of the life of a Detective Inspector who has to make decisions during a complex investigation... to have a feel for what that is like for policing colleagues and see ‘their system from their eyes’ is really important if we are putting ourselves out there to ‘change’ the very system they work in.”*

***(Staff interview)***

*“We have learnt more about the Police perspective and how they see things and challenges they face in reframing mind-sets... the dialogue around challenge has been fruitful. They are open to it and we are open to learning from them – reforming how Police respond is one of biggest areas of change.”*

***(Staff interview)***

## 5. Learning and Recommendations

Throughout programme delivery, learning has emerged about how to enable best practice. It is important to highlight this to ensure that the programme, and others, can continue to grow. The following learning has been identified by both staff and stakeholders:

### Timelines

The biggest piece of learning feedback that both staff and stakeholders had was around the timescales for the programme. As the programme was initially funded for a year, this imposed significant limitations. Following mobilisation and time required to develop and build credible relationships with key partners, this translated into approximately 6-9 months of delivery. Staff and stakeholders had significant feedback about the length of time of the programme, and in particular the ability to achieve strategic, system-level outcomes, through tasking within this timeframe. The goals and outcomes for the programme were incredibly ambitious to achieve within a year. When developing proposals for programmes with short timescales, it is important to ensure that the goals and objectives are realistically achievable within this timeline.

This has limited the programmes ability to deliver some strategic work, and has limited prevention officer's ability to 'sell' the offer of tasking by the programme. In some instances, the short timelines impacted on the programme's ability to deliver on tasks that were led by intelligence, and could have potentially been highly impactful. For example, some tasks with key organisations, such as Transport for London, have not come to fruition as the short time-frame did not fit with the planning timelines within this organisation, or because they felt the project would be too short.

*"We have some great work planned in the upcoming months, pushed by the very small window of time that these officers will currently be in post... the prevention officers are an absolute lifeline but an allocation of 6 months to provide support is not long enough."*  
**(Survey respondent from Unknown Organisation in the East of England)**

The project has made significant achievements so far in relation to its outcomes, and many felt there had been significant impact with those with whom they had directly worked. However, the ability of the programme to cascade these changes beyond individuals and further into systems is limited within a year. There was uncertainty about how impactful or sustainable one-off training sessions could be, yet within the timescales often this was all that could be provided. Staff and stakeholders felt that had the programme been funded for a longer timeframe, they would have been able to plan more for how the tasks could consider sustainability, embed learning, and extend reach.

*"There are things that haven't been able to happen because of timescales. 6 months is how long you spend making relationships with partners. Not enough time to allow expertise to embed... [we] could have had more impact with a longer timeframe. [There were] other things I'd have wanted [prevention officer] to do, but need higher level powers that be to sign off – so that they can take ownership of it and it becomes embedded... I have to be careful about sustainability."*  
**(Interview with a stakeholder from the East of England)**

*“Could have spent two days on it and there would still be more questions to answer and scenarios to think about.”*

*(Interview with VCSO representative in the West Midlands)*

Stakeholders also felt concerned about the continuity of staff within a one-year programme, and how this would affect relationships and the work in their area. As the extension of the programme came relatively late, around half of the existing team had already moved on or were preparing to. Many of these staff felt frustrated and expressed that they would have wanted to stay had the extension been confirmed sooner. This has meant that the team has lost skilled staff, with in-depth knowledge of their areas. It has also meant that the first few months of the second year will be spent on recruitment and relationship building in some areas.

*“It would take a new occupant of the post a long time to re-visit all the areas again and build up the knowledge that [prevention officer] has.”*

*(Stakeholder Interview)*

Whilst there are examples of ways in which outcomes have been achieved, and changes within systems, stakeholders had recommendations about how the programme could further its impact in systems - should there be further resource. Stakeholders from the police in particular felt that in order to change cultures, more in-depth training would be impactful, particularly to new recruits and frontline officers. There is evidence from the stakeholder interviews and survey that there is demand for more in-depth training sessions across a range of topics. However, the programme was initially unable to meet these demands due to capacity and timescales. Whilst the ability of the programme to deliver to all frontline officers or new recruits across the country is limited, the programme could explore options for developing and advising on content within training packages that are delivered in-house, or through resources accessible through The Children’s Society online. From feedback provided, it is clear that support for this type of advice would be welcomed:

*“This training should be given to all frontline officers”*

*(Feedback form from North West)*

*“[It would be] more beneficial to provide it to new recruits at the early stage. It’s where the organisation sets you up for the future... that’s what’s going to change the culture.”*

*(Interview with Police representative in the North West)*

## **Variations across regions and partners**

Whilst the success of the programme has been dependent on relationships, the strength of partnerships has not been consistent across the entire programme. There have been significant variations across the different areas, including across and within regions. In some areas, the beginning the programme struggled operationally to progress tasks, as a result of a lack of existing relationships. The prevention officers in these regions spent significantly longer building relationships, particularly within the ROCUs, from which there were varying responses and levels of buy in across the regions. It is apparent that the buy-in for the programme is often highly dependent on individuals within key organisations.

Whilst being part of an independent, trusted voluntary sector organisation has clearly had its strengths, not being based within or more integrated with ROCUs has had an impact on the programme. Some stakeholders also noted that they would have found it useful to know about

the programme earlier and from a central directive, rather than being made aware or contacted directly by the prevention officers. Others suggested that formal partnership arrangements from the outset of the programme, or before its implementation, would have been useful in their ability to engage with the programme. The team will seek to ensure such processes are re-established at the start of year 2 delivery.

*“[I] didn’t know about [prevention officer] until she presented at a conference... Once I knew about [them], I passed info on, but there was a wasted month before I found out.”  
(Interview with a stakeholder from the East of England)*

## Recommendations

As the Prevention Programme is confirmed to run for a second year, it is important to reflect on how best to maximise impact and the achievement of outcomes. The following recommendations are offered.

- Teams seek to further embed intelligence-led preventative tasking with stakeholders they have already worked, as well as generating new tasks that link with existing objectives

This may mean for example, delivering more strategic, in-depth, or longer training sessions, particularly focusing on those who work directly with young people as part of their roles. It could also mean rolling out sessions to more professionals within the same organisations or areas, to achieve greater impact at an individual organisation or smaller system level. This would have a greater impact on changing cultures within these systems, as opposed to multiple sessions across a wide variety of organisations and areas. It would also ensure that these sessions are more sustainable, with learning and practice more likely to be embedded as a result of the wider reach.

There are examples of where the programme has changed systems so that young people will benefit in the future. It is recommended that:

- There is a continued prioritisation of intelligence led opportunities where changes to structures, processes, or pathways can be achieved

Ideally, these would happen alongside tasks that aim to inform, build awareness, confidence, and increase skills of professionals to respond to exploitation, in order to prevent it. This would mean that these outcomes are complemented by changes within the system in which these professionals sit, empowering them to do more. This would maximise the impact of the programme, contribute towards greater sustainability, and ensure consistency across approaches towards young people at risk of exploitation and abuse.

It is recognised that prior to a task commencing the team are unable to anticipate the direct outcome of the work. However, with a second year of programme delivery about to commence, this offers opportunities for the programme to build on work already delivered, and further develop new and existing relationships. This is where systems may be most receptive to change. Staff and stakeholders acknowledged that there has been significant demand, not all of which the programme has been able to meet. As a result, **it is important that the programme continue to prioritise tasks based on reach, impact, intelligence, and sustainability prospects across a consistently wide geography.**

## 6. Conclusion

The large number of tasks delivered by the programme, in combination with the positive feedback received about the support provided, indicates that there is significant and widespread demand across the country for the type of support and insight offered by the Prevention Programme. The programme has worked with, and impacted on, a diverse and wide ranging amount of professionals, organisations, and sectors.

The programme has made significant progress towards achieving its aims, particularly with those with whom it has worked directly. There is evidence to suggest that professionals have increased awareness and knowledge of abuse and exploitation, are more confident in both spotting the signs of abuse and exploitation and responding to this, and have increased skills to react to suspected cases of abuse or exploitation.

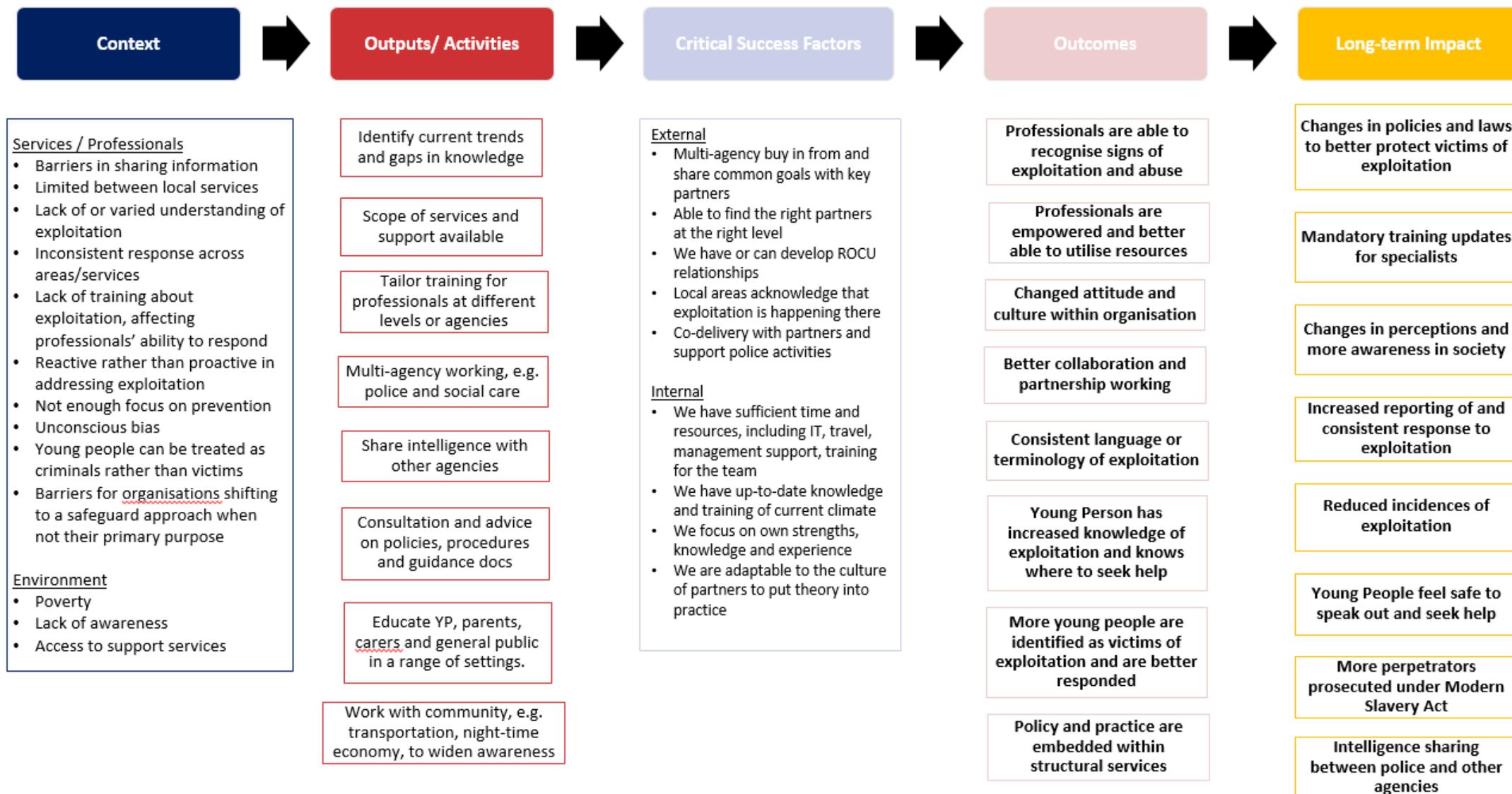
There is also evidence to suggest that those with whom the programme has worked, have changed the way in which they might respond to vulnerable young people at risk of abuse or exploitation. This includes changes in language, being more proactive in looking for signs, and changing viewpoints. There is also evidence that systems are changing, with particular examples of how this is happening locally.

The evaluation has highlighted learning about how best to deliver this type of work. This includes the importance of building strong and supportive relationships, relying on expertise, drawing on the voice of children and young people, being adaptable and flexible to suit local and regional needs, and understanding the system in which the programme operates. Learning has also been highlighted, and suggestions made about how to maximise and embed impact within systems, including focusing on sustainability.

In year two of the programme there is an opportunity to build, increase, and embed positive change so that the work of the team is sustainable and has greater reach into systems that can progress the prevention of child exploitation and abuse.

# Appendix A: Prevention Programme Theory of Change

## Prevention Theory of Change



## Appendix B: Evaluation Methodology

Impact data has primarily been gathered from professionals across systems after we have worked with them, through a survey mechanism. This survey was emailed to those who worked with the Prevention Programme in a variety of ways, including through joint working, coordination, networking, and attending workshops and training sessions.

In addition, the evaluation has drawn on other feedback data collected by the programme. This includes feedback forms completed by professionals at workshops, presentations, or training sessions, and feedback received on an ad-hoc basis, such as over email. The programme also collected a range of data on outputs and activities, which has informed the evaluation.

Evaluation data relies on the following:

- 73 responses to the survey (51 complete, 22 partial) from external stakeholders, completed after working with the programme
- 6 interviews with external stakeholders
- 395 feedback forms from events
- Ad-hoc feedback provided via email or other mechanisms
- 12 interviews with staff on the Prevention Programme

### Evaluating Complex Systems Change Programmes

The Children's Society (TCS) delivers a range of programmes that explicitly aim to achieve changes to systems that work with young people. "System changes" are changes to the people, organisations, policies, processes, cultures, beliefs, and environment that make up the system, with a view to changing these to respond better to the children and young people with whom they come into contact.

The Prevention Programme seeks to change the way that professionals respond to children and young people who are at risk of or being exploited, with whom TCS does not directly work. It aims to improve the response from a wide range of partners to those young people.

Learning from other programmes that focus on systems change, and evaluation methodologies focusing on complexity, have informed the approach. This learning has highlighted some key caveats when undertaking systems change evaluation:

- Approaches and responses to child exploitation and abuse vary significantly across the areas in which the programme is working. In order to be effective, the tasks and operational activities are locally and demand led, and the flexibility of the programme means that these tasks continually develop and change. As a result, setting out clear baselines from the beginning can be difficult, and drawing comparisons across different areas is not appropriate.
- There can be a pressure to collect quantifiable and validated data to evidence systems change. However, the nature of systems change means that often programmes are seeking to encourage change or implementation of best practice in an area where responses are emerging. As a result, this means that independent data often does not exist on the very problem that the programme is trying to highlight or change.

- For example, the Prevention Programme is seeking to enable areas to develop their responses to preventing child exploitation and abuse, in a field where responses are emerging. The data response in many areas is varied and non-comparable, and attribution to the Prevention Programme would also not be possible. It is important, therefore, that evaluations that consider complexity are able to utilise alternative methods of generating evidence.<sup>14</sup>
- Systems change can take a long time to materialise, and attribution can be difficult. In particular, it is important to note that the Prevention Programme so far has been delivered over a relatively short period of time. When trying to evidence changes within systems, including how professionals work with young people, it can be difficult to evidence significant change within a short time period.
- This is compounded by the fact that it is also often unknown when these changes will occur. Changes may only become relevant at certain times (i.e. when a professional interacts with a young person who may be at risk of exploitation). It is important, therefore, to recognise the relatively short period of time for evidence to be gathered, to demonstrate change within systems the teams have interacted with.
- Due to these factors, it is important to measure the steps towards systems change, rather than just looking for the 'end goal'. These steps towards systems change may be considered as '**changes within the system**', as opposed to the complete change of an entire system. In traditional evaluation, this could be considered as the difference between 'Outcomes' and 'Long-term Impact' (as within a Theory of Change). For example, it may mean the difference between changing the confidence of individual practitioners to feel more able to identify young people at risk of exploitation, versus changing the identification process itself for young people at risk of or experiencing exploitation, or an entire culture within a system. The evaluation seeks evidence of both 'changes within the system' as well as examples of 'system changes'.

On this point, we draw on learning from the first year evaluation of The Children's Society's Disrupting Exploitation Programme:

*"Over time, these positive [outcomes] may lead to systems changes relating to child exploitation, for example if practitioners contribute to culture changes within and across external organisations, changes in policies or laws, increased collaboration across the system, and changes to the pathways through which children and young people travel."* (The Children's Society Disrupting Exploitation Year 1 Programme Evaluation, Cordis Bright<sup>1</sup>).

As a result, these 'changes within the system' are explicitly measured with an assumption that this may lead to an overarching whole system change in future.

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<sup>14</sup> However, it is important to note that in Year 2, the evaluation will explore what data may now be appropriate to access. For example, this may include information about National Referral Mechanism data before and after receiving support from the programme.