Safe on our Streets
- an evaluation
Safe on Our Streets – Manchester
Evaluation of CYPU-funded runaways work
April 2003 to June 2004

Myfanwy Franks & Gwyther Rees

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Introduction

Project origins

In the Autumn of 2002, the Social Exclusion Unit and the Children and Young People’s Unit announced a short-term development fund for work with young runaways. Projects were invited to bid for funding to provide innovative services to support young people who had run away, been thrown out of home or were at risk of being in one of these situations. Safe in the City, a project run by The Children’s Society in Manchester, made a successful application and was provided funding to carry out work with young runaways in ‘at risk’ groups. The funded initiative was entitled ‘Safe on our Streets’.

As part of the funding of the project, there was a requirement that the development project would be evaluated. The Children’s Society’s Research Unit were approached to conduct this evaluation based on their extensive past experience of research into running away. The Unit is a partnership between The Children’s Society and The University of York.

Description of the Safe in the City project

Safe in the City was one of the first group of projects set up to work with young runaways in the UK. It began as a project working with young people on the streets in Manchester city centre in the 1980s. Since that time the project has been at the forefront of the development of practice in this field and has undertaken a range of work including:

- Work with young runaways from black and minority ethnic backgrounds
- Group work with young people in residential care
- Development of protocols for police missing person schemes
It has also diversified to work with other marginalised groups – young people who are vulnerable to social exclusion because of racism; who are refugees or asylum seekers; or who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The project aims to provide services for young people that:

- Ensure safety and prevent running away behaviour
- Meet individual needs
- Promote social inclusion and are equitable

Description of the ‘Safe on our Streets’ initiative

It was intended that the development funding would be used to develop services for the most vulnerable young people under 18 in Manchester who run away. The aim was to target some of the 25% of young runaways who are thought to be most at risk, including:

- Black and South Asian young people,
- ‘looked after’ young people,
- repeat runaways
- under 13s.

From past experience it was anticipated that South Asian young people in particular may not access services through the normal routes of referral and to this end outreach work was carried out in schools in order that young South Asian people would know about the existence of the project and what it could offer them.

In order to maximise opportunities to make contact with young people, the Safe on our Streets scheme accepted referrals from a range of sources including police missing person referrals, residential units, other agencies, family and friends, as well as directly from young people themselves. Once contact was made with young people, the work carried out was ‘young person centred’ being based on each young person’s individual situation and desired outcomes. In general, as discussed later in the report, this meant that the project often carried out extensive work with young people over a period of months. In this sense, the project operated in quite a different way from many of the other development projects funded by the CYPU initiative which tended to use a short-term crisis intervention model.

Description of the evaluation

The evaluation had two aims:

1. To examine the extent to which the initiative as a whole met its aims and reached its specified target groups.
2. To explore the specific issues in relation to young people of South Asian origin with whom the initiative worked

Monitoring system

Project staff recorded data relating to all the funded work carried out with young people using The Children’s Society’s MART computerised recording system. Information gathered included:

- Characteristics of young people – e.g. age, sex, ethnicity
- Young person’s situation at referral – where young person usually lives, current situation
- Details of work done – a comprehensive case record of each contact with young people and other people involved in the case

Case studies

In addition to the above, the project facilitated the research team undertaking a set of in-depth case studies. These involved interviews with project staff and questionnaires/interviews with young people undertaking at two points in time. The aim was also to gather information from parents/carers and external professionals but, primarily for ethical and practical reasons explained later in the report, this was not generally possible. The main focus for case studies was on the work carried out with young people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Information-gathering from project staff

The above data was supplemented by more general data-gathering from project staff. Two visits were made to the project in Spring 2003 to learn about the new initiative and its aims and objectives. Towards the end of the evaluation period key staff were interviewed over the telephone to capture general learning from the scheme, focusing on the following areas:

- Access and referral – i.e. whether the service reached the target group
- Service delivery and factors that helped and hindered delivery
- Perceived outcomes
- Key recommendations from practice learning
Overview of project work

This section of the report provides a primarily statistical overview of the project’s work based on monitoring data gathered in relation to all young people referred to the project over a 15 month period (April 2003 to June 2004). In total there were 60 young people referred during this period, some young people being referred several times. The monitoring system recorded basic factual information about young people (e.g. age, sex and ethnicity) together with a detailed account of work undertaken and issues covered.

Profile of young people referred to the project

Sex

Just over three-fifths (61%) of the young people referred were female and two-fifths were male. Research has indicated that, in general, females are more likely to run away than males and the balance of referrals is broadly in line with this pattern.

Age

The age profile of young people referred is shown in the table below. There were at least nine young people under the age of 13, and overall the average age of the young people is younger than in the runaway population as a whole (exactly 50% of referrals were 13 and under compared to an estimated 26% of all runaways\textsuperscript{1}).

Table 1: Age profile of young people referred to the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of referrals</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 11 years old</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 years old</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 years old</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 years old</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 years old</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 years old</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 years old</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 years old</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Missing data: 8 young people

**Ethnicity**

Ethnicity was not known for 21 of the young people referred. For the remaining 39 young people, 30 were defined as white and 9 from minority ethnic groups as shown in Table 2.
Table 2: Ethnicity of young people referred to the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Irish</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Pakistani</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ethnic group</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Bangladeshi</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black British</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other White</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White - Black Caribbean</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Usual address (referrals)

For many of the referrals, details about where the young person was living at the time of referral weren’t known. The table below summarises the data that was given at the point of referral.

Table 3: Usual type address of young people at referral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usual address (at referral)</th>
<th>Number of referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential care</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster care</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Running away history

It wasn’t possible to gather detailed information on young people’s running away histories. However, based on information gathered during the work at least 12 of the young people were categorised as ‘persistent runners’. 
The project had an initial meeting with seven of these 12 young people – four were living with family and three in residential care. In only two cases did these lead to substantial ongoing contact, both with young people repeatedly running from the family home.

**Other issues**

Again, whilst we don’t have definitive statistical data on all young people worked with by the project, it is clear that these young people were often at high risk. As well as the presence of repetitive running away as noted above, there were a range of other factors which are known to be related to running away, but seemed to be particularly prominent amongst the young people who the project worked with as the following quotes, relating to three different young people, illustrate.

X recently moved to Manchester to live with her dad. She does not attend education, is out with friends in the area and puts herself at risk by using alcohol and drugs, and shoplifting. Has gone missing. Recently assaulted and is thought to be working the streets of Manchester.

Mum said that she was worried about X because he had run away and stayed with a friend and they had not known where he was. X and some friends stayed in a house where he had not felt safe. X mentioned that the boy’s mother had come into his room and smacked her child in front of the other boys in her underwear. X had tried to go home late at night but said he had been locked in. X admitted that he goes to the woods when he is not allowed, which causes his parents concern. He has been drunk with his friends, and has been encouraged to shoplift. Mum believes that X is getting led astray by older boys and she has requested support.

X called on her mobile. She said that she had been arrested this week for shoplifting and released on bail. She has previously received a caution and is aware that next time she will have to attend court. School have labelled her an attention seeker because of the way she dresses and the learning mentor said that she is addicted to drugs. X admits that she has experimented with drugs (including speed and acid) but talked about measures she takes for safe drug use. X got excluded from school for 2 weeks for the way she dressed. She claims that school is trying to say who she is and is telling her what to do. X also mentioned that she hates fighting but kicks off when she gets stressed. Five weeks ago, X admitted to assaulting a police sergeant who was trying to search her, and received a caution.

These include:

- Concerns about exploitation by adults
- Involvement in drug-taking and drug-dealing
- Involvement in other criminal activity
- Risks of violence whilst away from home
- Problems at school and non-attendance

In a broad sense, then, the project seems to have been successful in receiving referrals from young runaways who appear to be at particular risk.

Circumstances of referral

Source of referral

The table below shows the sources of referral. There was a diverse range of sources with the four main groups being police, residential units, self referrals and schools (see Table 4).

There was some link between referral source and outcome of referral as discussed later.

It is worth noting at this point that only two of the nine referrals relating to minority ethnic young people were through the police route, and neither of these were young people of South Asian origin (who were either self-referrals or referred through schools). This tends to support the suggestions of previous research that young people in this latter ethnic group are unlikely to be referred via police missing person reports, and supports the project’s approach of building up a range of access routes for young people.

Most of the under 13s referred came via the ‘misper’ and school referral routes.
### Table 4: Source of referrals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of referral</th>
<th>Number of referrals</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/carer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Misper</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police (other)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Unit</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOT Worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Situation at time of referral**

Most young people referred had either recently returned from a running away incident or were classified as ‘at risk of running’. Young people in this latter group often already had a history of running away.

### Table 5: Young people’s situation at the time of referral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Number of referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Currently run away</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently thrown out</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recently run away</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recently stayed away</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At risk of running</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At risk of homelessness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outcome of referral**

The table below shows the outcome of the referral in each of the 60 cases.
Table 6: Outcomes of referrals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome of referral</th>
<th>Number of referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Met with young person</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pending</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided with info/advice</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No further action</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In just over half the cases the project met with the young person at least once as a result of the referral, and a further eight referrals were relatively recent at the end of the monitoring period and were still 'pending'. The main remaining category relates to young people who were contacted by letter and/or telephone but who either did not respond or did not attend an arranged meeting. This issue is discussed in more detail below.

Factors associated with the likelihood of initial contact with young people

Some patterns were evident in the likelihood of meeting young people according to the factors discussed above.

- Males who were referred were a little more likely (60%) to have contact with the project than females (47%).
- There was no discernible age pattern
- Young people from minority ethnic backgrounds who were referred were very likely to have contact with the project.
- Only three of the 11 referrals of young people living in residential care led to the project making contact with the young person.
- Young people who self-referred were the most likely to attend a meeting, followed by agency referrals from police and schools.
- Referrals from social services (field social workers and residential units) and from parents/carers were relatively unlikely to lead to the project having contact with young people.
Nature and extent of work carried out

Outcome of initial contact

The table below shows the outcome of the 31 initial contact meetings with young people.

Table 7: Outcomes of initial contact with young people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substantial further work</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited further work</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work just started</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young person did not want further contact</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young person moved out of area</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ongoing work

As can be seen from the above table, the project carried out substantial amounts of work with 22 young people (over a third of those referred and over two-thirds of those with whom initial contact was made). This amounted to an average of around five meetings per young person, with the maximum being over 20 meetings with one young person in a ten-month period. There was also substantial and regular telephone contact with some young people.

As well as contact with young people, the project had extensive contact with parents, carers and professionals in other agencies in most of these cases. Almost 400 contacts were logged with a wide range of professionals including social workers in 14 cases and schools or education workers in 11 cases. Illustrations of the range of work undertaken are included in the case studies in the next section of the report.
The work of the project with its main target groups

A key aim of this evaluation has been to examine the extent to which the project was able to meet its aims of engaging with the most ‘at risk’ young runaways. As shown in the summary table below, more than half (at least 32 out of 60 young people referred) were in one or more of the project’s four target groups – some were in more than one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Referrals</th>
<th>Met</th>
<th>Substantial work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minority ethnic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetitive runaway</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Looked after’</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or more of the above</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To this extent the project was very effective in terms of its target groups. As the third and fourth columns in the above table show, there was some divergence in patterns of contact and ongoing contact amongst young people in each of the four groups. In this section we look, in turn at the work with each of these four groups, and in particular the work with South Asian young people which the project wished to be a central focus of the evaluation.

Work with ‘looked after’ runaways

As shown in Table 8 there was a significant fall-off between referral and initial contact and a further fall-off in rates of substantial contact for young
people who were ‘looked after’. Only one of 11 ‘looked after’ runaways had significant contact with the project. This young person was initially running away from foster care not a residential unit.

The profile of the young people in this sub-group was as follows:

- Eight of the 11 referrals were directly from staff at the residential unit, two from field social workers and one from the police.
- Six of the young people were female and five were male
- There was a range of ages from 12- to 16-years-old.
- All the young people were white.
- At least six of these 11 young people had extensive experience of running away and also therefore fall into another of the project’s target groups – repetitive runaways.

Given the very limited amount of ongoing work done with these young people, the main focus from an evaluative point of view is to explore why initial and ongoing contact did not happen in these cases. The reasons for this come out very clearly in the case recording aspect of the monitoring system. There appear to be two main hindering factors to making contact with young runaways in this group.

First, the nature of young people’s lives at a time when they are running away repeatedly means that it is inherently difficult to make structured contact with them. There are many comments in the case recording which illustrate this obstacle to engagement (see Case Study 1).
CASE STUDY 1

Lisa

Lisa (15 years old) was first referred by a residential worker in October 2003:

Lisa is a persistent runner and there are concerns regarding child exploitation, drugs and alcohol.

Letters were written and messages left offering to meet Lisa but she did not respond. A call to the worker revealed that Lisa had said she was not interested.

At around this time the project had a meeting arranged with all young people at the residential unit but unfortunately Lisa did not attend.

Lisa was referred again by the unit in January 2004:

Lisa is persistently running away, she is going missing more frequently. She leaves the unit every night and does not return until the next day.

As a result of this second referral a call was made to the unit to arrange to meet Lisa:

I was advised to call early afternoon and see if Lisa is there and pop down to meet her straight away as there is more chance of catching her.

The next day the project made a telephone call to the unit at 1pm. A residential worker informed them that Lisa had not returned and suggested calling back later. In response to a second call later in the afternoon the project worker was told that Lisa was about to go into a meeting and was advised to call back another day.

A few days later two project workers popped into the unit in the early afternoon to try to arrange a meeting:

Lisa was at the unit but preparing to go out and did not want to meet. It was agreed that she would see [the project workers] the following day at 3.30pm.

As the workers arrived the following day at the arranged time they were informed that Lisa had got wound up earlier in the day and had left the unit and was not expected back that day.

Following this attempt:

A second letter was written to Lisa inviting her to contact the project. A copy of the letter was sent to her key worker. A leaflet was enclosed for her information.

Lisa did not contact the project.
Second, young people in these two groups are often highly disillusioned with attempts by professionals to help them and have become distrustful of adults. The referral itself may often be seen by the young person as an unwelcome intervention.

*Rang [Residential worker], she said she received the letter and has attempted to encourage YP to ring, but he says he is not interested, she said YP read the letter which was sent to him and threw it in the bin. She said YP will not engage with any agencies and she will attempt to encourage him again.*

This means that, even if initial contact is possible, this often does not lead to further engagement.

*Went to unit for an open day, met YP, he said, “you have written me loads of letters”. Explained how the project works, he sat through the meeting and took some information away with him, but went on to say that he did not need support.*

These two factors proved significant obstacles to engaging with the young people, even given the project’s acknowledged expertise at working with marginalised young people. It suggests that a model based on referrals relating to individual missing person incidents may not be the best way of maximising engagement with this group. The project has, in the past, successfully piloted models of group working with young people in children’s homes, not directly related to individual running away incidents, and it may be that this model would prove a better way of achieving engagement.

**Work with repeat runaways from home**

Excluding the ‘looked after’ young people already discussed above, six young people were identified in the monitoring data as being ‘persistent’ runaways. However one of these referrals came right at the end of the monitoring period and so information is not available about the young person or the work carried out. The profiles of the five remaining young people were as follows:

- Four were currently living with parents and one with other relatives.
- Three were male and two were female
- Ages ranged from 11 to 15
- Four were referred by police and one by parents

The project was able to arrange an initial contact meeting with four of these five young people (the other young person did not respond to attempts to contact). Two of these young people dropped out at the initial contact stage – one choosing not to work with the project and one being difficult to maintain ongoing contact with.
CASE STUDY 2

John

John (13 years old) was referred by police following a missing person report from his family.

The project initially telephoned the family home and spoke to John’s mother:

[The mother] informed me that she is keen for John to receive some support from the project, because he is going missing on a regular basis and although there are other agencies involved, namely social services, she feels that the situation at home is deteriorating. Mum went on to say that John is having lots of difficulties.

The project made an arrangement to visit John at home:

As arranged went to visit John, explained about the project. John said he is not happy at home, but did not want to say more, and did not want any intervention as he is involved with a lot of different agencies and felt that there were too many people in his life.

This leaves two young people in this group with whom the project had ongoing contact. Whilst this is a very small sample it is indicative of the challenges faced by projects attempting to work with repeat runaways and there are similarities with the issues discussed relating to young people in care. As research has shown, repeat runaways are often likely to be young people who have substantial historical problems, and for this reason also will often have had previous or current involvement with other agencies. In the case study above, as with runaways from care, engagement was blocked by the young person despite the initial facilitation of contact by the parent and other agencies.

Further testing is needed of different approaches to engaging with this particular target group and of the relative strengths of different approaches in this context.

Work with younger runaways

Nine young people aged under 13 were referred to the project during the evaluation period – two 10-year-olds, three 11-year-olds, and four 12-year-olds. As would be expected from previous research, there were more males in this group (six) than females (three). The initial referrals for this group came from across the whole range of referral routes to the project, but it is notable that the two 10-year-olds and one of the 11-year-olds were referred by schools. This indicates the potential strength of the project's approach of publicising their work in this way.
Six of the young people had recently run away or stayed away, and the remaining three were viewed by referrers as ‘at risk’ of running away. The project was able to meet five of the nine young people, and in all cases this led to significant ongoing contact. Two referrals were also pending at the end of the monitoring period as they had only been recently received. In the remaining two cases there was no response from the young person to attempts to contact them. So overall there was a much better level of engagement with this third ‘at risk’ group. This enabled the project to undertake some significant early preventative work with young people. The extent to which a slow and extended engagement was required in these cases is illustrated by Case Study 3.
Mark

Mark (11 years old) was first referred by in November 2003. He had been reported as missing to the police. The project staff had several meetings with Mark at school and at home and also met with his parents and with a learning mentor. From these meetings it became apparent that Mark had run away repeatedly due to boundary issues at home. He was also getting into trouble at school over his behaviour and was at risk of being permanently excluded.

It was also mentioned that Mark had a keen interest in rugby but was having difficulty in getting involved in this. The project began to do activity-focused work with Mark (trips to cinemas) and also facilitated him joining a local rugby club and supporting him to attend. These activities were used as a means of building up a relationship with Mark.

It was clear from initial conversations with Mark that there was substantial obstacles to maintaining engagement with him

> He mentioned that mum did not trust us or believe that we could change his behaviour. Mark's mum was not supportive of our work with him which influenced his behaviour towards us. Mark's mum thought SITC were 'do-gooders' and were not able to provide any effective support.

However the project adopted a slow and persistent approach to the intervention and several months later the case notes indicate a change in attitudes:

> On the way home, Mark seemed relaxed as he discussed his interests. In the course of the conversation, it became apparent that Mark comfortable with workers and the relationship was developing.

Several weeks later the project received positive feedback from Mark’s mother:

> [The mother] is pleased for Safe in the City to work with Mark and mentioned that Mark had built good relationships with workers.

This work was still ongoing at the end of the evaluation period. Over the course of four months the project had had more than ten meetings with the young person as well as regular face-to-face and telephone contact with his parents, and involvement with staff at school.

In general terms, the work with other younger runaways followed a similar pattern, usually involving extensive contact with young people’s parents as well as other relatives, school and social services. Because most of this work was long-term and ongoing at the end of the evaluation period it is difficult to assess the final outcomes of the work. However, intermediate
outcomes included: introduction to other agencies; facilitating the young person joining support groups and leisure activities; resolving immediate issues between young people and parents; supporting young people to attend school; and securing respite accommodation for young people.

Work with Black and Minority Ethnic young people

Of the nine black and minority ethnic (BME) young people who were referred, the project had initial contact with eight and in all these eight cases this led to substantial further work. This is a significant success and suggests that the project’s model of access and engagement worked very well with this group of young people. Within this BME group there are clearly a range of different needs, not only in relation to cultural differences but also in terms of gender. Five of the Black and minority ethnic young people were young women of South Asian origin and one was of dual heritage. For reasons explained in the introduction, the particular issues associated with this work were explored in detail through in-depth case studies. The material below is drawn from seven in-depth case studies collected from young people and project workers from Safe on Our Streets for a national CYPU-funded evaluation of 20 young runaways projects. They include six case studies with young South Asian or dual heritage young women and one young Black Caribbean male. This diversity illustrates the breadth of the work and the cultural sensitivity needed to engage with difference. The case studies are intended to demonstrate what processes have worked well, with whom, and in what context. Where possible we have carried out interviews with the young person at end of contact, followed by an interview with the project worker and also with a carer or another professional. In the research design, follow-up interviews were carried out with the same people three months later. Case study four is a young Black Caribbean male, Leon, aged 15. Leon was unable to obtain help from social services and felt this was the result of racial discrimination. Being unable to get any financial support he became detached from his parents and carers. In this situation he was exposed to the enticement of engaging in criminal behaviour but with the help and support of the project worker and the facilities that were available to him in the daytime at the project, as well as a degree of mentoring from older Black Caribbean males, he was able to resist this danger. Compared to the work with the South Asian young women this was a shorter-term intervention over ten meetings.
Leon

Leon lived with his mother, stepfather and stepsiblings and he and his mother had a volatile relationship. Leon was first thrown out at age 11. By the time he was 15 he had been thrown out fifteen times. Leon at 15 had been excluded from school for two years and was thrown out two weeks before referral to the project. He was living rough, staying at friends’ and sleeping in cars. He had attempted suicide when a youth worker referred him to the project. Leon was unable to claim benefit because of his age and had therefore gone hungry and was in a poor state of health:

He knocked on Social Services door and got nowhere; he felt that no-one cared for him, he felt how desperate could he get, and he felt as a black guy he wasn’t getting support.

The project worker listened to Leon and allowed him to express his anger. The project offered practical support such as the provision of underclothes, and the chance of a shower as well as vouchers and food. The project worker made a verbal child protection referral and tried to mediate with Leon’s mother, who wouldn’t have him back.

Leon said he appreciated a number of things about the project:

You can go to talk to them – say certain stuff (they) won’t tell anyone.

They help you (and gave) clean stuff to wear.

(They) helped me with anger, helped me with attitude and helped me with talking to people.

As a result of the involvement of a social services family intervention team the young person eventually returned home but he did not engage well with his mother. Three months on the young person is back on the streets and there have been no change in the issues causing Leon to be thrown out. Leon says he has ‘stopped violence’.

Leon’s referral route was not through a missing person referral. This is because young people who are thrown out are not generally reported missing. It is not possible to make any generalisations about Black Caribbean young people who are thrown out or run away from this one case study. Nevertheless, when taken in contrast to the South Asian case studies below, this case study illustrates the breadth of diversity within the group ‘Black and minority ethnic young runaways’ and the need for funding to be made available to make appropriate provision for such a diverse ‘group’, diverse not only in terms of gender but also ethnicity, cultures and beliefs. Where the young women below will be seen to have required long-term support Leon’s was a shorter-term intervention.

In the case of the young South Asian women, the case studies differ in that they consist only of interviews with the young person and a project
worker on one occasion. There are a number of reasons for this. First and foremost these young women are not able to contact home, there are safety issues involved for the young person. We were therefore not able to involve parents in the research. It is evident from the data that there is a problem with finding culturally sensitive other services which the young women can or will use. This precludes the possibility of the involvement of many other professionals. Lastly because of the isolation of the young women from their families, communities and support the work tends to be longer term and ongoing. In order to adapt the methodology to make it more culturally sensitive we have had to accommodate these differences by recognising that we were not able to carry out interviews at “end of contact” as such.

Work with South Asian young women

Three of the young women in the case studies are South Asian and one is dual heritage. All four are Muslims. They are 15 to 17 years old, from the older end of the project’s target age group. In order to preserve the young women’s anonymity and confidentiality we present below a thematic analysis of the case study material, and do not include any illustrative individual case histories as in the previous sections of the report.

Referral routes

The young women’s referral routes into the project are different from the ‘misper’ route of referral by the police. They have either been referred by project workers from hostels or have self-referred through friends or through having met the project worker through her doing school work. One young woman who was being physically abused and wanted to leave home contacted the project worker before she left. In this case the young person needed support in leaving. A common issue for the young women is that they are kept under a high degree of surveillance and it is hard for them to leave.

“They were strict on picking her up and dropping her off at school…they wouldn’t let her see friends…. She wasn’t allowed to make decisions. She didn’t have any freedom”

When such a contact is made prior to leaving the project does preliminary work:

“We often do pre-planned work before they leave home, to try to engage them with appropriate services”.
The context of running away or being thrown out

Three of the young women have escaped from a situation where they were being pressurised into arranged marriages abroad.

‘They were planning on marrying her abroad so she left home at that point as she couldn’t cope with it’

‘She left home because they were going to take her abroad and force her into marriage’

Two of the young women were pregnant. Because they were pregnant outside marriage they had to leave home and might have to leave the city because of the possible repercussions.

‘In her culture she was the only (unmarried) one pregnant. The shame was crippling her’.

Two of the young women had no previous running away history and two of them had been thrown out or run away on a number of occasions.

‘The first time away I moved to a hostel. My sister kicked me out’

Services

It is difficult to find appropriate culturally sensitive services and the young women are vulnerable because they are isolated from their families and communities.

Even though they have had to leave they miss their families:

‘I would love to be at home and sit down and talk about it and compromise’

For this reason the project’s engagement with the young person tends to be longer term.

‘There aren’t any services and we end up doing the work ourselves’

‘We tried to encourage her to go to counselling but she preferred to come to us to talk about stuff. We ended up doing the counselling’

‘She said “you can’t drop me – no-one else will work with me”’.

Appropriate culturally sensitive services are clearly hard to find and there may even be problems with services that are geared to South Asian women.

For instance F was staying at an Asian women’s refuge and the older women kept telling her to go home. This is even though the women had run away themselves. The South Asian project worker pointed out how, initially she has to work doubly hard with the young women in order to gain their trust because they fear that South Asian workers might report back to the family.

‘That’s difficult when I work with Asian young people, as I have to work that bit extra to build up trust with them. I’ve found this with most Asian young people particularly women’

but after trust-building,
‘I think (being of the same cultural background) that’s helped quite a lot. She said to me: I find it quite comfortable talking to you as I know you won’t judge me’

‘I like working with (project worker) because she’d understands a lot more [culturally] than other workers. She understands about arranged marriages.’

Other, mainstream, provision can place the young women in a situation where they are on the receiving end of racial harassment as well as not being able to make provision for the young person’s cultural and/or religious needs.

‘I lived in a hostel and they were all being racist and calling me ‘Paki’ and all that and fasting came around at Ramadan and the Safe on Our Streets (project worker) was there for me because she is a Muslim herself. I think it was good because I hardly knew any Muslims down in Manchester…’

When N arrived at the hostel it was Ramadan

‘When I first went to the hostel I was fasting and was on my own. People were smoking around me and it made me want to smoke. I had to cook my own food.’

‘I get upset all the time. Other residents don’t understand at all. I miss my family. It is better to talk to someone who understands’

Eid, as an important religious festival and family celebration, was a time when the young people felt particularly isolated.

‘On the day when it was Eid she gets really upset and that’s when she wants to self-harm’

The South Asian Project worker visited the young people at Eid and held a celebration for the young Muslim women. This was much appreciated

‘At Eid she took me to a restaurant.’

The lack of other options for support leads to the attendant issue of dependency

**Safety Issues**

T came to Manchester alone from another city to escape a forced marriage. She had no money or possessions. She was hanging around at night with nowhere to go and with no knowledge of the city. She was fortunate to meet an Asian man who had a female friend who could help her. Her situation could have been very different. She did not want to contact the police or social services as she was afraid they would contact her family. This isolation makes these young women especially vulnerable.

‘When she came to Manchester she had no money, no nothing, so she was hanging around the station. She just got a train and ended up in Manchester’.
There is also the likelihood that the young women will be pursued and found by relatives and their contacts. This could have dangerous consequences especially when there is a history of physical abuse. One young person who was pregnant was in danger of being seen at any time by a male relative who was a taxi driver. There are times when the police have returned young people to their family homes only for the abuse to start up again.

**Some of the issues shared with young runaways from other minority backgrounds**

There are a number of shared issues that emerge, issues shared with other young people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The first was a reluctance of one young person to engage with social services based on a previous negative experience.

‘I felt she wasn’t on my side. It felt like she was the family’s social worker more than mine. She didn’t help. I didn’t feel I could talk to her.’

There is also the issue for under-16s who are unable to get any financial support. In the case of young women who were expecting a baby she could not gain admittance to a mother and baby unit until she reached the age of sixteen.

**Interventions**

The project undertook a wide range of interventions with these young people. Below are some of the interventions identified by project workers and young people in interviews.

- Identifying possible sources of funding
- Help with finding long term accommodation
- One-to one telephone support
- Holding party at Eid
- Finding young person an Eid outfit
- Long term support
- One to one emotional support
- Counselling
- Advocacy
- Promoting self advocacy
- Linking with other agencies
- Befriending
• Enabling the young person to meet other young women from similar cultural background
• Help with making application for funds
• Identity work re-dual heritage
• Mediation
• Listening
• Financial and practical help
• Taking young person out to restaurant or shopping
• Referral to other agencies

Enabling and hindering factors

Young people and project workers were asked to identify factors that had helped or hindered the progress of the work and the outcomes. Figure 1 shows the enabling factors identified:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1: Enabling factors identified in the case studies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Young person willing to engage</td>
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<td>• Young person knew the project worker from outreach in a school</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Cultural identity of the worker who understands the issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The ability of the project workers to listen:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Good relationship with project workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Trust building</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Non-judgemental project workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The opportunity to meet other South Asian young women</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Physical and practical provision</td>
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<td>• A safe space</td>
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As can be seen from this list the particular qualities and approaches of project staff were seen as a crucial enabling factor:

‘She is someone I can talk to about my problems’

‘(She) always has time to listen’.

‘There was time for her (project worker) to build up trust with us’.

In addition the opportunity to meet other young people and the general facilities of the project were important to young people:

‘She has been able to meet up with other young people who have left home in her situation and got a lot of support from them’
‘There is a room where you can chill out with food, TV and radio’

Figure 2 lists the hindering factors identified.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Figure 2: Hindering factors identified in the case studies</th>
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<tr>
<td>• The lack of other agency involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The lack of other appropriate culturally sensitive provision</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Young person is resistant to social services through previous negative involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Young person is under sixteen and cannot be housed at mother and baby unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Young person is under sixteen and cannot get income support</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Young person becoming dependent on the project</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Young person becomes quite demanding of project worker time</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Initial trust issue and fear of worker reporting back to family</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Self harming and mental health issues</td>
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Many of the hindering factors relate to the lack of other service provision for this group and, as discussed earlier, the resulting potential for dependency on the project staff.

**Outcomes**

Through the intensive work carried out by the project, it is apparent that, despite the hindering factors identified, the project was able to achieve some significant outcomes for young people:

‘At first the young person was crying a lot and bordering on depression. She now smiles more and it is like a cloud lifted. The more contact we had the more she smiled. She now feels positive about the baby’

‘They gave me support. They have let me know someone cares about me’
Outcomes identified by young people and/or staff are shown in Figure 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 3: Outcomes identified in the case studies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Young person has a greater sense of her rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Young person more able to express her needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Young person has baby and lives in stable accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Young person is happy she kept baby</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The young person is able to self-advocate</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The young person is less depressed</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The young person has been able to communicate with mother</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The young person is self-harming less</td>
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<td>- The young person is less angry</td>
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N who was very satisfied with the help she received said, ‘They are always there to listen’. It was the first place she got help from. The young person said she would still go to visit the project when she is forty years old.

Concluding comments on work with black and minority ethnic young people:

Many issues arise from the South Asian case studies. This particular group of young runaways are completely isolated from their normal systems of support, and there is a lack of appropriate provision for these young women in mainstream services. Appropriate services cannot altogether be prescribed because although a young person, for instance, found herself in a hostel at Ramadan when she was fasting and met with unhelpful behaviours and racist responses, the provision at the South Asian women’s refuge was not altogether satisfactory as older women were telling the young person to go home, even though they had run away themselves. The identity of the South Asian worker who worked with these young women was experienced as helpful by the young people because they knew she understood the issues and was able to help in informing other services about these issues. However, this puts a great burden on project workers and the young women can become dependent upon them. The young people found the listening skills and the time offered to them very important.

In summary the key ingredients in the success of the project’s model of work with South Asian young women were: cultural awareness, providing the time to build trusting relationships and a relatively long-term commitment, offering listening support, and flexibility to individual needs. The work with the Black Caribbean young man also related to the importance of the identity of the worker who was able to engage in
understanding the pressures on this young person and in gaining his trust. The intervention was a short one, extremely practical on the one hand as with the young women and included the provision of clothes and food. Unlike the above young women, even though the young person had been thrown out he was not marginalised from the whole of his community and dependency was not an issue. It maybe that there was a gender, as well as a race issue, in Leon not receiving help from social services. Further research on the diversity of needs among BME young people who run away or are thrown out of home is needed if appropriate services are to be developed on a wider scale.
Summarising comments

The Safe on our Streets project has generated some important learning points for services working with young runaways. The project aimed to make contact and engage with the young people who were most at risk due to their running away, including:

- young people from minority ethnic backgrounds
- younger runaways
- young people who run away repeatedly
- runaways from the 'looked after' system

To a large extent the project succeeded in this aim. The majority of the referrals the project received fitted at least one of these criteria. The extent to which the project was then able to engage with young people in these four groups varied significantly. There was a high level of engagement with young people from minority ethnic groups and a good level of engagement with younger runaways. Whilst there were necessarily some differences in approach to working with these two groups, three of the common ingredients were a commitment to outreach work in order to receive referrals from these young people; a flexible and individualised approach to the working; and a willingness to provide a medium- to long-term intervention which enabled the project to build relationships and trust gradually. In addition, in relation to Black and minority ethnic young runaways, the cultural competence of project staff was a key factor. These ingredients are potentially transferable to other ‘hard-to-reach’ groups of young runaways and this initiative points the way to future development of practice in this respect.

The last two groups – repeat runaways and runaways from substitute care – were to a significant extent overlapping. These young people proved much more difficult to engage with successfully due to the chaotic nature of their lives and their mistrust of adults and helping agencies. This raises questions about whether individualised responses to specific running away incidents is the most effective way of engaging with these categories of runaways. Nevertheless the evidence gathered through the monitoring system again confirms that these groups of young people are at high risk of exploitation and harm and, given the experience of this pilot, alternative models of intervention may need to be tested for these groups.