N H

CHAOS TO CALM:

*How **consistency** and **collaboration change lives** for young people affected by **community violence***



Sarah McCoy and Sarah Tayleur

Y C

NEW HORIZON YOUTH CENTRE

CONTENTS

1. Introduction **5**
1.1 New Horizon Youth Centre's Youth Justice Team 5
1.2 Referrals to the Youth Justice Team 6
1.3 The Youth Justice Team within the wider NHYC offering 7

2. The evaluation **8**
2.1 An evolving approach 8
2.2 Data collection 9
2.3 The composite case study approach 10
2.4 Ethics, consent and anonymity 11
2.5 About this report 11

3. Understanding the cohort and system context **12**
3.1 The young people supported by the Youth Justice Team 12
3.1.1 Scale and demographics 12
3.1.2 Complex histories and overlapping needs 13
3.2 System context 15

4. Understanding young people's trajectories **17**
4.1 The shape of overall journeys 17
4.2 Crisis 17
4.2.1 Outcomes observed within the Crisis phase 19
4.3 Stabilising 19
4.3.1 Outcomes observed within the Stabilising phase 20
4.4 Thriving 20
4.4.1 Outcomes observed within the Thriving phase 22

5. Key insights shaping young people's trajectories **23**
5.1 Disrupted pathways into adulthood 23
5.2 Progress is not linear and setbacks are common 24
5.3 System friction in access to housing and other support 25
5.4 Focus on physical risk and crisis 29
5.5 Stability as the foundation for progress 29
5.6 Housing environments shape day to day experience 30
5.7 Transitions increase pressure and reduce support 32
5.8 When things settle, new challenges emerge 33
5.9 Young people's lives are shaped by their relationships 34
5.10 Individual needs shape how young people engage with support 35

6. The role of the Youth Justice Team **36**
6.1 The Practice Model 36
6.1.1 Dynamic risk management and safety planning 37
6.1.2 Managing pressures created elsewhere 38
6.1.3 Maintaining continuity across transitions 39
6.1.4 Navigating complex, fragmented systems 39
6.1.5 Embedding lived context in decision-making 41
6.1.6 Absorbing emotional and administrative load 42
6.2 Partnership with Vanguard psychologists 43
6.3 Ways of working with young people 45

7. Aligning structures with how change happens **48**
7.1 Support is relational and developmental 48
7.2 Structural pressures shape practice 48
7.3 Implications for service design 49

8. Recommendations **50**
8.1 Strengthen system conditions required for stability 50
8.1.1 Ensure accommodation supports stability 50
8.1.2 Balance safety with connection 50
8.1.3 Reduce fragmentation and improve coordination 51
8.1.4 Recognise transitions as high-risk periods 51
8.1.5 Recognise individual context, including neurodiversity and mental health needs 52
8.2 Enable the YJT model to operate as intended 52
8.2.1 Align capacity with relational practice 52
8.2.2 Protect time for stabilising work, not just crisis response 52
8.2.3 Recognise and resource the intensity of the role 53
8.2.4 Involve the team early and proactively 53
8.3 Strengthening evidence and learning 53

9. Conclusion **55**

Appendix: A Theory of Change for the Youth Justice Team **57**

"***I have seen first-hand the effectiveness of the Youth Justice Team's approach. It has enabled young people who previously struggled to access services to engage with support and secure more stable housing, where they might otherwise have remained in cycles of homelessness and criminal justice involvement.*** *- Vanguard psychologist*"



"***[The Youth Justice Team] is the only reason I am in the situation I'm in now. Otherwise, I would probably be in jail right now, or in a really bad condition. The support workers, if they feel like the housing team or the council have done something unfairly, they will challenge it. They actually show that they care.*** *- Young Person*"

1. Introduction

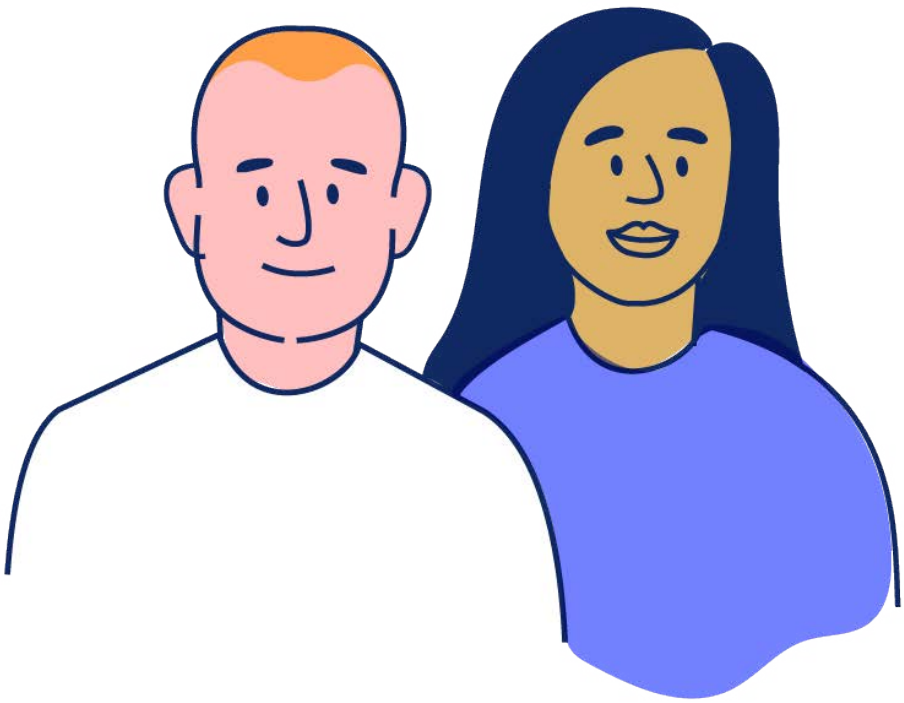
1.1 New Horizon Youth Centre's Youth Justice Team

The Youth Justice Team (YJT) at New Horizon Youth Centre (NHYC) offers tailored, intensive support to young Londoners aged 16–25 who are at risk of, or already involved in, community violence, crime, and exploitation. The team works across all points of the criminal justice system, including with young people in custody and those transitioning back into the community.

The YJT was established following learning from the Enhanced Constructive Resettlement (ECR) project. With funding secured from April 2023 to March 2026 from Propel and The National Lottery Community Fund, the team has expanded its service to work cross all London boroughs.

The team's approach is underpinned by principles of co-creation, advocacy and collaboration. Caseworkers work flexibly, shaping their support around young people's priorities. They build relationships not only with the young people themselves, but also with the wider networks around them – including family members and professionals – to improve coordination and access to support.

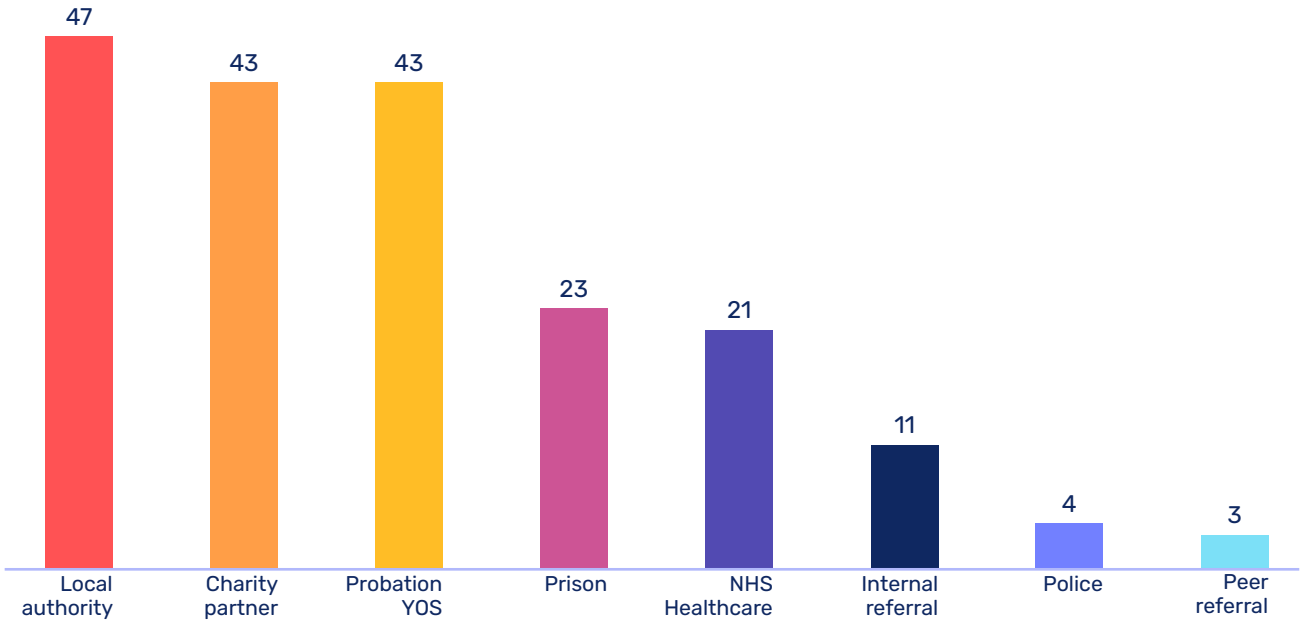
The intended pathway to sustainable change is illustrated in the Youth Justice Team's Theory of Change (Appendix A). Change is understood as a gradual process that begins with stabilisation and the development of trust. Early support focuses on helping young people address immediate pressures and feel safer in their day-to-day lives. This includes support to access suitable housing, advocacy to help young people navigate and influence wider systems, financial assistance and relational work aimed at building consistent, trusting relationships between young people and caseworkers. Together, these early changes create the foundations for further progress, which, over time, enable young people to develop greater confidence, self-understanding and engagement with opportunities such as education, employment or training. In turn, this supports longer-term improvements in young people's safety, wellbeing and independence.



1.2 Referrals to the Youth Justice Team

During the funding period, the YJT supported 214 young people[1]. As shown in Chart 1, these young people were referred to the team through a range of professional networks, reflecting the complex circumstances that often lead young people to engage with the service.

Chart 1: Referral routes for young people supported by the YJT during the evaluation period



Base: All young people from whom referrer information was available

The most common referral route was through local authorities, including referrals from social care (Personal Advisors) and specialist functions, such as Gangs Units and Community Safety teams), with a fifth (22%) of all referrals that led to support received directly from borough councils. Another common pathway was through a charity that delivers youth work within hospitals and healthcare settings. These referrals tend to occur when young people attend hospital following incidents of community violence. Where a housing need is identified – for example, if a young person cannot safely return to their home and home borough – practitioners may refer them to the Youth Justice Team for support.

Young people are also referred through various parts of the criminal justice system, including probation and YOS services (21%) and prisons (11%), and through the NHS or healthcare professionals. The latter includes referrals made through NHS Vanguard - a service led by clinical psychologists that the YJT works with closely (see section 6.2). In some cases, referrals to the team were made directly by the police, but this was relatively rare.

As noted, the YJT is a pan-London service, supporting young people across all boroughs. The borough to which young people are connected is recorded for all young people, regardless of referral route. The YJT supported young people from 28 of the 32 London boroughs during the evaluation period. The majority (60%), however, came from six boroughs: Islington (15%), Southwark (11%), Camden (9%), Lewisham (9%), Enfield (8%) and Lambeth (7%).

[1] This includes eight young people that the team were already working with prior to the start of the funded project.

1.3 The Youth Justice Team within the wider NHYC offering

The Youth Justice Team operates as part of the wider New Horizon Youth Centre (NHYC) service. Young people may therefore access the team not only through direct external referrals, but also through internal pathways within NHYC. As shown in Chart 1, there were 11 internal referrals into the YJT during the evaluation period.

The Youth Justice Team receives referrals through three key internal access points:

- **Housing Advice** – NHYC provides housing advice to young people experiencing housing difficulties in London. Where young people engaging with this service are involved in the criminal justice system, or face safety risks in particular areas, they may be referred to the Youth Justice Team.

- **Rough Sleeping Team** – NHYC runs an outreach programme that identifies and supports young people experiencing street homelessness across London. Where relevant safeguarding or criminal justice issues are identified, referrals may be made to the Youth Justice Team.

- **New Horizon Day Centre** – NHDC operates a physical youth centre that is open to young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Staff working in the centre may refer young people to the Youth Justice Team where additional support relating to safety, housing or criminal justice involvement is required.

Where it is safe for them to do so, young people engaging with the Youth Justice Team may also access the wider youth centre offer. This includes a range of youth work services, including support with jobs, education and training, life skills development, health services and a programme of social, creative and sporting activities.

Given this wider context, the outcomes described in this report should not be attributed solely to the Youth Justice Team. Young people's experiences are shaped by a combination of factors, including the broader NHYC offer (where relevant), input from partner agencies and the wider systems they are navigating. The Youth Justice Team plays a distinct role within this landscape, contributing to change by helping to create the conditions that make progress possible.



2. The evaluation

In 2024, Sarah McCoy and Sarah Tayleur were commissioned to undertake an external evaluation of the work of the YJT at NHYC. The evaluation of the programme aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how the YJT supports young people involved in community violence and the difference this support makes to their lives.

The evaluation ran over two years, from February 2024 to March 2026. It was designed to inform both future development of the programme and the wider evidence base around effective practice with this cohort.

2.1 An evolving approach

The evaluation was originally designed as a mixed methods study, with a strong quantitative component. As the work progressed, this approach shifted towards a deeper qualitative focus. This reflected both learning from the first year of the evaluation, and a growing recognition that the questions we were asking required methods capable of capturing complexity, non-linearity and the layered nature of young people's experiences.



Quantitative data collected through existing reporting processes provided valuable contextual information, including the characteristics of young people supported and the scale of delivery. However, it proved more challenging to use this data to capture change over time. Young people's journeys were often complex and non-linear, and progress did not follow a consistent or easily measurable pattern. This made it difficult to identify a meaningful and reliable way of assessing outcomes across the cohort using standardised measures.

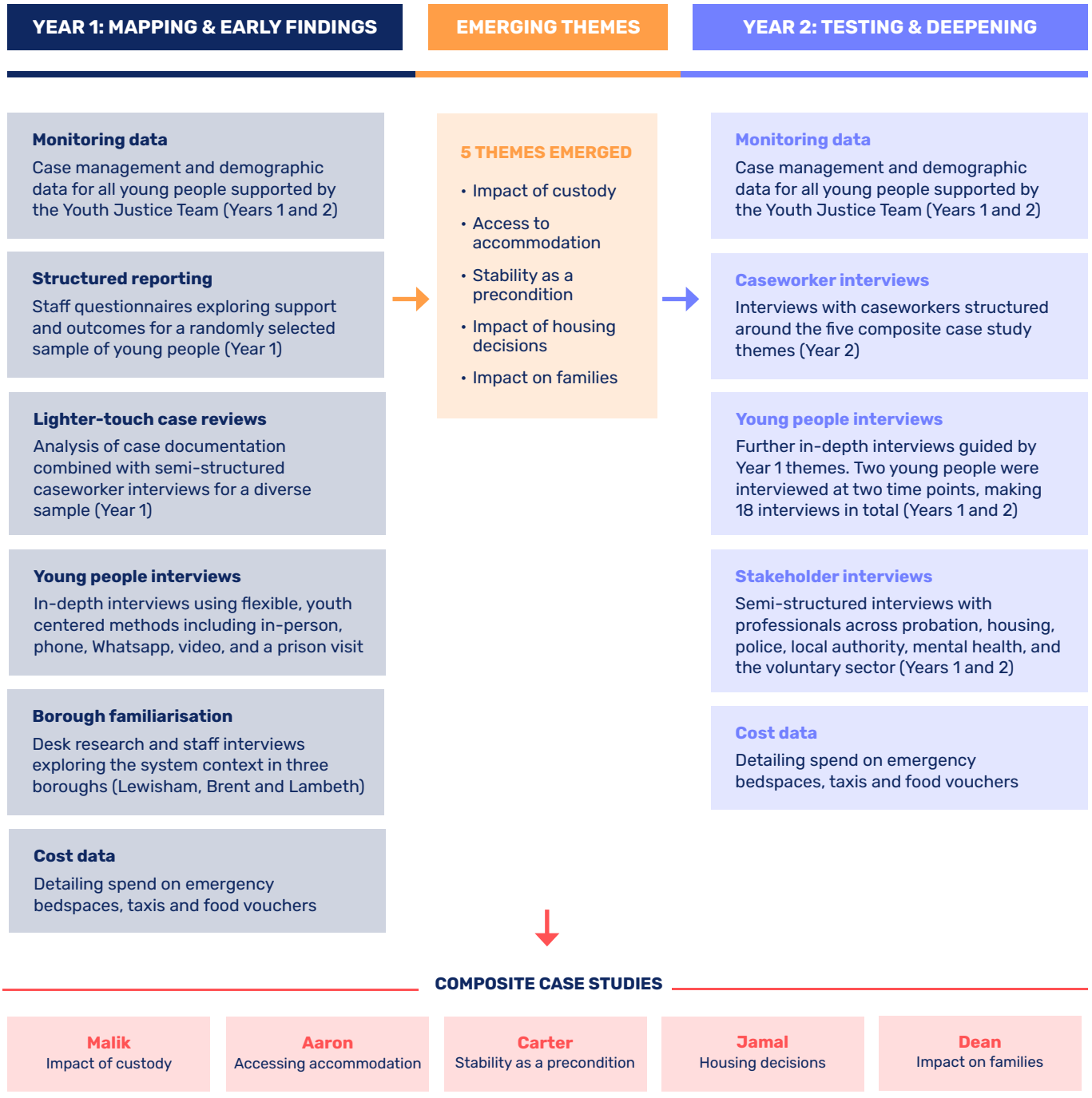
As became more evident over the course of the evaluation, a qualitative approach is particularly well suited to this cohort. As explored in more detail in section 3.1.2, the young people supported by the YJT are navigating overlapping and intersecting challenge, including housing instability, involvement in the criminal justice system, trauma, exploitation and fractured relationships with services. Their journeys do not follow predictable paths, and the changes that matter most are often relational, incremental and shaped by context. A qualitative approach allowed the evaluation to trace how change unfolds for these young people, and to understand the conditions that support or disrupt it.

The evaluation therefore draws on both sources of data, using quantitative information to provide context and qualitative evidence to explore how change happens in practice. While this approach does not allow for statistically generalisable conclusions about the full cohort, it provides a detailed and grounded account of the YJT's work and the conditions that shape young people's experiences.

2.2 Data collection

Data collection was structured across two phases of the evaluation, as shown in Figure 1. The approach moved from an initial period of mapping and exploration in Year 1 to a more focused phase of testing and deepening emerging findings in Year 2.

Figure 1: Data collection across Year 1 and 2 of the evaluation



In Year 1, the evaluation focused on building an understanding of the cohort, mapping the Youth Justice Team's ways of working, and identifying initial patterns across young people's journeys. This phase drew on a combination of monitoring data, structured reporting, lighter-touch case reviews and an initial round of interviews with six young people. Borough familiarisation work, including stakeholder engagement, provided additional context on the local environments in which the team operates.

Analysis of this data identified a set of recurring themes across young people's experiences, including the impact of custody, access to accommodation, the role of stability, housing decisions and family relationships. These themes provided the organising framework for the second phase of the evaluation.

In Year 2, data collection was more targeted, with further interviews undertaken with young people, caseworkers and a wider group of stakeholders working across the systems that shape young people's lives. This phase was designed to test, refine and deepen the themes identified in Year 1, drawing on a broader range of perspectives and experiences.

Young people were directly involved across both phases of the evaluation through in-depth interviews using flexible, youth-centred approaches. Interviews were conducted in a range of formats, including in person, by phone, via WhatsApp and video, and in one case through a prison visit, enabling participation in ways that reflected young people's circumstances and preferences. In total, 18 interviews were carried out with 16 young people across Years 1 and 2, including two young people who were interviewed at more than one time point.

Alongside this, the evaluation drew on a wider set of "lighter-touch" case reviews, combining interviews with caseworkers and analysis of case records. Together, these methods provided detailed insight into the experiences of 30 young people.

2.3 The composite case study approach

Alongside this synthesis report, the primary outputs of this evaluation are five composite case study reports, each exploring a different dimension of young people's experiences:



A composite approach was taken because of both the nature of the group and the patterns we observed in the data. The young people supported by the YJT are a relatively small and identifiable cohort, many of whom have experienced community violence and/or involvement in the criminal justice system. Presenting individual accounts, even with pseudonyms, would risk young people being identified, with potentially harmful consequences. By combining elements from multiple young people's experiences into composite narratives, the evaluation is able to tell grounded, truthful stories without compromising anyone's safety or privacy.

At the same time, many of the dynamics explored in the evaluation recur across different young people's experiences. Themes such as the disruption caused by custody, the challenges of accessing suitable

accommodation, and the impact of housing decisions on stability were not isolated to individual cases. Bringing these together into composite narratives allows these shared patterns to be explored in a way that retains the detail and texture of lived experience, while also incorporating aspects of young people's experiences that may not all have been present in a single case.

Each case study includes both a young person's narrative and a corresponding practitioner perspective, offering insight into how journeys are experienced and navigated from both sides. Elements from real experiences have been brought together carefully, and young people's language has been retained where appropriate, so that the accounts feel authentic while remaining anonymised.

Each case study report moves from narrative into analysis, drawing out findings and practice insights grounded in the wider evaluation. Together, they provide a detailed and evidence-based account of the Youth Justice Team's work, and of the conditions required to support change in practice.

2.4 Ethics, consent and anonymity

The evaluation was guided by a commitment to ethical and participatory practice throughout. All young people involved gave informed consent for their data to be used and for their experiences to be included in anonymised form. As a thank you for their time, participants were offered a voucher.

A flexible, youth-centred approach to participation was used, allowing young people to choose how they wanted to contribute. This included a range of formats, from informal conversations to more creative approaches such as video and illustration, depending on individual preference and circumstances. All names used in this report and the accompanying case studies are pseudonyms, and identifying details have been altered to protect anonymity.

2.5 About this report

This report presents the findings of the evaluation, drawing on data gathered across both years. It brings together insights from across the case studies, interviews and wider analysis to provide an integrated understanding of how change unfolds for young people and the role of the Youth Justice Team within this.

The report is structured as follows:

- In **Chapter 3**, we describe the cohort of young people supported by the Youth Justice Team and the wider system context in which they are navigating their lives.
- In **Chapter 4**, we set out the overall shape of young people's journeys, introducing the phases of Crisis, Stabilising and Thriving, and the types of change observed across these stages.
- In **Chapter 5**, we present the key insights that help explain how and why young people's trajectories unfold as they do, including the role of stability, system dynamics and relationships.
- In **Chapter 6**, we examine the role of the Youth Justice Team, setting out the core elements of the practice model and how practitioners work with young people and systems in practice.
- In **Chapter 7**, we explore how this model of practice aligns with, and is constrained by, the wider structural conditions within which the team operates.
- Finally in **Chapter 8**, we draw together the findings to set out recommendations for policy and practice.

3. Understanding the cohort and system context

This section draws on both quantitative and qualitative evidence to build a picture of the young people supported by the Youth Justice Team. Quantitative monitoring data is used to provide an overview of the number of young people supported, their demographic characteristics and basic information about their experiences and challenges. This is complemented by qualitative evidence from case reviews, interviews with young people and practitioners, and insights from stakeholders working across relevant systems. Together, the findings presented show the complexity of the cohort and the conditions shaping young people's journeys.

3.1 The young people supported by the Youth Justice Team

3.1.1 Scale and demographics

Between April 2023 and March 2026, the YJT supported 214 young people. The cohort was predominantly male (95%) and from racially minoritised backgrounds (84%). The largest ethnic group was Black/Black British, accounting for 64% of young people in the dataset.

Young people tended to be towards the older end of the service's age range when they first started working with the team, with just over half (51%) aged 21–24 and a further 43% aged 18–20. There were relatively few young people at either end of the scale, with only 4% under 18 and 1% aged 25 or over. This pattern is likely to reflect how young people access support, with 16–17-year-olds more likely to be identified and supported through other routes. The drop-off at the older end of the scale is likely to reflect the influence of the service's upper age limit on referrals, rather than a genuine reduction in need. This aligns with feedback from the team, who noted that eligibility criteria can shape who is referred and accepted.

The overrepresentation of young Black people within the cohort should be understood in context. It does not reflect an inherent difference in behaviour or risk, but the cumulative impact of structural inequalities that shape how young people come into contact with services, and how their needs are recognised and responded to. Evidence consistently shows that young Black people are more likely to be drawn into the criminal justice system through a combination of factors, including differential policing, disparities in access to early support, and system-level decision-making processes that can disadvantage them at multiple points[2].

Alongside this, there is growing recognition of the role of adultification, where young Black people may be perceived as older, less vulnerable, and more able to cope independently than their circumstances would suggest[3]. This can influence how risk is assessed and how entitlement to support is determined, with behaviour more likely to be interpreted as intentional or threatening rather than as a response to unmet need or trauma.

[2] David Lammy MP, The Lammy Review: An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System, 2017

[3] HM Inspectorate of Probation, Adultification bias within child protection and safeguarding: Findings from HM Inspectorate of Probation's thematic inspection, 2023.

Combined, these factors help to explain why young Black people are overrepresented within the cohort supported by the Youth Justice Team, and highlight the importance of interpreting this data within its broader systemic context.

3.1.2 Complex histories and overlapping needs

The young people supported by the Youth Justice Team are navigating multiple, overlapping forms of adversity that shape their development, sense of safety, and engagement with services. Although each young person's story is distinct, the cases we reviewed reveal a number of recurring patterns in young people's backgrounds and circumstances.

Exposure to violence emerged as a defining feature across most cases. At the point of engagement with the Youth Justice Team, more than nine in ten young people (94%) were navigating the impact of community violence. A large proportion had been physically harmed as a result of one or more incidents (87%), and 84% were connected to the criminal justice system in relation to community violence-related offences. Importantly, the data shows that the distinction between 'victim' and 'perpetrator' is rarely clear-cut, with nine in ten (89%) of those recorded as perpetrators also recorded as having been previously harmed.

In most cases, young people's involvement in community violence, exploitation and organised crime meant they were experiencing a very real threat to their physical safety at the point of entry to the service. For some, this threat was tied to specific areas of London that they felt unable to enter safely. As one caseworker described, for one young person they supported, "we could only find one borough in London where he said he would feel safe".

Living with this level of risk placed enormous strain on young people's sense of personal safety and security. Several young people described feelings of hypervigilance, with some experiencing paranoia or severe anxiety about being attacked. This sense of vulnerability was further compounded by housing instability, with over a third of the cohort (37%) experiencing homelessness, including street homelessness or sofa-surfing, at the point of service entry. For these young people, the absence of a safe place to stay intensified an already acute sense of risk.

> ***"I got stabbed by my heart, by my rib cage. I've got shot at as well. There's just certain things that as a 15-year old, nobody should be having to go through."*** *- Young Person*

Experiences of violence were often situated within wider patterns of trauma and instability. Across the cases reviewed, many young people had grown up in environments where violence, loss and emotional distress were common. Several described witnessing domestic violence in the home or losing friends and family members to community violence. Others spoke about growing up around criminal activity within their families or communities, shaping early expectations about what life might look like.

> ***"I've had a tough upbringing as well, my mum got through domestic violence [when I was] a little kid and stuff. I remember it all. Just seeing things and hearing certain things."***
> *- Young Person*

Table 2: Proportion of cohort with diagnosed or suspected mental health needs and/or neurodiversity

	Diagnosed prior to service entry (of all young people)	Suspected (of those with no diagnosis)	Total with diagnosed or suspected needs
Mental health needs	52%	78%	81%
Neurodiversity	37%	33%	54%

As shown in Table 2, a high proportion of young people were living with mental health needs and/or neurodiversity. Overall, 81% of the cohort had diagnosed or suspected mental health needs, and over half (54%) were identified as neurodivergent. While some of these needs had been formally recognised prior to entering the service, a significant proportion remained undiagnosed, with needs only identified or suspected – based on presenting behaviours and reported experiences - once young people engaged with support. This was particularly evident in relation to PTSD, where half of the cohort (104 young people) had a clinical diagnosis. Of these, 70% were diagnosed only after engagement with the service, meaning that 73 young people on the caseload had been trying to access support without their needs being formally recognised. This suggests that, for a substantial number of young people, mental health needs that were likely shaping behaviour had not been identified or understood prior to engagement with the YJT.

These experiences frequently intersected with long-standing engagement with the criminal justice system. When they first engaged with the service, the majority of young people were in the community, with only 14% (30 individuals) in prison. However, custody featured in young people's lives across the cohort, with some describing having spent significant portions of their adolescence in prison, missing key milestones and life events as a result. For these young people, periods in custody had become a formative part of their development, shaping how they understood relationships, safety and identity.

At the point of referral to the Youth Justice Team, many young people appeared to have very limited support around them. Caseworkers frequently described young people as having limited support from personal networks, alongside minimal engagement with other services or activities that might have provided some stability and structure (for example 89% were recorded as not in education, employment or training (NEET) within the dataset). Notably, over a quarter of the cohort (26%) were known care leavers at the point of service entry. Given that these young people were already known to services, this raises questions about the extent to which existing support had been able to meet their needs prior to referral.

These overlapping experiences combine to shape how young people understand risk, relationships and their own identities. For many, repeated exposure to harm and instability over time has shaped how young people experience safety and relationships, influencing patterns of attachment and making it difficult to trust others or sustain relationships with adults and services. Practical challenges, such as unstable housing or lack of income, sit alongside emotional and psychological pressures, meaning that even where support is available, it can be difficult to access or sustain. In this context, progress is rarely straightforward, and setbacks are common, particularly where the environments around young people reinforce instability.

Understanding this context is critical to appreciating the complexity of the Youth Justice Team's work. The support provided by the team sits within a complex and often unstable set of circumstances that young people are navigating. In this context, progress is rarely linear, and change cannot be understood as the outcome of a single intervention alone.

3.2 System context

In this section, we draw on semi-structured interviews with stakeholders to situate the findings in this report within the wider system landscape that young people are navigating. The stakeholders we interviewed worked across probation, local authority housing and community safety teams, mental health services, the police, and charities and other community organisations. Across these interviews, professionals consistently described many of the same challenges we discuss later in this report, while also highlighting how system constraints limit their ability to respond to them.

> ***Housing is probably the most recurring theme... housing was one of the biggest challenges for all of the young people that we're working with.*** *- Local authority stakeholder*

Housing was a consistent theme across the stakeholder interviews, often described as the condition on which everything else depends. Stakeholders spoke about a system in which housing options for the cohort the Youth Justice Team works with are extremely limited. Housing stock for young single people is scarce, particularly self-contained accommodation. Eligibility criteria, including statutory "priority need" thresholds, mean that young men aged 18 and over without dependents often fall outside the scope of housing support, even where professionals can see that their safety is at immediate risk.

> ***These young men are not priority. They don't have any dependents, so they're not seen as priority. There's nothing for them, to be honest with you, nothing.*** *- Local authority stakeholder*

Where accommodation is available, it may not be suitable. Professionals reflected on cases in which young people had been placed in shared environments that exposed them to further harm, as well as placements in locations far from their networks. They described working within conditions that limited what they could do to support young people, often aware that the "solutions" they were offering did not meet their needs.



Some of the constraints professionals face relate to the legal and policy frameworks within which services operate. Licence conditions, recall thresholds, borough-level housing policies and benefit rules, such as the Shared Accommodation Rate[4], all shape what professionals can do and when. Stakeholders described working within tight rules that were often poorly aligned with the realities of young people's lives. For example, the 84-day probation-funded temporary accommodation pathway - a short-term accommodation offer following release from custody was widely described as too short, with few suitable options available once this period came to an end. Compounding these issues, practitioners also described how the system does not consistently allow for early planning. In many cases, housing services become formally involved towards the end of these time-limited periods, rather than working with young people from the outset, limiting opportunities to put more stable arrangements in place at an earlier stage.

> ***"The young people pathway that we manage is particularly saturated at the moment, so we're looking at long waiting lists and quite a bit of difficulty moving clients into the pathway... That's something that we face a lot more as demand increases and availability sadly decreases."***
> *- Local authority stakeholder (Housing)*

Limited capacity was a recurring theme across every sector. Probation officers spoke about managing large caseloads, while local authority housing teams highlighted demand that far exceeded supply. Voluntary sector organisations were often operating at full stretch, in some cases unable to accept



new referrals. In this context, the time and sustained attention that effective work with this cohort requires - as the sections that follow will explore - is difficult for any single service to provide. This is not a reflection of the commitment of individual professionals, many of whom were seen to go well beyond what their roles formally required.

The challenges set out in this report were broadly recognised by the stakeholders we spoke to. Professionals across the system pointed to many of the same patterns seen in the case evidence, including the unsuitability of shared accommodation, the difficulty of supporting young people through transitions, the impact of repeated custody on mental health and development, and the gap between what young people need to progress and what current structures can provide. There was little disagreement about what needs to change. The barriers were largely structural, relating to housing supply, funding, capacity and the design of eligibility frameworks and assessment processes. In practice, it is these constraints that often limit what can be offered to young people, rather than a lack of understanding or will among the professionals working within them.

The sections that follow explore how these structural forces interact with young people's individual journeys, drawing on both case evidence and stakeholder accounts.

[4] The Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) is the maximum amount of Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit that most single people under 35 can receive. It is based on the cost of renting a room in a shared property rather than a self-contained home.

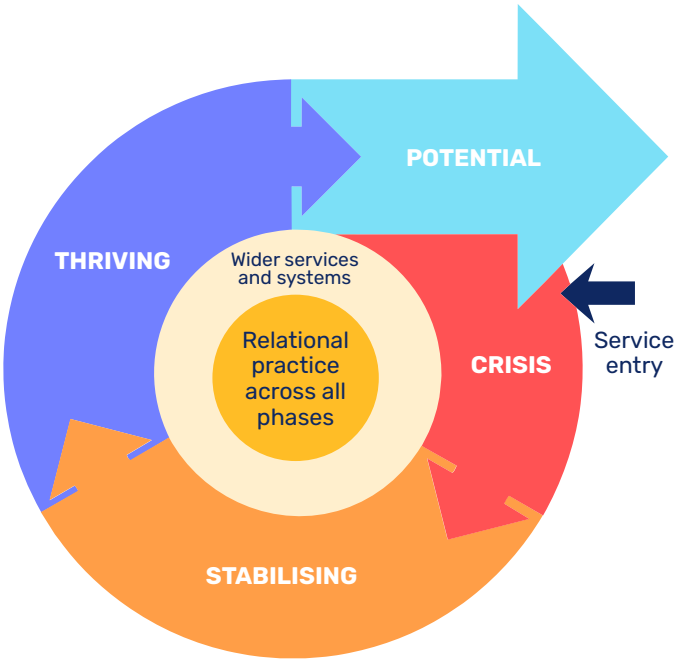
4. Understanding young people's trajectories

This section sets out the overall shape of young people's journeys as observed across the cases reviewed. While individual experiences differ, consistent patterns were identified across the cases. This model provides a framework for understanding the diverse role of the Youth Justice Team, particularly in the context of large caseloads made up of young people at different stages of their journeys.

4.1 The shape of overall journeys

During our analysis of the case-related data, three key phases of young people's journeys emerged. We refer to these phases as '**Crisis**', '**Stabilising**' and '**Thriving**', illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Overall journey of young people supported by Youth Justice Team



Depending on the phase young people are in, the support the YJT provides differs markedly, as do the intended outcomes that are prioritised.

As discussed further in section 5.2, whilst the intention is to support young people through each phase and ultimately towards reaching their potential, progress through the model is rarely linear. At all stages of their journey, young people face personal challenges and structural barriers that can make progress difficult and sometimes push them back into crisis. This is reflected in the circular form of the model.

> ***...there are good days and bad days - and I think that is true of all of us not just people who have been through so much. Recovery isn't linear so we can't expect every young person to go through the cycle first try.***
> *- YJT caseworker*

In the following sections, we look at each phase of young people's journeys in turn, briefly outlining the support provided by the YJT, the key challenges young people face, and the main changes observed in young people's situations. We come back to common themes in young people's experiences, and explore the role of the YJT more fully, in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.2 Crisis

Most young people first engage with the YJT during periods of acute crisis. At this point, they may be fleeing violence, leaving custody without safe accommodation, or facing immediate homelessness. Many are navigating complex interactions with the criminal justice system while also dealing with the psychological effects of trauma and

prolonged instability. As a result, when young people first come into contact with the YJT, they often do so with a high level of mistrust in services and a focus on immediate survival rather than longer-term change.

During the crisis phase of the YJT's support, positive change is typically concentrated in a small number of areas, particularly immediate physical safety and engagement with support. For many young people, securing safe accommodation outside areas where they are at risk of harm is the most urgent priority. At the same time, early shifts in trust – such as a willingness to accept help or maintain contact with a caseworker – create the conditions for future progress.

Consistent with the programme's Theory of Change, our analysis suggests that safety and trust form the key foundations for movement beyond the Crisis phase. Until these conditions are established, young people are often unable to engage meaningfully with wider forms of support or focus on longer-term goals.

However, as discussed later in the report, achieving these foundational changes is rarely straightforward. The cases we reviewed showed that progress during this phase is heavily shaped by structural barriers, particularly within the housing system. Caseworkers frequently described spending significant time navigating complex local authority processes, gathering evidence to demonstrate young people's vulnerability, and advocating for appropriate accommodation. These processes can be slow and bureaucratic, often requiring repeated assessments and extensive documentation.

Our analysis also highlights an important distinction between housing availability and housing suitability. While securing accommodation is a critical step in improving safety, inappropriate placements – particularly shared accommodation for highly vulnerable young people – can undermine stability and, in some cases, contribute to further offending and/or recall.
Within this phase, the role of the YJT centres on sustained advocacy and relational continuity. Caseworkers support young people to navigate complex systems, advocate for safe and appropriate accommodation (and arrange emergency accommodation where required), and maintain contact during periods of custody or instability.



Alongside this practical work, they focus on building trust at a point when many young people feel unable to rely on services. This combination of advocacy and relational support is critical in helping young people move beyond immediate survival and begin progressing towards stabilisation.

4.2.1 Outcomes observed within the Crisis phase

Progress during the Crisis phase tends to be in a small number of areas, relating to safety and engagement. Examples of changes observed in this phase include:

- **Increased physical safety**, for example through access to accommodation away from areas where young people face threats of violence[5].
- **Early development of trust with a caseworker**, including maintaining contact and beginning to share information about risks or needs.
- **Willingness to accept practical support**, such as engaging with housing applications, appointments or safety planning.
- **Increased understanding of available services and entitlements**, including housing rights, benefits and sources of support.
- **Access to identification documents**, enabling young people to apply for housing, benefits or other services.
- **Reduced exposure to situations associated with violence or offending**, for example through relocation or changes in daily routines.

[5] In monitoring data, 75% of young people were recorded as having experienced 'increased safety' whilst supported by the YJT. This measure is based on practitioner assessment and is not further defined within the dataset. However, it suggests positive change is being experienced in this area by the majority of young people the team is working with.

4.3 Stabilising

Following the initial Crisis phase, many young people enter a period where immediate threats to their safety have reduced (often through physical removal from high-risk environments), but longer-term stability has not yet been established and wider forms of risk remain. In our analysis, this stage is best understood as a period in which the pre-conditions for thriving are gradually put in place.

For many young people, this phase begins once safe accommodation has been secured and the immediate pressures of survival have eased. However, as we will explore in section 5.8, moving from crisis towards stability can be a slow and uneven process. Young people often arrive in accommodation with highly dysregulated nervous systems following prolonged exposure to violence, instability and institutional environments. As a result, this phase often involves a period of settling into relative safety and beginning to recover from the psychological and practical impacts of these experiences.

Within the programme's Theory of Change, this stage sits between the initial engagement phase and the longer-term outcomes associated with thriving. The role of the YJT during this period centres on sustaining stability and creating the conditions for further progress. This includes supporting young people to manage day-to-day pressures, develop practical skills for independent living, and reconnect with wider sources of support. The relational work established during the Crisis phase continues to play a central role, with consistent contact enabling young people to begin processing past experiences and developing new ways of managing emotions, relationships and decision-making.

As in the Crisis phase, progress during this period remains strongly shaped by structural conditions, particularly the environments in which young people are placed. Although

accommodation may have been secured, temporary housing does not always provide a stable base for recovery or positive change. As explored in Chapter 5, shared placements, isolation from existing support networks, and uncertainty about how long accommodation will last can all undermine the sense of stability required for moving forward.

As a result, a significant proportion of caseworkers' time during this phase is spent advocating for safer or more appropriate living conditions. This may involve seeking moves away from harmful environments, supporting young people to manage the stresses associated with their accommodation, and working with housing providers and other professionals to reduce risks where possible.

Despite these challenges, this stage often marks the point at which more visible shifts begin to emerge. As young people experience greater safety and consistency in support, many begin to strengthen relationships with professionals, engage more reliably with services, and show early signs of improved emotional regulation and confidence. These changes help to create the conditions for movement towards the next stage of their journey.

4.3.1 Outcomes observed within the Stabilising phase

- **Sustained safety**, including reduced involvement in situations associated with violence, exploitation or criminal activity.
- **Increased engagement with support beyond the Youth Justice Team**, for example through involvement with education, training, mental health support or other specialist services
- **Development of practical skills for independent living**, such as managing appointments, budgeting, cooking or navigating housing and benefits systems
- **Improved ability to manage stress, emotions and daily routines**, including greater stability in sleep, behaviour and decision-making.
- **Strengthening of positive relationships and support networks**, including more consistent contact with professionals, family members or other supportive adults.
- **Greater openness to professional support and advice**, including increased willingness to seek help or discuss challenges with caseworkers and other services.
- **Early shifts in mindset and future orientation**, for example expressing interest in education, work or longer-term goals.

4.4 Thriving

The final phase of the support journey involves young people using the safety and stability established in earlier stages to begin building meaningful and sustainable futures. At this point, the focus shifts from managing risk and stabilising day-to-day circumstances towards helping young people pursue opportunities that reflect their interests, strengths and ambitions.

This stage centres on young people developing a clearer sense of themselves and what they want for their futures, and building the confidence, skills and connections needed to get there. For many, this involves engaging with education, employment or training, reconnecting with positive interests, and developing the social and emotional skills required to navigate new environments and opportunities.

The young people we spoke to who had reached this stage showed clear signs of optimism and future-thinking.

Several spoke about wanting to earn their own income, build a stable future and move away from the patterns of behaviour that had previously shaped their lives. For some, the support they had received through the YJT had helped them begin to see professionals differently and become more open seeking support when they needed it, rather than feeling they had to manage everything alone.

However, our analysis suggests that reaching – and sustaining – this stage can be challenging. Only a small number of young people in our sample of reviewed cases had reached a point where they were ready to focus on longer-term aspirations such as employment, education or personal development. This reflects both the complexity of the cohort and the significant structural barriers that continue to shape young people's lives even once they have moved beyond immediate crisis.

At this stage of their journeys, young people often faced barriers relating to housing, employment and access to longer-term health or mental health support. Criminal records, housing shortages and benefit restrictions can all limit opportunities, while high thresholds for specialist support make it harder to address the longer-term effects of trauma or injury.

These wider conditions also shape how much support can be provided. In practice, demand at the crisis stage is high, with practitioners often working at capacity to respond to immediate risks and instability. This leaves little room to work intensively with young people who are ready to thrive, even where continued support is critical to sustaining progress. Whilst referral to other services at this point could be a potential solution, there are usually no suitable services to refer young people on to. The tension between the YJT knowing what young people need but being unable to provide it consistently because of structural constraints is explored further in Chapter 7.



4.4.1 Outcomes observed within the Thriving phase

Where young people were able to progress into the Thriving phase, examples of change included:

- **Engagement in education or training**, including enrolling on courses, attending classes, or working towards qualifications.
- **Development of employability skills**, such as creating CVs, preparing for interviews, building confidence in workplace environments, or receiving careers guidance.
- **Steps towards employment**, including job searching, submitting applications, attending interviews or starting work.
- **Greater awareness of personal strengths and interests**, for example identifying skills, talents or areas of motivation that shape future plans
- **Development of social and emotional skills needed for work and community life**, such as communication, reliability, emotional regulation and managing conflict.
- **Increased confidence in planning for the future**, including setting goals and making practical plans around work, housing or personal development.
- **Greater independence in managing housing, finances and daily life**, such as budgeting, maintaining accommodation and managing appointments or responsibilities.
- **A strengthened sense of identity beyond past experiences of crime or crisis**, including seeing themselves as workers, students, mentors or community members.



5. Key insights shaping young people's trajectories

Across the evaluation, ten recurring patterns emerged from the data that help explain how and why young people's journeys unfold as they do. Identified across multiple cases, these patterns provide a richer understanding of young people's experiences and the contexts in which change is – or is not - taking place. They highlight the structural constraints, developmental challenges and service dynamics that shape what is possible for young people, often in ways that sit beyond the control of any single service.

The findings that follow provide the context needed to understand the role played by the Youth Justice Team, explored in Chapter 6, and point to where change is needed at a system level to improve young people's experiences and support more stable and sustainable progress. We explore these implications for system design further in our recommendations (Chapter 8).

5.1 Disrupted pathways into adulthood

Many of the young people supported by the Youth Justice Team have experienced significant disruption to their development. Experiences of trauma, instability and institutional environments have made it harder to develop independence, regulate emotions and build a stable sense of identity.

For most young people, this begins early, through experiences of family instability, community violence or time in care, and is often reinforced by periods in custody during key developmental stages. In response, young people may develop patterns of heightened vigilance, emotional guardedness and readiness to react quickly to perceived threat as ways of coping or staying safe. Over time, these responses can become ingrained.

Caseworkers described young people developing a version of themselves that made sense within these environments, but created difficulties elsewhere. As one caseworker put it, they had become a "prison version" of themselves. Behaviours that were functional in custody or in unsafe environments – such as being constantly alert, keeping distance from others, or reacting quickly to challenge – can be misread in other settings, particularly where trust, openness or compliance are expected from the outset.

> ***"I've been in prison since 2015, that's too long, man. It's like I'm growing up in there, but then when I come out here, I still feel like I'm a bit immature because I ain't really grown out here yet."*** *- Young person*

A further consequence is that the transition into adulthood is often compressed. Rather than gradually taking on responsibilities over time, young people are expected to manage multiple demands at once, often at the point of release from custody or when moving into independent accommodation. This can include managing housing, finances, appointments and daily routines, frequently with limited preparation or support.

These expectations are often shaped by chronological age. Once a young person turns 18, they are typically treated as an adult within systems, with a corresponding shift in responsibility and a reduction in support. However, the cases we reviewed suggest that developmental needs do not align neatly with these thresholds. Young people may be expected to function independently at a point where key aspects of their development have been delayed or disrupted, creating a mismatch between what is expected of them and what they have had the opportunity to learn.

> ***You're asking an 18, 19, 20, 21, even up to 25 year old to try and live by themselves, and they may never have had that experience or even the family support around them to help them do that.***
> *- Local authority stakeholder*

In practice, this means that young people may be required to navigate adult systems without having developed the everyday skills that would enable them to do so. Tasks such as managing bills, responding to official correspondence, cooking or maintaining a living space can become sources of stress rather than routine parts of daily life. Where these challenges are not understood in this context, difficulties can be misinterpreted as lack of motivation or engagement.

At the same time, as explored further in section 5.8, the move into accommodation can be a period of heightened emotional instability, resulting in anxiety, difficulties with regulation, or a tendency to become overwhelmed or withdraw. This adds a further layer of difficulty at a point where young people are already struggling to manage new responsibilities.

These factors mean that what is often described as 'independence' can, in reality, feel more like being left to manage alone. Young people are navigating adult responsibilities without the gradual scaffolding that typically supports this transition, while also managing the longer-term impact of trauma and acute instability.

5.2 Progress is not linear and setbacks are common

As highlighted in section 4.1, across the cases we reviewed, young people's journeys did not follow a straightforward or linear path. Setbacks were common and formed a normal part of how change unfolded over time.

All of the young people within our sample who had made progress had also experienced periods where things had temporarily become more difficult. These included deteriorations in mental health, conflict with others, and, in some cases, further involvement with the criminal justice system. While setbacks were more likely in situations where accommodation was unstable or unsuitable, they were not limited to these contexts and could occur even when things appeared to be improving.

> ***I really struggled to get out of the lifestyle. Even though I was doing better... I was still slipping up, not being 100% legit, for example. I was still finding it hard to be on a good, good track.*** *- Young person*

These moments were not always understood in this way within the systems that surround young people. Setbacks were sometimes interpreted as a sign that support was not working, or that progress had been undone.

However, across the cases, they were more accurately understood as part of the process of change, particularly given the complexity of the situations young people were navigating.

Over time, as conditions began to improve, the nature of the setbacks young people experienced often shifted. Rather than disappearing entirely, they became less frequent or less severe, or young people were better able to manage them when they occurred. Early on, setbacks could be more acute, sometimes leading to a rapid escalation of events. As stability developed, young people were often more able to pause, seek support, or respond differently, reducing the likelihood that a single incident would lead to a wider deterioration.

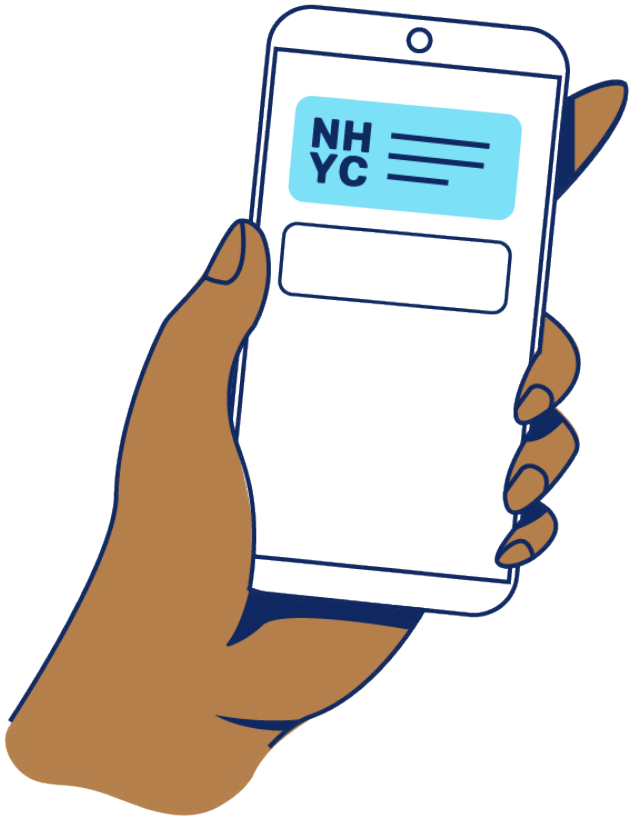
> ***I think probation's a journey, isn't it? So a lot of people have to go through it a couple of times. Like it's not super common that it's a one time and done, sort of thing.***
> *- Probation worker*

This suggests that progress for this cohort of young people rarely follows a straight line. Periods of instability are part of how change unfolds over time. Recognising this is important when considering how best to support young people and measure their progress.

5.3 System friction in access to housing and other support

Access to housing and other forms of support is shaped by how systems operate in practice. As discussed in section 3.2, these systems function under significant pressure, with practitioners working within tight constraints that limit their ability to respond to young people's needs. The challenges young people experience are rarely the result of a lack of understanding or willingness among professionals, but of the way systems are structured. Despite this, the impact is significant, with young people experiencing systems as fragmented and difficult to navigate.

> ***[The council] said he's not priority need and they were closing the case... but [New Horizon] knew his needs and that he did meet priority need. They gave all that information to another council and they accepted him.***
> *- Probation worker*



Young people were typically engaging with multiple services at once, each with their own processes, expectations and approaches to decision-making. From their perspective, this often felt confusing and like starting again every time. Young people and practitioners spoke of:

• complex processes involving legal or technical language that was difficult to understand;

• multiple professionals being involved without a clear sense of who was responsible for what;

• repeated and uncoordinated requests for evidence;

• inconsistencies in how different boroughs or services apply rules and thresholds;

• having to repeat the same information across different services and formats; and

• limited visibility of what was happening or what would move things forward

Within these systems, access to support was not determined by young people's needs alone, but by whether those needs could be evidenced in ways that aligned with system requirements. Practitioners spoke of support depending on:

• formal diagnoses or clinical assessments;

• documented evidence of risk or vulnerability; and

• young people meeting predefined eligibility thresholds, which - as explored in the next section - were often considered far too high or misaligned with the realities of young people's lives.

This created a gap between how young people experienced their situations and how those experiences needed to be presented in order to access support. Bridging this gap often took time, particularly where processes were complex or difficult to navigate.



This complexity is illustrated by the number of requests YJT practitioners made to secure housing support for young people. A Duty to Refer[6] (DTR) is typically completed when a young person is homeless or at risk of homelessness, requiring a referral to a local authority for housing support. During the funding period, the team completed 190 DTRs for 115 young people, with 56 young people requiring multiple requests. In practice, this meant that accessing support involved repeated referrals for more than a quarter (26%) of young people, along with corresponding administration and follow-up. This represented a significant investment of time and coordination for practitioners, and prolonged periods of instability for young people.

Across the cases we reviewed, delays within the process of securing accommodation for young people – or helping them access other forms of support – were common. While some stemmed from the need to gather and present evidence, delays were also driven by wider system factors, including:

- **duplication of processes across services;**
- **administrative errors or missing information;**
- **unclear ownership or responsibility between services or boroughs;**
- **staff changes or handovers disrupting continuity; and**
- **misalignment between different services' requirements.**

[6] The Duty to Refer is a legal requirement under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. It places a duty on specified public authorities, including youth justice services, to refer individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to a local housing authority, with the individual's consent. The local authority must then assess the person's situation and determine what support they are entitled to.

> ***We will specifically write, due to PTSD or youth violence, the young person cannot be placed in a HMO. And then the housing offer is usually a HMO... we challenge that. Sometimes it takes longer and the young peron will remain homeless for longer.***
>
> *- YJT caseworker*

As a result, even where need felt clear, progress could be slow. In some cases, young people waited months to be housed. During these periods, young people were often left in unstable or unsafe situations, including spending extended periods in emergency accommodation such as hotels, usually arranged and paid for by the YJT. The scale of these delays is reflected in the level of emergency accommodation provided. During the funding period, the YJT spent a total of £200,276 on emergency accommodation, equating to approximately 3,300 nights. Monitoring data shows that at least one emergency bed night was arranged for 87 young people, suggesting an average of nearly 40 days in emergency accommodation per young person.

While this type of provision may offer a level of immediate safety, it does not provide the conditions needed for stability or progress. Young people described being moved frequently between placements, often with little notice, and having no clear sense of where they would be staying from one day to the next. Many were living in environments that felt unpredictable, noisy and outside their control. For those already experiencing heightened vigilance, this could be particularly destabilising.

More broadly, periods of uncertainty created by delays made it difficult for young people to plan, engage with support or sustain progress, compounding the challenges they were already facing. Despite this, they were

still expected to remain responsive to system demands, or risk further jeopardising their situation.

In this context, power dynamics within these systems also shaped young people's outcomes. Across the cases we reviewed, there was evidence that young people were often understood primarily through their involvement with the criminal justice system. This could result in them being seen first and foremost as offenders, rather than as young people who had experienced significant trauma and instability.

> ***Me and my [pregnant] girlfriend have made it very clear to social workers, to everyone, our main concern is housing. Now we are six weeks away from a due date with still nowhere to go.*** *- Young person*

This had implications for how their needs were recognised and responded to. Compared to other groups experiencing vulnerability, such as those affected by domestic abuse, young people in this cohort were less likely to be recognised as requiring protection or support. Instead, responses were more often shaped by behaviour and perceived risk, with a focus on containment rather than meeting underlying need. As a result, high levels of vulnerability were not always recognised within decision-making processes, making it more difficult for young people to access the help they needed.

The emotional impact of navigating these systems was evident across the cases. Young people described feeling overwhelmed by the number of processes they were expected to manage, often at the same time as dealing with housing instability or other pressures. Without consistent support to hold things together, confusion about what was happening, what was required of them, or who was responsible for decisions made it difficult to stay on top of what was needed. This often led to frustration, which could shape how young people responded to systems and how they were, in turn, understood.

> ***If someone's fleeing domestic violence, [they are] almost housed imminently, they don't need to have anything... we need that type of response to someone who's fleeing community violence.*** *- YJT caseworker*

These experiences show that access to support is shaped not only by need, but by how systems operate, how they interpret young people's situations, and the extent to which young people are able to navigate them. Where this is not recognised, those with the greatest need may also be those least likely to receive the appropriate support.



5.4 Focus on physical risk and crisis

Young people's experiences and outcomes are shaped by how risk is understood and managed within the systems around them. Across the cases we reviewed, there was a clear emphasis on containing immediate physical risk, particularly where young people were perceived to pose a risk to others. In a context of limited resources, this focus shaped who was prioritised for support, how quickly they received that support, and how situations were managed.

> ***I was homeless. I just finished getting stabbed. I was homeless for two years.*** *- Young person*

Across the evaluation, practitioners gave multiple examples of young people they felt were highly vulnerable not receiving the support they needed. Often, this was because thresholds were set at a level that required young people to demonstrate a high level of immediate physical risk in order to access support quickly. Situations that did not meet this threshold were less likely to be prioritised, even where there were clear indicators of vulnerability.

> ***We had to do a threat to life assessment... which is basically someone in the police saying, we think you're going to die pretty soon if you don't get out of there.***
> *- YJT caseworker*

Where support was provided, the same focus on immediate physical risk shaped how situations were responded to. Solutions were often designed to reduce risk in the short term, including through restrictive licence conditions or placements that separated young people from perceived sources of harm. While this could reduce immediate physical risk, it did not always fit with the wider realities of young people's lives, meaning there were clear trade-offs.

Young people could be placed in environments that reduced one form of risk while increasing others. For example, in several cases young people were placed in accommodation that removed immediate physical danger but limited access to their support networks. This led to isolation and, when combined with restrictions that made it difficult to establish routines or build new connections, could increase the likelihood of young people returning to unsafe environments, returning to custody, or experiencing a deterioration in their mental health.

Decisions to place young people in these types of environments suggest an emphasis on risk management and containment, instead of on longer-term support, recovery or development – a reactive rather than proactive approach. In practice, this meant that situations often needed to worsen before they were recognised or responded to, with action typically triggered at points of crisis rather than earlier, when support may have been more effective.

5.5 Stability as the foundation for progress

Across the cases we reviewed, and in line with the project's theory of change, positive outcomes tended to happen when young people's lives felt settled enough for them to think beyond immediate survival. When day-to-day life was less chaotic, and when young people felt safer, more secure and more in control of what was around them, there was more space to pause, reflect and make

different choices. This included beginning to think about the future, rather than focusing only on getting through the day.

The cases we reviewed showed that having somewhere to live was a fundamental part of what helped young people feel more settled. As young people with experience of homelessness or emergency accommodation told us, without somewhere even partially secure, it was extremely difficult to focus on anything beyond preventing things from getting worse. However, on its own, having a roof over their head was not enough to help young people build a sense of safety or calm. What mattered was how different aspects of young people's lives came together, creating a sense that things were steady enough to begin to move forward.

> ***Before, I had no house, no way to do anything. Now I have like a base, somewhere where I'm not just going to get kicked out in the morning... I can actually think about other things in the future now.*** *- Young person*

Our analysis suggests that young people being able to build a sense of stability depends on three interconnected elements:

- **the physical environment that they are living in, including how safe, predictable and manageable it felt;**

- **their emotional capacity to cope with stress and uncertainty, including their ability to pause and respond to situations rather than react; and**

- **the presence of consistent, trusted relationships, and a sense of connection to others.**

> ***When things are not stable, it's easier to get drawn back. But when you're stable you can start to plan.*** *- Young person*

These elements were closely linked, with changes in one area often strengthening or undermining another. For example, a more predictable environment could make it easier to manage emotions, while instability in relationships could make it harder for young people to feel settled, even where their housing situation was secure.

Across the cases, these elements of stability did not always come together at the same time. Young people could feel more secure in one area while struggling in another. Some were physically safe but overwhelmed by their emotions, while others had somewhere to live but felt isolated or disconnected. In these situations, young people were often able to cope for a time, but their circumstances were fragile and could be unsettled quickly by changes that might have been manageable if these conditions had been more fully in place.

However, where these elements did come together and hold, a different pattern was evident. Young people were more able to move out of survival mode, respond to situations rather than react, and begin to move forward with their lives.

5.6 Housing environments shape day to day experience

Across the cases we reviewed, young people were often moving into accommodation from highly unstable situations, including custody, street homelessness and other forms of acute crisis. Many were already managing high levels of hypervigilance and difficulties with their mental health. In this

context, the type of environments young people were moved into shaped their day-to-day experiences, influencing whether they remained in a state of survival or were able to begin to settle and move forward.

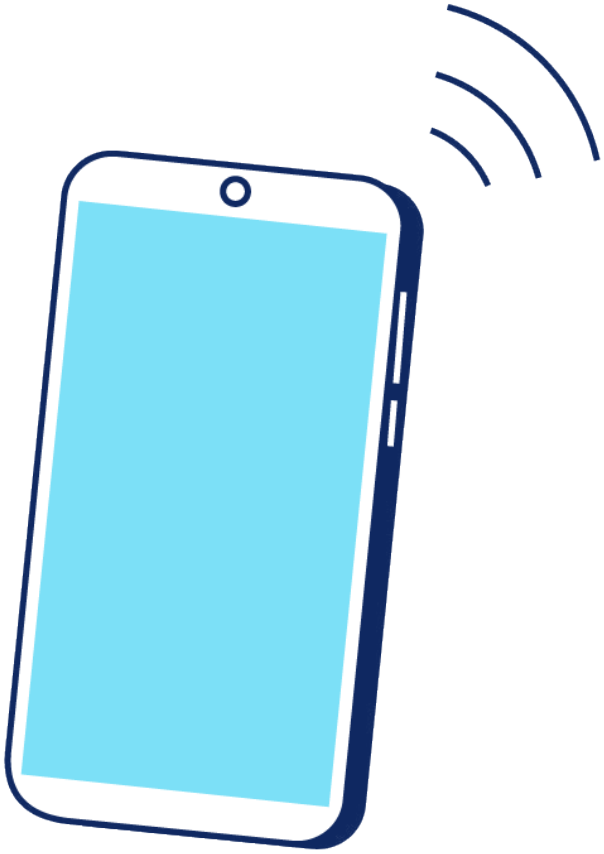
In some cases, young people were placed in environments that mirrored the conditions they were trying to move away from. Shared accommodation could be noisy, unpredictable and lacking in privacy, exposing young people to unpredictable behaviour from others and creating a constant sense of tension. For those already on edge, this could trigger strong emotional responses and increase the likelihood of conflict, in some cases leading to harm or recall. This is particularly significant given the high prevalence of PTSD within the cohort (51% had a formal diagnosis).

> ***I feel like when I was at the [shared accommodation]... just in a house full of other people that live there that are also involved in that kind of lifestyle, it's definitely a big block because, its trying to run away from something, but then its just there to remind you every day. Myself, I really struggled to get out of the lifestyle... I was surrounded by people that struggled like me. A lot of young people the only way they know how to make money is by drug dealing, because that's all they've ever done, and now they're trying to get away from it and now they're surrounded by it, so it's the only thing they can do.*** *- Young person*

In other cases, young people were placed in calmer environments, but a long way from the places, people and routines that felt familiar to them. While this could reduce immediate physical danger, it created a different set of challenges. Young people described being alone for long periods, with too much unstructured time and too little support around them. For many, this brought loneliness, boredom and rising stress, particularly where they were also trying to manage the practical demands of living alone for the first time.

> ***Although [shared housing] can be a place of safety in terms of actual violence, it's not a place of safety in terms of ease of access to drugs and ease of access to friends that are leading them in the direction of crime and violence.*** *- YJT caseworker*

Licence conditions could intensify this further. In some cases, young people were restricted from returning to areas where they felt connected. While intended to reduce risk, this could leave young people cut off from the people and environments that helped them cope. As a result, they were often left to manage isolation and increasing pressure without access to the support they would normally rely on.



In these situations, risk was not removed so much as reshaped. Young people were safer in one sense, but more exposed in another: cut off from support, under pressure to cope alone, and left in environments that could be difficult to manage both practically and emotionally. In some cases, this increased the pull of returning to familiar places or relationships, even where those carried clear risks of their own.

The quality of accommodation also mattered. We saw multiple examples of young people living in poor conditions. In some cases, this undermined their sense of physical safety, for example where locks were broken or environments felt insecure. In others, it affected how young people saw themselves, making it harder to feel that they were worth something better or to imagine a different future. Where accommodation felt unsafe or unliveable, young people were less likely to want to be there, making it harder to settle or invest in the space in any meaningful way.

Accommodation should act as a first step towards a different life, helping young people to recover and begin to build something new. However, across the cases we reviewed, it often did the opposite, making it harder for young people to put down new roots. This not only made it more difficult for young people to move forward, but in some cases actively pushed them back towards their previous lives, which could feel more familiar and, in contrast, more manageable.

5.7 Transitions increase pressure and reduce support

Across many of the cases we reviewed, pressure intensified and support reduced at key transition points. One of the clearest examples of this was release from custody. Whilst this was generally a positive moment in young people's journeys, it was also stressful. Young people described moving from highly structured environments into situations where they were expected to manage their time, appointments and responsibilities more independently. This sudden shift could be unsettling, especially for young people who were more institutionalised or had little support in the community.

Other transition points that were consistently associated with such pressures included:

- **the end of licence conditions, when probation would step away;**
- **moves between accommodation or boroughs;**
- **transitions into new placements, particularly where this involved emergency accommodation; and**
- **age-related transitions, where entitlements or services changed.**

> ***"Coming out [of prison], having been in custody for a period of time and maybe a lot of relationships breaking down with any professionals you have had and also within your family and your friendship networks, to come out feels quite lonely. And so knowing that there's somebody there that can support and guide you on your journey."***
>
> *- Local authority stakeholder*

At each of these points, young people were expected to take on more. This often meant managing new rules and expectations, working with new professionals, adapting to unfamiliar environments, taking on new tasks and responsibilities, and building new relationships or support networks, often all at once. At the same time, the support from statutory services to help them do this was often reduced or disrupted. Structure fell away, continuity was broken, and young people were separated from the people and

environments they relied on.
As a result, transitions were often points where things began to unravel. Rather than representing a step forward, they could introduce new pressures that made it harder for young people to cope and sustain progress.

5.8 When things settle, new challenges emerge

Across the cases we reviewed, a reduction in immediate crisis did not mean that young people's difficulties had been resolved. In many cases, once the most acute pressures had eased, other experiences began to come to the surface.

Young people described how, when things became calmer, there was more space to think and feel. During periods of crisis, much of their attention had been focused on getting through the day or managing immediate risks. When this pressure reduced, they were no longer operating in the same constant state of alert. This created space for thoughts, memories and emotions that had previously been pushed aside to come more fully into view.

> ***Obviously having my own place had a positive effect on my mental health but at the same time, because I've just come out of that lifestyle, it had just made me really tired. Imagine running a marathon, and then you go to relax. That's when your body's hurting, it's like you can't get up.*** *- Young person*

For some, this brought a sense of emotional intensity that could be difficult to manage. Young people spoke about feeling overwhelmed, low in mood, or more sensitive to what was happening around them. Experiences that had been held at a distance during crisis could become harder to contain, particularly where young people were now spending more time on their own. This was especially challenging where accommodation was located away from familiar people or sources of support. In these situations, young people could find themselves isolated, with more time and less distraction, and without the relationships that had previously helped them cope.

Moving into more settled accommodation can be understood as another key transition point in young people's journeys. As described in the previous section, these transitions are often points where responsibility increases at the same time as support reduces. As emotional difficulties begin to surface more fully, young people can find themselves expected to manage more just as their capacity to cope is being stretched, making this period particularly difficult.

> ***I think where a lot of our young people have anxiety, PTSD, where they're living in chaos when they're homeless, they don't really stop to focus on that. And then when they get to a safe space that's quiet and they're on their own, that's when a lot of those feelings start to come up and they start to reflect on things that have happened.***
> *- Local authority stakeholder*

As young people attempted to navigate this stage, a lack of understanding within the systems around them could compound their difficulties. Young people responded to the emotional challenges of resettlement in different ways. Some withdrew, while others became more easily heightened or overwhelmed. At times, these responses were read as disengagement, a lack of motivation or defiance, rather than as understandable responses to emotional overload. This, in turn, could shape how young people were responded to,

including decisions about support and accommodation.

This highlights the need for continued, and often increased, support during this period. When young people were no longer in immediate crisis, they were often left more exposed to their thoughts and experiences, particularly where they were living alone or away from support networks. Without consistent, day-to-day support to help them make sense of this and manage how they felt, it became much harder to hold onto the progress they had begun to make.

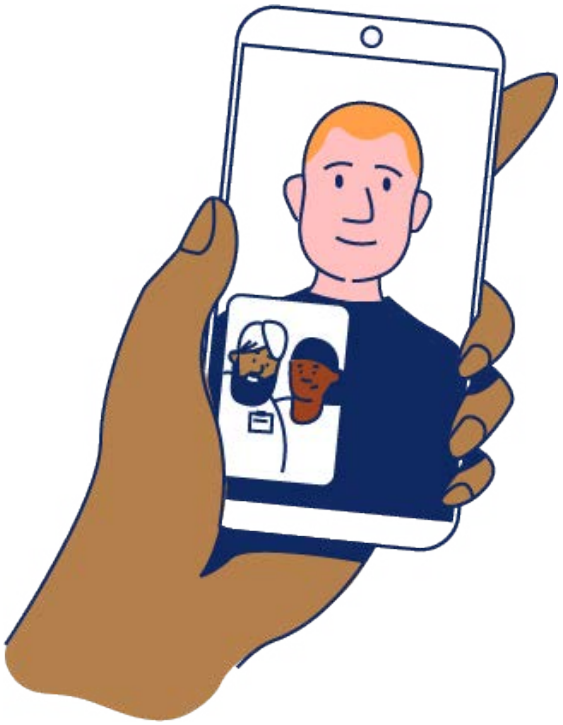
5.9 Young people's lives are shaped by their relationships

Across the cases we reviewed, young people's experiences could not be understood in isolation from the relationships around them. Their lives were shaped by their connections to family, friends and wider support networks.

Family, in particular, remained central. Even where these relationships were complex or strained, they continued to play an important role in young people's sense of identity, belonging and support. Throughout their journeys, young people often remained closely connected to family members, both practically and emotionally, and these relationships continued to influence their decisions and experiences over time. For some young people, family relationships were a key source of consistency, care and encouragement alongside the support provided by services.

Decisions about where young people lived or the support they received often affected more than just them, with direct implications for family members. These decisions were rarely straightforward, often involving complex trade-offs between different forms of risk. In some cases, entire families were relocated in order to keep them safe. This could be highly disruptive, particularly for siblings who had their own friendships and networks to maintain. In others, young people were moved away from their families, leading to separation and a different set of challenges, including anxiety, guilt and a disrupted sense of belonging.

> ***"It's that unknowing, "I don't know what area I'm going to be moved to"... It's like you're on a bit of a hamster wheel. So there's lots of emotions from the parents and then it can also lead to hostile family living... It's a lot of pressure not only on the parents but on all the family members because you have to play that long waiting game"***
>
> *- Local authority stakeholder*



Practitioners also described situations in which parents felt under pressure to separate from an older child in order to reduce perceived risk to younger siblings, including cases where this was explicitly requested by children's social care. While these responses are rooted in safeguarding concerns, they can place families in highly difficult positions and contribute to the strain and disruption described above. They can

also increase risk for the older sibling, who may be left to navigate the housing system - and the impact of leaving the family home - alone.

Placing young people away from volatile environments can reduce immediate risk, but it can also make it difficult to maintain the relationships that are critical to enabling them to cope. This can leave young people more exposed at points where they are already under pressure.

The experiences of the young people whose cases we reviewed suggest that, whilst the impact of placements on families and family relationships was significant, this was not always fully considered in decision-making. Where relocation or separation was necessary, support for families to rebuild their lives, or for young people to sustain these important connections, was often limited.

5.10 Individual needs shape how young people engage with support

The cases highlighted the significant role that mental health needs and neurodiversity play in shaping young people's experiences of systems and services. As described on page 11, these needs were highly prevalent across the cohort, with 81% of young people having diagnosed or suspected mental health needs and over half (54%) identified as neurodivergent. Several young people in the cohort had diagnosed conditions such as PTSD, ADHD or learning differences, while others displayed symptoms consistent with these conditions but were yet to be diagnosed. In some cases, practitioners described how trauma and neurodiversity could present in overlapping ways, making needs harder to identify or fully understand.

> ***They diagnosed him with complex PTSD, anxiety and depression... a lot of things he thought was his ADHD, but in fact... they said it was extreme trauma... which is why he became forgetful of certain things and impulsive with certain things as well.***
> *- YJT caseworker*

These factors often influenced how young people engaged with services, managed administrative processes and coped with the stresses of independent living. In some cases, challenges such as dyslexia or difficulties with executive functioning made everyday tasks – including managing benefits systems or attending appointments – particularly difficult.

The cases we reviewed showed that the factors that create risk, and those that enable progress, are highly individual. What feels manageable for one young person can be overwhelming for another, depending on how they process information, respond to stress and experience their environment. We found that the systems and processes that young people are required to navigate are often built around expectations that do not reflect this, with assumptions being made about how young people think, process information and manage tsks. Importantly, where young people were not able to meet these expectations, this was often seen as a problem with the individual, rather than with how the system was set up around them.

Given the diversity of the cohort and the complexity of their experiences, effective support for these young people needs to be flexible and responsive to individual needs. Otherwise, systems risk reinforcing the very challenges they are trying to address.

6. The role of the Youth Justice Team

6.1 The Practice Model

The analysis presented in the previous chapter highlights the complexity of the situations young people are navigating across all phases of their journeys. Across the cases, young people's experiences were shaped by disrupted development, fragmented systems, unstable housing and repeated transitions, alongside the ongoing impact of trauma.

Within this context, supporting young people is a complex task. Evidence from the cases shows practitioners working in situations that are often unstable, uncertain and shaped by factors largely beyond their control. Despite these challenges, the evaluation shows that the YJT has developed a model of practice that enables significant positive change for young people. Across the cases, progress was most evident where this approach could be applied consistently through sustained relationships, continuity of support and a focus on building the conditions for stability over time.

Figure 2 brings together the core elements of the YJT's practice model, as identified through our analysis. It sets out the key dimensions of the team's work, which, while presented separately, are closely interconnected in practice. All elements are relevant across young people's journeys, but they manifest in different ways depending on the circumstances at hand.

Figure 3: The role of the Youth Justice Team



The YJT's practice model reflects a way of working that is both relational and developmental, where change is built through sustained relationships and unfolds gradually over time. However, as explored in Chapter 7, the extent to which this model can be delivered consistently is shaped by the wider structural conditions in which the team operates, including commissioning frameworks and available resources.

6.1.1 Dynamic risk management and safety planning

Risk management within the Youth Justice Team is not something that happens only during formal reviews or at particular stages in young people's journeys. Practitioners described it as something they are thinking about constantly, weighing up different factors and adjusting their understanding of a situation as new information comes in. Rather than relying on a single assessment completed at one moment in time, they spoke about continually revisiting what might place a young person at risk and what might help keep them safe. This reflects a contextual approach to safeguarding, where risk is understood not only in relation to the individual, but in relation to the environments, relationships and systems surrounding them.

Practitioners described listening carefully to how young people talked about what was happening around them, including tensions in their environment or uncertainty about who they were living alongside. Paying close attention to how young people describe their own sense of safety forms an important part of how practitioners build their understanding of risk.

As described in the previous chapter, actions that reduce one form of risk can often introduce another, for example where accommodation creates distance from supportive relationships. Practitioners described situations like this as involving difficult judgements, where every option carries some form of risk. Part of the work involves sitting with these competing pressures and deciding which risks are most immediate and which might be manageable.

Safety planning also involves regularly updating assessments as circumstances change. Shifts in accommodation, changes in peer networks, or small changes in a young person's mood or behaviour can alter how a situation needs to be understood. Practitioners described piecing together information from different sources and adjusting plans in response.

The trusting relationships caseworkers build with young people, and the fact that they work with them over extended periods and across multiple transitions, allow them to develop a nuanced understanding of young people's circumstances and what is likely to keep them safe, which is not always possible in other agencies.

> ***"Because we know them so well or get to know them so well in a short period of time, we're able to analyse those factors and then put them in places. And then if it doesn't work and something pops up that we didn't quite get, we're able to continue to work with them and then fix those things as well.*** *- YJT caseworker"*

Because of this, an important part of the role involves communicating these risks to other agencies. Practitioners described needing to explain young people's wider circumstances, helping others to understand how different forms of risk interact and shape the outcomes of often rigid assessments. This includes translating the nature and gravity of risk, particularly where it is contextual and may vary significantly depending on location, relationships or the environments young people are placed in. This aspect of the work

might involve drafting emails or reports, or participating in safeguarding discussions or multi-agency meetings.

The cases show how quickly the conditions around a young person can shift, and the implications this has for their safety. Accommodation can change, placements can break down, and relationships may shift quickly. Supporting young people safely therefore means staying close to what is happening in their lives and revisiting plans as needed. Practitioners reflected on how much time this work takes, the level of judgement involved, and the responsibility they carry for decisions that can shape both immediate safety and longer-term outcomes.

6.1.2 Managing pressures created elsewhere

As we have explored, across the cases we reviewed, young people were often navigating situations shaped by decisions made outside of their control. This included temporary or emergency accommodation, environments that felt unpredictable or unsafe, and restrictions that limited access to familiar relationships or sources of support. These conditions shaped young people's day-to-day lives, affecting how they experienced their time, the choices available to them, and how manageable life felt.

While practitioners spent time advocating for improvements, there were clear limits to what could be changed, particularly in the short term. Much of the work therefore involved supporting young people within conditions that were far from ideal. This meant helping them to make sense of their situation, manage its immediate demands, and identify ways to introduce some degree of structure, connection or stability, even when this was difficult.

Practitioners described an important distinction between planning a life around system constraints and planning for stability while remaining mindful of them. In practice, this involved working with young people to build routines, maintain connections and find sources of support, while also navigating the expectations placed on them by housing systems, licence conditions and other services.

Across the cases, this often meant absorbing and buffering the pressures created by decisions made in the wider system, and trying to minimise their negative impact on young people's lives. While this protective element of the role is important and necessary, the time and attention required to mediate these external pressures meant that practitioners were often working reactively, with less capacity to focus on longer-term progress.



6.1.3 Maintaining continuity across transitions

Transitions are a defining feature of many young people's journeys. Across the cases we reviewed, young people experienced repeated changes in where they were living, how things were being managed, and who was involved in supporting them.

On paper, these changes can appear like routine steps in a process. In practice, they can be deeply unsettling. Moves between accommodation can involve sudden changes in environment and routine, while transitions between services or locations can disrupt relationships and bring new expectations. In some cases, periods in custody add a further layer of disruption, creating distance from everyday life and familiar connections.

Practitioners worked hard to maintain continuity for young people at these times. While young people's circumstances could shift frequently, their involvement remained consistent. This meant that conversations could be picked up where they had left off, rather than started again, and that planning could build on what was already understood about the pressures young people were facing.

> ***"There are cases that we've had that have broken down whilst a young person's gone into custody. [New Horizon] have been in there; they've been able to pick up and build on that relationship."***
> *- Local authority stakeholder*

This kind of continuity made an important emotional difference during periods of upheaval. Many young people are used to professionals coming and going, and to having to explain their situation repeatedly as services change around them. Having someone who remains alongside them can soften the impact of transitions, providing a familiar point of contact at moments when everything else is changing.

Maintaining this continuity requires active effort, particularly within systems organised around rigid stages and processes. At points of transition, young people are often managing multiple changes at once and may be overwhelmed or have limited capacity to keep on top of what is happening. In these moments, practitioners play an important role in holding things together, helping young people manage immediate demands and preventing situations from beginning to unravel.

This is a recognised challenge across the team, with practitioners and managers alike aware of the demands involved in maintaining continuity during periods of transition. However, high levels of demand and limited resources mean that it is not always possible to provide the level of continuity that is understood to be most effective for everyone. Practitioners are often required to make difficult decisions about how to prioritise their time, including whether to sustain more intensive contact with one young person, often critical to their progress, at the expense of time available to others. This reflects the wider pressures facing the service, rather than a lack of awareness, and highlights the need for systems to better account for the time and resource required to sustain relational continuity in practice.

6.1.4 Navigating complex, fragmented systems

At different points in their journeys, young people come into contact with complex statutory processes and multiple professionals. Particular pinch points can include court appearances, entry into custody, prison transfers, recall decisions, and engagement with housing, probation or other services in the community. Each of these moments brings its own language,

expectations and procedures.
For young people, the experience of working with statutory agencies can feel fragmented and difficult to follow, particularly when several professionals are involved simultaneously. Across the cases, there were examples of young people being presented with large amounts of information in unfamiliar settings. Some described nodding along to explanations or signing documents that they did not fully absorb at the time.

> ***I have to go through universal credit and then my universal credit is telling me to go back to housing benefit. There are so many different forms every day; I'm busy. Besides that I've got probation; I've got everything.*** *- Young person*

Part of the youth justice practitioner's role involved helping young people make sense of systems around them. Practitioners acted as a consistent point of contact, helping them understand who was responsible for different decisions, what the different stages of a process might be, and how different parts of the system were connected. Rather than leaving young people to piece together fragmented information alone, they helped bring clarity to situations that could otherwise feel confusing or overwhelming.

> ***You're asking him questions he doesn't know how to answer... sometimes having an advocate is important because we don't want young people on the street because they're not sure where to go.***
> *- Local authority stakeholder*

This often involved returning to conversations more than once, revisiting paperwork, explaining formal language, and talking through how particular requirements might affect day-to-day life. It also included accompanying young people to court or other statutory appointments, helping these environments feel less intimidating and ensuring they understood what was happening. At times, this extended to providing very proactive support, including helping young people complete tasks or attend appointments when they were too overwhelmed to manage these demands alone. Through trusted relationships, practitioners could help reduce distress in the moment, enabling young people to engage, communicate and make decisions more effectively.

Practitioners also highlighted the importance of clarifying what young people were entitled to within different statutory contexts. Young people are often eligible for forms of support that are not clearly communicated or are interpreted narrowly in practice. Helping them understand what support they can reasonably expect, and supporting them to access it, formed an important part of this navigational role.



> ***So how to navigate the system? I'd say if you're not on benefits you don't know how to get benefits. if you don't know what PIP is, you don't know if you're entitled to it and how to apply for it... You don't even know how to go to a council and say I'm homeless because you're sofa surfing so you don't see that as homelessness.***
> *- YJT caseworker*

Without this translation work, systems can feel confusing and difficult to navigate. Young people may find themselves repeating information, waiting without clarity, or feeling unsure about what is expected of them. This uncertainty can take a toll on their mental wellbeing and make it harder to manage other areas of their lives. With steady guidance, processes that might otherwise feel destabilising become easier to understand and navigate.

6.1.5 Embedding lived context in decision-making

A key part of the youth justice case worker's role is making sure that statutory decisions take account of young people's lived context. Practitioners often described this as "reframing" – bringing young people's experiences and perspectives into discussions that might otherwise focus primarily on risk or offending history. This involves helping others understand behaviour in light of young people's circumstances, relationships and developmental needs, and ensuring that decisions about risk and support reflect this fuller picture.

Justice, housing and safeguarding systems rely heavily on documentation and categorisation, with decisions often shaped by what is written in summaries, incident reports or risk assessments. Practitioners told us that important nuance can be lost when complex lives are reduced to what is recorded on paper, and that part of their role is to counteract this.

> ***I think one of the biggest roles we do for him is contain the system about his risk. And we actually put back his voice into the system and humanise him a bit.*** *- YJT caseworker*

Across the cases, there were examples of situations where young people's actions were recorded in formal terms that did not capture the wider context in which they occurred. Behaviours that appeared as non-compliance or withdrawal within formal systems could also be understood as responses to isolation, emotional strain, or the impact of trauma, mental health needs or neurodiversity.

Practitioners drew on their knowledge of the young person's circumstances, including how they were experiencing their environment, to bring this fuller picture into professional discussions and influence how situations were interpreted.

> ***[My caseworker] helped me to tell the council that a hostel is not suitable for me because I'm trying to move forward with my life so I'm not going backwards.*** *- Young person*

Across the stories we heard, this kind of 'whole-person advocacy' was not limited to key decision points. Practitioners described regularly engaging with what they referred to as 'micro-decisions' – the many small decisions made across housing, probation or safeguarding that, when taken together, shape a young person's trajectory. This might involve drafting emails to different stakeholders, clarifying context during multi-agency discussions, or accompanying young people to meetings to support them clearly articulate their circumstances and needs.

Part of this work also involves bringing in other professionals who can help build a fuller understanding of the young person's needs. For example, practitioners described working with psychologists and other specialists to undertake assessments where appropriate. These assessments can lead to diagnoses that ensure neurodiversity, trauma or mental health needs are formally recognised within statutory processes.

> ***"The more honest you are with me, the more honestly I can advocate for you if you tell me exactly how to translate it... I can now find a way to speak to a probation officer and advocate for her to maybe lift your curfew a bit, or meet in the middle."***
> *- YJT caseworker*

In the context of systems that often prioritise rules, processes and risk labels, ensuring that decisions reflect the whole person involves sustained engagement and, at times, careful challenge. The influence practitioners have is underpinned by the depth of the relationships they hold, both with young people and within the wider system, allowing them to draw on their knowledge and credibility to shape how decisions are made and understood. Notably, these relationships are built over time and rooted in personal trust rather than formal service-to-service connections

6.1.6 Absorbing emotional and administrative load

The work described in the previous sections places significant emotional and cognitive demands on practitioners. Working in such high stakes, unpredictable circumstances involves constant assessment, adjustment and coordination across multiple environments. Practitioners are making daily judgements about risk, safety, placement suitability, emerging pressures and the likely consequences of decisions. With large caseloads, this is happening for multiple young people at the same time.

Much of this labour remains invisible. Safeguarding emails, court preparation, multi-agency meetings, case recording, travel to custodial or accommodation settings, and liaison with housing and probation services take up a considerable proportion of practitioners' time, alongside their direct work with young people.

The nature of this work is also emotionally demanding. Challenging decisions, pressing for case reviews and pushing for reconsideration of placements requires persistence, and these conversations can at times be demanding or confrontational. Practitioners described the effort involved in repeatedly evidencing risk and articulating context within systems that often apply narrow criteria. This is further complicated by variation across boroughs, where housing thresholds, processes and decision-makers differ, requiring practitioners to hold detailed knowledge of multiple local systems at once.

Practitioners also described how the role regularly stretches beyond its formal boundaries, creating additional strain and responsibility. Young people on their caseloads may at times experience acute mental health distress, including severe anxiety, trauma responses or episodes of

psychosis. Youth justice practitioners are not clinically qualified to provide psychiatric treatment, yet in the absence of timely specialist support they are often the adults holding the situation day to day.

> ***It's just the patience that they have. They're really willing to listen to your problems and take them on board. Whatever problems you've got, they've got. It's like whatever stress you've got, they try to take all your stress away and they try to carry it.***
> *- Young person*

These practical and emotional demands sit alongside the fact that practitioners build sustained relationships with the young people they support. Over time, they come to understand their histories, strengths and the pressures shaping their lives, forming strong professional attachments. When young people make progress, practitioners experience that alongside them, and when setbacks occur, they feel that too. This includes working with young people whose engagement may fluctuate, especially during periods of instability or transition. Maintaining a consistent, non-judgemental approach in these moments requires significant emotional resilience, particularly where progress is not linear and can be difficult to sustain.

> ***We're the therapist, we're the social worker, we're the mentor, we're the friend.*** *- YJT caseworker*

By holding risk, managing fragmentation and persisting through repeated challenges, practitioners reduce the extent to which these pressures fall directly on the young person. Yet this level of sustained, complex work can take its toll, both physically and emotionally. It also sits uneasily within commissioning structures that prioritise throughput, fixed timelines or narrowly defined outcomes, creating additional pressure where practitioners can see what is needed but do not have the capacity or resources to provide it.

6.2 Partnership with Vanguard psychologists

A particularly important element of the YJT's practice model has been its close partnership with psychologists from the North Central London (NCL) Vanguard service. The two services support a similar cohort of young people and bring complementary forms of expertise. Vanguard provides clinical psychological assessment and therapeutic support, while the YJT contributes extensive experience navigating housing systems and advocating for young people within statutory processes.

This collaboration allows young people supported by the YJT to access psychological support that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. This is reflected in the high proportion of young people whose needs were only formally recognised following engagement with the service. Of those with a PTSD diagnosis, 70% (73 young people) were diagnosed after involvement with the YJT, most often following assessment through the Vanguard service.

In several cases reviewed for this evaluation, psychological assessments also played a crucial role in helping practitioners evidence the impact of trauma and mental health needs within housing and criminal justice processes.

> ***A lot of our housing success is definitely due to them [Vanguard]. They come in every Tuesday in the afternoon and they offer assessment slots for our young people... They're really good at also, like, coordinating, like mental health teams around a young person, creating that network.***
>
> *- YJT caseworker*

Clinical input has been particularly valuable in situations where young people's circumstances required formal recognition of psychological vulnerability. For example, assessments and letters of support from Vanguard psychologists have been used to:

- **inform sentencing decisions or licence conditions.**

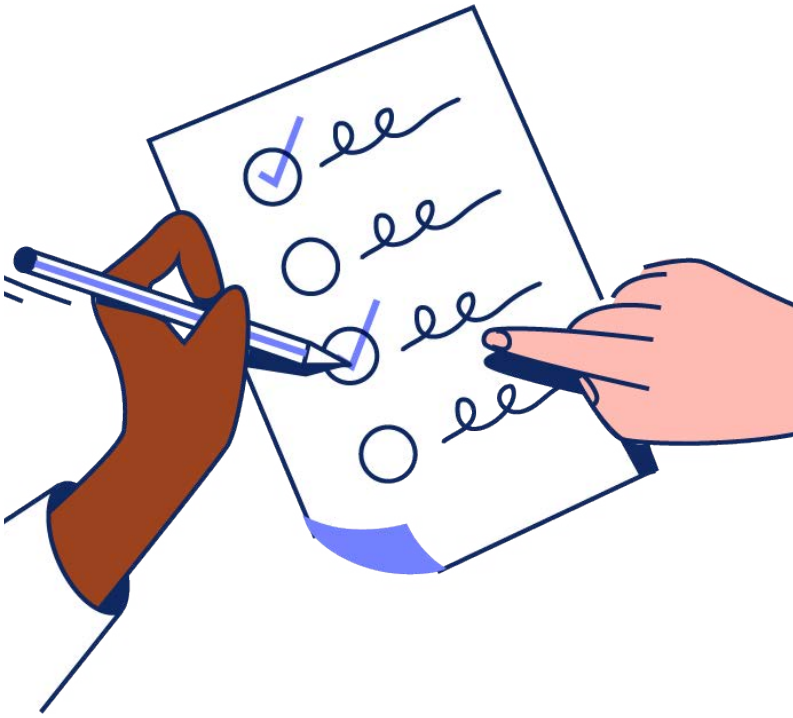
- **strengthen housing applications where local authorities are determining duties.**

- **support requests for more appropriate accommodation, including avoiding shared placements where these would be unsafe.**

The partnership also strengthens the credibility of advocacy undertaken by the YJT. In this context, diagnostic language often plays a practical role in enabling access to support. Practitioners described how clinical formulations can translate young people's experiences into forms that statutory systems are more likely to recognise, particularly in housing and criminal justice processes. At the same time, this work requires careful handling to avoid reinforcing reductive or stigmatising labels. Practitioners described how this involves working collaboratively with young people to make sense of their experiences, linking emotional and behavioural responses to trauma and context, and ensuring that clinical formulations are understood, meaningful and acceptable to them.

This allows for a more nuanced understanding of behaviour as shaped by trauma, exposure to violence and wider contextual factors.

> ***New Horizon don't have psychologists, but they have a really good working relationship with Vanguard... one of the things that they do quite a lot of is around trying to get young people recognised as priority need and having a psychological assessment done by the NHS, because Vanguard is part of the NHS. So they can then do those assessments which then gives weight to the housing application that New Horizon do.***
>
> *- Criminal justice system stakeholder*



In practice, the two teams often work closely together around individual young people. Psychologists regularly deliver sessions from the New Horizon Youth Centre to reduce barriers to engagement and make support easier to access. This co-location, combined with the strength of the relationships YJT practitioners have with young people, helps create a 'relational bridge' into psychological support. Young people are often supported to attend assessments by workers they already trust, who may remain present throughout, helping to create a sense of safety that enables them to speak more openly about difficult experiences. This can lead to richer assessments, in which young people's needs and histories are more fully understood.

While it is not possible to quantify precisely how often Vanguard support influenced outcomes within this evaluation, the case study evidence suggests that access to psychological expertise has been an important contributor to many of the changes described throughout this report. For some young people, therapeutic support played a direct role in helping them process trauma, understand their emotional responses and begin moving away from cycles of crisis. This kind of close, integrated working shows how bringing different forms of expertise together can create a more joined-up response for young people.

6.3 Ways of working with young people

When young people speak about their experiences with the Youth Justice Team, they rarely describe the service in terms of specific interventions. Instead, they talk about how they were supported and treated. For many, this was the first time they had experienced a professional relationship characterised by trust, respect and genuine care.

Across the cases reviewed for this evaluation, the way in which support was delivered emerged as central to young people's journeys towards positive change.

Our analysis identified a set of key features of this approach, which, while developed through the evaluation, are broadly aligned with the project's existing Theory of Change (see Appendix A). At the heart of this work is a deeply relational approach, grounded in an understanding of young people's individual circumstances. The sections below summarise the main elements of this way of working.

Seeing the whole person

A defining feature of the team's approach is their commitment to seeing young people as individuals rather than as cases defined by risk, offence history or system labels. Caseworkers actively seek to understand the broader context of young people's lives, including their experiences, aspirations, strengths and coping strategies.

> ***When everyone comes in here, they don't just see a bunch of kids. They know our names, they know everything.*** - *Young person*

This approach stands in contrast to many young people's prior experiences with statutory systems, where they often felt reduced to a set of behaviours or risks. By recognising young people as complex individuals, caseworkers are able to build more meaningful relationships and support responses that are tailored to each young person's circumstances.

Young people themselves frequently commented on this difference, noting that staff knew them personally and took the time to understand what was happening in their lives.

Genuine care and commitment

Young people consistently described feeling that caseworkers genuinely cared about their wellbeing. This authenticity appears to play a crucial role in building trust, particularly for those who have previously experienced inconsistent or conditional support from adults or services.

> ***They just care, like they actually care. They're not doing it for their job, they're doing it because they want to help.*** *- Young person*

Small gestures often carried significant meaning for young people. Examples included receiving letters while in custody, being contacted outside of scheduled appointments, or being checked on during difficult periods. These actions signalled that the relationship extended beyond administrative responsibilities and reflected a genuine commitment to young people's wellbeing.

Consistency and persistence

Consistency was another defining feature of the Youth Justice Team's approach. Many young people involved in the evaluation had experienced unstable relationships with professionals and services, often involving abrupt endings or changes in support.

> ***She was also visiting me while I was in jail and she was helping me make plans... She came to visit me a couple of weeks ago... She's amazing to be honest because she really goes out of she way to help.*** *- Young person*

We have described elsewhere in the report, caseworkers emphasised maintaining contact and continuing support even when circumstances changed, including during periods of custody or disengagement. Persistence in maintaining contact – through phone calls, messages and follow-up – demonstrated to young people that the relationship would not disappear when difficulties arose. For some young people, this consistency was unexpected and helped to reshape their expectations of professional relationships.



Honesty and transparency

Caseworkers also emphasised the importance of honesty in their relationships with young people. This includes being open about what they can and cannot do, the limitations of systems, and the realities of processes such as housing applications.

> ***I manage expectations so you know I can't wave a magic wand and fix your problems.*** *- YJT caseworker*

Rather than creating unrealistic expectations, practitioners often explained the constraints of the system and worked with young people to navigate them. This transparency helped build trust and enabled young people to understand why certain information or actions were necessary.

Non-judgemental support

Young people repeatedly highlighted the non-judgemental nature of their interactions with the Youth Justice Team. Many described previous experiences with services where they felt blamed or stereotyped because of their past behaviour.

> ***Other services and other people I've worked with, I feel like I'm judged. From the minute I met [New Horizon], I didn't feel that; you know, it was just like they were really really trying to help.*** *- Young person*

In contrast, caseworkers focused on understanding the context behind behaviour and recognising the ways in which young people had adapted to difficult circumstances. This approach helped young people feel respected and supported rather than criticised or controlled.

Building trust through action

Trust was rarely established through conversation alone. Instead, caseworkers described focusing on practical actions that demonstrated reliability and commitment early in the relationship.

Providing immediate practical support, following through on commitments, and delivering tangible outcomes helped young people see that the service could be trusted. These early "small wins" often played an important role in encouraging young people to continue engaging with support.

A trauma-informed approach

Underlying these ways of working is a clear alignment with trauma-informed principles. Practitioners demonstrate an understanding of how trauma shapes behaviour and communication, and adapt their responses accordingly.

> ***New Horizon even showed me I had PTSD. So these times I'm just thinking I'm paranoid. That's all I'm thinking. But it's just that... sometimes even going to [area]'s bit of a trigger because I've been stabbed there, I've been shot out there.*** *- Young person*

Rather than treating difficult behaviour as something to be sanctioned or controlled, practitioners often prioritise emotional safety, validation and de-escalation. They also recognise the importance of timing and consent when discussing sensitive experiences, particularly where systems require young people to recount traumatic events. This approach allows young people to engage with support without feeling re-traumatised or judged, creating the conditions necessary for longer-term change.

7. Aligning structures with how change happens

7.1 Support is relational and developmental

Across the cases we reviewed and wider evaluation evidence, a consistent pattern emerged. The approach that appears to support positive outcomes for the cohort engaged with the Youth Justice Team is both relational and developmental. Progress is built through trusted, consistent relationships and unfolds gradually over time, rather than through discrete interventions or linear steps.

Given the right conditions, young people's trajectories can shift significantly. This was most evident where young people experienced continuity in support, with practitioners who understood their history and context and remained alongside them through periods of instability. Early changes were often less visible, including increases in trust, emotional regulation and coping, and tended to precede more recognisable outcomes such as stable accommodation or engagement in education or employment.

This understanding of change is strongly reflected in the Youth Justice Team's practice model. Practitioners demonstrated a clear appreciation that progress is non-linear, with setbacks forming part of the process rather than representing failure, and that stability needs to be built and sustained over time. The team also recognise the importance of relational continuity as a stabilising force when circumstances shift, and the extent to which young people's trajectories are shaped by their wider context, including relationships, past experiences and structural pressures.

Importantly, the evaluation did not identify gaps in the team's understanding of what supports change. On the contrary, the team already works in ways that closely reflect this relational and developmental model. However, the evaluation also identified a tension between this model of change and the structural conditions within which the team operates.

7.2 Structural pressures shape practice

Despite the team's clear insight into how progress unfolds for young people, practitioners often work within conditions that make it difficult to apply the model consistently.

Several factors contribute to this tension, including:

- **high and fluctuating caseloads;**
- **significant demand from young people experiencing acute crisis;**
- **commissioning and funding arrangements that prioritise short-term or end-state outcomes;**
- **limited availability of complementary services that could share aspects of support; and**
- **increasingly complex statutory processes, particularly within housing systems.**

These pressures shape practice in several ways. When crisis demand rises, the time and space required to build and sustain deeper relationships becomes harder to protect. Once housing has been secured, it can be difficult for practitioners to remain alongside young people long enough to consolidate stability. As a result, young people may experience abrupt shifts in support intensity at points where continuity would be most beneficial.

This situation does not reflect poor practice, it produces uneven practice that is shaped by structural pressure. Staff are often required to prioritise immediate risk management over the longer-term developmental work they recognise as essential.

The strain of this misalignment is often absorbed by practitioners themselves. Where staff understand what young people need but lack the capacity or structural support to deliver it consistently, the result can be significant emotional pressure. Over time this contributes to burnout and staff turnover, which in turn undermines continuity for young people.

7.3 Implications for service design

Despite the team's clear insight into how progress unfolds for young people, practitioners often work within conditions that make it difficult to apply the model consistently.

The evaluation suggests that the Youth Justice Team's approach is well aligned with what supports positive change for this cohort. The key issue is whether the surrounding structures enable that approach to operate consistently and at the scale required.

If sustainable outcomes depend on relational, developmental and non-linear processes, then service structures, funding arrangements and monitoring systems need to reflect that reality.

The recommendations that follow therefore focus on how organisational, commissioning and evidence frameworks could be better aligned with the model of change evidenced through this evaluation.



8. Recommendations

This evaluation suggests that the YJT has developed a strong relational model of practice that aligns well with the needs of young people navigating violence, homelessness and criminal justice involvement. However, the effectiveness of this work is shaped by wider structural conditions, including housing systems, service coordination and the capacity available to support young people through different stages of their journeys.

The recommendations below therefore focus on three areas:

- **strengthening the system conditions required for stability;**

- **ensuring structural conditions allow the YJT model to operate effectively; and**

- **strengthening monitoring and learning**

8.1 Strengthen system conditions required for stability

Many of the barriers to positive change identified by the evaluation arise from the wider systems young people must navigate. Addressing these barriers would significantly strengthen the impact of the Youth Justice Team's relational approach.

8.1.1 Ensure accommodation supports stability

Across the cases, housing was not only a practical need but a core part of safeguarding and prevention. The type and quality of accommodation young people were placed in had a direct impact on their safety, wellbeing and likelihood of further system involvement.

Across the cases, there was consistent evidence that shared accommodation is almost always unsuitable for young people in this cohort. Many described these environments as chaotic, unsafe or emotionally destabilising, particularly when living alongside others experiencing crisis. For young people navigating violence-related risk and trauma, these conditions can undermine emotional regulation and increase the likelihood of conflict, disengagement or further system involvement.

Housing decisions should therefore recognise that stability is shaped not only by whether young person is housed, but by whether the accommodation they are placed in is appropriate for their specific circumstances. This includes:

- **not using shared accommodation for this cohort, given its consistent association with instability, distress and increased risk;**

- **reviewing the constraints created by Shared Accommodation Rate rules for under-35s, which restrict access to appropriate housing; and**

- **prioritising access to accommodation that enables safety, predictability and emotional regulation, rather than allocating on the basis of availability alone**

Expanding access to self-contained or low-density accommodation is likely to significantly improve young people's ability to stabilise and sustain progress.

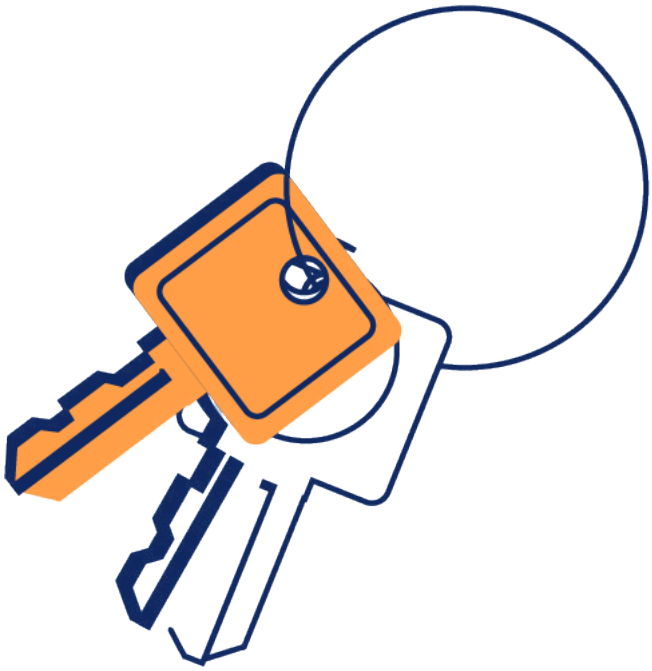
8.1.2 Balance safety with connection

Safety planning is essential when young people are leaving violent environments or distancing themselves from previous networks. However, the case studies show that solutions can unintentionally create significant isolation, particularly where young people are rehoused far from familiar people or places.

Support planning should therefore consider young people's need for connection as well as safety. This includes maintaining access to trusted adults, supportive relationships or community networks where possible. It also requires consideration of how licence conditions or geographic restrictions may increase isolation, and how these impacts can be mitigated.

8.1.3 Reduce fragmentation and improve coordination

Young people in this cohort often navigate multiple systems simultaneously, including housing, probation, youth justice, mental health and voluntary sector services. Across the cases, fragmentation between these systems created delays, confusion and repeated assessments at critical moments. Improving coordination is not simply about communication between services, but about how support is organised around young people. Without this, the burden of navigating systems, repeating information and holding different processes together often falls on young people themselves, or on individual practitioners acting on their behalf.



Stronger joint working should therefore involve:

- **clear shared ownership of support across agencies, rather than parallel involvement without coordination;**

- **protocols for sharing information across services, so that young people are not required to repeatedly recount their experiences;**

- **shared approaches to support, including aligned care plans and risk assessments; and**

- **multi-agency decision-making processes that actively incorporate the expertise of youth justice practitioners, particularly their understanding of context, risk and young people's day-to-day realities.**

This requires moving beyond coordination in principle towards genuinely joined-up working, where services operate collectively around the young person rather than as separate systems.

8.1.4 Recognise transitions as high-risk periods

Throughout the evaluation, transitions consistently emerged as points of heightened risk within young people's journeys. These include periods in and out of custody, changes in accommodation, and age-based shifts in service involvement. During these periods, instability can increase rapidly if support is not well coordinated.

Services should therefore treat transitions as critical moments requiring careful planning and continuity of support. This includes earlier joint-planning, clearer coordination between agencies, and maintaining support through periods of change rather than withdrawing it at fixed points or thresholds.

8.1.5 Recognise individual context, including neurodiversity and mental health needs

Across the cases, young people's experiences were shaped by the impact of trauma, including complex mental health needs, and neurodiversity. Where this was not adequately taken into account, behaviours were often misinterpreted, and young people struggled to engage with systems that did not reflect their needs or capacities. In several cases, progress only began once these underlying factors were better understood and responded to.

Services working with this cohort should therefore ensure that support is responsive to individual context and challenges. This includes:

- **improving access to psychological assessment and specialist support where needs are suspected;**

- **recognising behaviours such as disengagement or emotional dysregulation as potential indicators of underlying need; and**

- **ensuring that decision-making processes involve practitioners with a deep understanding of young people's circumstances and lived realities.**

Improving recognition of these factors can help prevent misinterpretation and support more effective pathways to stability.

8.2 Enable the YJT model to operate as intended

The evaluation indicates that the Youth Justice Team has developed a relational and developmental model of practice that is well aligned with the needs of this cohort. However, sustaining this model depends on structural conditions that allow practitioners the time, capacity and positioning required to work in this way.

8.2.1 Align capacity with relational practice

A relational and developmental model of change takes time to implement. Caseload expectations should reflect the intensity of the work involved, particularly around transitions and post-crisis periods, which are often the most demanding stages of a young person's journey.

Without sufficient capacity, effective practice becomes reliant on individual resilience rather than being embedded within sustainable service design, leading to burnout and negative effect on young people's outcomes.

8.2.2 Protect time for stabilising work, not just crisis response

Across the cases, the period of stabilisation emerged as a particularly challenging time for young people. As immediate pressures reduced and their nervous systems began to settle, a different set of challenges often became more visible, reflecting the longer-term impact of prolonged instability and trauma.

Progress at this stage depended on practitioners being able to support young people through the slower work of stabilisation, once immediate risk had reduced. However, when demand is high, practice can become focused on responding to crisis or 'firefighting', leaving limited space for this ongoing work.

To enable practitioners to support young people through this critical stage, service design, including caseload decisions, should ensure that time is actively protected for stabilising work, not just crisis response.

8.2.3 Recognise and resource the intensity of the role

The model of practice underpinning the Youth Justice Team's work is both time-intensive and emotionally demanding. Practitioners are managing complexity across multiple systems, maintaining relationships through instability, and carrying significant responsibility for young people's safety and wellbeing.

In practice, supporting this cohort also involves additional, often unplanned direct costs. Across the cases, this included the use of emergency accommodation such as hotels, travel where public transport was not safe, and the need to secure appropriate spaces for meeting young people. These costs reflect the level of risk and complexity involved, and form part of delivering safe and effective support.

To ensure services delivering this work are able to meet these demands and support staff wellbeing, appropriate resourcing is required. This must include:

- **realistic caseload expectations;**
- **protected time for reflective practice and supervision, enabling practitioners to process and hold the emotional demands of the role;**
- **monetary recognition of the skill and intensity involved in delivering this role; and**
- **adequate resourcing of the additional direct costs associated with safely supporting this cohort.**

8.2.4 Involve the team early and proactively

The Youth Justice Team combines relational insight with detailed understanding of housing, risk and system navigation. However, in many cases, their involvement is triggered once situations have already escalated.

Earlier and more proactive involvement in decision-making processes would allow risks to be identified and managed before they reach crisis point, strengthening prevention and reducing the need for reactive responses.

8.3 Strengthening evidence and learning

The evaluation highlights a gap between what the team knows works in practice and what is currently visible within monitoring and decision-making systems. This is an area that has been recognised by the organisation, with plans in place to further develop better recording and monitoring systems in the coming year.

While practitioners hold deep experiential knowledge about how change unfolds for young people, including the importance of relational continuity, living environment and system context, this knowledge is not always captured in ways that can inform commissioning or decision-making at service or system level. Much of the quantitative evidence drawn on in this report (including the information about the cohort presented in Chapter 3) was gathered manually by staff for the purposes of the evaluation. This was time-consuming and required additional effort alongside their core work. In routine practice, this level of insight is not consistently recorded or available in forms that can be aggregated or revisited over time.

This reflects wider inconsistency in recording and monitoring, shaped in part by data systems that are not well aligned with the realities of practice. Given the pressures

of working with young people in crisis, it is understandable that time is prioritised towards direct support. However, as a result, important aspects of the team's work, including foundational changes and structural barriers, are not systematically visible. This limits the ability to identify patterns, demonstrate impact and argue for changes to system conditions.

Addressing this requires revisiting both what is recorded and how it is recorded. This includes:

- **designing recording and monitoring processes that are aligned with the realities of practice, including the pace, complexity and variability of the work;**

- **simplifying systems so they are usable under pressure and accessible to staff with different levels of technical confidence;**

- **moving beyond destination measures to include indicators of foundational and developmental change, including early shifts in stability;**

- **identifying and tracking key structural barriers, enabling the team to evidence how system conditions shape young people's journeys over time;**

- **building in protected time for recording and reflection, recognising this as a core part of practice rather than an additional administrative task; and**

- **ensuring that data is actively used, both within the team to inform decision-making, and externally to support advocacy and influence system change.**

To ensure these approaches are effective, monitoring should be co-developed with staff and, where appropriate, young people, so that it reflects lived experience and supports learning rather than acting as an additional administrative burden.



9. Conclusion

This report draws together evidence on the experiences of young people supported by the Youth Justice Team at New Horizon Youth Centre. It explores the systems that shape their experiences, the role of the team's support, and how decisions, environments and relationships interact to shape outcomes over time.

The evidence shows that these young people are facing overlapping challenges, including exposure to community violence, housing instability, involvement in the criminal justice system, and the longer-term effects of trauma. Their journeys are complex and rarely linear, with progress shaped not only by individual motivation or engagement with support, but by the environments they are placed in, the relationships available to them, and the way systems respond to their needs. Despite this, they are often understood primarily through the lens of risk or offending, rather than as a group with specific and often unmet needs.



Within this context, the Youth Justice Team plays a critical role. The evaluation shows that the team has developed a model of practice that is closely aligned with what supports positive change for this cohort. This model is relational, developmental and responsive to context. It centres on building trust, maintaining continuity, and creating the conditions in which young people can move beyond immediate survival towards greater stability and independence.

Where this approach can be applied consistently, it is associated with meaningful shifts in young people's lives. These include increased safety, improved engagement with support, greater emotional stability, and, over time, movement towards education, employment and longer-term goals. The partnership with Vanguard psychologists further strengthens this model, enabling needs to be recognised and responded to in ways that statutory systems are more likely to acknowledge.

However, the evaluation also highlights a clear tension between this model of practice and the structural conditions within which it operates. Housing systems, eligibility thresholds, fragmented services and limited staff capacity all shape what is possible in practice. In many cases, these factors limit the extent to which effective support can be sustained, particularly beyond the point of immediate crisis.

Importantly, these constraints are widely recognised by practitioners, managers and stakeholders across the system. The challenges identified in this report do not reflect a lack of understanding or commitment, but rather the realities of working within systems that are under significant pressure and not always aligned with how change happens for this group of young people.

The implications are therefore twofold. At a local level, the priority is to ensure that the Youth Justice Team's approach can be sustained and delivered consistently, without overreliance on the resilience and goodwill of staff. At a wider level, this requires a broader understanding of the cohort and a shift in how systems respond, so that decisions and support better reflect the realities of young people's experiences rather than narrower interpretations of risk or need.

If improved outcomes depend on stability, relationships and time, then the systems surrounding young people need to be designed with these principles in mind. This includes recognising housing as a safeguarding and preventative issue, enabling greater continuity of support through transitions, aligning capacity with the intensity of relational work, and strengthening the evidence base to better reflect the nature of change.

The Youth Justice Team demonstrates what is possible when support is delivered in a way that reflects the complexity of young people's lives. The focus now should be on ensuring that this approach, and the understanding that underpins it, is more consistently reflected across the wider system.



Appendix: A Theory of Change for the Youth Justice Team

The YJT works **with young people, aged 16-25, who are at risk of serious violence in London.**
Trained caseworkers provide long-term, holistic support to young people including:

- Weekly 1:1 support, usually between 12 weeks and a year, but with some flexibility
- Personalised needs and goal setting to self-identify positive action
- In custody support and return to community support

How the YJT will work with me:

My caseworker will:

- See me as **an individual**, not just a statistic
- Be **inclusive** and welcoming, regardless of my background
- Understand how my **past experiences** may affect me
- Support me to make **choices** that benefit me
- Be **consistent** in their support
- Communicate with me **clearly and honestly**
- Help me to balance **aspirations** with **realistic expectations**

They will also:

- Work **with me** to plan my support, ensuring that the way they support me suits my **preferences** and **communication style**
- Work closely and carefully with other people in **my network** to help me get the support I need

Foundation changes

Immediate safety: I access emergency support (housing, supplies, funding) that helps me feel safe, so that I can focus on my support and making positive changes.

Trusting relationships: I feel supported, valued, listened to and understood. I am confident to talk about my experiences and feelings openly and honestly.

Other people supporting me:

- Have a better understanding of my experiences and challenges, and take a more trauma-informed approach to their work
- See me as a whole person, rather than focusing only on my negative experiences or "needs"
- Are more likely to meet their obligations to me
- Provide me with more appropriate, client-centred support, tailored to my needs, strengths and interests
- Give me more control over the support I receive

Thoughts and emotions

- I have a better understanding of myself and how my experiences have affected me
- I'm more aware of my strengths and interests
- I feel more positive about myself and my future
- I'm more discerning in my relationships and more confident in forming relationships that are good for me
- I have plans for a more positive future and a clear route to get there
- I feel motivated and empowered to make positive life choices
- I'm more aware of areas I might need support and more open to receiving it

Support and circumstances

- I get access to the support and services I need and can stay engaged with these services
- I take up new, positive opportunities, like jobs, education or new ways to spend my time
- I experience improved transitions between services and circumstances (e.g. children's services to adult, custody to community)
- I am less likely to (re)offend or be a victim of criminal activity
- I have somewhere to live that is safe, secure and long-term

Longer-term changes

I am:

- Safe:I am safer from emotional and physical harm
- Housed: I find and keep long-term, safe, youth-appropriate housing
- Healthy: I improve my mental and physical health
- Equipped: I have the life skills (emotional, financial and practical) to live my life

Young people have the opportunity to reach their potential and it's safer for all