

The National Youth Agency

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# Research Programme Series

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## Staying Safe: The implications for youth work of Every Child Matters

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Book 1: **Introduction**

Book 2: **Being Healthy**

**Book 3: Staying Safe**

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**Book 5: Making a Positive Contribution**

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# Staying Safe

## Key issues

- Staying safe is a hugely important area for children and young people. Having it as a core outcome with its accompanying targets and indicators places it firmly on to the policy agenda. As such, it is a step in the right direction that creates opportunities for working with young people in positive ways.
- While the core objective of staying safe is safeguarding children and young people, ECM introduces the importance of early intervention and prevention in helping young people stay safe. This is an important policy initiative and one which youth workers can make an important contribution to.
- Staying safe impacts on good health, making a positive contribution, being able to achieve and enjoy life, and being economically active. It should therefore, be a major part of a coordinated approach to supporting young people in their personal and social development.
- The staying safe agenda is being driven forward by a wide range of policies across central government. It is important that in coordinating local responses and practices youth workers and their managers draw upon this broad policy framework to underpin their work.
- To improve feelings of safety, policy and practice needs to recognise that, as young people reach their early 20s and move out into independent living, they will be more vulnerable to risks and will therefore need continued support and help beyond the age of 19. This is especially relevant for vulnerable groups and those without the support of adults.
- It is important that staying safe initiatives build in young people's perspectives. Not only will these help inform practitioners of the issues that should be targeted, but also allow for the development of an evidence base and assessment that recognises the positive contribution young people can make towards policy.
- Experiences of safety are influenced by issues of class, race, gender and sexuality, and policy and practice need to recognise this diversity in their local strategic plans.
- Government attention to aspects of safety such as recognising and supporting young victims is very welcome and important.

### Note

Any views expressed in this document are the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of The National Youth Agency.

Youth workers are well positioned to develop intervention programmes that help tackle these problems.

- Homelessness is an important indicator of safety and needs to be central to the ECM strategic approach to making young people safe in their communities. National policy provides a framework where youth workers could make a significant contribution.
- Government has made a very positive move to tackle the sexual exploitation of young women. Asylum seekers and refugees are a high risk group and they need to be given more protection. Youth workers have a good record of working with such groups and should be core to practice.
- The reduction of road accidents is a new and important area of work to introduce to the ECM framework. For young people coordinated plans should target young drivers, young workers, and young people in the home. This will need to be targeted at 16 to 24-year-olds.
- The type of work that needs to develop under the staying safe theme of ECM is very relevant to youth work methods and values. Youth workers are well placed to help develop 'soft' and 'hard' skills to help local authorities and central government achieve their core aims.
- Challenges do exist for youth work in this area of work – as the new forms of practice and structures for youth provision emerge. It raises challenges for the notion of *voluntary association* and core youth work values, but youth workers are well positioned to make a significant contribution to this area of work.

## 1. Introduction

In 2003 the Green Paper Every Child Matters (ECM) set out a holistic framework for the future development of children and young people's services. The ECM legislation was followed, in 2005 by the Green Paper Youth Matters (DfES, 2005). This aims to help teenagers (13 to 19-year-olds) achieve the five core outcomes of ECM.

### ECM wellbeing outcomes

- Being Healthy
- **Staying Safe**
- Enjoying and Achieving
- Making a Positive Contribution
- Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Government has also set down Core Outcomes, Targets and Indicators and an Inspection Framework (ECM, 2003). These aim to provide a detailed working framework for local authorities and service providers. Youth Matters takes these as core aspects to be addressed. This NYA briefing paper concentrates on the contribution of youth work to the Staying Safe outcome for young people aged 13 to 19. It is the third in a series of six papers commissioned by The NYA to explore this relationship across the five 'wellbeing' outcomes set out in ECM. The holistic approach of ECM proposes that the five themes are linked. Therefore, while only one theme is discussed here, this Briefing has connections with and implications for the other four.

## 2. The policy context of staying safe

The staying safe theme of ECM is a significant development in youth policy. It offers an innovative and creative framework for developing a way of working with young people around participation. It introduces a more rights based approach that requires substantial support from a wide range of agencies, and targets those young people who are in many cases victims, not only of abuse but of circumstances out of their control. It offers a new way of re-focusing policy and practice. The staying safe initiative is at the heart of ECM and its core focus is on constructing a safeguarding framework to clarify roles and responsibilities for professionals working with children and young people who are most 'at risk' (Parton, 2006).

ECM also has a broader agenda around early intervention and prevention for all children and young people (France and Uttings, 2005). Much of what is proposed is aimed at making positive early interventions into areas of young people's lives that makes them feel unsafe. For example, having prevention programmes to stop bullying, or reducing discrimination and exploitation. It is therefore important to recognise that local authorities should construct holistic programmes that include prevention as central to policy.

The ECM staying safe initiative also recognises the importance of risks young people face in a wide range of different social contexts, at different time periods in their lives. As research has found, young people's experiences of social life is greatly influenced by the wider social context (France and Homel, 2006) and requires interventions to be sensitive to transition points, moments of difficulty, or crisis that can disrupt their lives and create periods of vulnerability (Homel, 2005). Social policies have to build a strong preventative

framework that can intervene early into the problem (not necessarily early into the life course).

Staying safe is being addressed by a wide range of policy initiatives across central government. Policies around issues such as homelessness (DCLG, 2003), sexual exploitation (Home Office, 2004) victimisation (Wilson et al., 2006) and bullying (Oliver and Candappa, 2003) are being developed that make a significant contribution to help young people stay safe. These policy developments need to be coordinated to increase the impact of the staying safe programme under ECM.

## 3. Safeguarding children

ECM has its roots in concerns about how agencies manage their responsibilities in terms of child protection. Within this process it has radically re-defined the role of professional practice and changed the meaning of child protection. As Parton (2006) outlines, Government has constructed a new policy agenda of child protection that has been re-defined to *safeguarding*. This has broadened the responsibilities of social workers and also required all agencies such as youth workers, housing officers, and YOT workers to have more responsibility in protecting children and young people:

- all agencies working with children, young people and their families take all reasonable measures to ensure that the risks of harm to children's welfare are minimised; and
- where there are concerns about children and young people's welfare, all agencies take appropriate actions to address those concerns, working to agreed local policies and procedures in full partnership with other local agencies (DH, 2002a para. 1.5).

ECM requires local areas and professionals to not only have an effective method of dealing with child protection issues, but also to have a prevention programme that aims to minimise the risks that children and young people will be harmed. ECM has therefore brought about major changes. Three significant developments have taken place:

### 1 The development of a Common Assessment Framework

Under ECM the Common Assessment Framework of 1999 has been developed further. All professionals working with children and young people are expected to use it in their assessment processes. It aims to help identify a broader range of risks and needs that children and young people may have. Through

a referral process it then identifies if services used to tackle these should be universal, targeted or specialist. Prevention also takes a more central role in professional practice being seen as a major area of intervention.

## 2 Improving strategic coordination and joined up practice

ECM identified that a major failing of children and young people's services (especially in terms of child protection) was the lack of coordination and 'joined up' working. As a result central government has reformed children's services. This has seen the development of Children's Trusts where social services and education departments have been amalgamated. These new structures have also become responsible for the procurement and management of service contracts in the children and young people sector, and ensuring that coordinated area based prevention plans are put into place.

## 3 The development of identification, referral and tracking systems

Again, as a result of concerns about the lack of coordination and information sharing between agencies in the Victoria Climbié case, central government instigated the development of a national database where children can be tracked and monitored over time and space. This has been named The Information Sharing Index and will be fully operational in 2008. Its core functions are to help practitioners identify what services a child or young person may already be receiving, and who is already working with them (DfES, 2006). Pilots have already been run and evaluated (DfES, 2005) alongside consultations with young people and professionals (Children's Rights Alliance, 2006). As a result it is claimed the system is likely to be a useful tool for professionals and one that children and their families would not object to.

Under the new framework of safeguarding, all professionals are responsible for protecting children and young people. This means that youth workers now have a legal responsibility (as do all professions) to report any concerns or disclosures over child protection issues. The new Children's Trusts, the Common Assessment Framework procedures, and the Information Sharing Index are the new context for shaping the relationship between youth workers and young people. Youth workers can have a critical role to play in these processes especially around helping young people's voices to be heard (Merton et al., 2004). Historically social work has not been very successful in listening to young people in these processes (Parton, 2006), and youth workers are in a strong position to act as a young person's advocate, helping to ensure that their voices are

included in the decision making processes. Because of their ability to work with the most excluded and the levels of trust they can generate, youth workers are well positioned to help identify the needs of the most 'at risk' or needy young people (France and Wiles, 1996). They have a critical role to play in providing detailed information on issues that a young person may have.

While it is generally recognised that the changes outlined above need to take place and that they have the potential for tackling the future problems young people face (Pugh, 2007), there have been concerns that such processes could have negative impacts on young people. Professionals therefore need to be aware of the possibilities of 'net widening' and stigmatising those 'at risk':

**'Net widening'**. Assessment processes that broaden the definition of 'at risk' (to include prevention) run the risk of bringing more young people into the system under the surveillance of the state and its agencies. Evidence of effective assessment is still limited and young people who are assessed also show that many are unclear of why they are being assessed or what purpose it has in their lives. However, there are concerns that assessment may not be reliable and that it could have negative impacts on young people's identities (Ellis and France, forthcoming).

**Stigmatising those 'at risk'**. While the Information Sharing Index is generally perceived as a positive development by professionals working in this area, there are worries about:

- how it will be used;
- what information will be included;
- who will have access to the information, and;
- what consent is given by parents and young people to the process of information sharing.

While central government is clear that guidelines exist over these aspects of the process (DfES, 2006) and how it is to be used, there are concerns that it will change the relationship between young people, parents and practitioners in negative ways (Parton, 2006). The gathering and collection of data as a core function of professional practice may:

- disproportionately increase negative feelings and anxiety about young people and their behaviour; and
- increase the forms of surveillance of young people.

Evidence on young people's willingness to be involved in these processes also remains limited. Even though DfES commissioned a consultation of their views, it was small scale and limited to 41

young people of different ages and it remains to be seen how far the policy framework for the new Index has responded to the consultation. Young people clearly indicated their concerns about how they would be asked to give consent, and how their data would be used (Children's Rights Alliance, 2006).

## 4. Victimisation and fear of crime

Under ECM reducing children and young people's experience of criminal victimisation is seen as a central aim. There is a strong case for developing a local strategic focus on tackling youth victimisation. Evidence shows that a large proportion of young people are victims of crime and that this has a major impact on their everyday lives:

- 27 per cent of young people age between 10 and 25 have been a victim of crime in the last 12 months (Wilson et al., 2006);
- those aged between 11 and 15 are more likely to be a victim than 16 to 26-year-olds (Wilson et al., 2006);
- those living in deprived communities are likely to have high rates of victimisation (approximately 50 per cent, see Armstrong et al., 2005);
- young people who are excluded from school are more likely to be victims than non-excluded young people (Mori, 2004);
- assault and violence is the most common form of criminal victimisation and significant differences exist between males and females (Mori, 2004) and between younger males and older males (37 per cent and 29 per cent retrospectively); and
- while school is the place where most victimisation takes place, public spaces such as 'the streets' around their homes and local parks are places where young people are victimised (Mori, 2004; Wilson et al., 2006; Deakin, 2006). This does change with age – as pubs and clubs become more significant and schools decline in importance, as young people get older.

Criminal victimisation amongst the young is well above the national average (with 23 per cent of the adult population likely to be a victim – Wilson et al., 2006b). In some areas of victimisation it is known that young people are six times more likely to be a victim than adults (Jubb, 2003). When definitions of harassment are included the level of victimisation can rise to over 80 per cent of young people reporting having experienced victimisation (Deakin, 2006). Victimisation is known to have negative impacts on young people's lives in areas such as:

- their experiences of school (Mori, 2004);

- quality of life in their communities (Hine, 2005);
- their use of local public and privatised spaces (Hine, 2005);
- impact on health in that it can lead to young people self harming and committing suicide (Elliott, 1991 – in Deakin, 2006); and
- increase their fear of crime (Deakin, 2006).

Being a victim is usually undervalued as a part of the youth experience (France, 2007), and evidence from a wide range of sources shows how adults victimise children through a wide range of formal (use of the law), and informal (harassment and verbal abuse) interactions (Brown, 2005), and how peers can be perpetrators (Deakin, 2006).

Evidence from criminal victimisation studies also shows that young people are more likely to suffer repeat victimisation than other groups (Wilson et al., 2006). This tends to be highest amongst young people who have a number of behavioural difficulties and therefore are more at risk of being victimised. Evidence also shows that a relationship exists between victimisation and offending (Smith, 2004). The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime found that:

- at age 15 those who had suffered high levels of victimisation were seven times more likely to be an offender;
- being assaulted with a weapon was strongly associated with being an offender;
- offending makes young people vulnerable to a wide range of harassment and victimisation by adults;
- repeat victimisation can show strong associations with future patterns of offending;
- repeat offending can show future patterns of victimisation.

This research shows the importance and value of having crime intervention programmes to tackle crime in local areas that not only challenge offending behaviour but also address victimisation.

ECM tends to focus on supporting victims and witnesses through the criminal justice system, although a strong emphasis is on dealing with children and young people who become involved in prostitution. A number of developments have taken place across policy that supports this approach:

- Introduction of restorative justice into the Criminal Justice System that aims to bring together victims and perpetrators of an offence as a way of both achieving justice for the victim while also challenging the behaviour of the offender.
- The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (HMSO, 2004) for how public services should

respond to victims. Those under 17 are defined as 'vulnerable victims' and require services to work with parents (where appropriate) to support them through the processes.

- Special provision has been developed by The Crown Prosecution Service (2006), which provides guidance and advice on how to support children and young people who are entering the Criminal Justice System (CJS) as victims.
- The Code of Practice for Victims (Office for Criminal Justice reform, 2005) locates the responsibility for contacting young victims with the local Youth Offender Teams (YOTs).

It is positive to see victimisation being given attention by government policy, yet the approach taken still remains limited. Although victimisation has received attention, no mention of it as a priority was proposed in Youth Matters, and no strategy for supporting the implementation of this objective in a coordinated way within ECM or Youth Matters has been forthcoming. While government has been developing a coordinated approach to community safety (Home Office, 2004), it has given little attention to tackling youth victimisation. Its core objectives have been focused instead on reducing offending and anti social behaviour while building greater respect. While supporting victims has been seen as important, tackling victimisation has not.

All the developments that have taken place so far in this area tend to be aimed either at reducing and preventing sexual abuse, or at young people once they have been *victimised*, or have been a witness to an offence. Victimisation is also being used as a way of making restorative justice work. Without victims 'volunteering' this method of reducing offending cannot work. The approach emphasises this as a major purpose of making contact. If a young person rejects involvement then YOTs pass this on to 'other' non defined services. Locating this responsibility within YOTs may also be problematic, as they are fundamentally concerned with youth offenders, which may deter many young people from asking for support. Policy also still fails to recognise that victims and offenders may well be one and the same (Smith, 2004).

Youth workers have always been uneasy about working with young people on crime control issues or behaviour change programmes (France and Wiles, 1996), yet there are good examples of working with young people around their experiences of discrimination, harassment and victimisation – both in the school and the community. Youth work is well positioned to take this focus forward and work with young people in their communities around victimisation. They could be well placed to put the issue onto the agendas of Children's Trusts and local government, to ensure it is a priority in any locally

based strategy. This approach can also be seen to help in tackling the crime question (France and Wiles, 1996), in that many of most 'at risk' young people are also most likely to be victims (Smith, 2004). Work around intergenerational conflict and inclusion of the young in local community safety strategies on these issues would help ensure services have a balanced approach to the crime question – recognising that while a small proportion of the young are offenders, a larger number are victims.

Youth workers, because of their work as advocates and mentors could also work directly with young people by helping them manage their experiences of victimisation. They could become the 'other' service that YOTs pass young people onto as a way of helping them deal with their experience.

## 5. Tackling bullying and discrimination

ECM also acknowledges that bullying and discrimination especially in schools is a major issue for young people. Recent evidence suggests that over 54 per cent of year eights' thought bullying was a problem in their school (Oliver and Mano, 2006). As a response government has:

- set about trying to encourage schools to develop whole school approaches to tackling bullying in school settings requiring all schools to have 'anti bullying' policies and initiatives; and
- introduced assessment of this as a part of the Ofsted inspection framework for schools (DfES, 2000).

Tackling discrimination has also been outlined as a core aim, although there are no targets and indicators, or inspection framework for monitoring the success of such an objective. Evidence of racial discrimination in schools shows how a wide range of different ethnic groups have negative experiences in education (Archer, 2003; Sewell, 1998; Shain, 2003).

The bullying initiative is focused on schools, yet much bullying takes place outside of this context. For example, bullying occurs:

- in the streets and surrounding areas of schools;
- on the journeys to and from school; and
- in local community settings such as youth clubs.

Yet little recognition of this has been given in policy. Similarly, evidence has shown an increase in 'cyber bullying' in which new technology such as mobile



phones, texting, e-mail and chat room bullying are being used to coerce and frighten other individuals (Smith et al., 2006). Again, although there is a growing body of evidence of this aspect of bullying expanding amongst young people, government has been slow to respond.

It is also important to recognise the issue of bullying around sexual orientation or homophobic bullying. Recent research by ChildLine (NSPCC, 2006) and ILGA in Europe (Takács, 2006) have identified the growing problem young gay and lesbian youth have with being bullied both in and out of the school environment. Not only did many young gay and lesbian young people experience physical and mental abuse because of their sexual orientation, they also had problems telling anyone about it, because it potentially 'outs' them to parents or teachers. Similar evidence exists over the growing trend of bullying across other European states, with over two-thirds of a European study of gay and lesbian youth stating they had experienced bullying because of their sexuality. This had major implications for their feelings of inclusion (Takács, 2006).

#### **PACE (Haringey and Barnet)**

Pace is a youth work service for young people who are questioning their sexuality. The service's primary aim is to provide a safe environment for young people where they can find non-judgmental information and advice on a range of issues relating to their sexuality. This includes an opportunity for mutual support with other young lesbian, gay and bisexual people, which helps foster a positive self-identity and self image. PACE runs four separate groups, two for young men, one for young women, and one for both men and women under-18. It also works with local schools in Haringey and Barnet around issues of sexuality and difference, and works with agencies across London on policy and practice in lesbian and gay youth work. It also offers training to other professionals around issues of sexuality and homophobia.

Young people can call PACE and meet a youth worker in advance, contact via internet, phone or just turn up. Over 98 per cent refer themselves. The different groups all offer support to young people on a range of issues like coming out, parents, bullying, the gay scene, sex and sexual health, identity, homophobia, relationships etc. The groups also offer a programme of activities, internet access, trips, information, advice, resources, weekend residential and a chance to meet others and have fun. All services are free, and confidential.

There is also a weekly helpline and drop-in service staffed by youth workers, offering one-to-one support or advice and information over the telephone. A counselling project provides family therapy, groups and information to young lesbians and gay men and their families, and lesbian and gay parents and their adolescent children. The project also runs a free annual Summer Freedom summer school, which offers a chance for young people to develop new skills, such as film-making and photography or painting, take part in dance, drama, aerobics or drumming classes, watch gay/lesbian films and get support and information about sex, relationships, and dating. Young people can join in for a day or a week. In 2002, 70 LGBT students a day attended the event, with some travelling up to 100 miles a day to take part.

Members are encouraged to get involved in developing programmes. This is done in a variety of ways, through informal discussions with workers in groups, also formalised 'planning' sessions are built into group meetings. Regular feedback is also received from young people through monitoring forms. Young people are invited to take part in a young people's steering group. Young people can also become volunteers and join a service users' forum.

LGB aims to build young people's self esteem and a positive identity regarding their own sexuality. It offers a range of activities, workshops and social events that encompass a holistic approach to young people's health including their mental health. It also works with young people on issues of sexuality and difference in youth work settings and schools and colleges, which challenge young people's perceptions of LGB people and develop their education around this issue.

Again there is evidence that youth workers can have a critical role to play in helping address bullying, not only in the school but also in community settings. They have experience in helping to build resilience amongst the young and help them to develop 'soft skills' that give them confidence to say 'no' or to report bullying (Merton et al., 2004). Youth work, through its use of group work and drama, can also help develop prevention programmes with young people, and raise awareness over what is unacceptable.

## 6. Homelessness and young people

A major influence on young people's feelings of safety is related to homelessness. It is clear that those without a home or independent living are more at risk of being unsafe (DCLG, 2003). The Homelessness Act (HMSO, 2002) made it a requirement of local authorities to review the numbers of homeless in their districts and to devise homelessness strategies accordingly. The Act also introduced an order to extend the categories of vulnerable groups to include those with an institutionalised background (those leaving care, prison or the armed forces) and local authorities must deem those aged 16 and 17 and 18 to 21 leaving care to be in priority need of housing. Local authorities have a duty to provide accommodation until a settled home is found (DCLG, 2003).

Central government policy is now focused on preventing homelessness amongst young people by aiming to intervene earlier when people experience problems. For example, the intention is to provide mediation and housing support and benefits advice before young people leave care or become homeless (DCLG, 2006). The Government sees Connexions Personal Advisers as crucial to this role and extols the virtues of providing stable, adult mentors or 'trusted adults' (Social Exclusion Unit, 2005). Ruth Kelly's recent speech on 14 November 2006 reiterates the government's position on improving the situation of the homeless – especially the young single homeless by emphasising the role of mediation services in family conflict.

One concern is that government is placing too much faith in the role of mediation in resolving family crises and enabling young people to continue to stay within the family home. Some young people may be at risk from violence within the home. Indeed, a DCLG (2006) research summary which evaluated homelessness prevention highlights this reservation, and how initially some mediation schemes have fallen short of expectations due to the refusal of one or more of the parties to participate. Furthermore, few authorities monitor whether mediation assisted reconciliations continue to work in the medium or long-term.

Young people leaving care have a notoriously difficult transition from institutions to independent living and are disproportionately represented amongst young homeless people (Centrepont, 2006; HMSO 2006). The *Care Matters Green Paper* (HMSO, 2006) introduces a number of proposals to improve outcomes for young people leaving care. These include:

- piloting a veto for young people over any decisions about moving on from care before they turn 18;
- piloting allowing young people to continue to live with foster carers up until the age of 21; and
- creating more supported accommodation for older young people in care.

Research by Centrepont (2006) notes that, despite the movement to improve outcomes for those leaving care, there still remains a number of issues facing young care leavers that deserve special attention:

- they very often do not feel that they have much choice about when they leave care and where they move on to;
- they feel that they do not receive sufficient preparation and any support they get varies depending on where the young person lives;
- they feel that there is a need to develop a more holistic approach to their multiple needs and not just on developing practical life skills;
- they believe that there should be more focus on the role of peer mentoring in preparing young people for their transition to independence;
- there is a lack of suitable, affordable accommodation and where they are placed – as some are placed in unsafe areas with poor service provision; and
- there is no guaranteed support to living in their own flats and receiving support is again dependent on where the young person lives.

The Government is continuing its prevention strategy by also utilising a range of initiatives including:

### • **Hostels Capital Improvement Programme**

This programme aims to enable hostels to become places of change where service users can be supported into sustainable independent living (DCLG, 2006b). The programme is receiving £90 million in funds and involves transforming the quality of the physical environment, engaging residents in meaningful activity, and involving them in the development of services. Projects under this programme include residents taking part in self-build schemes and receiving advice services, and training and learning opportunities. The move towards revamping the hostel environment is particularly important given that previous research has shown that many young people feel unsafe or intimidated in such accommodation (see <http://www.homelesspages.org.uk/..%5Csubs%5Csubjects.asp?sbid=18>).

### • **Supporting People Programme**

This programme was launched in 2003 and aims to provide a better quality of life for vulnerable



people to live more independently and maintain their tenancies (ODPM, 2004). Services include: enabling access to correct benefits, ensuring they have the correct skills to maintain a tenancy, and a range of support visits tailored to individual's needs both short and long-term. The Programme is the responsibility of the (then) ODPM and allocates a grant to Administering Authorities who are responsible for implementing the programme within their local area.

As national policy has recognised, moving young people from being homeless to having a place of their own is a difficult and complex process. Government has put into place significant initiatives that are targeting help at this most vulnerable group and youth workers can make a major contribution to helping these be successful. Youth workers have experience of running 'One-Stop-Shops' in a wide range of contexts, and because of the voluntary nature of the relationship they offer young people, they could be in a good position to help young people identify their own needs, broker between service delivery agencies on behalf of the young person, and offer ongoing support throughout this process (Merton et al., 2004). While the development of skills that aid employability are important, many of these vulnerable young people need to develop the 'soft skills' to help them have their voices heard in the processes of assessment and the allocation of new accommodation arrangements.

#### A National Voice

A National Voice (ANV) is an organisation run by and for care experienced young people, with staff who have themselves been in care. Set up in 1999, its main aim is to create positive changes to the care system in England and provide a national platform for approximately 60,000 looked after children and young people, plus a further approx 50,000 care leavers. Its work includes consultation with young people, organising regional and national events for young people and promoting a positive image of young people from care. It works alongside voluntary organisations and local authorities to improve the care system, and raise awareness and promote the rights of young people in and leaving care. Its work is guided by a management committee consisting of young people aged 14 to 24. ANV is currently hosted, managed and mentored by the Prince's Trust, but aims to become an independent young people-led organisation (as a company limited by guarantee – and then a charity) from April 2006. It is funded by DfES (until March 2007).

Young people can become involved in a range of ways, including joining ANV; attending local meetings or starting a local group; campaigning and lobbying parliament or other decision-makers; contributing to the newsletter or website; and becoming a member of the regional forums or national management group. Levels of involvement vary, but national committee members make a substantial time commitment.

The experiences of young people from care shape the work of ANV at all levels. A young person from the North Yorkshire care system is currently seconded to the ANV staff team. Young people of all ages can become involved in ANV's campaigns, which are based on the views and concerns of young people in or leaving care. ANV's work is guided by a management committee representing the nine regions of England. This is made up of care experienced young people aged between 14 and 24, who meet four times a year for a weekend residential meeting. Committee members are selected and recruited from a list of applicants by other young people. The committee has recently invited three adult non-voting members to join the committee to provide additional stability and expert advice. There is also currently a regional forum in the South East of England, which steers the direction of the organisation in the region, supported by a regional development worker.

Feedback from young people has indicated they gain a range of soft skills, including increased confidence, teamwork and communication skills. Media training and involvement in the all-party parliamentary group on children from care also helps develop public speaking and presentation skills. They also benefit from meeting and networking with other young people from care.

#### Daylight Project

Day centre for homeless and/or unemployed young people aged 16 to 25 which uses an approach ranging from casual to structured involvement to re-engage homeless and/or unemployed young adults in education, employment or training. It is part of Emmaus Projects, a registered charity which aims to house and 'empower homeless young people to achieve independence'. Located in Aldershot, it works with young people who are from the surrounding areas including Hart, Rushmoor and those on the Surrey border. It works with up to 40 young people per day, of whom 56 per cent are under 19. 69 per cent unemployed and 65 per cent are homeless (in some shape or form). Some 31 per cent of the client group is female.

The Project was set up in response to the growing numbers of unemployed and homeless young people in the area, most of them disadvantaged with no educational successes behind them and no purposeful futures in front of them. The number of clients becoming homeless again and returning to Emmaus House revealed a need to do more than simply provide accommodation to enable young people to live independently. Uses both referrals by professionals and self-referral, particularly based on word of mouth publicity. Attendance is voluntary, but based on expectation of increasing levels of commitment and attendance by young people.

The Daylight Project uses a four-stage approach: call-in – offering a social meeting point; drop-in – young people come more regularly to do lifeskills and other vocational workshops; join-in – they attend frequently, do accredited vocational courses and help facilitate workshops; and step-out – moving to further education and employment. It works to three 14-week terms a year, using a structured and task orientated approach focusing on a different theme each day, including life and living; literacy and numeracy; work skills; team pursuits; and arts.

Young people are integrally involved with the evaluation of each term's work and the planning of the following term's timetable. Each young adult identifies their own learning needs, and is encouraged to facilitate workshops in the programme related to their own interests. Two young people are on the project's steering group.

Young people are able to increase their confidence and self-esteem through engaging with the programme. Clients are able to gain accreditation in Literacy and Numeracy, and engage in the Youth Achievement Awards programme. Daylight provides a gateway into FE, training, work and various other courses, enabling young people to achieve their full potential. We define a client as 'making progress' when they take a step/s towards achieving greater independence or realising their full potential. Others have made progress in their own personal development, for example addressing issues in their lifestyles, eg addiction, or becoming more involved in the programme and as a result have become more confident or developed, for example, literacy skills or social skills.

## 7. Young people and sexual exploitation

ECM recognises that there are a number of young women who are at risk of becoming sexually exploited or future prostitutes. As a result the staying safe initiative of ECM has highlighted the need for policy and practice to address their needs. Government policy has shifted from criminalising young people for taking part in prostitution to protecting young people (Pearce, 2000, Pheonix, 2002, Melrose, 2004). Young people involved in prostitution had until recently been dealt with by cautions and fines. Now with the introduction of new safeguarding guidelines under ECM, the Government considers children and young people involved in commercial exploitation as victims of adult offenders and they are to be recognised, protected and treated as such. The government guidelines *Safeguarding Children involved in Prostitution* (DoH/HO, 2000) sets out the following key points:

- To treat children as victims of abuse and regard them as children in need.
- Local authorities will need to develop interagency protocols for dealing with child prostitution.
- Key agencies include social services, the police, health authorities, education, youth services, probation, Crown Prosecution Services and Local authority agencies.
- In response to concerns that a child is involved or at risk of being involved in prostitution, multi-agency discussions should be held immediately and involve those from the key agencies.
- The multi-agency group should devise a support and exit strategy tailored to each child's needs. This should include providing accommodation, therapy, leisure; education and training (See also Cusick, 2002).
- Encourages policing that takes action against the exploiters through the criminal justice system (see Home Office, 2004).

This guidance devolves responsibility for developing procedures from central Government to the local level and means that children/young people involved in prostitution are entitled to full state protection (Pheonix, 2002). It is also interesting to note that children and young people involved in prostitution are (like many other groups of vulnerable young people) being 'funnelled' into education and training as a way out of their situation. This however, can overlook the impact of their socio-economic circumstances on their reasons for being involved in prostitution in the first place. Therefore a more holistic approach needs to be taken.

Lack of robust figures of the numbers of people involved in prostitution and particularly children and

young people make it a difficult issue to deal with (Home Office, 2004). However, it is suggested that:

- There are up to 5,000 young people involved in sexual exploitation at any one time.
- Children are known to suffer from this form of abuse in 111 (of the 146) Area Child Protection Committee districts (Swann and Balding, 2002).
- The majority of adult sex workers start the work when children (Pearce, 2000).
- Young people leaving care are particularly vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation (Wade, 2003).
- Young people who are involved in exploitative relationships do not always recognise that they are being abused ([www.barnardos.org](http://www.barnardos.org)).
- The issues facing young runaways echo those of care leavers with runaways encountering risks associated with sleeping in unsafe places, crime and abuse and physical and sexual assault (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).
- Refugee and asylum seeking children, particularly those who are unaccompanied, are also at risk of becoming involved both in sexually exploitative relationships and commercial sexual exploitation.

Tackling the problem of sexual exploitation is not without its difficulties. An evaluation of 19 projects for runaways found that what was successful was dependent on the type of runaway the young people was (whether they had stayed away without permission, were thrown out, or had absconded) and which referral route they followed (Dillane et al., 2005). The evaluation of projects that worked directly with those at risk from sexual exploitation found that positive change was not generally high. However, the research notes that those projects that managed to secure ongoing contact with young people might achieve some success over the long-term (Rees et al., 2005).

The Home Office (2004) notes that the main challenge in helping young people who are involved in commercial sexual exploitation, is to build up their trust. Young people are mistrustful of those in authority and the Home Office recognises that to be effective, services will have to invest the time and patience to listen to those whose trust in adults has already been badly abused.

Much of policy prioritises sexual health services in tackling the problem, but young people have a wide range of needs usually associated with accommodation problems, low or no incomes, drug and alcohol problems. To enable young people to leave prostitution will entail eliminating the need for young people to rely on illicit activities for income and a combination of the provision of basic needs, education regarding services, increased outreach

services and early identification and protection from childhood sexual abuse (Johnson et al., 1996).

The coercion and grooming of young people via new technology (mobiles and Internet) presents particular challenges to those attempting to protect children and young people who are more at risk. Whilst there are some general initiatives that are aimed all children (eg the Internet Green X code and Internet safety guidance for schools), there do not appear to be any Government initiatives that directly target those most at risk or already involved.

Difficulties and tensions remain within policy:

- Young people cautioned or convicted – who ‘slip through the net’ are 16 and 17-year-olds, and fall outside the age of consent and lawful sex legislation (Pheonix, 2002).
- Those who persistently continue to be involved in sex work after securing the best efforts of welfare agencies will be criminalised and dealt with under the Crime and Disorder Act (HMSO, 1998).
- Government policy can reinforce the notions of deserving (victims of predatory men) and undeserving ‘bad’ girls and boys who continue to go out and seek to earn money via sex.
- Criminalising young people who are persistently involved in prostitution will do little to enable them to identify themselves as victims and seek help from authorities (Cusick, 2002).
- Policy gives central attention to young women – but there is also evidence that young men may also be groomed for same sex prostitution – this is not recognised in policy.
- ECM focuses on the home as providing a ‘safe haven’ or a source of stability for young people. This overlooks the fact that for those facing commercial sexual exploitation – for many the home may be where it begins.

Youth workers have much experience in working with young people who are being sexually exploited and groomed for sex work. Locally new procedures of de-criminalising the young in these processes should be taking place, and youth workers have a major role to play in helping set up and support these initiatives. There is a strong need for coordinated services, with clear protocols and practice that offer support to the young. It is also necessary that local areas develop early intervention strategies for those most ‘at risk’. Youth workers have a key role to play in these processes. For example, they are more likely to be able to identify those most ‘at risk’ and build up trusting relationships with the most vulnerable and to help them identify their own needs (Coles et al., 2004). Youth workers can also offer support and advice to young women being groomed, and can, through helping them develop self confidence and

self esteem, help them to find ways of resisting the pressures (Merton et al., 2004) and expectations of those doing the grooming. Given the age group of these young women (usually 13 to 18), they tend to be failed as they move from child to adult services. Therefore youth workers who work with young people across these boundaries are in a good position to maintain a continuous relationship with them over a vulnerable time period of their life.

#### The Edge Project (Derby)

The Edge Project provides support and informal education for young people who are involved in or at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse through prostitution. It has drop-in facilities for young people as well as accommodation for staff and volunteers, providing a safe confidential space for young people to start putting their lives back together. The project also delivers education sessions to young people in Derby City's secondary schools, in order to break down stereotypes about prostitution and ensure that young people know how to access support. It is supported by a multi-agency partnership involving youth service, police, social services, business sector, church organisations. The youth service is the lead agency.

The project makes contact with an average of 50 young people under 18 in 12 months – 75 per cent are aged 16 and under. The need for this project was identified by youth workers, who saw young people falling through the net of existing provision as they became involved in the sex industry. Social services and the police acknowledged that they were unable to engage effectively with these young people who were at serious risk of harm and a multi-agency approach was called for.

The project has offered young people new experiences (including a trip to London) and developed their confidence and self esteem to move on with their lives. Young people have developed trusting relationships with youth workers, demonstrated by them phoning up and asking for support when they needed it.

## 8. Staying safe – young people and accidents

An emerging priority in ECM has been the reduction of accidents for children and young people. While much of this is focused on younger aged children,

research evidence does provide some indication of where future work with young people might be targeted. This also includes the need to broaden the focus simply on accidents on the roads to one that includes a strategy to reduce accidents in the home and workplace.

#### Road Accidents

Preventing and reducing the numbers of children and young people killed or seriously injured in road accidents in the UK is the primary focus of Government policy towards young people's safety. Indeed this is the main target highlighted in Every Child Matters. The Department for Transport's road safety strategy – Tomorrow's Roads Safer for Everyone sets out the Government's road safety strategy and casualty reduction targets for 2010 (DfT, 2004). It highlights how it aims to narrow the gap between the poorest neighbourhoods and the rest of the country by reducing road casualties in 88 neighbourhood renewal fund areas in England. Much of this work concentrates on young children, helping to educate them in road safety and improve their travel to school experience.

With regards to older young people, concerns have focused on young drivers aged between 17 and 21, who make up only 7 per cent of all licence holders yet are involved in up to one in seven accidents involving injury (see [www.youthinformation.com](http://www.youthinformation.com)). Using STATS 19 data (a system used by police forces to report road injury accidents), DfT notes that between 1997 and 2002 the peak age for driver fatalities was 20 to 24 – 17 per cent of male driver fatalities and 13 per cent of female fatalities. The peak age for passenger fatalities was 16 to 19, with 32 per cent of male passenger fatalities and 18 per cent of female passenger fatalities in this age group (DfT, 2004).

Where Government policy has taken an interest in young people's (as opposed to children's) road safety habits skills and behaviours, policy has focused on the prevention of road accidents by trying to instil the 'right' attitude towards driving amongst young people. This has been delivered by the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) who give presentations in schools, colleges or other organisations, with the aim of providing the correct information about the driving test and responsible attitudes towards road safety (DfT, 2004). Furthermore, Government has also consulted on whether to introduce measures tackling the way that people in general learn to drive. Yet research in this area is limited. One piece of research conducted for the DfT explores young people's perspectives on good driving and learning to drive (Christmas, 2007). It highlighted that:

- young people are more likely to follow the unwritten rules of what contributes to good



- driving rather than the test; and
- young people also believe that driving ability is a matter of natural talent brought out by experience.

As a result young people are likely to dismiss what they have been taught (pre-test) post test and to take on more extreme challenges immediately post test. Young men in particular are likely to emphasise the need to build and maintain a particular image and identity for themselves. This has implications for whether evidence, arguments facts and figures can have an impact on how young people think (Christmas, 2007).

Drink driving and drug taking are also acknowledged to contribute to the number of accidents, injuries and fatalities in people's driving behaviour in general. Yet little mention is given to the specific role they may play in young people's driving and importantly how they intend to deal with it within the Tomorrows Roads strategy.

**Accidents in other settings.** Much of the emphasis in youth policy on accidents is in reducing road accidents but accidents amongst young people also occur in other areas and policy should aim to include this in its coordinated plan for ECM.

- Over one million children under the age of 15 experience accidents in and around the home every year, for which they are taken to Accident and Emergency (ROSPA).
- Young children are most at risk from a home accident (aged between 0-4).
- Boys are more likely to have accidents than girls (Consumer Safety Unit, 2002).
- The most disadvantaged are more likely to be involved in accidents than those from higher socio-economic groups. Children from poorer backgrounds are five times more likely to die as a result of accidents in the home than those from better off families (DoH, 1998).

Policy has focused on preventing younger children's accidents in the home through raising awareness and public information campaigns. There is little discussion of how policy intends to otherwise involve and educate older children and young people in home safety.

A second overlooked area that should be included relates to accidents in the workplace. A report by *Hazards Magazine* (see [www.hazards.org](http://www.hazards.org), O'Neill, 2006) shows that:

- There are over four million workers aged between 16 and 25 and over half a million of these are aged 16 and 17.
- These young people are particularly likely to be in

their first job, more likely to be new to a job and more likely to be involved in insecure, temporary work.

- Young people in the workplace face serious risks to their health and safety.
- Every year nearly 4,500 young people are seriously injured or killed at work. The author argues that this is due to a lack of training for under 25-year-olds.

So far policy has not seen this as core to ECM objectives. Therefore a coordinated approach should also aim to tackle accidents in the home, and at work for older young people. Most education programmes in these areas tend to be focused on giving advice and information to a more general population. A small number of targeted initiatives do exist but they tend to be experimental and without evidence of their effectiveness. Youth workers could have a more significant role in helping to prevent accidents. Their informal and social education programmes tend to focus on helping young people gain knowledge and skills to help them deal positively with situations that may be risky (France and Wiles, 1996; Merton et al., 2004). These approaches could be of value in helping young people in the workplace and in education post 16 – helping them to understand the risks they face, and how they should aim to deal with them.

## 9. Expanding the staying safe programme

Whilst the staying safe programme is a positive development in youth policy, there are a number of areas where it should be expanded.

**Ensuring linkages across ECM.** It is critical that staying safe is seen as fundamental to all outcomes. Recognising the linkage across the five outcome areas will increase the success of the staying safe programme. For example, it highlights the importance of reducing accidents, yet other health issues are also very important to staying safe. Mental health issues can be hugely problematic in terms of safety for young people (Green et al., 2004) and therefore needs to be given a higher priority in helping young people stay safe. Similar issues exist over sexual health, where the transference of sexual diseases is at their highest (ONS, 2004). Ensuring the cross fertilisation of 'staying safe is important to its success.

**Increasing young people's voice.** While there is a strong message within Youth Matters over the importance of young people's participation in



policy and practice, the policy outcome measures and inspection frameworks for staying safe do not give enough emphasis and attention to young people's perspectives as ways of measuring the success of this work. While it may be implicit (and covered in 'Making a Positive Contribution') there are no indicators or measures in ECM (or Youth Matters) that give central focus to young people's perspectives of 'safety' and what it means to them. There is much research that shows the importance of young people's contribution to our understanding of safety, yet listening to young people is not strongly represented in assessing the success of this theme, or in constructing supportive frameworks.

**The importance of difference.** The staying safe initiative recognises vulnerability and vulnerable groups but has less to say about diversity. In terms of safety it is crucial to recognise that there are distinct class and gender experiences towards the question of safety. Similarly different ethnic groups have particular negative experiences that can undermine feelings of safety ie racial discrimination and bullying. Policy, especially at the local level, therefore should be able to respond to the different needs of these groups in different ways. There are also difficulties over groups that seem to be excluded from ECM. For example, youth justice was not included in the initial policy framework having its own independent policy (Youth Justice, 2003) and young offenders are seen as part of the problem (France, 2007).

**The vulnerability of asylum seekers and refugees.** Young people who arrive either as a member of an asylum-seeking family, or independently, also tend to be excluded from the ECM framework (Nandy, 2005), with three of the key agencies who deal with them being exempt (The Immigration Service, National Asylum Support Service and Detention Centres) from the statutory requirements of ECM. This has significant implications for their safety. As a group they have distinct needs. Many will have left their country of origin and families deeply traumatised. Arriving in Britain alone means that many will be frightened, stressed and will often require an interpreting service. Government policy which prioritises immigration policy over children's welfare compounds the difficulties that young asylum seekers face. Nandy (2005) notes that:

- Changes to the legal aid system have resulted in making it harder for young asylum seekers to access legal advice, and the advice that they get is poorer quality.
- The continuous expansion of the numbers of family detention centres despite reports that children's welfare and safety is at risk in them.
- Figures show that 4,000 of the 5,700

unaccompanied children currently supported by local authorities are 16 or 17. Because of their age they get a much reduced form of support. This means that local authorities have no obligation to give them ongoing support after the age of 18. On leaving local authority care they will be more at risk from economic hardship, more liable to poor housing, and have fewer job opportunities than other young people with probable additional needs.

**Broadening the age range.** The issue of age bounded policies is also important when examining the response to the staying safe programme. The main thrust of the ECM policy is targeted on those from 0 to 19, while Youth Matters is focused on 13 to 19-year-olds only, yet there is growing research evidence that policy and practice needs to broaden youth policy to include the 19 to 24-year-olds (Social Exclusion Unit, 2005). Transitions into adulthood have been extending and fragmenting. Evidence shows that transitions for all young people are undergoing significant restructuring (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004) and go beyond the age of 18 (up to 24). This is very important, especially given that it is now well recognised that difficulties in transitions into independent living exist for vulnerable young people leaving home (Jones, 2002), for those who have lived in care or had troubled and chaotic lives (Social Exclusion Unit, 2005), and for those from disadvantaged communities (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). By stopping at 19, support for those aged 19 to 24 is virtually non-existent.

## 10. Challenges for youth workers

A number of challenges exist for youth workers in this area of work. The three major ones are:

**Working in multi agency teams and having a centralised role in safeguarding work in the Children's Trusts.**

As Jones (2006) outlined in her discussion, youth workers are increasingly finding themselves having to work with a wide range of agencies. Not only is there sometimes a lack of clarity about what youth work is, there is also a growing competition amongst providers, and in some local areas youth services have been disbanded and youth work has become more fragmented. Maintaining core values and professional identity in this context has been difficult. As the new Children's Trusts become established, youth workers are going to have to construct a core role for themselves in the framework for youth provision. Having clarity

about what they do, how they can contribute to these debates – especially around staying safe, is essential if they are to remain important providers of youth services.

**Voluntary association – the challenges of data collection, auditing and safeguarding responsibilities.**

Youth work is fundamentally built upon the notion of ‘voluntary association’. It prides itself on relationship building, and young people consenting to participate in activities they offer. Under ECM and especially the safeguarding initiatives, new practices are emerging that will create challenges for youth workers. How assessment, data collection, monitoring and greater formalised early intervention will impact upon this critical feature of the youth work – young person relationship remains to be seen, but it has the potential of challenging the core value of ‘voluntary association’.

**Whose side are we on? Mainstreaming youth work and its impact on relationships with the young.**

The role of youth workers in deciding whose needs they meet (community or young people’s) has always been a major tension point for practitioners. Being advocates of the young is, as was discussed above, a critical feature of youth work, yet pressures for youth workers to take a more ‘community’ based approach to the problems of young people have been increasing. Dangers exist for practitioners in that they become ‘fire brigade’ youth workers being pulled in to deal with ‘problem youth’ as a way of maintaining ‘community cohesion’. There are also growing risks that youth workers are pulled into working with younger age groups – as early intervention and prevention – becomes central to policy. Young people aged 13 to 24 therefore are marginalised in resource allocation – as the ‘solution’ is seen as ‘getting to them young’.

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## **The National Youth Agency**

works in partnership with young people and with organisations and services to ensure better outcomes for young people. It is an independent, development organisation located between government and funding bodies on the one hand and service providers and their users on the other.

### **We strive to ensure that the work of services and organisations is:**

- relevant to the lives of young people;
  - responsive to policy;
  - effective and of a high standard;
- efficient and provides good value; and
- successful in securing the best outcomes for young people.

### **Our five strategic aims are:**

- Participation: promoting young people's influence, voice and place in society.
- Professional practice: improving youth work practice, programmes and other services for young people.
- Policy development: influencing and shaping the youth policy of central and local government and the policies of those who plan, commission and provide services for young people.
  - Partnership: creating, supporting and developing partnerships between organisations to improve services and outcomes for young people.
- Performance: striving for excellence in The Agency's internal workings.

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