

# Hidden in Plain Sight - Solutions to Protecting Teenagers From Exploitation and Harm

With Anne Longfield CBE, Chair of the Commission on Young Lives

Tuesday 23 May, 2023



Given the focus of this webinar, what is shared and discussed may be upsetting, so please take time out if you need to during the webinar and afterwards. Trauma can affect us all. If you need to speak to someone about how you are feeling, connect with someone you feel comfortable talking or you can speak to people in confidence at Samaritans by calling 116 123 or Breathing Space 0800 83 85 87.

Claire Burns, Director at CELCIS

Good morning, everybody. Great to see so many people here today. So a huge welcome to you all. I am Claire Burns, the Director of CELCIS, and I am so grateful that you've all made the time to come along to do today's seminar in what we know is really busy schedules that you've all got. This is the second of the new CELCIS Emerging Insights Series - Solutions to protecting teenagers from harm and exploitation - based on the Commission on Young Lives report. We are delighted today to be joined by Anne Longfield CBE, chair of the Commission on Young Lives, which reported in England last November, and I'll say a bit more about Anne in a moment. So, a bit more about the seminars, then. As you know, in this series of webinars, we're offering a space to consider some of the most current and most critical issues in relation to child protection. I said the last time as well that when we all recognise and support the emphasis on the agenda and early family help and family support. But we know that the task of keeping children and young people safe and free from harm remains a critical duty and responsibility for us all. And one, we always need to be open to hearing about emerging issues and risks. And that's been an

ongoing and key theme throughout these seminars. And we also know that it's a really complex interplay between supporting families and ensuring protection and assessing vulnerability. So again, it's our chance to get into that really complex interplay. In terms of well-being in the seminars, we know that from the last seminar as well, that what we share and discuss can sometimes be upsetting. So please take time out if you need to during the webinar, and afterwards. Trauma can affect us all unexpectedly and affect us all in different ways. Please take the opportunity to turn off your camera at any time if you need to, or step away if you need to, if you need to speak to someone about how you're feeling, connect with someone you feel comfortable with, or we have also provided information about the Samaritans or Breathing Space if that's what's needed. Further information on this can be found in the Q&A section for the webinars. We will be using the MS Teams and Q&A function to collect questions. So please feel free to contribute to questions using the Q&A function at any time. And a selection of these will then be passed to me to put to Anne so you know lots of time for questions from the floor so to speak. The session will be recorded and attendees can choose whether to have the camera on or off. So the focus of today's seminar, attendees will hear from Anne, Chair of the Commission on Young Lives, which reported in England last November, with a national action plan and recommendations to support vulnerable teenagers to succeed and to protect them from adversity, exploitation and harm. The webinar will look at what the commission's findings means for Child Protection now by putting a spotlight on a number of things. What we know about the exploitation of teenagers in the UK today, the findings from the work of the Commission on Young Lives and the possible solutions to protecting young people from such harm, which can often be hidden in plain sight. So just a wee bit more about the Commission before we move forward. The Commission is chaired by Anne Longfield, CBE and hosted and supported by the Oasis Charitable Trust. As most of you will know, Anne is a former Children's Commissioner for England. And she's also known to many of us and admired by many of us as a fervent supporter of children's rights. And I often say I like to see Anne on Channel 4 News at any point where she's on advocating for children's rights. So, Anne has been working with a panel of commissioners, young people and other experts who have lived experience of exclusions, of gangs and serious violence, to provide practical and affordable ideas that local communities, backed by government, councils, the police and social services can put in place. So you'll be glad that my bit is nearly over and you can get on to listening to Anne but just in terms of what's happening next, Anne will speak for the next 25-30 minutes. I will then lead the discussion of posing some questions that have come up through Anne's discussion, and then we will take questions from the floor that will be relayed to me from the communications team. So without further ado Anne, I'll pass over to you. Thank you.

[Anne Longfield CBE, Chair of the Commission on Young Lives](#)

Brilliant, thank you and thank you Claire so much. First for inviting me, that's fantastic, I'm really pleased that it's of interest for so many people but also your kind words and

you know for me, the job's not done on this, by any means. And when I finished my term as Children's Commissioner, having worked really hard to put a spotlight on, not only the scale of vulnerability, but the nature of vulnerability and where children were falling out the system that we have the group of children that I felt were furthest, both, first of all, was highest risk, but furthest away from any kind of policy solution, were teenagers at risk. And I would regularly hear people, quite senior people, say when it gets to teenagers, they're too complicated. You know, they're too old. We can't do anything, you know, it's gone past 14, what can we do, and I wasn't prepared to accept that. So I established this Commission, which I thought to really bring together a group of people with both expertise, but also experience in getting stuff done, and to talk to people who were doing it and put together a plan that really, as Claire said, was both practical but ambitious, in terms of how you would almost turn this system inside out to really be able to make it lean towards helping young people rather than, as it feels at the moment, lean away from helping young people. And Claire, I just wanted to check were all right with the image and the sound before I just rattle off the next 25 minutes. Yeah?

Claire Burns

You are looking and sounding good, Anne.

Anne Longfield

Well, there's always that thing at one point where you know, have you just kind of lost the line. We've got slides I'm going to rattle through and hopefully not without passing any of the important stuff. But I wanted to get to the point of discussion and questions as well. So primarily, as Claire says, we're going to be talking about the Commission and the final report we published at the end of last year. We haven't gone away, we are now working on implementation, but also currently working on a piece of work with Manchester Metropolitan University, on girls who are at particular risk of harm and violence, including in gang related situations. So we had a parliamentary seminar on that yesterday, and we've got a report out in about three weeks. So we can talk about that as well in discussions if people wish. So first slide, please. Or the next slide. We wanted to take a public health approach to really focus on prevention. You know, of course, we know that the headlines keep coming around young people at risk, and we felt that there was a completely inadequate response from agencies nationally, regionally and locally. But we wanted to actually design a system, what would it look like? If we were going to redesign the system nationally? And locally? What would it look like? It had to be doable. It had to involve all the agencies, how could we do that? So there's a strong element of prevention, in everything I've done over the last 30 years, there's always been a strong focus on prevention. But that's not to underestimate the need or the requirement to intervene now for those young people in crisis, too. So it's balancing those two things. If we could go to the next slide. These are some of the questions we set ourselves. In a way they are achingly obvious. But we had this as our kind of backdrop throughout and we came back to it from time to time. You know, understanding better what leads to vulnerability in

crisis. I learned a lesson in the early days of being Children's Commissioner where I went with Louise Casey actually, we went to visit some of the young women in custody. There were 30 young women in custody at that time, we spoke to about 12 of them. And the question we posed was, you know, in your own word, is how did it get to this point, and after – and these were, you know, very bright women who had ambitions for the future. And after about the third conversation, we realised that it was pretty much a blueprint. There was a same story being told again and again, vulnerability in family situations, often live with one parent, often that parent having high levels of addiction, domestic violence in the home, often very poor mental health. There would be a lot of transient relationships with adults in and around the home. At some point, sexual abuse would rear its ugly head and things would deteriorate from then onwards, often spell living with grandparents. And then in secondary school, often falling through the gaps in education, being excluded from school or non-attending school and becoming prey to those that wish to exploit them. And you were left with the feeling that, you know, you had 12 to 14 years of a child's life here, and you could almost map it for the majority of children. They were also very clear that there were moments throughout that process where there could have been interventions that could have helped, you know, why was the child being involved in so many fights at primary school? Did no one seek to ask around that? Why were they going missing? Why weren't they attending school? And so there are all these moments of intervention where there were red flags going off all over the place. But if it hadn't happened, and things have got worse. So the big questions here, what leads to vulnerability and crisis? And why aren't people responding? Why aren't the services we've got intervening as effectively as they might? How can we support those families to be able to support their own children? What about mental health support and well-being? How should that be delivered? How can schools be inclusive? How can we best protect vulnerable children from exploitation? And, you know, how does this system have to reform? What is the role of government? And how much will it cost? So we tried not to shy away from some of the big issues, (Thank you, someone has just brought me some coffee). Because we knew that if we're going to argue the case, to secure support for this, it needed to be thorough, it needed to have looked around every corner, it needed to be on clear ground in terms of both the rationale, the confidence in the proposals, but also the funding too. Also we tried not to box ourselves in. So what the next slide talks about the cross cutting issues. Yes it is a national plan, but it's not obviously going to be about just having a national plan. It has to be deliverable locally, and it has to have a local focus and its own local plan, if you like. Our focus, yes, was on teenagers at risk. And we had to constantly look at that. And I guess for me, when I talk about teenagers, I'm talking about from about 10 onwards, yes, about teenagers at risk. We understood that actually, vulnerability doesn't happen overnight. And early interventions, as I say, can prevent these things from escalating. We really felt those particular benefits want to explore about supporting children before they started school. We know the impact of early intervention in the early years. We know the importance of speech and language to good development later on. We know the importance of working with families in those early years to build

support for them, especially those vulnerable families. And by the way, you know, the work in the Children's Commissioner's Office at the time, we had found that around one in six children were growing up in in vulnerable families where there was one mental health addiction or violence present. So we knew that. We also knew that in terms of education, the disadvantage gap, which has shown itself at 16 - 40% of that was in place before children started school. So whilst we, you know, there's a discipline about carry on focusing on those teenage years or those older years, actually, we also wanted to look at what we could do earlier with that in view. We knew that services could respond more effectively if they work together to prevent harm locally, including schools, but we knew that for the vast majority of children that wasn't happening to the level it needed to. And we really wanted to look at how statue services could change, partly because, you know, that's where our public money goes in the main. But we also understood that this needed to be delivered as well by community provision, and we wanted to look at how we might be able to design a system that had a statutory footing, but it involved community organisations in delivery. We absolutely knew that trusted relationships with adults were absolutely at the heart of the solution. And when we also knew that support and nurture of vulnerable children, was absolutely essential, especially with a focus on trauma informed practice. We believed that this was something which was solvable if we could provide nurturing interventions. And when it comes to money, then, you know, we knew money would need to be spent, because actually, we're spending billions now, the cost of crisis is very high. It's just in a different box. So of course, you know, we're all involved in lots of conversations with decision makers where they are saying, you know, there's no money. But actually, when there's a crisis, there has to be money found, and it is costing billions. So we needed to find a more sensible way of spending it. So on the next slide, we looked at what this this local system might look alike. And we looked at where the gaps were now.

Well, most mainstream services we found pretty early on don't cater for these young people in any real way. That seems a huge generality. But actually, these were children who were being marginalised and we're falling through the gaps on a very regular basis. When we looked at incentives and drive, many of those were, as I say, leaning away from these young people, including children's social care. In England, there has been a review of children's social care, as you'll know, that reported a year ago, yesterday, I think. And of course, in Scotland, there was the review of children's social care there. When we looked at older children in care, then, there's an acknowledgment that these are the fastest growing children group of children going into care. In England, 25% of children almost in care are between 16 and 17. But of course, the care system wasn't set up for that group of children. It's only in recent years that there has been the understanding of contextual safeguarding. The model is very much about homecare, which doesn't work with the particular cohort of foster carers that we have for this group of children. And when it comes to residential provision, there is a deep gulf between both the level of specialism and quality that we need for those children, but also the quantity too. So there

was quite a lot of deep anxiety and lack of confidence about working with some of these children, especially working with some of the families at the point of crisis that we found. When they do fall through the gaps, then there aren't many next stage safety nets for this group of children. So it's often at crisis points where the symptoms are showing themselves whether that's children who were coming into A&E, or with severe mental health conditions, or who are going missing. And a lot of young people told us they felt alienated and actively withdrew. And we knew there's particular problems with the system, in the level of support for black boys and for children with SEND (Special educational needs and disabilities) as well. We also looked at what's working on the next slide. And, you know, these are our building blocks, if you like, of what we wanted to test out, wanted to build into the final system. Well, you know, you've got the message for me early identification and response before children start school, an approach that worked with parents and the strength to parents, so almost a family first approach, which wasn't, and isn't that happening at the moment. Service models that are inclusive, that see their responsibility for all children, and notice when children are going to fall outside, through those gaps, and can spot those signs and can intervene. A community based approach that fits in with the local geography of life and understanding with their mental health and well-being approaches that work from the community - a clear message from young people, I can come on to that later. And then that that notion of a continuous progression for young people in terms of their educational journey, children go to one school, you know, at primary school is much more of an intimate environment. They get less of that intimacy in that close framework in secondary school, and that's often when problems start, but actually very few children have that progression throughout their education, their childhood. And that's something that we thought was very important. And what we wanted to look at were solutions that stick with children. What we were told was that families and young people felt they were constantly being assessed, they were constantly being referred - those that are getting help - but often the solutions were quite short term and the case was closed. We were looking at support that really is able to stick with children and young people over time. So the design briefs - next slide. What we wanted to do following on from the last slide, was come up with solutions for all of those. We looked at what that would mean for different professions, we looked at what that would mean, for the accountability framework, if you'd like, we looked at how you can put in place mechanisms that drive that transformation. If you get the best policies in the world you have to find a way to be able to roll those out and transform local areas, and then what good government mechanisms needed to be in place to make these happen. Again, so much of this is down to will, so much of it is down to intent, and determination - led from the top - to be able to make sure that these good intentions actually follow through into real outcomes and impact for young people. Because one thing we knew was that at various points were knife crime that hit high on the agenda, lots of government departments had intervened with small scale pots around knife crime. At one point, we counted there were 11 different pots of money in different parts of government that were responding to knife crime. Now, all of those might have been about



30 or 40 million pounds, you know, useful money for a very unusual target groups of children. But there was no coordination. Often departments didn't even know another department was doing it. There was a sense from the ministers that we've done this, so it must have made things better. But and usually, it was a very, you know, a very limited space that that those different parts are working in to different timescales. Imagine if you could have brought those together into one sizable Strategic Fund that was able to have a strategic overview, and really look at how we could develop a system that could target the resources in the areas where there was most urgent need and greatest benefit. That's what we were after. And the next slide, just very briefly, to give you a bit of flavour of the way we worked. We had a call for evidence that we put out for specialists organisations, who wanted to put forward written evidence. We also did evidence sessions throughout the year where we had, they were all online, but we spoke to a range of experts, parents, and those involved in delivering provision to get their views on a whole range of different topics. We did lots of visits to look at places that we thought there were green shoots. We undertook consultation, and we gathered case studies. We also had a practitioners group, we worked with throughout, and we had a young lives group that we work with throughout. And the young people were absolutely brilliant in being able to get us to focus on what's important and not go off track. And we also had a parliamentary advisory group, which was very useful in terms of looking at how we move and land this in the longer term, we continue to work with them. We wanted as well to bring in as many of the key sector organisations as we could. We didn't want to be just a voice that got shriller and shriller. We wanted this to be about a wave that brought focus on this group of young people that could really have impact. And we worked on a number of thematic reviews, which we reported on every couple of months or so throughout that period with a final report that brought all that together. So moving on to the next slide. The first of those thematic reviews here was we started with children in social care. And when we looked at the huge increase in young people who are going into care and we looked at the nature and kind of provision that was available for young people, we found this kind of real mismatch. First of all, when parents or young people originally would get involved, maybe a parent would find, you know, a burner phone or cash in a child's bedroom. They told us that they might ring the police or they might ring children's social care, and say, you know, I need your help, now. Can we work together? And of course, the answer is thresholds are so high, we just don't have the capacity to do that. We aren't set up to be able to do it. So parents often found they're there on their own. And the situation would often continue until young people were in a situation of crisis. If they were at that point taken into care, often the shortage of places in residential provision meant that they were placed in so called unregulated provision that was often semi-independent without full care. And some of those places young people told us were places where they didn't feel safe. They were moved often, children often went missing from those places, and they were often targeted by those who wanted to exploit them. So there was this sense that, you know, children have been taken away at this point, because of real contextual safeguarding issues, of course, really vital. But they've been put into situations in the care

system, where they were still at risk, and in some even I would judge enhanced risk. So we raised concerns about that, we recommended a number of things, we said that the change and the different approach for teenagers was such a specific nature that actually we needed to look at a refreshed approach for children's social care for teenagers. It needed to be a very distinct approach. It needed to be able to look at understanding the signs of vulnerability and intervene before children and family got to crisis with a real response around those who are on the edge of exploitation or being targeted for exploitation. The other side of that, of course, is that those people who are looking to exploit young people are as agile as they come. You know, these are ruthless business models where those that are seeking to exploit young people are on the constant lookout to recruit their pool of available cheap labour to deliver drugs. And they will they will spot a vulnerable child a mile off. And they are the most agile, ruthless people in getting there. I wanted our system to be as determined and agile, in finding those young people and responding positively as these people were looking to exploit them. We said we wanted to look at new models of intense family support for those families with teenagers who are living with high risk. What did that mean? How could we put that in place? We wanted much more kinship care support for teenagers to be able to stay with their families, but again, highly wrapped in a safety programme. We wanted more specialist foster carers potentially drawing from youth work and those that have those skills in being able to engage and work with young people. And we said we wanted more local residential homes for young people where they could stay in their community and near to their family where there could be that joint work. And the other side of that, with the next slide is around the element of working with families there. We felt that, you know, there's lots of talk about early intervention and of course, the move away from early intervention over the last 13 years, as budgets have become tighter and tighter has been huge. There's been around a 70% move away from early intervention away from things like youth services and Sure Start in England. We felt that there needed to be a legal duty to provide early intervention that has to be set in the statute for that. We felt that local authorities need to have a joined up At Risk offer and that we also need to look at joined up provision in the form of Children and Family Centres. Looking at Sure Start models and how they could apply. We also wanted to see a much greater emphasis on family support that had the skills and abilities in this particular area. And we understood the real underlying issues around poverty. So to reset poverty targets and understand that a robust strategy to reduce poverty was really vital as part of this overall plan. We went on. And I'll try and quicken up a little bit for you, Claire. We went on to look at schools. And I won't go through all of this, but there's a clear link between children not being in school and being more at risk. We have endless discussions around that with researchers in government, but I think it's fair to say that there is that risk, we want to see schools that had what we called a new era of inclusion, that worked hard to identify those children who are at risk of either falling out of school or not attending or being excluded from school, and be able to support them. Now, clearly, they are more likely to be families, children with special educational needs more likely to be children, on free school meals, often more likely to be black boys.



But we wanted a much more strategic approach about that. And we looked at both the workforce strategies, and also the approaches required to keep children in school. And then our final thematic review looked at mental health, absolutely essential to every aspect of what we were looking at. The message from young people to us was clear that we are probably not going to refer ourselves to a clinic or a GP, because that's far too medicalised. We might not even refer ourselves to some of the emerging mental health teams in schools. But that doesn't mean that we don't need help, we want help to stay well, and to be able to access mental health support on our terms. What we put forward was the need for almost an emergency recovery fund for children's mental health because of a massive gulf between what was needed, and also what was being provided, fueled by the pandemic. So we put forward proposals around mental health hubs in the community run in partnership with community organisations, of mental health support activities, and well-being activities, and youth clubs and activities on prescription for those who sought help, and mental health teams on schools. And of course, for those that need specialist support, improvements in waiting times, and in the quality of support they were offered. When it came to our final recommendations, we pulled many of those things together. And just to give you some of the major points, if you like, in terms of the cases we made. First of all, we said there needs to be a national strategy - this has to be recognised that it's a problem. How can there be, you know, hundreds of 1000s of young people at the potential risk of such horrific violence, and it happens there is almost that there's a there's an acceptance that in a way the issues too difficult or big, we didn't want that we wanted this to be put on the basis of a national threat alongside terrorism and other threats to the nation. We wanted there to be, you know, the Cobra style meetings where the senior ministers from all departments meet, to oversee a plan to reduce risks. We wanted it to be taken seriously at the highest levels and maintain that. At the centre of our recommendations was the model of what we called a Sure Start Hub if you like, a Sure Start style approach for teenagers. So the Sure Start approach for teenagers we talked about was based on that, for younger children. And the way we envisage this would be that it would be in and around schools but also working with settings in the local economy. It would be a place where there were trusted adults, for young people and for parents, where there were youth workers working alongside pastoral staff, and teachers in schools, where there were family support work has been able to support families, where there is that cross disciplinary approach where there can become a bespoke service that can respond at speed to the needs of young people. We wanted schools to open for longer into the evenings, and into weekends and holidays. And we wanted that to be at the heart if you'd like, the kernel of a local network of provision, which started to increase activities available, and support available for children and for the parents. The kind of common themes around a family first, reduction of poverty ran throughout, and we kept to our specific recommendations around the social care system. We also said we wanted to recruit an army of youth practitioners. Now, these are the people who are skilled in building the relationships, trusted relationships with young people, that can help them find their own path. And we wanted this army, we said there needs to be 10,000 of them,

many of them have lost their funding. Over the last decade, we felt this was an absolutely crucial part of our new system of support that will be able to work in their own right, but also alongside other professionals. And when it came to youth justice, we wanted a distinct and timed move to a more welfare approach to youth justice, rather than looking at the system we have now, which is very much around security and punishment based, but it comes at crisis point, again, moving to prevention is absolutely key for that kind of move. I've rattled through those because, you know, I could continue for hours. And no one would want that. But I hope that gives you a flavour of the ambition, the level of understanding that we sought to get, and the level of discourse that we were fortunate, and really privileged to be able to undertake, to be able to get to some of those conclusions. It's all work in progress. We've been grateful for the response that we've got from some different government departments, and we're pleased with some of that, but we want that to go much further, you know, initial interest is good. But actually it has to move into action. And we're working with a number of opposition party teams as well, to look at how this could roll out over a 10 year programme, if there was that will to do so. Thank you.

#### Claire Burns

Thanks so much. And I think, you know, I can even feel over the webinar, people have just been so engrossed in what you're saying. So thanks for that really passionate and informed contribution. So if people want to think about some of the questions that they might want to ask and put those in the chat function. If you're like me you will have numerous questions going through your head. But just to reflect back with you as people are doing that, I've got a couple of questions. Just to reflect back on what I think are some of the key points that you were making, although I will not do justice to everything that you've said. But I think that thing about mapping out in a blueprint, that we have such a lot of information now about the trajectories of young people when some of these things happen to them, but I think you were equally saying in those trajectories you can always pinpoint missed opportunities from picking up on what was happening. But that the system isn't oriented towards those missed opportunities, the system is oriented towards having to reach a particular threshold before you get help. And I think families are consistently telling us that, that engaging with the system is absolutely brutal, you know, that it's not something that's easily accessible to them that they understand. So I think, again, you meet all of those points really well, really struck as well by that issue around intersectionality, which for all of us working in social care now is something that I think we really need to take on board in terms of where is gender, race, culture, where are all of these things that we need to take into account? And I think I want to come back to this on a question, but this is a particular interest of mine, but you've really struck on a number of things about what will it actually take to implement these recommendations what is the context into which they will be implemented? And you and I talked a little bit last week about our frustration of things coming to an end that we thought were working really well like Sure Start, you know, and that as an ongoing frustration for many of us

around systems and processes and practice that we thought was working well. So those were the key things I really picked up. So just two or three questions from me. The first one, because it's been an ongoing theme for us in this webinar and an ongoing theme for us, in Scotland, is around the role of lived experience and voices and these kinds of inquiries. Someone that you just care about, how did you ensure that you are getting lived experience across the board? And how were the young people and others supported to do that in an inclusive way?

### Anne Longfield

Thank you. So I guess, you know, my whole working life. I've always tried to work out what to do or what, you know, what is needed? The kind of answer, if you like to the proposition, I've always started by talking to the people who actually are the people who we are trying to work with. What I didn't say then actually, which is the usual absolute mantra is that actually I was surprised, even shocked at times, by the level of scepticism and distaste for a lot of statutory services from the families we talked to and some of the young people. And we know that, but the level that it is now at I think, is a level which should cause real concern. And the mantra throughout, which I've always supported anyway, is that families don't want to be done to. What we're looking for solutions that where people could walk alongside and work alongside young people, work along for their families and work to their strengths. So with lived experience we had, we were supported and hosted by Oasis Charitable Trust, which is a charity which has worked with some of the most disadvantaged communities for decades. At their heart, they define their mission is about building sustainable communities. So actually lived experience is the experience for the charity. And for me, they were great partners to host with because, you know, that is at the core. They don't define themselves in by programmes, if you like they design themselves in by how can we respond to those who are asking for help? And how can we support those individuals to be able to map out their own journey rather than us decide what that is. But they also work, have 52 schools 30,000 children come to those schools, their families attend community hubs, there are community hubs around all of those. So that was a fantastic resource. And a lot of our visits were to some of those communities. We had our Young Lives panel, we had our Practitioners panel. But we did spend a lot of time talking to parents, and talking to families in different communities. We also talked to young people who were in, you know, very difficult situations, and continue to do that. So our work on women and young women and girls at the moment, has taken into A&Es to talk to some of the emergency teams there who are seeing young women and men on a very regular basis there. And those that are working with support teams around the country. So that on every level for us, had to be the place to start. And what I've been really, you know, what has heartened me, whenever we've launched any of these reports along the way, is when I've heard people - there's been various phone-ins because you know, we worked hard at getting public attention for these. There would often be a phone-in or something and you do your bit on the on the radio, and then you hear the next phone in and I'd love it when someone came on, a young person came and, said this

is really interesting. How did they get to know this but most people don't. And we just worked hard at pushing and pushing, but none of us start, as you know being a vested interest in any part of the system. All of our spotlight has always been on young people's journeys and families' experiences as well. And I hope that comes through.

### Claire Burns

Great, thanks very much, Anne. Just shifting a bit to the workforce. Now I was really struck by the way in which you described the ruthless business model and agility. And again, in our last seminar, with Alexis Jay, who chaired the Child Abuse Inquiry in England and the Rotherham Inquiry. And that was something that comes through really strongly from her and you were seeing this system needs to be just as agile and ruthless. So that says a lot about our workforces. So I wonder if you could say something about how, how ready, do you think our workforces are? How knowledgeable do you think they are? And what's what needs to be done to build that awareness of some of the issues that came through the inquiry?

### Anne Longfield

I think there's a lot to do here, from workforces in all parts of the workforce. Where you get a lot of schools where teachers and school staff will see these issues coming through the door, see, you know, the symptoms coming through the door. And often, they either won't understand what those signs could be, or don't have awareness of that, or indeed don't have time to deal with it. Or even if they do address it, there's no one there to refer to. And I think what we've seen over the last 10 years plus is that all of those agencies who could be working on that slightly more outreach aspect of their work, have all had reduced budgets. And that means everyone's kind of gone into their core business. So you know, the school staff have all gone into what they have to do, the social care staff just all had to retract into that the police likewise, so the gaps in between, which needs glue, have all kind of become much bigger, and of course, it is the vulnerable kids that fall through those gaps. So in terms of understanding what these issues are and how young people experienced these issues, understanding the context and again, that ruthless agility that these businesses take. Understanding and having models of response if you like, that professionals feel confident in, that feel backed up within and, you know, have the green light about using. Certainly, it seemed to me that with social care, working with families, at points of crisis, you had to be pretty confident to do that, because you'd be out on your own, you know, it wasn't a model that was highly proven, you wouldn't probably have lots of people backing you up. You wouldn't need to be completely risk averse to do it, if you've got good confidence and judgement and you, you know, you've got lots of experience, that's a different matter. And when it comes to, you know, foster care, then they just didn't have, don't have those skills within the workforce, to be able to support these young people. So of course, placements break down. So I think on every level, there is a need for greater awareness, greater understanding of whose responsibility it is because often we would hear of, you know, young people are maybe working with 20

professionals, but actually, it wasn't clear who had lead responsibility to keep that young person safe. And we see that in serious case reviews, that come up with dreadful experiences. So we really believe there need to be a much tighter and greater clarity about that multi agency responsibility and who has, who holds that responsibility, who holds that lead relationship with that young person. But, you know, let's be in no doubt, there are people who will be looking for kids who are walking home from school, looking miserable, not being able to go into the shop and get some chips. And they might see them three nights, and on the fourth night, they'll buy him a bag of chips. And it's as simple as that. And it's all a process. And the level of debt bond that is instantly manufactured because it's just a curation that happens as part of the process is a control factor. And if that child wants to get out of that, and they find that very difficult, then there's a price to pay. We heard from some parents who were paying their way out of a debt bond for a child, it might have been for £400 or so. Heard from a young woman yesterday who paid the price to get out of that situation as she described it. It was a gang rape. It was a transaction she felt that was her only choice to be able to live with. It was her second gang rape by the way. You know, these are the kinds of experiences that most of us as adults hope we will never experience in our lives, nor any of people we know and love... you know, these are the most horrific experiences. I want, one of the emphasis on youth workers is that they are the ones who are trained to spot the signs, when kids are struggling, or feeling unhappy, or, you know, withdrawing, and they are the ones with the skills to be able to make those connections. That's why for every, you know, we're going to get 10,000 more police out there looking for the looking for young people. Well, actually, they're like, 10,000 youth workers to be working with them to be able to get to those kids before exploiters can,

### Claire Burns

Thanks Anne, I think you've just brought us into the real brutal realities of you know, what it is that you are recording, and I think that's so important, and I was actually going to pick up that very issue about youth and community workers. I think how you've articulated that piece about when budgets are so restricted, everybody goes to the core business, but actually what we know from what you're saying, and also going back to the Rotherham Inquiry, it was Youth and Community workers who first picked up levels of vulnerability, levels of risk, so going back to an investment in there is a preventative investment. Just one other question for me. You've said, we know, you've been very clear about the fact that the report is only the start, you know, how do we actually change the practice, change the culture, implement these? What do you think you learned about what it will take to implement? You talked a bit about funding, I was really interested about the kind of COBRA style kind of response as well. But we've been talking a lot in Scotland, particularly with The Promise about what it's going to take to implement. So what do you think you learned alongside funding about what this is going to take, again, thinking about some of the things you've seen around cross party support?

### Anne Longfield

I mean, ultimately, it kind of reaffirmed to me what I knew that actually, it takes political will. What it also reaffirmed me was that, you know, the question is, what will it take to get the attention and secure that political will at the highest level? What will it take? This was from our title as well in plain sight, because if you live in those communities, if you look, you can see this happening, you could see that 10s of 1000s of young people who are experiencing this violence. Some are losing their lives, virtually all of them have diminished life chances as a result. You know, it's not just those individuals, communities and families that are suffering, you know, we all want our society to be strong and productive as possible. So, what will it take? And, you know, it worries me, it shocks me that we haven't got to the point of tipping that balance into will, with what we know, and the headlines we've seen over recent years. So it reaffirmed the political will, I guess, it also reaffirmed to me that it is doable. So the will to do it is huge. And I think all of those different agencies, you know, if you look at health, if you look at mental health, and the like, you know, they would all play their part. Some of them are way off being having the capacity to do that. But they would all play their part, because I think everyone at this point knows that the way we have at the moment, isn't meeting the needs of these kids. And it would be doable, but it needs to have a framework of engagement, it needs to have the political will, and it needs to have funding behind it. And I don't think it all is all about funding. But I do think there needs to be transition funding to get us from the place where there's a, you know, most of the money goes in crisis intervention, leaving very little for anything else. We have to have transition money to be able to carry on doing that, but also to start that proper preventative work and early intervention.

### Claire Burns

Great, thanks very much, Anne. You must feel like you're getting interviewed for a job. If you are, you are doing really well. So just some of the questions. Quite a specific question here about a recent increase in curfews for our teenagers who are involved where there is a concern about exploitation. But actually young people are telling us that they are less likely to approach for help or support to come home when they're feeling unsafe because of this. Because they can't face doing a weekend or something. Is that something that you were aware of? Do you have any views around that?

### Anne Longfield

So the notion being that you don't go look for support, because if you do, you'll end up with a curfew. I mean, there were so many things that I guess this slightly, you know, if you start with a kind of, if you start with the criminal justice approach, if you start with a police approach, then there's all sorts of unintended consequences you get from there. You know, often people would say to me, Well, you know, at least it's doing something and I kind of get that I don't be overly critical of interventions, if you like that, basically we are really worried about what the problem is, and what on earth can we do. But unless you look at these things in the round, just having some kind of measure that responds to



one element of this, just knock something else off course. So yeah, kids not being confident about coming forward and asking for help. So that's why there needs to be this joined up approach and system in my view. And it's one that has well-being and welfare as its starting points, rather than criminal justice. But clearly, there's a role here for the police to play. And actually, we want the police to be really tough on those adult perpetrators that are making millions out of what they see is a cheap and accessible commodity in kids.

### Claire Burns

Thanks very much, Anne. And again, this is again, something that I'm interested in as well. But somebody's asked the question, I think about data that's collected, but I think just generally about the.. So something about data but the question is asked about the categorization and child sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation. And I think there's something there about how we sometimes use those interchangeably. And we're not clear about those two different categories. So the question is around those two categories and how we can become clear about them, and also anything you would want to say around data.

### Anne Longfield

Yeah. So if I just started with data, I should have mentioned data along the way. Clearly, there's a lot of gaps in data around young people, a lot of gaps in data about vulnerable young people. And when you layer that, which is absolutely essential in terms of identifying early in my view – and we are doing some really interesting work with universities about being able to have a kind of data led approach to improving outcomes. But also when you layer that alongside lack of information sharing, so the people in the A&E team in the hospital, they themselves have put together a data and information sharing agreement locally, where if a young woman is excluded from school and goes missing, they automatically get a mental health assessment locally, as a matter, of course, but that's something they've put together themselves, we don't normally have that. So the people who know about the child going missing aren't the same people that know about the child, being out of school, et cetera, et cetera. So don't have that joined up approach. In terms of categorization, I think, again, we need to understand that this at its heart is about child vulnerability. And the root causes and the underlying issues here are about vulnerability. That might be about poverty, it might be around vulnerabilities at home, it might be about special educational needs, it might be about self-esteem and confidence in that individual. And, yes, and then child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse are so often interlinked, in this they're part and parcel, especially when you look at girls. So I think we just need to be much more aware of the linkages here and aware of the root causes. And when it comes to categorization in terms of those referrals and police referrals, and the like, I just think we have much more nuanced about this. And understand that actually, one doesn't sit in a neat category over here and we just box that off, that actually there's a core issue of vulnerability. And this has to be what you

know, it's what we're seeing is sexual abuse, and criminal exploitation often. But actually, we have to understand that we're talking about a child being very vulnerable. One thing I should have said earlier as well is what often people will say is complex, you know, they've got complex needs. Complex are things that are challenging to the system, is the one that kind of usually makes my toes curl. But actually, a lot of those needs, they aren't complex, it is just that there are several of them. And you know, if there's four or five of them, often what we found was that they weren't getting support, because those four or five might have, they might have had multiple needs there. But actually, they weren't high enough to get through the threshold in any one of them. And that was a problem, because there were young people with a lot of experiences that were complicating their lives that they needed help on, but none of them broke through that one threshold, because it wasn't seemingly to the level of need enough.

### Claire Burns

We have had a question around Sure Start and, I think, a recognition that what you're proposing in terms of Sure Start Plus, I don't know, can't remember for terminology, and people are saying that's a great idea. You've talked about political will. I think we would all appreciate that politically that came from a particular party at a particular time. So you will be having to manage in that context. Is there political will for that, where is the most political will, in the recommendations that you made. So that's like a two parter around Sure Start but also, where can you see that you are starting to get a little bit of leverage?

### Anne Longfield

So I was very involved in Sure Start, I lobbied for it. I was seconded into the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit for a while to work out how we might do it. And my charity, when I went back, my charity ran quite a few of them. And actually, the ones that we ran, we ran about 100, where we could rather than be 0-5yrs, we actually extended them to 0-19yrs. So for me, it's just a very logical model. I mean, not least you get an engagement with families over possibly 20 years, rather than, you know, just a few years. So we deliberately chose I mean, you don't deliberately choose a name like that. You don't do accidentally to deliberately chose that. Partly, we deliberately chose it because we knew people would understand what it meant. And they did you know, when I talked to people about it, or did media work around it, no one said, what would this thing be? And we felt just saying another joined up partnership locally, you know, that was that didn't give it enough form, we needed to have something that people could get ahold of, and also that provoked a bit as well. So there is interest on the Sure Start for teenagers. Various teams in the opposition are interested in the home office team is interested in terms of prevention and youth crime and safeguarding. The Justice team are interested in it because if that worked, obviously there would be less funding requirement from the Justice team. The proposal around mental health hubs, Community Mental Health hubs, has recently been reaffirmed in terms of opposition around health. And whether it comes out as a top level or not, that joined up support that helps those children who are falling

out of education, but also those that are most likely to be one of the 20% that don't achieve in school at the moment, 20% leave school without basic levels of qualification, is also part of the discussion. So I'm feeling pleased with you know, they always say where's it docking? In these discussions? It's docking alright, it is docking in a number of places. And it's also what some of the more progressive areas and school systems are looking to do. You know, there's models around cradle to career, there's models that are looking at enhanced, multi agency partnerships locally. So for me, it's a logical thing to do. So I think it's in a good place. In terms of our government of the day, then there are certain elements around this probably, I would say around youth violence where there may be shoots to work, green shoots to work with, but what I would say is that, you know, especially when you look at England, we have one of the first contested elections for a long time. It's the first election for about 10 years that hasn't been around Brexit. So it's going to have much more of an emphasis on domestic policies. So it's all to pay for.

### Claire Burns

That's so interesting, Anne. I think that the way in which you've described Sure Start as being something that people were familiar with, they could conceptualise it, but there's so much of that that aligns with the evidence around how you bridge the implementation gap that actually it's a practice that we know. And it's quite explicit, and we would know how to scale it. So interesting that you've gone for something that had those elements. I hadn't quite thought of that, so really interesting. And I think people wanted to finish on being hopeful, you know. So, amongst all of this, where have you seen good practice, around recovery for family? So when families and young people come out with this, what does good recovery look like? And have you seen elements of good practice and recovery for them?

### Anne Longfield

Well, I'm an optimist, you know, as a starting point, which is probably a good thing. But essentially, what we saw throughout, when it worked was around long term relationships, you know, 18 months at a time, working with young people and with families. And what youth workers told me, well two things actually, one, they always said the level of incidents that are extreme, have increased in frequency since the pandemic. So what used to happen once a month now happens twice a week. And also in extremity. So that's the starting point, you know, everything is reset in a different place. They also said that, we're now we spend as much time working with families, as we do with young people. And I thought that was quite remarkable, because there would have been a time where, you know, youth workers didn't work with families. That just wasn't the way it was. But now there's that, you know, there's that understanding that actually working with families is going to help. So that long term support - there's a number of different examples we've seen, there's an organisation called Shift UK that work with, again, for an 18 month period, all about sticking with and providing those relationships, a move towards strength based work with families and young people at time of crisis. I mean, there are some local

authorities that we found where they stuck their necks out where there had been young people who actually had been, you know, were being charged with very, very serious offences. But actually, they've been able to wrap a tight and deep kind of ring of support around the families to enable them to be able to, you know, keep the person at home, but also safeguard, I think there is an interest and the start of development of that kind of halfway house and kind of pre-secure provision or pre-care provision that has the potential to be able to provide some respite for children and families, but doesn't mean the child has to go into care. So, I think there's going to be more of that. We went on a study tour to Norway and Scandinavia, just before the pandemic to see some of the work they were doing there. And I think there's so much to be gained there, if we can get more of that provision in place. And then some really good work. I mean, there's, you know, some of the violence reduction units are doing good work around that work around year five and year six, keeping you know, really working with, well, 9 -10-11 year olds to be able to work with them, to be able to build their confidence in being able to have that sense of agency. And there's some brilliant practice about inclusion and keeping kids in school. So there's one school, a primary school where, it's like, going into not just the community centre, it's like going in someone's living room. And there's always someone there working with families, they'll go to the housing office with parents to help them sort their housing, they have rows of clothes, they have, you know, all sorts of things there. And an Oasis project actually a hub around the school in Enfield where the staff talking about sweeping the kids out at the end of the evening, because they've stayed in school they're in at seven in the morning. They have about 100 children arrive at seven in the morning in the secondary school, they say because, it's safer there than in the parks. But there's also just a little kind of counter on that. There's also just wasted potential. So where we don't have youth clubs anymore, and in London there is a figure that half the youth clubs aren't there that used to be there 15 years ago. There were six murders in Croydon, which is just outside London, in 2021. And one of those happened just before New Year's Eve. It happened in a park next to a school about six o'clock in the evening, end of December. It was all dark, and the park was, you know, seen as a no go area. There was an empty house in that park in the middle, and the charity there had been asking to take over that building for a decade to make it into a youth centre for kids. And for a decade, they had been told it wasn't possible. If that hadn't been open, it would have been brimming with people around there, there would have been lights everywhere, there would have been things going on. And that's, you know, that wasted, wasted lives in this case, but also wasted opportunity. And so in my view, all of that, you know, we need to have just such a greater focus on all our responsibilities to make our communities safe and good places, not only just to protect kids, but help them succeed in life. And, you know, what our communities could be if we tried to make that possible.

### Claire Burns

That is such a powerful conclusion from you there, Anne. I think, how we re-think about youth and community workers use family and community to work and invest in that. So I

think we're going to stop there with the questions. And just to say, thanks so much for sharing your time and your expertise with us. And I'm sure to speak for everybody in saying we've got so much from this. And when we are in our work practice engaging with children and young people, where we are in places where we can influence we'll take lots of this in with us, so thank you.

[Anne Longfield](#)

I just think, you know, we've all got agency. We use that agency in whatever place we're in, but also, it is possible. So you know, agitation, in the best possible way, wherever we are, I guess, is part of that. But you know, imagine what we could get to if we all decided this was possible. And that was that will lead to make it happen. But thank you so much. It's been great.

[Claire Burns](#)

Thank you. I'll take away agency and agitation as our concepts for the day to take forward. Thanks so much Anne, it's been a pleasure.

[Anne Longfield](#)

Thank you.

[Claire Burns](#)

Thanks to everyone else for coming.

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