



Keeping Children and Young People Safe in Manchester



Summer 2023





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Keeping Children and Young People Safe in Manchester

This document sets out the early collaborative work being undertaken by a group of organisations and individuals in Manchester. This group has come together to consider their own roles, relationships with each other and the wider system, and what can be done to respond to the challenges faced by young people if we genuinely listen to what they have already told us.

The organisations involved are listed at the back of the document, but our key focus as a group is how we work as a collaborative and what it means to work together differently. This has been enabled by support from BBC Children in Need, and held by Young Manchester.

What does it mean for young people to feel safe in the city?

We know why young people don't feel safe.

They have told us many, many times.

They have told us what a lack of safety feels like, how it connects to different issues and concepts that effect their lives.

We already have a Shared Goals framework, shaped by young people, for thinking about what young people need (*see next page*).

And they have told us in great detail what their lives are like as a result of that lack of safety.

They have made it clear that for children and young people to feel safe:

- The **responsibility lies with professionals and key adults** involved and the systems they are part of
- To **understand and centre the reality of young people** at risk of experiencing serious violence
- And **respond in ways that make them feel like they matter**, are listened to, and are supported



Shared Goals Framework

This framework was developed by a group of organisations and supported by Social Finance. It brought together an enormous amount of feedback from young people about how they wanted provision to function, how they wanted to feel, and what the support offered to them should look to achieve. All the organisations involved in our work want to adopt and use this framework.

I want to feel safe, respected, hopeful and supported

I feel safe

Young people don't feel safe on their own streets. They are worried about the impact of violence on them and their communities. They are few safe spaces for them to go and they feel targeted by the police.

- There is less violent crime affecting my community
- There are safe spaces for me to go, I feel safe walking around and travelling to / from home
- I feel that the police and other professionals protect me and don't see me as part of the problem

I feel respected

Young people wanted to feel respected by their peers and the system but are disrespected by damaging stereotypes enacted upon them by police and other professionals. They are pressured to live up to the reputation of their communities.

- I feel respected by police and professionals and I'm not unfairly targeted by stop and search
- My voice is respected – my peers and I are treated as experts by professionals on issues that affect us
- I feel respected by the media

I feel hopeful

Young people feel like they have little opportunity in life. Services have been cut, blocking routes to success. Exclusions are common and have huge consequences. In comparison to dwindling job opportunities, crime can feel like a quick way to make money. The media are quick to show negative stereotypes.

- My education sets me up to be successful and aligns with my strengths and interests
- I have access to good, long-term jobs and opportunities to develop important skills
- I see and speak to successful people from my background

I feel supported

Young people have little trust in the system, besides youth workers. They distrust schools, who they feel are quick to remove them from education. They feel that they have taken the brunt of service cuts, but are blamed for the consequences. They want people to recognise the need to solve underlying issues.

- I feel supported in every facet of my life, including education and my mental health
- I can access support whenever I need it – delivered by people who genuinely understand me
- I feel like I can trust the system to work together to support me

Mapping existing provision

Direct engagement with young people – how does provision and practice help young people to feel safe, respected, hopeful and supported?
Commissioners and funders: Which services do we commission and fund that are specifically designed to make young people feel SRHS?

Deliver new provision

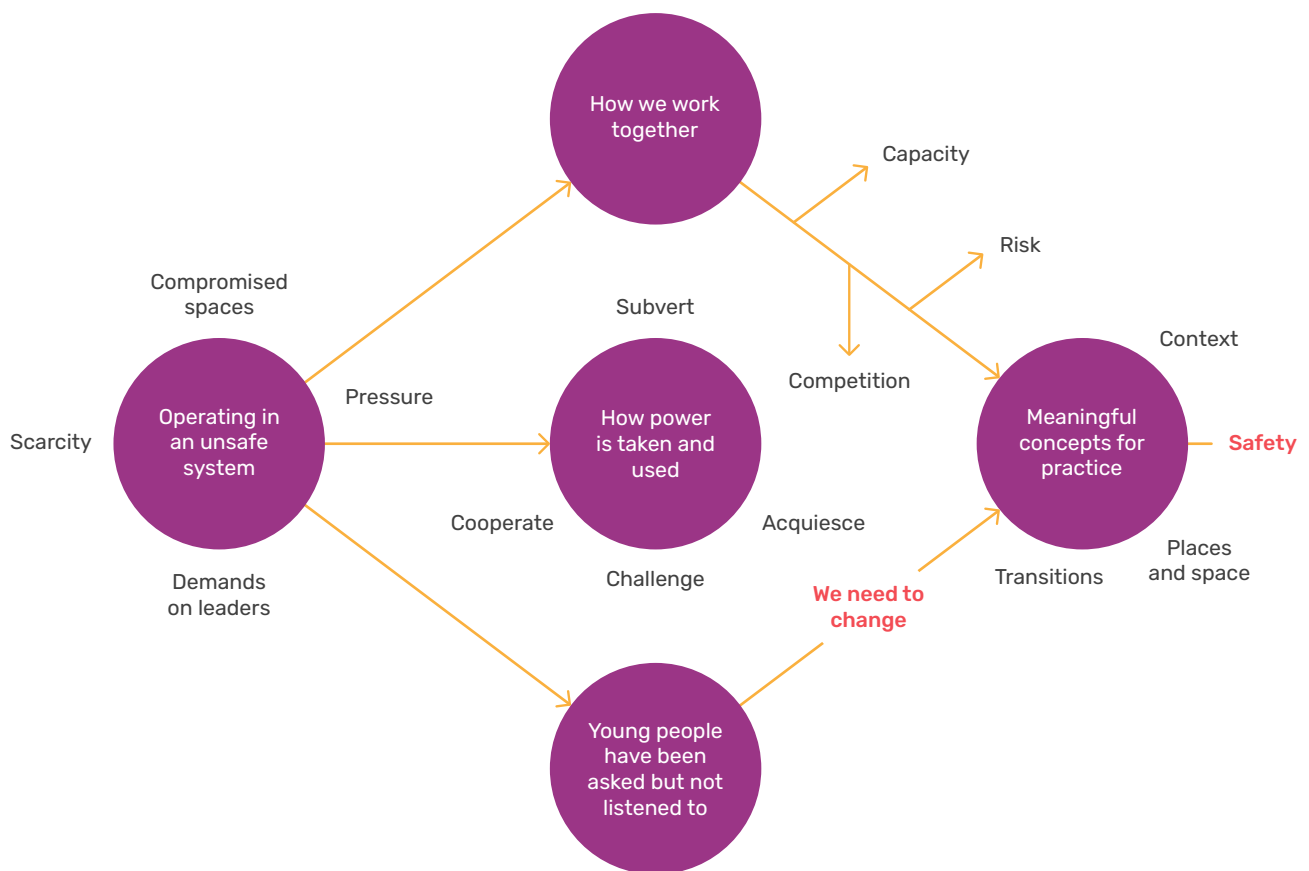
Direct engagement with young people: What services can we put in place that align with these goals?
Commissioners and funders: What services can we commission or fund that align with these goals?

Illustration of impact

Direct engagement with young people: What measures do we have/can we implement that will reflect how young people feel progress is being made?
Commissioners and funders: What measures do we have/can we implement that illustrate impact at the service and portfolio level?

Threads of learning

The rest of this document describes our ambitions, but we start with what we have learnt to date and what we will do with it. We meet every two months for an afternoon to discuss, share, interrogate and question ourselves and our work. Through this deep work together, we have started to learn something new. We have pulled together some key threads of our learning about ourselves and how we are working before building a proposition of what we will do.



1. The first thread was around the **feelings of operating in an unsafe system** and how those feelings needed to be acknowledged even if we couldn't always do much about them. Leaders talked about how the system felt unsafe for the children and young people they were there to support and many others. Unsafety was experienced by:

- Leaders, who needed to think about their roles, and where they got support from
- Spaces for children and young people, and how they were frequently surrounded by and interacting with environments and other people who were very unsafe
- How the pressure on people and organisations to deliver, to support and to keep going despite a scarcity of resource, meant that organisations themselves felt unsafe

Threads of learning

2. How **power is taken and used** is the first blockage to us moving away from that experience of unsafety. The system we operate in of funding, of how young people are understood and talked about, of how change is valued, all does a number of things to organisations working to change that system:

- It subverts their work by pushing it towards funder views
- It forces them to camouflage more radical and oppositional work
- It reduces the reasons for cooperation because of scarcity
- It encourages acquiescence with work that doesn't align with values



3. The first way around that block is a recurring thread: we don't need to ask young people the same things, **as young people have already told us what they think and feel**, but we do need to hear it and **do something with it**.

4. The second way around that is how **we work together with other organisations** and think about cooperation. That is hard because everyone is limited in capacity, competition happens for resources even when we don't want it to, and all organisations are different and have to take different risks about their work which can pull us apart. One might campaign, another might deliver, another might drive accountability – but all have their roles to play.

5. This has left us with a set of meaningful concepts for practice that we want to lean into:

- **Context matters** hugely for our young people, sometimes place, but sometimes not, and we must be highly contextually aware in how we act
- **Safety** is far more important a frame than violence. The language of youth violence portrays young people as the perpetrators of violence when they are much more likely to be the victims. We are aiming for safety in our places, spaces and relationships
- **Places and spaces** are hugely important for what we do, how young people experience their world and where they do and don't feel safe
- **Transitions** (such as between schools) are where services often fail young people and where points of less safety can be amplified.

The final thing that we have learnt throughout this time is that the context that we are working in has got worse for organisations. There have been delays to commissioning, there has been a worsening situation for young people around cost of living, and that has all put pressure on the organisations involved. It has made it even harder to collaborate and work together than we imagined.



Proposition

How can we pull the threads into something new?

The starting point is to understand **who** we are going to target our thinking on and why.

Our discussions focused on **targeting young people at c ages 8-12**, as the transition from primary to secondary school was recognised as a key point of intervention. We identified several groups of young people whose safety is not currently being well supported: **young men from a Black background with SEND, White working-class young men, and young people from the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities.**

Isolation, a lack of trusted adult support, and limited or no engagement with provision were identified as key issues which affect the safety of these young people. The Covid-19 pandemic also compounded these issues, as young people are spending more time in their homes and experiencing marginalisation and structural racism.

With that starting point, there are four areas that we agreed to progress

Data:	What data exists to define, understand, and identify the young people we are talking about?
Service mapping:	Do we have a clear map of what services are currently meant to help them – what do we think of the spectrum we sketched?
Advocate:	Who else do we need involved in this – either in the room with us, or not in the room but a point of targeting?
Promote and celebrate:	What great work already achieves our vision? What can we point to and say ‘more of this’?

We are going to build up a range of actions to start to push for change in these areas and are aware that we are going to have to explore it in different ways and iterate. But that group of young people are, in our view, underserved by the system.

Ambitions

This sort of work has to start from ambition. The organisations involved in this learning work are united by a balance of realism about the realities that young people and the organisations that support them are facing, but also ambition that things can and should be better.

It's not about better coordinating a system.
The system's fucked.

In recent years a range of organisations and agencies in Manchester have been working with young people around their safety, the personal and collective support of youth work, and young people taking action in their communities and in response to their beliefs and ambitions. This has been coordinated through the Keeping Children and Young People Safe steering group and sustained by the Embedding Youth Social Action (EYSA) in Community Safety Fund, with support from Children in Need and coordination from Young Manchester. The organisations involved can be found at the back of this document. The EYSA fund has the following aims:

- To contribute to long-term efforts to reduce the violence that impacts upon children and young people
- To better understand the role of youth social action in tackling violence that impacts upon children and young people
- To build and test new funding models that place children and young people at the centre

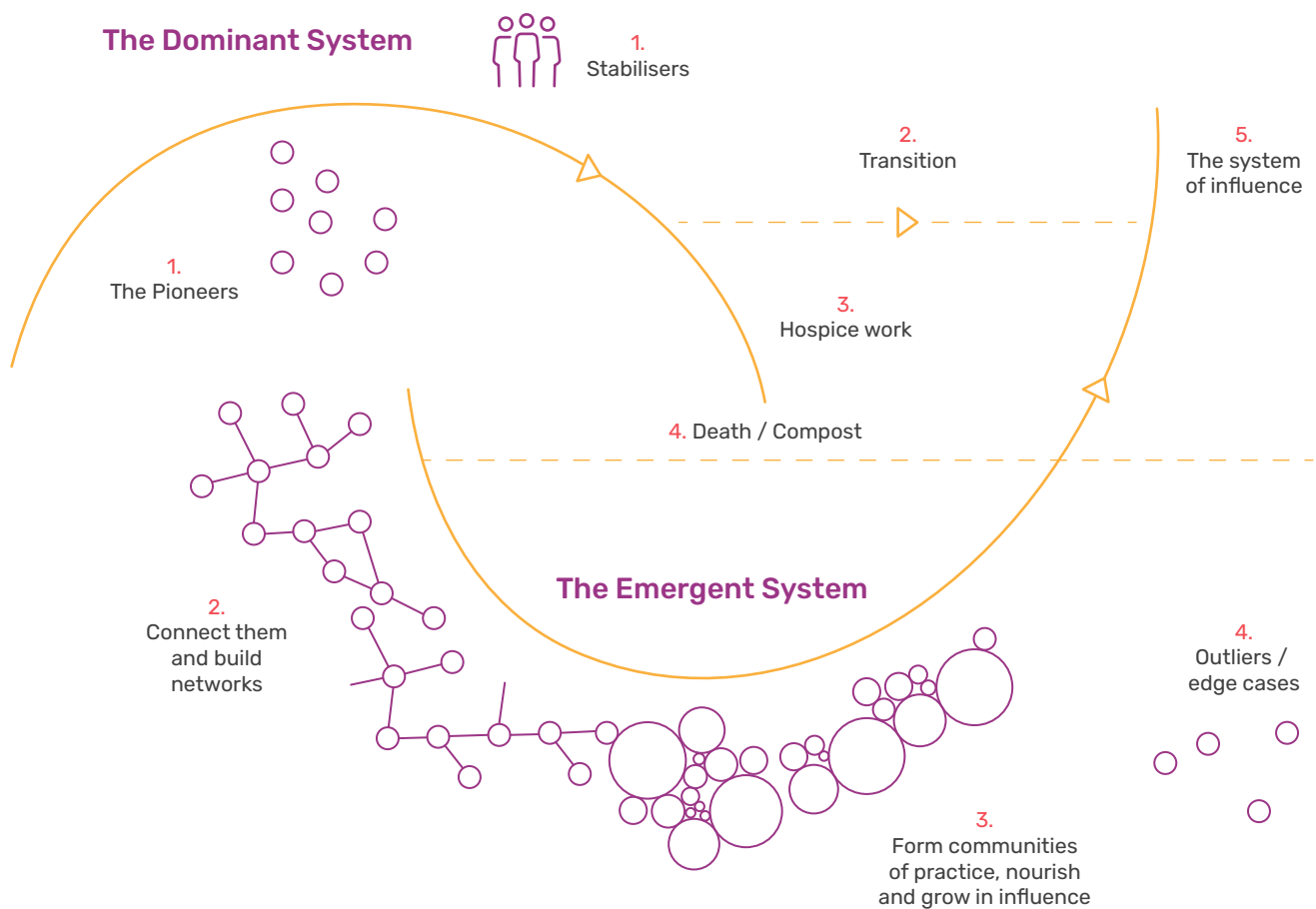
The work of the Keeping Children and Young People Safe group is informed by and builds on the findings of RECLAIM project's Listening to the Experts report. Close consultation and collaboration with young people highlighted the pillars that made up the Shared Goals framework.

Part of this work includes groups of young people coming together to create direct projects and approaches to reduce violence and champion social action.

The central stream of the work is collective, collaborative, learning and reflection. The bulk of this document sets out what the group is doing to respond to the challenges of the system through learning and reflection and how actors can work together to think differently about how a system works – and then change it.

Working differently to think differently

We are influenced by the idea that for a dominant system to be challenged, a range of people and organisations must come together to build networks and pioneer a new emergent system. This two-loop model comes from the Berkana Institute and has been widely used elsewhere.²



As a model it encourages us to see the value in connecting and building networks between organisations and individuals that would like to create a new way of

understanding and working, even at a time when a dominant system of working feels impossible to challenge.

How we are working together

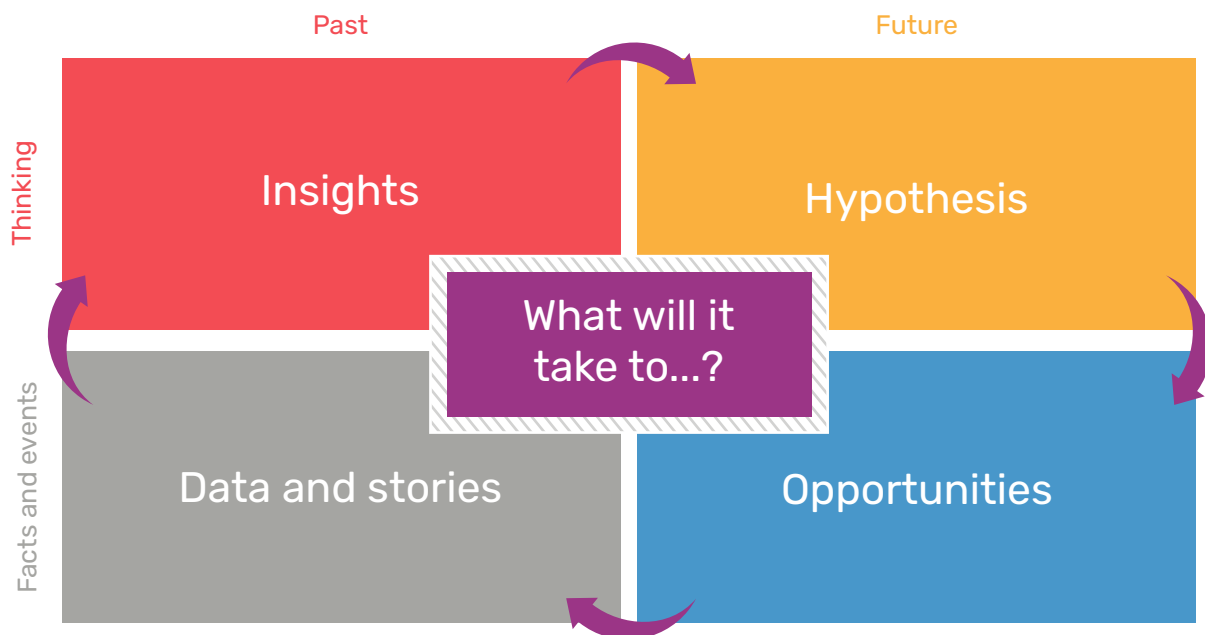
It begs the challenge: how do you create a process to think about this when you are in a system of operating that encourages you to behave and act in the way that you always have?

We have been working together on a regular cycle of learning that is both supportive, exploratory and developmental.

We have used Emergent Learning Tables as our tool. It is a methodology that is always centred on a 'What would it take...?' question. The group aims to answer that by listening to and hearing data and stories from different perspectives, then collectively analysing and interpreting what they have heard in relation to the question. The group then generates hypotheses about what it would take before deciding on future actions.

This approach is designed to balance reflection and learning with action.

We have found this a continually useful tool in our learning work across complex systems because of the way in which it is structured to give equal value to different perspectives throughout the learning. It doesn't matter what organisation, level, background or perspective you come from, everyone has something to bring to help us answer a 'what would it take' question.



How we are working together

The method has centred on experience, trust building, sharing, listening, provocations and contemplation. Nothing new comes from being stuck in inertia, and we all believe that we have to operate differently to build something new.

In our sessions to date, these cycles have built upon each other like spirals, as we've discussed:

1. The **systems** we operate in
2. The role of **power**
3. The potential value of **place**

By the end of the third session, it was clear that there is an opportunity for us to think differently about safety for young people in the city, and we wanted to move into something clear and practical. Reflection and action for those involved has to be balanced, and at times it can feel slow, but is now coming together.

This is part of our plan of eighteen months of learning and in the fourth session we are building up practical steps to develop a collective approach to young people's safety, drawing from our discussions in earlier sessions.

In March, we built on the reflection, and changed the structure to begin some practical steps.

Learning Question		When?
1	What would it take to have a shared understanding and definition of the system we're working in?	September '22
2	What would it take collectively to understand better and challenge the power dynamics in how young people's safety is defined in Manchester?	November '22
3	What would it take to appreciate and use the value of place in this work?	January '23
4	What practical steps are needed to develop a collective approach to safety with young people's experiences at its heart?	March '23
5	What would it take to work and learn as a system rather than as individual organisations?	May '23
6	What would it take to understand, value and improve impact across the whole system?	July '23
7	What would it take to build a model of collective impact that is sustainable in Manchester and/or scalable beyond?	September '23
8	What would it take to continue this work?	November '23

The process ahead

We are now in our second cycle and want to keep developing this momentum.

We are looking to use this document to acknowledge what we are learning, to highlight where we are going, and encourage others to join us.

We are not finished. We don't present this as an easy, neat answer. It is not.

This work is too important to take lightly, but we know that there are lots of reasons why we might not succeed.

If you are interested in helping us over the year ahead, please get in touch with Young Manchester:

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Collaborators

There are a range of organisations involved in developing this work in Manchester.



youngmanchester.org



reclaim.org.uk



bbcchildreninneed.co.uk



manchesteryz.org



4ctltd.blogspot.com



m13youthproject.org.uk

