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WEST MIDLANDS VIOLENCE REDUCTION UNIT EVALUATION

Serious Youth Violence pathfinder:
Evaluation report



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KITCHEN TABLE TALKS

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Executive Summary

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) is working to support the improvement of frontline services through grants and activity that target system-wide challenges. This involves a 'pathfinder' approach whereby local authorities and partners can pilot, develop and disseminate whole system solutions. The YJB has funded a pathfinder programme in the West Midlands overseen by the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit (WMVRU) in conjunction with the seven West Midlands (PCC area) Youth Offending Teams (YOTs).

In September 2020 First Class Foundation were commissioned, through a competitive tender process, to deliver their Kitchen Table Talks programme across the seven YOTs. First Class Foundation describe Kitchen Table Talks as a culturally competent, psychologically informed peer to peer outreach programme supporting and working closely with the parents of young people involved with the Youth Justice System. Acting as a bridge between the parents and the YOS, the service is designed to support the parents of those most at risk of reoffending by helping them to understand the youth justice system, being a sounding board and relaying information back to the YOS to help the service better understand and support the parents.

The evaluation is investigating *if* and *how* the development and delivery of Peer Support networks for parents is:

- working towards reduction in offending/reoffending and reducing the seriousness of offences
- improving the quality of relationships between parent/carer and the child
- influencing parents' confidence, knowledge, wellbeing, parenting style, engagement

The evaluation also seeks to understand parent's experience of the project, taking into account the cultural responsiveness of the project. A *process* and *impact* evaluation will investigate *if* and *how*, and identify any barriers to success. . This report presents findings from the initial qualitative data collection. Good progress has been made on accessing quantitative data and subsequent reports will present analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative findings.

Findings

The Kitchen Table Talks team have achieved a substantial amount in a relatively short space of time. Qualitative feedback and insights are overwhelmingly positive and the team should be commended for this. The engaging offer, independence from the YOTs, responsiveness of the team, and tapering of support, were highlighted as particularly positive. There is a need to continually review group composition to ensure parents feel able to engage. Parents report feeling supported and empowered and Kitchen Table Talks has the potential to be transformative where parents are encouraged to take a more active role in designing their own solutions. First Class Legacy are well placed to meaningfully involve a diverse range of community members in restorative practices.

The commissioning of Kitchen Table Talks through the WMVRU and YJB reflects a contemporary shift where parents are seen as having the potential to become part of the

solution. It is important in the next phase of the evaluation to quantitatively explore impact and outcomes on parents and children. The next evaluation report will also consider the Centre for Justice Innovation cost avoidance tool.

At this stage of the evaluation the recommendations focus primarily on developing referrals to Kitchen Table Talks to ensure the programme is fully utilised and rolled out further in some YOTs. At the time of reporting, YOT support for Kitchen Table Talks wasn't always reflected in referral rates. YOT referral barriers centred on current delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, perceived barriers related to the inability to engage in 'face to face befriending', parental familiarity with online meetings, and maintaining staff awareness of the programme while home working. Promoting the programme to parents with the most complex life circumstances was difficult, although these parents might be likely to benefit the most.

Recommendations and points to consider

- That YOT senior managers acknowledge and share with their teams the key points from this evaluation about the innovation of the Kitchen Table Talks approach and how it differs from other parenting offers
- Referrals processes vary at different YOT locations. While this is appropriate as the YOTs have very different profiles, there is a clear need to formally and informally share good practice to increase referrals
- YOTs could be asked to produce a short action plan to support referrals, and provide updates against it at working group meetings
- Referrals numbers have been highest where there is buy-in and active support from senior managers within YOTs. All YOTs should ensure senior managers are briefed on Kitchen Table Talks and actively support referrals
- In larger YOTs consideration should be given to appointing several Kitchen Table Talks Staff Ambassadors
- The referral process operates the most effectively when a Kitchen Table Talks representative is available at the YOT while cases were being discussed
- There is a need to maintain a high profile for the programme to promote referrals. We note that Kitchen Table Talks are producing new materials, including videos of parents talking about the programme
- All YOTs should acknowledge that Kitchen Table Talks has the potential to facilitate effective and constructive communication between parents and YOTs
- As England moves out of the current lockdown, renewed promotional activity should be undertaken to remind staff of the Kitchen Tables Talks provision. Highlighting the welcoming, safe and inclusive face-to-face programme delivery mode will be particularly important for those practitioners who view online programme delivery as problematic
- YOTs are encouraged to consider the potential for collaborative working with parents involved with Kitchen Table Talks, for example through peer mentoring recognition

Authors

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Dr Jane Booth is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Wolverhampton. Her research interests are community engagement and co-production. She is currently working on a collaborative project with University of Bradford called "Dying to Talk" working co-productively with young people aged 14-19 years to co-design resources to get young people talking more comfortably about death, dying and bereavement. She has previously worked in the voluntary sector, managing the project "Women in Governance" in South West London, providing training and mentoring for women from disadvantaged backgrounds to get involved in decision-making, and she was Project Manager of a parent participation project for a national autism charity.

Dr Mark Monaghan is a Reader in Criminology and Social Policy at the University of Birmingham. His work mainly focuses on the links between evidence and policy in the area of illicit drugs, violence reduction and youth justice. He is influenced by the use and application of realist methods. Mark has received funding from the ESRC and the Nuffield Foundation.

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1. Background: The Serious Youth Violence Pathfinder

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) is working to support the improvement of frontline service through grants and activity that target system-wide challenges. This involves a 'pathfinder' approach whereby local authorities and partners can pilot, develop, and disseminate whole system solutions. The YJB has funded a pathfinder programme in the West Midlands, overseen by the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit (WMVRU) in conjunction with the seven West Midlands (PCC area) Youth Offending Teams (YOTs).

Purpose of the project

The project's purpose is to create and facilitate parental peer support networks across the West Midlands YOTs delivery areas that can be accessed, and ultimately facilitated, by parents with children known to, or at risk of, involvement with the youth justice system. The offer should be an appropriate blend of virtual and physical meetings (with a physical presence required in each of the areas). The project will also be evaluated and contribute to regional and national learning.

Aims

The ultimate aim of the project is to contribute to the reduction of serious youth violence across the areas. This is related to a theory of change which aims to demonstrate that positive engagement of parents, through increasing their skills and resilience, will lead to better support for their child. This positive engagement with YOTs will make it less likely they will need to re-offend or prevent an engagement. An aspiration would be that this also has a knock on effect for siblings. Appreciating that reductions in offending take time, the provider will need to work with the evaluation team and the YOTS to show a blend of quantitative and qualitative measures which demonstrate progress and outcomes.

Year 1

- To co-create and co-design supportive spaces for parents in each area to share experiences and learn from each other, building personal resilience using a solution focused approach
- To build an online offer to compliment the physical support sessions
- To reduce isolation of parents who have children open to or at risk of involvement with the youth justice system
- To deliver and co-deliver awareness raising sessions to parents about key topics they felt they needed help with
- To develop a forum which encourages parent participation in decisions about statutory service delivery and creates a bridge between parents and the YOS/CJS for better working relationships
- To be inclusive and to empower parents
- To be proactive in removing barriers (such as finance, transport, childcare) so that they are able to participate within this forum
- To evaluate and share good practice/learning in conjunction with the overall YJB terms of grant to the VRU

Year 2

As above, plus:

- To identify and upskill parents within the networks to become facilitators of sessions and create further networks thereby increasing the capacity of the offer to build sustainability
- To co-develop training to empower and upskill parents within the networks
- To broaden access to include wider referral sources (ASB teams/Pupil Referral Units or self-referral for example)
- To work with the YOTS, the VRU and those engaged with the project to seek sustainability of funding

The project builds on a local small-scale project that is identified as good practice on the YJB resource hub. The pathfinder aims to take the potential of that experience and build on it across the region, strengthening the peer led element. Parents can be more involved in the design and facilitation of the sessions and ultimately create their own support networks. Once established in each area, an additional element of this project is to broaden the eligibility of those who can attend to include parents who may not be quite as familiar with the youth justice system, thereby expanding the model in to an earlier intervention space.

A working group has been established with representation from all the seven West Midlands PCC area YOTs.

In September 2020 First Class Foundation were commissioned, through a competitive tender process, to deliver their Kitchen Table Talks programme across the seven YOTs.

2. Kitchen Table Talks

Overview provided by First Class Foundation

First Class Foundation, formerly First-Class Legacy Ltd, was set up in April 2019, building on 15 years' experience. First Class Foundation exists to support families and young people in three key areas:

1. To reduce youth violence
2. Improve mental health resilience
3. Connecting families to their purpose through exposure to positive activities, jobs, training and apprenticeships

Serving the West Midlands, and being a Birmingham based organisation, First Class Foundation provides lasting solutions to a range of service providers helping them engage, connect and build lasting relationships with those in the community deemed traditionally hard to engage.

The organisation has actively engaged and successfully supported people who have experienced some of the well documented issues within Birmingham, including knife and gun crime, Child Criminal Exploitation, county lines, drug trafficking, sexual grooming, and drugs grooming. First Class Foundation work with young people and adults to support them in exploring alternative lifestyles and to provide them with a range of resilience strengthening tools that they can use. The success of the approach has been due to how they address the thinking, attitude and behaviour of the individuals that they support.

Kitchen Table Talks

First Class Foundation describes Kitchen Table Talks as a culturally competent and psychologically informed peer to peer outreach programme. Supporting and working closely with the parents of young people involved with the Youth Justice System they act as a bridge between parents and the YOS. Kitchen Table Talks is recognised by the Youth Justice Board: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/working-with-children-and-families/item/650-working-with-parents-kitchen-table-talks-sandwell-yos.html>

The service is designed to support the parents of those most at risk of reoffending, by helping them to understand the youth justice system, being a sounding board and relaying information back to the YOS to help the service better understand and support the parents. See promotional video <https://youtu.be/mY8TFBWRRA> and Figure 1 (over page: Kitchen Table Talks Flyer).



Kitchen Table

T A L K S



WHO ARE WE?

Kitchen Table Talks is a service dedicated to supporting parents of young people who come through the Youth Offending Service. We are very flexible, understanding and dedicate themselves on making sure you feel as supported as possible.



WHAT DO WE DO?

We hold informal face to face and online forums - as a group, with other parents, or 1 to 1 home visits. Due to COVID-19, we have gone online and set up video support groups instead. We support parents by providing them with assistance and any relevant information as well signpost you to any service or programme you may require.




WHAT'S THE PROCESS?

We will text you first to schedule a call to talk about how we can support you in more detail. During that call we will introduce ourselves and check-in with you to see how you are doing.


WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

Once your case worker has referred you, it would be greatly beneficial for you to engage with the Kitchen Table Talks service as parents have appreciated having a platform and a space to speak and share their experiences with others, that have had very similar situations with their children.




WHO WILL CONTACT YOU?

You will be contacted by one of our Family Support Practitioners - they will be your first port of call.



HOW OFTEN DO WE CONTACT?

We will either call, text and send you helpful information, on a weekly basis. You can also contact us as and when you need to.



@KITCHENTABLETALKSUK



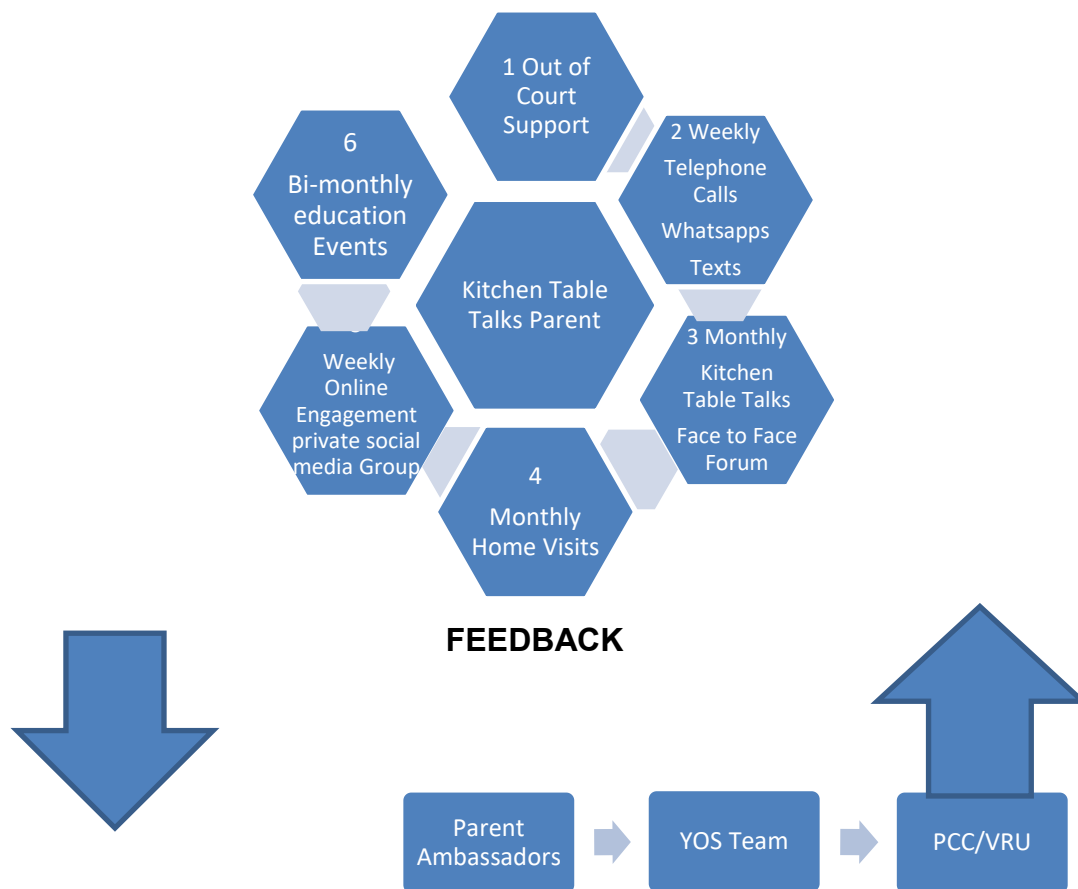
@KITCHENTTALKS



@_TABLETALKS

Figure 1: Kitchen Table Talks Flyer

Figure 2: Kitchen Table Talks Delivery Model



Below describes pre-Covid delivery:

1 Out of Court Support

Family Support Practitioner attends out of court panel to introduce the service and make first contact.

2 Weekly Telephone, WhatsApp, Text

Upon completed referral, family support practitioner will contact parents and begin engagement.

3 Monthly Forum

Parents are invited to monthly forums to supportively share their experiential learning with each other and gather information for professionals around the Youth Justice System should. We identify an appropriate venue to support open and guided discussion with refreshments included. Free for referrals to access.

4 Monthly Home Visits

For parents who cannot attend a forum, or who may not be ready to engage with us in a wider group, we offer home visits to break the ice and offer support.

Weekly Online Engagement

Delivered using Zoom for those who cannot attend, parents can watch it back through the private Facebook group where sessions are uploaded. Example webinar:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-Oj4K1RKOk>

3. Evaluation overview

The evaluation is investigating *if* and *how* the development and delivery of Peer Support networks for parents is:

- working towards reduction in offending/reoffending and reducing the seriousness of offences.
- improving the quality of relationships between parent/carer and the child.
- influencing parents' confidence, knowledge, wellbeing, parenting style and engagement.

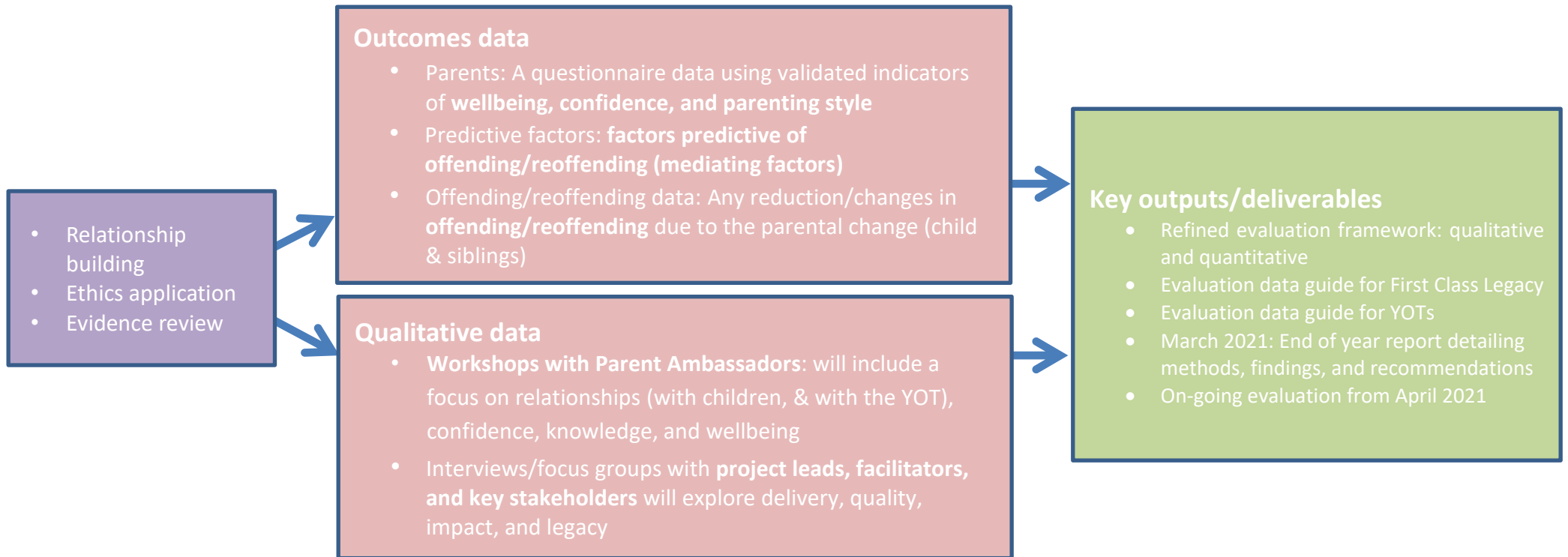
The evaluation also seeks to understand parent's experience of the project by taking into account the cultural responsiveness of the project. Investigating *if* and *how*, and identifying any barriers to success will be done through a *process* and *impact* evaluation. We are taking a mixed-methods approach to evaluating the project, being responsive to the practical and operational developments within the project delivery, amending the evaluation plan as appropriate while still maintaining the core requirements for robust evidence.

Impact evaluation: We are working with beneficiaries to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences and we will place the findings within the appropriate research evidence base and policy-context. We will gather quantitative data, and use a comparison group design, where appropriate, working with data already obtained and routinely collected by YOTs.

Process evaluation: This element will focus on understanding how and how efficiently, with specific reference to implementation of the project through the WMVRU, the project has evolved and the relationship between this and the outcomes/impact. Qualitative data will be collected through diaries and interviews with beneficiaries, staff, & other stakeholders, about the way the project has been developed, implemented and managed. This element will help the continued development of the project and identify any barriers to success.

We aim to make use of data already being collected by the seven YOTS, working closely with them to understand the data they already collect and the way they collect this data. We are experienced working with data from ChildView and Careworks and understand that some areas collect and manage their data in different ways. We are working closely with the Kitchen Table Talks team to integrate the collection of new data into delivery where appropriate, to reduce potential burden on the provider and participants increasing the amount and quality of data collected.

Figure 3: Evaluation Overview



4. Research context

Parenting and Youth Justice: Historical Context

Parents, young people and justice systems are inherently interwoven and transient, with the nature and extent of parental involvement impacted by broader social, economic and political factors as well as family resourcing. For example, prior to the emergence of childhood, the pre-industrial child engaged in work and leisure pursuits alongside adults and age-based culpability was poorly acknowledged in a criminal justice context. The emerging 'ideal child' was conceived as a passive, malleable vessel for moral and educational training, positioning parents, education and religious institutions as accountable. Yet economic hardship made it necessary for children in poor households to continue working and despite best intentions, notions of the 'delinquent child' first emerged. In attempts to improve working life and recognise age-based status, labour market regulation restricted child participation, presenting significant problems for poor families. Poor children increasingly inhabited the street, using alternative and sometimes illicit, ways of generating vital income. Restricted child labour market involvement also had the unintended consequence of reducing parental supervision, as parents worked longer to compensate for lost income.

Growing recognition of childhood as a distinctive life stage provided increasing justification for separate criminal justice treatment, with parental culpability creeping in alongside concerns with poverty and neglect. Piecemeal emergence of what we now refer to as the youth justice system illustrates an early example of connections between parents, young people and state based interventions under the rationale of being deprived or depraved. Long before the emergence of community-based treatment, two distinctive types of institutional settings emerged through the 1854 Youthful Offenders Act and 1857 Industrial Schools Act. Children entered reformatories if they had committed a criminal offence, and industrial schools if they were considered to be living in poverty or beyond control. Despite their impoverished status and enforced lack of daily contact with their children, parents of those in industrial schools were still obliged to provide financial support. These settings housed a significant volume of children with 30,000 children living in such settings by the year 1900. These developments suggest the treatment of children to be heavily socially situated, with family status and unattainable childhood ideals justifying state intervention *between* parents and children from the very outset. These early developments demonstrate the interconnectedness of parents, young people and justice interventions, with transient, structural causes clearly influential.

Punitive Parental Interventions

In the years preceding the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (HM Government 1998) attitudes towards parents and young people shifted, with tough, political rhetoric and sensationalist media coverage overlooking significant structural problems and holding families to account for the youth crime problem. In the 1980s political sympathies towards right realism increasingly connected youth criminality with family breakdown and moral deficiencies, with hardening of attitudes towards poor young people in particular. Prior to their electoral success of 1997, the Labour party challenged their reputation for being 'soft on crime' by developing an increasingly tough stance towards crime and young people in particular.

Shortly after entering office, the white paper 'No More Excuses' (UK Parliament 2020) described the need for a new response to the youth crime problem, with contemporary responses considered ineffective. Parents became formally implicated with Jack Straw, the then Home Secretary, describing the new Parenting Order:

"Families and responsibilities: we know that the single most important factor associated with youth criminality is the quality of a young person's home life—crucially, the relationship between parents and children, and the level of parental supervision. The parents of young people who offend or who are at risk of offending need particular support and guidance. They should also be made to face up to their responsibilities. A new parenting order will therefore require parents to attend guidance sessions and comply with requirements specified by the court to help them control the behaviour of their child. But families are about much more than preventing crime. They are the fundamental unit in our society, providing mutual care and support and helping to shape the values of future generations. At the Prime Minister's request, I am chairing a new ministerial group looking at wider ways of supporting families more effectively and promoting good parenting" (UK Parliament 2020)

After two decades of hardened attitudes towards young people and their parents, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 formalised new types of 'appropriate' treatment that were shaped by the broader political context. The Act legitimised increasingly punitive measures at an earlier stage for a wider set of people. Controversially, punitive interventions for deviant, rather than criminal, behaviour resulted in significant numbers of young people becoming imprisoned. Despite being a civil order, non-compliance with strict Anti-Social Behaviour Orders requirements became an imprisonable offence. Other interventions followed with the piloting of Youth Inclusion and Support Panels in 2002 essentially translating into social policy delivery through youth offending teams for children experiencing adversity who had not offended (Walker et al 2007). The risk factor prevention paradigm saw a continuation of risk-based policies that disproportionately impacted children from families experiencing disadvantage. For example, in 2009 the Scaled Approach (YJB 2009) legitimised sentencing interventions based on need and risk, rather than the severity or frequency of offending (Bateman 2011), marking a clear departure from justice-based principles. This again meant children from households experiencing multiple disadvantages would be assessed as higher risk, thus receiving more intensive community sentences than peers from 'secure' households for exactly the same sorts of offences.

In the context of children's illicit behaviours, different legislation has directly and indirectly positioned parents as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Formal accountability and punitive sanctions have diversified with compulsory parenting classes forming part of parenting order requirements in 1998. Three years later it became possible to prosecute and incarcerate parents for their children's persistent school absence. Parenting contracts were introduced in the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 with behavioural commitments cemented through new contracts between parents and key institutions such as schools or youth offending teams. More recently the Troubled Families programme of 2011 planned to 'turn around' 120,000 families with problems in multiple domains such as crime, employment, education and health. These strategies suggest the ongoing

acknowledgment of parents as an important part of children's interventions, though ideological underpinnings may not facilitate truly collaborative, solution focused working.

New Opportunities: Restorative Justice and Child First

Despite parents becoming increasingly implicated, the youth justice sector has gradually recognised the need to limit formal system contact (McAra and McVie 2007), with diversion from justice leading to significant progress in the sectoral objective of 'first time entrant' reduction and a dramatic drop in the youth justice population size overall (MoJ/YJB 2021). In terms of contemporary youth justice priorities, policy does not emphasise parental connections but inadvertent importance seems essential in three key areas (YJB 2020b). For example, effective local practice is suggested as requiring *all* local stakeholders to actively engage, which suggests parents are also part of the solution. Successful resettlement for custodial leavers is commonly connected to family support networks, again elevating the status of parents (YJB 2020a). Finally, the growing popularity of co-constructed justice and prevailing requirement for community involvement suggests a crucial role for parents when tackling the priority area of disproportionality and its complex causes.

Restorative justice provides some useful reflection points worthy of consideration in the context of this review. Despite net widening criticisms, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (HM Government 1998) contained progressive new components, with the promotion of community healing through restorative justice. Community involvement is now an accepted feature of domestic youth justice providing opportunities to acknowledge, repair and forgive through integrative shaming (Braithwaite 2000). Particularly useful for this review is the space restorative justice can provide in terms of allowing new, under-represented voices into justice systems to facilitate cultural plurality. The extent to which restorative principles are realised varies significantly in different jurisdictions, providing opportunities to transfer effective ideas. For example, in New Zealand, restorative meetings are a compulsory requirement *before* young people appear in court with judges compelled to agree with restorative meeting outcomes (Maxwell and Morris 2006). Of particular interest is the involvement of families and communities of over-represented Maori children, and the way Maori values have increasingly permeated the system through holistic, meaningful and culturally appropriate methods. In England and Wales, youth justice is delivered through multiple sectors with a heavy reliance on volunteers for restorative practices, such as community panels where sentencing features are set, reviewed and signed off. Yet questions can be raised about who 'community' is and how they are involved. Volunteering opportunities require a youth offending team-based application and selection process, raising questions about whether *all* community members have involvement opportunities. It is also likely that those in a position to volunteer are over-represented, such as retired professionals, and that communities with less faith in justice systems are less involved, such as members of the BAME community. This raises serious questions about the potential for Kitchen Table Talks to connect communities with the justice system in new and meaningful ways.

In stark contrast with the 1980s and 1990s, contemporary youth justice rhetoric clearly foregrounds the child rather than the offence, although policy recognition is yet to fully materialise. The key criticism here was that the treatment of children was shaped around the (potentially single) offence, with responsibility, punishment and labelling readily

apparent. Contemporary 'child first' youth justice prioritises a holistic, long term outlook where rights are foregrounded (Haines and Case 2015). It critiques the authenticity and effectiveness of post-1998 managerialism, proposing children to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Treatment should be legitimate and authentic to children, with adults (for example practitioners) responsible for programme outcomes, rather than children. Work at the Swansea Bureau evidences how diversion from justice and parental involvement can significantly reduce reoffending rates (Haines and Case 2013), adding weight to the need for strategic parental involvement. Prevailing aspects of the domestic system remain in conflict with Child First and seem difficult to reconcile, such as the use of youth courts, youth custody and compulsory sentencing requirements. This raises questions about system change and the extent to which Child First will be realised. What is clear is that this constructive new rhetoric provides opportunities to consider *who* is part of the solution. As parents remain inherently wedded to young people and youth justice, it seems important to engage in ongoing reflections about the extent and nature of parental involvement.

Serious Youth Violence

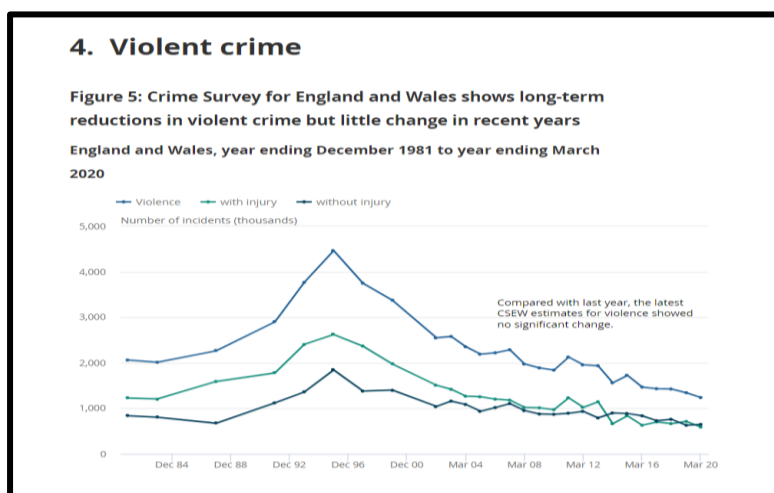
Violent crime covers a broad range of offences that range from minor assaults such as pushing and shoving, harassment and abuse that result in no physical harm, through to wounding and homicide (ONS, 2019). Survey data shows how most violence is fairly low-level and involves no injury to the victim. Where an injury is reported, it is often minor such as scratches and bruises (ONS, 2019). The CSEW showed that more than half of violent incidents in the last year (62%) did not come to the attention of the police. Over half (57%) of all violent incidents were experienced by repeat victims. This was most common among victims of domestic violence (ONS, 2019). It is likely that Covid 19 will impact on these figures and that assaults in public spaces will decline, whereas levels of domestic violence and abuse are likely to increase (Farrell & Tilley, 2020).

Data repeatedly shows how young people are more likely to be victims of violent crimes than those in older age groups. This pattern was more pronounced for incidents where the perpetrator was a stranger. In addition, men were more likely to be victims of violent crime where the perpetrator was a stranger or acquaintance. Women however, were more likely to be victims of domestic violence perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner. The CSEW, as a victimisation survey, is seen to be a more accurate account of crime and crime trends than the police recorded data. The utility of the CSEW vis-à-vis police recorded data relates to the detail of the crime types covered and population samples included. Police recorded data is limited by an absence of data on crimes that are not reported or not recorded by the police. The primary purpose of the CSEW is to provide national-level estimates on specific crime types. The CSEW sample is usually around 40,000. CSEW estimates for the year ending March 2020 are based on face-to-face interviews with 33,735 people aged 16 years and over; a further 2,398 children aged 10 to 15 years took part in the children's survey (ONS, 2020a). Overall,

“the CSEW response rate remains relatively high compared with other random probability household surveys (preliminary analysis indicates that 64% responded to the main survey and 57% of eligible children within households participating in the adult survey responded in the year ending March 2020” (ONS, 2020 (a))

According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales, there have been steady long-term declines in the violent crime from around the mid' 1990s (see Figure 4). Recent trends, however, may be showing a new pattern emerging. Contra to the continuous long-term reductions over previous decades, contemporary data shows a flat lining. In other words, over the last four years levels of violent crime measured by the CSEW have remained fairly flat, indicating a change in the previous downward trend (ONS, 2020a). Police recorded crime and NHS data have also indicated rises in the number of offences involving knives or sharp instruments over the last four years. These offences tend to be concentrated in London and other metropolitan areas including Birmingham and the West Midlands.

Figure 4: CSEW: Trends in Violent Crime in England and Wales (ONS, 2020a)



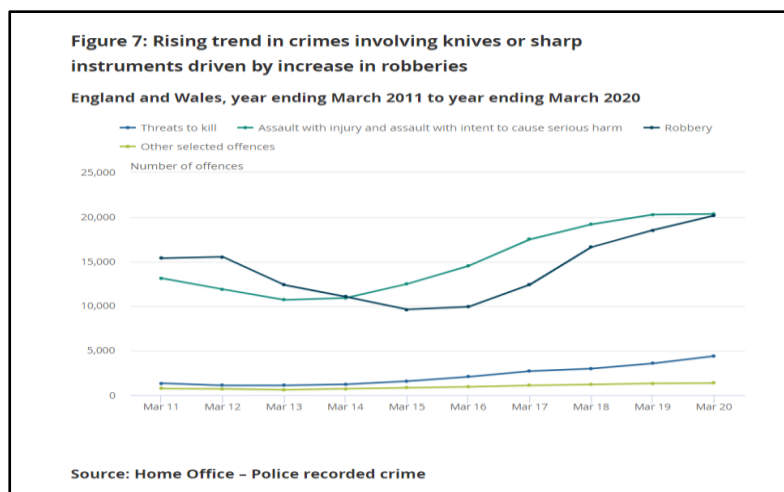
The findings of the CSEW are mirrored in other research. The Cardiff University Violence Research Group looked at a sample of 111 Emergency Departments (EDs), Minor Injury Units (MIUs) and Walk-in Centres in England and Wales, that participated as certified members of the National Violence Surveillance Network (NVSN) (Sivarajasingam et al, 2020). Key findings included:

- Overall an estimated 175,764 people attended EDs, MIUs and Walk-in Centres in England and Wales for treatment following violence in 2019. 11,820 fewer than in 2018.
- Violence which resulted in emergency hospital treatment decreased by 6.3% in 2019 in England and Wales compared to the previous year. The number of people injured in violence has fallen by 143,113 (45%) since 2010.
- Violent injury of males and females declined by 6.6% and 5.6% respectively in 2019 compared to 2018. Decreases in violence among those aged 18-30 years (down 11.7%) and 31-50 years (down 9.3%) were also recorded. Violence affecting those aged 51 years and over continued to increase (up 7.9% in 2019).
- As in previous years, those most at risk of violence-related injury were males aged 18-30. Violence-related ED attendance was most frequent on Saturdays and Sundays in March and August. .

Knife Crime

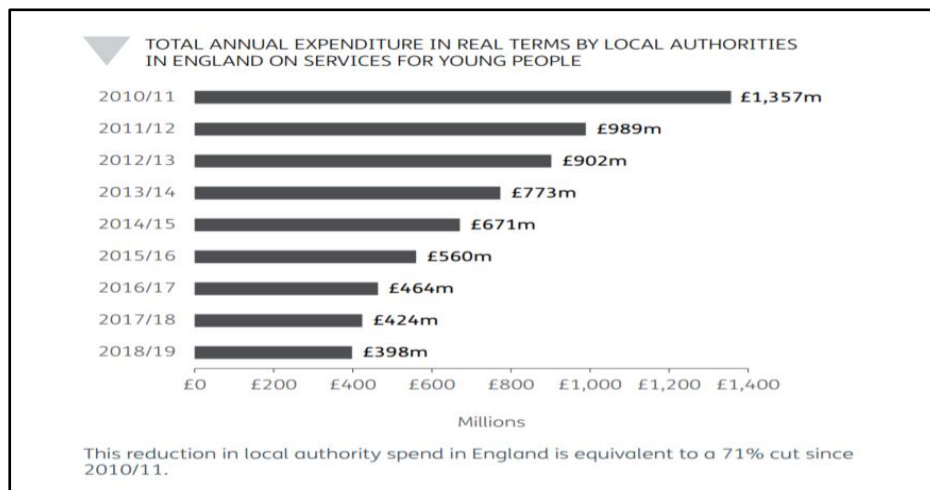
Despite assault with a weapon being a relatively unlikely event, from 2018 onwards, discussions over serious youth violence have become more prominent in the media. This stemmed from headlines that homicides in London had hit a ten year high in London after 134 deaths in the year 2017-2018. It was also revealed that more than 20 percent of these deaths were children and young people (Dearden, 2018). Data from the ONS (2020c) revealed a rising trend in crimes involving knives and sharp objects from police recorded data (Figure 5), prompting headlines of an epidemic for the second time in a decade (Squires, 2019).

Figure 5: Rising Trend in Crimes involving Knives or Sharp Instruments



There are generally two main ways that research into knife and violent crime is reported, particularly by the media. On the one hand there is an “epidemiological” approach that treats knife crime as an individual pathology or disease which requires medical treatment. The alternative approach is to view it as a public health issue. The latter focus on the causes of knife crime and situate these in terms of exposure significant psychological and social risk factors from family, peers or at school (Case & Haines, 2019). Critics point out that both explanations operate with a deficit model of the offender and neglect (Case & Haines, 2019) long held criminological knowledge that, where violence is concerned, the perpetrators and the victims are usually the same and that most violence tends to be intra rather than inter group (Lee & Young, 1984). Furthermore, knife crime is a complex problem with multiple causes but one common theme is that it is a symptom of toxic environments, which can leave children disaffected, fearful and vengeful. They are scared and provoked into carrying knives, joining gangs and committing violent acts (Case & Haines, 2019). Toxic environments are not created by children but are a product of long-term divestment in services for children. Estimates suggest that funding for Youth Services in England amounted to just 4% of local authority spending, compared with 13% in 2010-11 (Weale, 2020). One recent report estimates that funding for Youth Services in England and Wales has decreased by approximate £1 billion in the decade from 2010 to 2020 (YMCA, 2020). See Figure 6.

Figure 6: Annual Expenditure on Services for Young People



Elsewhere it has been estimated that cuts in government spending have reduced the support for young people, particularly in areas of high deprivation. Another recent report estimates that between 2010 and 2016, £387 million was axed from Youth Services across the UK with a further £13.3 million cut by the end of the financial year 2018/19. These colossal figures equate to ‘the loss of nearly 900 Youth Workers, and the closure of 160 Youth Centres’ and are part of a broader picture where than 4,500 Youth Work jobs have been lost and more than 760 youth centres closed since 2012, which amounts to at least 35,000 hours of outreach work with young people now not taking place (UNISON, 2019). The politics of austerity succeeding the global financial crisis of 2007-8 has provided fertile ground for environmental toxicity. Here ‘local council estates have been hollowed out’, which has left children ‘disaffected, fearful and vengeful’ (Case & Haines, 2019). It is now widely acknowledged that such cuts are causally linked to recent increases in knife and violent crime (Barnados, 2019; LocalGov, 2020; British Youth Council 2021).

Youth Justice Policy Background

The overarching direction of Youth Justice Policy and Practice in the 21st century can be said to be influenced by the search for ‘What Works?’ This coincided with the enactment of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the latter of which is seen as a tipping point in youth justice policy in the UK. ‘What Works?’ was in turn central to the direction of policy making in the UK under the first New Labour Government of Tony Blair. ‘What Works?’ became the *leitmotif* of evidence-based policy and practice (Monaghan, 2010). This was in turn central to the Government’s Modernising Agenda – a ‘pragmatic approach’ to policy making, influenced by Third Way thinking and the requirement to pursue a path between the socialist ideals of Old Labour and neo-liberal thinking of Thatcherism (Monaghan, 2010). The commitment to evidence-based policy making was also enmeshed with ensuring government policies were cost-effective and sustainable (National Audit Office, 2001). Central to this process are Comprehensive Spending Reviews (CSR), which prioritise funding for Government priorities. A noticeable turning point for CSR was seen in 1998 when the CSR introduced Public Service Agreements (Hope, 2004). A recent report for the Institute for Government notes how the introduction of PSAs was ‘unexpected and unplanned’ (Panchamia & Thomas, 2019), nonetheless they serve the function of setting spending agendas for Government departments over the short-term. The 1998 review

represents a watershed, which at the time was the largest scale review undertaken in the UK. The review was designed to replace the short-term planning and trading between ministers in terms of the allocation of resources. It foregrounded the need for detailed budgetary analysis on policies providing value for money and was, in this context, consistent with more managerialist, and also rational, evidence-based approaches to policy development occurring around this time (Hope, 2004). It is in this context that interventions and programmes to reduce youth offending must be seen.

In youth justice, evidence-based practice has been dominated by the Risk Factor Prevention Paradigm (RFPP) (Haines & Case, 2008) since the late 1990s. In the run-up to the passing of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, official reports and White Papers (Audit Commission, 1996; Home Office, 1997) had (re)framed offending in terms of risk factors, which were meant to 'predict' youth offending. The risk factors are primarily psycho-social and are framed as being within children's lives. Consequently, since 1998 various interventions have been introduced which are primarily preventative and target psychosocial risk factors, for example, emotional, family, education, neighbourhood and peers. They are rated 'effective' when reducing 'risk of reoffending'. The measure of effectiveness is usually ascertained via evaluations based on the 'What Works?' criteria established in the Maryland Scientific Scale (See for instance, Farrington et al, 2003) (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Maryland Scientific Methods Scale

<i>Level 1: Correlation between a prevention programme and a measure of crime at one point in time</i>
<i>Level 2: Measures of crime before and after the programme, with no comparable control condition</i>
<i>Level 3: Measures of crime before and after the programme in experimental and comparable control units, controlling for other variables that influence crime</i>
<i>Level 4: Measures of crime before and after the programme in multiple experimental and control units, controlling for other variables that influence crime</i>
<i>Level 5: Random assignment of programme and control conditions to units</i>

Although dominant, the RFPP is not without its criticisms on the grounds of the 'psycho-reductionist' approach (Haines & Case, 2009) to interventions and the way these are in turn evaluated, which has often relied on an experimental or statistical approach, based on closed systems which have factored out alternative explanations on the grounds of randomisation. Although alternative forms of evaluation are gaining currency, such as realist approaches (Emmel, et al, 2018) which begin the process of evaluation by looking at the extent to which the intervention was consistent with the Theory of Change, the RFPP endures. In the next section we consider some of the main families of interventions that have been introduced since 1998.

Interventions

Since 1998, under the guise of providing value for money and developing evidence-based practice, a whole industry has emerged around youth violence and youth crime prevention. Broadly speaking interventions fall into one of 3 categories:

- Primary prevention: interventions which aim to modify the criminogenic conditions in the wider physical and social environment
- Secondary prevention: the early identification and intervention in the lives of individuals or groups in criminogenic circumstances.
- Tertiary prevention: prevention of recidivism (Brantingham & Faust, 1976).

Many interventions that are tried and introduced will overlap one or more of these categories, for instance, Child Safety Orders. Created under the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act, Child Safety Orders were made by local authorities with social service responsibilities. These were overseen by a magistrates' court that could make orders in respect of a named child less than ten years of age. Child Safety Orders were made in respect to specific kinds of behaviours:

- a) the child has done something that would constitute an offence if he or she were over 10
- b) the child's behaviour was such as to suggest he or she was at risk of offending
- c) the child's behaviour was disruptive and harassing to local residents
- d) the child has breached a local curfew

The orders ultimately placed conditions on children's behaviours such as avoiding certain places or not associating with certain people, in an attempt to ensure not only that the child is receiving adequate care but also that the child is being properly controlled (Walsh, 1999). It is clear from the example that the Child Safety Order was both Secondary and Tertiary. A second way of classifying interventions is the setting in which they take place. Most secondary interventions are applied in a family, education or community setting. Where tertiary interventions are concerned these might also be applied personally or in custody. Again, it is the case that interventions often span settings. The Child Curfew Order, to follow the earlier example, is simultaneously a family and community-based intervention.

To consider the accruing evidence-base for any potential intervention, it is necessary to classify the type and location of the intervention. This can be achieved by understanding the theory of change. As part of the serious youth violence pathfinder with the Youth Justice Board and seven Youth Offending Services, the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit (WMVRU) via the Office of the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, wants to commission an innovative parenting peer support offer to parents who have children known to have, or are at risk of having, involvement in the youth justice system. This is a pathfinder to generate and deliver innovative practice, evaluate and disseminate learning. The agreed concept has arisen via informal feedback from parents with children in the youth justice system, who said that traditional methods of parenting support did not meet their particular needs or speak to their reality.

5. Methodology

The evaluation seeks to provide robust measurement of impact and also elicit an understanding of the mechanisms by which change occurs. The evaluation therefore takes a mixed-methods approach, using quantitative measures of the primary outcomes (e.g. YOT attendance, wellbeing, confidence, offending/reoffending), complemented and extended by qualitative work.

The Kitchen Table Talks team and YOTs have been consulted throughout the refinement of the evaluation plan and development of the data collection tools to ensure that the approach is appropriate and achievable. The Kitchen Table Talks team and YOTs have been provided with data collection guides, templates and a key point of contact within the evaluation team.

5.1 Data collection measures

Parents

Quantitative

A questionnaire using validated indicators of wellbeing, confidence, and parenting style is being completed at the start, at six-week intervals, and at the end of parent's participation in the programme. This data is being collected by the Kitchen Table Talks team and recoded using their UpShot system.

- Wellbeing: Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale: short version (SWEMWBS)

The Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2007) is designed to monitor well-being in the general population. The seven items relate to functioning rather than to feeling, such as measurement of elements of positive affect, satisfying interpersonal relationships and positive functioning.

- Parental confidence: Perceived Competence Scale (PCS)

Competence is proposed to be a fundamental psychological need (Williams & Deci, 1996) and perceptions of competence facilitate goal attainment. Additionally, perceived competence is predictive of maintained behaviour change and effective performance in activities. Thus any significant changes in participant scores on the Perceived Competence Scale (PCS) would indicate changes in the likelihood of behavioural changes and levels of effective performance. The PCS is a short, four-item questionnaire devised to be specific to the behaviour or activity being studied. Individuals rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = not at all true, 4 = somewhat true and 7 = very true. In this evaluation the PCS assesses participants' feelings of competence in parenting.

- Monitoring data

We are working closely with the WMVRU staff responsible for monitoring data to ensure we streamline requests for data. We aim to ensure we have information on project engagement, demographic data and referral information.

Qualitative:

The qualitative aspect of this research develops knowledge of Kitchen Table Talks process and impact with a particular focus on:

- Parental experiences of Kitchen Table Talks
- Parental engagement with Kitchen Table Talks
- Programme outcomes including soft and hard measures. For example, reoffending, improved relationships, or better peer support networks.

Stakeholders

Qualitative:

Semi-structured interviews are being conducted with project leads, facilitators and key stakeholders. The interviews explore delivery, quality, impact, and legacy; including the links between them, challenges to their progress, and the risks/impact of these. They will allow for triangulation of the quantitative elements of the evaluation. The interviews will also explore how relationships with parents have changed. Interviews will be conducted twice to allow us to track change over time, as well as to feed in 'live' recommendations as the evaluation progresses. Interviews will be approximately 40-60 minutes and be conducted either face-to-face or over the telephone. Interviews will be (with participants' consent) audio-recorded and transcribed.

Children via Youth Offending Teams

Accepting that it will take time to see and evidence any impact on offending and reoffending, the evaluation is looking at factors predictive of offending/reoffending (mediating factors) for example, data on changes to engagement. YOTs are being asked to provide data on children whose parents are engaging with Kitchen Table Talks:

- Data on engagement
- Data on educational engagement/attainment
- Offending/reoffending data: Any reduction/changes in offending/reoffending (child & siblings)

We will provide YOTs with an Excel spreadsheet on which to record data in on attendance on all children whose parents have been involved with Kitchen Table Talks on the following:

Gender, Age, Sentence/Programme Type, Sentence Duration (days), Sentence Start and End Dates, Contacts Offered (statutory & non-statutory), Contacts Attended (statutory & non-statutory), and Contact Not Attended (statutory & non-statutory)

In Summer 2021, when there have been more referrals, we will request data on attendance from children whose parents have been involved with Kitchen Table Talks plus a comparison group. We will also request data on education and offending. We will ask for this data again in late 2021/early 2022.

A note on offending/reoffending data:

Reduction in offending/reoffending¹ due to the parental change (child & siblings). This will also include some longer-term follow-up to track offending/reoffending data over time. We will seek to track offending/reoffending for a two-year period using data from the YOTs and if possible access PNC data. We acknowledge limitations to measuring impact in this way (see Wong, 2019²) and wish to highlight the importance of measuring engagement, mediating factors, and other outcomes listed above as the most appropriate routes to understanding the impact of the work. We intend to implement a 'comparison group design'³ when looking at mediating factors and offending/reoffending data. This data will be collected about young people whose parents are participating in the project and will also be collected from a comparison group of children in contact with the YOTs. In this instance, the comparison group – whose parent's did not attend the project – provides a basis for comparison, allowing for testing whether any changes can reliably be attributed to the project. Please see the Appendix at the end of this document for technical details on this approach.

5.2 Participants

Quantitative data

To date we have been unable to request quantitative data from the Kitchen Table Talks team while we await a Data Sharing Agreement from the WMVRU. This is expected to be in place from April 2021.

We have held data meetings with each of the seven YOTs. Quantitative has now been requested from all seven YOTs and the first set of data is expected in April 2021.

We will conduct analysis on this data once we receive it and update this report accordingly.

Qualitative data

Participants with different views and experiences of Kitchen Table Talks were invited to participate in this evaluation and research engagement was established with:

- One interview with two members of the Kitchen Table Talks team; the Programme Designer and the Coordinator.
- Four Interviews with YOT staff contacts for the Kitchen Table Talks programme, based in Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Coventry, and Sandwell (the Dudley interview is to be rescheduled and full contact is to be established with Walsall).

¹ We will seek data on binary offending/reoffending, but also data on the frequency and type of offending/reoffending and time to reoffence.

²<https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/11/Academic-Insights-Wong.pdf>

³ See for example, see: Caulfield, L.S., Jolly, A., Simpson, E., and Devi-McGleish, Y. (2020) 'It's not just music, it helps you from inside': [Mixing methods to understand the impact of music on young people in contact with the criminal justice system](#)

- Focus groups involving six parent users of Kitchen Table Talks from the following locations; Coventry (one parent), Dudley (one parent), Walsall (two parents), Sandwell (two parents).
- One interview with a Parent Ambassador (parents who have completed the programme and now make a more strategic contribution to the programme).

In terms of securing access with participants, key informant interviews with YOT contacts and Kitchen Table Talks were arranged directly through existing contacts as part of this project. Contact with parents and the Parent Ambassador was secured through Kitchen Table Talks. Use of an organisational gatekeeper for research participant selection was considered appropriate due to insider knowledge in terms of parental wellbeing and programme engagement. Parents and Parent Ambassadors engaging with Kitchen Table Talks can be in very different positions in terms of complex needs and mental wellbeing. Existing programme communications reflect this with the Kitchen Table Talks Coordinator initiating friendly, approachable communications upon initial contact. These important first communications are mindful of parental circumstances and preferences in terms of mode, frequency and the nature of contact. Such circumstances were important for this evaluation to consider when attempting to engage in meaningful dialogue with parents while avoiding harm as a result of evaluation involvement.

Kitchen Table Talks familiarity with each parent represented an important opportunity for this evaluation to include parental voices in an appropriate way. As such, parent focus groups were arranged and conducted by a Kitchen Table Talks Parent Ambassador. Initially it was hoped that research contact would include a number of Parent Ambassadors but varied circumstances presented a research barrier, with existing parental and work commitments limiting eventual contact to one Parent Ambassador. This contact was again organised by the Kitchen Table Talks team with the interview conducted by the evaluation project team. It would have been useful to unearth a breadth of views and experiences through different voices such as parents with children on less and more serious sentences, and parents engaging with Kitchen Table Talks on a voluntary and compulsory basis. It was necessary however to take into account existing referral numbers while prioritising parental wellbeing and engagement willingness.

5.3 Data analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) will be used to analyse the quantitative scale data. Paired samples T-tests will be used to identify whether there are any statistically significant differences between participants' scores on the scales before and after taking part in the project. Independent samples T-tests will be used to analyse project group data compared to a comparison group data. Absolute standardised effect sizes (ES) will be calculated for between and within measures comparisons to supplement important findings. An ES of 0.2 is considered the minimum important difference for all outcome measures, 0.5 to < 0.8 moderate, and ≥ 0.8 large (Cohen, 1988). The results will be presented in plain English to ensure they are accessible to a general audience.

In terms of qualitative analysis, the evaluation team were able to extract key themes (see Table 2, in section 6 of this report) from the audio data generated through the interviews and focus groups. These themes spoke to the overarching requirements for this evaluation to understand Kitchen Table Talks process and impact.

5.4 Ethics

The research was undertaken by a highly trained research team with considerable experience in conducting research in the criminal justice system and community projects. The research was granted ethical approval on 23rd February 2021 by the Faculty of Arts, Business and Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the University of Wolverhampton. The proposal adhered to the [ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society](#), and the committee assessed the research proposal against the University's [ethical framework](#).

In terms of the ethical considerations of recruiting parents to participate in the evaluation, Kitchen Table Talks undertake a risk assessment when service user engagement commences. When selecting participants those with significant mental ill health were excluded due to the heightened risk of harm. Initial contact with Kitchen Table Talks can initially be emotionally difficult for parents so research contact did not take place with new programme users. Instead, parents with more established programme engagement were asked to reflect back on initial contact.

6. Findings

6.1 Quantitative data

To date we have been unable to request quantitative measure data from the Kitchen Table Talks team while we await a Data Sharing Agreement from the WMVRU. This is expected to be in place from April 2021.

We have held data meetings with each of the seven YOTs. Quantitative has now been requested from all seven YOTs and the first set of data is expected in April 2021.

We will conduct analysis on this data once we receive it and update this report accordingly.

The Kitchen Table Talks team have provided us with information on referrals to date (as of 25/03/21).

Table 1: Referral data

Number of referrals so far (total)		66				
Number of referrals (broken down by YOT)		Sandwell – 33, 26 engaged Dudley – 10, 8 engaged Walsall – 5, 4 engaged Wolverhampton – 6, 3 engaged & 3 new so due to be followed-up Birmingham – 2, 2 engaged Coventry - 5, 4 engaged Solihull – 5, 2 engaged				
Parent's gender		Sandwell - 28 female 4 male Dudley - 8 female 2 male Walsall - 1 male 3 female Wolverhampton - 1 male 4 female Birmingham - 2 female Coventry - 5 female Solihull - 5 female				
Parent's ethnicity						
Sandwell	Dudley	Wolverhampton	Birmingham	Solihull	Coventry	Walsall
White British - 9 White Irish - 1 White English -	White English - 8 Black African - 2 Mixed backgroun	White English - 3 White British - 1	Pakistani - 1 Black Caribbean - 1	White English - 2 Pakistani - 1 White	White British - 3 White English - 1 White &	Pakistani - 1 Indian -1 Black Caribbean - 1

6 Pakistani - 2 Black Caribbean - 3 Black African - 3 Polish - 2 Slovakian - 1 Somalian - 2 Indian - 3 Prefer not to say - 1	d - 1			British - 1 White & Black Caribbean - 1	Black Caribbean - 1	Black African - 1
Concerns highlighted at referral about child				Anti-social behaviour 31 Truancy 5 Gone missing 13 Association with perpetrators of crime 23 Behaviour concern 33 Substance/Alcohol misuse 22 Special Needs 7		
Concerns highlighted at referral about parent/carer				Anti-social behaviour 6 Mental health concerns 16 Domestic disturbances 14 Chaotic lifestyle 6 Lack of guidance/supervision over child(ren) 17 Substance/Alcohol misuse 10 Lack of confidence in parenting 14		

6.2 Qualitative data

The key themes from the data so far fit into two broad categories. First, the process of implementing Kitchen Table Talks including key components contributing to success and areas that could be developed, and second, the impact of Kitchen Table Talks. Ten key themes emerged from the analysis, of which three relate to impact and four relate to the process of delivering Kitchen Table Talks. The themes combine findings from different participants allowing the findings to be considered from multiple perspective of multiple. The themes are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Key themes

Process	
1	Identifying a need for Kitchen Table Talks
2	Learning about Kitchen Table Talks
3	YOT referral process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Process b. Criteria c. Barriers
4	Tapering parental support
Impact	
1	Parental empowerment
2	Parent voice
3	Strengthening relationships
4	A supportive space
5	Enhancing Relationships and Becoming Empowered
6	Helping children and other parents

Project Process

Identifying a Need for Kitchen Table Talks

The Serious Youth Violence Strategy is well aligned with Kitchen Table Talks due to clear connections between First Class Legacy’s overarching objectives, which fall into three key areas of ‘*Reducing youth violence, improving mental health and resilience, and connecting young people to job opportunities and training [...] so all of that combined links to reducing youth violence in the West Midlands*’ (Kitchen Table Talks Project Designer). In particular, family vulnerability was described as presenting a key problem for children, providing a rationale for the provision of parental support:

‘One thing I know for certain is that where families are broken [...] when there’s anything wrong in a family, there’s vulnerability, and there’s a gap. There’s an opportunity there for something terrible to happen. Where families are left vulnerable for any reason at all – it could be anything, it doesn’t have to be youth violence, it could be anything, it could be ill health [...] there are so many vulnerable families out there, young people are finding ways to try and address that vulnerability but it’s going in the wrong way’ (Kitchen Table Talks Project Designer).

The idea of Kitchen Table Talks first emerged when the Programme Designer felt she wanted to understand more about her young teenager’s attraction to social media. After raising probing questions within broader networks, it became apparent that other parents felt the same way. Initially parents and children met in a context that was inspired by

informal conversations around the kitchen table. Parents continued to meet for six months, developing knowledge through conversation and experience sharing. After six months of meetings and further reflections, the capacity for this sort of forum to help tackle key issues became apparent:

'So I had this evidence. I knew that talking – coming together in a group and talking to people was something that was important. And sharing experiences. But in a safe space that was culturally appropriate. [...] there was food, there was drink, it was soft and relaxing – it wasn't an intimidating space at all' (Kitchen Table Talks Project Designer).

The value of Kitchen Table Talks delivery in a youth justice context was then assessed. First Class Legacy were already supporting work at a YOT on ethnic disproportionality, while also trying to engage parents and children who kept coming back into the service. First Class Legacy became involved in a consultation with this group of children and parents to try and understand things further, with parent service experiences not always positive:

'Its just a tick box exercise – they don't really care about what we're going through, etcetera etcetera. And we fed that back to the team, and the team then said 'but if we put on stuff for the kids that's really good but we need to engage the parents because it's the parents that have got to bring the kids to the appointments, and all that sort of stuff' (Kitchen Table Talks Project Designer).

A Kitchen Table Talks pilot subsequently took place to assess whether it might improve engagement with parents and children. The Kitchen Table Talks Coordinator soon started identifying problems with parental involvement:

'Can you imagine your son or your daughter's been arrested and nobody asks you how you are, and no one offers you advice? You don't know what this is. How on earth are you supposed to understand what they are saying to you? You don't have the time – because it's happening so fast – you don't have the time to be able to break down "sorry can you just explain to me what that abbreviation means please?". It doesn't happen. I said to the court officer "how long do you get with a family?" and she's like "a minute or two". I was like "what? You are literally saying this is what's going to happen, this is what's going to happen next" and I said "where does this happen?" and she's like "anywhere – sometimes we have a side room and sometimes its just in the corridor [...] and it's still happening – that's very normal' (Kitchen Table Talks Project Designer).

These initial findings led to a three-year piece of work, which is now growing into this regional project. Importantly, it emerged that youth justice outcomes involve parents in different ways leaving a feeling of sharing the sentence. Parents are vitally important when promoting sentence completion, suggesting it is crucial to maintain meaningful dialogue. For example, the Kitchen Table Talks Programme Designer, recounted one parent's significant practical barriers:

'My 13 year old can't pay the £1,500 fine, I'm paying it. I've lost my house, I've lost my job, he's breaching the order because I can't get to the appointment on time, because I work'. There's no space for that discussion [...] The appointment could be 11 o'clock in the morning [...] you're probably at work, you're not just readily available!' (Kitchen Table Talks Project Designer).

These findings suggest it is crucial to maintain a meaningful dialogue with parents, making it important for involvement to be constructive and strategic and evolving beyond parental blaming of the 1980s and 1990s to a contemporary place where different groups have the potential to become part of the solution.

Learning about Kitchen Table Talks

Although discussed very positively, Kitchen Table Talks is not a core or mandatory service partner at present. This meant YOT staff heard about the offer at different points and in a variety of ways:

'Myself and now our head of service we both sort of joined right at the very beginning, when it was being discussed [...] I think there's only two YOTs that have got Parenting Officers [...] the rest use their support workers, but I'm a dedicated Parenting Officer for [YOT 3] so that's why I was involved at the beginning' (Practitioner Three)

A Practitioner at YOT 1 explained how the programme had already been in place in YOT 4, with best practice shared at the YOT Regional Managers Meeting:

'After [YOT 4's] experience of using [Kitchen Table Talks] they shared that with other YOTs in the area, and so I think my Service Manager had attended a meeting about it and then asked me to pick it up so it's gone to a couple of meetings about it from there' (Practitioner One)

To understand more about the programme's potential, direct contact between practitioners and First Class Legacy was found to be important:

'I'd attended a meeting where the ladies from Kitchen Table Talks were there and they gave a presentation, a lot of information and then had sort of separate individual meetings with them [...] they were really positive about it - really helpful and they made it clear that if we did need anything we could contact them at any time' (Practitioner One)

YOT Referral Process

The Kitchen Table Talks referrals processes varied at different YOT locations, with programme profile and the recording of referrals considered to be important:

'I guess my role is really just to share the information with the team, what are the processes, what do they need to do, how do they refer, And kind of promote it and supervision and team meetings and that kind of thing. But then, you know, asking direct line managers and staff to be identifying those people who might benefit individually and to make the referrals themselves, but then to just let me know that they've made referrals so I can keep track of how many there are' (Practitioner One)

After YOT referrals had taken place, Kitchen Table Talks followed a clear process:

'A case worker will refer a parent to us, and then [Kitchen Table Talks Coordinator] will be the first point of contact for that person – she'll phone them immediately or message them and say "Hi, I got your number from your caseworker, just want to book in a meeting or chat with you – is this date okay? That's fine" that'll go into the calendar then the family support team will work through the calendar and contact the parents' (Kitchen Table Talks Project Designer).

Kitchen Table Talks has the flexibility to be embedded into local YOT operations in different ways depending on what is most effective. The referrals process seemed to be smoother when a Kitchen Table Talks representative was readily available at the YOT while cases were being discussed:

'We've been going into actual triaging sessions where [the YOT] are discussing the different cases that do come through [...] and it's a case of being able to be in those forums to kind of be like "actually that parent would need Kitchen Table Talks" [...] we're mainly doing [West Midlands YOT] at the moment but its going to be happening at a few of the other YOTs [...] the main manager's like "if you need to jump in and feel that Kitchen Table Talks would be beneficial do say" and not wait for them to say it' (Kitchen Table Talks Coordinator)

Despite face to face meetings not currently being possible, Kitchen Table Talks have adapted to online delivery while delivering treats through the post. This signalling message of care was an important connection: *'until I can buy you a waffle again'* (Kitchen Table Talks Project Designer). The new parent pack includes useful practical information, popcorn and a mug. Each month parents receive a compliment slip and popcorn, with particular days also recognised:

'Mother's Day, Father's Day – days that are significant for a parent. Because I know some of them wont feel like its Mother's Day for them. They might be going through bereavement as well as they might be feeling that they are not appreciated as a mother. So we will let them know that – and we do the same with dads on Father's Day – we do have some men so we'll send them stuff as well. They're still getting things, it's just a little bit different. We've just had to be creative' (Kitchen Table Talks Project Designer).

These findings suggest communication between Kitchen Table Talks and YOTs to be important with communication and between YOTs also valuable for understanding project value and maintaining a profile.

Referral Criteria

Notions of parental suitability varied in different YOTs. One location targeted particular groups of parents towards Kitchen Table Talks and others reflecting on broader programme signposting for any interested parties. One YOT described how Kitchen Table Talks would:

'Be useful for out of court teams [...] however, I knew that I had parents who would also benefit from that extra support - from more of a chat. If someone was going into someone's house, if it wasn't the current climate that it is with Covid, that I think would be really good. And to have any extra support for some of my parents is for me - a godsend' (Practitioner Two)

Contrastingly, at other YOTs, Kitchen Table Talks was made available to all parents based on perceived benefit. Parenting Orders were not considered effective for parent engagement so although Kitchen Table Talks would in principle be considered in this context, actual use was unlikely:

'I think we agreed at the beginning that we would consider the referrals for any of the young people we're working with and that we wouldn't target it at certain groups [...] because we like to offer the same service to all young people that we work with [...] I think my message to the team - and also to try and drum up some referrals - has been to consider for any parent that we're working with [...] we don't have many parents on Orders - I think we've got one at the moment we try to avoid them as much as we can, personally, I don't like Parenting Orders'.
(Practitioner One)

One practitioner initially showed an interest in Kitchen Table Talks being attached to statutory Parenting Orders: *'There are things that I would like included in Parent Orders and it's all about support, so yeah that that that would be good'* (Practitioner Two). After further reflection this was felt to be potentially problematic, detracting from the relaxed and supportive context:

'Maybe it wouldn't be a good idea, thinking about it, because they may think "oh another one", because some of the parents who become known to us - the young people - they have already had years of being involved with children's social care [...] if it was me and somebody said we're giving you an order and you've got to engage with these people [...] because I want it to be a nice thing [...] probably not a good idea to have it as part of a Parenting Order' (Practitioner Two)

Parental receptiveness was crucial when deciding who to refer with severity of the child's sentence not considered to be relevant: *'High end, low end - it doesn't matter. It all depends on if they want to be involved in that additional support. Because I give them as much intensive support as they need'* (Practitioner Three)

'They have to want to be referred because there's no point referring them just for the sake of it, they have to want that support and they want to have that group support, and so, not all of the parents, I feel, are ready for it. But the ones that are there at the moment want that peer support, they want to build those friendships, they want to see that they're not alone and in bringing up their children and their young people' (Practitioner Three)

'Also, as well it's confidence in being in those groups. it's just about them feeling able to be able to sit with four or five other people and feel comfortable - and not a lot do. Because a lot of families, I work with - they're isolated. They're their own family. They've got their extended family but they haven't got friends or

normal things that we have. They are quite isolated because of the offending of their young person, the embarrassment of it. They haven't got time to go to groups because they're dealing with missing people - you know not attending school - so there's a law there's a lot that they have to contend with, and then I'm asking them to go to this support group. And they sit there and think "What am I doing here?" so willingness has to be there. They have to want that additional support' (Practitioner Three)

YOT Referral Barriers:

At the time of reporting, YOT support for Kitchen Table Talks wasn't necessarily reflected in referral rates with acknowledgment that some practitioners are better at referring than others. Although broadly receptive to the programme, YOT referral barriers centred on current practice delivery during Covid-19. In particular, perceived barriers related to the inability to engage in 'face-to-face befriending', parental familiarity with online meetings, and maintaining staff awareness of the programme while home working. Paradoxically, perceived programme strengths presented a barrier to participation in the current context: *'Well, at the moment, obviously you've got Covid - that's a big thing that's a big barrier. Little things like access to internet - not being au fait with being on Zoom or Teams - don't like the video aspect of it'* (Practitioner Three). This view was echoed at another YOT location:

'I guess a social side that kind of connects parents to each other and kind of gives them a space to say "yeah the YOT actually they're not helping me, I wish they would do this..." I think that was what was the real selling point for me that I just think probably hasn't translated as well in lockdown as it as it could have' (Practitioner One)

Complex needs presented more of a barrier when asked about whether parenting style might have an impact particularly because 'complex families' engaged with multiple services online. Kitchen Table Talks had become less easy to distinguish, feeding into perceptions of increasingly complex service requirements:

'In a normal scenario you can say, "well, you have to go to meetings at this place with this person. But this person is just going to meet you for coffee", so it feels so different. Whereas at the moment it's "another person's phoning me... I have talk to another person on the phone". And that that's the feedback we've had from a couple of parents' (Practitioner One)

Despite being likely beneficiaries, 'selling' the programme was considered to be more difficult for 'chaotic parents': *'It might be more difficult to sell to in some ways, because they may see this as just another person coming in to tell them how to parent'* (Practitioner One). There had also been a technical issue with the referral process and although its origins were unclear, Kitchen Table Talks quickly found a solution:

'One barrier with making the referral is when you click on the link can't always get through [...] whether it was our side of things, I don't know, but I did forward it to our IT [...] however [Kitchen Table Talks] got round that barrier and sent us the referral form direct [...] you go in and you put your login and you put Kitchen

Table Talks 1 on and it didn't let me go any further. I was able to fill the referral in and send it direct to [Kitchen Table Talks] [...] Because if the other YOTs start, and we would need to get that sorted' (Practitioner Two)

When reflecting on referral process effectiveness, YOT operational size also seemed to be important: *'In terms of barriers I would say the size of the youth offending service, and their capacity [...] the bigger it gets - and especially if they haven't got everyone in post, and they don't have systems and stuff put together – it gets very, very difficult to get those referrals through' (Kitchen Table Talks Project Designer).*

The Kitchen Table Talks programme designer described how programme integration was crucial for effective referrals:

'Its systems change – because in [names three YOTs] they have found a way to embed it into the service – so it's not like it's a question, that you offer it. "is there an offer for the parent I can use?" No, no. It's an offer that's there, and they've made it fit the service. And so even with [names three YOT locations] they have been very specific in how they engage with us. And they've made it so they've put someone, or a couple of people that they can contact us constantly. The ones where they haven't quite got it right I suppose, have been the bigger YOTs where... for some reason the bigger YOTs have a massive capacity issue. They have staffing issues left right and centre and there's lots of missing people or changes of people [...] for us that's probably been the only barrier' (Kitchen Table Talks Coordinator)

These findings suggest Covid 19 service delivery, YOT operational size and full staffing to be barriers for Kitchen Table Talks referrals. The first of these barriers is connected to significant, dramatic and temporary societal change, suggesting the potential for resolution in the near future.

Tapering Parental Support

Kitchen Table Talks involvement made it possible to avoid a cliff edge of parental support withdrawal when a child completed their order: *'my involvement finishes - that's me ended. And if they've got someone else - sounds awful saying this - as an exit strategy [...] I just want them to have that support continued [...] it is lovely to think they have that lifeline' (Practitioner Two).* This view was echoed elsewhere, with tapering considered to be a unique aspect of the offer:

'I do refer parents from [YOT 3] to Kitchen Table Talks - they do the same role as me - what I do within YOT - I'm using it as an exit strategy for our parents [...] I'm using it as a contingency plan, because a lot of the parents, even though they get intensive support and they're ready to leave. They're not quite ready to be on their own. So I refer them to Kitchen Table Talks and then they get the peer group support that way. But they've only had two meetings so we're quite new to it, our parents are quite new to the process' (Practitioner Three)

'You can have three months voluntary after a closure and that could be for the young person and the parents. So that's why I refer them on to Kitchen Table

Talks. So they're still getting that peer group support from [a Parent Ambassador] if they need to – they're still getting that additional support'
(Practitioner Three)

These findings suggest parental support tapering adds a vital new level of flexibility that isn't currently available through YOTs, demonstrating the value of the Kitchen Table Talks programme.

Project Impact

One of the ways programme impact can be assessed is through data capture and communication. Although parents and YOTs have experienced Kitchen Table Talks in a positive way, programme impact measurement has not always been possible:

'The impact that it's had on them with the little time that they've had, is that they've felt listened to. And they think that the Kitchen Table Talks are very nice people. Non-judgmental you know, the conversations that they've had before the actual meetings - because obviously they ring them first - they've said that yeah that they're nice people [...] I've not been able to measure whether or not the work that they've done with them has been successful or unsuccessful, or it's just moved a little bit' (Practitioner Three)

Initially, meaningful engagement with parents was a positive end in itself, however, Kitchen Table Talks have now recognised the need to gather and share evidence on the nature and quality of contacts, to demonstrate programme value to YOTs:

'What we've started to do more recently is actually data capturing what they say on a call. How they're feeling on a call. Interaction, interpretation of what they're saying and we log all of that so every person's got a case file. And we can see every interaction that we've had – whether they've answered the phone or not – its all captured' (Kitchen Table Talks Project Designer).

Parental Empowerment

The focus groups revealed that when parents find themselves caught up in the youth justice system they develop feelings of disempowerment, not only because of the stigma they feel as a result of their child being involved in the youth justice system, but also because they feel under scrutiny from the agencies they are having to engage with. As one parent said,

'You're under the spotlight with all the services that are involved' (Parent 1 Focus group 2)

'Your life from that stage is like an open book...you've got to share so much of your life with other professionals' (Parent 3 Focus Group 2)

'There are hurdles we have to get over...and all these people we have to engage with...' (Parent 2 Focus Group 3)

When their children become involved in the youth justice system the parents reported how they, themselves, were thrown into a stressful and challenging situation. Not only are they having to engage with a variety of agencies and support their children through the youth justice process, but that engagement is frequently accompanied by feelings of shame and a sense of isolation from their family and friends.

'It was so new and raw for me, that YOS had to be involved in us' (Parent 2 Focus Group 2)

'It was such a stressful time...because sometimes you don't want to talk to family' (Parent 3 Focus Group 2)

'It was the first time YOS had been involved in my family...I was mortified, to be honest with you' (Parent 1 Focus Group 2)

In this context, YOTs understood the value of meeting with people in the same situation:

'That group element of it, for me, was something that we haven't delivered for a long time, and that would have been really beneficial, you know to meet up with other parents just to say "right we're in the same boat" and to kind of understand each other stories' (Practitioner One)

After their contact with YOS ended, parents explained how they had found it difficult to find a place to go to for support, until they found out about Kitchen Table Talks.

'I was relieved that there was something else out there...somebody I could speak to when the YOS workers had finished' (Parent 1, Focus Group 2)

'It's easier getting hold of Kitchen Table Talks than any other professionals' (Parent 2 Focus Group 3)

'I didn't know much about Kitchen Table Talks so it was, well, let's see what it's about and if it's not for me then, no problem....YOS didn't explain much about Kitchen Table Talks but I came with an open mind... but, no, I am really pleased' (Parent 4, Focus Group 2)

These findings echo the views of YOT Practitioners in terms of demonstrating a real need for supportive relationships, while also helping to avoid the cliff edge of support discontinuation.

The impact of Kitchen Table Talks is greater because of the variety of means of communication and engagement that they use. In addition, once parents engaged they were more likely to continue to engage because of the quality of engagement by the Kitchen Table Talks professionals:

'It's either a text message or we schedule in a phone call or you've got the monthly forum meetings where we all talk about everything. It's really easy to engage with you guys because you are really approachable and you're there when we need you the most. What more could we ask for?' (Parent 1 Forum Group 3)

'The video chats, the communication...it's a big thing...and it's nice to know that people do their job...they get paid...but they do it because they want to make a difference' (Parent 2 Forum Group 3)

Parent Voice

Thus the parents in the focus groups expressed how Kitchen Table Talks was having a personal impact on them, helping to alleviate their stress and isolation, as well as giving them a voice. At the very first session, the Programme Designer was unsure about the level of parental interest. After booking a table for five at a new desert shop, ten parents enthusiastically appeared:

'And then they just let rip, and just told me everything that had gone on, everything that had gone wrong, where they had been failed [...] I remember sitting there thinking "this is such an injustice, they have been through this a hell of a journey, and no one has asked them if they need help or support"' (Kitchen Table Talks Project Designer).

The parent voice has been recognised as an essential inclusion in services for young people. The Laming Report and the subsequent Children Act 2004 demanded the inclusion of the parent voice in 'dialogue, reflection and discussion' to 'help shape policy and practice and where contributions from all are encouraged and everyone is valued' (Gasper, 2010 pxix). The Lamb Inquiry too identified the necessity for 'face-to-face communication with parents, treating them as equal partners with expertise in their children's needs' (Lamb, 2009 p3). Parents report that the Kitchen Table Talks forums created a safe space where they can engage with other parents in similar situations to share "tips and tricks" with each other about dealing with their young people and to allow parents to provide peer support to each other. One parent described these forums as "'SEE": Support, Educate and Empower' (Parent 1 Focus Group 1).

'It made you feel as if you are not the only parent living through that experience...made you feel...I know this sounds weird..."normal"!' (Parent 1, Focus Group 2)

'On the local forum we talked about some of the issues surrounding our children and some of our experiences we've had and it was nice that we knew we weren't on our own...I was going through similar things to the other parents' (Parent 3 Focus Group 2)

'Its been amazing....knowing they were willing to listen and give you advice...' (Parent 1 Focus Group 3)

As such, Kitchen Table Talks adds value to existing YOT provision, with enhanced parental support clearly recognised as important:

'It did seem like a really, really exciting opportunity and something that we didn't have and that we weren't offering and that you know was bringing something different to the table, and I do feel that' (Practitioner One)

These findings suggest the need for a supportive place that is independent of YOT delivery, yet integrated in the context of communication, in order to help elevate the status of parent voices.

Strengthening Relationships

Focus group feedback also revealed that Kitchen Table Talks plays a role in strengthening relationships between parents and different agencies, specifically creating a bridge between YOTs and parents. Kitchen Table Talks gives the parents a voice, through facilitating the sharing of knowledge both between the Kitchen Table Talks staff and the parent participants but also between the parents themselves. This is proving to be empowering for parents. Knowledge is 'powerful' when it is 'based on' a range of 'evidence and experience', encouraging parents to move 'beyond their everyday experience' and draw on the experiences of others (Beck, 2013: 179).

'Kitchen Table Talks gives you a bit of clarity ...that there is some sense behind [the youth justice system] [...] but you may not see it at the time'

'When things are going wrong I have been able to speak to you guys and you helped me look at things in a different way' (Parent 1 Focus Group 3)

Indeed, Kotzee recognises that 'rather than view expertise as one phenomenon, it may be fruitful to investigate different expertise's in the light of differences between them rather than to force them all into the same mould' (2012:174). Kitchen Table Talks recognises and values parents as having expertise in areas such as navigating the youth justice system, or how to engage more effectively with children. Parents have a 'differentiatedness of expertise' (Kotzee, 2012:175) from professionals, and rather than privileging one understanding over another, the expertise that parents can bring to each other is nurtured and used to empower others.

Irrespective of existing parenting support, Kitchen Table Talks was considered uniquely placed to support parents: *'I still feel like this is a great opportunity to have somebody objective to kind of advocate for our parents'* (Practitioner One). Parental advocacy was considered by parents, YOT Practitioners and Kitchen Table Talks to be an important feature:

'What I thought would be the benefit is genuinely having that objective, completely separate professional to air grievances to [...] for us as a YOT to be able to say: "can you ask them if they understand" and sort of, evaluate our work

as well, to make sure that we're doing what we need to do, and that they understand but also just for them to have a person, they can go to, to ask those questions if they don't feel comfortable asking us' (Practitioner One)

The independence of Kitchen Table Talks in relation to core YOT activities was also important:

'That's a gap for us that we can't really fulfil because we're part of the problem in the fact that you know the kids are with the YOT, so it's somebody who is separate from it' (Practitioner One)

These findings suggest the value in strategic parental involvement, with a variety of voices required to be part of the solution. The need for additional support to facilitate parental confidence is also apparent in order to overcome longstanding perceptions of blame and limited strategic involvement opportunities.

A Supportive Space

The parents were appreciative of the warm and supportive space that Kitchen Table Talks presented to them, one where they are able to have a voice, and are able to share the issues and worries they had, such as difficulties with their relationships with their children or frustrations from their engagement with the different agencies. The supportive, empathetic and non-judgemental approach nurtured by the staff was particularly highlighted as a reason for parent engagement with Kitchen Table Talks.

'You're not judged, you're listened to' (Parent 3 Focus Group 2)

'Being put at ease right from the "get, go"....it is quite difficult when you go somewhere new and you have to talk about your problems to a stranger but from the first phone call I did not see (XX) as a stranger' (Parent 1, Focus Group 2)

'Knowing that we are thought of...you get sent things through the post and it gives you a boost...it's something I have not experienced before...I'm so glad I am here' (Parent 4, Focus Group 2)

'Having that communication from the beginning...that understanding and empathy for your situation. It's like [Kitchen Table Talks staff member] understands what you are going through'

'Everybody's friendliness and the way [Kitchen Table Talks staff] are all so approachable, made it really easy'

Although YOTs were focused on delivering comprehensive parental support, the need for a safe space outside of YOT delivery was also acknowledged:

'We've done a lot of trauma informed practice training in our team and that really emphasises the need to understand a parent's journey, as well as a child. And how that impacts on their parenting and the child's relationships. And for me, you can't do a good quality holistic assessment without understanding that parent's journey as well. But at the same time, I think it's a really important balance to strike that yes, you can have that knowledge and that assessment, that understanding, that relationship... but still recognise that that parent might need somebody else who actually can just focus on that. But I do think that the real selling point to me of this program was that really informal chat kind of somebody who can really build that that relationship with the parents. And then also, you know, follow up any things they need support with' (Practitioner One)

In just one case it was described how supportive spaces relied on the careful consideration of group dynamics – important when amalgamating different local groups:

'The feedback that I've had is that it was very positive they felt listened to. But the second one, that they had was with Birmingham and they felt less confident because all the Birmingham people knew each other, and that was a big thing. There was these four mums hoping to go into this group and to be able to chat and yeah, it didn't work for them. I fed that back. because they hadn't been a group for a few months, [Parent Ambassador] thought I'll put it all together as one and then at least they've had one this year and then and they'll go into their separate ones. And I think it's because of not enough referrals from other YOTs so that's why they joined all of the seven YOTs together. But it didn't work for my parents' (Practitioner Three)

The parents also appreciated recognition by Kitchen Table Talks of the other aspects of their lives; that they weren't just parents involved in the youth offending system. Kitchen Table Talks forums allowed them to talk about their other children, about any other challenges they faced and other aspects of their lives; being treated as a "whole" person.

'With other professionals you're told "this is the issue" and almost as if you are told you have to work with and engage with the services, but this (KTT) is more about you... "how are your other children?"...things like that really helped me get through it' (Parent 2, Focus Group 2)

'It has given me the opportunity to be myself around other parents because they are going through the same issues' (Parent 1 Focus Group 1)

Despite the seriousness of the situation these parents found themselves in, illustrated by one parent who said, *'you end up feeling you are the criminal'*, the activities and different means of communication used by the staff at Kitchen Table Talks provided the parents with some respite from the 'seriousness' of the situation and to be able to sound out:

'Before it became involved in our lives I thought (YOS) was great and then we were involved I realised the amount of negative stuff in the system...knowing how my son was treated... YOS didn't want to help with the negative feelings towards them but Kitchen Table Talks did' (Parent 2, Focus Group 2)

'I felt it was a weight lifted off my shoulders...I could kind of let it all out...it was just personal...like a personal experience. I appreciate all the check-ins between meetings... makes you feel that someone does care. I feel quite nurtured' (Parent 4 Focus Group 2)

'Sometimes you don't want to be talking about this stuff all the time. We as parents have so much to deal with...our work lives...our personal lives...so sometimes you don't want to go on about the same things' (Parent 3, Focus Group 2)

'Nobody comes feeling down and leaves feeling down' (Parent 1 Focus Group 1)

Enhancing Relationships and Becoming Empowered

First Class Legacy clearly identifies the positive difference that can be made to serious youth violence through parental knowledge and empowerment. Yet the point at which parents receive support and become empowered also matters in the context of children's outcomes:

'Giving parents a voice around the youth justice agenda is going to reduce youth violence. Why? Because parents know what their children need [...] I would say ninety five per cent of our parents would say "I've been asking for help with my child since they were seven or eight and its gone bad at the age of fifteen and now they can access all the help but now it's too late" - they needed help back then. If we can engage with parents, and encourage them, empower them, educate them, and give them the help and support when they ask for it, then you're going to have a different outcome for that child (Kitchen Table Talks Project Designer).

Not all parents had engaged with both the Parent Forums and the Webinars. Some parents had only engaged with the Kitchen Table Talks staff through telephone and teams to date. Parents who participated in some of the webinars reported that they found them very useful, helping them to gain knowledge that to enhance engagement with their children. Webinar themes included: how children use social media; the language that children use; YouTube clips and music videos; all of which might be influencing their child's behaviour.

'I found it really useful to learn about the language that young people use and unless you knew about it you might not actually realise what they are actually talking about'

'The topic of social media [...] and, like, how YouTube and music [...] impacts on your kids [...] and how as parents we find that challenging and how we can overcome those challenges [...] it's really good'.

The focus group confirmed that when parents' voices are heard they are more likely to engage positively with the relevant professionals and agencies. The communication facilitated by the relationship between YOTS and Kitchen Table Talks has the potential to facilitate a two-way process. It is not only about parents being more open to the engaging with, and listening to, the professionals but also about the professionals listening to the experiences and expertise of the parents and drawing on that expertise to enhance institutional praxis.

'We do care and we want to be involved in whatever you are doing to our child... Our kids are not just a number' (Parent 1, Focus Group 1)

The parents showing increased confidence is an important aspect of being involved in Kitchen Table Talks along with the positive relationships it facilitates between parents. This is generated by the "welcoming" atmosphere in which parents could be "open". Thus knowledge could be shared between parents to help each other navigate the youth justice journey. As one Parent Ambassador stated, sharing knowledge was seen as a central part of Kitchen Table Talks, as:

'It is not fair to keep what we know to ourselves' (Parent 1 Focus Group 1)

Being supported and having a space to explore their frustrations and reflect on their parenting and the reasons their child become involved in the youth justice system was another aspect valued by the parents. Indeed, many talked about how their relationships with their children were also benefitting from their engagement with Kitchen Table Talks. One parent talked about her child being in prison for attacking her. She reflected,

'After the bruises had healed, I think I was still a bit of a mess emotionally [...] but over the last 3 months I have developed a better understanding of [my child's] behaviour. [My child] was adopted and so there are loads of issues from their early life experiences [...] but we are slowly rebuilding our relationship [...] because I am in a better place'

These findings suggest the will for parents to be actively and strategically involved in children's interventions and outcomes, in a meaningful way with topical online activities delivered by Kitchen Table Talks during Covid 19 lockdown, were viewed favourably.

Helping Children and Other Parents

Parents appear to be building up more resilience to deal with the challenges they faced because of the social bonds Kitchen Table Talks provided through 'the group process (playing) a significant part in fostering a caring, supportive environment' (Kaplan et al., 1996, p. 163). This is helping parents reflect on themselves as parents in a more positive way.

'You ask, "what have we done wrong to be in this position?"...you beat yourself up about it... but then you talk to other parents with that experience and, you know, as long as you know you are doing your best' (Parent 1 Focus Group 2)

'I am a lot stronger than I give myself credit for. Thanks to KTT I do see myself as a strong, independent woman and I can deal with things' (Parent 1 Focus Group 3)

This empowerment of parents was evidenced by some of the parents in the focus groups revealing a more positive focus and direction for the future, so that:

'At the end of this negative thing that happened in our lives, there is something positive to come out of it'.

'My relationship with my child has improved [...] I'm thinking before I speak; I'm thinking before I act and I am understanding my child a lot better [...] and my child said to me "this is a turning point"'

YOTs also recognised that children and parents could not be considered in isolation, and that a 'whole family' approach was the most effective way of working. This meant that children were identified as key beneficiaries of parental engagement with Kitchen Table Talks:

'I think anything that supports parents, obviously impacts on how we're able to support young people - if it means that parents have a better understanding of their relationships with their children, and if it means that parents feel more supported themselves, that's likely to have a positive impact on their relationships at home and on the behaviour of young people' (Practitioner One)

Kitchen Table Talks had been valuable in terms of providing a communication channel that has promoted the safeguarding of children:

'Some information that was useful for us to be able to share with the police to keep a young person and others safe. So, the parent opened up to [Parent Ambassador]. And [Parent Ambassador] was able to share that with the YOT officer and myself - well I copied the YOT Officer in - and that information was very good for us to know, so from the safeguarding point of view, from keeping safe, that was good' (Practitioner Two)

Listening to parents and recognising the knowledge they have on their own children is therefore not only about providing peer support but it is also about placing a value on the knowledge of the parents, recognising their knowledge as a form of expertise in its own right (Booth, 2019). For the service user communities themselves, in this case the parents, - are enabled to seek solutions to the problems they face, rather than solely relying on 'expert-systems' telling those communities what they need (Booth, 2019). Therefore parents are likely to feel more empowered to bring about the changes they need in their own lives and that of their children. The various activities, such as the focus groups and the

webinars, encouraged parents to reflect on their role as parents. The parents gained the confidence to do this through peer support but also through the non-judgemental environment Kitchen Table Talks generated, allowing parents to think honestly about how to make changes that would benefit themselves and their children in the future.

'My relationship with my child has improved...I'm thinking before I speak; I'm thinking before I act and I am understanding my child a lot better....and my child said to me "this is a turning point"' (Parent 4 Focus Group 2)

'I understand my child a lot more than I did before...(KTT) has helped' (Parent 1 Focus Group 3)

'I am more laid back now...KTT has helped me calm down' (Parent 2 Focus Group 3)

This empowerment of parents was evidenced by some of the parents in the focus groups revealing a more positive focus and direction for the future. Kitchen Table Talks has the potential to be transformative if parents are encouraged to take a more active role in designing their own solutions (Aschhoff and Vogel 2018). They are laying these foundations:

'I was always negative about myself as a single parent and disabled...I can't do so many things with my children...I always felt guilty about that but talking to KTT has given myself a boost so I'm looking at myself in a different light now' (Parent 1 Focus Group 2)

'At the end of this negative thing that happened in our lives, there is something positive to come out of it' (Parent 1, Focus group 2).

'If we as parents can help each other then that's a positive thing' (Parent 3 Focus Group 2)

'The future is much brighter than I thought it was going to be!' (Parent 1 Focus Group 3)

There were no criticisms of Kitchen Table Talks that came out of the focus groups however COVID 19 was reported as having an impact. Some parents did not like having to, 'do everything on Zoom. I can't wait until we can all meet up and relax'. They longed to meet up face-to-face as they felt that, 'when we are able to meet in person friendships might be formed' (Parent 4 Focus Group 2).

7. Summary and recommendations

The Kitchen Table Talks team have achieved a substantial amount in a relatively short space of time. Qualitative feedback and insights are overwhelmingly positive and the team should be commended for this. The engaging offer, independence from the YOTs, responsiveness of the team, and tapering of support, were highlighted as particularly positive. There is a need to continually review group composition to ensure parents feel able to engage. Parents report feeling supported and empowered and Kitchen Table Talks has the potential to be transformative where parents are encouraged to take a more active role in designing their own solutions. First Class Legacy are well placed to meaningfully involve a diverse range of community members in restorative practices.

The commissioning of Kitchen Table Talks through the WMVRU and YJB reflects a shift a contemporary place where parents are seen as having the potential to become part of the solution. It is important in the next phase of the evaluation to quantitatively explore impact and outcomes on parents and children. The next evaluation report will also consider the Centre for Justice Innovation cost avoidance tool.

At this stage of the evaluation the recommendations focus primarily on developing referrals to Kitchen Table Talks to ensure the programme is fully utilised and rolled out further in some YOTs. At the time of reporting, YOT support for Kitchen Table Talks wasn't always reflected in referral rates. YOT referral barriers centred on current delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic. Perceived barriers related to the inability to engage in 'face-to-face befriending', parental familiarity with online meetings, and maintaining staff awareness of the programme while home working. Promoting the programme to parents with the most complex life circumstances was difficult, although these parents might be likely to benefit the most.

Recommendations and points to consider:

- That YOT senior managers acknowledge and share with their teams the key points from this evaluation about the innovation of the Kitchen Table Talks approach and how it differs from other parenting offers
- Referral processes vary at different YOT locations. While this is appropriate as the YOTs have very different profiles, there is a clear need to formally and informally share good practice to increase referrals
- YOTs could be asked to produce a short action plan to support referrals and update it at working group meetings
- Referrals numbers have been highest where there is buy-in and active support from senior managers within YOTs. All YOTs should ensure senior managers are briefed on Kitchen Table Talks and actively support referrals
- In larger YOTs consideration should be given to appointing several Kitchen Table Talks Staff Ambassadors.

- The referral process operates the most effectively when a Kitchen Table Talks representative is available at the YOT while cases were being discussed.
- There is a need to maintain a high profile for the programme to promote referrals. We note that Kitchen Table Talks are producing new materials, including videos of parents talking about the programme.
- All YOTs should acknowledge that Kitchen Table Talks has the potential to facilitate effective and constructive communication between parents and YOTs.
- As England moves out of the current lockdown, renewed promotional activity should be undertaken to remind staff of the Kitchen Tables Talks provision. Highlighting the welcoming, safe and inclusive face-to-face programme delivery mode will be particularly important for those practitioners who view online programme delivery as problematic.
- YOTs are encouraged to consider the potential for collaborative working with parents involved with Kitchen Table Talks, for example through peer mentoring recognition.

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Appendix

Comparison group design

The comparison group – who do not take part in the project – provide a basis for comparison, allowing for testing whether participation in the project has any influence on outcomes. In an ideal research design, individuals would be randomly allocated to either a participant or control group. However, we understand that participants will be referred to the project and so the research team will not be able to exert control over the selection and allocation of programme participants. When randomisation is not feasible, comparison-group studies are recognised as a suitable alternative (Coalition for Evidence Based Policy, 2007). Comparison group designs are most likely to produce valid results when programme and comparison groups are highly similar in key demographics (e.g. age, gender), key relevant factors (e.g. convictions, sentence length) and geographic location (e.g. from the same city), and when outcome data are collected in the same way for both groups (Coalition for Evidence Based Policy, 2014).

Data will be sought from the YOT Careworks or Childview (or other) systems. Project participants' data will be compared to data from a comparison group of children. The start point for the matching process will be all children serving sentences with the YOTs, but not taking part in the project. The participant and comparison groups will be matched as far as possible on gender, age, and – potentially - average sentence length (we will review the most potentially significant confounding variables, which might include sentence length and/or type of sentence/offence).

While a typical rule of thumb is to have project and comparison groups of broadly equal size, if the project (participant) group is relatively small a larger control/comparison group can be used to 'increase the probability that the control/comparison group will provide an accurate benchmark for statistical comparison and is recommended as a method to increase statistical precision (Rinido, 1990:75).

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