

Evaluation of St Giles Trust's Community Fund (Home Office)

Helping to Prevent Knife Crime 2018-2019

Introduction

Knife crime is an issue of huge concern, affecting young people, families and communities. The government and partners are actively responding to the issues raised. However, a key problem is that knife crime is no longer the preserve of inner city areas, but has spread to places, including shire counties, where it was previously rare or unheard of.

This spread has led to the urgent need for successful interventions developed in London and other big cities to be imported to areas where there simply isn't the time to establish local, robust and specialist responses to these newly identified problems. This parallels the experience of London in the 2000s where US experts and models were widely touted as the 'solution' to gang crime, with limited success. Drawing on this experience, it is critical to understand how St Giles Trust (SGT) and other specialist charities can replicate effective city based projects in ways that work for local communities in cities, towns and villages, without diluting the effectiveness of the approaches.

This report evaluates four SGT projects based in 3 different English regions and delivering across a range of organisations and communities located in city, town and village settings, with the aim of identifying successful approaches and learning points that can hopefully provide a useful reference for other organisations and commissioners considering how to replicate services.

The four SGT projects supported by the Home Office's Community Fund, piloted different approaches to providing preventative interventions to help children and young people avoid involvement in youth violence and knife crime. Projects took place between September 2018 and the end of March 2019, and were delivered in the Royal London Borough of Greenwich, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Ipswich and Leeds/Bradford.

All projects involved delivery of SGT's SOS+ programme to children and young people in a variety of settings including primary and secondary schools, alternative education providers, youth centres and community groups. Each project was tailored to the particular needs and circumstances of the children and young people, local area and participating organisations.

In addition to the core project offer of SOS+ sessions for children and young people, a range of other interventions and activities were planned, varying for each project and including:

- Delivery of SOS+ sessions for parents (Tower Hamlets, Woolwich, Leeds)
- One-to-one mentoring of young people at particular risk (Ipswich and Leeds)
- Recruiting and training Mentors and Peer Advisors with lived experience (Ipswich and Leeds)
- 'Train the trainer' sessions to upskill existing SGT staff to support sustainability of the model and approach (Leeds)
- Supporting the development of a small community based BAME partner organisation (Woolwich)

The main objectives of this evaluation are to:

- Understand the rationale for each project – the local circumstances, other linked or relevant services and partners and the motivations/needs of participating organisations;
- Assess the impact of the interventions – expected and unexpected – for young people and children, participating organisations, parents, communities, statutory organisations and any other identified stakeholders;
- Identify how the projects have met identified needs, as well as needs and demands that have emerged over the delivery period;
- Identify any key blockages and challenges affecting the projects, how these were dealt with and any significant changes that have needed to be made to projects;
- Analyse commonalities and differences across the different delivery models and target groups, and
- Identify learning points and provide suggestions for moving forward – to strengthen delivery, management and impact measurement of the overall SOS+ programme, for future planning and investment and for development work with partners.

This report begins with a summary and overview that considers all four projects together, drawing out key learning from across the work and providing some comparative comment and analysis, leading to a set of recommendations. This is followed by individual summaries of performance for each project, including impacts, challenges, successes and key learning points.

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Methodology

The evaluation took place between late February and April 2019 and included:

- Review of internal project monitoring reports and data, internal evaluation forms (children, parents, organisations) and other feedback (email, social media);
- Observations of some SOS+ delivery;
- Structured discussions with SGT project staff in each of the four projects to assess project performance, impact, key challenges and modifications of the original project plans, and
- Structured discussions with children and young people and staff in participating organisations, as well as key stakeholders including professionals in local authorities, youth services and youth offending.

Discussions were guided by a set of key questions, tailored for each respondent group, to ensure consistency of approach. Direct quotes are shown in italics and speech marks but are not attributed to individuals in order to protect confidentiality. Where any names are used, permission has been given to do so.

Summary and overview

St Giles Trust's (SGT) SOS+ Community Fund knife crime projects show that interventions with relevant content delivered by credible, engaging and skilled facilitators with lived experience of youth violence, weapons, gangs and/or drug running can help to provide children and young people with the knowledge and strategies they need to avoid involvement in such activity. Overall outcomes across the four projects include:

- Over 5,400 children and young people participating in SOS+ sessions and gaining a better understanding of the risks of carrying weapons, the danger of grooming and exploitation, and tools and strategies to build resilience and stay safe
- 10 particularly at risk children and young people received intensive one-to-one mentoring support to help them move into more positive lifestyles
- 464 parents gaining a better understanding, including how their children may become involved and strategies that they can use to support them
- Approximately 120 professionals (education, community leaders, youth services, police) gaining a better understanding, including how children and young people may become involved and strategies that they can use to support them
- 63 organisations engaged in SOS+ sessions, including:
 - 26 primary schools
 - 12 secondary schools
 - 10 youth provisions (including those run by youth offending services)
 - 2 BAME community groups
- A range of BAME communities were engaged, and one BAME community based organisation was helped to develop its services
- 3 volunteer Peer Advisors were trained to become mentors, and 2 SGT staff were upskilled to be able to deliver the SOS+ programme

Highly successful projects embedding positive approaches to tackling knife crime

- Children, young people, parents and professionals taking part in SOS+ sessions were highly positive about what they had learnt and taken away:

*"It made me really think about what is going on around me and how to keep away from it, and don't carry a knife." **Young person***

*"..educating the youth from early, hopefully things can change - education is most definitely key and having real people talk to the youth really helps. So thank you to people like you and the other guy who have turned your life around and show positivity and a passion to help others it truly does make a huge difference." **Mother***

*"The students were riveted...you could see the understanding creeping over them as they listened to what they (SGT facilitators) were saying." **Teaching professional***

*"We've had a marked reduction in aggression (since the SOS+ sessions) and it's changed a few attitudes for the better. For me, that is clear proof of how successful this is. St Giles never disappoints – you know that it's going to have a positive impact." **Youth worker***

"It was fantastic to listen to and take away a lot from the presentation – really engaging, enthusiastic and relevant. I would have found it invaluable to have met the facilitator 15 years ago when I started my career." **Police officer**

- Across the four projects, the children and young people taking part were aged between 10 and 18 years old and were from a wide variety of backgrounds. The majority were not currently involved in any form of youth violence, however, some were on the periphery of involvement and a minority had already experienced the criminal justice system. In schools, SOS+ sessions were delivered in a variety of settings including whole year assemblies, to individual classes and to smaller more targeted groups of particularly at risk young people and/or gender specific sessions. Many schools included the sessions as part of their personal, social, health and economic (PHSE) curriculum.
- Delivery in primary schools was largely to Year 6 children, and in secondary schools to Year 10. The decision to target Year 6 primary children was based on SGT's observations from their work with those already involved in youth violence, gangs and county lines, showing a pattern of increasingly younger children being drawn in, including a 7 year old and several 11 and 12 year olds. This evaluation shows that there is a strong case for extending SOS+ delivery to Year 7. Several comments from primary school professionals highlight the vulnerability of *"the ones who are a bit cocky and strutting about in Year 6 but who are really a bit insecure or have problems and at risk....they are ripe for exploitation when they are back at the bottom of the ladder."*
- SOS+ sessions specifically for parents were included in three of the four project proposals. In the London projects (Tower Hamlets and Woolwich), a significant number of the parents were engaged. SOS+ Yorkshire engaged parents of primary school children and through a BAME community group, however, the project focused the majority of its resources on reaching a very large number of young people. Involving parents in the SOS+ programme helps to develop a network of informed and trusted adults including parents, teachers, health professionals and other statutory services who can *"identify the warning signs and know what they can do to help."* This element of SOS+ should be incorporated as a key feature across the programme.
- Whilst the main target groups for the SOS+ projects were children and young people, and parents, it is clear that the interventions have not only had positive impacts for these participants, but also for others working with them. The reach into wider stakeholder groups – teachers, support staff, youth workers, police, youth offending teams etc. – is particularly important in being able to start embedding the knowledge and awareness that can help these professionals help children and young people in their care once SGT has finished its interventions – *"Understanding how they get involved and what the warning signs are really helps us in identifying who we need to support."* *"There were stacks of things that we learnt and that all helps us to help the children. We need more of that."* This professional development provides some measure of sustainability and impact beyond the delivery phase.
- A number of schools would like to follow up the SOS+ sessions with further activities to reinforce the learning and explore particular issues. Currently, SGT is not able to provide materials and lesson plans to guide this work and it would be useful to consider this as a way of further promoting the sustainability of the programme. Care would need to be taken to ensure that those using the materials had participated in the SOS+ programme so that they had the appropriate level of understanding.

Lived experience engages and gives credibility

- A vital factor in engaging children and young people in learning how to avoid involvement in violence and using weapons is the lived experience of the SGT facilitators that gives them *“a credibility that other types of presentations don’t have.”* Many children and young people commented on how *“their stories”* made a significant impression on them – not glamorising being involved in violence, crime or going to prison, but explaining *“how easy it was for them to get involved in things that they didn’t understand the consequences of.”* All professionals contributing to the evaluation highlighted the *“power that that kind of real life experience can bring when someone skilled at engaging with young people uses it in that way.”*
- Facilitators possess a range of very important skills in addition to their lived experience. These include relationship building with schools and other organisations to understand fully the needs of their young people, parents and staff; the ability to tailor core information to suit different age groups of young people and for adults; the ability to facilitate and to use examples from their lived experience in an engaging way that does not glamorise but does make a significant impression.
- The diversity of the facilitator team is important in ensuring that children and young people are able to hear about a range of different experiences and meet people who can provide positive role models. All projects included facilitators from different ethnic backgrounds. Two projects had a mix of male and female facilitators. It is particularly important that girls are able to meet female facilitators so that they understand the ways in which girls can be groomed into violence and exploitation – *“People think that girls aren’t involved in this kind of stuff, but they are. We need to know about all of these things so that we don’t get caught up.”*
- The number of SOS+ facilitators has increased over the life of the project in order to meet demand. This has included SGT staff in Leeds receiving training to enable them to deliver the programme, as well as additional facilitators being recruited in London. Due to local staffing difficulties, London based facilitators needed to deliver the Ipswich programme, incurring significant travel and costs. The growth in the SOS+ programme and in the demand for it indicates a need for SGT to establish a robust development strategy. This is currently being taken forward.

Mentoring is valued highly but requires more planning

- The SOS+ programme offers two main forms of one-to-one interventions with children and young people. The first can take place after session delivery where facilitators are available to answer questions, give guidance and, on occasions, hear disclosures from children and young people. Facilitators follow safeguarding procedures in respect of disclosures or where they feel a young person is in any danger. Where the pattern of delivery at a school/organisation involves two or three SOS+ sessions in one day, there are more opportunities for such support. The model adopted by the Woolwich Together project where young people attended a series of SOS+ sessions also enabled a range of individual support to be given.
- The second form of one-to-one intervention, offered by the SOS+ Yorkshire and the Jubilee Project (Ipswich), was more intensive mentoring for children and young people who were identified as being at particular risk. The mentoring was delivered by SGT’s trained volunteer Peer Advisors who themselves had lived experience. The mentoring service offered by SGT is popular and a range of professionals contributing to the evaluation stressed the importance of

and need for this service. However, there have been a number of reasons why mentoring has not been delivered to plan within the two SOS+ projects.

- In Yorkshire, resources were focused very largely on delivery of SOS+ sessions and the mentoring aspect of the project was under-developed as a result. In Ipswich, SGT had difficulty in recruiting suitable volunteers to become mentors, and, although 3 Peer Advisors were eventually trained there was an added challenge arising from the fact that all of the children were aged 10 or 11, therefore delivering mentoring outside of school hours and potentially in the centre of Ipswich was problematic.
- A number of contributors to the evaluation commented on the need for this type of one-to-one mentoring as part of the SOS+ programme, particularly for those children who are *“at real risk but don’t meet the threshold for other services – they could really be helped to avoid going down the wrong paths.”* In addition, school professionals identified that *“the summer holidays are a really risky time, particularly for the Year 6s who are full of bravado before they go off to high school....having mentoring during that time would really help them.”*

A wide range of impacts and a need to enhance measurement

- Measuring the impact of a session designed to help young people develop resilience and make better choices is challenging. Participants will take time to process the information and learning that has taken place. How and when they may use the understanding that they have gained, for example, to make less risky choices or to change their reaction to difficult situations takes significant follow up over a period of time. However, there are some useful ways of assessing initial impact, including:
 - reports from teachers/support staff of young people’s engagement in the sessions and any changes in attitude/behaviour after the session has taken place
 - young people’s assessment of the session
 - young people approaching the session facilitator to talk through questions, concerns and issues in more detail

Using these measures, it is clear that the SOS+ projects have had significant impact for young people. Feedback from evaluation forms together with discussions for the evaluation confirm that participating organisations and young people feel that the sessions and support delivered are valuable and have the potential to make a difference.

- The Woolwich Together project involved delivering to young people over a period of 6 months, allowing a much more contact with participants to identify how the programme was helping them. Whilst formal measures were not used on this project, it is clear from discussions with facilitators and some young people that the SOS+ input was helping them to identify potentially risky situations and use strategies learnt in the sessions to avoid becoming drawn in. The young people also reported that they had passed on this learning to siblings, friends and parents.
- Whilst there are internal impact evaluation processes in place, more robust and thorough methods would enable SGT to evidence impact more fully. SGT is currently reviewing its existing paper-based internal evaluation processes and is exploring how they could develop digital systems, including an app. This has the potential to enhance the information currently being

gathered and to extend the assessment of impact by enabling young people to report when and how they are using their learning. These developments are very positive and fit well with the overall strategy to take forward a national SOS+ model.

Extending reach into younger age groups and BAME communities

- The SOS+ projects have all broken new ground by delivering either to younger age groups, new geographical areas or BAME communities that have not previously benefitted from such specialist early intervention. Rather than pick the easy targets of organisations that SGT knew would readily engage or had already worked with, the projects sought to reach children and young people in organisations and in communities where earlier intervention was needed and could be of benefit.
- As identified earlier, SGT's extensive experience working with children and families affected by youth violence, gangs and county lines, as well as their work delivering the SOS+ programme in secondary schools, showed that much younger children were being groomed into this negative activity. This highlighted a clear need for primary school age children to be provided with a specially tailored, age appropriate SOS+ programme.
- Some primary schools had already acknowledged that some of their children were affected by youth violence and were very keen to take up the offer of the SOS+ programme. Others took some time to be persuaded, partly because of the challenges of 'admitting' to needing such an intervention. This is understandable given the pressures that can be exerted by parents and school governors. SGT's skill in working with organisations to talk through the benefits of SOS+ and to ensure that it is tailored to the needs of the children and the school resulted in the projects being able to reach a total of 26 primary schools across Yorkshire, London and Suffolk.
- The ethnic backgrounds of children, young people and parents taking part in SOS+ sessions reflected the communities in which the projects were located. The content and delivery took account of cultural and local sensitivities to maximise engagement. In this way, all projects were able to reach a range of communities.
- Two projects made particular links with BAME communities; the Gambian community in Leeds and the Somali community in Woolwich. In Woolwich, the project set out to work in partnership with a small community based Somali led organisation, B Young Stars, that provides homework clubs, football and mentoring for local young people. This joint working has not only benefited young people and their parents, but has also enabled SGT to develop its reach into the Somali community and strengthened the skills and services of B Young Stars. In addition, the Tower Hamlets project worked extensively with Bengali, Somali and Eastern European communities.

Flexibility and consistency are key to success

- The success of the projects demonstrates that the SOS+ programme can respond very effectively to a variety of different operating environments including large urban areas such as London, Leeds and Bradford, regional towns including Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds, and smaller towns and villages in Suffolk and West Yorkshire. This is in part due to SGT's profile, track record and good reputation as a specialist organisation in these areas, and the ability to ensure that the programme is tailored to meet local circumstances and needs.

- Of the four projects, three used a delivery model based on providing one or two sessions in each participating school/organisation. The fourth project, Woolwich Together, used a very different approach whereby the SGT facilitators delivered weekly sessions to a group of young people who attended regularly. This model also included coaching a community group leader to enable him to undertake some delivery on his own, including in the community's first language, Somali.
- Weekly delivery of the programme had the advantage of young people *"having things repeated which is really useful because you forget stuff."* It also offered more opportunities for relationships of trust to be developed to enable disclosure and one-to-one mentoring support. That said, delivering just one or two sessions in a school/organisation has had considerable positive impacts and enables a greater number of children and young people to be reached. Going forward, it is worth considering both models, and various combinations of the two, responding to the particular needs of the young people and organisations concerned.
- The core content and approach of the SOS+ programme has remained broadly consistent across the projects. However, with projects spread across several of SGT's regional teams, some differences have emerged, including in data collection. Reviewing and strengthening consistency is central to the SOS+ development strategy and this should help to provide the robust framework that improves consistency whilst allowing the necessary flexibility.

Maximum impact and sustainability requires longer term, consistent funding

- SGT has delivered impressive results in the very short funding period of 6 months available for the Community Fund SOS+ projects. That said, projects have been hampered by the lack of time for the necessary development work required to launch these pilots. It takes time to build relationships with those taking part and to recruit and train staff and volunteers with the appropriate skills sets (albeit for posts limited to 6 months duration) – all necessary foundations for projects that have broken new and very valuable ground.
- The fact that schools formed the main bulk of the participating organisations also brings a number of limitations to fast delivery including school holidays and the need to schedule SOS+ sessions without disrupting tightly packed school timetables. Two projects (Tower Hamlets and Ipswich) had further SOS+ sessions booked for delivery in April because schools were unable to accommodate them before the Easter break.
- Highly effective early intervention and prevention services such as SOS+ form a key part of a public health approach to tackling knife crime and other youth violence. Now that the funding has ceased, schools are unable to book follow up sessions (which the vast majority are requesting) and high quality, skilled facilitators are in danger of being lost to the service. Losing the momentum of such a valuable early intervention service such as SOS+ is a false economy.
- Commissioners and funders will gain increased and enhanced benefits by providing longer lead in times and longer funding periods. This would allow SGT to build a critical mass of awareness and understanding amongst young people, parents and professionals which has the potential to develop a culture in which children and young people can be far more resilient to the lure of involvement in violence, crime and other negative activities.
- The need for sustained funding is particularly vital in areas where there are few or no specialist services and where delivery organisations need to build a firm foundation on which to provide the range and depth of support needed for children, young people and communities.

Recommendations for moving forward

These recommendations are overarching suggestions that apply across all four SOS+ projects (and other SOS+ work delivered by SGT).

The main focus is to continue the work to develop a national strategy and action plan for SOS+, within an overall public health approach to tackling youth violence, gangs and county lines. Key strategic and operational recommendations include:

- Identifying two or three delivery models to take forward as options, drawing on the learning of what has worked well for the SOS+ projects. This should include considering repeat delivery as well as linked child/young person and parent delivery
- Agreeing core content for different age groups of young people and for parents, and the level and type of flexibility to take into account local variations whilst maintaining consistency
- Ensuring a balanced and integrated approach to programme delivery that includes engaging young people, parents and professionals, and that provides access to one-to-one mentoring where appropriate
- Continuing to explore and develop new ways of assessing impact, including through digital and app based methods that can be more easily administered, collated and analysed
- Developing a bank of resources that organisations that have taken part in the SOS+ programme can draw on to follow up on the intervention
- Developing a standardised bank of attractive and informative resources for promoting the programme and contacting prospective organisations eg: Mailchimp emails, fliers etc. These would need to be tailored for particular groups and some may require translation.
- Considering delivery to Year 7 students, and potentially one-to-one mentoring services for the transition summer period from Year 6 for at risk young people
- Exploring how one-to-one mentoring could be made available to primary school age children
- Ensuring that each SOS+ service has a gender balanced delivery team where the sessions are mixed and that girls only sessions are available in all areas and include a female facilitator as part of the team
- Exploring how SGT can work with additional community based BAME groups to extend the reach of the programme into other BAME communities and to support smaller organisations to build their knowledge and skills
- Ensuring that sufficient finance is built in for services that are being delivered outside of London and large cities, to take into account the additional costs of delivery in rural areas
- Subject to funding being available, expanding the service in all areas to meet existing and new demand

In addition to these practical suggestions for SGT, it is also recommended that prospective commissioners and funders consider project lengths of at least 18 months to allow the full value of the investment to be realised. This has recently been actioned in a commissioning round of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), in recognition of the fact that organisations require sufficient lead in time to be able to deliver to their full potential.

Brief background

SGT has longstanding experience in supporting children and young people involved in serious youth violence, including gangs and county lines, to exit this activity and develop more positive lifestyles. The SOS+ programme was developed in response to an identified need to provide preventative work in schools and community settings for children and young people who were at risk or on the periphery of involvement in violence, gangs and knife crime.

The key aims of the programme are to prevent children and young people becoming involved in serious youth violence and criminal activity by:

- debunking myths and stereotypes around crime, weapons, gangs and related issues, challenge some of the messages put out on social media and popular culture, de-glamorising the lifestyle and exposing the realities and consequences of carrying a weapon, including going to prison;
- equipping children and young people with practical tools and strategies that they can use to build resilience to risks such as negative peer pressure and grooming, giving them real knowledge and insights that will help them to make positive choices, and
- encouraging children and young people to stay engaged with education and take part in positive activities.

The programme is delivered to children and young people from the age of 9-10 years old upwards. Sessions are tailored to ensure that the materials, approaches and language used are appropriate for the age, gender and backgrounds of each group. Sessions can also be tailored to focus more specifically on issues that are affecting a particular group, for example, gang involvement, sexual exploitation or county lines. SOS+ offers a bespoke approach that ensures the content, timing and audiences for sessions are discussed in depth with the participating school or organisation.

Three of the projects also involved delivery to the parents/carers of children and young people. Again, these sessions are carefully tailored to suit the groups taking part.

Teachers, youth workers and other professionals are often present during sessions and report the benefits of the information and awareness raising, as well as the opportunity to hear and see how children and young people have engaged with the sessions.

SOS+ Yorkshire

This project set out to deliver SOS+ sessions in a range of organisations including primary and secondary schools/PRUs, secure accommodation and youth/community centres, as well as offering additional one-to-one support for young people at particular risk. Planned outcomes included:

- 500 young people have an improved understanding of the risks of carrying a knife and have tools to resist getting involved in gangs and crime and to stay safe
- 20 schools, PRUs and community organisations are more engaged in discussions with their young people on the dangers of carrying knives
- 50 parents have an improved understanding of the risks for young people in carrying a knife and feel more confident about talking with young people in their families and communities
- 50 young people are engaged more intensively in one-to-one support following the SOS+ sessions

SOS+ Yorkshire was developed in response to needs identified through the existing work of the SGT Yorkshire team. This work includes supporting ex-offenders, as well as families affected by deprivation, crime and being involved in the criminal justice system. Staff working on these projects were very well aware of the need for earlier intervention with young people to help them develop the resilience to avoid involvement in violence, gangs and knife crime. The SOS+ Yorkshire project was intended to meet this need.

The project sat well within the wider range of SGT services including the SOS Gangs project, funded by West Yorkshire Police, supporting those already entrenched in violence, gangs and/or exploitation to begin to exit this activity, and the serious and organised crime (SOC) pilot funded by the Home Office, working within multi-agency neighbourhood outreach teams identifying and supporting at risk young people.

The demand for the project has been very high and this is reflected in the significantly exceeded targets for the young people and organisations involved. Key outcomes for the project include:

- Over 4,000 children and young people participating in SOS+ sessions and gaining a better understanding of the risks of carrying weapons, the danger of grooming and exploitation, and tools and strategies to build resilience and stay safe
- 37 organisations taking part in sessions and discussions to improve their knowledge and increase their effectiveness in supporting children and young people to stay away from violence and knife crime
- 24 parents improving their knowledge and increasing their effectiveness in supporting children and young people to stay away from violence and knife crime
- 8 young people offered intensive one-to-one mentoring support continuing beyond session delivery, with a significant number also receiving one-to-one support and advice immediately after session delivery
- SGT staff and volunteers upskilled to enable them to deliver this specialist programme and to provide one-to-one mentoring support

Delivery took place between November 2018 and March 2019, as shown in the table:

Type of organisation	Number of organisations	Age range	Number of sessions	Number of young people
Alternative Education Providers/Pupil Referral Units including one Secure Accommodation provider	12	11-16 yrs	26	488
Mainstream secondary school academies	12	11-17 yrs	39	3,436
Primary schools	2	9-10 yrs	3	35 children (+ 6 parents)
Youth Offending Services (YOS) provision	3	12-16 yrs	5	49
Community groups/youth centres	8	11-18 yrs	8	156 (+ 16 parents)

SOS+ Yorkshire substantially overachieved against its targets due to the local manager making use of additional resources that became available after the Communities Fund bid was approved. This unexpected match funding enabled the Yorkshire team to respond to what was unprecedented demand for the SOS+ service. However, it should be noted for future bidding and financial planning purposes that this level of achievement would not have been possible with the Communities Fund allocation alone.

SGT's existing work meant that there were strong relationships with the police, youth offending and local authorities. These networks were extremely valuable in enabling them to penetrate a number of different organisations where children and young people would benefit from the SOS+ programme. Initial promotion of SOS+ resulted in a flood of enquiries and requests which continued through the life of the project as the word spread and additional organisations wanted to take part.

The main focus of the project was to reach children and young people. The majority of those participating were in mainstream secondary schools, with delivery mainly taking place in school assemblies which partly accounts for the larger than anticipated numbers. Around 10% of participants were in alternative education including pupil referral units. This is particularly welcome to see as these children and young people are often at greatest risk of involvement in knife crime and other violence, with some already on the periphery of involvement.

The work in youth centre settings includes those run by the YOS for young people who are already on the fringes of involvement in a range of negative activity – another very vulnerable group. Community work has included highly successful delivery within the Gambian community, involving young people and parents to help develop awareness, knowledge and resilience across the community.

Impact for young people and parents:

Discussions and feedback for the evaluation illustrate significant impact and a high level of enthusiasm for the interventions. Participating organisations are clear that the sessions have increased understanding for young people and parents:

"I can clearly see from the feedback after the session that our young people are now aware of the issues around carrying a knife and what to do if they are under pressure. The parental feedback was that the kids are still talking about the session and what they learnt. That means that it's gone in and they can use that information. The parents felt that having someone who had real life experience coming in was really important and made a big difference in the impact of the session on everyone.

St Giles is one step ahead of the game by helping to prepare young people and parents like this. Now when our kids see knife crime on the news they know what to do if they are caught up in that situation." **Community leader**

"St Giles delivered two sessions for us for very challenging young people on the fringes of being involved in gangs, 13-16 year old boys and girls. What impressed me was the matter of fact way that they delivered the information. They are real people that have been in real situations and are telling real stories – that gives them a real credibility – the young people were riveted, gripped from beginning to end – and that's not easy to do with these groups.

After the sessions, they have been asking some very interesting questions and it's sparked debates about knife crime – they talked about it for weeks afterwards which is a clear sign that they have really taken notice." **Youth worker**

"They got the kids engaged. They realised that these people (SGT staff) were from similar backgrounds to them and they could link things to people that they knew – that gave them a huge amount of credibility. You listen when someone says something that is directly relatable to your own situation and environment. Their calmness during delivery is amazing – there's no glamorising or shock tactics – just a calm explanation of facts. That's quite disarming and very impactful.

For them to sit through 50 minutes was amazing. They are a tough audience – difficult to engage and always asking silly questions. Their attitude as they walked in was very much 'Oh knife crime, I know all about that'. By the end of the session they were walking out with very different attitudes and clearly thinking and talking about what they'd just experienced." **Deputy head teacher**

A sample of feedback forms completed by young people demonstrates that they found the sessions interesting and engaging, confirming the view of professionals who observed this. When asked about what they had learnt from the session, the majority said *"not to carry a knife"*, demonstrating that the message is getting through. Others picked up on equally important messages including *"understanding about joint enterprise"*, *"being careful"* and *"the consequences of carrying a knife"*.

Interestingly, a very positive and unexpected outcome of the sessions was reported by a youth worker who explained that:

"SOS+ has had a really noticeable impact on our young people. The groups that have had the St Giles sessions have more respect for us as professionals and how we work with them as equals.

We've had a marked reduction in aggression and it's changed a few attitudes for the better. For me, that is clear proof of how successful this is. St Giles never disappoints – you know that it's going to have a positive impact.

In the past we've had police officers in to do sessions on knife crime. It's been useful in some ways, but they don't have the relationship that the St Giles staff develop with the young people so it doesn't have the same effect."

The change in attitude and behaviour displayed by these young people is a good indicator of the continuing impact of the programme. It may be in part due to seeing people who are 'cool' ie: the SGT facilitators with lived experience, in relationships of mutual respect with other professionals. This effect has been observed with regard to SGT's more intensive casework with entrenched young people and further measuring of this outcome in SOS+ provision could prove interesting and useful.

The lower than expected number of young people taking up one-to-one mentoring via the project appears to be for a range of reasons. Because of the demand for the SOS+ sessions, the Yorkshire team focused resources on meeting this demand which reduced the capacity for this element of the project. In addition, it was felt that the schools and other organisations where delivery took place wished to provide the support for young people who were identified as requiring it. Whilst this is likely to be the case, there is clearly a demand for this service and it would be beneficial to explore how additional capacity can be created within SGT, through skilled and trained volunteers perhaps, so that this important element can be delivered.

The eight young people who benefitted from one-to-one intensive mentoring have experienced a range of positive outcomes including one who improved his behaviour resulting in him being moved out of isolation at school and another who was helped to complete his work with the youth offending team and has not been in any further trouble with the police. These examples demonstrate the positive impact that such support can have.

Wider benefits for organisations and professionals

Participating organisations have also gained significantly from being involved with the programme:

"The session was excellent, outstanding and a real eye-opener. It gave me a great opportunity to be more conscious about knife crime. Our Society is about promoting community cohesion and instilling our young people with good attitudes. 95% of our community is Muslim. What St Giles was offering fits really well with helping us to equip our young people with knowledge so that they know what to do in difficult situations. The offer came to us through West Yorkshire Police and we were keen to take it up." **Gambian Welfare Society**

"I was really keen to take up the offer of these sessions and pitched the idea to all the heads of year who instantly got back to me wanting to take it up. It's really helpful for us to have this kind of specialist input." **Secondary school**

"It was fantastic to listen to and take away a lot from the presentation – really engaging, enthusiastic and relevant. I would have found it invaluable to have met the facilitator 15 years ago when I started my career." **Police officer**

Whilst two thirds of organisations taking part are located in Leeds, SOS+ was also delivered to organisations in Bradford, Wakefield, Castleford and Featherstone. This shows a good geographical spread, including areas such as Bradford and Wakefield that have significant problems with youth and gang violence. It also demonstrates good joining up across these key areas which could help in terms of promoting further cross area partnership.

Parents and primary schools are more challenging to engage

SOS+ Yorkshire has put significant effort into ensuring that they could reach as many organisations and young people as possible in the short amount of time available. This has been highly successful, however, the project hasn't been able to engage as many parents as planned. This isn't unusual and reflects the challenges of involving parents, including the practical difficulties of trying to deliver at times suitable for enough parents with work and childcare responsibilities to attend, and/or persuading parents that knife crime is something they also need to learn more about, not just their children.

It also reflects the Yorkshire team's strong focus on reaching as many young people as possible. Whilst this is clearly a priority, the importance of parents having an understanding of the issues, what to look out for with their children and how to help them is also vital in creating a culture of knowledge and resilience that can help children.

Interestingly, the greatest number of parents engaging were from the Gambian Welfare Society. This community based organisation has strong reach into the community which is likely to explain the level of engagement. That said, the session included parents and children together which is not ideal since it can be difficult for both groups to speak freely with the other present.

Primary schools were not a specific target for this project. However, given the very young age that children are now becoming involved in knife crime, gang and other negative activity, it is increasingly important to begin including Year 6 primary school children in SOS+ programmes to provide earlier intervention. These schools can be harder to engage because of some resistance to idea that children this young are subject to these issues and risks, and the reaction of some parents to their children receiving this information. This is evidenced in the Tower Hamlets and Ipswich projects, both of which targeted primary schools alone. However, for future provision, further inclusion of primary schools should be considered.

Ipswich Jubilee Project

This project aimed to build on SGT's existing service for young people in Ipswich which delivered SOS+ sessions to 11-19 year olds in PRUs and provided some one-to-one mentoring for those at most risk of involvement in or on the periphery of youth violence.

The new project aimed to expand SOS+ provision into Year 6 primary education, involving up to 10 schools in Ipswich and surrounding towns. The key planned outcomes for the project included:

- 750 pupils engaging in youth violence and knife crime sessions
- 300 pupils engaging in targeted sessions, for example, on CSE, gang involvement etc.
- 8 adults with lived experience of involvement in youth violence and knife crime being trained as mentors
- 16 pupils who are at particular risk of involvement being provided with intensive support from the trained mentors

Key impacts of the project to the end of March 2019 include:

- 475 pupils engaging in sessions including youth violence, knife crime and more targeted topics including county lines, increasing their knowledge, understanding and skills
- 3 adults with lived experience training as mentors with 2 children being provided with some one-to-one intensive support
- 30 school staff engaging in sessions and thereby increasing their knowledge, understanding and skills in being able to support pupils
- Relationships developed with 8 primary schools and a youth club, in Ipswich as well as in a range of outlying Suffolk towns experiencing issues with violence, knife crime, gangs and county lines and without any specialist services to support them
- Further development of relationships with statutory services including the YOS, local authority and police, and with voluntary sector partners

A breakdown of delivery shows the geographical spread of delivery:

Primary school location	Number of schools	Number of sessions	Number of young people
Ipswich	3	4	215
Stowmarket	2	4	90
Bury St Edmunds	1	2	80
Sudbury	1	1	60
Leiston	1	1	30
Totals	8	12	475

Further delivery of a follow on session to one primary school and an initial session at Wickham Market Youth Club are planned for late April as they could not take place in March.

A challenging context for delivery

Ipswich currently has the smallest capacity of SGT's regional centres, however, the town experiences significant issues with gangs and county lines, including a fatal stabbing in 2018. Whilst police enforcement has helped to diminish the activity of the two main local street gangs – that were also heavily involved in county lines, the problems remain and children are being groomed and exploited into violence and drug running. There are also significant issues in other towns including Bury St Edmunds, as reported by statutory agencies.

“There is a real need for more work from St Giles because of their specialist knowledge. We're very concerned not just about Ipswich but the west of the county – Bury St Edmunds and other places, and with the Roma where we see a real grooming risk in the 9-10 age group. We need targeted work with parents, particularly in diverse communities where they are really vulnerable.”

The East of England as a region has few specialist services for children and young people at risk of involvement in violence. The Jubilee Project has represented a vital service to help this vulnerable group avoid getting involved in gangs, county lines and the resulting carrying and use of weapons.

The project has had the full support of the local authority, Police and Crime Commissioner and youth offending services. There is a keen understanding that *“There's so much vital information that can be provided for children in a safe space through schools work. Also, if the teachers have the knowledge, then they're much better equipped to recognise when things aren't right.”* Running concurrently with the Jubilee Project, SGT was also delivering STOP sessions to professionals across education, social services, the police, youth offending, health and other key areas, providing key information, knowledge and strategies to help these professionals identify children and young people at risk, and to take appropriate action to help them.

The combination of being able to offer specialist sessions for children as well as separate, tailored sessions for professionals is particularly impactful and is likely to contribute to the sustainability of the approach by building expertise, as well as helping to shift cultural attitudes which is another key element in tackling all forms of child criminal exploitation and involvement in violent crime.

Lived experience is vital, but needs to be carefully managed

Central to SGT's ethos is that delivering specialist services effectively requires staff and volunteers to have relevant lived experience and/or cultural competence so that they have credibility with children and young people, can de-glamorise gang involvement and provide role models that demonstrate that it is possible to take positive paths away from negative activity.

Drawing on this principle it was planned that the school sessions should be delivered by a member of SGT's staff who was Released on Temporary Licence (ROTL) from a nearby prison and working in the Ipswich office. Whilst the member of staff was fully checked and appropriate for working in such settings, the local authority and the prison were unwilling to allow a serving prisoner to be on school premises – an understandable if disappointing reaction. The short timescale for the project meant that facilitators with lived experience but based in SGT's London office needed to deliver sessions.

Time required to build relationships

A further factor affecting delivery was the need to spend time liaising with some schools to overcome initial reluctance to take up the offer. SGT had already established good relationships

with secondary schools and PRUs, but primary schools needed some time to develop trust and a willingness to acknowledge the need for SOS+. This is understandable given the pressures faced by schools and the need to take into account parents' feelings and views.

This relationship building was highly effective, as illustrated by the fact that 4 schools took up the offer of follow up sessions and there is a keen appetite for further delivery from SGT.

Impact for children and organisations

Whilst the project has fallen short of the volume of delivery anticipated, it has had significant impact in an area that has very few specialist services to support these children and young people. This impact is illustrated in the feedback from children which indicates that they understood the content of the sessions and that it increased their understanding of the dangers of carry weapons and the grooming process. This learning has provided them with tools and strategies to help keep them safe. Below is a sample of responses when asked what they had enjoyed and learned from the sessions:

"It was good to hear an opinion from someone who has been through that."

"It was so inspirational to me."

"I enjoyed how they interacted (sic) with us and how (it made it) exciting."

"Finding out that D (the facilitator) was charged and stabbed (not a good thing) because it's amazing how she's turned her life around."

"talking about how not to get in trouble with the police."

"learning how to behave with people"

"how no one should carry a knife even though their (sic) not going to use it"

"the continuous questions that made everyone push themselves to how they feel about knives."

"where they said how to keep us safe."

"learning how to make the right choice."

Unprompted feedback from one parent reflects these views:

"A bit random but I thought I would message you and thank you for a talk you gave to my son's school today in Ipswich. It's so important that kids are educated on these things from an early age, especially kids that may come from a disadvantaged background they need to know their worth and believe they can have a positive future so what you are doing is really positive!

My son came home from school, talking constantly about your talk and that of the other man that spoke today also, It was good for him to have someone speak out that has been involved in that life as obviously as much I can talk and give guidance I'm his mum and never been about that life I'm like Mary Poppins compared to what he sees on social media and Tv ect lol (sic).

He's by far not an angel but he is a good boy mostly and has always said he wants to work in the police force so today he said your talk made him want to do that even more and help like you do in some way encouraging others that life on the street isn't in anyway good.....having real people talk to the youth really helps so thank you to people like you and the other guy who have turned your

life around and show positivity and a passion to help others it truly does make a huge difference. Thanks again and keep up the positive work."

Schools recognise positive impact for children

The participating schools praised the sessions and felt that the content, style and SGT personnel with their lived experience created an impactful intervention that meets an urgent need:

"We have children in our school who were affected by the recent fatal stabbing in Ipswich, some of them are related to the victim. We're also located opposite a park that has gang activity so the children are at risk in a variety of ways. Ipswich has a lot of problems with gangs and county lines. We're particularly worried about what will happen to our Year 6 children when they transition to high school – they need to understand how to avoid getting pulled into this kind of stuff. Many of them are quite naïve about gang recruitment. They also thought it was OK to stab someone as long as it wasn't in the body – that's quite shocking and my teachers were surprised at their naivety."

"The estate where our school is looks leafy and green, but there's a lot of stuff going on under the surface and we knew that the children were at risk and needed to understand. The children are a challenging group and the facilitators were brilliant with them – they (children) thought they were really cool which meant that they took notice. It was informative, snappy, polished, engaging and we all learnt something that day – we really need it for the professionals and parents too."

"The sessions were brilliant and very relevant. They engaged the children straight away because they gave personal accounts – they were their stories and the children said that's what was interesting. They've got excellent knowledge and they know how to get that over to children. The content and style of the sessions are completely appropriate for the age group."

"All the teachers have followed up with further work during PHSE sessions. Some children were a bit scared about the realities of what they had heard, but that's a good thing in terms of it making the right impact – and we can work with that to follow up more on the messages about how to keep safe."

"Everything about it was fantastic! I had all the other teachers from across the school in for one of the sessions and they thought it was really great. It's so important that the knowledge is there across the school."

"The sessions have helped children feel that they can come and talk to us if they are worried. A boy whose brother is gang involved came into talk to me and we're going to see how we can help him. That wouldn't have happened before."

"It expanded knowledge and increased awareness, with lots of advice for the children on how to deal with tricky situations. They enjoyed it and engaged with it." Teaching assistant

"Fantastic and engaging session that was both informative and inspirational. Long may the service continue!"

"My husband is a year 6 teacher at Woodhall Primary School in Sudbury Suffolk and recently experienced a presentation given by a member of your team to the whole of the year 6 cohort regarding knife crime and gangs (county) line issues. He was very impressed by the approach

taken by the speaker and the way in which the students reacted. I am the Subject Lead for PSE and Citizenship at a school in Colchester and we are always keen to try and involve effective outside speakers wherever possible."

Mentoring is much needed but requires a carefully planned approach

The additional cost incurred by needing to utilise London based SGT facilitators was met in part through the budget allocated to training mentors for one-to-one support, resulting in reduced capacity for this element. Three mentors were trained, however, the age group of the children (10 year olds) and the reluctance of schools to allow people on ROTL to be on their premises led to logistical issues about where mentoring could take place. Children were invited to come to SGT's offices in central Ipswich but the take up was very poor.

This is disappointing and does not reflect the feedback from schools and other organisations that indicates a real need for mentoring for this age group.

"The one-to-one mentoring is fantastic. It's such a positive relationship between the mentor and the young person. They have meaningful conversations around changing the trajectory of those young people's lives and making it much more positive. We really need that service as well as the schools sessions because we get lots of referrals from schools that we can't deal with." YOS

"Observing the children during the sessions meant that we could identify some who are at particular risk, because of their reactions. One child got up and 'went to toilet'. He's related to the stab victim and we know that he needs extra help. If we had the option of one-to-one mentoring for him and others in a similar position it would be really helpful, especially to support them in moving to high school with all the new pressures there. We're referred some at risk children to a YMCA project that helps with the transition, but specialist mentoring would really help – from people like St Giles who have that knowledge." Pastoral lead

Evidence from SGT's delivery of linked SOS+ and mentoring in another project located outside of London identifies that where the mentoring is delivered on school premises the take up is high and the support is effective. This model should be drawn on for future development of this type of project.

SOS+ Tower Hamlets Knife Crime Programme

This project aimed to deliver knife crime awareness and prevention workshops to Year 6 pupils and their parents in Tower Hamlets. The project was designed to fill an identified gap in prevention services the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH). SGT was already delivering SOS+ and one-to-one mentoring for at risk children in pupil referral units and secondary schools, as well as longer term casework with children and young people involved in violence, gangs and county lines. This also involves working with the families of affected children and young people.

This work identified a clear need for intervention with younger children and the Community Fund provided an ideal opportunity to trial this. The SOS+ workshops were intended to help increase children's and parents' understanding of the risks and consequences of carrying a weapon, how to stay safe without carrying a weapon, the key features of grooming and a range of other issues related to child criminal exploitation including gangs and county lines. The project planned to:

- Deliver knife crime awareness and prevention workshops to all Year 6 students (approximately 2,600 children) in 29 primary schools across Tower Hamlets
- Deliver knife crime awareness and prevention workshops to parents (approximately 2,000) of these children

As of the end of March 2019, the project outputs and outcomes include:

- 33 SOS+ sessions and one conference delivered across 16 schools and a community venue, with a further 4 schools booked for sessions in April 2019
- 782 children have a better understanding of the risks and consequences of carrying a weapon, grooming and other issues and how to keep themselves safe
- 290 parents have a better understanding of the risks and consequences of carrying a weapon, grooming etc. and increased knowledge to help them support their children more effectively
- A minimum of 40 school professionals (teachers, teaching assistants, pastoral staff etc.) have a better understanding of the risks and consequences of carrying a weapon, grooming and increased knowledge to help them support pupils and parents more effectively
- Relationships of trust and understanding developed across a range of schools and with BAME communities, enabling further follow up work to be carried out

Whilst the project has not met the projected numbers, it has had significant impact in establishing a firm foundation on which to expand and develop the work, as identified in this summary.

Engagement with a new sector takes time

Relationship building around a sensitive subject such as knife crime takes time – a real challenge when faced with a six month delivery period. The local authority provided some initial support with a list of primary schools, however, many of the contacts were general 'admin' email addresses and significant time was spent in finding the best person to make contact with. Whilst this appears to be a small administrative detail, against the backdrop of a very short delivery timeframe it represents a significant delay.

Once contact had been made with primary schools, the main challenge was to engage primary schools as many were “*a bit wary to begin with*”. It can be difficult for primary schools, even in the heart of London, to publicly acknowledge that they feel their children may be at risk of getting involved, or on the fringes of involvement in violence, gangs and other negative activity. There are implications for school image and taking the step of engaging with such a programme may involve repercussions from parents and governors. Project workers needed to have several conversations with many schools to talk through the SOS+ programme and understand the individual concerns, needs and sensitivities of each school.

Schools needed time to consider the benefits and challenges of engaging with the programme and how they might persuade parents that this would be a positive intervention for their children. Project staff provided significant input throughout this engagement period, talking through the programme in detail, giving examples of positive outcomes from previous delivery, and exploring and suggesting how it could be presented to parents as an important learning and safeguarding opportunity.

Building the foundations for impactful delivery

Whilst this relationship building has been time consuming it has reaped rewards in establishing really good foundations upon which to launch the programme and in enabling the project to undertake more intensive work with each of the 16 schools. The depth of preparation also meant that facilitators were able to deliver a session each for children and for parents in each school. This is a particular achievement given that it is generally more difficult to engage parents. Dual delivery such as this is likely to help build a ‘multiplier’ effect whereby children and parents are helped to develop a common understanding of the risks around knife crime, gang involvement and other forms of child criminal exploitation, and how to avoid being groomed and lured in.

Feedback from participating schools is extremely positive:

“The delivery was at the children's level with a serious message but engaging at the same time. The children really enjoyed the session and said they got such a lot from it as they felt the tutors were talking about something they had direct experience of which made it more meaningful for them and they really related to the subject matter, to the tutors and how the information was delivered. Thank you.”

“The children enjoyed the session, they had a chance to discuss situations that are not covered by the curriculum. The format of the session - split into listening, discussion and movement made it engaging for children. They had time to reflect on what was discussed and the fact that the session was delivered by someone who had first hand experience of the consequences made it more meaningful for them.”

Participating schools are now requesting further sessions to focus on particular issues, for example, gangs and county lines involvement. There is also clear recognition that there is huge vulnerability for some in the transition to senior schools (echoed in the Ipswich project). To date, SOS+ has typically been delivered to those in Year 10 and above, however, there are strong indications that delivery for year 7 students would be very helpful as children move to “*being a small fish in a very big pond, much more independence and all the risks that go with trying to find your identity as an adolescent.*” In addition, one-to-one mentoring over the summer transition period between Years 6

and 7, for those identified as at greater risk of/on the fringes of involvement could prevent a number of children from entering into the downward spiral of involvement.

Reaching BAME communities

The project has also had particular reach into the Bengali and Somali communities which is very important given their significance in Tower Hamlets. In addition to this, the project has also had impact for children and parents from Eastern European communities, as described by a participating faith school where the majority of children are from this background. The lived experience of the facilitator was seen as particularly powerful and important:

“Our families tend to be quite sheltered and they don’t have the information or knowledge about knife crime and these other issues. It’s really important for the parents as well as the children to see and hear the realities. Although we don’t seem to have any issues with the children, the local area has rising teenage crime and it doesn’t mean to say that they won’t get involved at some point. The transition to secondary schools is a concern as some will be on their own with no friends moving up with them, or other children they don’t get on with. That makes them vulnerable.

When the facilitator asked the class of 27 children if they knew what an ex-offender was, none of them knew. The looks on their faces when the facilitator told them that she was one and how easy it had been for the gang to trick her into doing things that led to prison they were amazed. Her lived experience makes a phenomenal impact. They realised how they could be tricked into being involved and that just because someone’s been to prison it doesn’t mean that they are bad. It was far more effective than someone just coming and talking at them. She understands what she can and cannot say to 10 and 11 year olds, she’s fabulous.”

All sessions were not only tailored to suit the audiences – children or parents, but also to be culturally sensitive and aware of potential English language needs where needed. An interpreter was used in one particular session with parents where it was known that many had very little English language.

A useful development of the project could be to work with other community based organisations that have additional reach into BAME communities to build on this success. SGT is currently developing a relationship with one such organisation in Tower Hamlets with respect to its one-to-one mentoring work with young people who are already involved in child criminal exploitation and has also been working with a Somali organisation in Woolwich on another SOS+ project. These relationships and the experience gained from them could be drawn on for the SOS+ programme in Tower Hamlets.

Impact for children

The children participating in sessions included mainly Year 6 pupils with some from Year 5. Feedback indicates that they enjoyed the sessions and gained a great deal from them in understanding the risks of carrying weapons, how grooming works and how to help keep themselves safe. The lived experience of the facilitators not only provides the much needed credibility that is so important in connecting with children (especially those who are already exposed to violence and

gang activity), but also provides a level of 'enjoyment' which is equally vital if children are to be fully engaged in the process of learning.

School staff were highly positive about the sessions, stressing how engaged the children were – *"I've never seen a class so focused. Because this lady had been to prison she had their attention for the whole session."* The fact that children clearly understood and took on board the messages from the sessions is reflected in their feedback, including their verbatim comments:

"I enjoyed the session because you told us everything we need to know about knife crime."

"I enjoyed it because they were honest and I understand it even more."

"how they talked about social media and how it could be dangerous"

"I enjoyed how it gave us awareness of knife crime through people who have experience."

"I enjoyed the stories they said that happend and now we know the concecuences."

"It gave us a lesson for life."

"I enjoyed learning about how you can be careful on what is happening around you and I also liked the teachers background story because it taught me to be careful and aware of who I hang out with."

"It made me feel safe and how to protect myself and other people."

The facilitator stayed behind after each session so that she could talk to children one-to-one if they have additional questions or, as is sometimes the case, feel able to disclose experiences or issues that are affecting them. For example, one boy disclosed that his father was in prison and, given the information provided during the session, *"he was very sad because he was trying to work out why his father was in jail."* He had the opportunity to talk things through with the facilitator and this also highlighted to the school that he needed further support.

This SOS+ programme did not include the facility for follow up mentoring with children which might have been very beneficial for this child, not least because it is clearly recognised that having a parent in prison is an adverse childhood experience (ACE) that can be an indicator that the child is at greater risk of involvement in negative activities.

Along with the children, school professionals (teachers, teaching assistants, safeguarding leads etc.) have benefited significantly from participating in the sessions, helping them to increase their understanding and to observe how their pupils react to the information being provided. Staff also actively participated by asking questions related to specific issues that had come up in the school so that facilitators could ensure that these very pertinent experiences were focused on in an informal way, enabling children to get the information that they needed. This partnership approach helps to ensure that consistent and accurate information is provided whilst responding to very specific circumstances and needs.

Impact for parents

The project impact for parents has been highly significant. It is clear from feedback that they valued the sessions very highly – *"very good presentation"* and *"everything was helpful"*. The sessions enabled them to understand *"the warning signs and indicators to look out for in your child"* to help

provide early identification of being groomed or being drawn into violence and exploitation. Other tools that parents feel the sessions helped them to develop included *“listening to my child and giving them more confidence.”*

Again, this impact takes skilled delivery, including to overcome the initial reactions of some parents:

“To begin with some parents give me funny looks when I talk about being an ex-offender. But then they realise that my life is completely different now, and that that experience is what gives me the knowledge that I can pass onto the children and to them.” **Facilitator**

“The parents were a bit wary to begin with, but by the end of the session several of them were in tears realising how the facilitator had been drawn into that world and had ended up in prison. After the session they were better able to identify things that might be a sign of problems. She went into more detail with the parents about her grooming and what happened to her and showed them her tag. It’s a shame that more of the parents weren’t there, but the ones who came discussed it on the WhatsApp group and told the others about it. I’d really like to have more sessions.” **Deputy head**

“A lot of parents don’t let their children go to school on their own, even in Year 6. It was really helpful for them to learn about how easily they can be asked to do things by young people posing as ‘friends’. It means that they feel they have the knowledge to be able to have that conversation with their child ahead of them going by themselves to school.” **Family & safeguarding officer**

The work with parents is also leading to further engagement. For example, the facilitator is going to be attending a coffee morning at parents’ request so that she can hear more about their concerns and issues with a view to providing additional support and intervention. The parents’ conference attended by 120 participants has also led to requests by parents for sessions in 4 additional primary schools that have not previously participated. This demonstrates the power of the sessions – parents’ word of mouth endorsement of the effectiveness of the work persuading their children’s schools to become involved.

Woolwich Together

This project involved a partnership between SGT and B Young Stars, a Somali led organisation working with young people and their parents in Woolwich. Through the combination of SGT's experience, track record and infrastructure, and B Young Stars' credibility and reach into the local community, Woolwich Together aimed to:

- Engage approximately 100 young people and 75 parents in knife crime awareness raising sessions that aim to increase their understanding of the risks and consequences of carrying a weapon, and how to stay safe without carrying a weapon.
- Enable B Young Stars to develop as an organisation and enhance its ability to deliver
- Improve SGT's engagement with 'hard to reach' and at risk groups of young people in BAME communities

By the end of March 2019, the project had delivered the following outcomes:

- A series of interventions that focus on knife crime awareness and other key topics such as gang involvement, grooming, drugs, going to prison etc. delivered to a minimum of 150 young people, helping them to gain a much greater understanding of the risks and consequences, and gaining strategies and tools to help keep them safe.
- A total of 47 SOS+ sessions delivered to young people, 4 of them girls only, and a total of 12 SOS+ sessions delivered to parents. This included 1,187 attendances by young people (an average of 25 young people per session) and 174 by parents (an average of 15 parents per session).
- A series of interventions on these topics delivered to a minimum of 150 parents to help increase their understanding of the issues, what to watch out for in their children and how to support their children more effectively.
- Establishing a firm partnership between SGT and B Young Stars, resulting in the development of enhanced provision for children and young people to help them develop resilience to being involved in violence, gangs, drugs and other negative activities and to encourage and support their achievements and progress. The partnership has also resulted in SGT having greater understanding, reach and impact in Woolwich.

Delivery took place at Woolwich Common Youth Club and the Barnfield Hub (in Woolwich) and included 27 joint SOS+ sessions delivered by the SGT facilitator and leader B Young Stars, and 20 sessions delivered by the leader of B Young Stars alone, including some in Somali.

This arrangement appears to have worked very well, enabling SGT to provide specialist input that benefits the young people and parents as well as coaching the leader of B Young Stars to develop his range of skills and knowledge to deliver sessions independently. The young people were a mix of girls and boys in the 11-18 age range, predominantly from the Somali community. Three SGT facilitators were involved in delivery, all male.

SGT has previously delivered some services in partnership with other organisations in Woolwich but this project broke new ground in working closely with a community based Somali organisation. B Young Stars had already established a range of activities based in the two youth clubs, combining sport with homework support and some mentoring where needed. The organisation had developed

a strong and respected presence in the community, helping young people to enhance their academic achievements and providing activities for those who might otherwise be drawn into negative activities.

A flexible programme

Woolwich Together used a different model of delivery to the other 3 SGT Community Fund projects. Rather than providing one or two sessions to different groups of young people coming to the youth clubs, the SGT facilitators worked with the leader of B Young Stars to dovetail and co-deliver sessions that included smaller, tailored SOS+ input combined with the existing homework and sports club.

This demonstrates the flexibility of the SOS+ programme in that it can be adapted to fit with the provision and structures of different organisations. For youth clubs with a regular group of attendees it was possible to trial the idea that weekly input from specialists might provide a good way of not only raising awareness and delivering information but also give 'group mentoring' opportunities to support the aim of keeping young people engaged in education.

One of the SGT facilitators working on Woolwich Together was already delivering an intensive SOS+ programme in a school outside of London, using a similar model. Embedding the service in such a way enables the facilitator to develop an ongoing relationship with young people and the host organisation. This has a number of advantages including providing opportunities for one-to-one mentoring for young people with particular needs and supporting the host organisation to develop its knowledge, understanding and responses to young people's involvement in violence and other negative activity.

The flexibility demonstrated in this project is clearly very positive. That said, going forward, care will need to be taken to ensure that the unique features, quality and consistency of the SOS+ programme is maintained when modifications are made. The plans in process for a national model with local flexibility will provide a useful framework for achieving this.

Impacts for young people

Initially, *"some of the young people were hesitant about having sessions on knife crime, but as soon as they heard about the attacks (knife crimes in London) they cried and they saw that it would be a good thing to do."* This is particularly interesting when set against the feedback from young people that follows – where they clearly state that it's important for young people who aren't involved in knife crime to gain the knowledge and understanding of how to avoid it.

Young people interviewed for the evaluation were very positive and enthusiastic about the benefits of the SOS+ work:

"People think that girls aren't involved in this kind of stuff, but they are. We need to know about all of these things so that we don't get caught up. Also, just because we're trying to do well at school doesn't mean that we can't get persuaded into those things. If you're feeling a bit fed up with stuff, you might be tempted. Knowing exactly where it can lead helps you to think again."

"We can tell our family and friends what we've learnt. I told my younger sister. She thought the groups of boys that hang around near us were just chatting. I explained that they could be doing lots of other things. Now she keeps away from them."

“We’re surrounded by it here – drugs, gangs, people getting stabbed. The sessions really help us to keep away from it and focus on work and doing better.”

“I know if I have a problem or I see something I think is wrong I would come and talk to them. I trust them and that’s one of the things we learn – find people you can trust that you can talk to.”

“It’s a really great thing to have them come and speak to us – they know about all these things because they’ve been through them. And it’s really good that we see different people (facilitators) too – they have different experiences to tell us about and it all helps us.”

“Having someone coming in regularly is really good because you forget things, and then you have a chance to hear them again. That’s really important.”

“Because we’re all trying to do better with our work, it’s great to have them come in when we’re doing our homework sessions. They motivate us with that, as well as telling us things that we need to know. It’s inspirational.”

These comments highlight important points around ensuring that services such as SOS+ are delivered to all children and young people, even those who would not be expected to be at any risk of getting involved in violence. It also underlines the need to remember that girls can and are drawn into this activity. Whilst knife crime, gangs, county lines and other forms of violence and exploitation involve more boys than girls, the latter are involved and are groomed, exploited and become heavily entrenched. A good development for this project would be to include female facilitators with lived experience. They would provide particular points of reference for girls, and specific tips and strategies for developing resilience to grooming and exploitation.

The relationships of trust developed between facilitators also encourages young people to speak more freely about their experiences, for example, *“giving their perspective on elders trying to groom them and their friends – they didn’t realise what was happening until they had the sessions.”* This demonstrates the important and positive impact of the SOS+ intervention.

Whilst not in the original project plan, some street outreach also took place involving the leader of B Young Stars and the SGT facilitator. This helped the facilitator to understand more about the youth violence and gang context in the local area, as well as providing opportunities to help some of the young people caught up in it. The SGT facilitator shared his life experience and explained how he had turned his life around. As a result of a number of meetings and talks with these young people, 4 stopped their involvement – *“When the kids met him and heard his story, they kind of went ‘Oh’, and it made a big impression.”*

Impact for parents and the community

The leader of B Young Stars was able to explain to parents of those young people attending the provision the importance of the information and awareness delivered by the SOS+ facilitators. As a respected figure in the community, this helped to encourage parents to come to sessions. The number of parents involved in sessions is impressive and is a key indicator of the strength of involving a community based BAME led organisation.

It can be difficult to engage parents in challenging topics such as knife crime if they feel that it ‘doesn’t apply to my child’. However, the parents involved in this project *“were thrilled to be able to*

meet with the facilitators and after the initial delivery demanded more!" This is extremely helpful in developing the wrap around awareness and support needed to help keep young people safe, and to begin to increase understanding across a community so that resilience can begin to build.

Once they had begun to take part, they were extremely enthusiastic about what was being offered:

"They spread the word and so more and more parents came. I could offer translation for community elders and we had someone who could also translate into Arabic. It was really effective and it's made a real impression on those parents. It gave us a platform to cover other issues like ASB. We've been to council meetings and a parent's meeting – it's created a lot of opportunities to get involved. We've also trained two parents to become volunteer community advocates – it's been really successful." **Leader of B Young Stars**

Care will need to be taken to ensure that SOS+ content and approach remains consistent as messages are fed through communities, but it is clearly worth exploring other similar partnership arrangements to engage with particular communities.

Helping to develop a community based BAME group

Key outcomes for the project were to enhance the delivery of a community based organisation for SGT to improve its reach into communities where there are at risk young people. Young people from the Somali community in south East London have been and are involved in some of the most challenging child criminal exploitation, including through several gangs, county lines and cross over extremism activity. This partnership development demonstrates the impact that can be achieved for a community that is experiencing some particularly difficult issues, and that may help to prevent other young people from getting groomed and exploited into negative activity.

A firm relationship of trust and mutual respect between SGT and B Young Stars has developed over the course of the Woolwich Together project. The leader of B Young Stars feel that *"St Giles has helped to develop our work, and the lived experience of the guys really helps – the kids take more notice of what's being said. As an organisation we're more recognised in the area. There's a lot of organisations that say they're doing things, but they're not. St Giles is different – what you see is what you get!"*

SGT has brokered B Young Stars helping both MOPAC and the Home Office with consultations around knife crime and extremism. B Young Stars also supported the HO's #knifefree campaign.

By the same token, SGT has increased its understanding of and engagement with the Somali community which can help them to develop partnerships and services that can meet the needs of young people who may be affected by youth violence, gangs, county lines and other negative activities.

SOS+ as part of a public health approach

The SOS+ projects have been delivered against a backdrop of increasing publicity around knife attacks involving children and young people, many resulting in death. The reasons for knife crime are complex and there is no single solution that can tackle this crime that destroys and affects many lives. However, taking a public health approach to the issue, the SOS+ programme represents a key element in terms of prevention – essential if the spread of an ‘infection’ is to be reduced.

Interestingly, this key point is recognised by some of the young people engaging in SOS+, as explained by their youth worker - *“The recent attacks (Manchester and London) have really upset them – they ask why the young people involved in those haven’t had SOS+. They feel that if they had been able to have that, they may not have ended up killing someone or being dead.”*

In moving forward with the SOS+ programme, and more widely with services to help support children and young people to develop resilience, the much publicised public health model has some useful approaches to consider. The model draws on the approach that might be taken to tackle and control a disease outbreak or epidemic – including fast intervention to reduce the risk of others coming into contact with the epidemic, effective ‘treatment’ of those already affected (using methods that have been assessed as successful) and action to eradicate the source of the epidemic.

The model also rests on key principles that include effective cross agency working between police, health, social services, criminal justice system, schools and specialist voluntary and community organisations, typified by SGT services including SOS+. It relies upon all professionals across these agencies having an accurate, common and regularly refreshed level of understanding of the key issues.

Using the health analogy, it is possible to see how pivotal the SOS+ programme is:

- **how to identify the infection** (in this, young people’s involvement in knife crime) – being clear about how it manifests itself in the local area, and what it is a symptom of – with young people on the periphery of involvement, SOS+ sessions can result in disclosures to help identify what is going on
- **how to identify those affected** – they will present differently according to the type and level of their involvement and which agency they happen to come into contact with first eg: presentation at A&E as a result of violence, in school with poor behaviour or truancy, in a custody suite, through social services contact with the family etc.
- **why children are being infected** Understanding the risk factors that increase the likelihood of a child becoming involved in knife crime as a victim and/or perpetrator and the factors that may protect them from this is essential. However, it is also very helpful in beginning to change organisational cultures and professionals’ attitudes to identifying vulnerability. This is not simply for compassion’s sake. If the vulnerability of a perpetrator/victim is acknowledged, the learning about why they were so at risk of involvement and exploitation can take place and this in turn informs responses to prevention as well as exit
- **what are the most effective treatments/interventions** – for those already infected eg: SGT’s services for those already involved in youth violence, and to prevent others from being infected eg: early intervention work such as the SOS+ programme. Treatments and interventions should be founded on an evidence base that demonstrates effectiveness and identifies the reasons for success ie: what are the key factors that make it effective and how can these be replicated

A further element in the public health model is to ensure widespread adoption of effective models/approaches/treatments/interventions across all relevant agencies. This should include through training, professional development and sharing of expertise and knowledge. That said, what this evaluation demonstrates is that 'one treatment does not cure all' – interventions need to have a consistent core but be capable of tailored and nuanced application – much as 'cocktail drug' approaches might be tailored to suit individual patients being treated.

SOS+ is a vital element in building an effective public health approach. SGT's work through SOS+ is delivering effective preventative treatment in the form of specialist support to children and young people. The fact that parents and professionals are also included in the programme means that there are greater chances of controlling the infection and building resilience against it through widespread adoption. Development and roll out of a national SOS+ programme could benefit many areas of England and Wales in providing a key element that can help children and young people be resilient to involvement in violence, exploitation and crime.