Addressing the safety and criminal exploitation of vulnerable young people – psychosocial transformations before, during and after COVID-19 and lockdown

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Addressing the safety and criminal exploitation of vulnerable young people - before, during and after COVID-19 and lockdown

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1. Vulnerable not violent: Addressing the safety and criminal exploitation of young people

This chapter is discussing the intersection of, what is arguably an epidemic, and a pandemic, both of which can be fatal. In recent years there has been an epidemic in youth violence and crime, particularly in East London, and in the London Borough of Newham, where knife crime cases and youth knife injuries in particular have been consistently higher than comparator boroughs and London as a whole between 2013 and 2017, although all areas had shown an increasing trend[1]. More recently, serious violence affecting young people, had declined in Newham from a peak in December 2017 (113 victims) to September 2019 (72 victims)[2], and although the reasons for this reduction are as yet unclear, this number of incidents demonstrates that it remains a substantive issue, and particularly, one where 30% of residents (of all ages) in a survey said that knife crime in particular was a problem. Another concern connected with this is that the number of children entering the criminal justice system had increased recently, with this figure doubling for 13 year olds during 2018-2019, with many linked to knife offences[3]. Therefore, it appears that a key condition for this 'epidemic of youth violence' is the criminal exploitation of vulnerable young people, that is targeting children as young as 13, and probably even younger. This could explain why the number of male suspects for acts of violence in Newham also increases steeply from age 10 (less than 100/100K) to age 13 (just under 1200/100K) based on figures presented in December 2019[4]. Similarly, injury from sharp objects (including knives) was reported as increasing 'steeply' between 14 and 16 year olds in research from the Royal London Hospital Accident and Emergency Admissions.[5]

One pathway to criminal exploitation and youth violence often starts through exclusion from school that leaves children and young people exposed and vulnerable whilst 'on the street', where they can associate with others already engaged in violent and illegal activity. Therefore, a key intervention approach is to support children and young people to settle, transition and perform at school. A particularly important transition is the one from primary to secondary school. If this can be supported successfully, it could significantly reduce the possibility of young children being criminally exploited during the summer months between this transition. This was a key aim of a complex intervention called "Newham Keeping Safe" (hereafter NKS), that was implemented by the London Borough of Newham during July-August 2019, and lasting until the end of March 2020, that was evaluated by a team from the University of East London (UEL).

Approximately six months after the NKS intervention had started, in December 2019 the "Mayor of Newham's Youth Safety Board" produced a report that contained recommendations that further

[1] MOPAC Weapon enabled Crime Data Dashboard and population data from ONS
[2] Mayor of Newham's Youth Safety Board: Report and recommendations, December 2019
[3] Newham Youth Offending Team data 2017/18
[4] Mayor of Newham's Youth Safety Board: Background and evidence briefing youth safety in Newham, December 2019
[5] Taken from Mayor of Newham's Youth Safety Board: Background and evidence briefing youth safety in Newham, December 2019

justified the approach that had been taken. This proposed following the Public Health approach, that states it should include:

“prevention strategies which address the multiple risk factors which cause and perpetuate violence and promote the protective factors which mitigate against the perpetration and victimisation of violence.” (Public Health England, 2019)

as:

“Serious case reviews and thematic reviews have highlighted the ways in which the transition to a secondary school can lead to behavioural problems and vulnerability to bullying and exploitation or offending behaviour if vulnerable children are not well supported.”
(Mayor of Newham’s Youth Safety Board: Report and recommendations, December 2019)

The Mayors report also stated two important key outcomes, namely: Outcome 2: Vulnerable children and adults are kept safe from exploitation and violence through effective early intervention; and, Outcome 3: Children and young people who are at the greatest risk receive effective and timely support so that they and others are safe and can get their lives back on track.

So, although the NKS intervention preceded the Mayors report, it contained important characteristics that were in line with this later thinking, where young people who participated in the intervention who were considered at-risk were identified by the primary school safeguarding leads. The evaluation team assessed the effectiveness of the NKS intervention; identified the *key components* implicated in its operation; and, proposed how this model could be adapted, transferred and scaled-up going forward (see Ravenscroft et al. 2020).

This timing turned out to be particularly poignant, with the intervention coming to an end just as the UK went into its first ‘lockdown’ as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of writing of this chapter the UK is in its second lockdown as a response to the same pandemic. This also, arguably, signals a step-change in the way we need to think about the impact of the pandemic and plan future activities and services as we emerge from it. As such an emergence is more likely to be characterised by adhering to new sets of conditions and restrictions that will also be changing and evolving, rather than returning to some sort of easily graspable ‘new normal’ in the near future.

This is the context for this chapter, that will now describe the Newham Keeping Safe (hereafter NKS) intervention, proposing how this type of intervention could be adapted to the changing conditions of COVID-19 restrictions, and exploring the *broader psychosocial implications* for future interventions that aim to reduce the criminal exploitation of vulnerable young people, as we ‘open up’, or, at least, travel through new sets of changing conditions and restrictions. Such an endeavour requires that we reflect on what future levels of social distancing combined with more digital connections and practices could mean. Future interventions, we argue, need to include a reflection on the complex needs of children and families, and fathom the impact of interventions and their future post-COVID-19.

2. A pilot complex intervention in Newham, East London

The Newham Keeping Safe intervention[6] involved a complex operational plan. This included a programme of *positive diversionary activities* for children that are designed to build confidence, resilience and improve communication. These positive diversionary activities included a 5-week summer programme combining classroom-based learning with offsite learning at an outdoor learning centre outside of London. The classroom-based learning consisted of 3 days of educational activities linked to specific themes e.g. trust, relationship building, communication. These themes were explored and reflected upon in the classroom setting through topics such as understanding the law (e.g. the concept of joint enterprise), crime, choosing one's friends and/or understanding the consequences of 'hanging out with the wrong crowd'.

A key aspect of the approach was direct work with the whole family from a specialist in-house team, including individualised support from an assigned coach and youth practitioner, and family sessions with Keeping Safe psychologist. Each assigned coach worked with their families to understand the issues that triggered the referral to the intervention and developed a support plan within the framework of the NKS intervention. There was also peer mentoring, education and support for parents, including Non-Violent Resistance sessions, support through CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) to improve parenting capacity, and ESOL[7] classes.

Additionally, there was mentoring and introduction of positive role models for children, including finding and supporting access to free local activities, such as boxing, football and martial arts classes, access to community-based company offering a 'Rites of Passage' programme. There were also one to one mentoring sessions with NKS coaches involving sessions around young person's culture and heritage (sessions were around resilience using examples of people who have achieved their dreams because of their resilience and dedication). *The Keeping Safe delivery team* consisted of an operational team lead for the programme, three family coaches and a family therapist, who were tasked with delivering the majority of the services to young people and their families. They also co-ordinated support from schools and other agencies to achieve an integrated and individualised package of support for each family.

The NKS model was devised to provide support to young people and their families through a multi-agency, whole family lens, combined with two distinct intervention approaches: (i) diversionary trusted relationship-led activities, and (ii) all family strength-based work focused on improving parental capacity.

The young people and their families recruited to the Newham Keeping Safe intervention were identified as being at risk of becoming involved in violent crime and/or criminally exploited via the safeguarding leads in local primary schools in Newham. The types of risk identified included issues such as; young people being easily led and getting into trouble, violent conduct at home and school, sexualised behaviour in primary school, poor family relationships, difficulties regulating emotions and escalation of negative behaviours, forming inappropriate friendships with older peers, parental mental health issues, family issues with knife crime, exclusions and lack of SEN support. Thus, the intervention included a number of strategies to support the complex needs identified for each young person and their families (see Ravenscroft, et al., 2020).

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[6] The London Borough of Newham (LBN) were awarded funding by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) to deliver a pilot to support children and families who were at risk of becoming involved in violent crime and/or criminally exploited, and to reduce the instances of this occurring over time. Funding for this time limited pilot began in July-August 2019 and ended on 31 March 2020, and the resulting NKS intervention.

[7] English speakers of other languages

The full evaluation reported in Ravenscroft, et al., (2020) also includes a description of the key components of the intervention along with recommendations and lessons learned to inform future service design. So, at the time of writing this chapter, although the evaluated pilot has ended, the London Borough of Newham (LBN) are reflecting on the findings and recommendations from the evaluation and considering how they can best be embedded and built upon going forward.

Below we discuss the learning from the intervention through a lens that considers the impact of the lockdown and the emergence from it from the perspective of the families and the young people that were involved in this. This is done through performing a narrative 'walk-through', that begins with the needs analysis of the family cohort, summarises the evaluation findings, and then reflects on these in terms of the implications as we experience and then emerge from lockdowns. The evaluation was approved by the UEL Research Ethics Committee, and similarly, the data that is reported was covered by a data sharing agreement between both parties (UEL and London Borough of Newham).

2.1. Family needs

The support needs that were identified for each young person from the relevant preparatory work presented a complex set of needs for the intervention team as a whole. To summarise, all young people had a minimum of two and a maximum of five support needs. Half the cohort (9/18) had a category of *family dysfunction*; seven even out of eighteen (7/18) had a category of *violent behaviour/anger management/regulating emotions* (or a combination of these); four (4/18) had a category of lack of *consequential thinking/impulse control*; four (4/18) had *mental health issues or special educational needs*; three (3/18) had a category of *neglect/deprivation*; and, three (3/18) had a category of *parenting capacity.* In brief, the cohort had a range of complex needs and challenges.

2.2. Perspectives and experiences of the intervention

A description of the full evaluation of the NKS project is given in Ravenscroft et al., (2020), for the purposes of this Chapter we draw on highlights from interviews with children and their families that were undertaken near the beginning and at the end of the intervention.

Both young people and their parents viewed their involvement in the Newham Keeping Safe project as a positive experience for themselves as individuals and for their family. From their accounts, young people appear to have benefited from their participation, through positive improvements in their emotional and mental resilience, attitude towards risk behaviours and prosocial skills and activities. For parents, the benefits appear to relate to the practical and emotional supports provided through involvement in the project and directly by the coaches. From these accounts, it would appear positive foundations have been lain but it was difficult to assess whether young people and their families were sufficiently resilient to overcome all their potential challenges going forward, particularly when considering the onset and impact of the COVID-19 lockdown, which is discussed later.

Impact of participating in the NKS project

In their accounts, both young people and parents praised the overall supportive environment of the intervention for promoting responsible behaviours by helping them to understand acceptance and recognition, highlighted the key role of the family coach, who became a trusted individual within their family unit, and appreciated having someone in their corner, who was listening to and acting on their needs.

Young people, in particular, highlighted the mutual respect between themselves and their coach, and being treated as grown up, with respect:

> *I love the project; it was really fun…. I also made new friends…. Yes, it was a great time. My experience overall is a 10 out of 10. I liked all the activities what it's taught me, and I get less in trouble than I used too. (Gabriel, participant in Newham Keeping Safe Project)*

> *So, [name of coach] has helped me control my anger and ignore people who don't respect who I am…Yes, we trust each other a lot….I trust him it means that there's someone out there helping me out….And that he could sort some of my problems out, he can, he can develop my confidence and that's what I mean. (Gabriel, participant in Newham Keeping Safe Project)*

> *I'd say it helped my family and it encouraged me and inspired me you know. (Kaysan, participant in Newham Keeping Safe Project)*

> *I'm going to cope with the words he said to me, even if he's not there, he's still, it's still the words that he said and the things that he taught me are still in my head. So even if he's not there, his words will be there… (Gabriel, participant in Newham Keeping Safe Project)*

> *He just helps me a lot and he's a great man and I feel lucky. I just, I don't know how I want to say thank you to him. Because he really helps me. (Daniel, participant in Newham Keeping Safe Project)*

> *I think she's a wonderful person. She's helped me really, a lot and she's helped me…She listens…She listens really good even though I talk a lot. (Billie, participant in Newham Keeping Safe Project)*

Even from the early reports it became apparent that children enjoyed socialising, going out, using public transport, venturing out of their immediate neighbourhood; being trusted to return from school; feeling that they were 'growing up'.

Two themes that were particularly important to the generally positive impact of the intervention were its positive impact on the emotional and mental resilience of the children linked to its impact of family resilience.

Impact on emotional and mental resilience

There was evidence showing young people were beginning to develop and practice *self-control behaviours*, and were demonstrating improvements in their anger management, regulation, and expression of their emotions. This appeared to be cultivated through having a *sense of freedom* during the summer program, that provided them with different opportunities to try new and challenging activities, meet new people and have fun. It took them out of their usual environment and engaged them in activities designed to help them learn how to strengthen their life skills such as problem solving, self-control, anger management, conflict resolution, social and emotional skills, as well as learning how to manage personal risk. This set them up to experience freedoms of *transitioning to adulthood*, taking more responsibility of self, such as traveling to school on their own, being allowed to play outside or visit their friends' houses.

Additionally, it was noticeable that the young people *improved their pro-social skills***,** and were thinking and relating to others, and developing more stable friendships. These findings are backed up by evidence from wider literature that: trusting relationships at school and within other social networks emerge as protective factors that are crucial to the positive development of early adolescents; and, good quality friendships provide children with companionship and support and are

associated with a range of developmental advantages including better mental health and academic functioning. It is important to recognise that these improvements in personal emotional and mental resilience seemed to co-occur with improvements in family resilience.

At the same time, the intervention had started to help *building stronger family relationships***,** that involved setting boundaries and following *behaviour management strategies* (regulating communication, problem solving). There were signs that families were functioning better as whole, with improved communication, warmth, understanding and coping strategies. Although there was less evidence for improved *parenting capacity*, with parents involved voicing anxiety about the future and their ability to cope.

This is also supported by evidence from wider literature that shows that stable family relationships and resilience are a critical factor in the development of self-control, emotional and mental resilience in adolescence.

Importance of being 'taken into the country and out of usual surroundings'

There seemed a particularly positive impact through the opportunity to experience this *sense of freedom* that was cultivated through the outdoor activities. This took the children to an unfamiliar setting that enabled them to participate in activities safely, and allowed them to experience a sense of risk, that is an important ability for dealing with real-life challenges. In a sense, this allowed them to *just be children*, rather than on guard, and having concerns and anxieties about their own safety. This also promoted their ability to adapt to their 'own world', by improving their risk-appraisal skills and their sense of balance between proper independence and social understanding

The outdoor activities also allowed them to be physically active, gain a sense of self-efficacy and a sense of mastery. This was particularly important for children with learning difficulties, or who were generally disengaged, etc. The outdoor activities also helped to build skills such as empathy, communication, conflict resolution and emotional intelligence, which also helps develop confidence and identity.

This is also backed up by evidence from wider literature, which suggests that natural settings can have a long-term positive effect on mental health and wellbeing during young adulthood and that woodland and forests can provide certain therapeutic qualities that a young adult may use to alleviate stress and mental health problems. There is also evidence to suggest outdoor activities leads to: activation of higher cognitive processes and healthy brain development; and, learning from mistakes through engaging with risks is a necessary process for children and young people and that to do so is actually a way of safeguarding.

Another key ingredient seemed to be the value of practical, physical and team-building activities (at the outdoor centre) to engage and promote confidence and non-formal learning of key skills amongst the young people, and particularly assessing and managing risk. These included team-working, communication skills and joint problem-solving. These outdoor activities were probably more memorable and/or attractive because they were the least similar to a school environment and offered a greater sense of freedom and practical ways to assess risk – which are key mechanisms with which to embed learning (esp. for those children who struggled in a more formalised environment). A caveat to this was that the 'class-room based' activities were considered less engaging and 'fun'. This is important to note, as transitioning to Secondary School and a primarily school-based education was a key aim of the intervention. Future work should take this on board, and carefully link non-formal learning through out of school activities to more formal learning in school, and could consider existing approaches that have looked into how to realise such a 'bridge' to help with this (e.g. Ravenscroft et al., 2018; 2020).

The coaches and the roles they played were reported as particularly important in a number of ways including: acting as positive roles models for the young people; coaching thinking and decision-making skills amongst the young people; being 'critical friends' in relation to the emotional reactions and related behaviours of the young people; being practical advocates and facilitators for the children and families; and, generally, being a reliable person who was 'always there' to help.

Benefits of mentoring

Contemporary mentoring research literature suggests that the mentoring process can be an important intervention for youth development. A meta-analysis of a large number of mentoring programs directed toward children and adolescents published between 1999–2010 concludes in favour of the effectiveness of mentoring for improving outcomes across behavioural, social, emotional, and academic domains of young people's development. The most common pattern is for mentored youth to exhibit positive gains on outcome measures compared to non-mentored youth (DuBois et al, 2011, p. 57).

More specifically, mentoring can: have a positive impact on self-esteem (Schwartz et al, 2012 pp. 18-19); reduce anti-social behaviour (Roberts et al, 2004); foster adult thinking which enables adolescents to become more receptive to adult values, advice, and perspectives (Rhodes and DuBois, 2008); facilitate identity development (Rhodes and DuBois, 2008), and contribute to the improvement of educational performance in relation to gender (Odih, 2002). As non-parental adults, mentors can provide reliable support, communicate moral values, teach various skills, and enhance interpersonal relatedness, leading to fewer problem behaviours, more positive attitudes towards school, less nonviolent delinquency, and lower levels of anxiety and depression (Southwick, S. et al, 2007). They can also provide emotional regulation and conflict resolution whilst promoting a youth's future orientation (Dzoba, 2014).

Effective mentoring

Positive academic and/or behaviour adjustments of a youth are often conditional on the development of a strong bond to his/her mentor, characterized by mutuality, trust, and empathy (Rhodes and Dubois, 2008). Other research highlights the length, intensity and quality of the relationship as important for positive outcomes (Schwartz et al, 2012; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Dubois & Silverthorn, 2005: Rhodes et al., 2006), with the most successful mentors being those who invest time and energy and have frequent and prolonged contact with the children they guide (Southwick et al 2010).Successful mentoring takes time and has significant benefits when it is youth-centred and flexible in style, taking into consideration the youth's preferences and interests (Rhodes and Dubois, 2008). The mentor's experience, the setting of the meetings and the management of expectations are influencing the outcome (Dzoba, 2014).

Mentoring is an inter-personal experience. When conducted properly it can have long lasting effects on a young person's life, but the outcomes are often hard to systematize or quantify. Mentoring interventions could benefit from clear and rigorous design and drawing on academic literature in the planning stages. Research calls for explicit models of how and when change is brought about (Newburn and Shier, 2006) and more attention to research in the planning phase of an intervention: 'Mentoring strikes deep emotional chords and has attracted powerful constituents who, at some level, have looked to research only to confirm what they intuitively hold to be true' (Rhodes and Dubois, 2008, p. 257).

5.1. An integrated Intervention Model: pre and post COVID-19

We have hopefully provided a sufficient picture of the complex psychosocial nature of an intervention, and the mobilisation of the wide range of agencies and forces involved in making a difference in young people's lives. Back at the time, it became apparent that it takes a concerted communal effort to make things work; *it takes a whole village to raise a child*, as one of the coordinators put it. We will now focus on interpersonal relations and the insights emerging from the intervention.

For example, it is important to adopt a developmental and empowering 'mind set' with the families, being systematic, where possible, in facilitating and developing competences supporting independent activity that can be sustained in the longer term rather than creating a sort of 'dependency' on professionals or volunteers. At the same time, showing parents how to deal with certain agencies, such as teachers and schools, rather than 'doing things for them' also emerged as a positive development. From a social pedagogy point of view, it is important to focus on young people learning from mistakes through engaging with risks to develop risk management skills, instead of potentially 'losing confidence' through perceiving outcomes as 'failures'. In term of cognitive apprenticeship (see also Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989), practitioners and coaches developed young people and their families through supporting the modelling of better ways of communicating and acting.

Coaches created an enhanced psychosocial environment for the young people. They were neither nor friends, but critical others who approached them with dignity and care. The coaches influence was wide-ranging and significant. They formed a trusted and reliable relationship with the children and families; advocated for the young people and families through liaising with related services (e.g. Schools, CAMHS, Social Services, Job Centres); identified available after-school/summer school and youth and community programmes and activities (e.g. school summer programmes, local youth centre summer programmes, sports clubs, peer-support services for parents);acted as role models, raising awareness about other role models (e.g. who have overcome similar challenges and/or come from similar backgrounds and contexts); cultivated confidence, self-efficacy, agency and having positive yet realistic aspirations; and, facilitated the development of skills in communication, decision making and risk-assessment.

Critical to any future intervention, we argued back then, would be a clear approach to continuation and sustainability. This could be achieved through Coaches or Mentors having a clear 'exit strategy', where they are continually working towards facilitating the children and parents becoming more independent and empowered. Practically, this could involve an initial 'lighter touch' approach after the end of any intensive intervention, that eventually leads to entire independence after a period of time, such as at least two to three months post intervention.

5.2. Before, during and after lockdown

At the time of writing this Chapter the UK and London were maintaining social distancing measures as part of the second lockdown response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although vaccine testing had started to produce positive results, it seemed likely that social distancing restrictions would continue, in different ways, for the foreseeable future and probably for at least another six months. Therefore, it is useful to consider whether and which elements of this type of intervention can be delivered digitally and online. Or similarly, whether alternative online activities could replace the physical ones that are no longer taking place. Although face-to-face and physically present activities were crucial to the evaluated intervention, it could be advantageous to consider digital equivalents as these may be more efficient, lower in cost and more sustainable. To do this

systematically we will consider the complex intervention in terms of its overlapping and interrelated dimensions, that are organisational (e.g. coordinated services such as Schools, CAMHS, local Borough services), social (e.g. peer relations, families, coaching and mentoring) and personal (e.g. confidence, self-esteem, thinking, decision making, communication). The promising and positive findings from the NKS intervention and evaluation that we have reflected upon in this chapter arise from this complex and holistic approach to intervention, so it's useful to consider how these conditions and characteristics would have changed during lockdown, and then consider how it might look as we emerge from it. In terms of the specific intervention that is reflected upon in this Chapter, the implementation team lead would have organised post-intervention support for the families involved.

At a more general level, at the point of writing this chapter, we can provide some guided speculation about what happened during lockdown and what might happen after, to families and young people in the circumstances that are similar to those that we evaluated, through considering how the key components of the model that we have described above will have been affected by the lockdown.

During lockdown it is likely that there was a 'rupture' in the organisational aspects, with all follow-on services linked to the families having to adjust and move online where this was possible, such as Schools, CAMHS and local Borough Services. The authors were unable to remain engaged with the families involved in the reported intervention in order to understand their experience of lockdown, and similarly, it was no longer possible to remain closely involved with the NKS Coaches and implementation team, who due to the time-limited funding were leaving the pilot project as the first lockdown started. However, we can speculate that the vulnerable young people and their families were disproportionately affected by the lockdown, often having less financial resources, fewer digital resources and a low or poor standard of accommodation. For example, poor families on 'pay as you go' internet tariffs would be unable to adapt to the more digital organisational landscape, so this will have reduced their capacity to learn and receive the services they had before. In terms of the key components of the intervention, during lockdown the children would have experienced less personal contact with professionals, such as teachers or CAMHS workers and also had no or little personal contact with their peers and friends.

Similarly, they would no longer be able to participate in many positive diversionary activities, where these were linked to organisations that were no longer operating (such as youth organisations and sports clubs etc.). They would have been unable to do the sort of activities at any 'outdoor centre' that appeared to have a particularly positive influence. It is also possible that they had greater anxiety and lower self-esteem and confidence, which would have made changing to the more digital connections and communications more difficult. At the same time, the parents and children will have inevitably spent more time together, that, depending on their interpersonal relations, would have meant that such relations probably got better or worse during lockdown, rather than stayed the same. A corollary of this, is that, on the one hand, many vulnerable young people would have spent less time 'on the street' and suffered less anxiety and danger related to this. But on the other hand, isolation indoors would have been incredibly challenging for active children, and particularly those who have emotional and/or behavioural issues.

Indeed, as we proceed with this guided speculation, it becomes apparent how difficult it is to predict how vulnerable families will have coped during lockdown, and whether, for each family, it was simply: some things got better and some things got worse; things generally became worse; or, whether things actually got better. In a sense, there is a 'black hole' of experience around what exactly happened with vulnerable young people and families during lockdown. This uncertainty and lack of clarity, we argue, is something that needs to be picked up on as we emerge from lockdown. We cannot assume that things stayed 'sort of the same' or know with any certainty what actually

happened. Similarly, every reader can reflect on their own lockdown experience, to get an idea of how different and strange it has been, and in ways that we are not yet able to reflectively process. This means that we need to deeply and seriously re-engage with vulnerable young people and families to investigate and map out their individualised experiences of lockdown, and then re-shape our approach to ongoing interventions as a result. What will be crucial will be mass problematisation, as citizens and services re-negotiate their relationships with one another, and continue those relationships with completely different sets of conditions, more digital *modus operandi*, and, an altered individual and shared consciousness.

Consciousness is arguably a useful concept for trying to understand and locate what's changed psychologically due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown. There has been an extreme shared experience, but it has affected people similarly and differently, and, as yet, there is no way to predict what has happened to individual and mass psychology. The only certainty, is that everyone, literally everyone on the planet, has an altered consciousness. People are probably more aware of who they are and what's important, on a human level, and perhaps we have touched a deep sense of a shared humanity that would have been impossible to experience before. So, as we emerge from lockdown, a possible, if maybe simplistic catalyst for our re-emergence into a new set of practices is a notion of shared humanity linked to technological possibility. This lens could be applied to the reconfiguration of the type of intervention described, evaluated and reflected upon in this chapter.

For example, in the near-term, mentors or coaches could meet the vulnerable children and families 'in person' and in a socially distant way, initially, to initiate the relationship building but then move to more online communications. This would reduce practical constraints and costs linked to travelling, and could provide a more accessible, convenient and cost-effective way to continue post interventions. In brief, there is a useful opportunity to explore digital alternatives that could help to mitigate some of the resourcing and practical constraints contained in the NKS model we evaluated. Similarly, 'classroom' based learning, about trust, relationship building, managing conflict and communication, could be moved online, and integrated to link more broadly with the wider impact of crime. Direct work with the families by specialists could be easier to facilitate online, such as CAMHS workers and SEN support. Similarly, being more online could provide a 'window' into more positive and easily accessible online activities in general. It is likely that all of the above will settle down into a hybrid model, like we have suggested for future coaching and mentoring, with a blend of 'in person' and online activities.

6. Conclusions

In this chapter we have considered how the evaluation of a complex intervention aimed at reducing the criminal exploitation of young people can be 'pivoted' to propose an integrated psychosocial intervention that is relevant to the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown and then subsequent 'opening up'.

The qualitative findings from the interviews in our evaluation showed that both young people and their parents viewed their involvement in the Newham Keeping Safe project as a positive experience for themselves as individuals and for their family. Young people appear to have benefited from their participation, through positive improvements in their emotional and mental resilience, attitude towards risk behaviours and prosocial skills and activities. For parents, the benefits appear to relate to the practical and emotional supports provided through involvement in the project and directly by the coaches.

The key components of the intervention that led to the positive outcomes seemed to be the presence and activities of the Coaches and the various roles they played, such as role models, mentors,

services liaisons, advocates, reliable ‘fixers’ etc., and the summer programme of practical and physical confidence and team building activities. These two elements also came together, as it appeared that taking the young people out of their ‘usual’ environments created a context where the Coaches could have greater influence, such as coaching about decision-making, managing risk, and managing emotions. Key implications concern how the promising improvements can be sustained going forward and learning how to do this through considering the lessons that can be learned from this pilot project. The findings, lessons learned and recommendations have been considered collectively to propose an integrated psychosocial intervention model that can inform future service design, transfer and scaling-up, along with a framework for assessing the conditions that should be met for this to happen, that is fully reported in Ravenscroft et al., (2020).

The current status of this work is necessarily relying on processes of critical and creative reflection linked to praxis. The underlying (poor) social and educational conditions that cultivate the criminal exploitation of young people are likely to get worse during lockdown and when we open up, making this a bigger challenge than before. However, the work reported in this Chapter provides some concrete pointers for how the key components and necessary conditions for future interventions with vulnerable young people could be adapted to whatever the ‘new normal’ turns out to be. Arguably, it gives us hope predicated on systematic inquiry and interpretation, the challenge therefore, is to ensure we keep doing what seems to work through reconfiguring and adapting to the changing conditions we will be experiencing in the near future.

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