



Nottingham Trent  
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Research and evaluation of

# KAIROS WWT FEELING SAFE SERVICE:

an exploration of exploitation and transition for young women accessing support

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*...falling through the cracks...*

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## Acronyms used throughout the report

### **KAIROS WWT**

*Kairos Women Working Together*

### **ACPC**

*Area Child Protection Committee*

### **AMHS**

*Adult Mental Health Services*

### **AOS**

*Ageing out of services*

### **AVA**

*Against Violence and Abuse*

### **BBQ**

*Barbecue*

### **CAMHS**

*Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services*

### **CEO**

*Chief Executive Officer*

### **CGL**

*Change Grow Live*

### **CRASAC**

*Coventry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre*

### **CSA**

*Child Sexual Abuse*

### **CSE**

*Child Sexual Exploitation*

### **D&AS**

*Drug and Alcohol Service*

### **FDAC**

*Family Drugs and Alcohol Court*

### **FS**

*Feeling Safe*

### **FWT**

*Foleshill Women's Training*

### **GP**

*General Practice*

### **HMP**

*His Majesty's Prison*

### **IAPT**

*Improving Access to Psychology Therapies*

### **ISHS**

*Coventry's Integrated Sexual Health Services*

### **MACE**

*Multi-Agency Child Exploitation*

### **MASH**

*Coventry's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub*

### **NCDV**

*National Centre for Domestic Violence*

### **NHS**

*National Health Service*

### **PA**

*Personal Assistant*

### **PIP**

*Personal Independent Payment*

### **SGO**

*Special Guardianship Order*

### **UK**

*United Kingdom*

### **VAWG**

*Violence Against Women and Girls. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) made recommendations to end discrimination, violence, unfair treatment and social prejudice against women and girls worldwide.*

### **YMCA**

*Young Men's Christian Association*

### **YOUNG WOMEN**

*The term 'young women' is used throughout when referring to Feeling Safe service participants, aged 18-25 years. Stakeholders and existing literature may refer to 'young adults' 'young people' 'youth' or 'adolescents'. The United Nations describes young people as those aged between 15-24 (United Nations 2020). In England children up to and including 17 years of age are subject to child protection processes defined by the Children Act 1989. Over 18 years of age the Care Act 2014 has a remit for safeguarding young people.*



## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

This report presents key findings from a study evaluating the experiences of young women at risk of sexual exploitation, seeking support from the Feeling Safe service at Kairos Women Working Together [Kairos WWT]. The report firstly outlines the background and context to the study, including an overview of the Feeling Safe service delivered by Kairos WWT and provides context to understandings of sexual exploitation amongst children and young people. The report then details the evaluation framework, including the methodology and an overview of the participants and data collected.

The main body of the report is grounded in data generated from the evaluation, including Kairos WWT monitoring data, observational data, interviews with key partners and stakeholders, Kairos WWT team members and young women accessing the Feeling Safe service. A stakeholder workshop also yielded important data which provided insight to the current service level context for young women who have experienced or are at risk of sexual exploitation and are at a transitional age. A series of workshops were held with young women to find out how they experienced the service provided. The evaluation concludes with a summary and reflection, which includes learning points and recommendations for the future direction of the Feeling Safe service.

The purpose of this study is to provide independent research into issues of transition into adulthood for young women at risk of or subject to exploitation in Coventry, including transition between services with a remit

for supporting children and those with a remit for supporting adults, alongside evaluation of Kairos WWT's delivery of the Feeling Safe service. Through mixed methods the views of young women service users, Kairos WWT management and delivery staff and a range of multi-agency stakeholders in Coventry were gathered.

A key aim of this research is to positively contribute to the development of Kairos WWT as an organisation. This includes evidencing their everyday practice and pointing towards learning opportunities. The collaborative approach taken to evaluation allows for research and evaluation to become embedded in the everyday practice of the service. This robust research report aims to support the sustainability of the organisation and the Feeling Safe service and to provide key learning for services in the locality regarding transition.

### **INTRODUCING KAIROS WWT**

Kairos WWT is a woman-centred organisation which began in April 1999 to support women that were perceived as marginalised and vulnerable, with a focus on women who were caught up in street-based prostitution. Kairos WWT provided harm reduction and crisis support to women engaged in street-based prostitution, 'meeting women where they were at'. Gaining charitable status in 2002, over time Kairos WWT has evolved into an organisation that supports women 'at risk of or subject to sexual exploitation', including women involved in prostitution, young women who were subjected to sexual exploitation as children, and, more broadly, women facing multiple disadvantage.



## The mission of Kairos WWT is:

*To empower women to increase their safety, stability, self-belief, and self-reliance, through the provision of emotional and practical support, advocacy, and awareness raising.*

Kairos WWT offers a range of services to support women of 18 years and above and are evolving and developing, in response to identified need. Their current offer includes street-based Outreach and Drop-In, a daytime multi-agency support drop-in (Wonder Women Wednesdays), 1-2-1 Support and Advocacy within the Feeling Safe, Aspire, A Home of Her Own, and Women's Justice services, groups with specific focus – Queen Bees, Blossoms, Warrior – and access to therapy. Each of these services are designed to support women who are marginalised, have experienced trauma and have a range of unmet needs. In 2018 Kairos WWT partnered with Foleshill Women's Training, Coventry Haven Women's Aid, Coventry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre and Central England Law Centre to form the Coventry Women's Partnership. This partnership draws together organisations in Coventry that have been providing long-standing support to women and provides a wider platform to champion their needs.

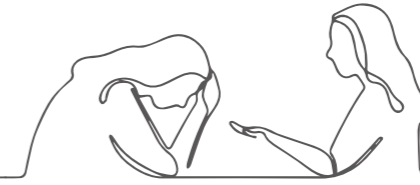
Kairos WWT has grown from just three paid members of staff to nine, in a short timescale.

In 2021 a new Head of Service Delivery role was created. A significant restructure in 2022 led to the deletion of two posts and the creation of two new roles in order to improve efficiency and consistency across the organisation – Team Manager and Specialist Justice Practitioner. During the period of evaluation there have been three changes of leadership, the current Chief Executive Officer being appointed in 2021, on a full time rather than part time contract, to develop and steer the new strategic direction.

### **THE FEELING SAFE SERVICE**

Kairos WWT first began delivering preventative work in 2012 through establishing a partnership with The Children's Society, Coventry Rape and Sexual Assault Centre (CRASAC) and Combat II. This partnership highlighted the lack of support within Coventry for young women 18 and over, who were at risk of or already experiencing sexual exploitation. It was apparent that reaching the age of 18 did not mean that risk or vulnerability was reduced, although needs may change. Kairos WWT highlighted that the 'ageing out' of children's services

for young women with experience of social care left them vulnerable to risks, including sexual exploitation. The Feeling Safe service was developed to offer support to young women at risk of sexual exploitation. It was and is the only specialist service in Coventry City to support women aged 18 to 25 who have been subjected to sexual exploitation; other services provide support to young people under 18 years.



## Kairos WWT's Feeling Safe service aims to offer the following:

- Intensive, holistic, 1-2-1, emotional and practical support and advocacy to help service users address factors in their lives that make them more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including mental health, homelessness, substance use, lack of family and friendship networks and unresolved past trauma and abuse.
- Criminal Justice Support through support at court, accessing legal aid, prison in-reach, release day planning and support, community reintegration, and liaising with probation services.
- Awareness Raising sessions, delivered on a 1-2-1 basis or in group settings within the community, to increase young women's understanding of exploitation, covering key topics like healthy relationships, grooming, consent and online safety.
- A semi-structured group for Feeling Safe participants focussed on women's right to feel safe, through exploration of issues such as grooming, consent, abuse, coercion, exploitation, boundaries, assertiveness, and healthy relationships; recently named 'Queen Bees' by participants.
- Therapeutic and enrichment activities, such as creative sessions to increase confidence and self-belief, reduce social isolation and improve mental wellbeing. Examples have included horse therapy, theatre and gardening.
- A Summer Programme, which includes a series of fun and pro-social activities, such as visits to local museums and galleries, attractions such as amusement parks, and outdoor adventure facilities. The aim is to provide the young women with opportunities to have fun, develop their social skills, confidence, self-belief and wellbeing.

The Feeling Safe service is funded by The National Lottery. Following organisational restructure in 2022, the Feeling Safe staff team includes two 0.8 Support and Advocacy Practitioners, supported by Kairos WWT's Team Manager. Support and Advocacy Practitioners work with young women, offering 1-2-1 support, and facilitate groups. They have a case load of women who are at various stages in their journeys. Some women may be experiencing significant crisis and distress. A high level of liaison, co-ordination of services and advocacy is required for women who have a high level of complex need. Other women may be more settled and stable, requiring less intensive support. Support at this stage is focused on building connections, confidence and accessing opportunities for progression. Some women remain on a caseload but need little support, established through regular check-ins. The evaluation of the Feeling Safe service is specific to the most recent funded period of 2019-2022.



## SECTION 2: **BACKGROUND CONTEXT TO CSE POLICY AND PRACTICE**

### **(CHILD) SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: DEFINING THE ISSUE**

The concept of sexual exploitation of young women or young people aged 18 and above has not been given the same level of policy attention as the sexual exploitation of children. Adults, unless having specific care and support needs in accordance with the Care Act 2014 have not been regarded as in need of protection, safeguarding or support in the way that children have been. At the point when the Feeling Safe project was conceived in 2012 the terminology of sexual exploitation was rarely applied to adults; over the age of 18 young people were often mistakenly regarded by society and services as making choices and having agency. A Serious Case Review in Coventry

in 2016 recognised that without any planned transition into adult services young people are open to significant risk of various forms of harm. Since this time, understanding of child exploitation has developed and expanded from the recognition of sexual to other forms of exploitation. The starting point for this research is to define how Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is understood. In England and Wales, early definitions of Child Sexual Exploitation were initially set out in Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009) and have now evolved to:

*Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology (Child sexual exploitation: Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual abuse (Department for Education, 2017:5)*



CSE is still a relatively recent policy concern. Research conducted regarding prevalence of CSE within the UK in the early 2000's suggests that 111, out of 146, Area Child Protection Committee districts [ACPC] had children and young people who had been subjected to CSE, with an average of 19 girls and 3 boys per area (Swann and Balding, 2002). However, this research is likely to have drastically underestimated the number of young people subjected to CSE as it was carried out during a time period where CSE was often poorly defined, particularly regarding risk factors, therefore hindering efforts of prevention (Laird, Klettke, Hall, Clancy and Hallford, 2020). Kelly and Karsna (2017) state that prevalence is difficult to establish both nationally and internationally as there is no globally-recognised definition of CSE. Delineating boundaries between sexual abuse and exploitation is also important when trying to identify and measure. The prevalence of CSE nationally can be difficult to estimate due to lack of awareness of the indicators of this form of abuse amongst service providers, as well as the poor standardisation of assessment within local areas (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009). Services responsible for identifying 'at risk' young people often have varying concepts of 'risk' and 'vulnerability' (Brown, Brady, Franklin and Crookes, 2017). The way that young people present to services can also lead to them falling through gaps and not receiving the most appropriate response. For example, disabled and neurodiverse young people can be presumed to be too disabled or impaired to be subject

to abuse or not disabled enough (without a diagnosis) to receive appropriate support (Franklin, Brady and Bradley, 2020). Disparity in being able to access support for young people who are being sexually exploited is influenced by not 'fitting' within the image of the 'ideal victim', often due to stereotypes regarding the likelihood of being a victim. There is a lack of robust evidence of risk factors for becoming a victim of CSE, the range of screening and assessment tools used to identify risk are not always fit for purpose and increased knowledge on which to base practice is needed (Brown, Brady, Franklin, Bradley, Kerrigan and Sealey, 2016).

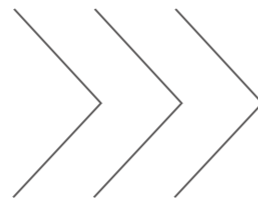
**RISK AND SOCIAL VULNERABILITIES**

'Risk' in relation to CSE can be a contentious topic regarding language use/misuse (Radcliffe, Roy, Barter, Tompkins, Brookes, 2020), with the importance for individual risks and socially constructed vulnerabilities having a greater impact on risk for young people. These socially created vulnerabilities can include growing up in poverty, having learning difficulties, being excluded from school or being a looked after child (Turner, Belcher, and Pona, 2019).

Research has shown that children and young people who are in the care of Children's Social Care or leaving care and those who have learning difficulties are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse. Franklin, Bradley and Brady (2019) carried out research to find out what works in terms of effective support services and interventions. They interviewed 10 young people with learning difficulties and 10 young people

with experience of being in care, all of whom had accessed Child Sexual Abuse [CSA] support services in England and Wales.

For young people with experience of social care the elements of practice that they identified as important to them were:



**Practitioner understanding of the complexity of life for young people in care, the impact of multiple traumas and the importance of attachments made with foster carers.**

**Practitioner ability to make young people feel cared for and nurtured.**

**A consistent practitioner for each young person. Many professionals involved in care enter in and out of their lives, which increases the ongoing impact of traumas and attachment difficulties. Developing a positive adult relationship with a consistent professional helps to aid recovery.**

Young people with learning difficulties identified:

**A need for accessible information, to be given time and support to process information.**

**A consistent practitioner, to help to overcome anxiety about change.**

**The possibility of having a fixed time and place for support.**

**Sufficient notice if the support is due to end.**

**Understanding and support in education settings when they have experienced trauma. The emotional impact of trauma continues long after the abuse has stopped, and young people need ongoing understanding and support from schools and colleges to help them recover from their experiences over time.**

**Identification of young people with learning difficulties and referral for support in relation to CSA.**

**Understanding of specific needs relating to different types of learning difficulty and other learning challenges, so that services can offer appropriate support.**

**TRANSITION: AGEING OUT OF SERVICES**

While practice and research have increasingly focused on the sexual exploitation of children, the continued sexual exploitation of young people of

18 and above has not received the same attention. Other sectors have more experience of considering transition from child to adult or children's to adult services (mental health, state care, special educational

needs) and good practice often recommends pathway planning for the next phase of life. Yet the period of transition concerning sexually exploited young people is currently less understood and less documented (Holmes, 2018).

The point of transition into adulthood has always been a challenging time for young people who have experienced CSE; little research on this topic exists, even internationally (Brady et al, 2022). The age at which prevalence of almost every kind of sexual abuse increases is between 15 and 17 years of age (Karsna and Kelly, 2021). 'Ageing out of services' (AOS) often occurs at this time, as many services are designed to meet the needs of either children or adults, referred to as a binary divide. Ageing out can be defined as occurring when state-provided supports are removed due to a young person reaching the age of 18. Ageing out of services combined with unsupportive social contexts can compound negative consequences for young people, such as young mothers, particularly regarding housing, parenting and employment (Shoveller, Chabot, Johnson, Prkachin, 2011).

Although adolescence has been recognised as a developmental stage, rather than being defined strictly by age, services continue to hold firm age limits for access (Stewart, 2009). Adolescence can be a phase of positive significant change but can also be difficult for many due to the rapid emotional, social and psychological changes occurring all at once (Christie and Viner, 2005).

Many of the support services available to young people, particularly regarding mental health and housing, have rigid age eligibility criteria. As a result, young people must move from children focused services into adult focused services, resulting in an entirely different set of workers and support staff, as

well as systems and processes. With regards to mental health services, research suggests that poor transition between services can lead to disruptions in the continuity of care, disengagement from service support and can lead to poorer clinical outcomes (Singh 2009). Rates of optimal transition for young people transitioning from child and adolescent mental health services [CAMHS] to adult mental health services [AMHS] are low. Optimal transition is considered to include adequate transition planning, good information transfer across teams, joint working between teams and continuity of care following transition, with this being experienced by less than 5% of young people who had gone through the child to adult services transition (Singh, Paul, Ford, Kramer, Weaver, McLaren, Hovish, Islam, Belling and White, 2010).

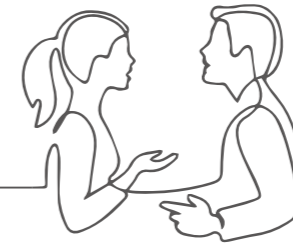
CSE has become a global criminal concern. In the UK, the legal age to consent to sex is 16, but young people are not classed as adults until the age of 18, creating complications when prosecuting perpetrators of sexual exploitation (Seigfried-Speller and Soldino, 2020). This issue can exacerbate the experience of young people who are ageing out of services as they can feel unsupported by the criminal justice system as victims of crime.

This concern also translates into safeguarding issues for young people, defined by the United Nations (2020) as being aged between 15 and 24 years old. In England, young people aged 17 and under fall under the Children Act 1989, but young people aged 18 years old and over fall into the Care Act 2014, with Holmes (2021)

suggesting that the design of both of these safeguarding Acts do not consider the developmental needs of youth, as defined by the United Nations (ages 15-24).

Cocker, Cooper, Holmes and Bateman (2021) support this, suggesting that safeguarding is currently operating with a child/adult binary, with neither side adequately meeting the needs of young people. Instead, they suggest a transitional approach to safeguarding youth that is relational, developmental and contextual: focusing on the goals and desired outcomes that the young person who is experiencing neglect and abuse wants. This allows the young person to participate in their own safeguarding, giving them autonomy and a more inclusive experience of working with services.

Often young people are making a number of transitions simultaneously, any transition to adult-focused provision needs to be well planned, co-ordinated and a clear pathway provided. Without a planned transition young people can experience significant issues in navigating access to support or to being left without any support. There is international geographic variability to how this process, including assessment of need and 'risk', is managed (Brady et al, 2022).



### SECTION 3: **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

Having established the context of this evaluation this section details the research design and methodological approach of the study. The evaluation team wished to capture the breadth of experience and views from a range of key stakeholders. A number of methods were utilised, including: collection of baseline monitoring and assessment data; semi-structured interviews; creative /arts based workshops; reflective diaries; stakeholder workshop. The approach to this research and evaluation was developed in partnership with Kairos WWT; the evaluation design was integral to the bid to National Lottery Community Fund. The objectives of this evaluation were as follows:

1. To examine the process by which the Feeling Safe service is provided (how it's funded, how it's delivered, by who, when, over what time period, and to who)
2. To identify the level of need and types of need for support (specifically acknowledged and identified and also coming to light during contact with service) of young women service-users
3. To capture the potential benefits associated with the various elements of support offered within the programme – for young women service users, for Kairos WWT staff, and for stakeholders
4. To identify potential challenges to the provision of the above service – for women service users, for Kairos WWT staff, for stakeholders

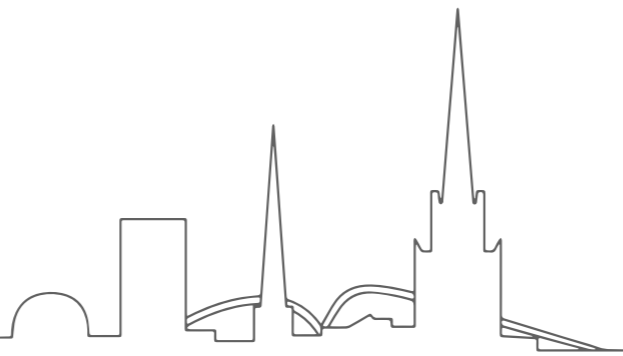
5. To explore interaction and relationships between staff and service users (with specific reference to whether relationships are constructive, healthy, and therapeutic)
6. To capture the impact of the service model on women service users, Kairos WWT staff, stakeholders, and the wider sector
7. To capture the views of young women who have not accessed the service – recruited through other avenues and services engaged with women's support services, the CSE Forum, Sex Worker Forum and safeguarding Boards
8. To consider the need for future provision for young women service users and any other individuals or groups identified, locally and beyond

Ethical approval to carry out the research was gained through Nottingham Trent University in June 2021. The research team ensured that consent was informed, responses were anonymised and kept confidential. Procedures for secure data storage were in place. Personal data was always pseudonymised.

#### **BASELINE DATA COLLECTION**

The starting point of the study was to understand the inception of the Feeling Safe service in 2012 and how it aligns with wider policy, in particular the Prevention strand of the Co-ordinated Prostitution Strategy (Home Office, 2006). The team were interested to know what data was collected about the women accessing the support from Feeling Safe project.





The team were provided with monitoring data and outcome measures, statistics regarding the numbers of women worked with, referral routes and outcomes.

**The data provided included:**

1. Reason for referral / self-referral / motivation of participants engaging with the project
2. Demographic information of participants, including age and ethnicity
3. Initial expectations about the Feeling Safe service
4. What was wanted from the Feeling Safe service

The data was shared anonymously and securely transferred to the research team.

The collection of this information helped to provide a context to the research.

The tables below provide demographic context.

**DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE FEELING SAFE SERVICE USERS**

In total, 66 young women accessed the Feeling Safe service between 1<sup>st</sup> November 2019 – 20<sup>th</sup> December 2022, with many needing numerous hours of support from the service. Below are tables displaying the demographics of the young women accessing the Feeling Safe service, with age, ethnicity, and working status displayed.

**AGE**

This table shows the age range of the young women using the Feeling Safe service over the 3-year project.

Age	Number of Young Women
18	3
19	6
20	6
21	9
22	12
23	11
24	9
25	6
26	4

Table 1: Age



**ETHNICITY**

Coventry is an ethnically diverse city, with 33% of the population identifying as being from minority ethnic groups, compared with 20% for England as a whole. The largest minority ethnic group in this area is Asian/Asian British communities, which make up 16.3% of the city's population.

Below is a table showing the ethnic diversity of the young women accessing the Feeling Safe service.

Ethnic Background	Number of Young Women
Any other mixed / multiple ethnic backgrounds	4
Any other white background	4
Arab	2
Indian	1
Pakistani	1
White / English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	43
White and Black Caribbean	7
No data	4

Table 2: Ethnicity

**WORKING STATUS**

As a city Coventry's employment rate is slightly below that of the rest of England, with a rate of 70.80, compared with 75.70 for the rest of the country, as of 2021 (the most recent data).

Below is a table sharing the work demographics of the young women accessing the Feeling Safe service.

Employment Status	Number of Different People
Claiming Benefits	38
Employed	3
Unemployed	23
No Data	2

Table 3: Employment Status





### SERVICE-USER DEPENDENTS

Included in the table below are the number of young women who have dependents..

Service-user has Dependents	Number of Different People
No	43
Yes	22
No Data	1

Table 4: Service-user Dependents

### CARING STATUS

Below is a table outlining the number of young women in the Feeling Safe service who have caring responsibilities.

Caring Responsibilities	Number of Different People
No	48
Yes	5
No Data	13

Table 5: Caring Responsibilities

### RELATIONSHIP STATUS

This table displays the relationship status of the young women accessing the Feeling Safe service.

Relationship Status	Number of Different People
Divorced / Separated	1
In a Relationship	20
Married	1
Single	39
No Data	5

Table 6: Relationship Status



The presentation of this data provides a useful context to the data that follows. It tells a story of who the young women service users are and of their general circumstances. As all young women accessing Feeling Safe are older than 18 years, they are not currently transitioning into service from child to adult. The majority are White British where ethnicity is known, most are unemployed and/or claiming benefits. Not all young women who are mothers have their child/ren living with them, with a range of care arrangements being represented. It is not possible to tell if the familial arrangements are formalised or informal. Information about care status and relationship status is a little more ambiguous. Many of the young women identify themselves as single but may be in some form of relationship with a partner.

### QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

#### TABLE OF QUALITATIVE METHODS

Method	Participants	Number of Participants
Semi-Structured Interviews	Kairos WWT Staff	11
	Young Women	11
	Stakeholders	2
	Volunteers	3
Participant Observation	Young Women attending the Summer Programme	2 X Sessions, 6 Young Women per session
Participatory Creative Methods [Fieldwork Sessions]	Young Women attending the Queen Bees sessions	6 X Sessions varying numbers per session, average 3-6
CSE Workshop [Online]	Stakeholders	X 17 participants

Table 7: Qualitative Methods Used

A number of qualitative research methods were employed with the aim of ensuring a holistic understanding of the Feeling Safe service. The following details the methods used with each participant group.

#### STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP

It was important to include the views of multi-disciplinary professionals in order to understand the practice context in Coventry, as young people transition from child to adult and move through services. We also aimed to identify gaps in the provision of support and services.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions it became very difficult for the research team to engage with stakeholders of the Feeling Safe service, partly due to the requirements for work to be conducted online and also due to the increased workloads of the staff within this sector during an unprecedented world-wide lockdown.



To resolve this issue an online event via Teams was convened. The research team firstly presented findings from an international systematic review that they had carried out on the topic of safeguarding young people who had experienced child sexual exploitation at or around transition from child to adult (Brady et al, 2022). This was followed by a workshop-based discussion of the issues raised where questions were posed and contributions to the research were made.

A wide range of sector professionals within Coventry were invited to the event. The organisations that took part in the stakeholder workshop and interviews included: Coventry City Council Adult Social Care, All Age Disability Team, Floating Support Team, Transforming Care, Horizon Team, Change Grow Live, Crisis, CRASAC, St Basil's, Valley House. Participants were in managerial, operational and front-line roles across adult and children's statutory services and the third sector.

### **PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION [SUMMER PROGRAMME]**

The research team began the period of fieldwork following Covid in 2021 by accompanying young women on the Summer Programme, a series of activities which take place over a number of weeks in the summer. They began by observing interaction, having the opportunity to talk 1-2-1 and generally getting to know the participants before introducing the research study and asking them to take part. Time was taken to tell the young women about the research and

the planned workshops and to elicit views about the type of activities the young women would like. Being part of the activities and day trips helped to build rapport from the outset. Summer Programme feedback was collated by Kairos WWT staff and shared with the research team to give a better understanding of the opportunities offered to the young women who access the Feeling Safe service.

### **SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

#### **FEELING SAFE YOUNG WOMEN SERVICE USERS:**

Given the importance of ensuring the well-being of the young women taking part in the research, all were recruited by Kairos WWT and data collection took place on the service premises or in other locations where the researchers were accompanied by a Kairos WWT team member. Participants knew that they could access support during the interview or workshop or afterwards, if needed. On each occasion of data collection a plan of activity was agreed between the research team and Kairos WWT. A total of 11 semi-structured interviews with young women were also conducted. Some of these participants were accessing intensive emotional and practical support and advocacy and did not choose to attend the regular group meetings. Contact was facilitated by Kairos WWT, sometimes accompanying the researchers to the home of the young woman, undertaking interviews in coffee shops or at Kairos WWT premises or wherever they felt most comfortable. This flexibility was important to the process. Interviews were between



A team of university researchers would like to share with you the findings of a recent review that has highlighted the key issues around safeguarding for young people who are in this transitional period, which may or may not include transitioning between services for children and services for adults. The findings will help to generate discussion of how best to meet the needs of young people/young adults, through joint and co-ordinated working.



1-1.5 hours long. All interviews were digitally recorded, with permission; most took place in person, a minority were carried out on the telephone (due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions). Interviews allowed us to capture the benefits of the 1-2-1 support provided by the Support and Advocacy Practitioner.

### **FEELING SAFE STAFF:**

Staff responsible for the Feeling Safe service delivery (frontline) and management (hereafter referred to as Kairos WWT Senior Management, Kairos Management, Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioners) were interviewed to provide their views and experiences of supporting young women aged 18 to 25 through this transitional period. They also provided additional insight into what is considered to be best practice when working with young women who were subjected to child sexual exploitation and are at risk of further sexual exploitation as adults.

### **FEELING SAFE VOLUNTEERS:**

In addition to the original research plan, Feeling Safe volunteers were also interviewed to provide their views and experiences of supporting the programme on a non-paid basis. Questions focused on their understanding of the service and how effective they feel it is in supporting young women.

### **PARTICIPATORY CREATIVE METHODS WORKSHOPS**

To capture more open and in-depth insights about young women's perceptions of support, support services and specifically the Feeling Safe service, the

research team facilitated six participatory/creative workshops. We aimed to create a space for different types of conversations, employ a range of creative activities and diversify the data collected. The research team were keen for workshop sessions to be organised through consultation with the young women and the Feeling Safe team.

This methodology helps to document the experiences and challenges of young adult women who are transitioning from child to adult. Participatory visual methods are able to convey real lived experience in a way that other methods are not, other methods may provide only a snapshot in time. The medium of choice was discussed with the young women at the start and other points across the workshop delivery period. As previously stated six themes were explored during monthly workshops at the Kairos WWT's women's hub, during weekly Feeling Safe 'Queen Bees' group sessions. Sessions were held on a Tuesday afternoon and the research team attended on the final Tuesday of each month.





It was anticipated for workshops to be an effective way to create a safe space for young women to share their views and experiences. The research team were keen for sessions to be fun, a way to build relationships and spend time with young women and a means of capturing young women's stories. Our experience highlights how creative methods can be an effective tool in stimulating conversations, democratising the research process and creating research outputs, enabling both the retelling and sharing of stories (Brady and Brown, 2013).

It was important to share the dates we would be working with the young women ahead of time, so they were kept informed and were able to ask questions before the group session. On reflection, this was a particularly useful tool to support engagement with the research sessions as the young women were able to ask questions about the forthcoming session and notify either a researcher or a Feeling Safe staff member if they felt uncomfortable with the topic or preferred not to attend.

The sessions were a useful medium to allow reflection, young women were able to consider their journey through the Feeling Safe service and in some cases from

transitioning through child to adult social care services. Working with and alongside participants, using creative methods to represent their lived experience, the team captured powerful stories which aid understanding, challenge myths, and allow the voices of seldom heard young women to be given prominence.

Each session aimed to explore a topic and the workshop plan was shared with Kairos WWT in advance of the planned day, to ensure the research method and topic was appropriate for the young women who would be attending.

**A NOTE ON 'THE REVIEW'**

We organised each session to explore a theme stemming from international qualitative research evidence, a systematic review that explored safeguarding practices for young people and young adults (aged 16-25) who have experienced sexual exploitation before or during transition to adulthood. This review of the wider literature in this field was conducted by members of the research team and others and was funded by What Works in Children's Social Care (Brady, G et al 2022). The key themes stemming from the

Review formed the basis of the workshop discussion. These themes included; Family, Support, Relationships with Professionals, Mental Health and Well-being and challenges associated with being at a transitional stage of life.

**WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS**

A total of 10 young women participated and in line with the wider weekly session the number of young women at each session varied. A Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner would be present, occasionally a Kairos WWT manager and sometimes volunteer supporters. Everyone attending the session had the opportunity to participate in both the creative activity and the discussion.

Session	Date	Topic	Research Method
1	26-10-2021	Family	Artefact to represent
2	23-11-2021	Support	Open Conversation
3	25-01-2022	Relationship with Professionals	Zines
4	22-02-2022	Becoming an Adult	Planting Seeds
5	29-03-2022	Mental Health and Wellbeing	Food Prepping
6	28-06-2022	Reflection on FS and research participant journey	BBQ Celebration + Creative Legacy Activity

Table 8: Creative Methods Workshops Agendas



**SESSION 1: FAMILY**

**The Review:** The review of CSE and young people identified how family and familial relationships are implicated in a myriad of ways in the lives of young people at risk of CSE. We chose to explore 'family' as a topic first, as young people noted that support received from friends and family during transitional periods, which they linked to critical personal moments – such as change of living arrangements, moving between schools and declaring new sexual identity – was crucial to their stability. Where there was limited and no attachment to family and peers, young people felt anxious and emotionally lonely at the time of transition, leading them to seek acceptance elsewhere (Beech et al 2018).

**Data Collection:** This session explored what young women associated with the concept of 'family'. We asked the young women to bring something to the session (an artefact) that they associated with family. The workshop involved engaging the young women in a discussion about the meaning of family, the various forms that family can take, the positive and negative aspects of family relationships.

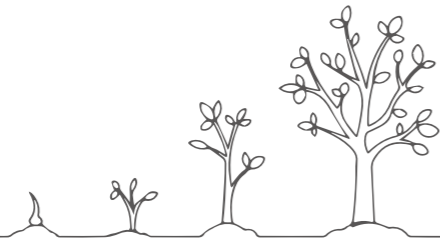
Through photographs we visually captured the artefact and invited the young women to share, via recording or writing, their views and stories.

The visual representations were collated into a short digital story, which was shared with the young women in the second workshop. The main focus was for images, voice and text to be the vehicle to elicit young women's stories.

**SESSION 2: SUPPORT**

**The Review:** Supportive relationships with peers, families and practitioners are important to promoting emotional wellbeing and avoiding isolation and / or/ loneliness, which can make young people vulnerable to exploitation.

**Data Collection:** The aim of this session was to consider at what point support is important to the young women accessing Feeling Safe and to ask what good and effective support looked like. The research team provided art materials, including magazines and coloured pens, the young women were encouraged to create collages using images that reflected their feelings regarding support. This session became more discussion-based, led by the needs of the young women who were present.



### SESSION 3: RELATIONSHIP WITH PROFESSIONALS

**The Review:** Reliable, trustworthy and stable relationships with professionals were important to young people experiencing transition. Relationships strengthened when young people felt professionals were caring and made practical contributions to their lives. However, feeling judged or uncared for produced negative impacts for young people and the resulting loss of trust affected their relationships with services.

**Data Collection:** The session explored how the young women viewed their relationship with professionals, including relationships which they had encountered across different points of their lives as they transitioned from childhood to adulthood. During this session the group created zines using text and images to capture a visual representation, from the young women's perspective, of how they viewed the role professional relationships have played, or play, in their lives. The research team brought a range of magazines, newspapers and crafts. This session was the first session after the Christmas break, so the session was organised with space to carry out the activity but also for the group to catch up with each other and review the previous sessions. Photographs were taken with consent, capturing the process of creating the zines within the group.

### SESSION 4: BECOMING AN ADULT

**The Review:** It was identified that the age of young people was a defining factor in eligibility for services. Termed 'ageing out of the system' (Williams and Frederick 2009, p. 26), studies reported young people describing how they were no longer able to access services. The average age of entry into CSE was 16-17 years old and this coincided with being forced to leave the family home or ageing out of foster care (Dank et al 2015). It was identified that young people could be experiencing ageing out of the system at the exact point that their risk of exploitation was growing. There was an absence of continuing services for young people after the age of 18. This was not only a problem for young people in foster care settings, it was also an issue for young people on probation (Williams and Frederick 2009). As juveniles they were either not viewed as 'at risk' or their vulnerability was 'misjudged' (Williams and Frederick 2009, p. 30).

**Data Collection:** This session explored young women's views and experiences of 'becoming an adult'. The session was designed around a planting and growing activity, with the research team bringing the resources needed. The young women sowed edible herbs and spider plants. After the session, the young women were asked to take photographs of the plants as they grew, with these photos and the stories collected used to develop a short film or storyboard of the young women's experiences.



### SESSION 5: MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

**The Review:** Mental health is an important consideration in the lives of young people who have experienced CSE. Being affected by mental health challenges and/or those of family members creates a context conducive to CSE, and CSE also has a mental health impact. Professionals' focus on mental health, trauma and on-going support was seen by young people as helpful and necessary (in addition to services meeting their material needs) to successfully leaving and 'recovering' from sexual exploitation.

**The Data Collection:** This session explored views about mental health, mental wellbeing, support and services and considered relationships with professionals. This included considering relationships that they had encountered at different points of the transition from childhood to adulthood. During this session, the group was involved in preparing a lunch (wraps, fruit salad, sandwiches, soup) which was eaten together. This session was an opportunity for all present to prepare food and to eat together, exploring the topic in an informal way.



### SESSION 6: WIDER RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

**The Data Collection:** The key aim for this session was to find out how young women felt about being involved in the research and evaluation of the Feeling Safe project and to reflect on their passage through the service.

The research team prepared and the young women collaborated in preparing a BBQ lunch. The young women talked about their journey through the project and this was conceptualised and captured as a road drawn on a paper roll. Paint was used to capture handprints and quotation stickers and free drawing were also utilised in this creative legacy activity. The young women were engaged in discussion throughout, with photographs taken to mark the day.

This methodology was novel in that the key findings of the wider international literature review of young people's experience of sexual exploitation during a transitional age (16-25 years) formed the basis of empirical explorations. The creative methods helped to capture the nuance of the experiences of the young women. In addition, the collective process of the endeavour helped to engage the participants and appear to build bonds amongst the group. Having presented the way that we collected the various forms of data the following section moves on to address the emerging findings.



SECTION 4:

**KEY FINDINGS**

This section presents key findings based on demographic data, monitoring data, participant observation, semi structured interviews, a workshop with stakeholders, and participatory creative methods workshops. This mixed approach to data collection was designed to capture a range of views and experiences through different means, in order to provide a holistic picture of the service provided by Feeling Safe. Following the presentation of monitoring data all other qualitative findings will be presented thematically.

**EVIDENCING YOUNG WOMEN'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE FEELING SAFE SERVICE:**

*What evidence does Feeling Safe track?*

Kairos WWT and Feeling Safe use a varying range of mechanisms to generate evidence of the performance of the service and the progress made by those accessing Feeling Safe. Table 9 outlines the various data sources.

**WHAT COUNTS AS EVIDENCE?**

Kairos WWT collect both quantitative and qualitative data from the young women that they work with who are accessing the Feeling Safe service. The primary tool is the Outcomes Star, which is an evidence-based tool for supporting and enabling change, developed by Triangle. The tool enables conversation about the young woman's life, encouraging a shared viewpoint and improved action planning, which ultimately should lead to better outcomes. It is a licensed tool, staff are trained in its use and it is supported by a growing evidence base [About the Star | Triangle \(outcomesstar.org.uk\)](#)

The collection of data about young women service users serves a number of purposes. Firstly, it is a way of tracking a young woman's journey through the service from point of first contact to exit and of recording progress against set goals. Secondly, it provides data which can be used to demonstrate effectiveness of service; to partners, commissioners and funding bodies. Denzin (2009) notes that good evidence is vital to the continual funding of a charity via grants, with quantitative data often preferred as the 'quality standard'.

Feeling Safe Service	Types of Evidence Collected
Group Sessions (Queen Bees)	Support and Advocacy Practitioner notes via LampLight
Individual 1-2-1 work	Young Person's Outcomes Star Scale [updated quarterly] Support and Advocacy Practitioner notes via LampLight
Partnership Working	Feedback forms [Likert Scale]

Table 9: Evidence Collected

Kairos WWT monitoring data, reported to the funder annually, provided useful insight to the women who had engaged with the Feeling Safe project over the three years of this study alongside insight into the effectiveness of the service. Feeling Safe staff are concerned to be appropriately evidencing in order to meet funder expectations:

*‘I think that there are challenges around monitoring and evaluation because obviously you want it to be meaningful don’t you and so often it’s hard when somebody’s in crisis to be like ok, let’s get this like, piece of paper out and lets score how you feel in life erm... there’s an understanding across the whole organisation about how crucial good evaluation and monitoring is you know both in terms of being able to demonstrate our outcomes for the women but also to funders as well you know, so it’s just about how do we do that in the best possible way’ (Kairos WWT Senior Manager)*

When asking ‘How much progress are people making in each outcome area?’ the monitoring data discussed below highlights the areas of progress for each young woman who is accessing Feeling Safe. These are explored further in the next two graphic illustrations displaying monitoring data related to Outcomes, with the former exploring in which areas young women are experiencing the greatest improvements and the latter showing where young women are struggling, with a decrease in Star ratings during their time in the Feeling Safe service.

It is clear from this monitoring data that Kairos WWT and the Feeling Safe service excel in improving ‘People and Support’, which is defined as support from workers and networks outside of the service. One of the key aims of the Feeling Safe service is to empower women to increase their stability, as some women are often cycling in and out of crisis.

For this reason, to be ‘maintaining’ is regarded as a successful outcome.

#### YOUNG PERSON’S OUTCOMES STAR SCALES

During the period of this evaluation Kairos WWT and the Feeling Safe service made various changes to the ways in which they evidence their support with young women. Previously, outcome tabs and impact scales were used to track support plans and look at progress made. Recently, Kairos WWT have adopted Outcomes Star Online, which uses Outcomes Stars to track each woman’s progress. They also use action plans, which are regularly updated, to track whether an action has been completed or whether it has perhaps become less relevant, enabling staff to track engagement over time.

The Young Person’s Outcomes Star scales have an overall outcome to support young people into independent living and

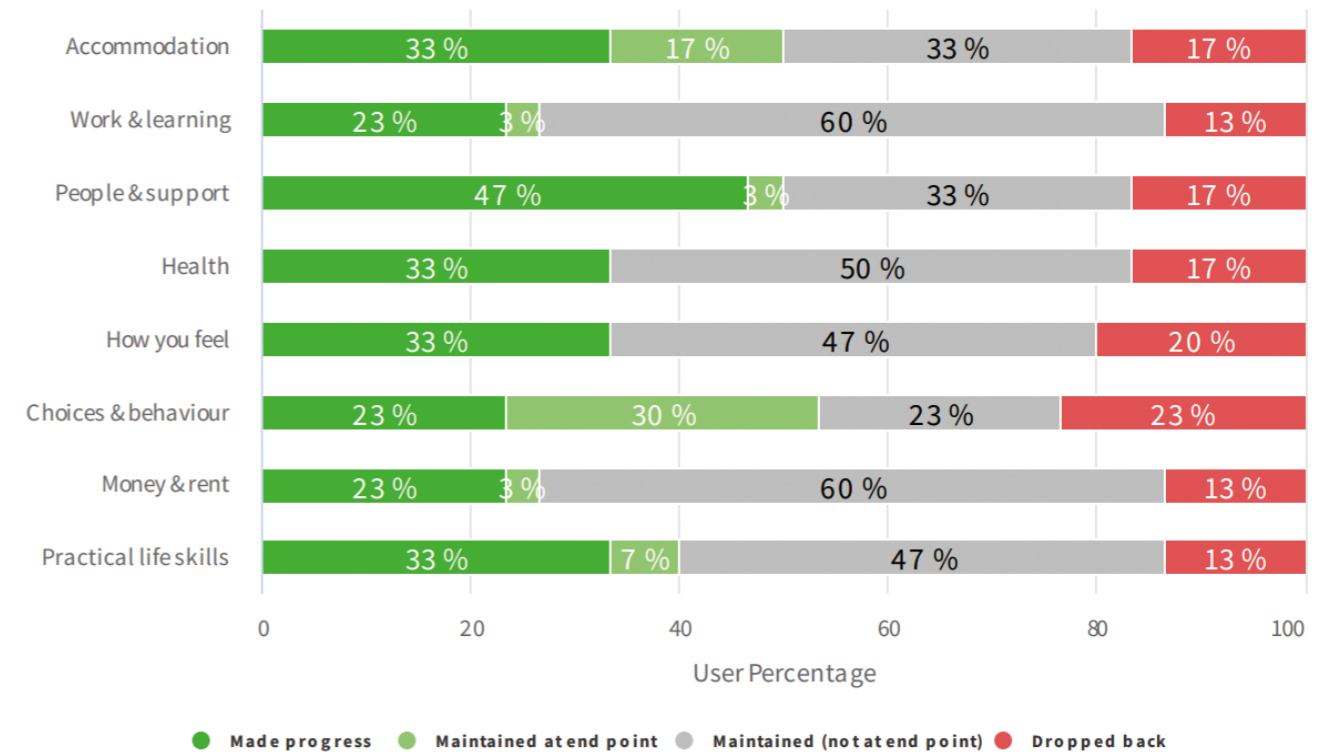
track accommodation, work and learning, people and support, health, how they feel, choices and behaviour, money and rent, and practical life skills.

One Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner liked that this form of monitoring provided options on how it was completed:

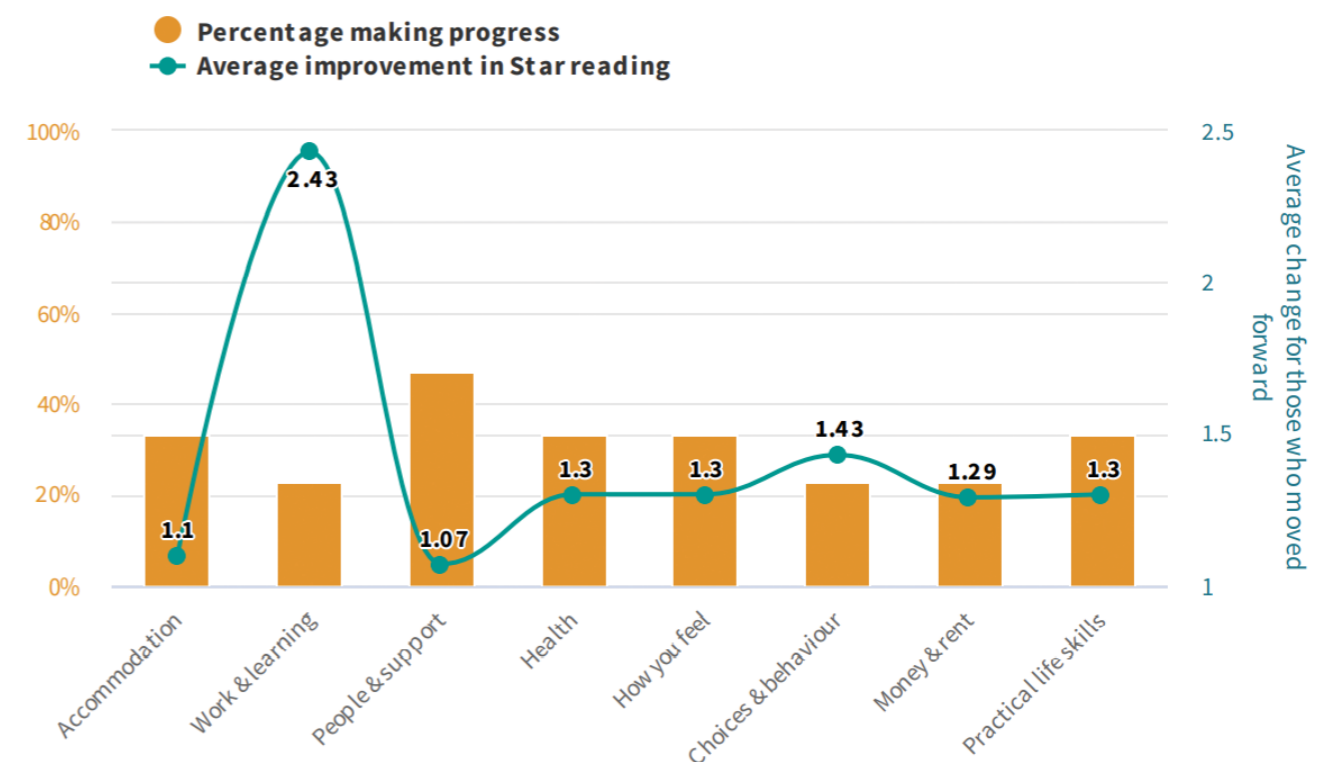


Further to these tables, a snapshot of the Outcomes Star reports was shared with the research team.

How much progress are people making in each outcome area?

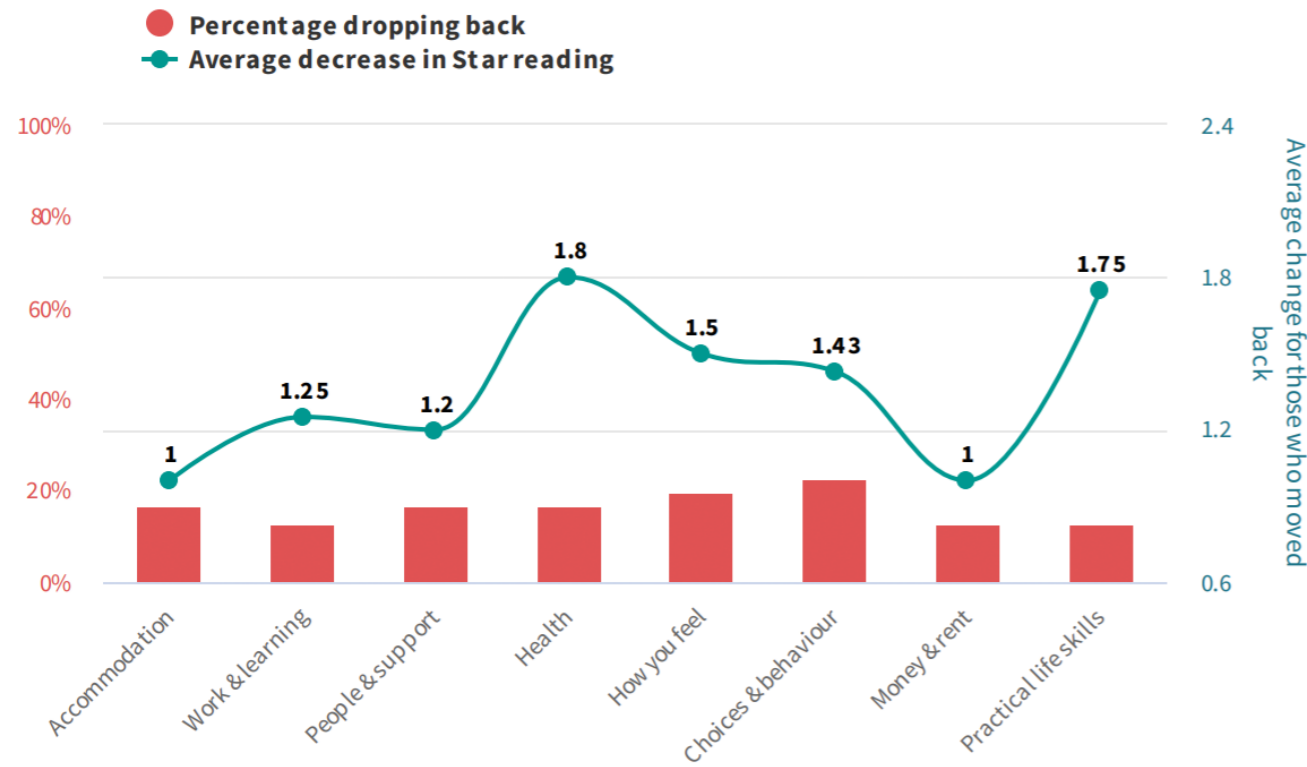


In each outcome area, how much progress are people making?





**In each outcome area, by how much are people dropping back?**



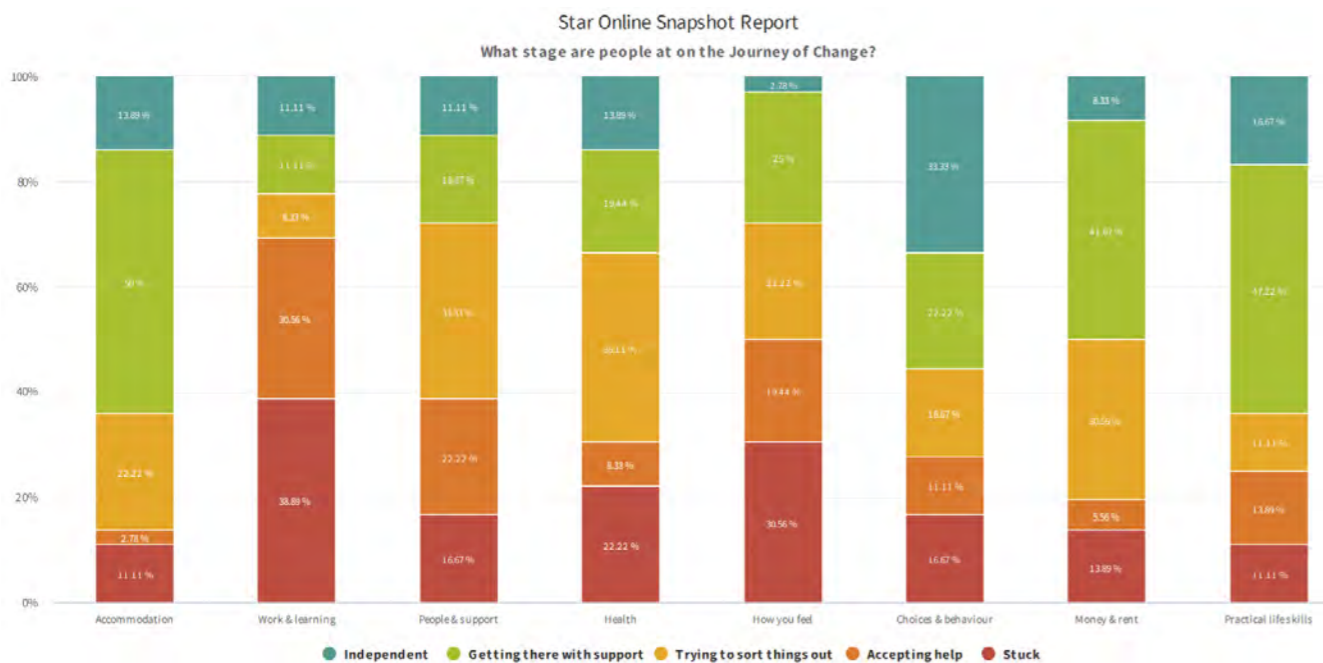
*'...you can complete a Star as a practitioner or as a practitioner with the woman that you're supporting. I've had times where I've printed off the Star and the woman said, oh, actually, can I do this by myself at home? Which, again, I find really positive because it's taking that step in sort of that accountability and that responsibility with her actually wanting to complete the work and see her own progress...' (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner).*

*Having the option for young women to engage with their own Outcome Stars, rather than a professional completing it for them, is a positive way to enable young women to see their own progress and take accountability for what actions they would like to take next. The literature suggests this is a vital aspect of support for young women who have previously experienced traumas and an absence of control, as they are able to take back their autonomy over their own bodies (Godoy, Abrams, Barnert, Kelly and Bath 2020).*

It is important to note that Outcome Stars are completed once every three months for each young woman accessing the Feeling Safe service, so what is presented here is only a snapshot into the stages of the 'Journey to Change' that the young women are experiencing. However, what this snapshot does suggest is these young women are still experiencing a number of challenges in each area that the Outcome Stars track (accommodation, work & learning, people & support, health, how you feel, choices & behaviour, money & rent, and practical life skills).

Feeling Safe recognise that whilst the use of a digital tool for collecting data and monitoring is effective, collecting quantitative data alone would result in a missed opportunity to discover the depth of support that they offer to young women. The inclusion of more qualitative data is helpful in developing a deeper understanding of the monitoring data, with numbers and statistics struggling to fully explain the complexities of the lives of the young women accessing support and the varying nature of life.

Therefore, Feeling Safe also collect testimonials from service users, regularly seek feedback and also create case studies, based on information provided whilst case working.



## GENERATING FUNDING

Funding the Feeling Safe service so that it is sustainable is an overall priority for Kairos WWT. Staff at all levels, frontline, management and Chief Executive Officer, recognise the importance of providing evidence of the success of Feeling Safe to those who are or who might fund the service. It is a service that addresses complex needs, where gains for individuals may be small and incremental rather than big and tangible. The shape of the service has to meet need, be appealing to women and be needs-led but also be able to demonstrate that goals have been met:

*'...funders aren't going to necessarily be interested in funding projects that just bring women in to paint rocks, you know, to do crafts... like there has to be some outcome...'* (Kairos WWT Senior Manager)

However, due to the complexities of the lives of young women that access the Feeling Safe service, many of whom have been excluded from other services or had very negative previous experiences, this can be quite difficult:

*'...we are working with women who have multiple unmet needs, maybe all of their needs are unmet, you know, we're working with women who are falling through the cracks of every other service...'* (Kairos WWT Manager)

The multiple issues that young women are facing, such as mental health challenges, domestic violence, addiction, insecure housing, can fluctuate, with some

improving and others regressing. This means that it is easy for those without inside knowledge to look at the more quantitative monitoring data and infer that young women are not making progress, however, this may not be the case.

*'...it's not a linear journey. People go up and down all the time, there's setbacks, there's massive successes, there's tiny victories, there's tiny disappointments that lead to catastrophic consequences. There's like, life is not kind of easy to plan and plot out on a graph...'* (Kairos WWT Manager)

This can be exacerbated by the 'conceptual' nature of the support that Feeling Safe offers,

*'...it can be really hard to kind of track progress when you're working in a service where things are quite erm, sometimes they're quite conceptual. They're quite conceptual, like things like housing might be quite easy because you can go right homeless, temporary accommodation, starting to get tenancy, sustaining tenancy, like that might be quite easy to measure the success of, but something like empowerment or healthy relationships. How on earth do you even put numbers to those?'* (Kairos WWT Manager)

This tension stems from the holistic nature of Feeling Safe and the multiple needs of the young women that are receiving support; for this reason a combination of young women's stories and the statistics generated through the quarterly use of Outcomes Stars

helps to create a clearer picture of the success of Feeling Safe.

A Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner illustrated how the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions added to this struggle to provide much needed evidence for end of year reports to funders:

*'...each time the end of that cycle comes up for each year when getting the information ready for the reports, it's always trying to evidence what you've done to try and meet that, even in a pandemic where you literally can't, you know, nobody is allowing visitors, you know you can't get out, maintain and do sessions...'* (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner)

The pressure of ensuring that all objectives were met during the Covid-19 lockdown periods was a very real concern for the Feeling Safe staff. Despite the fact that Kairos WWT, including the Feeling Safe team, continued working throughout the pandemic, as they were classified as key workers, target numbers were a struggle to reach:

*'...lots has happened this year, there's been lots of things that have been difficult, but we have made it to the end, just not on target with what we said to Big Lottery...'* (Kairos WWT Manager)

Feeling Safe were anxious not to be achieving their planned targets and hopeful that the funder, The National Lottery, would be understanding about the constraints to their service delivery, particularly when it came to the criminal justice prison in-reach aspect of the service :



*'...we've reported back to Big Lottery, erm, my target was to be working with 10 women a year erm... obviously, they will be flexible because they would know that there's some set up time isn't there, sometime where you have to make the initial contacts and set the project up, then they're going to be aware that COVID's happened and we can't go into the prisons at that time...'* (Kairos WWT Manager)

The data presented shows that Kairos WWT understands how important it is to be able to evidence what they do, to capture how many, who, in what way, and to plot from entry to the Feeling Safe service to exit. The mechanisms used are appropriate and are under constant review. Understanding of the different reasons for collecting data on the needs of young women and any progress made is also demonstrated. The funder recognised that the team were working hard to maintain a service, adapting according to restrictions, and was flexible and understanding, which helped to relieve anxiety regarding not being able to meet the outcomes predicted within the proposed bid, particularly within the years 2020-2021.

## QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Having provided the context to the work that Feeling Safe service is doing to meet the needs of young women from entry to the service through to the point at which they no longer need the service, this section presents the experiences of Kairos WWT and their partners (or potential partners) who are working in this city to address,

adult sexual exploitation, and complex need. The qualitative findings present an in-depth understanding of the experiences of multi-agency practitioners, of Kairos WWT and of young women who are accessing the service. This section presents the views of Kairos WWT staff and other stakeholders thematically. The following section presents the views of the young women who are receiving support from the Feeling Safe project.

## 1. WHAT IS THE FEELING SAFE SERVICE?

### VISION AND AIM OF FEELING SAFE

Each participant was asked about their knowledge and perception of the Feeling Safe service. There was some variation in the description of the Feeling Safe service and what the work entailed, between Kairos WWT managers, frontline Support and Advocacy Practitioners and also stakeholders. This needs to be understood in historical context. Originally Feeling Safe was set up to bridge the gap between support from specialist CSE support within Children's Services and the lack of support once reaching 18 years old. It was designed as a preventative service for young women at risk of further sexual exploitation as adults. It was structured around a short course of "protective behaviours". Over time it has continually evolved in both vision and strategic objectives to meet the ever-changing needs of women. There have been changes in the executive leadership and the Board of Trustees during this time which have influenced the direction of travel.





A Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner described the aim of Feeling Safe as follows:

*‘to provide safety, stability and self-belief for the women to enable them to live a life that is free from exploitation and for them to be empowered and know their rights around consent erm like, identify awareness raising around consent, healthy relationships, red flags, what rights they have, access to services, ensure that they’ve then been equipped with the necessary tools for them to journey forward knowing how to access the most appropriate services, free from exploitation’ (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner)*

She strongly identified with this mission and went on to say that this was what motivated her to support the young women who access the service.

### **ELIGIBILITY FOR REFERRAL TO FEELING SAFE**

Whilst having a person-centred and holistic approach to offering support can mean a wide number of women with different challenges can be supported, a potential barrier can be the difficulty in defining what the Feeling Safe service actually is about. The question is raised - Is it primarily for women at risk of sexual exploitation, or women with multiple, complex needs who could be considered as generally vulnerable? The ambiguity was echoed by staff members,

*‘...in terms of how we’re marketing it to potential young people, I don’t think we’ve quite... I think that’s the problem is we aren’t quite sure what Feeling Safe is ourselves and therefore we’re not, we don’t know how to market it...’ (Kairos WWT Senior Manager)*

Given this unease about clarity regarding the shape of the service, it was perhaps not surprising that partners or stakeholders often found it difficult to articulate exactly what the remit of Feeling Safe service was:

*‘[...] for staff (of the partner service) to be clear about the project to others because actually if we’re the ones who are sharing it with young people or even the team, it can be quite difficult actually, we kind of say, they’re able to offer a lot of support but we’re not really able to kind of, get it, really really explain what it is [...] so it’s always been grand if we’ve said oh look, there’s this other service, think they’d be great for you, maybe we could call them together? Then I’ve been able to say to the team this young person has experienced this and now they’re working with Kairos but actually is there more, are we missing that selling point, I think we probably are’ (Frontline worker 1, Drug & Alcohol Support Service).*

This highlights the need for a clearer definition of the remit of the Feeling Safe service that can be shared with the wider public. It also raises questions about the presentation of the Feeling Safe service working with young women ‘at risk of sexual exploitation’; this could be a potential barrier to how the programme is understood, given that it addresses such a wide scope of need.

Whilst the service as designed as a preventative project aimed at young women at risk of sexual exploitation, it is apparent to Kairos WWT that many of the young women who access the service have already been sexually abused or exploited. This has led to questioning whether the

service should be described as being ‘preventative’, since saying that they are preventing sexual exploitation may also be undermining or not validating any existing experience of abuse. Kairos WWT have also questioned the educational aspect of “protective behaviours”. Research has shown that such an individualised response which implies that young women need to change their behaviour in order to prevent themselves from being exploited or ‘putting themselves at risk’ can be considered victim-blaming (Eaton and Holmes, 2017, Franklin et al 2018) and is not appropriate. Such language inadvertently contributes to ascribing blame and responsibility and as well as positioning children as the source of the problem and the source of the solution (Eaton and Holmes, 2017) also positions young women in the same way. When consulted, young women themselves are not interested in Feeling Safe being a ‘protective behaviours’ service in terms of educating them about behaviour:

*‘So, I’m aware of, for example [...] like they’ve said to us, with the group, for example, they don’t want to talk about grooming and healthy relationships, and those subject matters because they come to us as a safe space, so they’re saying to us, we come to you for a reprieve, like from, well, from all of that, you know, an escape from all of that, we want to just come and build confidence and self-esteem and have positive connections with other young women and maybe like learn leadership and things like that [...] we do not want to come in and talk about the signs of a groomer or, you know, the signs of an abuser or what sexual exploitation is and all of that. So, there’s a definite tension there because obviously that’s what the, that’s what*

*the National Lottery are funding us to do [...] there’s still this lingering expectation that we’re supposed to be providing, you know, sort of psychoeducational course-like material, but that, but then the young women are telling us that’s not what they want, and we need to listen to them’ (Kairos WWT Senior Manager).*

The Feeling Safe service is however preventative in supporting young women who may have been at risk of entering the sex industry to not follow that trajectory, evidence shows that for women involved in the sex industry their abuse or exploitation often started in childhood. The approach that is taken is to build confidence but also to acknowledge and aim to address the external challenges and socio-economic conditions that make exploitation more likely.

### **ROUTES AND PATHWAYS TO REFERRAL**

There are a range of services and agencies in the city that have a remit for supporting children, young people and young adults. Many of these services could potentially refer young women aged 18-25 to the Feeling Safe service to be assessed for support. A key theme identified in the data related to how service users were referred to Kairos WWT and the Feeling Safe service. Referral encompasses a range of factors, such as identification of the pathways of referral, the key organisations involved in the referral process and any barriers to referral for organisations and for young women themselves, who are able to self-refer. The following section draws on data from Kairos’ staff and stakeholders to provide insight to the process of referral and support-seeking.

It was of interest to the evaluation how stakeholder services had become aware of the services offered by Kairos WWT:

*‘[...] we had an email come through from [FS Worker]. It had a breakdown of all the projects that they had and I thought, oh I’ll give them a call and essentially someone that I was working with, someone else had suggested Kairos to them, so I thought I’ll give them a call, find out, and they definitely agreed that Kairos was an appropriate service for them... when I asked kind of, what is the support, they’ll kind of say ‘whatever that young person needs’, which is great, can be a little bit difficult then for me to explain to people in the team what is, what is that kind of level of support on offer erm, but, from what I can gather, it’s working with people who, young females who have been exploited or who have been in that unhealthy relationship and need that... that support quite erm, I suppose from experience it has been quite intense in the sense of they’ve really been there, you know, they’ve not been in the background they’ve been there erm, with housing or they’ve been there with finances they’ve been there with kind of, emotional well-being or to kind of, support them if it’s been a mental health appointment, especially while it’s been kind of over the phone and things like that so... I couldn’t necessarily say too much about the actual project itself (FS), other than kind of, what the young people I’ve been working with have kind of experienced with their support’ (Frontline worker 1, Drug & Alcohol Service)*

This participant describes a positive working relationship with



the Feeling Safe service and the way in which joint working starts to organically evolve:

*‘what’s been really quite lovely is once we started to try and understand what we all did, there were a few other names that would kind of crop up and then we’d start to say well, actually I think you’d be able to support this person and this person so we were starting to get some kind of joint working together’ (Frontline worker 1, Drug and Alcohol Service)*

Stakeholder services are appreciative of this contact with Kairos WWT as Feeling Safe are often willing to support young women who many services would consider too complex in nature or would only be able to support one aspect of need, e.g. mental health or substance misuse.

One Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner summarises where most referrals come from:

*‘The majority of our referrals come from Through Care, which is women that come through the care system, and St Basils, Housing, Rough Sleepers team, I’d like to think that we were linked in with a lot of agencies’ (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner)*

*‘...whether that be St Basils, YMCA, P3, housing providers, it is, it’s very, very broad...’ (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner)*

Data provided by Kairos demonstrates that referrals come from a range of partner services **St Basils (Housing Provider) 11%, Through Care 12%, Horizon Team 9%, CGL / Positive Choices 8%, NHS 6%, FDAC 3%, Other 4%, with the majority being Self Referral at 47%.**

Alongside referral by other services, young women are also able to self-refer. A member of the Kairos WWT team explains the referral process:

*‘You can self-refer, where you say I would like to access Kairos and then we would, like, a member of staff would go through the referral form with them over the phone so that we can understand what their support needs are, or somebody could be referred by a professional and then we would ask the professional to fill in the referral form and then send that over to us, erm, or we might encounter somebody via our evening outreach and drop-in service’ (Kairos WWT Manager)*

Word of mouth or introduction based on a young woman’s own experience are also important routes of referral, via friends, family members and acquaintances who can see the potential benefits for others of receiving support:

*‘I’ve dealt with a lot of clients who I’m working with them and then they’ll say, well, my friend, she’s 21, and she’s got this going on for her and I know just from that discussion that she hits the criteria, and I’ve spoke to her about Kairos and I’d really like to bring her along and we get a lot of referrals that way...’ (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner)*

A Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner describes the eligibility criteria for the programme,

*‘I know that the criteria for being accepted into Kairos is that you have to be at risk for sexual exploitation... but apart from those elements, obviously, if you’re experiencing domestic*

*violence, if you have a learning disability, that obviously makes you vulnerable to being exploited... also if you’re homeless, but the ultimate criteria is obviously the risk of exploitation so once that box has been ticked then there will be other elements that come in...if we know that you’re vulnerable, we will, we would take you on...’ (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner)*

The practitioner seems to be saying that the primary reason for referral is risk of sexual exploitation; alongside that, young women may be and often are experiencing any number of adverse circumstances, some of which are also regarded as indicators of ‘risk’ in assessment processes. Feeling Safe recognise that women may be experiencing multiple disadvantage or complex or unmet needs which put them in a position of being at risk of all forms of exploitation and harm. Whilst the service may have been conceptualised as a preventative service, plugging a gap in provision for this age group, inequalities are clearly intersecting and exploitation or sexual abuse does not sit outside of multiple trauma and disadvantage.

In recognition of this, Kairos WWT have become a trauma-informed service, aiming to support and advocate for young women using trauma-informed approaches. The Feeling Safe service is able to be flexible and ‘meet the young women where they are’, as individuals. By taking the above inclusive approach to referral and recruitment, Kairos WWT are available for a range of young women of 18 years and above who may need their support during this transitional period.

As well as referral of young women to the Kairos WWT

service, stakeholders also spoke of referral of young people who have experienced or are at risk of sexual exploitation to statutory services. Stakeholders from within Adult Social Care/ Services stated that the process of assessment and referral was highly dependent on who was carrying out the procedure and whether they took an inclusive approach or narrowly interpreted criteria. Positive work had been done by Adult Social Care with Probation, Housing and Health services in order to increase understanding of the remit of the Care Act (2014). An example was given of on-going support being provided by Adult Social Care that was not ‘showing’ in terms of meeting targets, it was above and beyond the initial Assessment and Support Plan, in order to maintain a trusting relationship and help the young person to settle in a new environment. A manager commented that ‘the statistics do not fit into social care processes’.

Stakeholders felt that some young people who would benefit from being able to access support did not see that they were at risk and did not consent to being referred:

*‘And so if a young person can see that risk and realizes that risk is there then they may consent to that referral to go to either Kairos or, but it becomes then sort of into the relationship work, rather than the exploitation work, which is slightly different in terms of how a young person views that. So they might see kind of Kairos, Valley House and those sort of places as a domestic abuse service. And if they don’t feel like their relationship is abusive or their coercion is coming from somewhere that isn’t necessarily a partner relationship they then will feel like they don’t fit that bracket’ (Frontline Worker 2,*

*stakeholder workshop, Drug & Alcohol Service).*

Sometimes young people are not clear about the remit of a service so are not willing to consent to be referred. Often they have had poor experience of services in the past and have no reason to expect that anything will be different with the service that is being introduced. It is also the case that services who are providing support for women with a whole range of needs and complexities are often stigmatised as a service for a particular ‘type’ of woman, such as those subject to domestic abuse or involved in prostitution. The stigma associated with the service can lead to misunderstanding and a wish for women to distance themselves from association with such a service.

As the Feeling Safe service is providing support for those of 18 years and over it was important to know how the CSE support service for under 18’s approach referral and signposting to other services. The team have a process in place to identify young people who are at risk, they are then able to work with those at medium or high risk, which may involve referral to other support services:

*‘Ideally, once a referral comes into MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) the MASH will do an initial screening as part of their gathering information, so even if they’re low risk, they’re then still on our radar, so we can kind of look at the intervention around that. Tools are reviewed every three months when we’re working with a young person that’s being exploited. We have our MACE (Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Panel) meetings to assess the risk, look at the intervention, the disruption plan for that young person. And we also we have a screening tool review, so every*



Wednesday we review our screening tools [...] that's the system that we use and we also get them by e-mail via schools via hospitals that we will then review and then look at if referrals are needed for that young person' (CSE Specialist Team U18's, stakeholder workshop).

Representatives of Adult Social Care felt that Area Teams could be making more referrals and in a more timely manner, 'Children's Services often keep them until they are 18 and don't refer' (AADT). It was felt that a longer lead in time could provide the opportunity to assess need earlier and arrange provision of support if need was established.

### **BARRIERS TO REFERRAL**

When discussing the ways in which young women are referred or refer themselves to the Feeling Safe service, across the participant groups, challenges and barriers were raised. There are a growing number of women of this transitional age who would benefit from accessing the support that Kairos WWT and the Feeling Safe service offer. One of the key barriers to referral has been the small size of the team, with limited hours in which support can be provided and a growing need.

As a Kairos WWT Manager says:

*'It has been hectic, is the word to describe it. It's been constant and overseeing everything, it's just coming in at every angle because the needs of the women is 10 times more than, you know, the types of issues that we're supporting, with the intensity and the amount of support that the women are needing, is a lot... we've got all these new referrals, but they're at capacity now, so we can't add anybody on...'* (Kairos WWT Manager)

As the need for the Feeling Safe service intensified following the Covid-19 pandemic and with the cost of living crisis, Kairos WWT noticed a significant risk in the complexity of need. This included increased numbers of safeguarding needs, increased domestic and sexual violence, incidences of self-harm and also suicidality, and women were experiencing crisis. The small staff team were challenged by the level of need and at capacity in terms of the support that they could provide. This impacted the referral process as it meant some young women had to join a waiting list for support. Once on a waiting list they received regular phone calls to keep in touch and to be informed of how soon they were likely to be able to access full support, young women were 'not just forgotten about' or turned away. This an example of how Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioners will go beyond their immediate concerns to not leave young women feeling isolated and without any support. One team member shared that they had 25 young women on a single caseload and were finding it challenging to provide support to all when all were active cases. More typically, a caseload of 25 might be only 15 active cases and 10 inactive, not in need of support at the time but still included in the service.

Amongst partner organisations and stakeholders a barrier to referral relating to who might meet referral criteria to which available services emerged. Participants expressed that they would appreciate some differentiation between some of the services with a remit for supporting women in need. For example, the work that Kairos WWT and Coventry Haven do relating to healthy relationships, so that they would know 'when you would refer here and when

you would refer there' (Frontline worker 1, Drug & Alcohol Support Service).

### **CRIMINAL JUSTICE WORK BARRIERS**

The most difficult challenge for Kairos WWT in Year One of this project was the criminal justice delivery strand of support. After an initial positive start and investment of time in building relationships at HMP Peterborough, Drake Hall and Foston Hall much of the planned work was not possible once Covid-19 restrictions came into place. All access to prisons was suspended. The team looked for other ways to offer support. The lead for the criminal justice strand of support made the Partnership Organiser aware of the service that Feeling Safe offers to women 18-25 who are from Coventry or intend to settle in Coventry on release. Whilst told that there were no women who matched that criteria, Kairos WWT became aware that other managers within the prison were looking for this support for women and were struggling to find it (e.g. the Resettlement Team, CFO3).

This lack of clear communication within the prison proved to be a barrier to work of Kairos WWT's Feeling Safe team; it was also found to be a barrier in the research team's previous evaluation of the prison in-reach and out-reach work delivered by Kairos WWT (Brady et al, 2018). The target, to work with 10 women a year in prison became a challenge, despite the best efforts of the Feeling Safe team to support women, without them being identified and signposted to the team it was not possible.

Concerns were raised in the Feeling Safe team that almost a year was lost in the progression of the criminal justice work. The positive conversations which had

taken place with Drake and Foston Hall prisons at the beginning of the period of funding had to start afresh, however, rather than this being a limitation it appeared that the crisis in prisons, exacerbated by Covid-19, provided more of a sense of urgency for collaborative working between some prisons and the third sector, which Kairos WWT were in a strong position to capitalise upon and take forward with the introduction of a Specialist Justice Practitioner role across the organisation, to work with women of all ages.

To summarise, the data shows that the vision and remit for the Feeling Safe service was not always understood or consistently relayed by research participants. This is understandable as the service has evolved considerably over time and other services in the city are catching up with the changes. There have also been leadership and frontline worker changes which have helped to shape the direction of travel for the project and address the inconsistency in mission and messaging. The recent restructure, introduction of a clear strategic plan and culture change have helped to address internal inconsistency and promote a more unified service. Young women service users are also regularly consulted to contribute their own ideas of what they would like the service to be. Whilst it is a service that is person-centred and flexible in meeting the needs of individual women, this can lead to a lack of clarity when it comes to explaining to partners what is being offered, partly because most services do not have the flexibility to work in this way and are tightly focused on a specific need or issue.

Whilst the Feeling Safe service was initially conceptualised as a service to prevent sexual exploitation, it addresses a range of needs and bridges a well-known chasm in provision when CSE services no longer support post 18. The vulnerabilities or inequalities are clearly intersecting and a response that can flexibly address the complex challenges that are impacting the lives of young women is provided.



## **2: WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP TO ACHIEVE AIMS**

### **AWARENESS RAISING**

Awareness raising for Kairos WWT has been crucial in order to increase understanding of who they are and what they do amongst other organisations within the city of Coventry and nationally. Awareness raising activity takes place on a number of levels – raising awareness of the service offer amongst other services; raising awareness of sexual exploitation amongst young women; raising awareness of their contribution to the sexual violence sector. Despite COVID-19 making this job difficult during this period of evaluation staff with a remit for awareness raising were able to develop innovative ways to communicate and raise the profile of the Feeling Safe service.

Unfortunately, all planned in-person awareness raising delivery events scheduled in Year One of the project had to be cancelled, due to COVID-19. Having to cancel the sessions was a source of frustration and disappointment, so the Feeling Safe team discussed alternative ways of reaching people to convey important messages. They used part of The National Lottery budget and money awarded from a small grant of £12,000 to work with a media production company, ARK, to develop awareness raising films in the form of animations. The process included writing scripts, selecting animation styles, recording voiceovers, editing the films. The first of the films was launched on September 29<sup>th</sup> 2020, closely followed by another six videos. Viewing platforms were discussed and the films are available on [YouTube https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdLxFwhdUEmb-LQLBE8lzsQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdLxFwhdUEmb-LQLBE8lzsQ). In addition, they were also promoted on Facebook and

Instagram, the Kairos WWT website and sent directly to stakeholders. An evaluation form was linked to the website in order to get a sense of how the films had been received and how many viewers they had reached. A prize of a £50 Amazon Voucher in October 2020 incentivised views. A total of 6 films were produced with the above production company. This was a wholly new venture for Kairos WWT and an innovative way of reaching audiences, continuing to raise awareness during the Covid restrictions. Staff saw the videos as achieving a dual purpose:

*‘...a lot of people still don’t know that Kairos exists in Coventry, you know it, there’s a lot of there’s still that where it’s like, well, who’s Kairos and how long’s Kairos been in Coventry? And then they’re always surprised it’s been in Coventry since 1999 or whatever. So, you know, it’s still kind of there’s a general awareness raising needed around the whole charity really not just how we’re trying to reach potential service users or service users or people who would erm be eligible for our cohort of women, you know?’ (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner)*

Staff commented that the marketing for these videos was limited, leading to view counts being more limited than expected, though it is important to remember the time period in which these videos were released. The Feeling Safe team have taken the opportunity to reflect on the key messages, in the context of changing perceptions of the role of ‘preventative’ educational resources in CSE and how this translates when trying to reach young (adult) women.

As lockdowns began to ease, the Feeling Safe team were able to begin their awareness raising in person again, with staff offering training and awareness sessions to other organisations, such as Coventry University. These sessions aimed to raise the awareness of what Kairos WWT does, with one member of staff explaining it’s ‘about our work and being trauma informed and the barriers that women face, especially in the health services and with the statutory services, and how we can help with that’. (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner).

Following the organisational changes referred to above, over the three-year period of this evaluation, Kairos WWT no longer have specific staff dedicated to the delivery of Feeling Safe awareness raising, instead a number of management and front-line staff deliver awareness raising sessions, workshops and training to a variety of organisations. The sessions focus on sexual exploitation and related issues, trauma-informed practice with women and also update other agencies on the strategic aims, remit and the service offer provided by Kairos WWT. Organisations that have commissioned such training include various teams within Coventry City Council and the NHS, university courses and other voluntary sector and support services.

### PERCEPTION

With the appointment of a new CEO and management team the awareness raising work has been regarded as crucial to moving the organisation forward in being recognised as a key player in the field. Kairos WWT staff indicated concern regarding the perception of them as an organisation:

*‘...fundamentally people will just say, ‘oh Kairos, yeah, you just work with “sex workers”, that’s what this connection is’, and it’s like, no, that’s just one element of the work that we do... so I wouldn’t be surprised if there were organisations out there that had very limited knowledge on the Feeling Safe service’ (Kairos WWT Manager)*

This perception that Kairos WWT only work with women involved in prostitution still persists, despite communication and partnership working improving during this time and the remit of the service expanding into several different areas of support for women.

With the combination of either a lack of knowledge of Kairos WWT or inaccurate information about Feeling Safe, it appears that external partnerships did not have a good understanding of what Kairos WWT could offer young women in Coventry, thus missing out on referrals and the ability to support young women who desperately needed it, with one member of staff sharing,

*‘...we just keep trying until we get through to them because otherwise, they’ll just fall through the cracks and then what’s going to happen? Nothing positive.’ (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner)*

By recognising the importance of being an open-ended service, unlike other services in the city that are timebound, this member of staff displays the importance of a service like Kairos WWT in Coventry. This also enables Kairos WWT to build partnerships with a broad range of external organisations as and when the young women require their help, allowing staff to advocate on their behalf over an extended time period, with the same workers.



### COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT

Communication with partners has further developed over the three year evaluation period. In early interviews with Feeling Safe team members it was suggested that there were often tensions between Kairos WWT and other services regarding clear communication on who should lead on the support for each individual woman. However, one of these participants was hopeful of improving partnership relationships,

*‘I’d definitely like to see us having more established relationships with some key partners that then increase our referrals...’ (Kairos WWT Manager)*

Kairos WWT recognises that in order to meet the various needs of the young women that Feeling Safe support it is essential that they work in partnership with other organisations. The complexity of their needs such as poor mental health, domestic violence, housing or substance use, requires specialist support. Feeling Safe are able to lead on multi-agency case co-ordination in order that the young woman remains at the centre of the support, rather than support becoming siloed.

*‘Multi partnership working is key for outcomes with women, men, anybody that you’re working with... our Wonder Woman Wednesday drop in, the multi partnership working that goes on there is absolutely phenomenal. A one stop shop for women to come in to access all the different services...’ (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner)*

All members of staff in the Feeling Safe service felt passionately about partnership working and recognised this as the best way to

support the young women that are in the service. One suggests:

*‘...if you look at things like, and this is about children, I look at Serious Case Reviews and key findings on every serious case review will be ‘failings in multi partnership working’. That’s why, as a practitioner, that is up there on my list of priorities to link in to ensure that there’s a support network that are all connecting and in communication with each other’ (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner)*

Having staff that recognise the importance of partnership working, Kairos WWT are able to offer young women something that is unique; a Support and Advocacy Practitioner that can offer holistic support, despite the needs of the young woman being classified as ‘complex’, as they link them into other services and remain the constant in their life. This gives young women the opportunity to only have to share their story once, to one practitioner that they trust, instead of having to share the same information over and over again, risking the possibility of being retraumatised in the re-telling of their lives.

Feeling Safe staff state often that advocacy is one of the main components of their role. Kairos WWT staff are able to build a trusting relationship with young women, they have a more in-depth understanding of the issues the women are facing than a worker who may only see them for the specified length of time that the service offers or in relation to one issue. An example of this is explained in one interview with a member of the Feeling Safe frontline staff:

*‘...for example, children’s services could say ‘mum’s not engaging with us and she’s not engaging in support’, whereas*

*Kairos, as like, a supporting advocacy organisation for the woman, we'd turn it around and say 'it's not that she's not engaging, is it that she's got a lot going on? Is it that she's overwhelmed with the amount of professionals that are involved?'* (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner)

This example demonstrates how the frontline staff see that one of the primary aspects of the Feeling Safe service is advocacy. It also suggests young women in Coventry are in need of a service like this, as currently many young women feel that there is no other service like Kairos WWT for them, where they are able to get all their needs met through a relationship with a single worker.

Advocating and working with partners is not just a local issue, but much broader for the Kairos WWT team, who are amplifying the voices of women in order to influence change at a systems level:

*'...a massive part of it is also building those partnerships and advocating on a local and national level to actually sort of, you know, show the need and be able to provide that more intensive support...'* (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner)

Kairos WWT recognise that they are in a unique position by being with young women for such a long period of time (potentially 18-25), which is why Feeling Safe staff can take the lead when joint working with a young woman. Members of the team note that their primary aim, to prioritise a trauma-informed approach, is not the priority of some other services:

*'...it's about advocating for the right thing for the service*

*user because while we have a very specific focus and a very specific remit, other organisations don't, you know... their number one focus isn't being trauma informed...so sometimes it's about thinking, actually, I'm the person who knows the most about this in the room, and I am the one that needs to step up here and say actually no, we're not going to do it like that, we're going to do it like this...'* (Kairos WWT Manager)

Partner organisations recognised that they were not always working in the most joined up ways with each other that best supported young women and this was a source of frustration. The sharing of information was regarded as crucial and an initial response to a young person reaching out for help was seen as really important. For example, Adult Social Care had tried to work with the Police to request that some indication, a marker, was added to young people's files so that each young person contacting the police does not have to repeat their life story, it was felt that a short 'pen picture' could indicate something of their background. However, this had not been possible and they relayed that they had met with systems that 'do not speak to each other'. They expressed concern that the repercussions of this might be that an unhelpful response would lead the young person not to seek support again, risking their situation becoming worse and the level of risk they might be subjected to increasing, which may lead to a safeguarding concern. Stakeholders said that 'any examples of good practice are down to individuals, not services' (All Age Disability Team). It was suggested that a contact name for someone within the local police for Adult Social Care to speak with when they have safeguarding

concerns would be a useful step forward in addressing these concerns.

Stakeholders were asked about their awareness of good practice in other geographical areas that could be suggested to develop practice in Coventry. Other local authority areas were said to have multi-disciplinary teams that focus on transition. Good practice examples were shared where Multi-disciplinary Teams, Psychology, Psychiatry and the Children's Team worked together to provide support in other Local Authorities. In Coventry meetings between the Adult Disability Team and the Children's Team took place, where there were safeguarding concerns about young people. Many young people and young adults who are 'a cause for concern' do not meet the Care Act (2014) criteria for support, if they are seen to have no care and support needs they are not 'open to service'. It was recognised that this created gaps and left some young people who needed support without any support.

#### **AGE CRITERIA LINKED TO ELIGIBILITY WITHIN SUPPORT SERVICES**

Stakeholders were concerned that there was a gap in provision of support for young people between the ages of 16 and 18. They raised the issue of a lack of support for mental health concerns between the ages of 16 and 18. An example was given of a young person aged 17 and 7 months with an eating disorder, they were unable to be referred to Adult Services until they were 18 years of age, Children's Services seem to wait until young people 'age out', young people of this age 'do not fit anywhere. (AADT). Young people with a learning disability can be accepted at age 17 years 6 months, but this does not seem to be widely known or acted upon.

It was remarked that there was no robust plan for transition for children with neurodevelopmental disability. The same stakeholder said that while the disability service is described as 'all age' up to the age of 25 it currently operates very much as 0-18 years and 18-25 years, rather than working across child to adult transition. Young people were also said to be waiting long and unacceptable times for an assessment and diagnosis from mental health services. This led Children's Services to paying privately for assessment through Looked After Children and Parenting Assessments yet Mental Health Services will only accept an NHS diagnosis, so young people remain on the waiting list. Research has drawn attention to the impact on mental health for young people who have been subjected to exploitation, stakeholder organisations describe the context in which all agencies are trying to secure mental health support for young people in this transitional age group.

The data showed that there is a need for increased collaboration and for further understanding of what each organisation does and how they fit together to support young people. One suggestion was that some staff were designated as links or transition champions as all staff cannot know everything. One immediate barrier to this was that such a role would not fit within an existing process although good practice examples from other areas do exist.

#### **TENSIONS AND CHALLENGES**

Despite the healing and holistic work that takes place when multi partnership working is successful, dealing with partner organisations can be a challenge, with staff commenting on tensions that

have arisen throughout their relationships with external organisations.

*'...I think we're being as open to working in partnership as we possibly can, but there are tensions because it's a small market and you're potentially competing for the same funds...'* (Kairos WWT Manager)

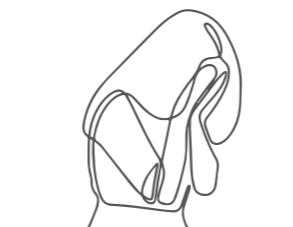
These tensions stem from a broad range of causes, not just that of competitive funding but also the way in which services support young women. Kairos WWT were keen to emphasise that they did not take a performative approach to claiming to be trauma-informed in their practice, as some other organisations might

*'...there's definitely issues, like, Kairos are a very trauma-informed organisation and not an organisation that says it's trauma informed and ticks a box and then moves on...'* (Kairos WWT Manager)

COVID-19 led services to be overwhelmed with demand, with little funding, trying to support the worsening mental health of young adults; Kairos WWT were also facing the same challenges. Feeling Safe staff relay how they had to be persistent and dogged in fighting for what they feel is right for the young women who rely on them:

*'it's very frustrating, yeah, because you do have to kind of fight tooth and nail to get any progress...'* (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner)

*'...for the women to try and access any service is so, so difficult. The system is just overwhelmed... that's the big challenge.'* (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner)





### NEED FOR RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Kairos WWT are aware that there is little research in the transition period for young women at risk of sexual exploitation, as is explained by the CEO here,

*'I don't know that there's a lot of research into intervention, like, intervening at that stage between being involved in childhood sexual exploitation and becoming, like, fully involved in prostitution...'*

Because of this, Kairos WWT often invests in research around this area, to help to build an evidence base for the young women that they support. For example, alongside this evaluation, Kairos WWT have joined a pilot scheme with four other women's organisations, to explore trauma informed standards specifically for the women's sector (led by Against Violence and Abuse [AVA]). This sits alongside their 3-year strategy 2022-2025 to become a fully trauma-informed service. Once training had been undertaken, Kairos led on the establishment of the Coventry Trauma Informed Practice Network in 2021. A group of staff from across local organisations are working to embed trauma informed practice within their own organisation and together they are developing a set of local practice standards.

### 3. DEFINING WHAT 'SUPPORT' LOOKS LIKE TO KAIROS WWT STAFF AND STAKEHOLDERS

Covid 19 had a profound impact on the delivery of services to marginalised and vulnerable groups. Kairos WWT took the

difficult decision not to furlough their staff as the women that they work with would effectively have no support at all, as a number of other services had found it necessary to close. Adaptations were made to largely work online for group events and all workers became classified as 'key workers', meaning that they were able to continue working during the strictest lockdown phases. Kairos WWT staff and some of the partners that they work with expressed that they were fully aware of just how crucial support can be to young people who are experiencing a crisis, they need a swift response to feel that they are not on their own with issues that feel too big to deal with.

This Support and Advocacy Practitioner with Feeling Safe describes a typical day in her role:

*'So, as a support worker I obviously do 1-2-1 support so working with erm... service users on a 1-2-1 basis, dealing with each of them and their issues or concerns, it could be something as simple as needing a food bank voucher or something like getting a non-molestation order put in place erm, because of an abusive ex-partner... it could be as simple as trying to get a £10 phone to applying for grants so that they can get a smart phone or a tablet or maybe for relief erm, so it's just, it's-it's a lot of different things you do for these women and every day at Kairos is never the same, you can have a plan and you know okay I'm going to do this, this that today, I'm gonna maybe focus on these people today and then someone just comes in with their own issues and your plan can just go out*

*the window, so you have to really be quick on your feet to make sure you still meet your targets, your personal targets for the day as well as obviously tackling the needs of the people that have probably come in, knowing how to prioritise is very important because sometimes maybe somebody that you needed to meet up for a coffee with might, maybe what they're going through might not be as severe as someone else's, so you might have to reschedule that and then focus on the crisis at hand, which can, it can just happen you just never know, so yeah, it's a lot of just dealing with their individual issues' (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner).*

It is clear that the team need to be responsive, flexible, able to change direction from the plan which they had if they are going to be truly young-women centred and focused on where need is greatest. The Feeling Safe team try to resolve issues for young women who do not have the traditional forms of support that many people do have. During the Covid 19 pandemic they sought a range of ways of trying to still advocate for young women in their interaction with services and to show care and support:

*'asking the individual, can you phone up and can you say this and just tell them you're happy for them to speak to (me), that doesn't work because they (the agencies) don't do it, I've had people on 2 phones and putting the phones together erm, which, some agencies worked for and then others have been like no, she needs to*



be with you physically and I'm like but what's the difference, she's here on the phone like, erm, you know, erm, so there's been a lot of struggles and barriers that way but yeah, a lot of it has been emotional support and erm, you know, ambulance call outs and, we-we have a lot of high mental health anyway but I think the fact that everyone's isolated or... even not being able to see us face to face as often, has had a massive impact you know, erm, because, for some of them, Kairos is their only support network or their only erm, consistent thing in their life, so they might have family erm, but, they might have been abused by that family as a child or they might have been neglected by that family so, although every now and again they're in touch with family, it's not positive interactions and actually Kairos is their only consistent, positive... people, well, people in their life, so we have had a lot of that, a lot of domestic violence and a lot of mental health has really increased erm, a lot of isolation we've noticed, hence why we've been trying to you know, get them care packages and you know, colouring books and anything that's just going to keep them having something to do really, and as you know with the group, we was a bit at first it was a bit like, oh, group can't run, we tried to think of other things that we could do, so we started doing activities without erm, the video call just so that they were doing something but then it was just like, it's not the same so, brought that together, and then with the awareness raising again, we have a target of reaching 200 women erm, 200 people, between the ages of 18 and 24 every year, of

awareness raising erm and although (Frontline worker) had booked in people, she'd booked in 100 people, then lockdown happened so that got cancelled (Kairos WWT Manager).

During this time young women were struggling with their mental health more than usual. Mental health challenges are prominent amongst young people who have experienced adversity in many different forms. The current offer of mental health provision is not always appropriate for the kind of mental health issues that young people are experiencing. This is particularly so where mental health issues overlap with use of drugs or alcohol and where young people are neurodiverse. One of the partner agencies describes why what is offered is often not suitable for a young person, in this case a young man:

*'So, IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapy) would be very structured, maybe 6 sessions, up to 12, typically kind of 6-9, anxiety, low mood you know, very structured 30 minute sessions whereas actually this young person now has so much anxiety that he'll almost talk for maybe 2 hours and then by the end of the 2 hours he's started to kind of get to what he was trying to talk about at the beginning and we've made amazing progress, essentially we're not a mental health service but it impacts the cravings that he experiences from the substances because that's been his coping strategy but if he was to mention substances to a mental health service they'll say we're not going to support you because they'll say it's the substances that's contributing to the mental health and then actually because he takes so long to get to where he wants*

*to be or where he feels he's able to then talk about what's going on for him, that 30 minute structured appointment wouldn't work for him, he wouldn't get the benefit and then we're back to square one of, I've tried something, it wasn't effective, and then the problem is if you introduce that idea, you're the one that's giving the ideas that don't work then, do you know what I mean?'* (Frontline Worker 1, Drug & Alcohol Service)

All young people need flexibility in the support that they are offered and the opportunity to share their experiences in their own time and at their own pace. For some young women less formalised support is beneficial to their sense of self and well-being. The support provided within the Feeling Safe 'Queen Bees' group aims to be flexible and to be guided by the young women who attend. Such support is not just from the staff leading the session, there is a strong sense of peer support amongst the young women that attend even when they do not really know each other well:

*'Even when, even when they don't know each other they give... because you have to realise they don't all come to group at the same time, yesterday for instance, one of the girls shared her experience of her teacher saying that she was, her teacher said that her work was S H I T and when she was in year 11, no, when she was in college, and they, oh they just, how could she say that to you? they all just, and she was new to the group yesterday so you can imagine, they all just jump in like, defending her straight away, and that's something that I really do love and appreciate about those girls, they're just like, no one should talk to you*



*that way sort of situation, of course you're great at it, they were all just like, they'd never seen anything she'd done, but they're just like, I'm sure you're great at it, of course you're great at it, you're perfect at art, I'm just like wow you've just met this girl today and that's just something really lovely'* (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner).

In describing the approaches used within the group session a Support and Advocacy Practitioner talked about a session where art materials were used to encourage the group to think both collectively and individually about what it means to be a woman in today's UK society. A number of powerful and positive words were shared and written onto the image of a hand:

*'it was quite an emotional day because a lot of them really opened up about past experiences, that was just, only for the last 10 15 minutes of group, we did something completely different and that was like the end of group when we decided to do that, but the girls really opened up about past experiences of being you know, molested or abused and they were, there were new people in the group that day, but they all felt very comfortable just sharing erm, something that's very... very erm, very sensitive you know, you know, things such as rape or molestation or you know, they shared that with people that they barely knew that they had just seen you know, an hour ago, and they were just quite open and honest about it and they all just were kind of like, very reflective that day so it kind of was a very special moment where they all kind of got to bond with each other and some of them are*

*friends out of group, I didn't even realise that through group some of them had become friends because one of them had their birthday I think, her birthday was in the beginning of the month and when I went to give her her present, I was like oh, so what're you going to do for your birthday today, she was like, oh I did something yesterday so I was like ohh so what did you do?, I went to the park with erm, some of my friends, you know that girl from group and she told you who she was and I was like oh okay, that's nice and it's just like, they had actually formed a friendship outside of group and I didn't even know that, erm so that was really nice to see'* (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner).

The support, friendships and connections made through being part of the group were perceived as empowering to young women. The support of the Feeling Safe service is offered over a long period of time, as there is an understanding that young women are not always ready to reveal their past experiences and needs until they have built a trusting relationship. The support offered can be a crucial lifeline:

*'I think that's the beauty of Kairos, like, if it means we have to take it slow just to maintain that relationship at the end of the day, the girls have from when they're 18 to when they're 25, if they're referred to us and they engage most of the time, it would take a long time before (Kairos WWT Manager) would close someone so she'd make sure that she put all the necessary steps in place, she would try and make contact with you, try and engage, send out a letter, call your emergency contact as a final resort, but erm, I think*

*the thing about Kairos is that we make sure that we assure them that we're there and we're just there to help them because during lockdown one of my girls tried to take her life and it was hard to get in touch with her erm, because she wouldn't, she wouldn't pick up the phone but she would text me, she would text, she would just text sporadically so I'd sent her a message and it would take her hours to get back to me but after I hadn't heard back from her for a while I sent erm, the police over and she wouldn't take the- because she wouldn't pick up her call I couldn't refer her to Crisis Team, so, I ended up calling the police and they sent an ambulance over and they took her to the Caludon (mental health hospital) and she was just like, thank you so much because other people would just get frustrated with me and you know, they would just give up on me, other services will just be like 'eurgh, she's just doing it again' sort of thing but you didn't and I said well, that's what Kairos is about, we're just here to support you every step of the way and we won't give up on you and that's the thing about Kairos, we don't give up on people just because they're difficult or they're not engaging or, we just keep trying until we get through to them because otherwise they'll just fall through the cracks and then what's going to happen? Nothing positive' (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner).*

The data show that the Feeling Safe team have an understanding

of the women that they are working with and can sense when something does not feel right. This knowledge and understanding develops because support relationships are built over time, gradually young women allow staff to see the reality of their lives, which can be complex and a daily struggle.

### **TRANSITION FROM CHILD TO ADULT**

Stakeholders expressed frustration that young people, some still classed as children at age 16 and 17 were expected to move/transition out of services with a remit for caring for children. At this time statutory services were said to move towards closing cases of young people as they approach the age at which their obligation to provide a service ends. A further issue occurs as this begins to happen quite far in advance of the age of 18. There are also gaps which appear and leave young people vulnerable to poor mental health and other circumstances when they do not seem to belong in services for children or those for adults:

*'I think that happens with social care, I think that happens with mental health services, I don't even, I wouldn't even say 18, I'd say 16, alarm bells start ringing and they're going oh we need to get this person off our caseload at some point, erm, and... I don't fully know why, for me, a young person is a young person, oh, I mean, we're going young person up to like, 24 to be fair so, erm, but we've had it where, I've had to support a young person who's got really poor mental health, to*

*the hospital, took them to the children's section, he was 17, they said, oh, you've got to go next door so, yeah, whatever reason, when that age hits, I just think there's no, there's no real transition, the support really reduces and then all of a sudden they're not, they're not gonna hit their thresholds for Adult services because then they didn't receive any support when they were younger or maybe not enough support, not the right support, not the appropriate support, so all of a sudden, these young people with a need have nothing [...] so, there's a gap, a massive gap' (Frontline Worker 1, Drug & Alcohol Service).*

A matter of further relevance to transition is where young people who are in the care of the Local Authority are 'placed'. This becomes highly significant in determining the level of support to which they are entitled once they reach the age of 18:

*'Young people who have been in care...but haven't necessarily been seen as being a looked after child from the local authority, so they might have grown up kind of with an SGO (Special Guardianship Order) and then they don't apply for the PA (Personal Assistant), so they quite often get to kind of that age group and talk about kind of feeling dropped and not having somebody that can then take over the work that the social worker had been doing with them. So that's something that I've seen a lot. And so it (the presentation of the systematic review findings on sexual exploitation and transition) hasn't surprised*



*me, but it's quite refreshing to see it [...] it's frustrating, especially when you're working with a young person that you can see needs that support and you would think would really benefit from a PA and actually has been in care and not been with their parents, but don't fit the criteria. It's frustrating' (Frontline Worker 2, Drug & Alcohol Service, Stakeholder workshop).*

The consequences of such ineffective support for young people at this transitional age can be devastating, as this frontline worker says:

*'So I've been doing this role for 2 and a half years now and I've actually lost two kids who were transitional age. One was actually transitioning out of social care into adulthood. And the gaps that I found, it went to Serious Case Review and the gaps in his care and sort of as he moved from transitional age from 17 to 18 and everything, just how it was handled, it was quite shocking to be honest with you' (Frontline Worker 3, Drug & Alcohol Service, Stakeholder workshop).*

The same frontline worker goes on to talk about the pressures of working within this sector and of supporting young people at a transitional age:

*[...] Umm and burnout? Yeah, it's it's crazy. I mean our caseloads. I think we have around 34-35 kids, which is just it's unmanageable. So as it was sort of mentioned before about kids feel let down by staff or staff changes and staff turnover, I think they're*

*inevitable given the demands on staff. If I'm being honest with you. Yeah, you don't really switch off to be honest' (Frontline Worker 3, Drug & Alcohol Service, Stakeholder workshop).*

The team responsible for CSE support to under 18-year-olds in the city also recognised the need for further work to take place around transitional safeguarding of young people:

*'[...] It's something that we consider greatly in our team. We're working with young people, especially because we only work young people like you said till they get to the age of 18. So already by the time they hit in 17 and a half we're thinking about that exit plan so that that the young person is not gonna be left on their own once we are no longer going to be working with that family. And that might be depending on the level of risk at the time that that young person turns 18, what intervention they've had during that period of time, it might be that we speak with our early help support, because they will work with young people until they're 19 and or we look at the agencies that might be working with that young person that will continue to work with them once we end our supports, ideally what you would want for that young person is for the risk to be low before we end our involvement but you know that's not always the case and that's where that exit plan needs to come in really before we look at closing' (CSE Specialist Team U18's, Stakeholder workshop).*



When asked about what change is needed to improve services and address these considerable needs it was suggested that other local authorities have strategies that span the divide from adult to child and this local authority and partners are looking at developing an approach, strategy or service:

*'I think at the moment there's lots of discussions taking place. We're looking at, potentially looking at An Adolescent Strategy. So there's lots of kind of scope because obviously as well as that we'll incorporate our 'missing' (missing young people) into our expectations. So it's a bigger picture that's definitely under review' (CSE Specialist Team Manager U18's, Stakeholder workshop).*

The work involved in this sector is extremely challenging, as evidenced here. Individuals have various motivations for staying in their roles and trying to make a difference. A member of the Feeling Safe team uses an example to encapsulate why she does the job:

*'I mean, when you're able to achieve something like, I mean, I had one of, one young lady she has a daughter and obviously her ex was abusive erm, so I tried referring her to the Law Centre just because she wanted to erm, she wanted full custody because he kept threatening to take the baby from her and because of her mental health he would always say things like oh just go and kill yourself you know, we're better off without you, your daughter's better off without you and just say horrible things like that to her, which obviously will impact on her mental health erm, in the end I ended up just going through NCDV and within the space*

*of 2 weeks she got a non molestation order put in place erm, and, you can just see how much lighter she is, she'd always call, she'd call crying on the phone just talking for like an hour, to now just feeling so relaxed and at ease, going to the gym, meeting up with her friends you know, and it's just a huge difference, so for me, if that's not rewarding, then I don't know what is' (Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioner).*

Apart from individualised motivation one of the stakeholder agencies saw a role for collective values when working in partnership, they appreciate that both Feeling Safe and their own organisation really value young people:

*'I think the values feel aligned in terms of how we work with young people, how we support young people and the understanding and the kindness and the compassion and the empathy, all of these kinds of things, I've felt that from the workers, even just in terms of how they respectfully talk about young people, I think you know, that's the type of thing that's going to make a difference, they're the ones that are championing that young person and that's what often is needed' (Frontline Worker 1, Drug and Alcohol Support Service).*

Asked about what stakeholders would like to see change for young people who have such adversity, complexity and challenge in their lives one frontline worker drew attention to the underfunding of support for young people in this age group and vividly highlighted the consequences for young people:

*'I mean you know the ultimate goal would be that actually we, as services, wouldn't be needed really wouldn't it, that would be quite incredible to think that that would be the case however, more realistically I would say erm, you'd want money, funding, support, however, what you know, however it works, you'd want that shift and focus to be on young people's services, I think for so long they've been an afterthought, they've been the ones that it's been easy cut and maybe that's because they don't really have a voice, erm they're not able to vote so why would we, why would we kind of, give them extra, and they'll be okay without X Y and Z, whereas actually we're seeing, we're seeing deaths every day, we're seeing knife crime every day, we're seeing this talk of gangs you know, this talk of drug running, dealing, county lines, when was county lines a thing before?' (Frontline Worker 1, Drug and Alcohol Support Service)*

The participant presents a scenario where all needs are met and formal support services are no longer necessary for young people. They also draw attention to the minority status and lack of access to power of children and the paucity of funded provision or offer of sub-standard provision.

### **FUTURE OF THE FEELING SAFE SERVICE**

Kairos WWT are reviewing the focus of the Feeling Safe service and the way in which it is delivered. They have considered revisiting the time that young women aged 18-25 can be part of the Feeling Safe service; they are clear that it will not be based on a number of weeks but may need some alternative 'measures' of progress:

*'Oh no. I never want time-bound. [...] I think what's come out really strong and clear across the board for Kairos in terms of, definitely what the women value, but also what makes us different is that we aren't time bound in the sense of we're a six week program or six month program or two year, you know, I think that's important to maintain because, because it is long, it requires long term, long term effort, you know it's not something people don't change their whole lives like overnight. Erm, you know, it's not linear and it's a lot of, you know, 20 steps forward, 25 steps back, one step forward, four steps back. You know that that's what people's journeys look like. I guess it's just about like, I don't know, just tweaking it a bit a little bit in terms of the focus being on, I guess we need to be, and it's in the Strategy, we need to be more outcomes focused like, what is it we're trying to achieve? How are we going to do that with you and on an individual basis? And then like at an organisational level? Whereas I think, in the past, it's just been, 'we're here when you need us' (Kairos WWT Senior Manager).*

These are big considerations, wishing to ensure that there are tangible benefits to accessing the service whilst ultimately recognising that each woman is on their individual journey and rarely is that a linear path without any set-backs. To learn more about what young women want from Feeling Safe an informal and impromptu consultation with two of the young women took place:

*'the young women started telling (Manager) and (Support and Advocacy Practitioner) how Kairos should be run [...] so the worker got them*

*flip chart paper and didn't even need to facilitate it, they went off into a corner on their own and were writing down so many ideas and then I engaged in conversation with them and basically what they were coming up with was music to my ears because it literally matched up with what I already had in my strategic plan. It was pretty amazing in terms of, like, what I want to implement over the next three years in terms of peer leadership and just really, really, increasing the women with lived experience and service users being actively involved in how we run the organization and so they were coming up with the idea that they would like, to them specifically, they would like to start offering a welcome session for new Feeling Safe young women. They'd like to hold welcome sessions, and because they were saying, "we can tell them what it's really like and how they can benefit better than you can and I'm like, yes, you can, that's cool because like, they were like, we are better at it because we've been through the programme. So, we know more than you do and I'm like yes absolutely, you definitely do. So, they'd like to run a welcome session, they were, they want to put together promotional material to promote Feeling Safe more, they want to have us offer them the opportunity to develop their leadership skills, they want us to give them training and accreditation or qualifications for them to become peer leaders, to then become staff members kind of thing, they want to, they want to run the groups, like they were coming up with all kinds of things. Yeah. It was really*

*brilliant. It was, it was great, and they probably wrote other stuff down as well, so that was definitely like exactly, I was like, like, this is, this is, this is this is brilliant, literally coming from them raw, yeah and like, you know, they're, they're the younger ones as well and they've been, they see themselves as, as having been through, Feeling Safe and now they're in this position to do this stuff, so that is a great success of Feeling Safe' (Kairos WWT Senior Manager).*

The suggestions arising from this interaction with two of the group also chime with what has been collected as part of a wider consultation with young women who access Feeling Safe. Kairos WWT are keen to build on the lived experience of the women who access their service to really find out what they want from such a service and to provide a service that meets their needs as they first enter and also as they progress, having received support. The requests for training, accreditation, peer leadership skills are coming from their lived experience and knowledge of what would be a successful goal or outcome from their perspective. Having presented data collected from the Kairos WWT team, their partners and other stakeholders the following section presents the voices and views of the young women that accessed the Feeling Safe service.



## SECTION 5: YOUNG WOMEN SPEAK OUT

The young women who took part in this research were aged between 19 and 25 years old. The majority were referred to Feeling Safe from other services in the city (CGL, St Basil's, CRASAC, GP service). Two young women found out about the service through a family member who was accessing it. All young women participants in this research have multiple needs. From the interviews undertaken, the range of needs and vulnerabilities reported included:

**Sexual abuse, experience of CSE, homelessness, violence, substance use, motherhood, domestic violence, care experienced, poor mental health, family conflict, poverty, experienced bereavement of a parent, neglect, complex post-traumatic stress, medication, attempted suicide, pregnancy, termination, experience of child mental health service, unstable home life, diabetes, ambivalent attachment disorder, relationship breakdown, anxiety, poor literacy, self-harm and experiences of trauma.**

When needs such as this are experienced in combination they are often referred to as adverse life experiences or severe and multiple disadvantage or multiple and complex needs. All of these terms attempt to represent the intersection of negative experiences which lead to need for support and/or safeguarding. Without understanding the context and background when young women present to services such services can be siloed in their remit and response and use victim-blaming language,

assuming 'chaotic lives', 'risky lifestyle's', 'choices' where young women are regarded as 'putting themselves at risk' of harm', failing to recognize the intersection of trauma and adversity.

### **WHO ARE THE YOUNG WOMEN PARTICIPANTS?**

In order to retain anonymity and confidentiality young women interview and workshop participants are known in this report by a pseudonym – their names are Anna, Bella, Carlie, Donna, Emma, Fay, Gillian, Hadley, Ivy, Jackie, Keira, and Lilly.

Of the twelve young women participants ten young women identified as White British. Six young women received 1-2-1 support and advocacy and six young women received 1-2-1 support and advocacy and also attended the Queen Bees group sessions on a Tuesday at Kairos WWT's women's hub. Data from the young women participants has yielded a number of themes which stand alone and are also highly interconnected:

### **IMPORTANCE OF A SAFE SPACE FOR YOUNG WOMEN - SEX MATTERS**

Young women spoke about the importance of having access to a safe space. The stories shared highlighted wide ranging and complex needs and vulnerabilities. The fact that Kairos WWT is a female only space was deemed important. This was a space that they felt was 'safe'. It was their choice whether to talk openly about their lives, with other women, their peers, the volunteers and Feeling Safe staff.



Young women had a sense of certainty about the Feeling Safe service offering a non-judgemental, empathetic environment where they would be heard and they welcomed the opportunity to receive support from women in a way that centred their needs. Young women accessing the Feeling Safe service reported experiences of abuse and violence often perpetrated by men. Having a space where they can be vulnerable and share experiences formed part of a learning and healing process. Whilst not all of the young women participants attended group sessions they felt it important to have safe spaces, for young women such spaces played an important role in building a supportive community.

As stated above, the young women who access the Feeling Safe service have often experienced difficult environments that are not safe or conducive to their wellbeing. By accessing the Feeling Safe service, the young women are able to share their experiences in a female-only environment, knowing that they are safe and will be heard by the others around them:

*‘Yeah, because of obviously, when I was a child, I went through lots of different sexual exploitation and abuse so, for me, naturally as an adult, sometimes being around men can be quite triggering. So, in order for me to grow and process and do things I need to do, it’s important that my environment is like, as calm and relaxing as it can be for me, so yeah, it is really important that I’m around females in order to kind of, feel safe and to feel like I can be involved and feel free...’ (Anna)*

A key aspect of Feeling Safe is the groupwork that occurs once a week called Queen Bees. Some of the young women initially felt that this would not be a good idea, due to the nature of the trauma that they had all experienced, though many now feel that it allows them to be heard and understood, as shared experiences are recognised by others of a similar age to them:

*‘I was so scared. I didn’t want to meet new people and I thought, really, why would you put a little group of girls together that’s been through the same situation in a group? Surely that’s not going to work well, but, I was wrong’ (Ivy).*

Other young women recognised that even if they had not experienced the exact same situation as another young woman, they are able to relate to aspects of each other stories, enabling a sense of connection and community:

*A lot of girls here obviously had abuse from partners and stuff like that, but with me, mine was family. So, when they talk about our relationship with boys and stuff like that, I can’t*



*relate to them, but I can in some aspect because obviously I have had it with my family. So, we all can connect on a level’ (Ivy).*

The focus on being women-centered and trauma-informed, is vital due to the complex nature of the young women’s experiences. A number of young women accessing Feeling Safe expressed that they had been let down by other services, such as mental health services:

*‘I didn’t even pay much attention cause I just had no hope in the service at all. Because with, like I was under child mental health from a young age, transferred to adult, got let through the net all the time. It was just bullshit basically, so I just didn’t, I didn’t care. I didn’t have any... I was like yeah, if we get somewhere we get somewhere, probably won’t, but...’ (Carlie).*

Similarly, the Feeling Safe service users recognise the difficulties with being a parent when you have complex needs, with one young woman sharing that she had ‘lost’ her daughter (taken into the care of Children’s Services), and with no family support around her she relied on Kairos WWT to:

*‘...get my head straight, otherwise I probably would’ve gone off the rails. I think that was probably my main thing, was having a bit of support there when I knew nobody else was there for me, so I always had [ Support and Advocacy Practitioner] when I needed her, I could ring her and just say, ‘can I have a chat?’ (Jackie).*

The young women recognise that the focus on young women is what makes Kairos WWT so effective, as they need that space to be able to feel secure, in the knowledge that they will not come across men who may trigger past experiences:

*‘... think as well, because of the type of charity that Kairos are, they have to be very female empowered, like, if they’re not boosting us up every single week saying, come on girls and stuff like that, like, it’s not, it’s not gonna work out, that’s one thing I’ve learnt erm, especially in terms of the Feeling Safe project as well, like, it has to be that constant energetic flow that you want to I dunno, do something good or have a good time, have a good laugh, because, you know, we come to these sessions and if you have that one dull, really boring session, it does make you question whether you want to come back again, so it is very important to have that constant energetic flow so that like, you know, even though we have our one-to-one sessions and they are very like, deep and you can get the personal stuff, the times when we’re in group situations like, it’s all just fun, there’s no stress, no drama, just pure relaxation and just being able to just chill out and enjoy yourself whilst you’re here erm... And I think, just in general like, they all, I think we all work really well with the workers, because they’re quite young as well, so like, we, like you’re not sat there with some miserable, because we’ve had some miserable workers with other companies and stuff like that*





*and you just sit there and you think like, you really hate this job, why are you here and you just sit there and you think, are you gonna attack me, like throw your pen at me if I say something wrong like and you do get some workers like that, so I think with Kairos, I think because they're all young women or like, just, like really positive women, I think it's a lot easier to get on with a lot of the workers' (Keira).*

Young women's conceptualisation of a 'safe space' was characterised as an environment that is non-judgemental, allows for autonomy and a sense of freedom, is caring,

supportive, open, encourages individuals to speak and be heard, to share vulnerabilities, where thoughts and ideas are positively received. A safe environment provides opportunities for peer support and building friendships, for young women to be 'more than a problem', to have fun, to learn, to forget trauma or be free from fear of being in a space that leads to re-traumatisation, to find solace, to engage or disengage, on their terms, without fear of negative repercussions.

During Workshop 2 the value of a safe space became clear when a young woman became upset. An extract from researcher reflections follows:

*One young woman appeared distressed and spent the majority of the session being supported by [Support Worker] Having spent some time talking the young women at the Feeling Safe Summer, programme, I had some understanding of her personal circumstances and some of the difficulties she was being supported with by FS. Having this prior knowledge was very useful as it meant I knew the best way forward was to continue with the session but ensured she knew that we were happy for her to join at any point.*

*At the start of the session, I shared the film developed from the activity carried out in the previous session. The topic was 'family' and led to [a young woman] becoming very distressed and leaving the room. I decided to go and speak to her and she explained that the film was a trigger as it reminded her of the lack of familial relationship or positive experience with her family. She hinted at having attended a session (with another service) that morning and that the issue of family was an area of discussion not having had sufficient time to process the discussion so revisiting this topic was a trigger. ... She explained how she often felt unsupported by her family and how her response to the activity was a reflection of this. ...I thanked her for being open and willing to share her experience with me. On returning to the main room, we sat around the table and talked about support. The young women were very candid and spoke about the significance of Kairos and the relationship they had with [a support worker] they identified a number of ways they viewed support, which was captured. We noted how throughout the session there were various interruptions, but this did not prevent us having a conversation that was rich and informative and, in which everyone had an opportunity to contribute. A positive outcome was towards the end of the session all the young women present contributed to the conversation of their own volition and offered thoughts about types of images that represented support to them.*



Throughout the data when referencing needing to feel safe young women showed how sex matters. Sex, age, social class and other aspects of self and social identity can be the basis of vulnerability. The stories shared by young women starkly showed relationships between sex, power and forms of inequality and the implication of being young and female in vulnerable circumstances, alongside the role that sex plays in the provision and receipt of support.

#### **CONTEXT SHAPES LIVED EXPERIENCE**

The way in which some young women come to the attention of services, in conjunction with the often narrow remit of some services, can result in some young women falling through service gaps and their needs remaining unmet. There are limits to how 'risk' is conceptualised, understood and prioritised and young women supported by the Feeling Safe service present with a range of interconnected issues. Factors such as experiences of familial, interpersonal and partner-based violence (physical and emotional), economic hardship, growing up in the care system, poor mental health, homelessness, young motherhood and substance misuse were identified as contributing to young women's vulnerability. Responding to their needs necessitates consideration of how intersecting inequalities shape their everyday lives. The data points to multiple ways in which vulnerabilities can unfold in the lives of the young women and the importance of a multi-dimensional approach.

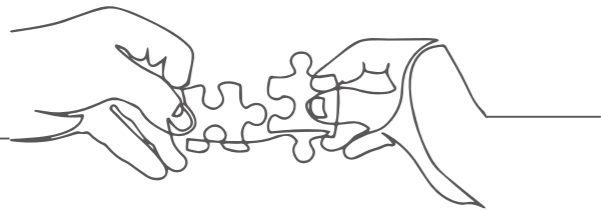
The young women service users feel strongly about the support that they receive, and recognise that Feeling Safe is a unique opportunity for them to be able to have long-term, caring support and advocacy:

*'It's a very rare organisation because obviously with domestic violence I've been, because of that I've moved around the country a lot. So when I mentioned Kairos and stuff, no one ever heard of it, and I've explained what it is, thinking that I've got something different or something similar, and no one got anything like it. It's literally just here that have it' (Carlie).*

As Kairos WWT are a 'by women, for women' charity, the frontline Support and Advocacy Practitioners have a deep understanding of the complex experiences that the young women have lived through, with other services in Coventry recognising this. This is often why partner services refer young women to Kairos WWT and the Feeling Safe service if they hear that they are experiencing exploitation,

*'...so, obviously as with [names service], which is for drugs and alcohol. And then my support worker – obviously, certain things were going on in my life where I was being exploited and I was in a domestic violent relationship. Erm, so then they refer me here, and that's how I feel that come about...' (Carlie).*

In Workshop 3 Carlie recounted what attending the weekly group sessions meant to her:



*'It's a bit simple, ...so you've had something bad happen and then rather than deal with it on your own and having the pressure having to deal with that, I would come here to try and move myself forward, I think the aim is to kind of set yourself up for when you do leave, you never really should need the service again, like, they've taught you everything that you need to know, you're a different person than the person that, you know, experienced those things that that time in your life, and you've built on that foundation to be somebody else so, it should be about life balance, new skills, boosting confidence changing their quality of life erm, and just being more like, able to... find happiness within yourself, I think, rather than externally needed support' (Carlie).*

#### **POVERTY OF CARING RELATIONSHIPS**

Young women's stories illuminate a range of challenging relationships; within families, friendships, intimate partnerships and when interacting with services. Young women shared multiple examples of circumstances in which they felt 'let down,' 'alone' 'isolated' 'unsupported,' had 'difficulties building positive relationships and/ or 'trusting' others'. For some, Covid 19 exacerbated this feeling. Feeling that no one cared impacted their sense of self-worth and was a catalyst for not engaging with services and isolating themselves from others. This increased their vulnerability and there were examples of a lack of self-care and self-worth,

leading some to engaging in 'risky behaviours' or being at risk of exploitation.

The young women who access Feeling Safe feel strongly about the Support and Advocacy Practitioners that they create relationships with. The young women feel that the workers that support them are not just there because they need to work, but there because they truly care about the wellbeing and goals of their service users:

*'...and that's one thing I've always said is Kairos is one of them places where, most of these other places you go to like counselling places and stuff like that and like, especially mental health teams and stuff like that, you find that you feel like, they're only doing it because that's their job, whereas it feels, with Kairos, and every single member of staff that I come into contact with here, it's like, they do it because they want to, like, it's not because it's just a job to them, they do it because they actually care...' (Keira).*

#### **PICKING UP THE PIECES**

Young women reported difficulty in accessing services they needed due to feeling stigmatised and experiencing differential treatment. Young women bring their prior experience of services with them, Kairos WWT's Feeling Safe service does not only need to support the self-identified needs of the young women they support but also reconnect young women with services. This requires working to build young women's confidence and self-worth to engage positively with services.



Young women who access Feeling Safe have experienced other services in Coventry and sometimes nationally. They often have little expectation that engaging with Kairos WWT will be any less of a negative experience than they have had previously:

*'...I've never really engaged well with services over the years because I've got quite a lot of bad experiences so I was a bit reluctant to begin with, I wasn't very open minded. But it's actually, to be fair, one of the best services I've used so that's a good thing...'* (Carlie).

This story of poor relationships with other services is shared often amongst the service users and perceived as a lack of care by frontline members of staff:

*'I just got moved out [...] then I was supposed to have a Leaving Care worker, but she was doing nothing for me. I was going there to collect my weekly money and then leaving. Every time I went in she was always on annual leave, or she was doing some other job...'* (Fay).

It was not just frontline staff that young women had issues with when experiencing external services, but entire systems failing them by not providing the appropriate care and support that they desperately needed,

*'...I had social services involved all the time, but they failed me a lot, saying that I was lying about everything, so I didn't get the help I needed. So, I've never had that adult support kind of like services, anything like that...'* (Ivy).

Oftentimes the young women shared their experiences of constantly changing members of staff, new people taking up roles and their struggles with having

to reshare their stories to new members of staff on a regular basis, with some finding this re-traumatising:

*'...I was always moved around so I didn't, I don't like change as it is, I like to keep one person who like, I can get to know, that knows all about me because the more workers you have, you've got one worker coming in and then they learn all about you and you tell them everything and it's like you don't have to keep explaining yourself to different people and I hate that, I don't want to sit there and have the same conversation with 10 different people in the same 10 months, I don't think that's fair but, you feel like you're telling your story to f\*cking everyone, sorry...'* (Jackie).

These past negative experiences result in poor expectations when entering the Feeling Safe service, which Kairos WWT work hard to prove wrong:

*'...really didn't have high expectations at all, I think because I'd never really had help before because obviously, I've been with child services, like, CAMHS, stuff like that, but like I never really got anything from it erm, it was always passed pillar to post and stuff like that, so when erm... when I left like [names service] and came here I was just like I don't really expect much...'* (Keira).

These issues are particularly prevalent with statutory services, it is perceived that they often have a 'tick box' system that does not feel personalised to the young person who desperately needs specific types of support:

*'...I always say, don't expect much from them because the way they tick a box so that if*

*you do anything on your own accord, like you take your own life or anything like that, they can say oh, well we did see her, we did make the effort, even though you literally just sat there chatting rubbish to them for the solid hour and they didn't offer you any help in return like, it does seem very much that way because the amount of times I have like, been in hospital for my mental health and they have literally just come out with a piece of paper with a load of phone numbers on it and it's like, you really think that's gonna help? Like, the reason I'm here like, is not to get a load of phone numbers and that's just, they just have an awful approach, so I'm, that's what I think I'm very fond of Kairos and their work because, like I said, they're here because they want to do it, not because they're being paid to do it and it's their job like, they're doing it because they want to, so that's one thing I've always stood by like, I'd rather have 5 Kairos's than 1 mental health team because they're just useless...'* (Keira).

Though there is a recognition of the waiting times and backlogged nature of some statutory services, the young women feel that this would not improve their experiences due to the lack of care when under services, particularly relating to their mental health:

*'It's definitely a big thing that needs to be changed but then they never will, especially because they're backlogged as well, like I understand they're very busy with like, such a massive workload but I also sit and think of it where you know, if the workload would be a lot less if you actually did your job properly because if they did like, work with people properly*

*then people would come off the mental health team probably a lot quicker and they would probably get the help they need a lot quicker so they wouldn't need the mental health team anymore...'* (Keira).

A lack of services, poor access and negative experiences of services can have serious consequences, leading to some young women being unwilling to seek support. Young women clearly reported having a lack of expectations about support and support services, even when having experiences of poor psychological and emotional health and desperately needing to be able to receive support for multiple needs. For some of the young women this created barriers that could exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and increase the risks they faced. Feeling Safe work to address complex needs and also to undo past negative experiences of services and to move forward.

### GIVING HOPE

As is discussed above, often the young women who are accessing the Feeling Safe service have had long and painful experiences

in other services, they are tired and have low expectations when being referred to Kairos WWT for support. This is why it comes as a surprise when the young women experience frontline staff who truly care and ask appropriate questions of the young women, as they are getting to know them:

*'She asked me questions, like about my life, how I got on from there. Umm and as I like she generally wanted to know about my life and wanted to help me. And you could sense that from the outset. Yeah, they sense that.'* (Donna).

The caring approach that Kairos WWT takes with the new service users is described as 'magic' [Donna] by one service user, who feels that Kairos WWT are the only service to truly care about them and want to see them improve.

This is highlighted by one young woman who shared:

*'They're absolutely brilliant. I mean, my life without them wouldn't be alive, if that makes sense...'* (Gillian).

This quote encompasses the positive impact that Feeling Safe can have on their service users,

giving them something to look forward to and be hopeful about for their future. This hope also improves the young women's ability to share their past experiences and grow from them, rather than become stuck and unable to move forward:

*'I look back on the path now and think, why was I being quiet about it? Now I am happy to talk about it. I'll sit down and speak about it. But I used to, like, sit and wallow in the past - and all this happened to me, or this happened to me - but now it moves on and looks at the future...'* (Ivy).

Workshop 4 discussed the future, the transition between childhood and adulthood and used a growing activity as a metaphor to explore this period. Young women planted mustard seeds and spider plants that they could take home and watch grow.

The impact that Kairos WWT has on the hopes and futures of the young women is encompassed in the below statement, shared by a young woman who has been accessing the Feeling Safe service for a number of years and sees them as lifesaving:





*‘One thing I’ve always said and it’s the one thing I’ll always say, is Kairos gave me my life back and that’s the way I look at it and I’m grateful and even after Kairos has finished like, I’ve already spoken to the workers about it, as like, the 2 year wait that you’ve got to wait and then you can come back and volunteer, I will be coming back and volunteering because I love this place so much and I’d love to give back for everything that they’ve done for me like, because they’re just great, they’re a good bunch of people and it’s nice to have that. It’s nice to have some support and to have people who do care...’ (Keira).*

The data presented makes clear that young women strongly feel that, in a number of ways, the Feeling Safe service offer a lifeline. Examples were given of young women who would not be alive if they had not received the support that they got at a point in time. Feeling Safe is considered as offering a chance for young women to self-identify their needs, have access to support, advocacy and befriending, which builds confidence and self-worth. Young women describe the Feeling Safe service in terms of a ‘family’ in which they are able to grow and to see a future.

### **DIGNITY, RESPECT AND RIGHTS**

There is a need to look beyond young women’s vulnerabilities and the negative labels often used to characterise their lives. Young women in the study were able to articulate their needs and demonstrated understanding about how these needs are best met. They demonstrated a capacity to build positive

relationships in an environment in which they felt they were treated with dignity and respect and where their rights were acknowledged. Young women were open to be challenged and in turn felt able to challenge too.

Long-term experience with services leads young women to a clear understanding of the issues that they are experiencing and the type of support that they need:

*‘...my first worker with [names service] like she said she picked up very quickly on the fact that I know when I’m going to go into that deep, dark place and I know when them thoughts start and the bad thoughts start, she said, you notice them, you just try to ignore them and push them away and she said and that’s what you don’t want to be doing, you want to address them when you like, experiencing them, so it was things like doing worksheets and stuff like that to keep myself entertained, or writing down in a journal and stuff like that and just little things like that, like it helped, erm and then like Kairos kept up with, up to date with it as well, they were like, oh is this helping like erm, is there anything in your journal this week that you want to talk about and stuff like that like, it eventually it got to the point where I just started typing it in my notes app in my phone and I’d come to (frontline worker) on like, on our appointment session and have like a whole list of things ha-ha, she’d be like, okay, we’ll tackle these today and then we’ll do these next week and it become just a thing*

*like, I’d just write it down in my notes if I had a problem or had a thought which I needed to talk to someone about so, it was quite nice...’ (Keira).*

As Kairos WWT recognise that young women know their own needs and encourage the young women to engage with their own support plans autonomously, such as completing their own Outcomes Stars assessment, the young women feel that they are heard and can benefit from the support they receive:

*‘Yeah, because some support workers, you know, they sit there and they’re like, well, you can’t disagree with me because I’m the professional one and I ‘m the one that’s right, ra ra ra. And I think that just doesn’t help, if that makes sense? It just does not help...’ (Gillian).*

The young women feel that this way of working, of allowing them to engage with their own support plans rather than plans being pushed onto them, shows that the Support and Advocacy Practitioner respects them and allows them, rightfully, to make their own decisions about their own bodies and lives:

*‘She’s like, advising, she’s not telling. Like if someone’s telling me what to do, I ain’t gonna listen to you. You know what I mean? But if you advise me what to do if I take it on then it’s more my right as a human being to be able to do that...’ (Gillian).*

## **“Dealing With Their Material Reality is Equally as Important as Addressing Emotional Needs”**

Connections between young women’s material reality and emotional well-being are evident across the data. Young women spoke about the importance of the role the Feeling Safe service played in supporting them with their basic needs and how this allowed them to create a space for them to focus attention on their psychological and emotional needs. Having access to a warm home, food, navigating bureaucratic systems, support with practical living skills and daily tasks when required to live independently lays a foundation for young women to build upon.

Kairos WWT encompass both the mental and physical health of their service users. Their first aim is to ensure that the young woman is in a safe environment, whether that is by finding accommodation or more suitable accommodation. In more recent months the Feeling Safe team have developed a stronger working relationship with the internal A Home of Her Own’s Specialist Housing Practitioner, in order to access housing support for women aged under 25. Kairos WWT take the long-term steps to ensure the young woman’s mental health is taken care of, through partnership working and regular support meetings to ensure all needs are being met as the young woman requires. This is shared through the young women’s stories:

*‘...They help support in a lot of ways really, not just mentally and physically, emotionally and everything else...’ (Gillian).*

*‘Yeah, it’s just as important as emotional to be honest, because it’s all well and good having the emotions being dealt with, but then if it’s being done physically, there’s no, it’s a hard one really...’ (Carlise).*

Whether it’s food vouchers, housing or legal support, Kairos WWT are equipped, whether in-house or through partners, to ensure they are able to meet the varied needs of the young women who come to them for support:

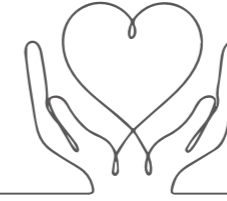
*‘...they help with, uh, like you know with food when I was low on money. Bus ticket, travelling, you know to my appointment, so I have money for food. Uhm yeah, they do support in every way possible, but obviously I don’t really like asking too much? Even though they would help me, but obviously I don’t like asking too much because I am not that type of person but definitely help me a lot in life...’ (Donna)*

*‘...It could be anything from like having a chat in the car just, you know going to the foodbank. Supporting me with my PIP form which I didn’t obviously get it and then obviously about till, what’s the word, and you gotta redo it, when you have a re judgement or something. She’s helped me with a few things to be fair, my electric and gas problems at the minute. She’s been there pretty much all of the time. You know, yeah, sometimes it’s hard to get through to her. It’s not the easiest, but when I do. She is there for me...’ (Emma).*

### **CARE, COMPASSION, COMPETENCE, COMMUNICATION, COURAGE, AND COMMITMENT**

Building positive supportive relationships and a therapeutic alliance between young women and support staff is a key part of the Feeling Safe service. All the staff associated with the service understand the significance of demonstrating, care, compassion and competence in how they





carry out their role and engage with young women. There is recognition that communication is important to building relationships and keeping commitments and being realistic about what they can and cannot do. This is not to suggest that there are not situations in which young women are unhappy about change to the service or request changes to a worker, but the wider environmental culture of the service means that young women feel able to voice discontent and know that they will be heard.

Woven through all of the evidence presented here is care and compassion as the Feeling Safe team build therapeutic relationships with their service users. The idea that the support role isn't 'just a job' is reflected by many of the young women in their interviews and during the workshops:

*'...because its charity based, it's not like - I'm just here for the job. It's actually people that do give a sh\*t. Whereas you find a lot of wider range services that are provided by the NHS or anything else, it is just a job that they don't care, they couldn't care less. They're still going home watching Netflix at night, so they ain't bothered...'* (Carlie).

The individualised care that the Feeling Safe staff build up with their service users is often personalised to each individual, with the aim of understanding where they have come from and where they want to go, ensuring they are supported along the way through regular conversations that are non-judgemental and constructive:

*'...I think it's different for different people but their approach with me, that I'm a very out there person, especially my bipolar, so they have to kind of know how to take me and like my humour, like I'll unfortunately I do joke about my trauma cause it's just the way I deal with it. Whereas a lot of people I know are like, well, don't do that. You know, but they just get it \_\_\_ this jaw dropping moment, you know. Like they just know. They just know how to get me, as a person, like they're not narrow minded like, or judgemental. And if I give them attitude, they give me it back, which is what I need...'* (Lilly).

The aim of these conversations is to build a relationship that allows the young woman autonomy for her future, ensuring that she is empowered to make decisions about her future and goals, rather than Feeling Safe staff providing goals to young women that they may not feel 'fit' them:

*'...and like tell me what to do, like, not just give... put all the ball in my court, but not make me feel like I'm being controlled either...'* (Carlie)

### REBUILDING OF SELF

Feeling Safe creates opportunities for young women to reimagine their lives. The service helps to build their confidence and self-esteem. Young women in the study shared how Feeling Safe has led to them feeling positive about their lives and futures and they shared examples of things that they have accomplished.

The support that the Feeling Safe service offers has empowered the

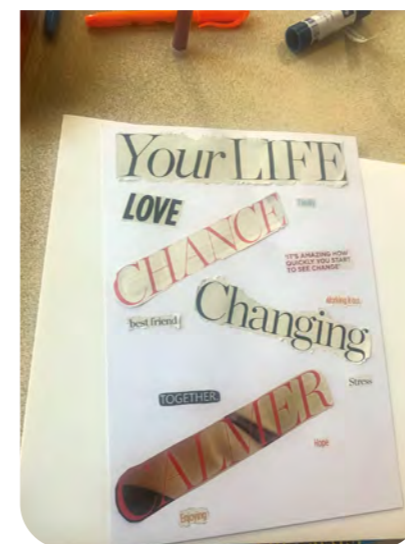
young women to take back control of their lives, which previously may have been considered out of their hands and too complex to tackle:

*'There is actually nothing wrong with my brain right now, but yeah. I wouldn't do it by myself at all. I would not really know where to start from and what to do with my life, I was in a really bad state. My mental health was bad. It was horrible and I didn't like myself. I was always putting myself down and you know, and you know, I they put myself up again and I felt like me again as well...'* (Donna).

The notion of 'rebuilding of self' relates to the hope for the future and unexpected change in self that the young women experience when they start receiving support with Feeling Safe:

*'I just don't know how to explain it. Just so hard when you're in, so you used to be somebody, and you can actually change to somebody else, like in a better way. And like you can feel so much brighter in yourself, which you never thought you could...'* (Donna).

Part of this rebuilding of self is reflected in the influence that the Feeling Safe Support and Advocacy Practitioners have on the service users, with the young women sharing that they feel they are more confident to stand up to others and know what they want out of their relationships with others, as seen below by numerous women within the service:



*'She's influenced me a lot on how to stand up to people and, you know, not let people take the p'ss out of me and yeah, she's been really, really great... I feel like I'm just a new woman...'* (Gillian).

*'It has actually like made me more confident and able to speak to people because before I did go to the group actually ...I didn't speak to anyone my age because I had no phone or anything like that, so. It was like it gave me like a support network. I could feel safe there... [...] But at the start I just didn't want any like contact with anyone else but now I have changed my mind [...] It makes me feel more valued and like that I actually matter as a person, not like just the police case. So, Kairos is more caring on an emotional level'* (Hadley).

The life skills that Feeling Safe teach are part of this aspect of 'rebuilding of life', where the young women are able to develop and grow their own interests whilst learning the necessary skills that they may have missed out on in earlier life:

*'I was literally a ghost walking around. But now I feel like I can walk outside, hold my head up high. I think, no, I've got this. You can do this today like I've learned. So much cooking skills. Ways to cope with mental health like before I came here, I never spoke to anyone about my mental health and yesterday I had my first counselling session and it was like a massive weight came off my shoulder, but it was (FS frontline worker) who said it's*

*time to talk up, they're gonna believe you, no one is gonna think you're lying. No one is going to diss you. It's so good'* (Ivy).

The images shown here were created during the final workshop (Workshop 6). Young women were asked to share their perceptions about their journey through the Feeling Safe service. The images capture the positive feelings, a sense of development, growth and appreciation of the care received

The empowerment aspect of Feeling Safe is integral to the process of support, with Feeling Safe staff sharing that it is their aim to empower the young women to make their own decisions. This is reflected in how the young women now speak about themselves:

*'Yeah, I look back on days I am feeling sh\*t and look at it and go, oh no, you are strong. You can do this. Kairos has done this for you. It helped loads and we did something the other week as well, and it said you were stronger than you think and braver than you know. something like that and it helps on bad days...'* (Ivy).

*'I was in such a low place in my life and you know, Kairos have really really pulled me out of that so I do think that, you know, I have a lot of trust and faith in them because of what we've been through together and how much they have helped me so much...'* (Keira).



## RE-BUILDING A GATEWAY

By accessing the Feeling Safe service, the young women are also able to access the external partners that Kairos WWT have connections with. This means that Kairos WWT are able to offer more holistic support, enabling the young women to work with a variety of services, whilst having the constant advocacy from a Feeling Safe team member, who they have built up the trust and relationship with:

*'I wouldn't have accessed them myself, definitely not, because even appointments with the mental health team, like they come, they've come to a few appointments with the mental health team with me, and even then having that support there is a lot easier because these doctors don't care, as long as they tick the box and say oh, we've seen them, they don't care so having like, [Support and Advocacy Practitioner] there for a few sessions was really important because she was able to say this, and you're not actually doing anything, she's coming every week telling you the same things that you're asking, because they obviously give you a different worker every week so you're never speaking to the same person so you have to go on about your whole life story again to the new worker and then by the time you've finished, they're like, oh well, we don't really know what we can offer you, so having someone there with a professional opinion, to put their foot down and say this is not okay, it helped a lot because it actually got me going places further with the mental health team, than I would've got on my own so it was a lot nicer to have that support there, so I think, in terms of working with outside like, client, like outside*

*companies and stuff like that, it definitely helps having that support from Kairos, like, a lot' (Keira).*

The support that Kairos WWT ensures is given via external agencies is not always easy to achieve, due to the varying nature of support workers and agency arrangements. However, Feeling Safe staff are not deterred, and continue the fight for the young women to make sure that they are given the best care that they deserve:

*'So I erm, actually got counselling through [names service], I think, I've been with two so I've been with [names organisation 1] and I've been with [names organisation] erm, first I went through [organisation 1] because we had tried to reach out to our mental health team, and our mental health team are pretty rubbish, they always have been erm, and then we reached out to another one that's like, part of the mental health team and they basically turned round and told us that I was too high maintenance, like, basically had too many problems and like, we were just like, how is that even a thing like, how can you even say that to someone when you're a mental health team and you're supposed to help with that thing, so we were all a bit shocked. Erm, but then they put me forward to [organisation 1] and at first I was a bit skeptical because obviously, in the past when I've had counselling with like, mental health team, it's always been a bit rubbish and I think when you have such a negative experience with like, one thing, you do get nervous so I was really really nervous, but then they come, Kairos come with me to my first session, had my first session,*



*felt a lot more comfortable because I had someone that I could trust there erm, and like, with, like I did a whole set of counselling with them erm, it did, it weren't for me, like the counsellor weren't for me, she wasn't like my type of lady erm, and it, it was very much, she interrupted you when you were half way through speaking and then it's like you'd lose your train of thought and then it's like, well now I don't know what I'm talking about so like, erm, just her style of counselling just weren't for me but I'm... they then put me through to [organisation 2] and I did 2 separate counselling with [organisation 2]' (Keira).*

An important aspect of the Feeling Safe service is to ensure that young women access the support needed. This means working in partnership with others and being able to signpost young women to relevant services is an important aspect of the work. Feeling Safe can be seen as a gateway to other services; this may require having knowledge about services readily available, building young women's confidence so that they feel able to access services independently, acting as an advocate for the young women, ensuring young women are able to get to appointments and befriending and accompanying young women to appointments.

## SAFETY, SECURITY, AND STABILITY

Across the data young women share what it means to receive support from a service that is responsive to their needs. This is not to suggest that the young women are not impacted by changes to the Feeling Safe service, in the data they recount feeling unhappy about changes in support staff and

the impact of Covid on service delivery. However, they are positive about the overarching culture and approach utilised, welcoming the informality but the professionalism of the support workers. Having access to a service that is trauma informed, centres the needs of the young women, is flexible, fair and has effective channels of communication is valued. This is alongside giving young women a choice in how their needs are met, through having access to one to one support and/or group support.

An important aspect of the Feeling Safe service is the offer of stability via the long-term, non-timebound (from 18 to age 25) offer of support. By giving support over long periods, Feeling Safe are able to ensure that their service users have access to the same Support and Advocacy Practitioners even if that service user has dipped in engagement with the service:

*'I have built a big relationship up with her and obviously when I build bonds with people and they go it hurts me a little bit because it makes me feel that I have lost another person again because all my life I have been let down. I have been hurt. I have been losing people. Right now I am not ready to lose her again. I know eventually I will have to go but I am not sure how that works to be honest' (Emma).*

Over the entire time Feeling Safe has been delivered Kairos WWT have had an unwavering focus on supporting young women who are experiencing vulnerability:

*'I think, you know, the service that they provide, what it was built on, and they have managed to maintain what it was built on, it hasn't changed, and that's a good thing. Cause a lot of charities or whatever, they'll start off something, but*

*then the agenda will change throughout or it won't be solely based, or they'll put too much on the table of what they want to try and do to help. But when there's too much on the table, not enough of each section is getting the support if you know what I mean' (Carlie).*

Having a dedicated, responsive service over this length of time has been really important, particularly during the pandemic and lockdowns. The women recognise that the support they receive from Kairos WWT has changed their lives for the better, however, during COVID-19, the support that they were able to receive changed, due to the lockdown protocols. As a result, Kairos WWT worked even harder to ensure they were meeting the needs of the young women they knew needed them, such as ensuring the young women were not lonely by encouraging group connection, even if it was online:

*'So, during the lockdown because obviously I couldn't speak to anyone or anything she thought it would be a good idea for me to join the group, but she'd already wanted me to join group before but I was like, oh no and then I joined it during the lockdown... I think it's because I had literally like no human contact and I think she thought it would be best for me in that situation and she thought it would be like good for me to talk to other people like around my age and that... It makes you feel like you're not the only one, like you're not alone, yeah. It's more like, we don't really speak about what has happened, but I think we all can relate in a way which*

*makes us a bit more relaxed with each other...' (Hadley).*

The young women who access the Feeling Safe service truly appreciate and recognise the depth of understanding that their support workers have of their lives, which is only possible by having the same long-term support workers working within the service:

*'Yeah, being able to listen. Being there for you supporting you and actually having that knowledge about what to look out for about me, my circumstances, what I will be like. I don't know how to explain it. My difficulties basically. Just being able to understand the person they are working...' (Emma).*

The team are also able to offer support via long distance, through texts and phone calls. For some young women, this is extremely important to their feelings of safety and security,

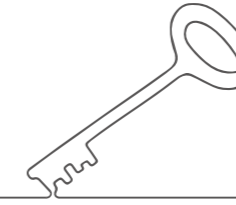
*'...100% the safety, safety is a hell of a lot because sometimes I'm, I've suffered from domestic violence as well, like bad domestic violence, and sometimes I've been able to like text [Support worker] and say something's going on and she's like alright, I'm ringing the police, like there's that support, and sometimes when you're in a position like that, you can't talk to anybody, it's not like you can just ring 999 and say Help, you can quickly send a text, delete it, and then she can do it and it makes me feel a hell of a lot more safer in my house as well, I've-I've found that so much better because*

*I've always been too scared to ring the police and stuff like that but if I've text I'm not good like, she'll know, when I've got like a, I'm working with Haven as well and they have like a safety worker and if you say on the phone, 'oh, I can't talk right now', like, it means you need, something's going on, it's not safe, and it's nice to know like, that [Support and Advocacy Practitioner] will know the different signs of when I'm doing good...' (Jackie).*

The security of the Feeling Safe group also relates to the regular and reliable sessions that the service runs:

*'... they become a part of like, your everyday on a Tuesday, like, it's like they become a part of the group so even though it's like, obviously, it's like they're professionals and they're there to look after us and keep us safe, like, it is kind of like we're our own little family, which is really, really nice...' (Keira).*

The data presented here demonstrates the meaning of the service provided by the Feeling Safe team, the practical and emotional support provided and the relationships that have been built over time.



## SECTION 6: KEY MESSAGES

The aim of this research was to evidence the practice of the Feeling Safe service and to capture any changes throughout the evaluation period in policy, provision or partnership working. The inclusion of staff, service-user and stakeholder perspectives coupled with existing research evidence located the intervention provided by the Feeling Safe service in the wider landscape of services that support young women aged 18-25 who have complex needs and who are affected by or have experienced sexual exploitation.

In this final section of the report Key Messages are drawn out, challenges identified and recommendations made. This independent research and evaluation into issues of transition and adulthood for sexually exploited young women was guided by objectives and has:

- Examined the process by which the Feeling Safe service is provided
- Identified the level of need and types of need for support
- Captured the benefits associated with the various elements of support – for young women, for Kairos WWT staff and for stakeholders
- Identified challenges to the provision of the Feeling Safe service
- Explored interaction and relationships between staff and young women
- Captured the impact of the service model on young women service users, Kairos WWT staff and stakeholders

- Considered the need for future provision for young women and any other individuals and groups

## *With confidence the evidence presented allows us to say:*

- Feeling Safe provides an effective and supportive transitional service, the evidence presented demonstrates the continued necessity for a service that addresses the specific needs of young women of 18 years and above with complex unmet needs and vulnerabilities.
- Previous research and evidence presented here shows that age and being positioned at the interface of services designed to meet the needs of either children or adults is a site of vulnerability to a range of issues at this transitional stage of life (Holmes 2018; Brady et al 2022). Whilst older children may not be deemed as in the same need of protection as younger children, 16 and 17-year olds are still vulnerable to exploitation. This vulnerability does not disappear as they reach 18 years old, often harm or risk of harm is either still present or can increase as abusers target young women. The flexibility of services delivered by Kairos WWT in the voluntary sector helps to meet needs and promote rights to support.
- Feeling Safe was initiated as a preventative service for young women at risk of sexual exploitation, based on a 'protective behaviour's'

approach. The evidence presented and Kairos WWT's own recent deliberations conclude that it may be preventative of further abuse and exploitation, however most young women had already experienced abuse or exploitation. This requires a more nuanced interrogation of the concept of 'prevention'. Feeling Safe aims to prevent risk of initial exploitation, risk of further exploitation, risk of entry into the sex industry and also risk of harm for women within the sex industry. It also aims to prevent further forms of harm associated with a range of wider socio-economic issues. As the service has moved towards a trauma-informed approach it has left behind the preventative protective behaviour approach, which has been critiqued for implying that young women should keep themselves safe from exploitation through making changes to behaviour, an approach that is regarded as victim-blaming.

- Austerity, Covid and the current socio-economic climate have been instrumental in increasing young women's vulnerability to all forms of social harm. This calls for a need for support that understands the context within which young women live their lives and services with scope to provide support better able to understand and respond to the cycle of disadvantage and structural inequality that often characterises their lives.
- Many services have a specific focus or remit which can lead to services appearing fragmented and not co-ordinated. Evidence presented here demonstrates the complexity of young women's lives. Whilst sexual exploitation is an important focus it intersects with issues of violence, housing insecurity, mental ill health, substance

misuse, loneliness, all types of poverty and disadvantage. Feeling Safe is a holistic service which responds to a wide range of need for support.

- Kairos WWT'S premises provide access to a safe space for young women where they can be themselves, feel a sense of freedom and exercise autonomy. Both the physical and emotional environment are safe, supportive and trauma-informed, providing opportunities for purposeful activities and growth.
- There are shared young people centred, women centred values amongst the Feeling Safe team and a growing shared purpose. Whilst the team is relatively small they extend their reach and depth by working with volunteers who have lived experience.
- The Feeling Safe team have constructive and caring relationships with the young women who access the service and show understanding of their needs. Time is taken to build relationships and to engage young women who may have had previously negative experiences of services. Young women's experiences are validated and in turn they have hope for their future.
- Whilst there is consideration that on-going support that is not time-bound may lead to service-user dependency, the evidence shows that young women appreciate being able to sustain a professional relationship, particularly where previously they have been made to feel undeserving of support. Time is much-valued and a crucial resource in the building of relationships of trust and extended support.
- The Feeling Safe team provide a much-needed advocacy service.



- Working holistically across all forms of need and responding flexibly they are in a unique position to multi-agency co-ordinate the cases of the young women that they work with.
- Where stakeholders know of the work of Feeling Safe and have experience of working in partnership they value the approach, knowledge and ethics of care of the team. They also appreciate the unique role played in addressing the needs of young women who are over the age of 18.

#### CHALLENGES:

- One challenge throughout the evaluation period has been changes in leadership, service roles, personnel, along with changes to the external environment. Changes in leadership have influenced direction and at times the overall mission has become less clear. Kairos WWT now have a full time CEO, a new Board of Trustees and have undergone a restructure. They have a comprehensive three year strategy (2022-2025) with a clear vision. They are already delivering on the strategy and will need to keep momentum

in order to promote awareness, attract funding, encourage staff motivation, manage the expectations of young women and further develop partnership working.

- Further awareness raising and promotion of the focus of the Feeling Safe service is much needed in order to counter misunderstandings or outdated perceptions of the service. This has been recognised in the three year strategy. Community awareness raising and liaison is important, as is strategic visibility and representation on decision-making Boards.
- A clearly defined pathway between Children's Social Care and the Feeling Safe service is currently lacking, creating a challenge to ensure that links are (further) developed with the most appropriate services, including Horizon specialist CSE service. There are a number of transitional models of safeguarding that can be considered and then tailored to the needs of localities.
- Building strategic partnerships – within the locality and within the wider sector. Recent appointments to the senior management, management and Board are well networked in women's services, VAWG and youth sectors. This leaves Kairos WWT well-placed to strategically influence policy and practice relating to transition for marginalised young women at risk of harm.
- Monitoring of the journey of change or progress could be further developed, drawing together qualitative case study data of women's journey through the service and interrogating further the quantitative evidence gathered through the Outcomes Stars system.

- The majority of young women accessing the Feeling Safe service and participating in the study identify as White British. The Feeling Safe service is targeted at some of the most vulnerable young women in Coventry and the only service working holistically with young women deemed to be at risk of exploitation. This means it is essential to proactively build relationships with Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities who are often less served by services and whose needs often overlooked.
- The Feeling Safe team are highly committed to the women that they support and to the service. When working at capacity, with high numbers of cases, women in crisis had to take priority which made other forms of delivery difficult to balance, particularly during the Covid 19 pandemic.
- Future challenges to a young women's service may come from external drivers, for example, commissioned services may move towards mixed sex service provision. Whilst the rationale for remaining women only is evidenced here in the views of young women who have experienced sexual and other trauma securing certain funding may be a challenge.
- Increased levels of need and multiple disadvantage in this current cost of living crisis where poverty and inequality are affecting many more young women may lead to stretched capacity and a need to expand the Feeling Safe team.



## SECTION 7: **LIMITATIONS**

Despite the limitations imposed by pandemic conditions and the need for an adapted service, 66 young women have engaged with the project since April 2019. Feeling Safe has sustained the contact and the engagement of the majority of these young women.

There was slippage to the timetable of the project and the evaluation due to the pandemic restrictions. For example, the summer programme was unable to run in 2020, face to face contact was limited, which impacted on the proposed methods of evaluation. Evaluation methods were adapted in light of ethical and government guidance not to meet anyone face to face. COVID-19 impacted the original research plan, especially regarding our hopes of participant observation and following journeys over all 3 years. The original aim to collect face-to-face data from Kairos WWT staff, stakeholders and young women service users during year one was not able to be met. This change led to ethical amendments for the project, face to face interviews were not possible. All interviews were moved to online interviews using Teams or phone calls.

This enabled 5 Kairos WWT staff semi-structured interviews to take place in year one, along with the research team meeting the Feeling Safe service user group virtually. In this meeting the team outlined the research, explaining what the young women's participation might entail and beginning to build a rapport with the young women that would grow throughout years two and three.

Careful discussion took place to ensure that there was diversity of experience amongst the women included in the research. Whilst we achieved diversity in terms of those who regularly attend the group and others that engage in direct work 1-2-1, diversity in terms of ethnicity is limited.





## SECTION 8: **RECOMMENDATIONS AND FINAL REFLECTIONS**

The findings presented in this report will be useful to practice in the women's services sector and in child/adult sexual abuse/exploitation policy and practice. The findings also have relevance for Children's and Adult Social Care Services, the sectors of youth justice, housing, education, substance misuse and mental health services. The findings presented call for policy-makers and practitioners to recognise that experience of abuse, exploitation and the associated trauma can impact young people long-term and have a detrimental effect on education, relationships, mental health, well-being and, importantly, access to opportunities. Responses are needed that provide support to women for this wide range of need, not just need relating to exploitation. Having established that this is what the Feeling Safe service has evolved to provide we recommend:

- To situate this work within any Violence Against Women and Girls' strategy, sexual abuse and exploitation are part of VAWG.
- To use all available monitoring, evaluation and outcomes data and the 2022-2025 strategic direction to appeal to funders who champion the value of a specialist women-centred service which is embedded in the local community and addressing multiple disadvantage.
- To share the learning from the voluntary sector with the statutory sector and other partners and use this evidence to demonstrate that local need

has been identified and a local, multi-disciplinary response is needed.

- To partner with Adult and Children's Services and other relevant agencies in the development of a strategy to address the needs of this transitional age group, e.g. an Adolescent Strategy or Pathway of Support or Protocol for young people/young adults, a transitional response to safeguarding young people aged 16 and above which overcomes binary service divides. Draw on examples of good practice and research that identifies factors that facilitate or constrain successful transition to a stable adult life.
- As a key member of Coventry Women's Partnership it is recommended that Kairos WWT harness support from their partners to promote the benefits of the Feeling Safe service to reach more young women in need.
- Across Kairos WWT staff, stakeholders and young women's contributions it is clear that positive relationships with services are wholly dependent on relationships with individual workers. Investment in this workforce should be prioritised, providing support that recognises their experience of vicarious trauma when working with high levels of need and trauma, addressing the need to de-brief safely and ultimately retaining workers that are committed to making a difference for young people.



- The findings show that young women's voices need to be central to the development of services aimed at supporting them at a transitional age. Clear themes arose from young people's accounts of their life by using participatory methods that uncovered their experiences. Alongside the extensive consultation work that already takes place it is recommended to further increase the involvement of young women in co-leading aspects of the Kairos WWT service.

## FINAL REFLECTIONS

This evaluation and research provide an evidence base for the delivery of the Feeling Safe service by Kairos WWT. Nationally, professionals and organisations working in the field of child sexual exploitation recognise the need to improve practice for this age group of young women. For example, the Association of Directors of Children's Services; Chief Social Worker for Adults and Children; British Association of Social Workers; National Working Group on Exploitation; Research in Practice and a large number of children's charities are keen to ensure that young people in this transitional age group who have needs are still supported. This may involve initiatives that do not organise services around age eligibility, as services designed to meet the needs of one group not the other can create sites of vulnerability, to abuse, coercion and exploitation (Holmes and Smale, 2018; Brady et al, 2022). These findings make a clear contribution to a limited research evidence base relating to young

women who have experienced child sexual exploitation and are transitioning to adulthood. They present the journey of a service that has been at the forefront of leading a response to need amongst sexually exploited young women. A Serious Case Review in 2016 in Coventry recommended 'joint working or commissioning of services for the victims of CSE'; practitioners and senior managers repeatedly identified that the impact of being exploited can be long-term, can impact all aspects of well-being, can affect access to appropriate services and 'lead to significant problems beyond the ages of either 18 or 21' (SCR 2016), all of which is of 'serious concern'. The voluntary sector were regarded as key players in providing support, following the role played by Kairos WWT and Streetwise in recognising and responding to signs of sexual abuse and exploitation. The support provided following disclosure and 'during the process and as long as she wanted it subsequently was an example of the good practice that did exist' (SCR 2016).

Kairos WWT have 10 years of experience of undertaking work with exploited young women through the Feeling Safe service (longer experience with all age groups across their service). As well as learning from the delivery of such an innovative service, the current strategic approach within the service is both critical and questioning of many of the assumptions embedded in 'CSE' policy and practice. Understandings of forms of exploitation are ever-evolving and there is a place for questioning previously accepted practice and policy directions.

Kairos WWT adopt a holistic, strengths-based, woman centred, trauma-informed approach to the Feeling Safe service delivery. During the Covid-19 pandemic the Feeling Safe team developed innovative ways of keeping safe the women in their care, proactively responding in order to meet the changing needs of their service users. They enacted constant oversight, tried new methods and approaches, listened to feedback from young women to adapt, in order to avert crisis and meet need wherever possible. At the start of the evaluation there were six strategic priorities of **Safer, healthier women; Reduced isolation; Reduced re-offending; Increased stability and self-reliance, Skills development and Increased resilience against exploitation**, all of which are evidenced in this report. Strategic priorities have moved in the direction of being values based – **a commitment to working in ways which are woman-centred, trauma informed, hopeful, collaborative, relational, holistic, outcomes focused, evidence based and reflective** – presenting a clear mission for the service as it moves forward.

When sexual exploitation is focused on child abuse (CSE) it can fail to include a right to protection and safeguarding for young people/young adults who are reaching the age of 18 and beyond. The voices of young women with a range of intersecting inequalities and unmet needs are seldom heard, they need to be amplified in order to increase understanding of the interplay of multiple issues of disadvantage in their lives and improve outcomes for children, young people and young adults.

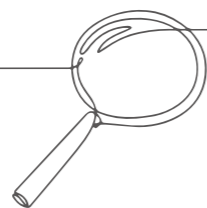


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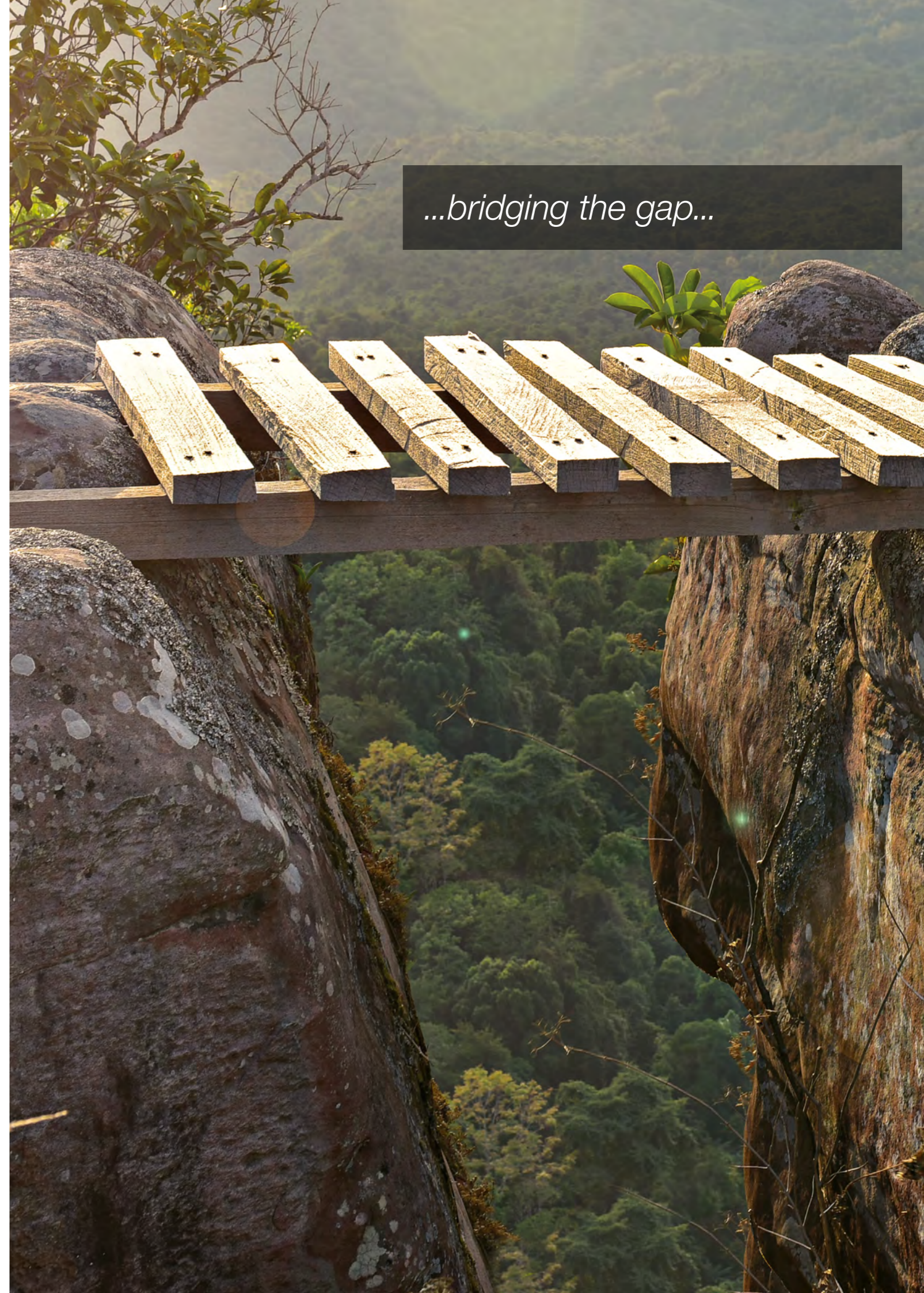
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