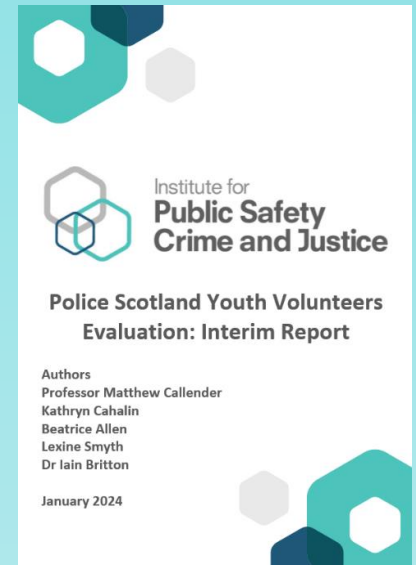


Executive Summary

This short report provides a summary of the findings of the first interim evaluation of a wider ongoing evaluation of the Police Scotland Youth Volunteer (PSYV) Programme. The evaluation was commissioned by Police Scotland to identify what impact taking part in the PSYV programme has for young people, their lives and on the wider community. Police Scotland wish to understand what positive outcomes, if any, the programme enables and where there could be changes or improvements to enhance PSYVs experiences through taking part. The evaluation is being conducted by the Institute for Public Safety, Crime & Justice (IPSCJ) at the University of Northampton and will run for approximately two and a half years, with a final report being produced in Autumn 2025. This short report summarises the research background and aims, data collection method and the key findings and recommendations. The findings of this first evaluation of PSYV has been overwhelmingly positive from respondents including the youth volunteers, adult staff and volunteers and alumni. Though some key areas of improvement have been identified, from which several evidence-based recommendations have been made to support the development of the PSYV programme as well as to enhance the experience and benefits of participation for young people and facilitation for adult staff/volunteers.



Key messages from the first interim report are outlined below:

- ❖ Over 8 in 10 PSYVS rated being a PSYV as having a positive impact on their skills; communication (89%), teamworking (94%) and problem-solving skills (88%), resilience (81%) and confidence (83%).
- ❖ The array of opportunities provided to the youth volunteers was also raised as a significant benefit, as they encourage social development and stronger community bonds, through volunteering and socialising with their peers and community.
- ❖ Around 7 in 10 PSYVs responded that they think Police Scotland upholds the values of integrity (65%), fairness (62%), respect (71%) and human rights (72%) to a 'great extent'.
- ❖ 97% of youth volunteers agreed 'volunteering is a good way to gain life experience', as many stated it would help them in their future education and/or career.
- ❖ 71% of alumni respondents stated that being in PSYV had influenced their decision making in terms of what they wanted to do in life, and 92% stated the programme had helped them with a job application, and 87% for an education placement.
- ❖ The adult staff and volunteers were overall very positive, with 95% stating that they enjoy their role and almost all respondents would recommend their role to others.
- ❖ Key areas of development include establishing mechanisms for young people to consistently have a voice and say into how the programme is run.
 - ❖ It is recommended that the role of PSYVs at events are clearly defined through clear guidance to the youths to make the volunteering experience more purposeful.
 - ❖ It is recommended that enhanced safeguarding training is made available to all adult staff and volunteers as 62% agreed they would like to see more national guidance and consistency in respect of safeguarding.



Police Scotland Youth Volunteers

Police Scotland Youth Volunteers (PSYV) are groups of up to 24 young people based across Scotland. They are supported by adult volunteers and led by a police constable or other community leader. The PSYV programme aims to strengthen the relationship with the police and young people. They also aim to break down barriers and promote positive role models. PSYV promotes a way for young people to understand policing in Scotland and to support their local area through volunteering. Young people are given a chance to be heard and are encouraged to promote good citizenship and participate positively within their communities.



The Joint Strategy for Policing and National Youth Work Outcomes

The PSYV programme aims to contribute towards the Joint Strategy for Policing and National Youth Work Outcomes. The aim of the Joint Strategy for Policing 2020 is to improve the safety and wellbeing of people, places, and communities in Scotland through the delivery of five outcomes. These outcomes include that “the public, communities and partners are engaged, involved and have confidence in policing” and “our people are supported through a positive working environment, enabling them to serve the public”¹. The National Youth Work Outcomes aims to develop young people’s individual needs with seven outcomes². These include enabling young people to; 1) build their health and wellbeing, 2) develop and manage relationships effectively, 3) create and apply their learning and describe their skills and achievements, 4) participate safely and effectively in groups and teams, 5) consider risk, make reasoned decisions and take control, 6) grow as active citizens, expressing their voice and enabling change and 7) broaden their perspectives through new experiences and thinking.

PSYV Evaluation

The overarching objectives of this evaluation are:

1. To understand the views of youth and adult volunteers, including their experiences, views towards PSYV, development, and learning opportunities.
2. To explore whether PSYV enables positive transitions as young people grow up.
3. To explore the impact of PSYV over the longer term; understanding what happens when people leave PSYV and gaining an insight as to their destinations.
4. To assess the extent to which PSYV contributes towards Strategic Outcomes - Joint Strategy for Policing (2020) and the National Youth Work Outcomes for Scotland.

This short report draws upon findings, from qualitative and quantitative data collected through a survey of 248 PSYV’s (approximately a third of all PSYVs), a survey of alumni PSYVs (to which there are currently 26 responses) and a survey of PSYV’s Coordinators and Volunteers to which 61 responded. It is important to note this is the first interim report of findings from the evaluation and further insight will be obtained as the evaluation progresses, this will include tracking PSYVs over time through yearly surveys, in-depth qualitative work with young people and a building sample of leaver and alumni surveys and consultation with key stakeholders. Further reports will be produced in the Autumn of 2024 and 2025

It is important that young people were able to actively participate in the evaluation design and delivery by testing and providing feedback on the annual surveys; saying what they would like the programme leaders to be asked; and producing a short video introducing the research to their fellow PSYVs. The research team and Police Scotland are committed to continuing to involve young people in the process and are currently working on recruiting some PSYVs to sit on the steering group.

¹ Police Scotland, 2020, p. 9

² Youth Link Scotland, 2020

Youth Volunteer Survey Respondents Demographics

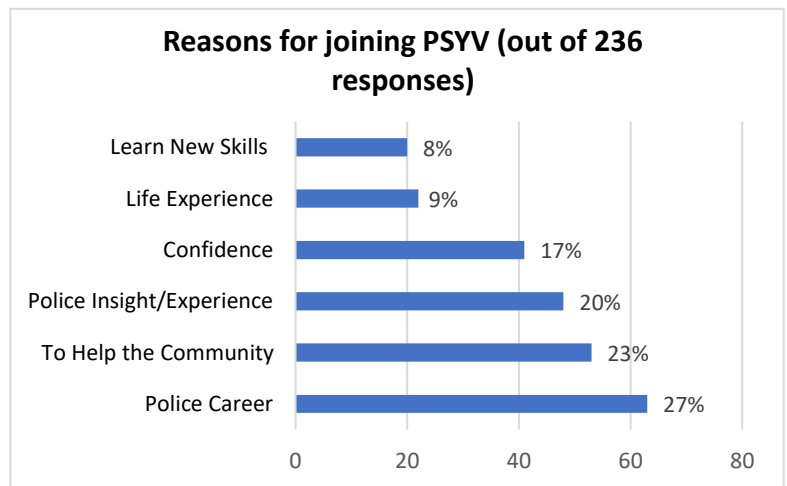
54% of youth volunteer respondents identified as female and 40% identified as male, the last 6% selected either ‘non-binary’ (4), ‘prefer not to say’ (4), ‘other’ (1), or were missing (5). When asked if they would consider themselves to be trans or have a trans history, 8 answered “yes” and 7 “preferred not to say”. 71% of the respondents identified as heterosexual, 13% preferred not to say, 8% identified as bisexual, 5% other, 2% lesbian and 1% gay. Most of the data are representative in terms of sexual orientation, when comparing this demographic data with the findings from the Annual Population Survey (APS), although, a larger percentage of PSYVs selected that they ‘prefer not to say’ at 13% compared to 3.7% in the APS³. For ethnicity, most respondents were “White” (86%), the next largest ethnicity was “Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British” (6%) followed by “Mixed or multiple ethnic group” (4%). 15% (39) of PSYVs answered ‘yes’ to the question ‘Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expecting to last for 12 months or more’. Some (8) felt their condition or illness made it difficult for them to engage with PSYV.

Recommendation: Police Scotland to consider conducting a short demographic census of their PSYV population on a yearly or two-yearly basis as well as consider the introduction of an Equality and Diversity Form for new entrants.

There is currently limited information on the demographic breakdown of the entire population of PSYV, therefore the extent to which the PSYV programme is representative of the wider population is currently unknown. Also, the extent to which the PSYV survey responses are representative of the wider population of PSYVs is not determined, so we do not know if some groups are under or overrepresented.

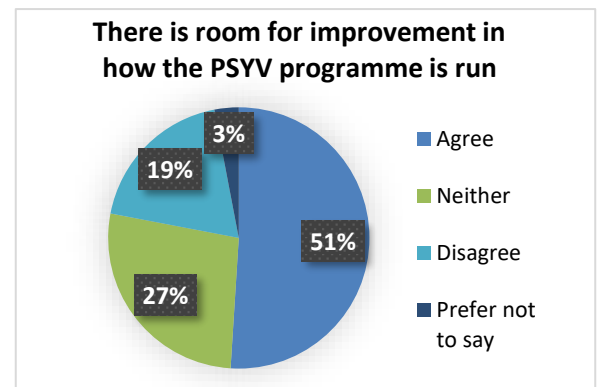
Motivations for Joining PSYV

Wanting to join the police was a key motivation for many PSYVs, with nearly half (45%) of PSYVs classing themselves as ‘very interested’ and 21% classing themselves as ‘quite interested’. This is therefore a valued aspect of PSYV in comparison to other youth organisations available in Scotland and so the police aspect should not be lost. Despite many of the young people being motivated to participate due to an interest in a police career it is important to note this is not a motivation for all, with a fifth (20%) of PSYVs ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ interested in a policing career.



Diversity and Room for Improvement

Most respondents (91%) believed the PSYV programme encourages and values diversity. There were no statistically significant differences found when looking at this statement by gender, ethnicity, or disability. However, there was a significant difference in sexual orientation, as 77% of those who classed themselves as not heterosexual (20 out of 26) agreed with the statement, compared to 94% who classed themselves as heterosexual.⁴



Most respondents believed that PSYV leaders communicate plans well (88%) and PSYV is run well (91%). However, 51% of respondents believed there is room for improvement in how the PSYV programme is run, although, most respondents had no suggestions on how the PSYV experience can be improved, suggesting there are no prominent issues within the organisation for the youths.

³ ONS, 2023

⁴ Due to comparatively small numbers of respondents in the ‘non-heterosexual’

category (26) these differences must be treated with some caution.

Youth Experiences and Challenges at PSYV

In terms of their experience of being in PSYV, there were highly positive responses with most respondents stating they can help other people at PSYV (89%), they can be themselves (84%) and they have a sense of belonging (83%). A statement where there was a relatively lower level of agreement was 'I feel that I have a say and influence over the content and direction of PSYV' with 76% of young people agreeing (of which 40% strongly agreed) and 8% disagreed⁵. It is also worth noting that 14% of Coordinators and Adult Volunteers disagreed that PSYVs have a say and influence over the PSYV programme, and 78% agreed, with only 25% 'strongly agreeing' which is relatively low compared to other statements⁶.

Recommendation: It is recommended that a youth voice strategy be developed, establishing mechanisms for young people to consistently have a voice and say into how the programme is run and their participation in different activities.

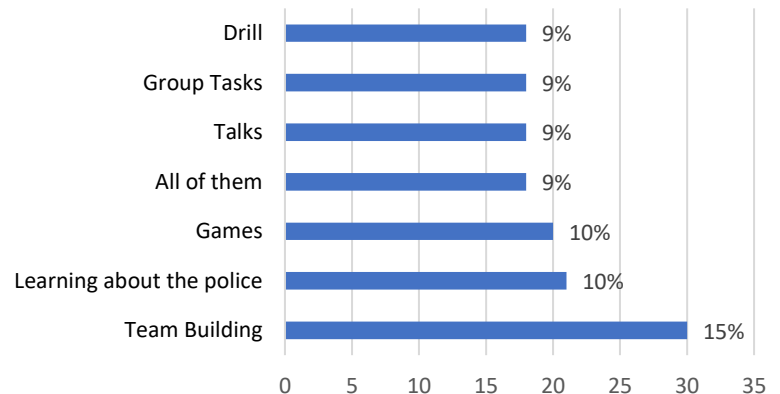
"Some people don't like the police therefore don't like us"

When asked if there was anything they found challenging about being a PSYV, 109 youth volunteers did not write an answer and a further 61 youth volunteers responded 'no', they felt no challenges. Of the remaining respondents, the most common challenges raised included engaging with new people (17) and making time to volunteer which can be hard to manage (14). Another issues eight volunteers found challenging, was being worried about the perception or reaction of their peers about them volunteering with PSYV due to young people's negative views of the police.

Activities and Events

The favourite activities for group nights included team building exercises and group tasks, learning about the police and games. The enjoyment of police related activities is to be expected due to the high proportion of youths who joined PSYV for greater police insight. Most respondents stated there were no activities they did not enjoy however some suggested to do less drills and talks. The responses demonstrate the diversity in individuals' likes and dislikes of activities, as some enjoyed drill, whilst others asked for less drill, suggesting it is best to provide a varied array of activities to keep volunteers engaged.

Group night activities PSYVs enjoyed (out of 204 responses)



The most popular national event was the Edinburgh Tattoo and Braveheart, however there were suggestions that not enough responsibility is given to the volunteers at national events. Some PSYVs stated the smaller groups do not get the same opportunities as others due to group size and geographic location. As a result, these smaller groups feel as though they are missing out. This was also raised as an issue by some Adult Volunteers and Coordinators. **Across all surveys, there were perceptions of uneven opportunities for the events available for different groups.** Although these claims are not able to be validated at this time, the perceived inequities between different groups are impactful to the experiences of some of the youth volunteers and adult staff/volunteers.

Recommendation: It is recommended that a national audit is undertaken to assess the participation of groups at events and campaigns.

⁵ The remaining 14% selected 'neither agree nor disagree'.

⁶ The remaining 8% selected 'neither agree nor disagree'.

“We are a small community group [and] therefore don’t get as good opportunities as groups like Glasgow or Edinburgh.”

The volunteers provided suggestions for local events and campaigns they would like to be involved in, including more sporting events, concerts, and charity campaigns. Other feedback from the volunteers included that they occasionally felt disregarded or were given silly tasks at events (10). **When asked what suggestions they had for PSYV involvement in local events, responses suggested it should be ensured that there is always duties or roles for the volunteers and clearer insight of**

Recommendation: It is recommended that for all external activities, a standard pro forma be developed with PSYVs input which outlines the nature of the activity, roles, and responsibilities for PSYVs as well as the benefits and value of the activities for different participants/recipients (e.g. PSYVs, Community, etc.).

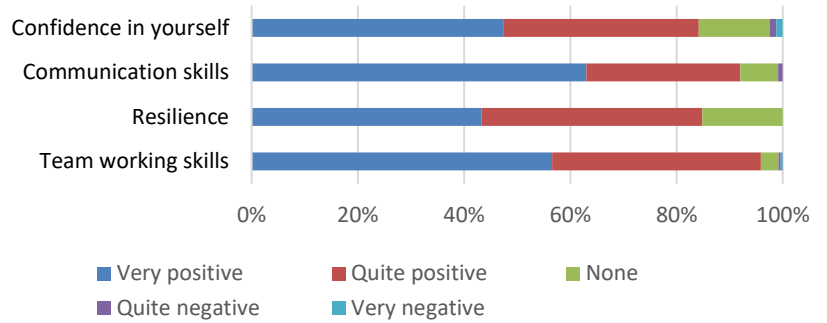
what these roles entail should be established beforehand.

Another volunteer proposed there should be a PSYV stand at events to explain to members of the public what PSYV do and attract more members.

Young People’s Perceptions of their Confidence and Skills, and the Impact of PSYV

7 (69%) in 10 PSYVs agreed they had confidence in themselves. However, females were significantly less likely to agree than males, with 63% agreeing compared to 78% respectively, this reflects findings in wider society that females rate their self-esteem and confidence lower than males, which emerges in adolescence⁷. It is important to note that overall, just under a fifth of PSYVs (17%) disagreed that they had confidence in themselves. However, 8 in 10 (83%) PSYVs felt that being a PSYV had a positive impact on their confidence, with almost half saying a ‘very’ positive impact (47%). The proportion was similarly high for those completing the alumni survey with nearly all saying PSYV had a positive impact (96%) and over half selecting ‘very positive’ (58%).

What affect, if any, has being a PSYV had on your skills and confidence?



Approximately 6 in 10 PSYVs rated their team working skills, leadership skills, resilience, communication skills and problem-solving skills as ‘strong’. With the highest proportion being for team working skills (65%) and the lowest for leadership skills (54%). Therefore, there were notable proportions of volunteers that classed their skills as ‘weak’ ranging between 28% and 33%⁸. However, over 8 in 10 PSYVs also rated being a PSYV as a having a positive impact on each of these skills.

Assisting Transition into Adulthood

When asked about how PSYV may help them in the future, responses referred to gaining confidence, experiencing new things, and learning different skills which would help them both in their future education and career. A further 28 volunteers stated it would look good on their CV, 29 referred to gaining knowledge of what it is like to be in the police, and 35 stated that being a PSYV⁹ would help them to get into the police force.

“PSYV has drastically helped me develop confidence and teamwork skills, I have come a long way from when I joined and was extremely shy.”

The results from the surveys of Alumni indicates positive results in the role of PSYV in transitioning into the adult world. 71% of respondents stated being in PSYV had influenced their decision making in terms of what they wanted to do in life. Reasons included that PSYV had helped them identify a career path, for some joining the police and others deciding

⁷ Carducci, B.J. et al. 2021

⁸ Some rated these skills as ‘neither weak nor strong’.

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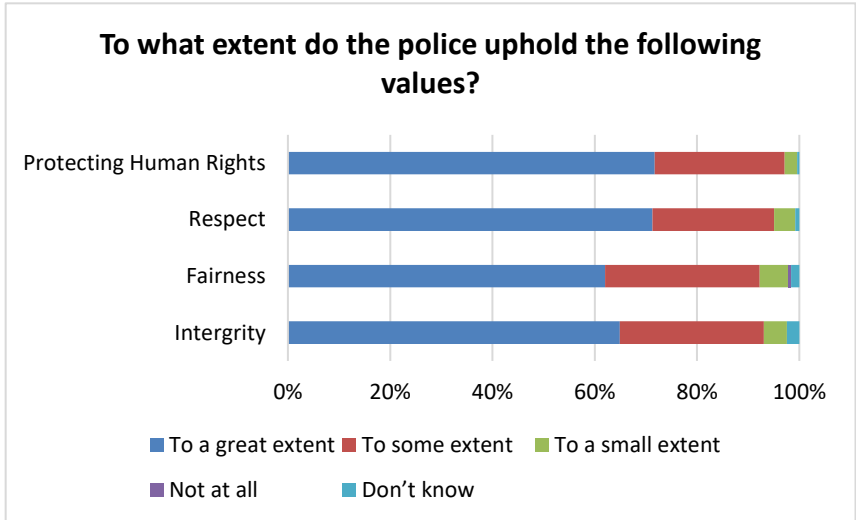
a police career was not for them. Additionally, some explained that volunteering at PSYV helped them understand they had a passion for helping others and broadened their understanding of opportunities. Many of the Alumni stated the programme had helped them with a job application (92%), an application for an education placement (87%), in an interview for an education placement (84%), in a job interview (80%), whilst in a job (79%). Although, numbers for the Alumni survey are currently low as it has only recently been launched, the survey will run throughout the evaluation and will be sent systematically to leavers. Therefore, the data on the impact after the programme will build over time.

Perceptions of the Police

PSYVs have a very positive perception of the police, with around 7 in 10 responding that they think Police Scotland upholds the values of integrity (65%), fairness (62%), respect (71%) and human rights (72%) to a 'great extent'. This is a much higher proportion than in the general population in which about 2 in 10 agree Police Scotland uphold these values to a 'great extent'¹⁰.

There was a high proportion of agreement to statements such as the police are helpful and friendly to young people (86%). Over 8 in 10 agreed that they would feel comfortable approaching the police (89%) and confident reporting a crime (84%) and 9 in 10 (92%) felt they have a good understanding of all the different things the police do.

However, 4 in 10 (43%) agreed with the statement 'the police sometimes treat young people unfairly', with males (60%) significantly more likely to agree with this statement than females (36%).



"I think it makes you understand how the police feel and work and humanises police officers"

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of PSYVs responded that the programme made their perception of the police more positive. A further 32% stated that their perception of the police hadn't changed since becoming a PSYV, the majority of which indicated they had a positive view prior to joining. The PSYVs were more negative about their wider peers' perceptions of the police, with 45% of PSYVs believing that in the wider community their age group had a negative perception of the police.

PSYV Coordinator and Adult Volunteer's Experiences and Key Areas of Improvement

Out of the sample of 61 respondents, most (33) were Adult Volunteers, followed by Group Coordinators (14), Deputy Group Coordinators (6), Senior Adult Volunteers (3) and 4 preferred not to say. 95% stated that they enjoy their role in PSYV, 95% feel they are making a positive contribution to the community, 96% feel they are making a positive contribution to the lives of young people and that their role is rewarding. Key gains to the role that were listed included gaining a range of skills, having a positive impact on young people's lives, self-worth and personal gratification, and impact/interaction within the local community. Almost all Coordinators and Volunteers stated that they would recommend the role to others. One of the main challenges listed for PSYV Coordinators and Adult Volunteers is balancing their role in PSYV against other work and personal commitments.

"Personal pride that I have assisted young people on their journey into adulthood"

¹⁰ Strategy, Insight and Engagement: Research and Insight Team (October 2023) Police Scotland Trust Tracker:

Waves 1-4 (FY 2022-23) and Waves 5-6 (FY 2023-24), Police Scotland.

The adult staff and volunteers expressed a want for **additional safeguarding training** to enhance the statutory training that they currently receive, **specifically more national guidance and consistency**. Adult staff and volunteers also requested to receive updated training for lesson plans, ideas, and teaching materials. **Key weaknesses suggested by the adult volunteers included the regularity and currency of training**. Largely, the respondents identified finance and funding as a big threat towards the PSYV programme going forward in the future.

Recommendation: It is recommended that enhanced safeguarding training is made available to all adult staff and volunteers to enable further understanding and knowledge on important safeguarding topics, including explicit procedures for both adults and young people to report safeguarding issues.

Recommendation: It is recommended that regular training sessions on programme content and group management is also made available so that the that the adult staff and volunteers can feel even more supported and confident in their role.

It is important to acknowledge that many of those joining PSYV are interested in joining the police, with nearly half very interested, and the most stated reason for joining is because they want a career in the police. A common suggestion by the adult staff and volunteers was that there should be more police interaction and police related content in the PSYV programme. **It was also suggested that there is a lack of awareness of**

what PSYV does by other Police officers. It is important that Police Scotland consider the extent to which the balance is struck in being a youth organisation that is attractive to, and meets the needs of, all young people whether they intend to have a career in policing or not (as a fifth of the sample were not very or not at all interested).

Recommendation: It is recommended that the National PSYV team review the communication strategy to disseminate information about PSYV to Police Scotland colleagues to raise awareness as well as consider the inputs from different policing teams into the programme.

Discussion

Overall, this interim report demonstrates significant positivity across the PSYV programme from the perspectives of young people, alumni and adult staff/volunteers. The evidence shows how youth volunteers develop their skills, alongside gaining important opportunities, through volunteering at PSYV. Some of the main skills young people gain from the programme are communication, social skills and confidence, which are valuable transferable skills which will support their development as they grow older. The added aspect of gaining social responsibility through a range of activities facilitates valuable contributions to a range of communities.

PSYV is different from other youth organisations due to the involvement of Police Scotland. It is evident in the youth responses that this interaction and insight into the police is a valued factor of the programme, especially due to two thirds of the volunteers being interested in a police career when older. More than half of the responding youth volunteers also felt that 'to a great extent' Police Scotland upholds the values of integrity (65%), fairness (62%), respect (71%) and human rights (72%), which is a far higher percentage than in the general Scottish population.

The Adult staff and volunteers were overall very positive about their roles and responsibilities, with 95% stating that they enjoy their role and almost all respondents would recommend their role to others. Key gains to the role were the ability to have a positive impact on young people's lives, personal gratification, and interaction in the community. The adult respondents raised a want for enhanced safeguarding and more consistent training. Key areas of improvement have been identified from which several evidence-based recommendations have been made.

It is important to note this paper is from the first interim report of findings of the evaluation and further insight will be obtained as the evaluation progresses and further reports will be produced in the Autumn of 2024 and 2025.

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