



# Youth Now 'peer mentoring' approach to help support Contextual Safeguarding with young people

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Paula Skidmore with the Youth Now team



## **Preface & acknowledgements**

The Youth Now project is a two-year pilot project using the principles of Contextual Safeguarding to develop better responses to increasing levels of youth violence in the Oldham area of Greater Manchester. The project is based within the Youth Justice service of the voluntary sector organisation 'Positive Steps' and the key partners in the pilot are Greater Manchester Police and Oldham Council. More information about the project is available [here](#).

Paula Skidmore, Senior Research Fellow, worked as an embedded researcher with Youth Now, to support the pilot to establish and sustain local Contextual Safeguarding approaches to extra-familial harm around serious youth violence. The interview below was conducted between Paula and one of the Youth Now mentors.

We are always interested to hear how these documents have been used and adapted by other practitioners. Please contact us at [contextual.safeguarding@beds.ac.uk](mailto:contextual.safeguarding@beds.ac.uk) or

## Youth Now and peer mentoring

The Youth Now team at Positive Steps includes several young people who work as mentors alongside other staff to deliver the pilot project as part of the Youth Justice Service. Here one of the mentors describes the kind of work they have been able to do as a mentor that supports the Contextual Safeguarding approach within community settings and schools, and how that has developed over time.

Can you outline your current role/work within Youth Now and how it differs from your previous work at Positive Steps?

I am a mentor for young people within the Youth Justice Service and work alongside other professionals to provide low level interventions in order to assist young people to gain independence and get themselves into a positive routine to keep themselves 'out of trouble'.

As part of 'Youth Now' my role has been to support young people during provisions we have put on, on a Friday night and build positive relationships with them while engaging in physical activities with them. Additionally, I have attended schools on a Monday morning with young people who have been excluded from mainstream school and have to attend an alternative provision (on-campus). Some of these young people have been identified to have learning difficulties or behavioural issues. I have also assisted other workers to gathering information around young people and their peers for a peer assessment.

What has been the main challenge of developing the work?

The main challenges of developing the work have been to start it off right in the first place (given that this is a pilot). Thinking contextually has proven to be a lot harder than anticipated! however once up and running, everything seemed to make a lot more sense.

What are some of the key successes in the past year?

I believe that the Friday night provisions which were put on by us were a success, in terms of keeping young people occupied as well as bringing agencies together as one big team so all agencies were working together to reduce youth offending as well as giving young people the opportunity to be accepted into society rather than being seen as 'the problem'. Additionally, the work carried out in schools and building relationships with young people to gain their trust has been a success, as it has proved that young people work better and are more willing to engage if they are able to trust you and bond with you.

What aspects of Youth Now do you feel will be the best to develop from now on?

Personally, I believe that all aspects of Youth Now need to be developed little by little, however the most important aspect for me is to locate 'places and spaces' where young people are more at risk of being exploited. Additionally, I believe that it will also be wise to develop the aspects around family ties for young people and identify any possible way to mitigate risk factors linked to family, as this is a crucial feature of a young person's life which undoubtedly influences their actions outside of the family home.

How relevant do you feel the Contextual Safeguarding approach is for your work with young people?

I believe that the Contextual Safeguarding approach is extremely relevant for my work with young people as it focuses on all aspects of the young person's life and considers every possible risk factor. I feel as though it entails a very thorough assessment prior to any work being carried out with a young person, taking into consideration any possible risk factor/vulnerability as well as any strength which can then be used to create positive ways of working with individual young people as well as the peer groups.