

Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities: Safer Lives

Submission date 04/06/2026	Recruitment status Recruiting	☐ Prospectively registered ☒ Protocol
Registration date 10/08/2026	Overall study status Ongoing	☐ Statistical analysis plan ☐ Results
Last Edited 10/08/2026	Condition category Other	☐ Individual participant data ☒ Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

In England and Wales, serious violence committed by young people (YP) has risen significantly, leading to an increased number of victims (Youth Endowment Fund (YEF), 2024). Boys from Black backgrounds remain overrepresented at all stages of the justice system, despite White YP having the most contact with police and justice services. Black YP are also more likely to report vulnerability as both victims (21%) and perpetrators (22%) than their White peers (16% and 14%, respectively) (YEF, 2023).

Parenting interventions are viewed as a promising, evidence-based approach to reducing youth violence. These programmes help parents and carers develop more supportive, consistent parenting strategies that can improve YP’s emotional regulation and encourage positive behaviour—factors associated with reduced involvement in violence.

The YEF funded a feasibility study of the Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities: Safer Lives (SFSC:SL) parenting programme, designed to address youth violence. The feasibility study explored how best to design a future evaluation and was deemed successful. As a result, the YEF has funded a two-armed parallel efficacy trial with an internal pilot.

The primary aim is to assess the impact of SFSC:SL on self-reported offending among YP, compared with business as usual (BAU). It will also examine secondary outcomes for both YP and parents/carers, investigate potential mediators of any effects on offending, and conduct subgroup analyses to understand which groups may benefit most. An implementation evaluation will run alongside both the pilot and efficacy trials to assess fidelity, feasibility, and delivery.

Who can participate?

YP's aged 11-18 years who are involved in offending and violence.

What does the study involve?

SFSC:SL combines a core parenting curriculum with additional content on preventing youth violence. It focuses on identity, relationships, discipline and community, while covering child development, positive parenting strategies and factors influencing violence. The programme is culturally inclusive, highly interactive and accessible, using diverse facilitators, multilingual materials and activities that encourage parents to apply and share learning.

The programme is delivered in person by trained facilitators, usually in pairs, who reflect the communities they serve and are supported through supervision and quality assurance. It takes place in accessible community settings for parents of at-risk young people, using interactive group sessions. The programme runs weekly over 13 weeks, with three-hour sessions and small group sizes, with certificates awarded based on attendance.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
Benefits and risks not provided at time of registration

Where is the study run from?
The University of Greenwich (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
March 2026 to May 2029

Who is funding the study?
The Youth Endowment Fund (UK)

Who is the main contact?
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Study information

Scientific Title

Participants: young people aged 11-18 engaged in or at high risk of crime and violence.
Intervention: Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities: Safer Lives parenting programme. comparison: business as usual. outcome: primary outcome - self-reported offending

Acronym

SFSC:SL

Study objectives

1. Primary research question: What is the difference in the volume of total offending between YP randomised to receive SFSC:SL and those randomised to receive BAU?
2. What is the difference in secondary outcomes between YP and PCG randomised to receive SFSC:SL and those randomised to receive BAU?
3. Do any proposed variables mediate the relationship between intervention arm and self-reported delinquency? Potential mediators include parental supervision and monitoring, warmth and involvement, parental and YP self-esteem, self-confidence and self-discipline and YP attachment representations.
4. Do any proposed variables moderate the effect of treatment? Specific moderators include callous-unemotional traits, temperamental irritability, ethnicity.
5. What are the barriers to a successful implementation and efficacy trial of SFSC:SL in this setting?

Ethics approval required

Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)

Approved 06/02/2026, University of Greenwich University Research Ethics Board (University of Greenwich Old Royal Naval College Park Row, London, SE10 9LS, United Kingdom; +44 02033318000; researchethics@gre.ac.uk), ref: UREB2026_08

Primary study design

Interventional

Allocation

Randomized controlled trial

Masking

Open (masking not used)

Control

Uncontrolled

Assignment

Sequential

Purpose

Treatment

Study type(s)**Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied**

Young people 11-18 involved in offending and violence

Interventions

Brief name: Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities: Safer Lives (SFSC: SL) parenting programme

Why - rationale and theoretical basis: The SFSC:SL programme is grounded in the understanding that parents and carers play a central role in shaping their children's wellbeing, behaviour, and resilience, particularly in high-risk environments. While parenting alone is not the cause of youth violence, strong, responsive and informed parenting can act as a key protective factor—buffering children and young people against the risks they may face in their communities. The programme was developed through the REF's prior work on violence prevention (including gangs and knife crime) and through co-design workshops with practitioners and community stakeholders. The programme supports parents to build caring and consistent relationships, respond to challenging behaviour non-violently, and promote children's emotional and social skills, which are linked to lower rates of risk-taking and youth offending. The SFSC:SL programme is also based on social learning theory, using interactive, practical methods to support parents to reflect, learn and apply new approaches. It incorporates core components of the universal SFSC programme—focusing on building parent-child relationships, setting boundaries, and community engagement—alongside an added supplement addressing the specific drivers of youth violence. The programme centres on identity, ethnic, spiritual, faith and cultural roots, and social context, supporting parents to reflect on their own experiences and how these shape family life and parenting.

What – Randomisation will be undertaken by the North Wales Clinical Trials Unit (NWORTHCTU) after baseline assessment is complete. This will use a dynamic adaptive algorithm to compute block sizes with an equal allocation ratio to ensure allocation concealment. Randomisation will be stratified by site and referral pathway (Youth Offending Team (YOT) versus non-YOT) and undertaken by REF Parenting Programme Officers (PPOs) using the NWORTHCTU randomisation system.

Procedures, activities and materials: SFSC:SL includes the full curriculum of the core SFSC parenting programme, with a supplement focused on reducing youth violence. The curriculum is structured across five thematic components: cultural/spiritual identity, rites of passage, enhancing relationships, discipline, and community involvement. Topics within these components include understanding children's developmental stages, building positive discipline

strategies, enhancing parent–child relationships, and supporting community participation. The supplement adds content on the individual, family and societal drivers of violence; the teenage brain and risk-taking; and the influence of technology and social media. The programme is culturally responsive and inclusive by design, with a focus on ensuring accessibility for parents from diverse ethnic, social and learning backgrounds. In practice, this means that facilitators are recruited from the same/similar local communities as participants and are trained to reflect and respect the cultural and social diversity of families. Sessions encourage parents to draw on and share their own cultural traditions, values and lived experiences, making the content relevant and relatable. Materials are provided in over 20 languages and alternative formats to meet different literacy and accessibility needs, with sessions delivered verbally, supported by visual aids and interactive activities to engage a wide range of learning styles. The provision of food at sessions is also an intentional design choice, recognising its importance in many cultures for fostering hospitality, building social bonds and creating an inclusive group environment. Sessions are highly interactive and participatory. Activities include information-sharing, group discussion, role-play, paired work, and reflection. Parents are encouraged to test out strategies at home and share their experiences in group sessions. All parents/carers receive a manual in their preferred language or format, available in over 20 languages and accessible formats. Literacy is not required, with information presented verbally and supported by visual aids. Provision of usually hot food and refreshments is a core element of the programme to support group bonds, sharing of culture and sustenance to engage in the session.

Who providing - programme facilitators: Each programme is delivered by two trained facilitators who have completed the REF's five-day SFSC training, and an additional one-day module focused on the SFSC:SL content. Facilitators typically have a background in youth work, family support, social care, or community development, and often reflect the demographic and cultural backgrounds of the communities they serve. Many are embedded in local services or community organisations. Their lived experience and understanding of community dynamics are central to their ability to build trust and engage participants. Facilitators are supported through structured one-to-one supervision and are subject to quality assurance monitoring. Peer co-facilitation is also encouraged—some programmes are led by individuals who previously participated in SFSC, supporting a model of community co-production and sustained engagement.

How - mode of delivery: The programme is delivered in person, in a group-based setting, using a manualised structure and interactive learning methods (as outlined).

Where - settings and locations: The programme primarily engages parents and carers of young people aged 11–18 in contact with YOTs, or those involved in crime. The programme itself is delivered in a range of accessible, community-based settings including family hubs, libraries, youth centres, schools, and other local venues. All delivery venues are assessed for suitability, considering privacy, comfort, transport access, safety, and the potential for on-site childcare.

How much - frequency, duration and dose: The programme runs over 13 weeks, with weekly group sessions lasting three hours each. Each group typically consists of 6–10 parents or carers. There are no incentives offered to parents for attending the intervention itself, but participants who attend nine or more sessions are considered to have completed the programme and receive a completion certificate. Those who attend four to eight sessions receive a participation certificate. Programmes are usually scheduled to align with school terms and breaks.

Tailoring: The SFSC:SL programme is adapted from the universal SFSC curriculum, with the addition of a targeted violence prevention supplement. See Table 1 of the core differences between SFSC and the SFSC:SL parenting programmes. While the core structure and manualised format ensure fidelity, the programme is designed to be flexible and culturally relevant, with

delivery adapted to reflect participants' lived experiences, language needs and community contexts. Facilitators are encouraged to use local examples and draw on participants' insights to strengthen relevance.

Modifications: No major modifications were made to the programme during the feasibility study. However, insights from ongoing stakeholder engagement were used to inform facilitator practice, venue selection, and contextual framing of discussions.

How well - fidelity monitoring: Fidelity is supported by a structured facilitator manual and ongoing quality assurance procedures. All sessions follow a prescribed sequence. New facilitators are observed during their initial programmes, and facilitators will receive supervision and support from the REF.

How well – adherence and acceptability: an embedded implementation and process evaluation is planned to assess the extent to which the SFSC:SL programme is delivered as intended and received as acceptable by participants and facilitators. This will include monitoring session attendance, facilitator adherence to the manualised curriculum, and levels of participant engagement.

The SFSC:SL parenting programme is hypothesised to work through four key pathways or 'mechanisms of action' at the individual, interpersonal, ethnocultural and social/community level. These include:

1. Individual level: an individual process of learning, self-reflection, and emotional growth in parents during the programme sessions (and beyond) to understand their past and build agency in themselves and their family moving forward.
2. Interpersonal level: relational changes in the parent-child relationship, including more healthy communication, increased trust, greater boundaries and setting consequences/expectations, and promoting young people's emotional and social skills.
3. Ethnocultural level: building shared family values and belief systems which are strongly rooted at the intersection of ethnicity, culture, spirituality, and faith.
4. Social and community level: parents and young people more connected to their community with confidence to identify their needs, actively seek support and advocate for what will help their family.

These four mechanisms are expected to interact and reinforce each other throughout the delivery of the programme, contributing to a range of short-term outcomes for both parents and young people.

- Parents learn about a range of parenting approaches, including how to respond rather than react, use less controlling and punitive methods, and use more positive approaches such as prioritising quality 'special' time with their child, having clear communication around boundaries and consequences, and promoting their child's emotional and social wellbeing. Parents also consider and make changes in their own risky behaviours and networks.
- Parents reflect on their past histories to develop an increased awareness of how they may have experienced parenting and are encouraged to develop agency and confidence around their own practices, as well as form values and belief systems of importance for their family.
- Parents connect with other parents and families and services, which reduces isolation and increases engagement with support.
- Young people start feeling more seen, heard, and supported at home. They feel emotionally safer with fewer conflicts with their parents and feel closer in these relationships.

As these changes are sustained, we expect to see medium-term outcomes for parents and young people, which are linked to lower rates of risk-taking and youth offending:

- Parents continue to sustain changes in their parenting practices and own behaviours, which is reinforced by responses and outcomes in young people. Parents continue to connect with peers

and services and develop a sense of belonging and accountability to their family and community. - Young people start seeing improvements in 'self-esteem, self-discipline and social competence (commonly referred to as the '3 S's' by the REF). These changes are supported by strengthened parent-child relationships, where greater trust, security and warmth raise young people's self-esteem and improve their mental wellbeing. As self-discipline develops, they are better able to regulate their behaviour, reducing impulsive or risky actions. Increased social competence helps them to engage more fully in prosocial activities and networks, such as education, sports and positive peer groups. Taken together, these improvements also reinforce a stronger sense of identity within their family and community, underpinned by their ethnocultural roots.

These medium-term changes lay the foundation for longer-term impacts. As parent-child relationships strengthen and young people develop greater self-esteem, self-discipline and social competence, they begin to experience more hope and aspiration for their future and a stronger sense of belonging in their families and communities. Together, these shifts support a more positive and violence-free transition to adulthood. Over time, this is expected to contribute to reduced involvement in crime and violence, decreased vulnerability to criminal exploitation, and improved wellbeing for families and communities.

The intervention rests on several key assumptions across these pathways, as follows:

- Parents and carers are willing and able to engage in reflective, group-based learning and the programme environment—facilitated by relatable, trained practitioners—offers sufficient psychological safety to support emotional growth.
- Changes in parenting behaviours and relational dynamics can occur without direct intervention with the young person, and these changes are meaningful enough to influence the child's emotional security and behaviour over time.
- A strengths-based approach focused on ethnicity, culture, spirituality, and faith can foster belonging and pride without stigmatisation.
- Community connection and peer support will be sustained beyond the life of the programme.
- Improvements in individual, family, and community relationships can collectively contribute to reductions in youth violence and long-term wellbeing.
- No major external disruptions—such as significant changes to the cost of living, political climate, or local service provision—that would overwhelm families' capacity to engage with the programme or undermine its potential effectiveness.

Business as usual (BAU)

All parents and young people in both trial arms will receive BAU, but parents will be asked not to attend any other group-based parenting programme during the study. Parents and young people will continue to access all services available, including those through YOT's, family services, NHS and care services or any other youth-based services and programmes. The randomisation stratified by site will balance out any BAU differences. Interviews as part of the implementation process evaluation (IPE) will help describe what BAU looks like in each area.

Pilot RCT

The study incorporates an internal pilot RCT. Recruitment for the pilot ended in the first week of June 2026 and trial registration was completed at this time. No major changes to trial design (from the published trial protocol on the funder site) were incorporated during the pilot period, except for a change to blinding. Researchers were originally blind to treatment allocation, but this created significant challenges in accessing safeguarding data for researcher visits. Furthermore, blinding was not deemed to be practical due to disclosure of treatment allocation by families during research assessments. This change was approved by the funder.

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

1. Offending measured using YP report: International Self-Report Delinquency Study 4 survey offending scale (ISRD4) volume scale: calculated by sum of total number of each of 14 offending behaviours at 9 months post-randomisation

Key secondary outcome(s)

1. Child criminal exploitation measured using ISRD 4 questions with follow on questions used in YEF Functional Family Therapy RCT; YP report at 9 months post-randomisation

2. Parenting behaviours measured using the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire 15 item short form; parent and YP report at 3 months post-randomisation (parent report); 9 months post-randomisation (YP report)

3. Quality of parent-child relationships measured using the Child-Parent Relationship Scale short form; parent report at 3 months post-randomisation

4. Parental supervision, monitoring and child disclosure measured using the ISRD 3 parenting scale; YP report at 9 months post-randomisation

5. Parent Wellbeing measured using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMBS); parent report at 3 months post-randomisation

6. YP wellbeing and prosocial behaviours measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire; YP and parent report at 3 months post-randomisation (parent report); 9 months post-randomisation (YP report)

7. Temperamental irritability measured using the ODD subtyping items; YP and parent report at 3 months post-randomisation (parent report); 9 months post-randomisation (YP report)

8. Callous-Unemotional Traits measured using the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) Callous-Unemotional (CU) traits scale; YP and parent report at 3 months post-randomisation (parent report); 9 months post-randomisation (YP report)

9. Parental self-efficacy measured using the Brief Parental Self-Efficacy Scale – short form; parent report at 3 months post-randomisation

10. YP self-esteem measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE); YP report at 9 months post-randomisation

11. YP self-efficacy measured using the General Self-Efficacy Scale; YP report at 9 months post-randomisation

12. Sense of belonging measured using the General Belongingness Scale (GBS); parent report at 3 months post-randomisation

13. Community cohesion measured using the Social Cohesion and Trust Scale; parent report at 3 months post-randomisation

Completion date

31/05/2029

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

1. Child/young person aged between 11–18 years

AND WHO HAVE EITHER

1.1. Being seen by Youth Justice Services (YJS) or having been seen for an order that finished in the last 6 months

OR

1.2. On out-of-court disposal or having been so in the last 6 months

OR

REFERRED BY SCHOOL, PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT, OR COMMUNITY ORGANISATION AND ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING:

1.3. Police contact

1.4. Gang or County Lines Drug Network (CLDN) affiliation as identified by police or other statutory service

1.5. Evidence of one or more of the following offending behaviours:

1.5.1. Graffiti

1.5.2. Vandalism

1.5.3. Shoplifting

1.5.4. Burglary

1.5.5. Vehicle theft

1.5.6. Weapon carrying

1.5.7. Robbery

1.5.8. Group fight

1.5.9. Assault

1.5.10. Drug sales

1.5.11. Intimate postings

1.5.12. Online hate speech

1.5.13. Hacking

1.5.14. Cyber deception

AND EITHER

2. Young person is living at home 50% or more each week

OR

3. Index child/young person is currently in an out-of-home placement, but with a clear return home plan (discussed on a case-by-case basis)

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Mixed

Lower age limit

11 Years

Upper age limit

18 Years

Sex

All

Total final enrolment

0

Key exclusion criteria

1. Index child/young person is actively homicidal, suicidal or psychotic
2. Problem sexual behaviour is the central concern
3. Parents/carers unable or unwilling to provide consent
4. Parents/carers unwilling to participate in a parenting programme
5. Parents/carers are mandated to participate in a parenting programme
6. Parents/carers unwilling to consent for the YP to be contacted for recruitment
7. Parents/carers already participating in another related research study
8. Parents/carers taking part or having taken part in another parenting intervention in the previous 6 months
9. Significant child protection concerns: basic needs of children are not being met
10. Family have plans to move out of area, thereby making attendance at classes unfeasible

Date of first enrolment

26/03/2026

Date of final enrolment

30/11/2027

Locations**Countries of recruitment**

United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre**Greater Manchester**

90 Deansgate

Manchester

England

M3 2GH

Study participating centre**North London**

50 Isledon Road

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London

England

N7 7LD

Study participating centre**West London**

145 Kings Street
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W6 9JT

Study participating centre**South London**

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SE22 9AN

Study participating centre**East London**

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Sponsor information**Organisation**

University of Greenwich

ROR

<https://ror.org/00bmj0a71>

Funder(s)**Funder type****Funder Name**

Youth Endowment Fund

Alternative Name(s)

YouthEndowFund, YEF

Funding Body Type

Private sector organisation

Funding Body Subtype

Trusts, charities, foundations (both public and private)

Location

United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study will be stored in a non-publicly available repository, specifically, the UK Office for National Statistics Secure Research Service. Further details can be found on the YEF website: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/evaluation-data-archive/>.

IPD sharing plan summary

Stored in publicly available repository

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Protocol (other)	Version 1.4	29/01/2026	11/06/2026	No	No