



Listen to Learn

A guide for shaping support for girls and young women:
Putting what they want in to practice



ABOUT SAFER LONDON

Safer London works with young Londoners and families affected by violence and exploitation.

Through specialist one-to-one intervention, we are supporting young Londoners to move onto the positive futures they deserve. We put young Londoners at the centre of their support, focusing on them and their needs. By building strong, trusting relationships we gain an insight into their world, begin to understand what they need and together we find the best ways to keep them safe.

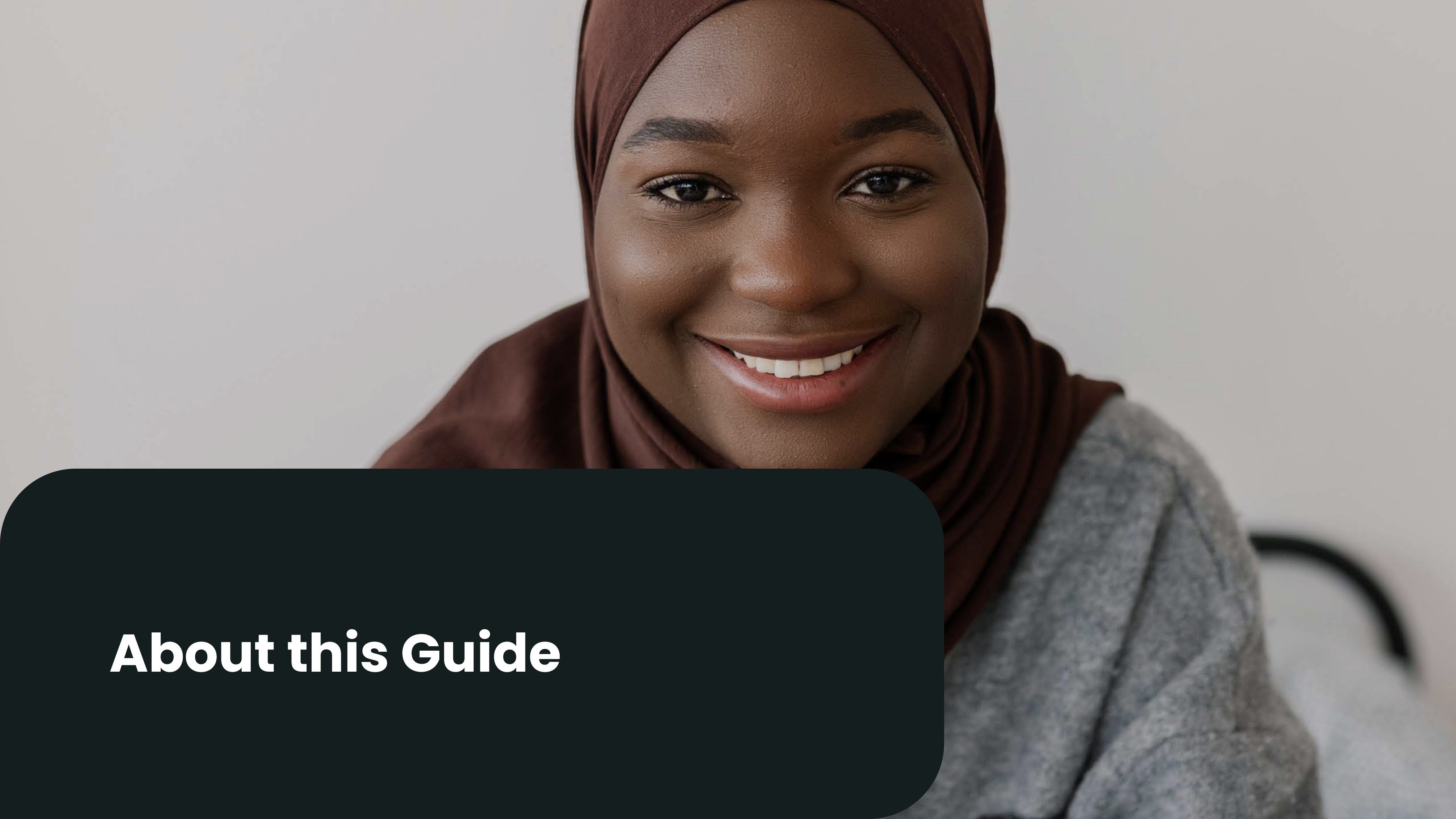
Understanding young Londoners’ lives are shaped by the world in which they live, we work not only with them and their families, but also their peer networks and directly within the community and the places where they live and spend their time. We are committed to learning, innovating, and delivering high quality, evidence-based support.

With a footprint in every borough in London, we build trusting, professional partnerships to embed our approaches and work towards achieving our vision of a city that is safer for all young Londoners who live here.

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About this Guide



About this Guide

THE PURPOSE

This guide is designed for practitioners working with girls and young women whose lives have been impacted in some way by exploitation or violence. It has been developed, shaped, and informed by the voice and experiences of girls and young women. Some who have accessed Safer London's services, but many who, for various of reasons, do not feel seen, served, or appropriately supported by services. We took the time to work alongside them, to learn from and reflect on their experiences. The end result is this guide, crafted with the intention of providing practitioners with improved insights on the support they desire. The aim is to guide practitioners, ensuring their practice and approach is shaped by the voices, views, and experiences of young women and girls.

Although this is produced with Safer London practitioners in mind, we hope that others may be able to take some valuable learning from the girls and young women involved. For Safer London practitioners this guide should be read alongside the Service Delivery Manual and act as an additional resource to guide your practice when working specifically with girls and young women.

THE NEED

At Safer London we know the voices and experiences of girls and young women is often missing from the research and practice landscape when discussing youth violence and exploitation. As a result, there are limitations in understanding their experiences and the impact of violence and exploitation has on girls and young women.

Little is known about what they want from services; what support should look like, how this should be delivered and the barriers to accessing support they might experience.

For girls and young women from minorities and/or marginalised backgrounds, this is heightened further as their experiences and access to services are compounded by discrimination and oppression from services, including racism, homophobia, and classism.

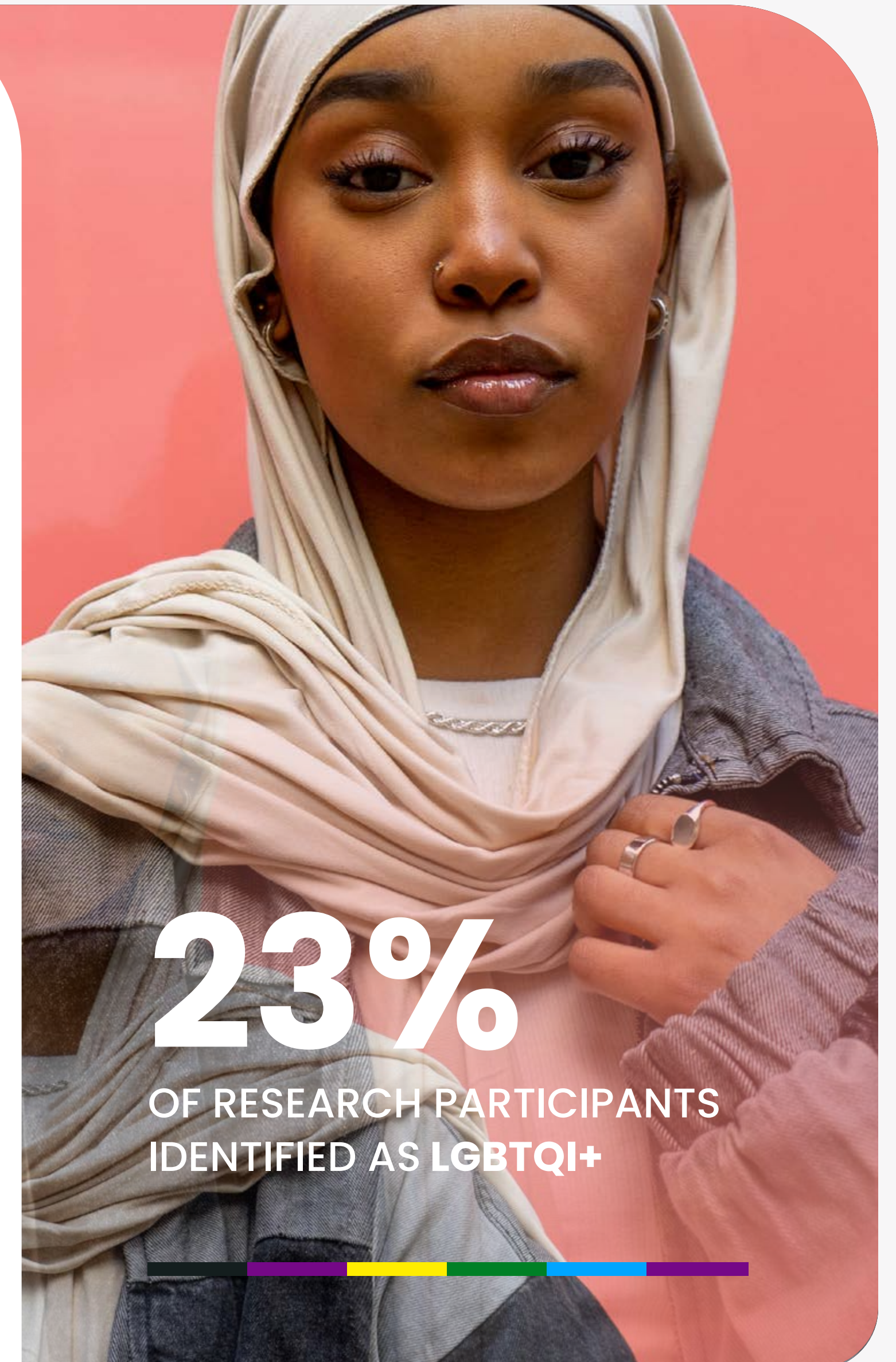
HOW WE MADE THIS GUIDE

This project was undertaken in two phases, the results of which are captured in this guide. In phase one Safer London commissioned Street Girl and Laurelle Brown Training and Consultancy to draft a report to inform the development of its services for young women and girls in London. The findings in the report were the result of two months of research, during which interviews, a focus group and social activities were undertaken with 31 girls and young women aged between 12-25 to identify key themes and recommendations. In phase two, a partnership between Street Girl, Female Hackney and Safer London brought together a group of 11 young women for a weekend residential trip to focus on the finer details of how they would want a service to look and feel. The project team were mindful in engaging with girls and young women whose voices might otherwise be marginalised, hidden or erased. We also engaged with girls and young women who are Safer London VIP youth champions, who shared their feedback and provided creative contributions to this guide.

WHAT WE LEARNT

Young women shared what they felt was important for us to consider and this can be understood as three distinct but intertwining elements:

- 1 Structural elements the **organisation** needs to have in place
- 2 How they would like their individual **relational** experience through support
- 3 Considerations at different points throughout their **journey** of support



23%
OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
IDENTIFIED AS LGBTQI+



IN THIS GUIDE

Throughout the resource there are opportunities to hear directly from girls and young women, be inspired by their creative contributions and take moments to reflect on how we can implement into our practice the things they are asking us to consider.



The perspectives and opinions of girls and young women:

Indicated in purple text, these are quotes attributed to the girls and young women who participated in the residential trip as part of phase two.



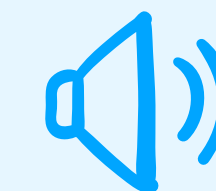
Photos, images and illustrations:

Some of the young women and girls who shaped this guide were part of the Photovoice project. You can see their creative outputs throughout this guide.



Proactive action:

Drawing from the insights we gathered, Safer London implemented changes to our internal processes on how we work. We've shared this throughout the guide, indicated in green text.



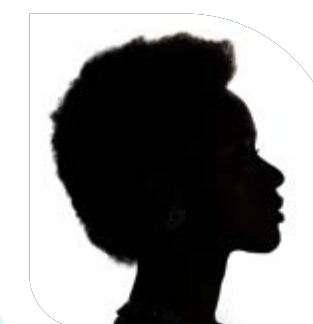
The voices of girls and young women:

Click the play button to hear the voices of the girls and young women through audio recordings. These are the real perspectives of the young women and girls who took part in phase two of the project.



Time to reflect.

Throughout the guide we will invite you to take pause and reflect. Posing a series of questions that will help inform your practice.



I think the worker needs to be able to see your potential...



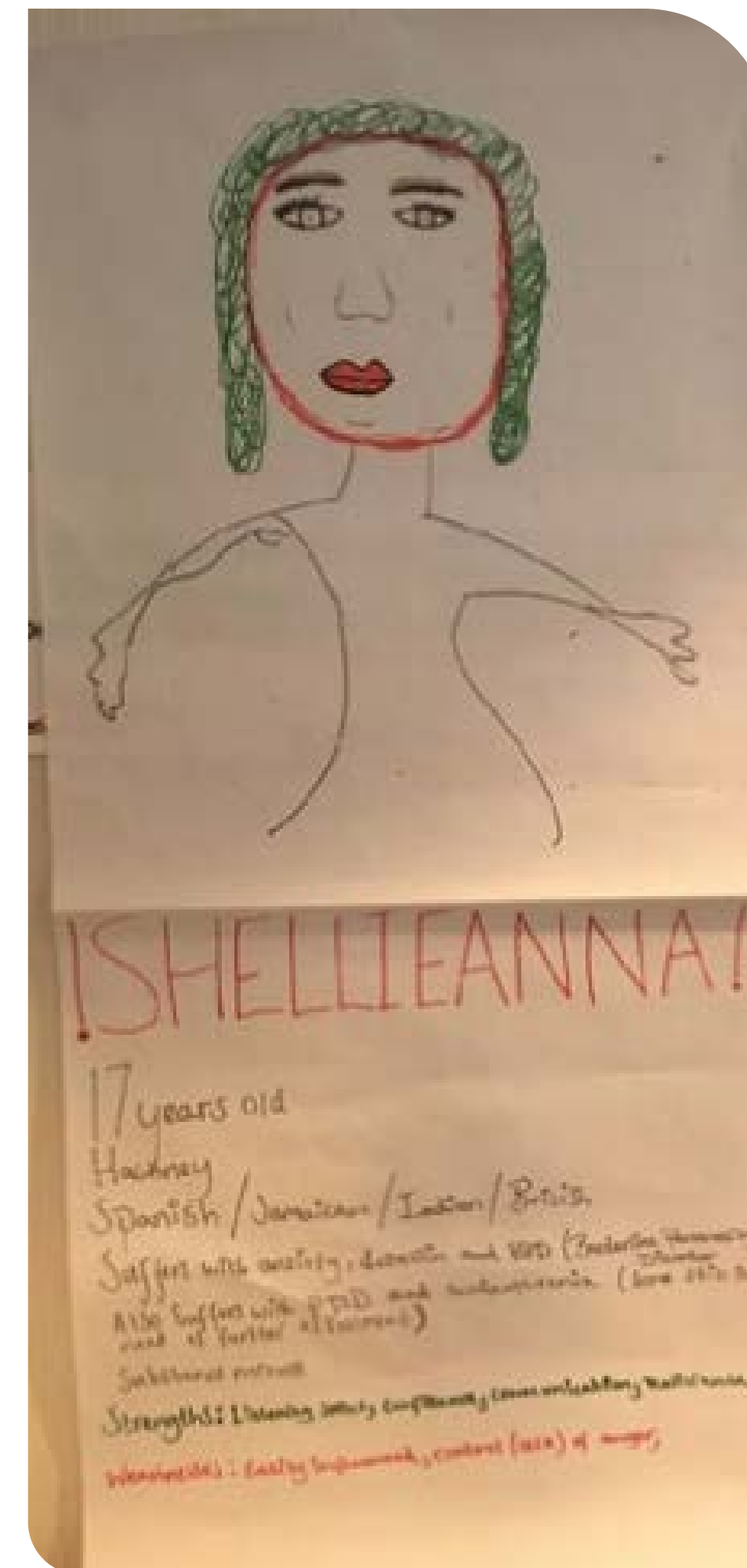


THE CONCEPT

In this resource we explore the journey through a service through the eyes and experience of three girls and young women, Tatiana, Shellieanna and Aaliyah, characters created by the young women who shared their time, energy and expertise with us at the residential in phase two.

Whilst the characters were created separately, we felt there was value in imagining them as friends. A key message that surfaced during both phases of the project was the value of informal support provided by friends, family and community.

We encourage practitioners to be considering how these relationships can be strengthened to help create safety for the girls and young women they are supporting.





MEET THE GIRLS

We introduce you to Tatiana, Shellieanna and Aaliyah, a group of close friends coming from different environments but have shared experiences and are there for each other.

Throughout this resource, they will offer you an insight into how they feel, what they need and what they do not want in a service that seeks to support girls and young women affected by youth violence and exploitation.

Throughout this guide you can find quotes from Tatiana, Shellieanna, and Aaliyah. The quotes attributed to the characters were developed after they were created and are designed to support practitioners' reflective practice.

They are completely fictitious and not created by the girls and young women who participated in either phase of the project.



Tatiana 21 years old

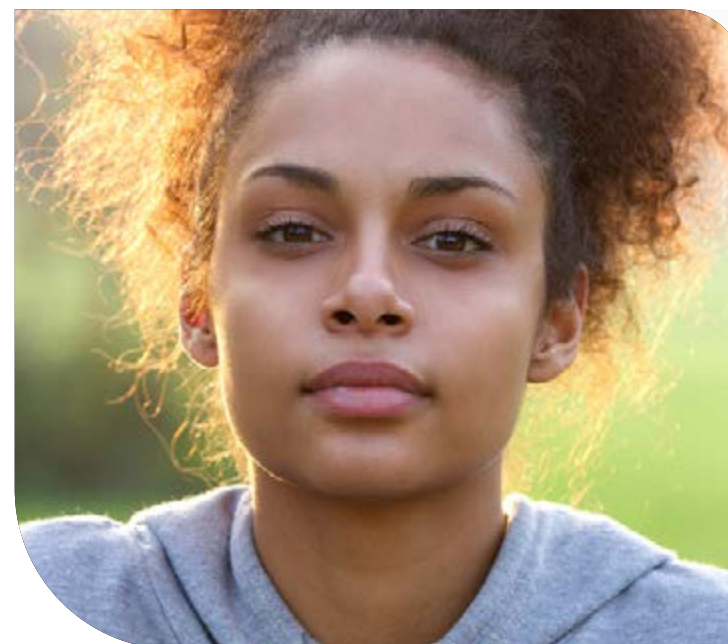
My dad died when I was 11 and I feel unsupported by my mum who is very strict. I spend a lot of time away from home and stay with different people. My older brothers judge me for the people I hang out with. My teachers told me that I am too angry, and I was excluded. I don't feel like anyone understands me and I don't think anyone will listen or be able to help me. I have anxiety and PTSD and I rely on my friends and people around me instead of my family, especially after something happened to me one night.



Shellieanna 17 years old

My friend Tatiana often stays at mine as my mum doesn't really care who is there. I always remember lots of different people being in our house when I was growing up and I always have to do a lot for my younger brothers and sisters.

When I can, I like to be out with my friends as that is when we will feel free. Sometimes we end up in places that aren't nice, but we've got each other and that is what is important.



Aaliyah 16 years old

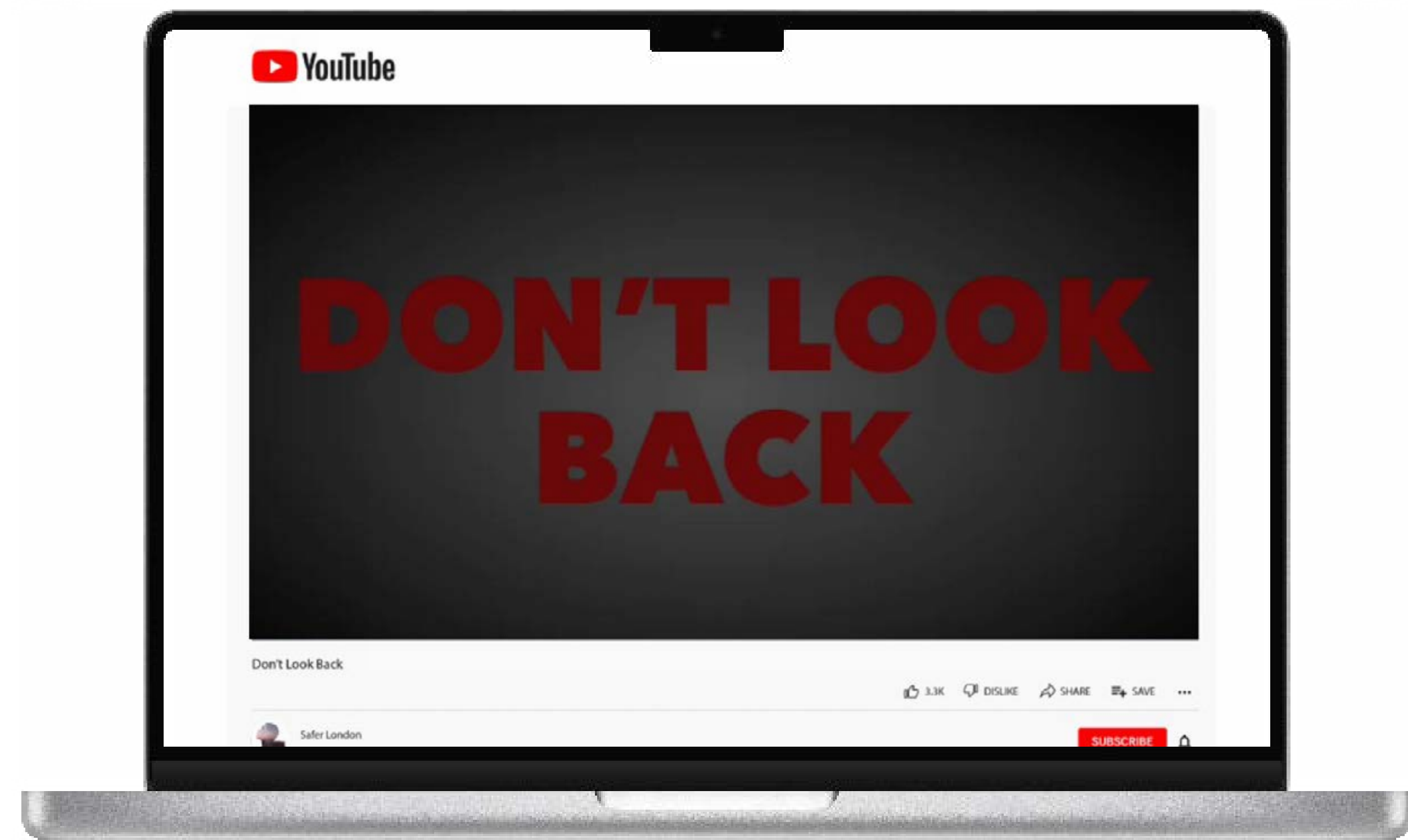
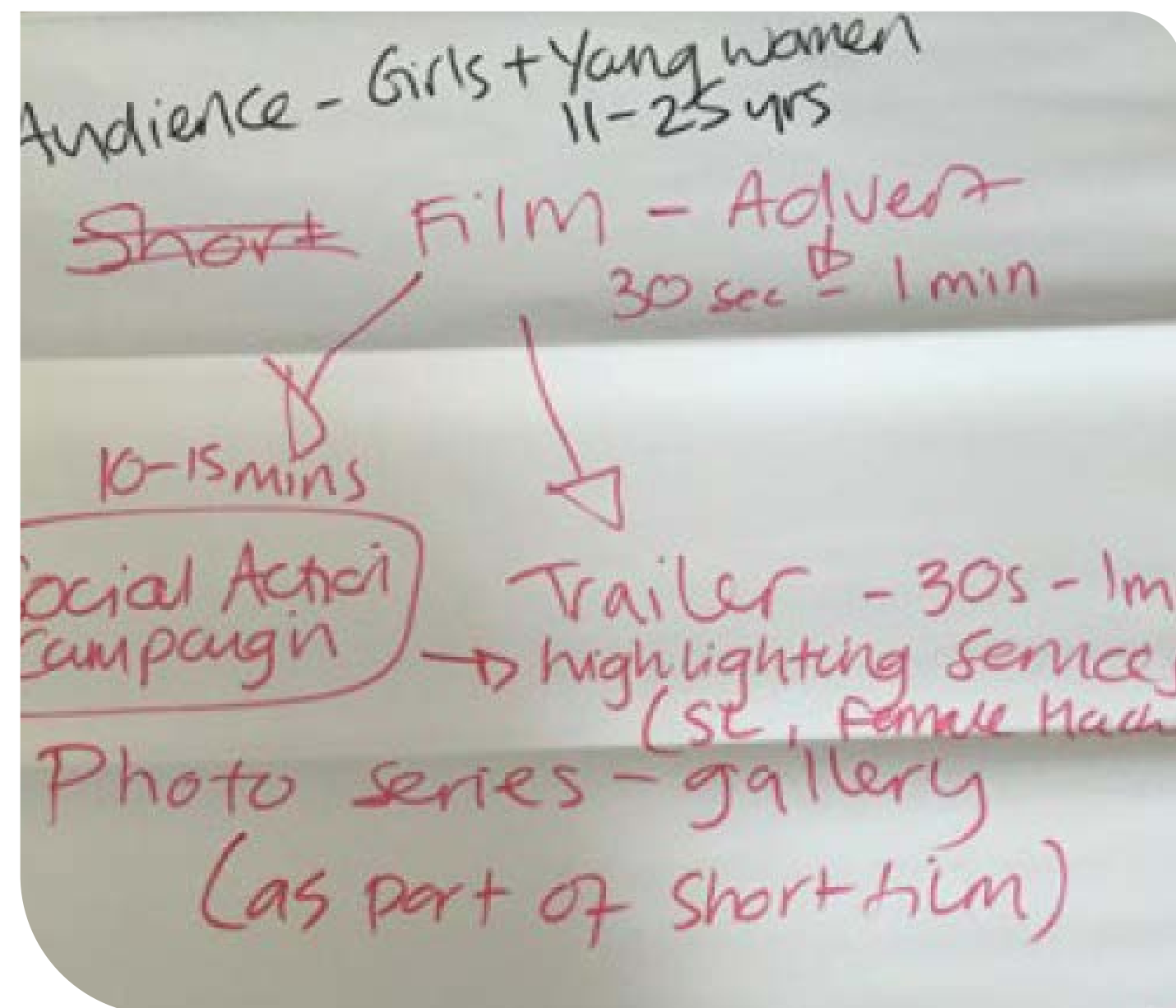
I really don't trust adults and don't want to engage with services. Adults just don't listen and think they know best – always telling me 'do this' or 'don't do that'. I have a lot to deal with and I don't have the energy for my time to be wasted.

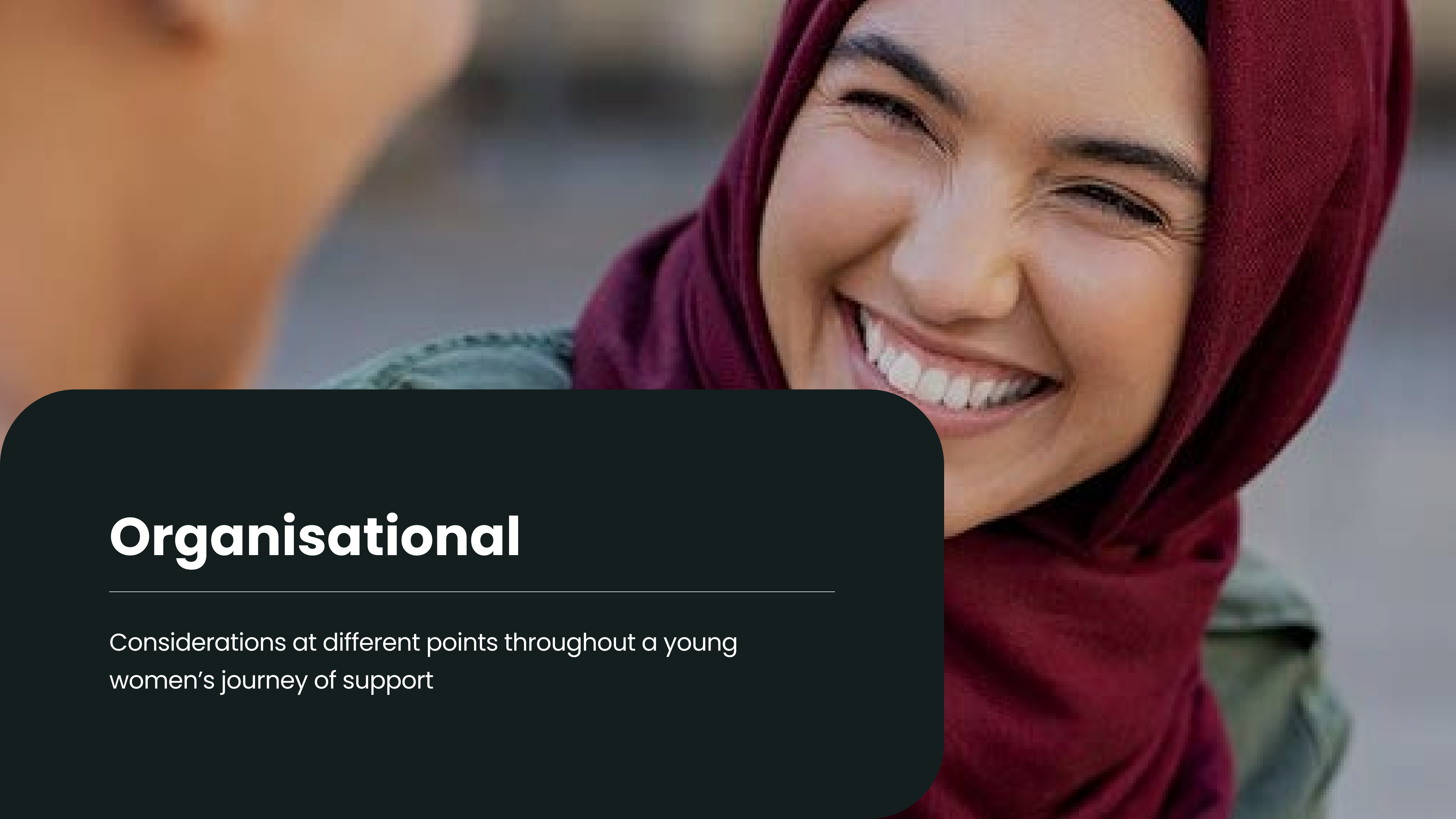
My friends are my family and the people we chill with are our community although some of the older guys act like they can tell us what to do. We don't let them....or we try not to.



As part of the project the young women and girls involved were given the time and resources to develop a piece of creative content, exploring the lives of our three characters.

After planning and development they choose to create 'Don't Look Back', a short film which tells the story of the challenges these three young women face and how they overcome them.



A close-up photograph of a young woman with a joyful expression, wearing a maroon hijab. She is smiling broadly, showing her teeth. The background is blurred, showing other people in a social setting.

Organisational

Considerations at different points throughout a young women's journey of support



Organisational

STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS THE ORGANISATION NEEDS TO BE IN PLACE

Our goal with the project was to listen to the voices and experiences of young women and girls, so we could inform our understanding of how Safer London services could better meet their needs, and other young women and girls with similar experiences.

Furthermore, we wanted to take positive action and shape our future service delivery to meet those needs. From listening to their voices we learnt that any organisations wanting to engage with and work alongside girls and young women affected by violence and exploitation, need to implement some fundamental structural elements.

Only by doing this can they support effective practice and create inclusive and accessible services for girls and young women, who might otherwise be marginalised or excluded from services. From our discussions we identified the following recommendations:

- 1. SERVICES NEED TO BE TAILORED TO MEET THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN.**
- 2. ORGANISATIONS SHOULD PRIORITISE INTERSECTIONALITY IN SERVICE DESIGN AND DELIVERY.**
- 3. PRACTITIONERS NEED TO BE PROVIDED WITH REGULAR, HIGH-QUALITY TRAINING TO UNDERSTAND THE INTERSECTIONAL NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG WOMEN OF COLOUR AND LESBIAN AND GAY YOUNG WOMEN OF COLOUR.**

- 4. ORGANISATIONS SHOULD ENGAGE IN ASSERTIVE PROMOTION, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION, THAT REACHES THEIR TARGET AUDIENCE.**
- 5. THE TEAMS NEED TO TAKE THE TIME TO UNDERSTAND GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY.**
- 6. ORGANISATIONS SHOULD EXPLORE PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS, WHICH ENABLE YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS TO ACCESS A RANGE OF OPPORTUNITIES.**
- 7. ORGANISATIONS NEED TO REVIEW ORGANISATIONAL SYSTEMS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES TO ENSURE EMBEDDING OF OPPORTUNITIES TO ACHIEVE GREATER ORGANISATIONAL DIVERSITY, IN PARTICULAR, BLACK WOMEN.**
- 8. ORGANISATIONS AND PRACTITIONERS SHOULD PROVIDE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT TO FAMILIES, PARENTS, AND CARERS.**
- 9. BE MINDFUL HOW CHANGES IN A CASEWORKER CAN AFFECT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN AND HOW THIS IMPACTS ON THEIR SUPPORT.**





1. SERVICES NEED TO BE TAILORED TO MEET THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN.

At Safer London our services and practitioners adopt a person-centred and collaborative approach that can be adapted to meet the needs of girls and young women. Whilst there is a structure and expected journey through the service, no two assessments or work plans with girls or young women should ever be the same.

Throughout every step of the journey, practitioners should be making sure they are curious and responsive to ensuring people's preferences, needs, identity and values are considered. The work plan and any decisions should be respectful of and responsive to the needs and preferences of the young women and girls they are working alongside. During the residential weekend the young women suggested that the referral process should include consideration of the young woman's preference for a worker.

In response, to this Safer London tries to be as responsive as possible to young Londoners voiced preferences in workers in terms of ethnicity, gender and sexuality.



2. ORGANISATIONS SHOULD PRIORITISE INTERSECTIONALITY IN SERVICE DESIGN AND DELIVERY.

In designing and delivering services, organisations working with children and young people need to empower all their staff to have a good understanding of intersectionality and cultural competence and how this relates to their role.

At Safer London we made changes to our recruitment process. We wanted to make sure our job descriptions, adverts and interview questions were designed to ensure potential candidates can demonstrate an understanding of an intersectional approach. We need to see that candidates understand and can acknowledge the systemic discrimination young Londoners may experience due to their gender, gender identity, race, sexual orientation and identity, economic status, immigration status, national origin, and ability, among other aspects of one's identity, and how this systemic discrimination impacts on their access to opportunity, support, and protection.



Anyone working with children and young people needs to be able to demonstrate cultural competence through an open attitude, self-awareness, awareness of others, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills. All practitioners and managers are expected to consider young people's needs in relation to their intersectional identities and experiences and reflect this in assessments and work planning.

At Safer London we've embedded prompts to enable practitioners to consider demographics, identity and intersectionality in the referral and assessment process. This is used to inform the work plan and how they approach their work with the girls and young women. This is also included in supervision templates and case file audit template, so we can monitor and track our practice in this area and inform what additional training or development might be needed.



Tatiana

"When I spoke to them on the phone, I got to say what I was looking for in a worker. I felt like Safer London listened to me. There is no point because if I can't relate to my worker, they won't be able to help me. They also asked me how I wanted to be contacted, where I felt safe to meet...questions that made me feel I had choices, so I felt more in control."



3. REGULAR, HIGH-QUALITY TRAINING TO UNDERSTAND THE INTERSECTIONAL NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES

During both phases of this project girls and young women expressed the importance of practitioners receiving high quality training to understand the intersectional needs of young women of colour and particularly, lesbian, and gay young women of colour.

One young woman stipulated that in order to feel safe, practitioners supporting them “**need to be fully trained to be able to work with young women with complex needs**”.



At Safer London we’ve embedded EDI training into our induction programme as a mandatory requirement for all staff to undertake. As part of our workforce development plan, we commissioned an additional training course specifically for managers. We are also committed to developing and delivering additional training sessions which focus on intersectionality, white privilege and fragility and understanding the needs of young people who are LGBTQI+.

We have access to a range of training courses which will also support practitioners learning including:

- Understanding the impact of hate crime
- Unconscious bias
- Working with children with learning difficulties and disabilities

We also have created a reading list of helpful books, articles, research and other resources that can support learning in this area.

It’s important to note that all practitioners will all be at different stages in our journey to understanding and taking an intersectional approach, and this will no doubt be shaped by our own identities and experiences.

However, it’s our personal responsibility to ensure we are equipped to understand and respond to intersectional experiences of discrimination, power and privilege and use this to safeguard and advocate for girls and young women.

Practitioners need to be committed to and continue their own learning, reflection and development by accessing additional training and using supervision, case management reviews and Annual Performance Reviews, to identify and respond to needs in this area.



Aaliyah

“We’re black young women. No-one is looking out for us so we do the best we can, that’s why I am so protective of my friends.”



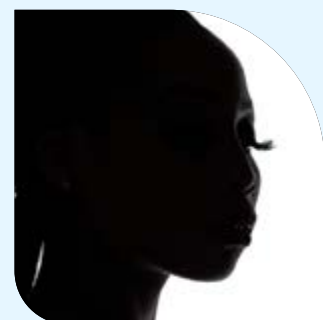
4. ENGAGE IN ASSERTIVE PROMOTION, MARKETING, AND COMMUNICATION

"I have a voice that once wasn't heard. Now my voice is being heard. My voice is now the voice of people not being heard".



One of our learnings from this project was that services may not be reaching girls and young women who are most marginalised and alienated from mainstream services. The majority of Safer London's referrals come via other professionals, such as Children's Social Care or schools.

The girls and young women engaged with this project told us that might be more likely to engage with a service if it was promoted directly to them, rather than through a professional, who they may not trust. They had lots of great suggestions about where and how we might do this; including ensuring we reach into the communities and space where they are, particularly online.



I found out through my mum...



Listen to audio

The initial messages they would want from a service that might encourage them to engage with included:



'Come alone or bring your squad'



'We can come to you'



'We hear you'

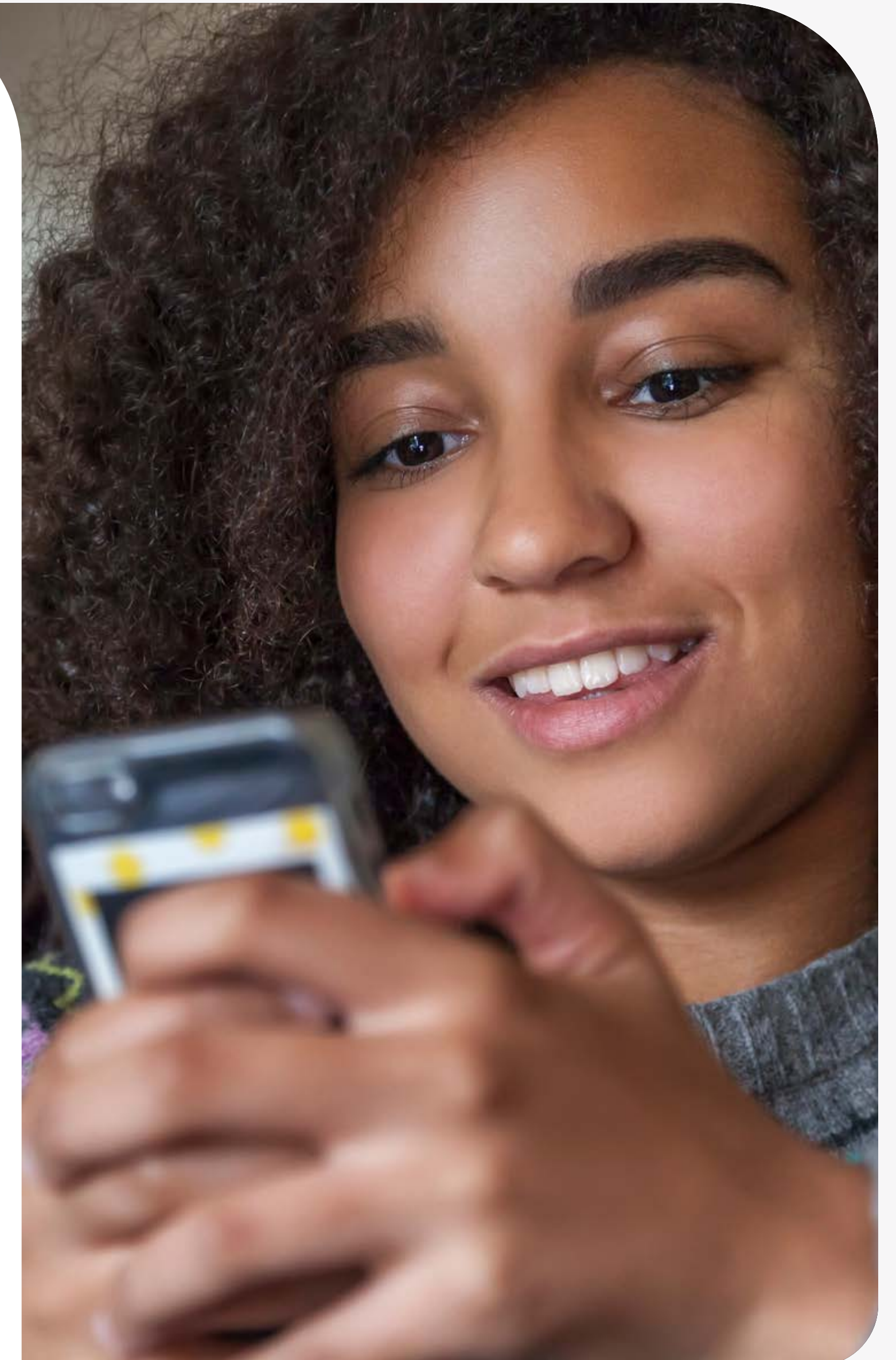


'Lunch on us'

They also highlighted some key messages to share in the advertising that would make them feel more likely to engage with a service:

- **Do the workers represent people like me?**
- **Can you help me with the things I think are most important, like housing?**
- **Can you support me to grow and develop myself?**
- **Can you give me the space I need to talk about how I'm feeling?**
- **Can I find out more without giving my personal details?**

At Safer London know we've got some work to do on this, so we've committed to drawing on the expertise and experiences of young Londoners to support the development of this work. Whether this be through employing peer educators or youth voice ambassadors, or having discussion with the Safer London VIP young champions.





5. UNDERSTAND GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

To support girls and young women to explore and address their personal safety you should approach the topic with care and compassion and consider their experience and perception of safety.

This should consider their safety in the different contexts where they spend time, including at home, in their peer relationships, their school or workplace and their wider community and public spaces. You can draw on a range of tools and activities to support this, including peer and/or safety mapping and safety planning.

Addressing safety is a huge element of the support we offer at Safer London and our Theory of Change has been designed to guide practitioners to consider physical, emotional and relational safety.



It's important to recognise that girls and young women's perceptions of safety and protection may differ from yours or the wider professional or family networks. It's part of your role to support girls and young women to consider and critically reflect on their experiences, but also be open to having your own perceptions or assumptions about safety challenged and influenced.

Girls and young women should be involved in creating the solutions. It's important that they feel they are being collaborated with, rather than done to.



Shellieanna

"Working with us on safety means more than thinking about just where we are safe and more about what makes us feel safe and how we can create this"



6. EXPLORE PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION WHICH ENABLE ACCESS TO A RANGE OF OPPORTUNITIES

“At some point in this process you need a list of all community organisations you can kind of direct them towards, cause sometimes you might not be able to do what the young person can do better than another organisation”



One of the young women in this project told us she thinks an organisation should ‘**swallow that pride as an organisation**’ and ‘**know your limits**’.

We need to be mindful that we are not a one-stop-shop to address and respond what girls and young women need to achieve safety and thrive. We need to work alongside other partners and organisations to support them in different areas of their life. This should be reflected in work plans and there must be a purposeful effort to seek out partners who specialise in certain areas and who have the expertise to address the identified needs.

It’s also important to be thinking about next steps beyond the end of a young woman’s support. One young woman urged us to ‘**Look for a space where that young person can continue to grow**’ and being particularly mindful of building connections in their community. Safer London is committed to developing new specialist roles as needs arise. Therefore, this list is not exhaustive or necessarily an accurate reflection of all of Safer London’s specialist roles.

At Safer London we have internal specialist and expert roles who can support our work with girls and young women where additional needs are identified:



Families

Specialist support or advice for parents/ carers and additional support and advice around addressing harm in the wider community.



Housing and resettlement

Specialist support or advice around accessing to housing and additional benefits/support upon relocation.



Education, training and employment

Specialist support or advice around access to education, training and employment.



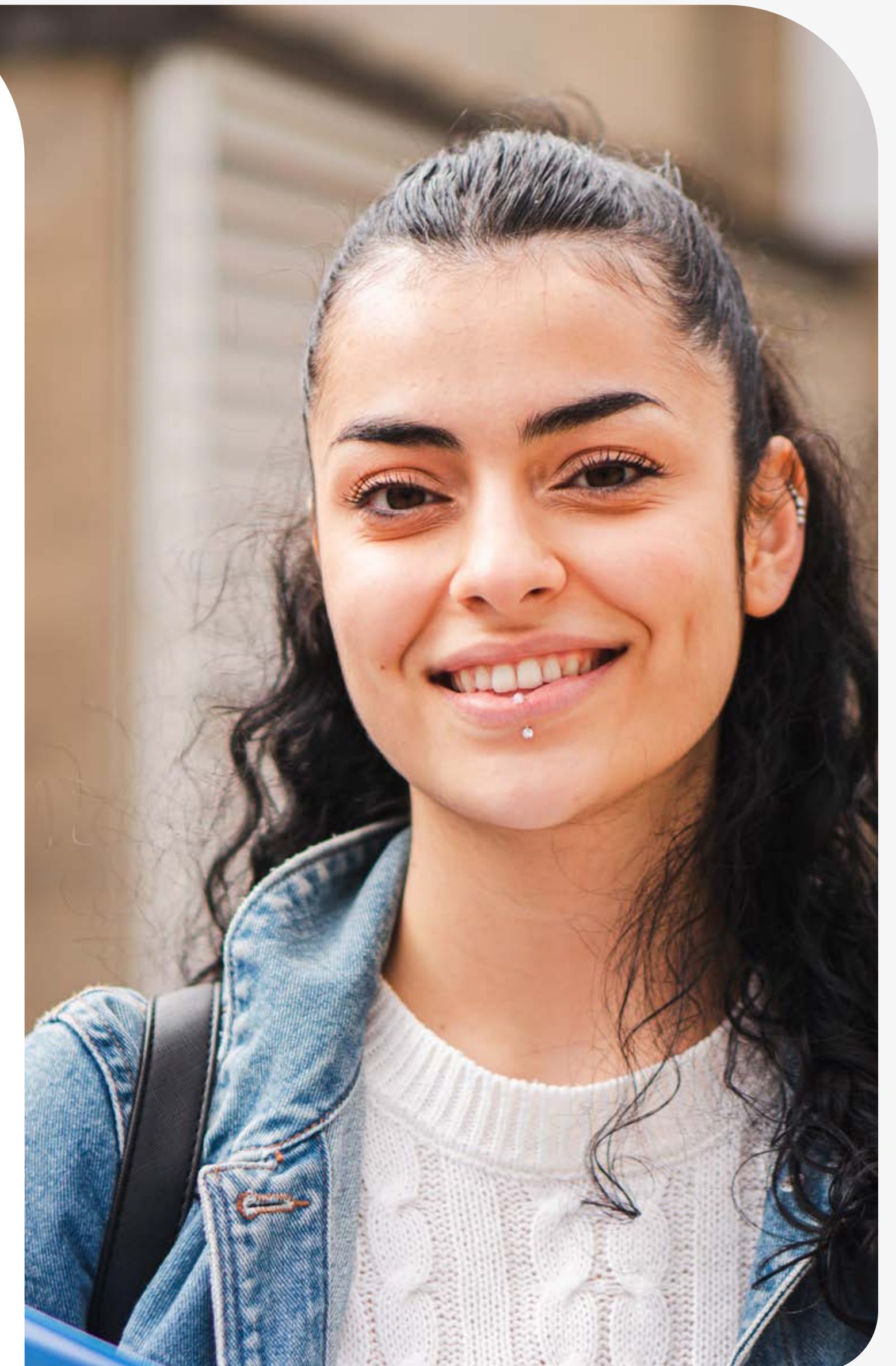
Neurodiversity

Specialist workers experienced at working with children and young people with SEND who are affected by violence and exploitation

Time to reflect

One young woman advised us to be thoughtful about those circumstances when ‘**we’re not the right fit**’. As we won’t always be.

Use your supervision and case review meeting to consider if this is the right service for the girls and young women you are supporting. With this in mind, you need to have a good understanding of a range of services are available and that young women and girls are aware of their options.





7. REVIEW SYSTEMS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES TO ENSURE OPPORTUNITIES AND ACHIEVE GREATER ORGANISATIONAL DIVERSITY

Diversity and representation should not only be celebrated and promoted, but also hold utmost significance in decision-making, delivery, and development processes.

A workforce which represents and is relatable to children and young people affected by violence and exploitation is important. It's also important that those employees experience an organisation which is supportive, inclusive and enables them to feel comfortable and confident being themselves in work.



At Safer London we value diversity and we're committed to creating an inclusive culture. We know to make London a safer place for the young Londoners who live here, we need a diverse range of perspectives, experience and knowledge.

In 2020 Safer London worked with an external organisation, Listen Up to create an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Plan and as part of that we've been reviewing and amending our systems, policies and procedures.

All staff are expected to engage with this plan and contribute to making Safer London an organisation which honours its ambitions around equity, diversity and inclusion. Staff are also encouraged to put forward their suggestions on how the plan, as well as our policies and procedures, can be developed or improved.

In our 2022 staff demographics census we had a workforce which was:

65% are women

56% Are black Caribbean, black African, black other or mixed

11% Identified as being LGBTQI+

16% Shared that they have a disability

30% of senior leadership team were black women

54% of our practice management team were women of colour; 36% of whom were black



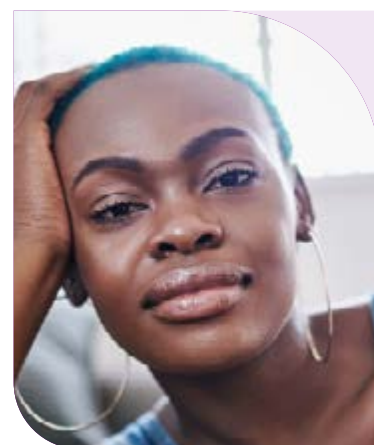
8. PROVIDE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT TO FAMILIES, PARENTS, AND CARERS

Parents and carers hold a crucial role in their child's safety and well-being and, where safe and appropriate to do so, we should be proactively engaging with them.

This should be discussed and agreed with the girl or young woman and careful consideration should be given of the family dynamics, and their safety and support within her family context.

At Safer London we offer support to families through specialist caseworker roles. Safer London practitioners consider referring into this additional support if they identify needs within the family context.

This can be helpful as it offers parents/ carers their own worker, reducing conflicts of interest for the worker, as both the young Londoner and the parent/carer have space to share their experiences confidentially with a worker who is there to advocate for them and support them.



"Because I don't always get on with my mum I didn't want my worker telling her everything we talked about and they respected that"

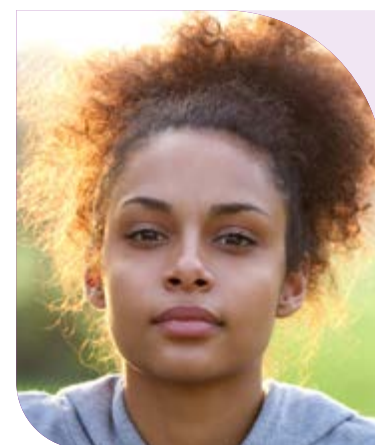
- Shellieanna

9. BE MINDFUL OF THE IMPACTS OF A CHANGE IN WORKER

The young women in this project spoke about the difficulties they experience when there are frequent changes or a lack of consistency in workers. Many of the girls and young women we will support may have already experienced this with other services and this will impact on their ability to trust and build relationships with services. The young women acknowledged that change will sometimes happen, but what is important is how this is dealt with.

If you're leaving a role giving suitable notice isn't just about letting your employer know about your departure, it's also about preparing the young woman you are supporting. This includes planning an appropriate ending which is understanding of their experience of trauma, loss and abandonment, all of which might be triggered and impacted by multiple changes in worker and poor experiences of ending and starting those relationships. Organisations should also be committed to minimising changes in worker where possible and be very clear and transparent in the process if it is needed.

At Safer London we have a Service Delivery Manual that provides guidance around endings for our practitioners, including how they will manage appropriate endings when they are leaving a role.



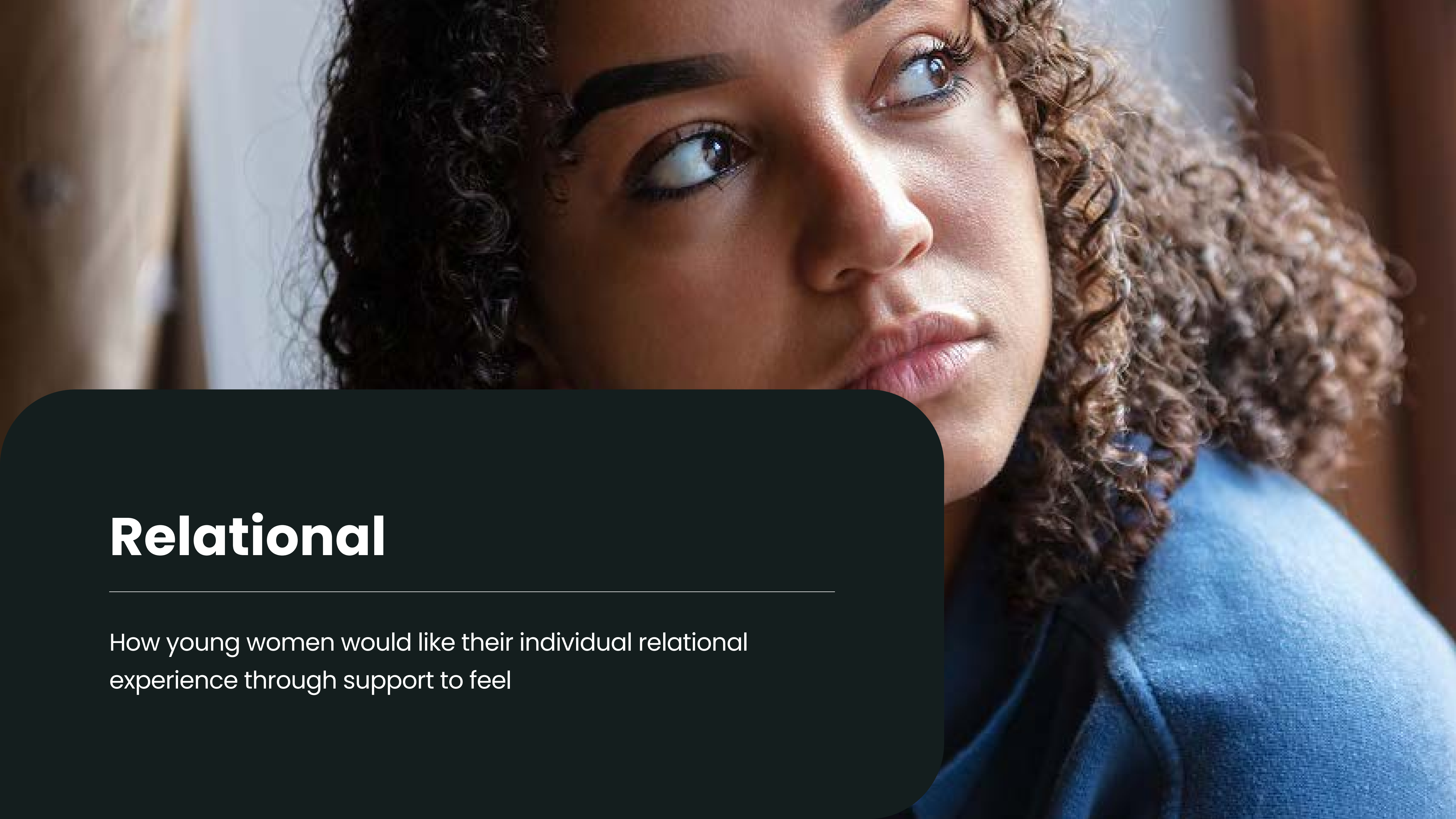
"I have had so many social workers. It's not fair when they change so often. How many times can you tell your story? How can you build trust?"

- Aaliyah



Time to reflect

Take a few minutes to think about how a young woman might feel when she gets told her worker is changing. What could you do to make this process feel safer for her?



Relational

How young women would like their individual relational experience through support to feel



Relational

HOW INDIVIDUAL RELATIONAL EXPERIENCE SHOULD FEEL

A central characteristic of our work at Safer London is the creation of safe and trusted relationships with anyone who accesses our services.

Relationship-based practice recognises the professional relationship as the medium through which the practitioner can engage with and intervene in the complexity of an individual's internal and external worlds. Both the individual worker and the organisation have a responsibility to build trust and create a sense of safety in their relationships with the girls and young women we support.

Exploring the relational element of the support emerged as a key consideration for the girls and young women, and they shared their views and hopes about how a service and a worker should make them feel, and importantly, how they should not.

With this in mind we asked the following questions:





1. WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU WANT IN A WORKER?



"I don't like it when people come to me and say 'this is your life, you have decision over it and then they do something that says the complete opposite.'"

- Phase 1 Project Participant

The girls and young women said they would like their worker to be:

Accommodating of young people



Able to acknowledge and navigate differing perspectives



Open-minded and non-judgemental



Honest and Genuine



Emotionally intelligent



A great listener and understanding of their needs



Good at communicating



Able to build a relationship



Be able to maintain good boundaries



Lived experience/experience working in the field



2. WHAT SHOULD SUPPORT LOOK LIKE?



"You can't give agency for a start"

- Phase 2 Project Participant

Girls and young women shared that to feel supported by a service they would want to see evidence of some key elements, with their priorities being:

Good communication



Seeing their potential



Offering fulfilment



Community-based



Being reliable



Knowing your limits



Being consistent



Knowledge of services



Accountability



I think the worker needs to be able to see your potential...



She kept reassuring me that the sessions are confidential...



3. HOW SHOULD SUPPORT FEEL?



“It shouldn’t feel like social services at all. I want to feel like you care and can support me through things.”

- Tatiana

The girls and young women told us support should feel:

- Warm ✓
- Genuinely caring ✓
- Happy and positive ✓
- For love ✓
- Family-feel rather than business ✓

4. WHAT SHOULD SUPPORT DO?



“I hope my worker would help sort me somewhere to live ASAP. I can’t think about going back to college or doing anything until I know where I am sleeping every night. Only after that can I start planning for the future. I need money too....”

- Tatiana

The girls and young women told us support should:

- Provide opportunities ✓
- Offer space to grow ✓
- Be a way to try new things ✓
- Not give false hope ✓
- Support a young person’s passions ✓
- Recognise the young person’s journey ✓



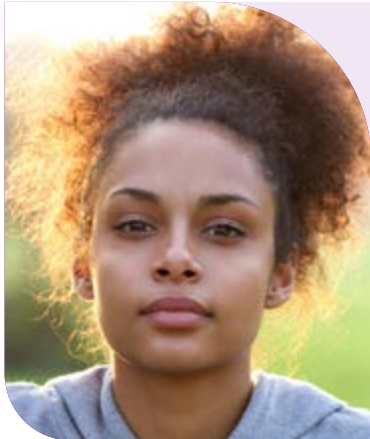
The support was like really helpful...



It’s given me a lot more confidence...



5. HOW SERVICES SHOULDN'T MAKE YOUNG WOMEN FEEL?



"We know we get judged, and our teachers definitely do, even our parents, so the last thing we need is to feel like that might happen from people that are meant to help us."

- Aaliyah

The girls and young women told us support shouldn't make them feel:

Anxious	✗
Judged	✗
Disregarded	✗
Unsafe	✗
That trust is broken- either they are not trusted or that they can't trust their worker	✗

The girls and young women we spoke to talked about how approaches which make girls and young women feel this way can trigger their trauma responses and impact their mental health.

As an organisation which is prioritising being trauma-responsive as a key approach underpinning our services, we would want all practitioners to be particularly mindful of how our behaviours, actions and words may impact on young Londoners and it is our responsibility to ensure we do no harm.

6. WHAT LANGUAGE SHOULD WE USE?

How we talk to, and about, girls and young women can have a significant impact on how safe and supported they feel and whether they want to engage with our services.

The girls and young women in this group said they wanted practitioners to make sure that the words and language they used were:

Not patronising	✓
No big words	✓
Accessible	✓
Conveys interest in understanding young person's context	✓

If in doubt they suggested that practitioners should:

Use urban dictionary!	✓
Use plain simple language	✓

Talk to them about the language they want to use

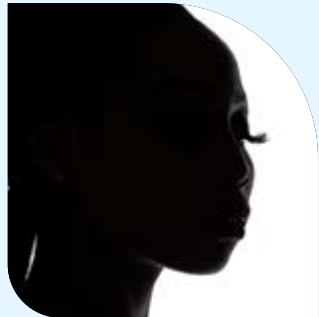


As an example one young woman spoke about the word 'empowerment'. She felt this word takes away the agency and power from the young woman and places the power with the worker, and that the young woman can't hold that power without the worker giving it to them.



"How you speak to me will decide whether I want to talk to you, let alone trust you. Lots of adults have spoken to me with disrespect in the past. If you do too, then I will probably shut off from working with you."

- Shellieanna



Even though it is going to be scary....

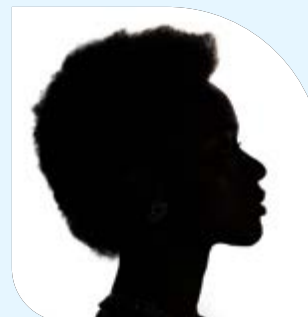


7. HOW CAN TRUST BE BUILT?

Trust came up frequently and in many different ways, including the consideration of the conditions needed to build trust both with individual workers and as an organisation.

The girls and young women felt that to build trust the following considerations were needed:

- **Can only be developed by engaging with a worker – not automatic**
- **A worker who communicates – is clear, consistent and honest**
- **Worker coming down to level of the young person**
- **The worker's approach – needs to be flexible, relatable, credible and genuine**
- **Youth work background – better to build rapport**
- **Confidentiality – clear and honest about expectations and boundaries**
- **Worker to have relevant life experience – makes it easier to relate**
- **There is a clear distinction from the Social Worker**
- **Worker should ask questions and not draw own conclusions**



I feel like girls and young women feel insecure...



Time to reflect

Building trust is a key element of how we deliver our services at Safer London and it is integral to taking a trauma-responsive approach. Consider how you will approach this by exploring the guidance offered in the Service Delivery Manual.

Take a few moments to reflect on:



What does trust mean for you in your own relationships?



Times where you have experienced positive relationships of trust in your work? How did this feel?



Times when you struggled to build trust- what do you think impacted this? How did this feel?



What can you do to help build trust with girls and young women to support their engagement?



8. WHAT ABOUT THE WIDER COMMUNITY?

“What these young people need is a community”



The girls and young women we spoke to highlight the importance of community in providing safety and support.

They were very conscious of ‘big’ organisations coming in and not being connected to their community and taking the place of local grassroots organisations. They felt it was important for practitioners to:

Understand that community can do more for a young person than an institution can.



Know what is going on the community – or link to someone who does



Work towards strengthening community networks.



An idea that developed from this conversation was that girls and young women would like to hear more testimonials from other young women who have accessed the service. They felt this would be a helpful way to promote the support offered at Safer London.



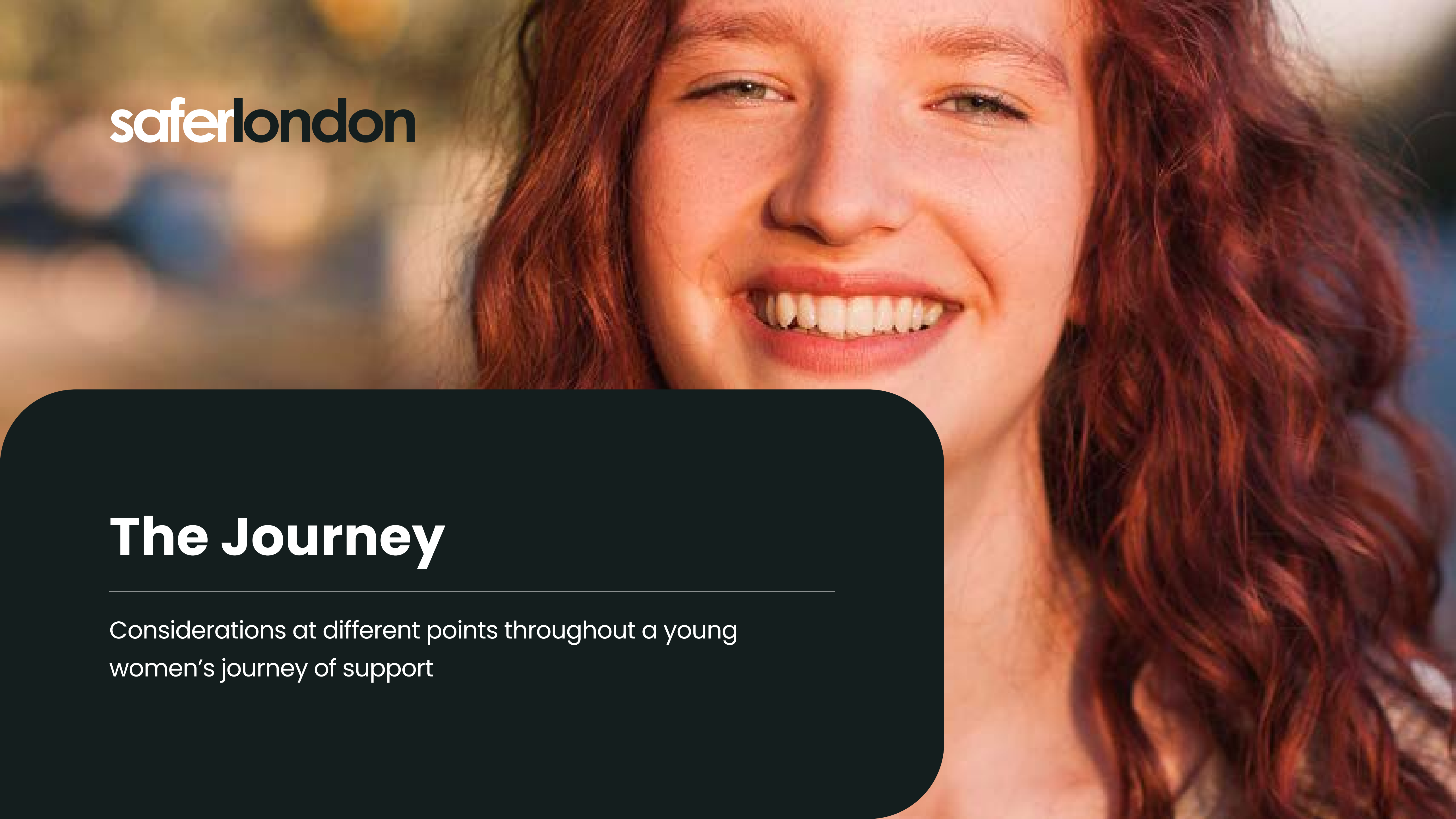
As a result, we have committed to developing this idea and recruited a young Londoner to support us to implement this into practice.



Shellieanna

“Working with us on safety means more than thinking about just where we are safe and more about what makes us feel safe and how we can create this”





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The Journey

Considerations at different points throughout a young women's journey of support



The Journey

Alongside structural drivers and relational approaches the group spent time reflecting on key moments in a girl or young woman's journey through the service.

In this section we encourage you to reflect on how you engage with girls and young women through the different stages of support.





1

PRIOR TO INITIAL MEETING



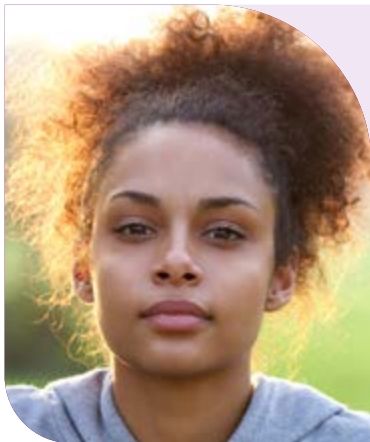
"I am really anxious about the meeting, I wonder if my friends can come for support? I hope my worker is a female and not too old."

- **Tatiana**



"Something happened to my friend the other night and we don't know what to do to help her. but we need to do something."

- **Shellieanna**



"I'm still not convinced they can help. No-one has ever helped before"

- **Aaliyah**

Time to reflect



Consider how the girl or young woman might be feeling at this stage. Based on the information you might have so far; what do you think they might be feeling?



Have you given the young woman opportunities to choose where, when and how she would like to initially meet?



Can you consider meeting a young person with a friend?



Can you speak to your line manager about risk assessing this?





2 INITIAL MEETING

“No-one wants to sit there and read through all of this and sign and that, dunno, makes it institutional. When you have all this institutional language, it is alienating for the young people”



The initial meeting is an important opportunity to set the scene and expectations for the young woman but not to overwhelm with too much information or paperwork.

They suggested some key principles to hold in mind throughout the work, but particularly important at the beginning:



Ask, don't tell – work from a principle of choice and options – with the emphasis on things being optional.



Think about how the young woman is feeling and allow space to go at her pace.

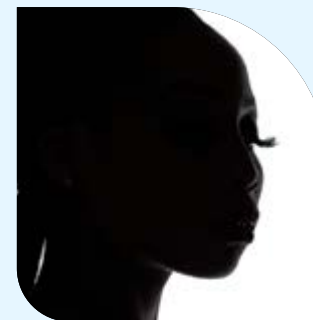


‘We hear you’ – it is important that we actively hear what the young woman is saying and that we can validate and offer reassurance.

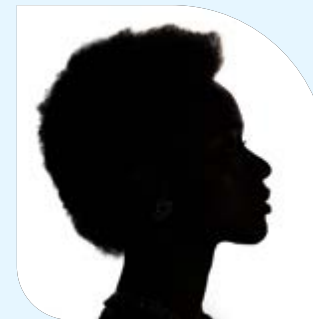


Expect abruptness and sass– expect it to take a few meetings to break down the walls.

The group reminded us that a young person may also tell us a lot by how they act. If they react by causing a scene or walking out, this is because they do not know how to be assertive and feel like they are losing more control over their lives.



I was shy at first...

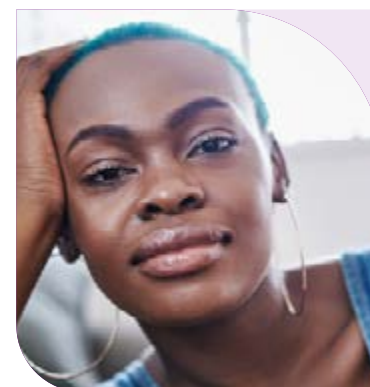


I felt like they were gonna call social services...



“I am glad I didn't have to sign anything straight away. I wanted to get to know my worker more and find out what the service can do to help. It sounds like they can help with lots of things.”

– Tatiana



“It was more like a chat than a meeting. It doesn't feel like there is any pressure. I wonder if they will support my friends too”

– Shellieanna

Things to cover in the meeting:

Whilst there are a number of key things we need to cover early in our work with young Londoners, the young women felt that the three most important areas to cover are:

Options to communicate in different ways



E.g. Face to face, Zoom, telephone, WhatsApp – varied options

Options for ongoing support ‘continuous meetings’ and ‘check-ins’



‘we keep the door open’

Explain to the young woman what to expect from you



Support



Listen and observe



Educate the young woman to enable themselves and have a voice



3

ASSESSMENT “UNDERSTANDING YOUR NEEDS”

The word assessment can conjure up a lot of things but for many young people there is often a negative connotation to it – they may have been assessed by Children’s Social Care, CAMHS, the court and often feel alienated from the process and like they don’t have any control or real idea of what the outcome will be.

The group told us that girls and young women do not want to feel interrogated when their needs are being assessed and would like workers to think about how they approach this. This needs to be less formal and avoid using institutional language; instead adapting your approach to suit the young woman’s needs or personality.

One young woman stated it works best if they don’t even know you are doing it – although they appreciated the need for transparency. We don’t suggest that we deceive the young person but it might help, for example, not to asking straight up ‘institutional’ questions such as ‘on a scale of 1-10 how are you feeling?’ but instead use a medium to get there that draws on their interests, such as music, film, hobbies etc.

It is important to step away from a scripted ‘institutional’ dialog and lean towards language that caters to the young person’s personality. The girls and young women said they understood it might involve being observed but it should not feel that way.

To achieve this, they suggested that workers need to think about their approach to doing the assessment and how they describe it– be clear about why you are doing it and how to engage the young woman in the process. They suggested leading by asking about hobbies and interests and considering the things that are going well, as well as the concerns.



Tatiana

“I felt comfortable and that was most important. We talked about things I liked and that just made it so much easier to speak about some of the things I need help with. Obviously, I didn’t tell them everything, but it was a start...”





The girls and young women said they would like their worker to be:

- Be aware of mental health ✓
- Understand that young women may find it hard to be in social settings ✓
- Have knowledge of her background and experiences ✓
- Be aware of violent history and risk assess this ✓
- Consider any safeguarding concerns ✓
- Consider emotional support needs ✓
- Provide reassurance ✓
- Explain confidentiality ✓
- Develop trust ✓
- Be honest ✓
- Make the young women feel comfortable ✓

Assessment should lead to:

- 👍 A clear plan of how the worker will support the young woman.
- 👍 Better support from services.
- 👍 Safe spaces to explore female safety.



“At the end of the week my worker contacted me just to ask how I was doing. We arranged to meet again to start making a plan. It didn’t feel formal, and I didn’t feel pressured. It was something I wanted to do.”
- **Tatiana**



“My worker asked about my friends and understood how important our friendship is. This was important for me to be able to trust a service.”
- **Shellieanna**





4

**PLANNING:
'PRIORITIES AND GOALS'**

The young women told us that the plan should centre the young woman and consider how they are actually going to feel like they have autonomy over their life.

The focus should be on giving young people the tools and information they need to act upon their agency. Having a plan helps provide clarity about purpose and direction and helps set clear expectations.

"I knew when my worker was calling me, it was not for no reason"



Planning should aim to:



Open girls and young women's eyes to opportunities



Be a youth-led space



Be something visual

"At this stage, these are your options and at this stage, these are your options"

**Time to reflect**

Ask yourself these questions:



What language is used in it?
How is it written up?



Think about timescales – does it need to cover 6 weeks or longer, or is it more useful to address the here and now?



Can you consider a phased development of a plan? Extend it step by step – it might take 5 meetings.



Would weekly planning work with the young women?



Does the plan incorporate options and can be adapted when things change?



"I feel like my worker listened and I have a plan. Not one that is overwhelming but feels realistic. I am starting to believe I can get things sorted out."

- Tatiana



5 **REVIEW: 'GROWTH'**

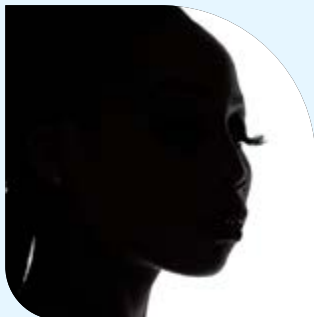
The young women spoke about the role of review and reflection and how important this was to help see when there was growth.

They shared that it was important to:

- Revisit the initial meeting.
- Reframe review and outcomes as looking at 'growth'.
- Reflect on the knowledge they now have from this support/part of the journey.
- Acknowledge that this is part of a journey that is ongoing.



"My worker takes things at my pace and I feel like I have choices about everything."
- **Shellieanna**



I think I will remember the impact...

Time to reflect



Ask yourself these questions:



Are you placing the young woman at the centre of her support and thinking about how she can have autonomy and make decisions about what is going on in her life?



Are you or your organisation the best person to support the young woman?



Have you got knowledge and relationships with wider community grassroots organisations?



Are you considering the young woman's wider support network?





6 ENDING SUPPORT: 'THE OUTCOME'

The young women saw ending as an opportunity for reflection on change and felt that this should be a celebration of achievement.

It should also acknowledge that it is not the end of the young woman's journey and should prepare them for what is ahead and the part of their journey which is yet to come.

"No-one wants to sit there and read through all of this and sign and that, dunno, makes it institutional. When you have all this institutional language, it is alienating for the young people"

They felt that a final plan should:

Signpost on towards:

-  Social enterprises
-  Employment and education opportunities
-  Access to funding such as hardship grants for interview clothes etc
-  Information- especially on their rights

They should have a summary about what has been achieved and this should be written in collaboration with the young woman.

It should:

-  Highlight what issues are outstanding so they know what still needs to be done.
-  Involve answering questions at the beginning and revisiting at the end.
-  Be a reflective process.
-  Recognise what goals have been achieved.
-  The outcome should be presented in the young woman's own words.

"Revisiting represents your growth."

"You can't put a young person's growth into words or data or numbers. It's personal."

Time to reflect

How can you reframe growth? Growth looks different to the young Londoner and the professional.

-  Can you collaborate on defining what growth means for the young Londoner?
-  How does this relate to outcomes/ what the young person wants to achieve? E.G. Attending a meeting every week.

The young women felt that the ultimate goals that should be achieved in time for ending support should include them experiencing:

Safety – in their environment – based on what this means for the young woman



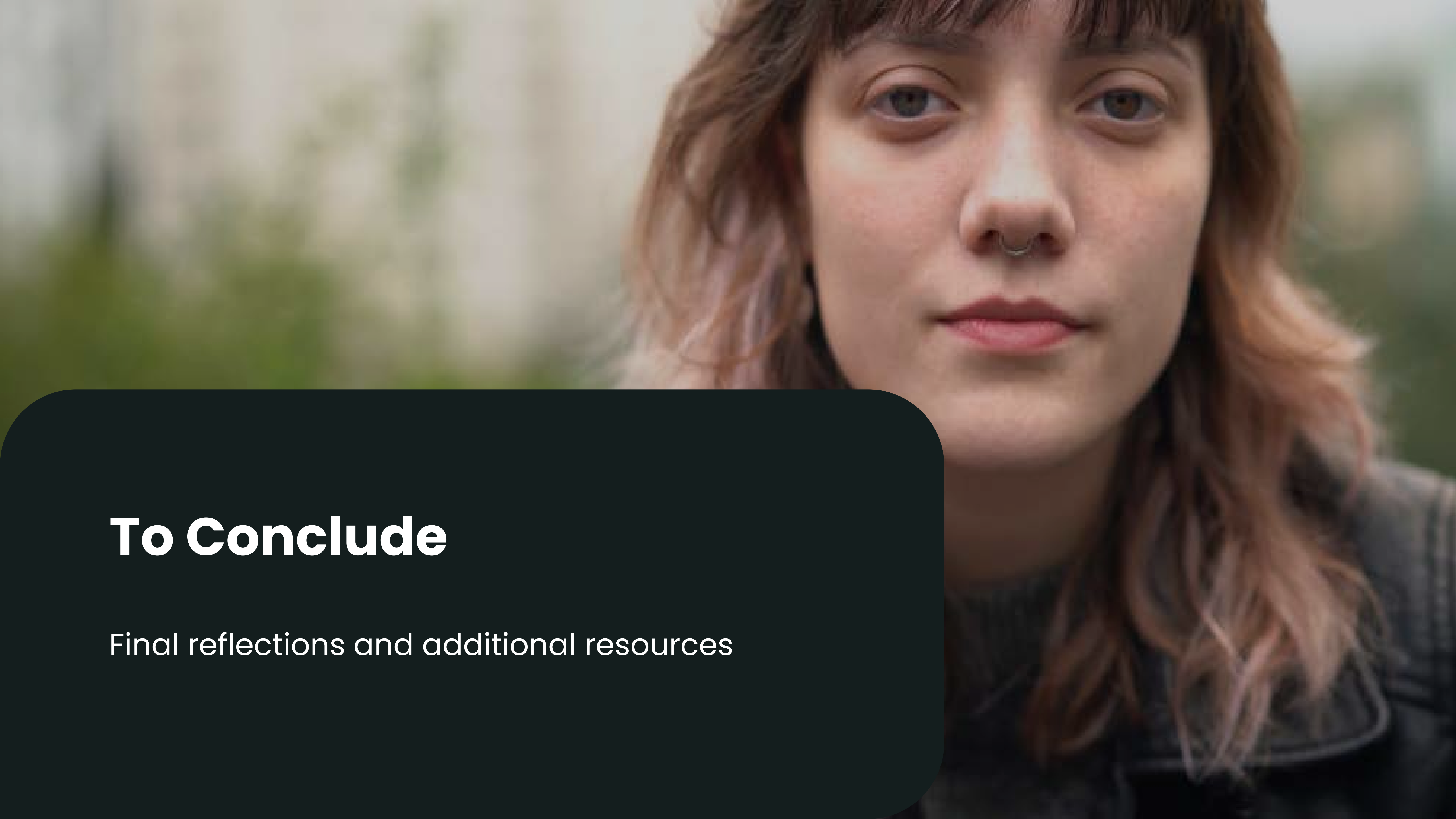
Supportive relationships



Emotional well-being



What they shared aligns well with Safer London's Theory of change, which aims to achieve physical, relational and emotional safety and has a positive future focus. They would also like to know that Safer London will 'keep the door open' and be available to them for informal well-being check-ins if they need it.



To Conclude

Final reflections and additional resources



To Conclude

In conclusion, we hope this guide, developed in collaboration with young women and girls affected by violence, can serve as a useful resource for practitioners.

By amplifying the voices and experiences of those it seeks to support, this guide provides practical strategies informed by an understanding of their unique challenges.

As practitioners, our commitment to creating a safe and supportive space can be strengthened by listening to and learning from the experiences and opinions for young women and girls. We hope this guide will support you to continue to advocate for the rights and well-being of young women and girls.

Through this collective effort, we aim to build a future where every individual can thrive free from violence and exploitation, guided by empathy, inclusivity, and a steadfast commitment to their well-being and autonomy.

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- The Safer London VIPs

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. LalalaLetMeExplain. (2022). Block, delete, move on: It's not you, it's them. Bantam Press.
2. [It's not you, it's them... but it might be you - Podcast](#)

Violence Against Women and Girls

3. [The Decriminalisation of rape: Why the justice system is failing rape survivors and what needs to change](#)
4. [Race on the Agenda: Female Voice in Violence](#)
5. [Victim focus: Toolkits](#)
6. [Office of the Children's Commissioner: "Sex without consent, I suppose that is rape": How young people in England understand sexual consent](#)
7. [Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2016 – 2020](#)

Intersectionality

8. [Kimberlé Crenshaw: Intersectionality and Gender Equality - YouTube video](#)
9. [Akilah Obviously: On Intersectionality in Feminism and Pizza - YouTube video](#)
10. [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story | TED - YouTube video](#)
11. [The Social Matters: Intersectionality for Social Workers - Podcast](#)



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