off the radar

Children and young people on the streets in the UK

Emilie Smeaton

Railway children

THE VOICE FOR STREET CHILDREN WORLDWIDE

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Acknowledgements

Further Information

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1. Introduction

Charlene

On a freezing winter's night in a tourist town in England, Charlene, aged thirteen, is spending the night under a railway arch with a group of homeless adults.

Charlene's father started to sexually abuse Charlene when she was nine and, by the time she was eleven, repeatedly raped her. Her father drank too much and bullied her mother who was depressed and spent a lot of time in bed.

When Charlene was twelve, she could no longer cope with what her father was doing to her and ran away, preferring to be on the streets than in a home where she lived in dread of a father who will not report his daughter as missing because of what he has been doing to her and a mother who won't protect her because she fears her husband.

Charlene's street family is a group of homeless adults, some of whom remind her that the streets are dangerous for a young girl. At any mention of social services, Charlene threatens to run away from the safety of her street family; from Charlene's perspective, social services failed to protect her when she was living at home and being abused. Whilst Charlene, now thirteen, describes how some of her street family look out for her, protect her and share what little they have with her, others encourage her to take heroin and one homeless adult has become Charlene's boyfriend.

1.1 Detached Children and Young People in the UK

Charlene is one of many children and young people under the age of sixteen in the UK who have become detached from parents and carers and spends time on the streets. The term 'detached' was coined by Stein and others[1] and further developed by Smeaton[2]. It describes children and young people who are away from home or care for lengthy periods of time; who live outside of key societal institutions, such as the family, education and other statutory services; who do not receive any formal sources of support; and are self-reliant and/or dependent upon informal support networks[3].

Children become detached in a number of ways:

- Some run away from home or care.
- Others are thrown out of home by parents or carers.
- Others simply stay away or find themselves drifting away from their home and carers.
- Some become detached when they are abandoned by parents who leave the child or young person.

In American literature, young people in some of these situations are often referred to as 'street youth'. However, this term excludes some of those children and young people who become detached. For example, whilst many detached children and young people live on the streets and/or are street-involved[4], others are detached but do not spend time on the streets, but are equally at risk behind closed doors.

Detached children and young people may fall into a sub category of young runaways[5] but their experiences, diverse in many ways, reveal a specific set of issues and circumstances that lead them to be particularly vulnerable and marginalised.

1.2 Policy Developments Linked to Detached Children and Young People

In the past twenty years there have been a number of key policy developments relating to children, some with a specific focus on protecting more vulnerable children, and other policy developments aimed at reaching young runaways. All of the key policy developments described below either address issues relating to detached children and young people or outline measures to protect and meet the needs of children. Despite these policy developments, too many children and young people's needs are not met and the children and young people who participated in this research, and their families, have often not benefited from preventative and/or responsive

measures to protect them and meet their needs.

The 1989 United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK Government, contains a number of articles related to the protection and rights of all children. A number of these articles are of relevance to detached children and young people. For example Article 27 states that:

Parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. (United Nations, 1989.)[6]

In England and Wales, The Children Act 1989, alongside outlining other measures relating to children and their carers, provides a legal framework for the provision of support from local authorities and legislates to protect children who are or are at risk of suffering significant harm. Section 51 provides a legal framework for refuge to be provided for children who run away. The Children's (Scotland) Act 1995 and The Children's (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 cover similar ground as The Children Act 1989.

In 1999 the Government's Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) scheme began to be implemented in England focusing upon:

> "joined up services of health, childcare and play, early education and parental support to families with a child under the age of four"
> (Melhuish & Hall, 2007; 11.)[7]

Attention was also given to ensuring the inclusion of parents, avoidance of stigma, lasting support for older children, cultural appropriateness and sensitivity to particular needs[8]. Other aspects of SSLPs included outreach for hard-to-reach families[9]. The National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) was commissioned in 2001 and evaluation findings revealed that SSLPs were not having the desired impact upon children and their families. Drawing up these finding and those from another research project[10], it was announced in 2005 that SSLPs were to be changed into Children's Centres and the new Sure Start Children's Centres were transferred into local authority control.

In 2001, following the publication of *Still Running* (Safe on the Street Research Team, 1999)[11], the Social Exclusion Unit produced a report[12] highlighting findings from existing research addressing running away amongst children under sixteen. This was followed by a major consultation exercise and then a second publication[13] in 2002 offering guidance for establishing policy and practice to meet the needs of young runaways. Also in 2002, guidance[14] was

1   Stein M Rees G & Frost N (1994) *Running the Risk: Young People on the Streets of Britain Today* London: The Children's Society.
2   Smeaton E (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Young Runaways* London: The Children's Society.
3   Ibid.
4   The term 'street-involved' refers to circumstances where a child or young person may sleep in the homes of others but spends a significant amount of their time on the streets where they find, for example, their sources of support and survival.
5   The term 'running away' is used in the UK to describe children and young people under the age of sixteen who have left home, stay away without parental/carer permission or have been forced to leave. The term is generally used to describe incidents where the child or young person is away for at least one night. Running away amongst the under-sixteen population is a diverse experience and there are many differences and needs amongst the many sub-groups of children and young people who experience running away from home or care.
6   United Nations (1989) *The Convention on the Rights of the Child* http://www.unicef.org
7   Melhuish E & Hall D 'The Policy Background to Sure Start' in Belsky J Barnes J & Helhuish E ed (2007) *The National Evaluation of Sure Start* Bristol: The Policy Press
8   Ibid
9   Ibid
10 Sylva K Melhuish E Sammons P Siraj-Blatchford I & Taggart B (2004) *Effective Pre-school Provision* London: Institution of Education.
11 Safe on the Streets Research Team (1999) *Still Running: Children on the Streets in the UK* London: The Children's Society. This research report identified the prevalence of running away in the UK and children and young people's experiences prior to running away and whilst they were away from home or care.
12 Social Exclusion Unit (2001) *Consultation on Young Runaways: Background Paper by the Social Exclusion Unit* London: Cabinet Office.
13 Social Exclusion Unit (2002) *Young Runaways: Report by the Social Exclusion Unit* London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
14 Department of Health (2002) *Children Missing from Home Care and from Home: A Guide to Good Practice* London: Department of Health.

produced by the Department of Health (DoH) relating to children who go missing from home and care. Despite local authorities having a statutory duty to implement guidance, facing prosecution if they fail to do so, there is some diversity in how this guidance has been implemented. Whilst some local authorities and police constabularies have put into practice a number of measures outlined in the guidance documents, there are geographical areas where there are no or very limited options for support of children and young people who are unable to remain in home or in care. The term 'postcode lottery' has been used to describe this diversity of services available to children and young people.

In 2003, in England[15], the Government published the Green Paper *Every Child Matters*[16] alongside the formal response to the report[17] into the death of Victoria Climbie. In 2004 the Government published *Every Child Matters: The Next Steps*[18], passed The Children Act 2004 and launched *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*.

Care Matters, the Government's White Paper setting out how it would improve outcomes for young people in the care system, was published in 2007 and the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 enshrined many of those commitments in statute. The year 2008 also witnessed the launch of the Department of Children, School and Families' (DCSF) *Young Runaways Action Plan* which includes the forthcoming review of missing from home or care guidance, a review of emergency accommodation and the introduction of a national indicator that monitors local authorities' performance relating to children who go missing from home or from care. The indicator (NI71) was introduced in April 2009, and is designed to:

> "raise local area awareness to create a focus on the provision of services to this vulnerable group of young people. The indicator will support joint working between the police and Children's Services and other relevant bodies, to support local strategic partnerships and children's trusts in establishing the scale of running away in their local area and to put services in place to respond accordingly and effectively. It is envisaged that with the improvements in local service provision that this indicator will bring that in future spending reviews, it may be possible to have a indicator based on a more robust data source, relating to levels of running or repeat running, or on specific outcomes for runaway or missing children." (DCSF, 2009.)[19]

Whilst a local authority does not have to choose this performance indicator as one of the thirty-five upon which their performance is measured, all local authorities have to implement a self-assessment tool to measure their performance in relation to how:

- information about running away is gathered;
- local needs analysis, based upon gathered information, is in place;
- local protocols are in place to meet the needs of runaways;

- protocols for responding to urgent/out of hours referrals from police and other agencies are in place and procedures are set in place to support these protocols;
- prevention and early intervention protocols are in place.

If a local authority does not choose NI71 Performance Indicator as one of thirty-five to be measured upon, the DCSF can still offer support, helping the authority to improve their performance. This can range from light touch advice and guidance to more significant interventions should the self-assessment reveal particularly low performance and real cause for concern.

After the death of Baby P, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, the Rt Hon Ed Balls MP, commissioned Lord Laming to produce a report[20] outlining progress of the implementation of effective arrangements for safeguarding children. Also in 2009, the House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee produced a report[21] addressing Looked-After Children.

1.3 Practice with Detached Children and Young People

By the very nature of being detached, children and young people who experience being away from home or care for long periods of time often do not seek support from statutory and voluntary projects working with children and young people, preferring to receive support from informal support networks. However some detached children and young people have received support from projects working with children and young people, both prior to becoming detached, whilst detached and after the period of being detached has ended. For example, projects with a specific remit to work with children and young people who run away may work with a child or young person who is detached. Other projects such as those working with sexual exploitation issues and substance misuse may also work with children and young people who are detached. Some children and young people who become detached may be in local authority care or involved with social services in other ways prior to becoming detached or social services may become involved as a consequence of being detached. However, many children and young people who become detached have not received any support from statutory or voluntary agencies.

1.4 Research Addressing Detached Children and Young People

Previous research addressing running away amongst the under-sixteen population has identified the existence of detached children and young people in the UK. In 1994 Stein and others identified children and young people who had become completely detached from legitimate support after running way or being forced to leave[22]. *Still Running* (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999)[23] identified

15 Equivalent material for Wales can be found in: Welsh Assembly (2004) *Children and Young People: Rights to Action*.
16 Great Britain Treasury (2003) *Every Child Matters* Cm; 5860 London: The Stationery Office.
17 Laming H (2003) *The Victoria Climbie Inquiry: Report of an Inquiry by Lord Laming* Cm; 5730 London: The Stationery Office.
18 Great Britain Parliament House of Commons (2004) *Every Child Matters: Next Steps: Oral Evidence/Education and Skills Committee*. House of Commons; 658 London: The Stationery Office.
19 DCSF description of NI 71: Children Missing from Home or Care (2009)
20 Lord Laming (2009) *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report* London: The Stationery Office.
21 Children, Schools and Family Committee (2009) *Looked-after Children* London: The Stationery Office.
22 Stein M Rees G & Frost N (1994) *Running the Risk: Young People on the Streets of Britain Today* London: The Children's Society.
23 Safe on the Streets Research Team (1999) *Still Running: Children on the Street in the UK* London: The Children's Society.

small numbers of children and young people who had become detached from family or substitute care for at least six months. Research focusing exclusively on the experiences of these children and young people was carried out in 2005[24] as there was recognition that these children and young people are particularly vulnerable and marginalised and that their needs are predominantly not met by practical interventions in the UK. As this research was the first study to focus upon detached children and young people, it is worth describing this research and highlighting a few of its findings:

- Twenty-three children and young people[25] participated in the research across six urban areas of England. The research sample consisted of children and young people who had been away from home or care for four weeks or more aged fifteen and under.

- *Living on the Edge* highlighted how becoming detached can happen with no prior history of running away or being away thrown out of home and can be triggered by a culmination of abuse, family problems and conflict that has taken place over a period of time or by a particular event or incident.

- Once detached, there was considerable diversity in children and young people's experiences relating to for example, length of detachment, coping mechanisms and survival strategies and sources of support.

- *Living on the Edge* also shed light on detached children and young people's perception of risk, both prior to becoming detached and once away from home, and their perceptions of early maturity that sometimes raised concerns of children and young people's vulnerability to exploitation.

1.5 Background to Railway Children's Research with Detached Children and Young People on the Streets in the UK

As an organisation with a history of working with children on the streets in a number of locations across the world, Railway Children recognises that, as in other countries in the world, there are children and young people in the UK who are detached from parents or carers for long periods of time who spend time alone on the streets under the age of sixteen. These children and young people live outside of key societal institutions and are self-reliant and/or dependent upon informal support networks. They have very few options for legitimate support, often resort to a number of dangerous survival strategies and are at risk from others wishing to harm or exploit them. This group of children and young people, as previously identified, are therefore extremely marginalised and vulnerable and face social exclusion as children and into adulthood.

At present, policy and practice responses generally do not incorporate the needs of these children and young people and there is an identified need to provide an evidence-base that highlights their experiences and identifies measures to respond to their needs.

To achieve this, Railway Children made a strategic decision to invest in qualitative research that:

- captures the experiences of children and young people in the UK who become detached from parents and carers, are street involved and/or experience living on the streets for four weeks or more;

- presents an up-to-date and realistic perspective of what it means to be detached and on the streets/street involved in the UK;

- provides a range of policy and practice recommendations to meet the needs of this group of children and young people.

1.6 Characteristics of Children and Young People Who Participated in the Research

One hundred and three children and young people participated in the research. Of these, fifty-three were female and fifty were male.

All who participated in the research experienced being detached under the age of sixteen. Some of the children and young people were in these circumstances at the time of participating in the research. Some young people were over the age of sixteen at the time of participation and offered a retrospective perspective of being detached. This was important as it enabled consideration of the longer term impacts of being detached and on the streets under the age of sixteen.

Whilst the majority of children and young people were White British, children and young people from other ethnic backgrounds also participated in the research:

Ethnic Background	Number
Bangladeshi	1
Black Caribbean	4
Hungarian	1
Indian	1
Romanian Roma	1
White British	89
White British/Black Caribbean	6

Seven of the young people described themselves as gay and one as bisexual.

Nine of the children and young people self-identified as dyslexic. One has an undiagnosed learning difficulty. Three young people have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Another has Asperger's Syndrome and one young person has a bi-polar disorder.

24 Smeaton E (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Young Runaways* London: The Children's Society.
25 The majority of children and young people were White British except from four children and young people who defined themselves as White British/South Asian, Bangladeshi, Indian Hindi and Black-Caribbean.

1.7 Structure of the Report

The following section outlines the research methodology. The rest of the report moves on to present findings. This research generated a large amount of interesting and valuable data[26] and it is not possible to include all of the findings from the research in this report. To manage the amount of data and produce a coherent report, the report has been organised into a number of overarching themes presented as sections addressing:

- family and home
- violence
- the role of the streets
- experiences of agencies
- behaviours, identities and states of mind

Each of these related themed sections begins with an individual child or young person's story that illustrates some of the content of the section. Children and young people's words and stories are used extensively throughout the report to enable their voices to be heard and to present their experiences as perceived by them.

There is a lot of cross-over in these overarching themes both in the lives of detached children and young people and in this report; there is no neat segmenting of children and young people's lives into discrete categories. For example violence can be experienced in the home and act as trigger for a child or young person becoming detached. It can also be experienced once the child or young person has become detached and is on the streets; the same child can be a victim, a witness and perpetrator of violence and violence can become a behaviour that leads to a child or young person's involvement with an agency. There are some behaviours, identities and states of mind that are common in the majority of detached children and young people's lives and are both implicitly and explicitly relevant to all of the overarching themes in the report. Each section varies in length, thereby representing the prevalence and impact upon children and young people's lives. For example, the section addressing family and home is particularly long as experiences relating to home life played a significant part in children and young people's experiences and the section outlining children and young people's experiences of agencies is relatively short as their experiences of agencies were limited.

A short summary is offered at the end of each of the sections addressing research findings.

The report ends with concluding comments and recommendations stemming from the research.

Explanation of Indication of Prevalence amongst this Particular Sample of Children and Young People
This research is a qualitative research study and the sample, collected in a number of locations across the UK, represents an opportunity sample accessed through, as mentioned in more depth in the following section, contact with agencies, snowballing[27] and spending time in locations frequented by detached children and young people. This sample cannot therefore be assumed to be representative of the numbers of children and young people on the streets across the UK. Because these children and young people are largely not attending school, are avoiding contact with agencies or are not known to agencies and may live nomadic existences, it is not possible, by any known means, to gain a representative sample of the children and young people who are detached and on the streets. What this research provides is insight into the lives of detached children and young people on the streets in the UK and provides indication of the prevalence of certain characteristics and experiences in this particular sample of children and young people.

Use of the Terms Relating to Children and Young People
The term 'children and young people' is used to describe those who participated in the research. 'Young people' is used on its own when describing those aged sixteen and over; for example, when describing the services young people accessed once they became sixteen. Whilst those under the age of sixteen are legally children, it is common to refer to older children as young people and this is how many older children refer to themselves and others.

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26 Other findings from the research will be disseminated in other forms.
27 'Snowballing' refers to asking research participants to identify others who fit the sample criteria.

2. Methodology

Lana's perceptions of participating in the research

"Before I got here and I didn't know what it was going to be like, I was a bit shaky; I get a bit shaky sometimes but I don't show it. Do you know what I mean? When I came into the room (where the interview took place) it was like 'what am I going to say?' but then we started talking and it felt good and I feel a lot better now. … It was good, really good; especially doing it in private with no-one else here."

The methodological approach to this research was based upon previous experience of carrying out research with detached children and young people and building upon approaches outlined in research literature. To achieve in-depth understanding and rich data relating to detached children and young people's lives, an approach was constructed that was, simply expressed, an ethnographic approach based upon 'hanging out' with children and young people in their spaces and allowing them to tell their story.

2.1 Data Collection

Throughout this section of the report, the term 'interviews' has been used to describe the interaction that took place between the child or young person and the researcher[28]. In all cases, some of this interaction took the form of semi-structured interviews that were presented by the researcher in an informal manner as 'conversation' whilst focusing upon specific lines of enquiry. However, as no two interviews were the same, there was flexibility within the interview for a child or young person to discuss issues and experiences that were unique or important to them. In some cases[29] second interviews were carried out with children and young people. A second interview was also significant as it offered the opportunity to meet with the research participant after establishing the relationship and its purpose was to:

- enable the research participant to reflect and offer further information;
- enable checking out of hypotheses, hunches and any uncertainties that may have arisen from listening to the first interview;
- build upon questions asked in the first interview.

Sometimes this second interview was prearranged, other times it took place when the child or young person and researcher saw each other again. A few children and young people requested to meet with the researcher again as they wanted to share more of their experiences.

With children and young people's permission, a digital recorder was used to record interviews to enable the researcher to fully concentrate on the child or young person and what they were saying. Whilst none of the children and young people who participated in the research refused permission to use the recording equipment, it was apparent that a few children and young people had some unease about being recorded[30]. In these instances, the digital recorder was not used and the researcher took notes and wrote them up as soon as possible after the interview to ensure as much information as possible was captured.

A narrative approach to interviewing was included that placed the research participant as storyteller and the researcher as listener[31]. Therefore, research participants told stories about their lives and it is through these stories that we understand their experiences. This approach was linked with a biographical-interpretative method that assumes a gestalt – a whole that is more than the sum of any parts – that informs a person's life and, therefore, it was the researcher's responsibility to maintain the intactness of this and not to destroy this whole through following their own research concerns[32].

As confirmed with previous research with vulnerable groups of children and young people, the first few minutes of an interview were often crucially important in establishing the nature and tone of the interview as often both explicit and implicit negotiation takes place. The initial setting and the behaviour of the researcher is of even further importance when the research participant is being asked to tell their 'story'[33] so emphasis must be given to setting broad boundaries within which the research participant feels free to talk in their own terms. It can be particularly difficult to elicit stories from those who feel that their life is not of importance or interest and some children and young people did not possess significant story-telling abilities. Therefore it was particularly important to phrase questions so that there were both specific and drew out stories from research participants. The manner and responses of the researcher was very important, as was the need for the researcher to give indications of acceptance and refrain, at all costs, from any judgemental reactions. As noted by Holloway and Jefferson[34], it was important to consider that research participants:

- may not hear questions through the same meaning-frame as the interviewer;
- invest in particular positions in discourses to protect their own vulnerabilities;
- do not always know why they experience or feel things in the way that they do;
- may be motivated, often unconsciously, to disguise the meaning of some of their meanings and actions;
- do not feel the need to conform to the meaning-frame of the interviewer and to recognise that meaning can both be shared and unique.

Children and young people not only participated in interviews but showed the researcher their local area – where they slept, for example – and introduced her to their friends and other people in their lives.

As well as recording interviews, the researcher also kept field notes which were written as soon as possible after spending time with a child or young person. A series of reflections were also written after the researcher had completed work in a particular location.

Participant observation was also a component of the methodology as there are a number of similarities between interviewing and participation observation:

- Both require acknowledgement of context and of the role of the researcher.
- Both require building rapport.
- Both require building relationships.
- Both can be controlled, to some degree, by the researcher's presentation of the self.

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28 The researcher, who designed the methodology for the research, carried out all fieldwork with children and young people, all first level analysis and some second level analysis, is also the author of this report.
29 It would have been ideal to have carried out second interviews with all children and young people but it became apparent through the pilot period of the fieldwork that this was not always necessary and not always possible when working with particularly chaotic children and young people.
30 For example, one young person had a stutter which intensified with use of the digital recorder so a decision was made not to use the digital recorder.
31 In many ways, the most interesting interviews were those where the interviewer said very little and the research participant told their story with very little prompting.
32 Rosenthal G (1990) *'The Structure and "Gestalt" of Autobiographies and its Methodological Consequences'* Unpublished Conference Paper presented to Twelfth World Congress of Sociology: Madrid.
33 The term 'story' is used to describe children and young people's account of their life.
34 Holloway W and Jefferson T (2004) *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: Free Association, Narrative and the Interview Method* London: Sage.

2.2 Accessing Children and Young People

Children and young people became involved in the research through different means:

- Many children and young people were accessed on the streets in a range of locations such as places where food was supplied to the homeless or where children and young people were likely to be.
- Time was spent with children and young people in, for example, cafes, parks, train stations, on the streets, drop-in centres and soup kitchens.
- Some children and young people were accessed through voluntary sector projects[35] and one young person was accessed through a statutory project.
- Interviews were also carried out with young people in a young offender's institute (YOI).

In some areas the researcher, both on the streets and based at a particular location, was approached by children and young people who heard that she was carrying out interviews with children and young people who were detached.

Sometimes a child or young person contacted the researcher after their interviews to inform her that a friend or relation of theirs would also like to participate in the research.

To support the participation of children and young people whose views and experiences are rarely sought and gain important information about children and young people, it was necessary to work in flexible ways that enabled the child or young person to feel comfortable. Whilst some interviews were carried out in a appropriate setting where the child or young person and researcher could carry out the interview with a degree of privacy, others were carried out in a range of settings that were not always ideal in some respects but enabled children and young people to participate in the research. For example, interviews took place in a tiny storage room, sat upon piles of clothing, which was the only private space in a busy drop-in centre for the homeless, where staff walked into without knocking and other children and young people banged on the door, wanting to know when it was their turn to be interviewed. Interviews took place in a shop doorway on a freezing winter's night; in many a McDonald's all over the UK with music blaring and others interrupting to find out what was going on; in train stations; on park benches; in the back of soup van; sat cross legged on the streets, resting against a wall; on the steps of a famous monument. Sometimes working in these locations had consequences for the researcher who found herself on the receiving end of insults and abusive actions from others on the streets.

The majority of children and young people were happy to work with the researcher on a one-to-one basis but there were instances when interviews were carried out in the presence of other people. For example, three young girls found on the streets in London who were initially unsure about participating in the research because of their age

and particular circumstances agreed to carry out an interview if they could all be interviewed together[36]. Another young person's adult boyfriend was reluctant for the interview to take place[37] and showed the researcher some hostility. The interview with this young person took place within her boyfriend's sight and the researcher was very aware that this situation had to be handled carefully, made a decision not to enquire about recording the interview and accepted that the interview was likely to be very short. One interview was carried out with an interpreter as the young person's first language was not English and her preference was to be interviewed in her first language. The young person's older brother did not wish his sister to be interviewed unsupervised so it was agreed that the young person, the interpreter and the researcher would sit at one table and that he, her brother, would sit at the next table. Towards the end of the interview, the young person's brother had made his way into the interview and was also inputting into the interview. Two other members of the young person's extended family also became part of the interview. Whilst enough time was given to the young person herself, the inclusion of other family members did provide some insightful and important information.

2.3 The Role of the Researcher

The nature of the research required the researcher to effectively manage being on the margins. There are a number of different theories that exist about outsiders and insiders in social research. For example, that insiders are needed to carry out research with certain groups and, conversely, that when an insider carries out research with similar groups, it is likely that objectivity will be lost. In reality, this is not always the case but can represent:

> "elements in a moral rhetoric that claims exclusive research legitimacy for a particular group."
> (Styles, 1979;134.) [38]

To ensure that an accurate understanding is gained, it is appropriate for the researcher to have some knowledge of the groups being researched and this knowledge may be built in a variety of ways. Where there is some 'inside' knowledge, it is important to guard against over-rapport. Therefore, to guard against the perils of being both an insider and an outsider, the researcher adopted a marginal position, as this enables creative insight. In practice, the researcher often found herself socially:

> "poised between stranger and friend."
> (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; 97) [39]

This positioning had a number of benefits, both in gaining valuable information about detached children and young people's lives but also for children and young people themselves as many stated, both during interviews and at points after participation in the research process, that it had helped them to talk with the researcher about their lives.

35 These projects included those working with children and young people involved in sexual exploitation, supported housing projects, drop-in centres and hostels.
36 Even though this set of interviews were not carried out entirely satisfactorily from a research perspective, they had important consequences as two of the three young people were siblings and after the interview, after the researcher had said goodbye, the younger sibling told the older sibling that she would like to return home. The older sibling contacted the researcher to say that her sister wanted to go home and asked if the researcher could facilitate a return home. The youngest sibling is now once again living at home and the older sibling, who is now sixteen, has regular contact with her parent and spends time visiting the family home.
37 Given the age difference between the young person and him, this was not surprising.
38 Styles J (1979) 'Insider/Outsider: Researching Gay Baths' in *Urban Life* 8 2 pg132-152.
39 Hammersley M & Atkinson P (1995) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* Routledge: London

This position of marginality also has its complications that require addressing: those of ambiguity and uncertainty of a social position on the edge and of operating in a way that is both ethically acceptable and meets the needs of the research. It is also important to retain some social and intellectual distance[40] for it is in this space that enables the researcher to be analytical and produce a piece of research, rather than an account of actions, experiences and views.

Undoubtedly situations arose when the researcher engaged in social interaction for reasons outside of those of research and strategic interests, for example, when offering comfort to a research participant who becomes upset during a research interview. Whilst this is acceptable and important, the researcher must also never:

> "surrender oneself entirely to the setting or the moment. In principle, one should be constantly on the alert, with more than half an eye on the research possibilities that can be seen or engineered from any and every social situation."
> (Ibid, 99.) [41]

2.4 Analysis

A grounded theory approach[42] was adopted to generate small-scale theories that are fully grounded in data, are legitimate and represent what is taking place in the 'real' world. The literature review took place throughout the research process; a number of theories from the research literature were used to identify themes and issues to be explored throughout the data collection process, and also throughout analysis to respond to emerging patterns.

Analysis was undertaken in two stages. The first was not a distinct stage of the research but took place alongside fieldwork, as fitting with grounded theory where future data collection is strategically guided by emergent theory. This interaction between data collection and data analysis required reflexivity which was used to identify and check any potential initial misreading or to strengthen conviction. It is important to recognise that all cannot be known about a person and their experiences from participation in one or two research interviews and spending time with research participants. Therefore to concentrate upon the whole of what is known about the research participation, it was important to write the 'story' of the child or young person in detail which amassed the whole with its socio-cultural context and meaning. The field notes and reflections provided additional descriptive detail and context. The writing up of interviews, field notes and reflections was done in such a way as to form a first level of analysis. The second stage of the analysis was carried out using the software package Atlas.ti to identify themes and issues and make connections and comparisons across the body of data.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

A great deal of consideration was giving to the ethical aspects of this research. Whilst information sheets were produced for both children and young people and professionals, it is recognised that, in some circumstances, it is not always appropriate to give a child or young person a written handout[43]. Whether or not a child or young person had received an information sheet, the purpose of the research was explained verbally to every child or young person who participated in the research alongside the opportunity to ask questions. This was in order to obtain informed consent.

Ending an Interview and the Option to Refrain from Answering a Question
Children and young people were informed that they could stop an interview at any point either temporarily or permanently. No interviews were terminated prematurely by children and young people. In two cases the researcher made a decision to end the interview prior to completion because of concerns about the welfare of the child or young person. It was also explained to each child and young person that if a question was asked about anything that the child or young person did not want to discuss, they could tell the researcher that they did not want to talk about that particular issue or experience and this would be respected. Children and young people were largely very open and willing to share their experiences but on two occasions, young people said they did not want to discuss a particular issue[44].

Confidentiality
A high threshold of confidentiality was offered to children and young people who participated in research interviews as valuable and important information may not have been disclosed if children and young people feared a breach of confidentiality. Confidentiality was offered apart from where there were exceptional circumstances and a child or young person, or someone else they identified, were in extreme and immediate danger[45]. This refers to situations where:

- ■ life is at risk
- ■ a person is in need of hospitalisation
- ■ a young person discloses historical abuse and, as part of this disclosure, it is identified that other children and young people are or may be presently being abused.

In eleven cases, information was presented by the child or young person that did raise some concerns. In all cases, the researcher was able to negotiate with the child or young person so that permission was given for certain information to be passed on to the appropriate professional or organisation.

Anonymity
Children and young people were offered anonymity and, in some cases, it was agreed between the researcher and the child or young person that certain information would not be presented in any research products because to do

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40 Ibid
41 Ibid
42 Glaser B & Strauss A (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* Chicago: Aldine.
43 Many detached children and young people have low literacy levels and the formal nature of a written information sheet could act as a disincentive to some children and young people to participate in the research.
44 One young person did not want to discuss the activities he was involved in with his gang and another did not want to discuss what crimes he had committed.
45 This model of confidentiality has been used previously by Pearce J Williams M & Galvin C (2002) *It's Someone Taking a Part of You: A Study of Young Woman and Sexual Exploitation* London: National Children's Bureau and by Smeaton E (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Young Runaways* London: The Children's Society.

so would identify them or another person and place them in danger.

Debriefing
At the end of the interview, the researcher spent time with each child and young person to check how they were feeling and discuss any issues that may have been identified during the interview. In some cases the child or young person requested that the digital recorder be switched on again as there were some more things they would like to say as part of their interview.

Withdrawing from the Research
Children and young people were given a period of four weeks after the interview had taken place[46] to withdraw their interview from the research. None of the children or young people did so.

Ensuring the Researcher's Safety and Well-being
Consideration was also given to the safety and well-being of the researcher who carried out the fieldwork with children and young people. Whilst out on fieldwork, a support system was set in place for the researcher to ensure that her location was known at all times and a policy was designed that outlined a protocol to follow if various situations arose. The researcher also received some external supervision to ensure she was able to discuss anything that impacted upon her through undertaking fieldwork and analysis.

46   Where more than one interview was carried out with a child or young person, the four week period began after the last research contact with the child or young person.

3. Family and Home Life

Casey

Casey spent the first year of her life in a homeless hostel with her parents and older sister and brother. Casey's mum had an affair with another man who was also living in the hostel and Casey's father left. Casey and her family moved into a council house with Casey's stepfather. Casey's mother and stepfather misused alcohol and Casey's stepfather was violent to the whole family. Eventually Casey's stepfather left her mother and she started using heroin and crack.

Casey's mother neglected Casey and her siblings; often there was no food in the house. Casey and her younger half brother took on the role of carers, trying to look after their siblings and mother. Sometimes Casey and her little brother were sent shoplifting for food. Other children and young people presumed that it was 'dead good' to live in Casey's house as Casey was allowed to do what she wanted. Casey would have preferred her mother to tell her when to come in and to have had tea on the table at particular times, for which Casey had to be home. Casey did not take advantage of the lack of rules and boundaries in her family home and tried to lead a normal life despite her mother and her friends smoking crack in the home.

When Casey was twelve, she started to live with her father. He was a heavy cannabis user and found it difficult to care full time for a child; sometimes Casey was locked in her room for the whole day. Casey stayed with her mum two nights a week and when she was thirteen, realised that her mother was selling sex. Casey and her older sister were sexually abused by some of the men that paid for sex from Casey's mother. Casey's mum was not always aware that the men she brought back to the house were abusing her daughters but, at other times, she allowed them to do so for money.

When Casey was fourteen she ran away from home for the first time because she was fed up of being locked up in her room all day. She stayed with her stepfather for a few weeks and then returned to live with her father. Casey and her father started to have physical fights and Casey's father threw Casey out. At this point Casey left school permanently. Casey stayed with different friends and with her cousin who had her two children taken into local authority care. By the time Casey was fifteen, she was committing violent street crimes with her cousin.

For nearly three years Casey had little contact with her mother. However, now sixteen, Casey moved in with her mother and her mother's new husband as she had nowhere else to live. Her mother's husband was caught filming Casey in her bedroom and Casey's boyfriend beat him up and is serving a prison service for aggravated assault. Casey's mother and her husband separated and both moved out of the house. Casey is squatting in the house which is in the process of being repossessed and has no heat or electricity. She has no source of income. Sometimes her mother comes round to the house when she wants money. Casey's mother is still selling sex and using heroin and crack. She will not go to the job centre to confirm that she no longer lives with Casey and Casey cannot claim any benefit. Casey is worried about her mother and fears that she will soon end up dead. Her mother has been beaten up by punters, has overdosed a number of times and has had a collapsed lung. Casey phones her mother every day and would like to have a relationship with her but her mother does not respond to this.

Casey spends a lot of time alone. She says she does not have any friends and finds it hard to trust people. She is also depressed and self-harms. Casey would like to spend time with other members of her family but only has contact with her younger brother who she sees daily. Casey's younger brother lives with his father, Casey's stepfather, and she goes round to see him and keep an eye on him as she is very close to her younger brother and knows that his father is violent towards him.

3.1 Complexities of Family Life

The families of the children and young people who participated in the research are particularly complex. Many of the children and young people do not know their parents. A high proportion of the children and young people's parents have issues with which they do not receive support, cause stress and prevent them forming loving and positive relationships with their children. Some issues are intergenerational and embedded in family relationships and patterns. Some children and young people described how their own parents had unhappy childhoods. Experiences within the family are often reinforced by witnessing similar patterns and issues amongst others that children and young people know and, for many, there is a sense of acceptance, of 'this is how it is', and a process of normalisation that prevents both adults and children from seeking support to address their own issues and problems and those of other family members.

Many of the children and young people have been forced to deal with a range of difficult events and circumstances within their family and were left to navigate their way through them with no support to understand the behaviour of the adults around them and their own emotions. They experienced, for example, the death of a parent, abandonment by a parent, physical harm and other forms of maltreatment. Many had parents who were simply not able to show them love and care because of their own experiences of being parented and were lost in a world of substance misuse, domestic violence and mental health illness, leaving no room to meeting children's needs. Children and young people also witnessed those they cared deeply about being harmed and some were forced, either by others or by their own sense of responsibility, to act as a carer.

3.2 Family Form and Relationships with Parents and Carers

A fifth of the 103 children and young people's biological parents remained living together at the time that the child or young person participated in the research. Some of these were described as being unhappy and others of not really being together despite living together and having a relationship of sorts:

> Trixie did not realise for a long time that her father was gay; she was thirteen when this became apparent after being introduced to his long-term boyfriend. There has never been any explicit statement from her father or anyone else that he is gay. Trixie's father's long-term partner lives abroad and Trixie's father stays with him when he is in the UK, returning to the family home, where Trixie's mother lives, once his partner leaves. Her father has always expected Trixie's mother to do everything for him and this is what she does. Trixie thinks that her mother is unhappy and lonely and, as a result, has recently become obese.

A third of the children and young people were born to lone mothers and just under a further third of children and young people experienced living in lone parent families after relationships ended between biological parents and mothers and stepfathers. Whilst the majority of children and young people remained living with their mothers, some lived with fathers in single parent households. Some children and young people have experienced life in a number of different family forms and, as discussed later, spent time living with other family members.

Relationships with Fathers
Fathers play a crucial role in raising their children. Where fathers are involved, children's education is strongly correlated with more positive outcomes[47] and children are more likely to have higher levels of self-esteem, better peer relationships and lower rates of criminality and substance misuse[48]. Just under a fifth of the children and young people who participated in the research do not know their biological fathers, having never met them. A further fifth have grown up without fathers, some because their fathers died when they were young and more because contact with their father ceased after their parent's separated. As mentioned previously, some children and young people remained living with their father after their parents separated. In one case, the young person chose to live with her father because:

> *"Even though my dad used to get arrested sometimes, he was always there for me. He always helped me and that and, no matter what my mum did, he always made me feel like I was safe and that. … I was always with my dad because I was scared of my mum … 'cos she used to get really violent sometimes when she was drunk."*

Some children and young people did not know the identity of their father and a few grew up believing their stepfather was their biological father. One young person was pleased when he found out that the man he thought was his father is, in fact, his stepfather:

> *"I've never liked him. … He didn't ever let me do what I wanted … and we argued all the time. … I just found out there, a couple of months ago, that he's my stepdad. … I was happy; I was happy, like."*

A few young people did not meet their fathers until they were adolescents. For two young people, this relationship came to an end after a few years:

> *"I'd never met me dad, as well, until I was thirteen. … Me ma came to see me one day and said 'I've met your dad and he wants to see you'. We saw each other for a few years and then he moved away and I haven't seen him since."*

Bethany began a relationship with her father when she was twelve which came to an end when he died two years later:

47 Goldman R (2005) *Fathers' Involvement in their Children's Education* London: National Family and Parenting Institute.
48 Flouri E (2005) *Fathering and Child Outcomes* Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

Bethany's mother met Bethany's father when she started working in the same office as him. Bethany's mother was thirty-five when she met Bethany's father who was seventy-one when he fathered Bethany. Bethany met her father for the first time when she was twelve:

"And he started to visit us like on a Saturday and stuff."

When Bethany was fourteen, her father's wife died and he moved into their family home:

"I liked it 'cos I was close to my father at the time."

Bethany only knew her father for a few years as he died from dementia when she was sixteen.

Finding out that the man they thought was their father was not their father could be very confusing and distressing and had, for example, consequences for a child's sense of identity or increased a child's isolation:

The circumstances of Jay's conception, birth and identity are complex. Jay's mother was involved with two men at the same time: the father of Jay's oldest half-brother, who is black, and a white man who was to become the father of Jay's youngest brother. The relationship with the father of Jay's oldest brother ended and Jay's mother told the other man, with whom she was still involved, that she was pregnant and that the baby was his, whilst not knowing the identity of the baby's father:

"*But when I was born, when I came out, I was a black child … so my mum didn't know what to do. But, as she explained to me, he (Jay's youngest brother's white father) was there at the time and the best thing she could come up with was that I had an illness and I was the colour because of the illness … and I grew up thinking I was white."*

Jay's younger brother is eleven months younger than her and, because of the time of year they were born, Jay and her younger brother were in the same class at school. Jay told others that they had the same parents:

"I'd be saying to everyone 'yeah, we've got the same mum and dad'. … I'm clearly black and he's clearly white but that's what I kept on saying (that they shared the same parents) because that's what I was told and that's what I believed: that I had this illness and that's why I was the colour I am."

The relationship ended between Jay's mother and the man Jay thought was her father. Jay and her younger brother spent weekends with him. When Jay was six, her life changed dramatically:

"I remember coming home from school one day with my little brother … and my mum was like 'yeah, we'll go to the pub' and I didn't think nothing of it 'cos it was where I met up with all of my

friends, you know? … We always went to the pub, all the time: after school, at the weekend; we had dinner at the pub. … Everyone knew us at the pub. ... And when we went to the pub on this particular day, everyone was like 'who's this black man that she's talking too' and he was like a proper black Jamaican in the Jamaican vibe. … And she went 'this is your dad'. … Me and my friend came in, and my friend thought the white man was my dad as well, and we came in and 'this is your dad'. … I just burst into tears and ran out and my friend ran out after me and we went to the park and I said 'I'm never going home again' … and my friend kept saying 'how is that your dad? How is that your dad?' and I was like 'I don't know'."

Finding out that her father wasn't her father, that someone else was her father, and that she was black and not white, become unbearable for Jay:

"I used to sit with my hands over my ears, not wanting to hear anymore, wishing it would just stop."

Joanna and her two sisters all had different fathers and, for the first few years of her life, she did not know the identity of her father. Joanna's best friend lived in the same street as her and Joanna went to her house most days and felt a part of their family. One day, when Joanna was eleven, she went to visit her friend as usual but her friend had gone out. Joanna's friend's father was there and he invited her into the house. He told her that he was her father. This completely astounded Joanna as she had known this man, his wife and daughters most of her life. She found this very confusing, did not know how to deal with it so never mentioned it. Joanna felt awkward when she was around this man who claimed to be her father so stopped going to her best friend's house and, eventually, they drifted apart. Around this point in her life, Joanna started experiencing what she now knows was depression.

Finding out that they had been lied to about the identity of their father sometime led children and young people to have problems with their mothers, when good relationships had previously existed, and to the child or young person becoming detached:

"I got a stepfather and I found out at the age of fifteen that he wasn't my real dad and things went pear shaped. … And the worst thing was me finding out from someone else, not my parents. They said they were going to tell me when I was sixteen when I was old enough to understand which, from their point of view I can understand. But finding out from someone else and my mum lying to me – I asked her and she lied – and she said that she did it to protect me. So I left home and was away for nine months. I went back when I was sixteen and then left again and got in with the wrong crowd … they were into drugs – heroin."

Some of the children and young people who had limited contact with fathers they did not live with have experienced unsatisfactory and damaging relationships with their fathers:

Aidan charted his relationship with his father:

"From two to ten (Aidan's age) it was nothing more than him giving my mother money, sort of thing. From ten to fourteen, I saw him about once a month … for a day and overnight, sort of thing. After that, as I started getting older, sort of thing, I started seeing him every two weeks. And then I started getting all these problems: getting in trouble at school, fighting and he just sort of drifted off."

Since this point, Aidan has tried to see his dad:

"All the time, I have to phone my dad. He never rings me to say 'do you wanna go here, do this' sort of thing. … He's got his own life, so …"

Liam's father raped Liam's mother and Liam was conceived. When he was fourteen, his biological father made contact with him:

"I got a phone call out of the blue … and for two or three weeks, things went well and we used to go down to the pub and that but then it all just died."

For over fourteen years, Liam's mother and biological father had no contact. At the point when Liam's biological father traced and started seeing him, Liam's mother and (step)dad's relationship was in a bad way:

"I found out later that my mum and dad were having a rocky patch and that my mum would go to my father and do things with him to get back at my stepdad."

Liam believed his biological father started spending time with Liam to get at Liam's mother in some way. When Liam's mother ended the affair with Liam's biological father to remain with Liam's stepfather, Liam's biological father broke all contact with Liam:

"He never gave me any explanations and hung up on me on the phone and never spoke to me again and I never knew until this year why he did it – just because my mum and dad were going through a rough patch and she went with him to get back at my stepdad and when he (Liam's biological father) couldn't get what he wanted (Liam's mum), he dropped me. … So I was sort of stuck in the middle."

Some of the children and young people described how much they loved their fathers:

"My dad was a nice guy. He was one of the most genuine people you could ever meet in your life. He was my world."

Others still loved or respected their fathers even though they disliked how they behaved, sometimes making excuses for their father's actions or absolving their fathers from responsibility or blame:

"I love my dad but he's a twat and a kid who hasn't grown up yet and just expects things to be done or happen … he needs to get a grip."

"My father's a lovely man. He just can't stop having kids. He's just had another one now. He's got about sixteen/seventeen kids all together. … Some of his kids are in care 'cos he picks alcoholics (to have his children with)."

"Really and truly, I just feel like beating him up (father who subjected young person to years of physical abuse). I am angry with him but the thing is, he's still my dad. And that's why he kept doing it because he knew I had that kind of respect for him. He knows I won't hit him because of the fact that he's still my dad. He just kept on using that against me."

"Even though he was violent to my mum, me and him get on well. I won't move in with him but we have a good relationship, much better than me and my mum."

Some of the children and young people were able to love their fathers even though they had abused them in horrific ways:

"I always loved him. I always used to forgive him, no matter what he did because it wasn't really his fault; he probably had a mental health illness or something. … He was violent and he abused me. … When he was sober he was the best person you could ever meet but when he was drunk, he had a real real evil side, so he did."

After ceasing to live with their fathers, some children and young people have, over time, managed to develop more positive relationships. Often these relationships are with fathers who do not take on a parental role[49] but have become a 'mate':

"We're getting on quite well at the moment. I'm spending quite a bit of time with him, helping him out with a bit of painting and decorating."

"When he kicked me out of the house, it made us closer. My dad's like my mate. We hang out together and chill out together. It's not like he's my dad now but my mate."

Some of the children and young people described how they neither loved their fathers nor respected them:

Troy's father did not show him affection or praise. His mother told him that his father didn't know how to show that he loved him. Troy has no love for his father but would like a father that he could love and respect:

49 This is true of many of the fathers in the research, not only those where more positive relationships have developed.

> *"Someone to look up to; someone who would come and watch you play football; someone who would tell you all about girls and that stuff."*

Troy also despised his father because of how he treated Troy's mother:

> *"He slept around. He had this pretty young girl (Troy's mum) who loved him and went shagging about, putting his dick anywhere that would have him. Mum knew and they would argue but he always ended it with his fists."*

Other children and young people described hating their fathers:

> *"And then I thought you shouldn't grow up hating your dad and that maybe I should get back in contact with him so I did and then it's just sort of fucked up in another way. … He's a fucking arsehole, I swear to God he is. I cannot stand that man. I don't know why he's so violent and such an arsehole. … I hate him; I fucking hate him. I still hate him now. I thought I could talk to him now but if he dropped dead tonight, I don't think I'd cry … I wouldn't care."*

> *"He's a drugged up, fucked up waste of space."*

Others have memories of a father from the past who they did not like but wonder what they would be like now:

> *"I don't miss my dad but I do wonder what it would he is like now and what it would be like to have a dad again. I talk to my old lady about it and she says we can try to find out where he is if I want but I'm not sure; what if he's still a wanker?"*

Relationships with Mothers
Many of the children and young people's mothers gave birth to their children when they were legally still children themselves. Some mothers had many children in quick succession from a young age and, as mentioned previously, were left to parent in very difficult circumstances:

Terry's mother had thirteen children from the age of sixteen. Three of her children died and her husband started drinking and became physically abusive towards her. After his death, she was left to raise ten children with no support and started to misuse alcohol. Her younger children were taken into care and her older children were left to fend for themselves.

Brian's parents had nine children. After Brian's father died, his mother was left alone to care for her family. One of her children has ADHD and there are at least four children with behavioural problems; two attend a school for children with special needs. Two of her children have been sexually abused and a third child was raped by two men as a young adult. Whilst some of her own children still live at home, Brian's mother also took

on the role of primary carer for her two grandsons, one who is mentally disabled. Brian and other siblings have been involved in the criminal justice system and have substance misuse issues.

Research concerning the impact of children growing up without mothers appears to be less prolific than the impact upon children of growing up without the presence of their father. However it is touched upon in some of the literature addressing children growing up alone after the death of their mother from AIDS/HIV[50] and the impact upon children when their mother is incarcerated in prison[51]. Children who grow up without a mother may be susceptible to emotional and behavioural impacts such as aggressive behaviour, low self-esteem, depression, problems with schooling and have an increased likelihood of taking on the role of carer. Some children and young people who participated in the research have never known their mother or grew up for a significant proportion of their life without contact with their mother. A small number of mothers left the family home:

> *"(She) just left and didn't want to talk to us. … And then she started wanting to get in contact with us but no way did I want to be in contact with her when she hadn't wanted to be in contact with me in the first place."*

Other young people have not seen their mothers from an early age after their mothers left to be with another man:

> *"Me mam left when I was three. I don't remember her much. There's some photos kicking about the house and she looks like me but I don't remember her. She ran off with this bloke. I don't know where she is now."*

> *"My mum ran off with the man from next door."*

Just under a tenth of the children and young people grew up without a mother for most of their lives because their mothers died when they were young; this is discussed in more detail toward the end of this section of the report. Two young people have not known their mothers for most of their lives for other reasons:

Horatio does not know the circumstances in which his mum became pregnant and does not know the identity of his father. When Horatio was a couple of months old, his mother decided he should be adopted. When Horatio was older, he decided that he wanted to meet his mother:

> *"I just says (to my social worker) that I wanted to talk to me ma. … She was married with four kids, the usual: married with four kids."*

Horatio met his mother once and found it:

> *"Weird. It was like 'who are you?' … She has four kids plus me, so five kids, but had to spend all her attention on the other four kids."*

50 For example in Black M (2000) *Growing Up Alone: HIV/AIDS a Global Emergency* Ireland: UNICEF.
51 For example, some of the findings of research addressing the impact upon children of their mother's incarceration is summarised in South African Human Rights Commission (2006) *Children in Prison: Briefing to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Correctional Services*. http://www.sahrc.org.za/sahrc_cms/downloads/children%20in%20Prison.doc

Horatio has never wished for his own family but would have liked to have more contact with his mum:

"But that's not possible now because she (Horatio's mother) passed away. … She died about two years ago. … She died from an overdose … an intentional overdose. … God knows why."

At first Kerry lived with both parents. From the little that she knows about her parents' relationship, she thinks it was not a happy one:

"From what I know, I'd say they weren't happy. He (father) beat her (mother)."

When Kerry was five months old, her father took her away from her mother; Kerry knows very little about the circumstances:

"But my daddy kidnapped me when I was five months … and brought me over here. He told me mummy that if she ever tried to look for me, he's just keep moving or he'd end up killing her. … I don't know how it happened. People tell me that she (Kerry's mother) didn't want me and me daddy always said that me mummy didn't want me. … All he told me was her name, and that she was a drug addict and didn't want me; he never told me anything else about her…. But now that I'm starting to get to know me mummy, I've asked her 'did you not want me?' and she says 'I did want you'. I've never met me mummy (since being five months old) and I've only just started to get knowing her. She's in X (name of the place she lives) still and we (Kerry and her support worker) found her about a month ago."

In some households with two parents, a few children and young people described how their mothers provided for the family in every way, recognising that they did their best to provide for them. In all of these households, the fathers or stepfathers were supposed to care for the children whilst their mother was at work but did not fulfil this role due to either their alcohol misuse or mental health issues and it fell upon children and young people to care for their siblings:

"My dad was supposed to look after us kids whilst mum was at work but he didn't 'cos he was usually drunk so I had to get the kids all ready for school, take them to school and give them their tea. It wasn't fair."

"From nine I was looking after me brother and sisters 'cos me dad had insomnia and couldn't sleep at night so he used to sleep in the day whilst my mum was out at work all day."

Some children and young people love their mother deeply:

"We do fight quite a lot but I love her to bits; I do. … She'd be there for me for ever."

"I'm very close to me mum. She's homeless now too. … We're gonna try and get a place together."

"She was devastated when I stayed away last summer. … I guess I was a bit selfish, just wanted a good time and that and didn't think what it was like for her. I won't do that again. … I'm at home a lot more spending time with my old lady and helping at home. She's brought us up right and has worked hard to make sure we have what we need. She's pretty cool."

"Me and my mum are really close; I tell my mother everything. I'm a real mummy's boy."

Others felt very negatively about their mothers and are resentful not about what their mother has done to them and others:

"Me mam's a slag. She was then and she is now. … She didn't help me nan with bringing me up one bit; she let her do everything. Me nan said she would care for me so she could go back to school and get some exams and everything but me mum just took the piss, didn't go to school, took drugs, stayed away from home for days without letting me nan know where she was and if she was alright and that."

"She's evil, my mother is. When my dad moved in with us, he had another house. He made a will and left a third each to me, me sister and me mum. When he got dementia, me mum married him so she could take over the will and then she took everything off me and me sister."

"When my mum lived with us and me dad, she used to bring other men home to have sex with them. And we used to hear it. Obviously when I was young I didn't know what it was what was going on but it used to cause lots of problems with dad."

A few children and young people whose mothers remained with violent partners expressed that they thought their mothers like being abused, perhaps failing to understand the complexities of domestic violence, and this caused them to lose respect for their mother:

"He used to beat me mum up. … All me mum's boyfriends have beaten me mum up and that's how she likes it; she likes men being violent to her."

"Well, she won't leave him. We've offered to get him out but she wants to stay with him so it's her own fault what happens to her now."

Whilst this may be a common view and impact upon the child or young person's perception of, and relationship with, their mother, the research on domestic violence contradicts such a perspective. The perspectives of children and young people ignore, for example, the impact of disorganised attachment and the need for attention, albeit negative attention, apparent in many victims of domestic violence.

It was common for children and young people to have different expectations of mothers than fathers. In families where both parents had issues, were abusive towards their children and played a role in the child or young person becoming detached, some children and young people were resentful towards their mothers in a way that they weren't towards their fathers:

> "She (mother) says it's (that she was physically abusive and an alcoholic) because she never had a chance to have her own life when we were younger because there's so much going on. We (young person and her siblings) say it isn't our fault. We've been put into care and you've had your chance to have your own life but you're still drinking and being abusive. I've had to explain this time and time again to her: that it's been as hard for us kids as it has been for her. … I just love me dad. He's got more children now and a young girlfriend. I don't see him often but we speak on the phone. We're really close now."

> "When I ask me dad if I can go stay with him, he says no 'cos he's got a girlfriend and that now. … I used to go up to me mum's, knock on the door, tell her I was desperate and she would say no. I can't believe that, coming from me own mother: shutting the door on her own daughter. That breaks my heart, that does".

> "I hated my mum when I was five 'cos even though it was my dad that had the affair, I thought it was her fault when my dad left."

These and previous quotes regarding children and young people's perceptions of their father highlight illusory or idealised relationships with fathers and a longing for something that does not exist. Whilst it is likely that some mothers could be to blame in particular circumstances, it is also probable that because mothers were often the parent that was there, raising families in very difficult circumstances, and were flawed, it was easier for some children and young people to blame them.

Some children and young people recognise that their mothers have tried hard to be both more understanding about their children's issues and to address their own to enable them to spend time with their children and have a better relationship:

> "I know my mum finds it difficult that I drink so much and live on the streets but she's accepted it now and tries to help me when she can."

> "My mum's got the house all ready and my mum stopped drinking …. So we managed to move in with my mum. It was just a trial. It was really good. My mum had changed."

Other children and young people still have complex relationships with their mother:

> "I try and tell her she can't control me no more but she won't have it. Obviously she still has a certain hold over me 'cos she's my mum but she can't control me no more. … When I tell her that, that she chucked me out and I live by myself now and I know what to do, she gets angry. I think she's finding it hard to let go."

Other children and young people have learned to manage their mother so that they are able to have some contact with them:

> "It's hard for her to see things from my perspective. When I did live with her, she was very abusive; she used to batter me when I was very young and that's why we got taken to me nan's. … When we got older, we had some contact but she used to be exactly the same but we never pressed charges. And over the years I've just learned how to restrain her."

Other children and young people's mothers retain contact with their children whilst they are detached and on the streets, supporting them in ways available to them:

> "I have contact with my mum. She comes (into the city centre) about once a week to see me and always gives me some money. My dad doesn't know that she comes."

> "That was my mum that just phoned. I'm going to meet her after I've been with you. She come into town 'cos she's got some money for me."

> "She's coming to see me tonight and will give me five pounds so I can get something to eat in the morning. We usually end up arguing 'cos she says things like 'look at the state of you; you smell; you look like a tramp' and we end up arguing but I guess she's just trying to look out for me."

In some cases, there is acceptance that the mother and the child or young person, whilst caring for one another and retaining some contact, cannot live together. Other mothers do not want contact with their child:

> "I don't see my mum at all…… I would like to see her but I haven't seen her for years. And I would like to see her as I've heard that she's just had a baby and that but I don't think, I dunno I don't think she wants to. I've seen her once, actually, in X (name of the town), and she just walked straight passed me."

Sometimes children and young people started running away to find their mother, sometimes travelling long distances on their own and spending time on the streets:

> "I went into care at three years old and started running away when I was eleven to try finding my mother but I didn't find her until I was fourteen and then it was infrequent contact."

Relationships with Step-parents
Just under a third of the children and young people lived in reconstituted families with mixed experiences. Some children and young people had very positive experiences:

> "And my stepmum moved into the house with her kids but I call her my real mum 'cos of how much she's helped me."

> "She (mother) met him (stepfather) on a Thursday and married him on the Monday. … She was on the social with four kids and when she met him, he was her way out card. He had money and a good job so she married him on the Monday. … He was brilliant; he was wicked; he was my dad."

> "I know he's not my dad but I class him as my dad 'cos he's always been there for me."

> "He was on my side; he understood why I ran away 'cos he also wanted to leave her (young person's mother) but he couldn't leave her because of my sister. So he understood and he stuck up for me."

Some relationships with a step-parent have been difficult but the child or young person and step-parent have been able to improve their relationship:

> "And he was fucked up by it all as well. … I felt sorry for him and I got in the car to talk to him, heart to heart, sort of thing, about everything that happened and I felt sorry for him. … (Talking to him) gave me a better understanding of why he was the way he was. … It's worked out well 'cos we get on well now, like."

More children and young people did not have such positive experiences of their step-parent:

> "I fucking hate him 'cos of what he's done to me and my mum. I want to kill him."

> "I hate her; she's such a bitch. She doesn't like him (young person's father) going out with me and just wants him to be with her all of the time."

> "She's managed to twist my dad's head so much, yeah. She caused me and my dad to argue and everything so I said to my dad 'who's it going to be, me or her?' and he chose her. … When she goes out, he comes and sees me. … He won't tell her he's coming to see me. … It's hard because he comes up and he stays for about twenty minutes but he don't feel like my dad anymore. He just feels like a nobody."

> "I mean, he was horrible. He used to touch me up and that."

> "Since being two, I've just had loads of problems from him. The main problem has been domestic violence, not just physical but mental as well. … Like he'd make me stay up until two o clock in the morning. … It was just like his daughter was treated differently. … Every day was like a challenge with him."

Some of the children and young people asked their mother or father to choose between them and an abusive step-parent and in all but one instance, the parent chose the step-parent and the child or young person became detached.

The Role of Grandparents
Grandparents, particularly grandmothers but not exclusively so, played an important role in many children and young people's lives, often caring for them when their parents were unable to. Ten percent of all the children and young people who participated in the research spent some time living with their grandparents. Sometimes a grandparent stepped in to care for the child or young person after the death of a parent. Grandparents also cared for children and young people to prevent them going into care. Some children and young people were cared for by their grandmother because of parental substance misuse:

> "My family are all alcoholics. I grew up with me mam but me mam was a piss head so I started living with me nan."

> "Me nan came to live with me and me dad because he's a useless fuck and couldn't even look after a cat. She lived with us until I was eleven and then went into a home and died a couple of years ago. She was nice, me nan."

Children and young people were raised by grandparents, and other relatives, in different circumstances:

Tilly's mother gave birth to Tilly when she was fifteen and she was raised by her grandmother, who was thirty four when Tilly was born:

> "Me nan was a single parent with four kids and one grandchild. She was brilliant. She provided a warm home, there was always food on the table and you could talk to her about whatever you wanted."

Javron was born in Jamaica. His family were poor so his mother moved to the city to earn money to send home and Javron was raised by his grandmother. Javron remembers being loved by her and early childhood as a happy time. When he was nine, it was decided that he would live in England with his great aunts who would provide a good home and education.

Whilst other children and young people did not live with them, their grandparents played an important role, providing support for children and young people and their parents, for example by providing child care when parents were at work or ensuring children were clothed, fed and attended school. Other children and young people turned to their grandparents when they ran away or were thrown out of home:

After being thrown out of home by her father when she was eleven, Kerry would have preferred to remain with her grandparents but returned to live with her father to prevent him hurting her grandfather:

"And I had to go and stay with my grandparents. … My grand-daddy kind of knew a bit of what was going on but didn't want to put me on the spot and ask me so he just left it and one night my daddy came up when he'd been drinking and started arguing with my grand-daddy, making threats and saying that if my grand-daddy didn't let me go back with him, he was gonna hit my grand-daddy and I didn't want my grand-daddy being hit, 'cos I love my grand-daddy, so I do, so I says I'd go back home with him. Went back home with him and the violence just started all over again."

Other children and young people would have liked to stay with grandparents when they were away from home but, in some cases, this wasn't possible:

"My granny's always wanted to take me but she's never been allowed because she's not too well."

"That's why I wouldn't stay with them, because every time I did something that caused trouble, my nana was unwell and had to stay in hospital and that. I was out on the streets, stealing, getting into heroin and that, and carrying weapons – knives – drugs."

Some children and young people experienced problems with their grandmothers, who clearly held a strong matriarchal role within the family, that led them to becoming detached:

After Troy's father went to prison, Troy's mother found it difficult to manage so he and his mother went to live with his grandmother who was strict, religious and controlling:

"Man, she bossed my mum around and she bossed me around. She used to make us go to church on a Sunday and I wasn't allowed to play out on a Sunday."

Troy started refusing to attend church, miss school and smoke cigarettes which caused conflict with his grandmother. She did not approve of how he lived his life: smoking weed, listening to hip hop, hanging out with his friends:

"I thought 'fuck this not going out with my mates on a Sunday' so I went out on a Saturday night and stayed out all night, sleeping at friends' and having a good time. … I'd be away the whole weekend; go home on Sunday night, have an argument with my nan and head off out again"

Troy believes that if he and his mother had not gone to live with his grandmother, he would not have left home at fourteen:

"I'd never have left my mum on her own but she's got her mum and I can't live with that woman."

In some cases, conflict between the child or young person and older generations was linked to different cultural expectations and intergenerational perceptions of appropriate and reasonable behaviour and boundaries:

"My aunts are old man, they come from Jamaica, have lived here but still think things should be how they are in Jamaica but it's different here. None of my friends have to go to church. They're allowed out in the evening and that and I want to do all that too. It's normal here. So we used to have all these arguments with them saying I was disrespecting my elders and me trying to explain that it's normal to go out and do thinks that other kids do."

Sometimes children and young people's behaviour, lifestyle or circumstances meant there were consequences relating to grandparents they loved:

"I don't see my nan when she comes to England to visit. … Does she know about how I live my life? No, she'd be so disappointed in me. Well, perhaps not in me as I know me nan will love me whatever I do but it would hurt her if she knew how I live my life and some of the things that have happened to me and some of the things I have done. It would kill her if she knew about the prostitution and that."

"That really killed me (Kerry's grandfather dying), that did; more than it did me daddy dying because I was more close to my granddad than anybody. And then what really hurt was my granny: she wouldn't let me go to my grand-daddy's funeral because of how bad I was being."

Children and Young People's Relationships with Parents at the Time of Participating in the Research
Just over a fifth of all the children and young people were having satisfactory relationships with their parents at the time they participated in the research. However, only three of the children and young people had returned to live at home after being detached. These three children and young people had returned home in quite different circumstances. Two of these young people were friends:

Leo and Jes met at football practice:

"He started coming round to ours and then hanging out with me and my mates on the estate where I live. He gets on well with my mum and she doesn't mind him staying over. I've only been to his house a few times – it's very different from mine. His parents are loaded."

Leo explains they became detached:

"Jes was coming over to the estate a lot – we were having a laugh, smoking grass, drinking (alcohol) hanging out on the estate, nicking a bit from the local shops; partying a lot! Jes' parents called the police when he didn't go home for a while and they turned up at mine and my mum hit the roof. We had a massive argument and I stayed away. … That summer was like one long party! Like I said, I did call my mum now and again. She knew I was alright 'cos people told her they had seen me. I

> *wasn't actually far from home but was sleeping at lot during the day when my old lady was likely to be out and about. We crashed at people's flats, or went down to the park to get a few zeds during the day."*

Leo decided to go back home after being away for about five weeks as the summer holidays were coming to an end and he felt it was time to go back:

> *"The football season would be starting soon. I was back at school and I was missing my old lady and was a bit worried about her. I knew me brother was in court soon and it was time to be back home. … She had a plate in her hand when I walked in and threw it straight at me. I ducked out of the way and she started shouting, calling me selfish with no respect for her. I do respect my old lady but could see why she thought that I didn't. Then she calmed me down and cooked me some tea. We talked and I told her that I wouldn't do it again. Sure I'm out late some nights and don't always go home the odd night but my mum quite often works nights (she works in a pub) or is out with her bloke and she knows I won't stay away for a long time again."*

About a week before school was about to start, Jes also decided it was time to go back home:

> *"The summer had been the best fun ever. But I was beginning to feel a bit tired and, if I'm honest, was missing the comforts of home. I was sick of eating junk food and wanted to sleep in my own bed, have a bath and see my mum. I was a bit apprehensive about seeing my dad as I knew there'd be a massive argument."*

Jes' mother cried when he walked through the door and hugged him tightly. His father ignored him for a while, though Jes could tell that he was relieved Jes was home. His parents called the police to let them know he had returned and, the next day, a policeman came round to talk to Jes:

> *"He asked me where I had been, what I'd been doing, whether I was okay. He (the policeman) was okay with me. I gave evasive answers. The policeman told me that my parents had been really worried and that it wasn't safe to be away from home for such a long period of time. He said that he hoped we – me and my parents – could sort things out between us so it didn't happen again."*

Just before Jes was about start his final year at school, his father asked to speak with him:

> *"Dad was really cool for once. He said that him and mum realised that I was growing up and that it was different being a young person today than when they were growing up. Whilst they weren't happy about me staying away overnight, they realised that they couldn't stop me and wanted a compromise. I've always done well at school and*

> *they wanted me to do well in my GCSEs so they suggested that I worked hard during the week and didn't stay out late during the week but at weekends I could spend my time how I wanted as long as I let them know that I was staying out and called a couple of times to let them know I was okay. So that's how it's been for the past six months. Leo and I hang out at the weekend, either on the estate or in town. I do what I do and phone my parents a couple of times over the weekend. They don't ask what I've been up to them and I don't need to tell them any lies so everyone's happy."*

These two young people viewed being away from home as an adventure, as fun. Their parents did not have the issues and problems described in this report and the two young people did not experience any abuse or harm in the home. It was possible for negotiation to take place and both these young people were able to show some understanding of how their parents felt whilst they were away. The background and route home for Emily, the third young person who returned home after being detached, was different:

> Emily was on the streets with her sister when she participated in the research. Her return home was facilitated by the researcher and support has been put in place to enable her to remain in the home.

3.3 Parents' and Carers' Issues

Three dominant issues were experienced by parents and carers: problematic substance misuse, domestic violence and mental health issues. Each of these issues is discussed individually with the recognition that all three issues can impact upon children and young people in similar ways, as well has having specific impacts. Whilst children and young people often shared similar experiences and were clearly affected by parental issues, some children and young people changed their responses to parental issues and developed coping mechanisms as they become older and more resilient.

Parental and Carer Substance[52] Misuse
Parental and carer substance misuse featured heavily in the lives of children and young people who participated in the research as three-fifths of parents and carers misused substances. A range of substances were misused: alcohol, heroin, crack, amphetamine, ketamine and cannabis. Alcohol was the substance most frequently misused, and polydrug use was a feature in some parental and carer substance misuse. In some cases, both parents misused drugs but in all cases fathers misused drugs more frequently than mothers[53]. Some parents and carers were also involved in selling drugs, and in a couple of cases, involved children in selling drugs by using them as runners.

In 2003 The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs estimated there are between 200,000 and 300,000 children in England and Wales and between 41,000 and 59,000 children in Scotland whose parents and carers have a serious drug problem[54]. These figures represent

52   In this report, the term 'substances' encompasses alcohol and other drugs.
53   However, as noted at a later point in the report, a proportion of children and young people do not know their fathers so the extent of all father involvement in problematic substance is not known.
54   Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (2003) *Hidden Harm: Responding to the Needs of Children of Problem Drug Users* London: Home Office.

between two and three percent of all children in England and Wales and between four and six percent of all children in Scotland. In a 2004 study by Cleaver and others, at the stage of initial assessment, 11.6 percent of children in social workers' caseloads were found to be living with a parent or carer with a known substance misuse history[55]. From these figures, it is apparent that problematic parental and carer substance misuse occurs much more frequently in the experiences of detached children and young people than the national averages.

Cleaver and others[56] identify how problematic substance misuse can affect the child in utero when foetal growth can be seriously hindered. Post birth, children and young people who have parents or carers with problematic substance misuse can be exposed to:

- poverty
- abuse
- neglect and inappropriate parenting practices such as inadequate supervision
- temporary or permanent separation from birth parents
- inappropriate accommodation and frequent changes in accommodation
- toxic substances in the home
- criminal or other inappropriate adult behaviour
- unsatisfactory education and socialisation
- Difficulties with socialisation
- an increased likelihood of low levels of self-esteem.

The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs concludes that adverse effects of parental and carer substance misuse are multiple and cumulative and vary according to the child's development:

"They include failure to thrive; blood-borne virus infections, incomplete immunisations and otherwise inadequate health care; a wide range of emotional, cognitive, behavioural and other psychological problems; early substance misuse and offending behaviour; and poor educational attainment." (Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs; 2003; 10.) [57]

Recent government initiatives to address the impact of parental and carer substance misuse have been mixed in their focus upon children. As noted by Cleaver and others:

"The main focus of the Hidden Harm enquiry was children of problem drug users. Less attention is given to the children of problem alcohol users, although alcohol is involved in one-third of child abuse cases and 40 percent of domestic violence incidents (National Family and Parenting Institute and Alcohol Concern 2001). The Government's Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy (Strategy Unit 2004) places alcohol firmly on the national agenda. … However, although noting that there are between 780,000 and 1.3 million children who are affected by parental alcohol problems, children of problem alcohol users are not addressed in this report." (Cleaver and others, 2007;19.) [58]

Many of the 'adverse affects' mentioned previously are apparent in the lives of children and young people who participated in the research. Some children and young people were born to substance-misusing parents. One young person described how she experienced a number of health problems until she was ten that stemmed from her mother's heavy alcohol use during pregnancy:

"When I was born, I was born with these worms because of all the alcohol she was drinking … and I was seriously ill."

Some parental substance misuse led parents to physically and emotionally neglect their children. One young person described how her mother did not care if she attended school or not and stayed away from home for days at a time:

"She wasn't bothered. As long as she could do what she wanted, drinking, taking drugs, she didn't care what I did."

Other children's physical and emotional needs ceased to be met once their parents started using drugs:

Barry lived with his mother, father and younger sister. Barry described family life as good until they moved to another area and Barry's parents started to use heroin. As a consequence, family life changed:

"'Cos they started not being able to buy food and that for us. They couldn't cope with me wee sister and me so we got put into care."

It was common for Leanne's father to spend most of the weekend in the pub. Her father took her to the pub with him and left her outside with other children, occasionally bringing her a coke and some crisps. After leaving the pub early evening, her father crashed out and Leanne found food that did not need to be cooked, watch some television and put herself to bed.

Ciaron does not know where his mother and stepfather got the money from to buy drugs but knows that all the money they had went on drugs:

"There was never anything in the house and never anything to eat for us. My ma was always getting on at us, hitting us, locking the door on us all the time, not letting us in. Stuff like that. Just forgetting about us all the time."

In the majority of cases where children and young people were subjected to physical abuse by a parent or carer, the perpetrator of physical abuse had substance misuse issues. Alcohol misuse frequently featured in these cases, sometimes alongside other substances such as amphetamine, ketamine and cocaine. Some children and young people also experienced other impacts of parental or carer substance misuse:

55 Cleaver H & Walker S with Meadows P (2004) *Assessing Children's Need and Circumstances: The Impact of the Assessment Framework* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
56 Cleaver H Unell I & Aldgate J (1999) *Children's Needs – Parenting Capacity: The Impact of Parental Mental Illness, Problem Alcohol and Drug Use, and Domestic Violence on Children's Development* London: Department of Health.
57 Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (2003) *Hidden Harm: Responding to the Needs of Children of Problem Drug Users* London: Home Office.
58 Cleaver H Nicholson D Tarr S & Cleaver D (2007) *Child Protection, Domestic Violence and Parental Substance Misuse: Family Experiences and Effective Practice* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

When Lewis was five, his mother became involved with a man. After a few months, Lewis' mother moved in with her boyfriend and Lewis remained with his grandparents. He saw his mum a couple of times a week but didn't spend any time with her boyfriend. Lewis' grandmother died when he was seven and Lewis moved in with his mother and her boyfriend. Lewis' mother's boyfriend resented Lewis being there and any time his mother gave him. He often referred to him as 'a little faggot' and started hitting him. His mother could not cope with the situation and when the violence and shouting began, shut herself in her bedroom. Lewis realised that his mother's boyfriend was using speed and cocaine. Most of the household's money went on drugs. Often Lewis did not have any breakfast and tea but largely survived on the lunch he ate at school from free school dinner tickets. There were days during school holidays when he did not get any food unless neighbours invited him for a meal when he was out playing with their children. When Lewis lived with his grandparents, there had not been much money but he was well cared for and loved. He had toys and books, which he took with him when he went to live with his mother and her boyfriend. Lewis' mother and boyfriend did not buy him toys and books though his grandfather and aunt often bought him gifts. For his eighth birthday, Lewis' grandfather and aunt bought him a bicycle and Lewis was so proud of it. He returned from school one day to find that his mother's boyfriend had sold his bicycle, Lewis thinks, to buy drugs.

Some of the children and young people had to act as a young carer[59]:

'I had to wash, cook, wash all the clothes, cook my brother's and sister's tea. … I had to keep all that hush. … My mum said 'if you tell them, they'll do this and they'll do that'. Sometimes she said (if the young person told social services) that she'd beat me or that she'd kick me out."

Sometimes a parent's substance misuse has damaging and far-reaching consequences for a child or young person who is forced to inhabit a violent and dangerous world that can accompany substance misuse, as Casey's story at the beginning of this chapter reveals. Parental substance misuse sometimes led to a child or young person being taken into care:

When Taylor was four his mother started to work and left him with his eleven-year-old brother. She started drinking heavily and misusing drugs:

"Fuck knows what she was taking. Sometimes we'd come home from school and she'd be face down on the settee, completely out of it."

Taylor and his brother never spoke to anyone about their mother being away from home and instinctively knew to keep her drink and drug use a secret. This need for secrecy bound them together and also impacted upon friendships with peers as they could not invite friends home. His mother's

chaotic lifestyle heightened; her drug use increased and she injected heroin daily. Her boyfriend was also violent towards her. Taylor felt very distant from his mother but was unhappy when he heard her being hit. On one occasion, a fight broke out between Taylor's brother and his mother's boyfriend in the garden and a neighbour called the police. Taylor, aged twelve, became involved in the fight after leaping on to the back of the boyfriend in an attempt to stop him hitting his brother. The police broke up the fight with their mother screaming in the background about how her children were no good. This was too much for Taylor and years of frustration and anger came pouring out about her drug use, never being at home, not caring for her children and her boyfriends:

"Years of shit came pouring out of me. I didn't know I felt some of that stuff. Seeing her twat of a boyfriend hitting my brother was the last straw and her screaming that we were horrible kids when the truth was we weren't and never had been. She did her own shit. We stayed out of her way and looked after ourselves."

The police called social services and Taylor was placed in care.

Adam has very early memories of living at home with his parents being 'off their faces' and lots of people coming and going to both buy and use drugs in the family home:

"I remember me dad used to lock me in me room. He used to barricade me in me room when they tooting[60] and whatever they do. He put a lock on outside me door so he could lock me in my room."

Adam lived with his parents until he was four when he was placed in foster care:

Because me mum and dad were taking and dealing drugs … heroin, everything."

Some children and young people were able to identify far-reaching impacts that problematic substance misuse had upon them and their whole family:

"If my parents hadn't taken drugs, I'd have had a different upbringing; I'd have got a job and that and I wouldn't be here living on the streets and that."

"She (mother) didn't used to take drugs at first but she got into drugs because of everything that happened with me da – because of his drug dealing and being put in prison and that. Now my wee sister's started running away and now my wee brother's in residential school. So now she's (mother) like psycho now as well as me, into drugs and all that."

Parental substance misuse was often, explicitly and implicitly, the trigger that led to a child or young person being away from home and becoming detached:

59   Young carers are discussed at a later stage in this section of the report.
60   'Tooting' means smoking heroin.

Katie was raised by her father after her mother left to be with another man. As Katie grew up, her relationship with her father deteriorated because of the impact of his alcoholism. Katie missed a lot of school when she lived with her father:

"'Cos me daddy was an alcoholic, he used to keep me up all night, talking to me and that, the way alcoholics be, and I was just always too tired in the morning and couldn't go. … He always goes nasty when he's drinking. … He would grab me by the throat and slap me, or something. … He'd wake me up when he'd been drinking and throw me out when he'd been drinking, over nothing. He'd accuse me of stealing something or of doing other things that I hadn't done. He'd just come out with random things and just used to throw me out. And that's why I moved out of his house."

Luke lived with his mother, father and younger brother. Whilst Luke acknowledges that his parents did care for him and his brother, family life was not happy:

"Dad was in and out of prison and me mum liked amphetamines. They sold drugs and things like that."

When Luke was fourteen, he got into trouble with the police and was fitted with an electronic tag. Luke's father was furious that Luke had got himself tagged, as this jeopardised Luke's father's illegal activities. Luke's father told Luke that he could no longer remain living at home and threw him out.

Sarah got to the stage where she could not longer bear to be with her mother:

"Me mam was always drunk and always puffing fags with us all sitting there in the room and I was looking at her thinking 'that ain't my mum'. … She weren't a violent person. It was just the expressions on her face and she stunk and she made you feel physically sick just looking at her and I just couldn't face it anymore. … She'd come home from work and start drinking and moan saying 'it's work, it's this, it's the other' and we were only kids and didn't understand stuff like that. … So I was sat there on the couch looking at her and thought 'I've had enough'. I went upstairs, got some clothes and got my teddy and went. … First of all I sat in the back garden for an hour and thought 'what am I gonna do'. I'd left me window open in case I had to come back. Then I went to my friend's house and my friend snuck me in and I stayed there for a week without her mum even knowing."

Domestic Violence

In general it is difficult to assess the prevalence of domestic violence because many victims of domestic violence are reluctant, or fearful, to seek support when being abused. Home Office figures suggest that:

"Every year around 150 people (120 women and 30 men) are killed by a current or former partner, and domestic violence affects the lives of thousands more. One in four women and one in six men will be a victim of domestic violence at some point in their lives." (Home Office, 2000, xii.))[61]

Cleaver and others found in 2004, at the point of initial assessment, 17 percent of children in social workers' caseloads were found to be living with a parent or carer with a known history of violence[62]. Approximately half of the children and young people who participated in this research witnessed domestic violence[63] between their parents or between their mother and her husband or boyfriend. In many of these cases, substance misuse also featured. In one case, it was the young person's mother who was the perpetrator of domestic violence.

The effects of parental and carer domestic violence upon children and young people are similar to some of the effects of parental and carer substance misuse. Experiencing domestic violence can also impact upon a parent's ability to care for their children. Hester and others[64], for example, have outlined a number of impacts upon children where domestic violence is present, some or which can be seen in the experiences of the children and young people who participated in this study. These include: experiencing fear, insecurity and low self-esteem; introversion and withdrawal; truanting and running away; and advanced maturity and responsibility.

The children and young people found witnessing their parent or carer being harmed very traumatic and some were aware of the impact this had upon them:

"He used to pick my mother up by her throat, slam her against the wall and all that. … I've got depression; I take anti-depressants and I've had to go to hospital to see a psychiatrist and all that because of all the crap with my mother and father."

Some of this violence was very extreme and a few fathers served prison sentences for domestic violence:

"They used to argue and fight and that when I was younger and, er, one night me dad come home and that. I don't really know what happened but he ended up arguing with me mum. I remember I was sat on me mum's knee and, like, my dad ended up stabbing me mum. … Me and me mum went to some refuge thing, some women's refuge. We was staying there and me dad went to prison."

Other children and young people and their mothers are still waiting for domestic violence to end:

Terry's mother's third husband is very violent:

"He beats me mammy but he doesn't just hit her, he beats her so bad. And when she goes to hospital – 'cos he's put her in hospital lots of times – the last time, the people that work there and see her all the time didn't even recognise her because of what he done to her. … She's too terrified to leave him. … The worst thing is that she can't

61 Home Office (2000) *Domestic Violence: Breaking the Chain: Multi-agency Guidance for Addressing Domestic Violence* London: Home Office Publications.
62 Cleaver H & Walker S with Meadows P (2004) *Assessing Children's Need and Circumstances: The Impact of the Assessment Framework* London: also Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
63 The term 'domestic violence' covers physical, sexual and emotional abuse within close relationships, usually between partners or ex-partners and also includes behaviours such as, for example, harassment, threats of violence, restriction upon personal freedom and isolation.
64 Hester M Pearson C Harwin N & Abrahms H (2007) *Making an Impact – Children and Domestic Violence* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

speak to her kids because he won't let her. But she does sometimes. She phones me if he's like drunk or when he's out or something. The last time she phoned me was about two weeks ago and she was saying that she loves me and that she prays every night that he will die and we can all be together again."

Terry's mother is still with her husband who is involved in a paramilitary organisation. Most people are too frightened of him to try to intervene to prevent him harming Terry's mother. Occasionally someone will attempt to do so and will be threatened by Terry's mother's husband. Whilst still living in care, Terry told his mother's husband to leave his mammy alone and his mother's husband:

"Came and found me in one of my care homes and said 'I'm going to fucking kill you'."

Some children and young people witnessed domestic violence perpetrated by a number of men towards their mothers and this led to some young males leaving home and becoming detached:

From six, Fred witnessed a number of his mother's boyfriends being violent to her:

"Me mum started getting on the drugs and everything and started seeing a new boyfriend. And then he (the boyfriend) started hitting me mum and another boyfriend hit her."

When Fred was thirteen, he and his sister left home for the first time after giving their mother an ultimatum that either her violent boyfriend left or they did:

"And we were only away like for a weekend, something stupid like, and we slept in the bushes in the park, and she got rid of him."

Two months later, Fred's mother started to look for another man:

"She started going on the internet and that and chatting to all these men and then, when I was about twelve, she started chatting to this man from London and he used to come down but he was just the same as her ex-boyfriend when he has a drink: he tells her what to do and hits her and that and by that age (fourteen), I'd had enough of it and I walked out."

Even though Fred had conflicting feelings about his mother, he felt concern about what was happening to her and sometimes slept, without his mother's knowledge, in the shed in his mother's garden to keep an eye on her:

"I'd go and sleep in me mum's garden shed just to be near and see what was going on there and everything. … After the way she treated me when

she had her boyfriends, sometimes I couldn't really care about her and then other times I did think about her and wonder if he (his mother's boyfriend) was still doing what he had been doing to her."

Phil has lived on the streets since he was fifteen, has a heavy heroin habit and commits crime, involving knife crime, to fund his heroin use. After Phil's father was sentenced for dealing drugs, Phil's mother started a relationship with a man who was very violent. Phil felt that it was impossible for him to return home because of his mother's boyfriend's violence:

"She got a boyfriend and he kicked the shit out of her. He'd beaten his ex-girlfriend and this is how social work became involved and all that and he started beating her kids and that and it was just mental. This was when I was about fifteen and me Da was in jail and I was on the streets and that. Me Ma's boyfriend would always end up battering me Ma and then we'd get into fights with him with a knife and stuff 'cos that's what we were all into. That's the way we were and that's what we done. I won't go back to me Mum's because of all this so I'd end up on the street or standing in phone boxes with Bob (Phil's cousin) to keep warm the whole night, talking, just because it was so cold. Me cousin came to sleep with me on the streets and I've just ended up being on the streets ever since, sometimes staying with homeless pals and with friends, you ken[65]?"

Jake's stepfather was violent to both Jake and his mother. After a few years, he became used to the violence:

"And I didn't feel anything about it."

Jake tried to protect his mother from being abused:

"I used to say to me mam 'let me take it; it don't bother me anymore'."

When Jake was eleven, he said to his mother:

"'Either he goes or I do'. She chose him so I went."

From the ages of eleven to sixteen, Jake has been largely been detached from parents or carers, has supported himself through crime, including violent crime, has spent a short time living in care and is presently serving a prison sentence.

Witnessing domestic violence also had other consequences:

Germaine believes that the anger he has felt for years and part of the reason behind his drug use and violent behaviour stems from the domestic violence his stepfather enacted upon his mother:

65 'Ken' means know.

> "He was violent to her in the past but he doesn't do that any more. My mum always used to be making excuses to my nan, to my aunties, to her friends about how she fell and every other week she'd be falling. But of course they knew."

This stopped when Germaine, aged fourteen, and his brother told their stepfather they would beat him if he continued to hit their mother. However, whilst the physical abuse stopped, the emotional abuse continued:

> "He couldn't get away with that (physical abuse) but he's still abusive … the mental abuse is almost worse. … He doesn't let my mum go out or do anything. He says he's being protective over her but it's not that. … That's why I wish me stepdad would be just normal like and be a proper dad and me and him could be pals. Is he ever gonna change? … The way he speaks and treats my mum, like. I would never treat a woman the way he does 'cos I know it's not right. I've seen her black eyes and it's just not right. And I've seen where he's kicked the door off. … Me and my mum are real close; I tell my mother everything. I'm a real mummy's boy. And when I think about what's been done to my mum, it makes me real angry."

Germaine has served a number of prison sentences for violent offences. Some of these sentences have been a result of intervening after seeing a man shout or hit a woman:

> "And when I see a man kicking off at a woman, I've always got to go and say something. That's half the reason I've been in jail: men shouting at their woman and I've had a bad fight with them and ended up in jail for it. That's why I've been locked up in jail most of the time: fighting for someone else's argument."

Many children and young people found witnessing their mother being subject to violence distressing and experienced a range of emotions, such as fear, anger and confusion, but became used to this violence. Some children and young people acknowledged the conflict they felt liking a man who was good to them but violent to their mother:

> "He was violent to me mother but he was good. He used to look after us. … He looked after us better than me mum even though her were violent to me mum. … Me mum used to go out at night and not come back until the afternoon the next day or summat. … She was sleeping with other men. … He was never violent in front of us so we never knew (at the time)."

Parental Mental Health Issues[66]
The World Health Organisation estimates that one in four people will experience a mental health disorder at some point in their life[67]. In the UK it is estimated that 20 percent of women have some form of mental health issue, compared with 14 percent of men, and 18 percent of women and 11 percent of men have a 'neurotic disorder', which includes depression, anxiety, phobias and panic attacks[68]. Previous research has found that there are higher rates of mental health issues amongst lone parents than adults living with another adult[69] and children and young people who live with a lone parent who has a mental health issue are particularly vulnerable because there is no other parenting adult to care for the child or young person when the parent experiences problems.

Over a third[70] of children and young people who participated in the research described how a parent's mental health issues affected their life and, in some cases, led them to becoming detached; children and young people who become detached are more likely than the general population to have lived with a parent or carer who has a mental health issue. From children and young people's descriptions, it appears that some parents suffered from a range of mental health issues and diagnosed psychiatric illnesses or disorders as well as brain damage[71]. A fifth of the children and young people identified their mother as having mental health issues [72]. As noted previously, many of the children and young people's mothers were raising their children on their own in very difficult circumstances, often leading them to be more susceptible to mental health issues. A tenth of the children and young people identified their father as having mental health issues[73]; a couple of children and young people described their stepfather as having mental health issues. There were a few children and young people who had two parents, or a parent and a carer, with a mental health illness. There were fewer single parents with mental health issues than parents who lived with a partner.

Children and young people can be affected by parental mental health issues at all stages of their life starting in utero and continuing throughout childhood and adolescence. Cleaver and others[74] chart the possible impacts at all stages of children and young people's development relating to, for example, health, education and cognitive ability, identity and social presentation, family and social relationships and emotional and behavioural development. Nathiel[75] identifies how daughters of mentally ill mothers can develop, for example, feelings of guilt and fear of the same fate alongside becoming embroiled in secrecy and acting as a carer.

Parental and carer mental health issues clearly have an impact upon the parent or carer's ability to parent and their perceptions of self and the world around them. For example, depressed mothers can view their child as

66 Throughout the report, depression is included in the umbrella term mental illness issue or disorder.
67 WHO (2001) *The World Health Report 2001 – Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope* http://www.who.int/whr/2001/en
68 Mental Health Foundation (2006) http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/information/mental-health-overview/statistics
69 Cleaver H Unell I & Aldgate J (1999) *Children's Needs – Parenting Capacity: The Impact of Parental Mental Illness, Problem Alcohol and Drug Use, and Domestic Violence on Children's Development* London: The Stationery Office.
70 From the description of parents and carers, it is likely that many more parents and carers experienced mental health issues but children and young people did not explicitly make the links between events in their life and their parent or carer's mental health issues.
71 The presentation of parental mental health issues are drawn from children and young people's descriptions and not clinical descriptions.
72 It should also be noted that due to women more often providing the role of carer, more is known about the impact of mothers' mental health issues and research has largely focused upon the impacts of maternal mental health illness rather than paternal mental health illness.
73 Many children and young people did not have contact with their fathers so were not able to describe anything about them – including their mental state.
74 Cleaver H Unell I & Aldgate J (1999) *Children's Needs – Parenting Capacity: The Impact of Parental Mental Illness, Problem Alcohol and Drug Use, and Domestic Violence on Children's Development* London: The Stationery Office.
75 Nathiel S (2007) *Daughters of Madness: Growing Up and Older with a Mentally Ill Mother* Westport: Praeger.

having significantly more behavioural problems[76]. Cleaver and others[77] describe how depression can make parents irritable and angry with children, particularly those of school age[78] or with adolescents exhibiting 'difficult' behaviour.[79]. A family's standard of living can be affected when the parent or carer is unable to work due to their illness. Children and young people may find their social relationships with peers affected through acting as a carer or because they are told or feel that they cannot bring their friends home because of how parental or carer mental health issues affect home life.

The majority of parents identified by children and young people as having a mental health issue experienced depression which manifested in different ways:

> "My mum, she's a manic depressive and she was on these anti-depressants and stuff and she went a bit mad sometimes. … She used to get really depressed and find it really hard to cope on her own with us kids and she used to have like some wild breakdowns and stuff. … She'd smash things up and stuff. It was quite scary as a kid. She used to shout and scream and stuff."

Many children and young people's parents became depressed after their partner had died or left:

> "Oh, my dad just went to pieces (after his wife died of cancer)."
>
> "Erm, all I can remember, really, is when I was five, me mum and dad divorced and, erm, it really messed me mum up."
>
> "I think it was hard for him, having us growing up and him having to cope with us (after his wife, the young person's mother, was found in bed with another man and left the family)."

Some described their mother as spending most of their time in bed and failing to engage with their children while life took place around them:

> Celine and Emily lived with their mother who was not able to work because she had mental health issues and was depressed, often spending long periods of time in bed. Sometimes she would get up, try to be cheerful and make an effort with her daughters. However, this would not last for long as her depression would manifest again and she returned to bed.

Children and young people also described other mental health conditions:

> "My mum's got bipolar disorder."
>
> "He's (young person's father) got issues with his brain. He takes injections to calm him down so he doesn't lash out with people. He's got problems with anger."

Some of the children and young people witnessed their parent self-harming and threatening to kill themselves:

> "Yeah, she used to do stuff in front of us: she like slit her wrists and stuff and took loads of tablets and stuff like that."
>
> "She used to say 'I'm going to kill myself, I'm going to do this to mysel' and this was not the sort of thing I wanted to hear. … That's psychological fucking torture. I wouldn't dream of saying that to anybody."

Some of the children and young people were unable to live with their parents because of parental mental health illness and either lived with extended family or were taken into care:

> Lewis is an only child. He has never met his father. His mother has some mental health issues. Lewis used the word 'simple' to describe her. There were concerns about her ability to care for a child and it was agreed that she would return to live with her parents who would support with care of Lewis.

> When Jono was three, his parents split up:
>
> "They were having a bad time. My mum, she's always had mental health problems and me dad's always been a chronic alcoholic with a violent temper so when they broke up, I couldn't stay with either of them 'cos they couldn't cope so I ended up in care when I were four."

As mentioned previously, there were some families where both parents had mental health issues:

> "My mum's got mental health problems … ever since I can remember. … My mother is depressed just because of everything that's happened in her life. … As well as being depressed, I think she's got a brain deficiency as well. … My dad's got mental health problems too. His dad was really violent to him and my dad is violent and drinks too much and takes too many drugs."
>
> "My mum's bi-polar … and my dad gets suicidal."

Previous research has outlined how, for many children and young people who live with a parent with a mental health illness, there is no long-term risk of behavioural or emotional difficulties[80]. However, where mental health illness co-exists with family disharmony, there is likelihood of long-term adverse effects upon children. As all but a very small number of children and young people who participated in this research experienced family disharmony, with a range of problematic issues and experiences, parents' mental health issues did have a largely negative impact upon them. For some children and young people this led to them wanting to be away from their parents. For example, one child started to run away when he was ten because his father was depressed and started to cut himself:

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76 Fergusson D Horwood I & Lynskey M (1995) 'Maternal Depressive Symptoms and Depressive Symptoms in Adolescents' *Journal of Child Pyschology and Psychiatry* Vol 36 pg 1161 – 1178.

77 Cleaver H Unell I & Aldgate J (1999) *Children's Needs – Parenting Capacity: The Impact of Parental Mental Illness, Problem Alcohol and Drug Use, and Domestic Violence on Children's Development* London: The Stationery Office.

78 Rutter M & Quentin D (1984) 'Parental Psychiatric Disorder: Effects on Children' *Pyschological Medicine* Vol 14 pg 853 – 880.

79 Norton K & Dolan B (1996) 'Personality Disorder and Parenting' in Gopfert M Webster J & Seeman M (eds) *Parental Psychiatric Disorder: Distressed Parents and Their Families* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

80 Rutter M & Quentin D (1984) 'Parental Psychiatric Disorder: Effects on Children' *Psychological Medicine* Vol 14 pg 853 – 880.

> *"Well, me dad used to smoke the drugs, you know, and then he started slitting his wrists in front of us, so I went, 'I'm offski'. Me dad was slitting his wrists in front of us and it's not very nice is that."*

Other children and young people acted as a carer[81] for both parents and siblings or were neglected because their parents were unable to care for them. One child mimicked her parent's behaviour[82]:

> After Charlie-Ann's father left when she was five, her mother's existing mental health disorder appeared to intensify:
>
> *"She was always in and out of hospital, or trying to kill herself and that. And I was only allowed to see my dad on a weekend and that was really good, just being able to be away from my mum for a while as all she used to do was cry and try to kill herself."*
>
> Charlie-Ann's mother self-harmed herself in front of Charlie-Ann who, in turn, started to self–harm when she was eight:
>
> *"I think I was like following in my mum's footsteps 'cos like I had to go to for a lot of help and I started to cut myself and I started to try to hang myself."*
>
> Charlie-Ann still self-harms and has attempted suicide a number of times.

Protective and Risk Factors Associated with Parental Issues

Cleaver and others[83] note various protective factors that can limit the short and longer term impact of parental mental health issues, domestic violence and parental substance misuse. Unfortunately a number of these protective factors are not apparent in the lives of the majority of children and young people who participated in this research study:

- Sufficient income support (the majority of detached children and young people lived in low income households whilst still living with their family).
- Practical and domestic help (this was unavailable to many families and sometimes the child or young person took on, or was forced to adopt, the role of carer to provide practical and domestic support).
- Regular attendance at school or some form of further education (with very few exceptions, detached children and young people left school and the education system permanently before the minimum school leaving age[84]).
- A trusted adult with whom the child or young person is able to discuss sensitive issues (whilst some detached children and young people met supportive adults, for example, from the homeless population, many of these adults were in chaotic circumstances themselves and not all adults had the best interests of

the child or young person at heart).

- Acquiring a range of coping strategies and feeling confident of what to do when a parent is incapacitated (some of the children and young people clearly had coping strategies and were confident and competent when their parents or carers were incapacitated. However the range of options available to them was limited).
- Information outlining how to contact relevant professionals (many detached children and young people were not aware that there were professionals who could help them which is one of the fundamental reasons a child or young person becomes detached).
- Unstigmatised support from relevant professionals who recognise the child or young person's role as carer (in most cases where a child or young person acted as a carer, there was no involvement with services).
- An alternative, safe and supportive residence for young people subject to violence and the threat of violence (as there are only nine refuge beds for young runaways and present forms of emergency accommodation do not meet the needs of detached children and young people[85], there is very little appropriate alternative accommodation for detached children and young people).

Cleaver and others also cite as a protective factor:

> "An ability to separate, either psychologically or physically, from the stressful situation"
> (Cleaver and others, 1999; 98.)[86]

This ability led some children and young people to take the initiative to remove themselves from a damaging environment but for the children and young people who participated in this research, the streets were sometimes the only place to go. So children and young people spent time on the streets, met other people (often older young people) frequently becoming involved in drugs and crime[87]. As time went on and their home environment did not change or worsened, children and young people's friends often became their family[88], the streets became their place of fun and support[89] and they spent less time at home, eventually becoming detached.

In the families of a twelfth of all children and young people who participated in the research, domestic violence, parental substance misuse and parental mental health illness were all present. Two of these parental problems were apparent in a quarter of all children and young people's experiences, with substance misuse and domestic violence being the most common combination, followed by substance misuse and mental health illness. These children are particularly vulnerable due to the combination of parental issues and because, in many cases, there was only one adult living in the home.

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81 This is discussed at a later stage in this section.
82 Children and young people's own mental health issues are discussed in section seven of the report.
83 Cleaver H Unell I & Aldgate J (1999) *Children's Needs – Parenting Capacity: The Impact of Parental Mental Illness, Problem Alcohol and Drug Use, and Domestic Violence on Children's Development* London: The Stationery Office.
84 This is discussed in more depth in section six.
85 Smeaton E (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Young Runaways* London: The Children's Society.
86 Cleaver H Unell I & Aldgate J (1999) *Children's Needs – Parenting Capacity: The Impact of Parental Mental Illness, Problem Alcohol and Drug Use, and Domestic Violence on Children's Development* London: The Stationery Office.
87 Substance use and crime is discussed in sections five and seven.
88 This is discussed further in section four and five
89 The role of the streets is discussed in section five.

As noted by Cleaver and others[90], the impact of parental issues can also affect the safeguarding and promotion of the welfare of children because parents and carers may fear their children being removed and therefore are not willing to seek support or accept services. Moreover, as the following quote from one of the young people reveals, parents and carers can also use the threat of children being taken into care to prevent others from seeking support:

> "She (mother) used to tell me that I wasn't to tell anyone what was going on at home, about her using drugs and staying out all night and me looking after my little brother, 'cos we'd get put in a children's home."

3.4 Experiences of Abuse by Family Members and Others in the Home

Physical Abuse

Around 60 percent of all the children and young people who participated in the research experienced being physically abused by a parent or carer. In just over a third of these cases, fathers were the main perpetrators of physical abuse, even though there were many families where there was no father present and some children and young people had never met their father. Mothers were the perpetrators of physical abuse in just under a third of all cases. More mothers who lived with their partners physically abused their children than those mothers who were lone parents; of the two-thirds of children who lived with single parents, only four experienced physical abuse from their mother Stepfathers were responsible for physically abusing approximately a fifth of all children and young people. Brothers, an uncle and a grandfather also physically abused children and young people. Sometimes a child or young person's carer physically abused all of their children but some children and young people were singled out and abused:

> "I think my stepdad didn't like me and picked on me."

Some children and young people experienced extreme physical abuse:

> "He shook me and shook me when I was a baby and half my brain is damaged."

> "He hit me with sticks, burnt me with cigarettes, knocked me around the room so that I bounced off the walls."

> "Until I was four, I've been belted round the neck with buckles, beaten black and blue, left, right and centre. … He's broken me arm. … He shot me in the foot."

> "I had braces at the time and he hit me so my braces cut inside my mouth and my nose bust at the same time. And when he'd done, he washed his hands and chucked a face cloth at me and said 'clean yourself up'. … The last time was when he said something and I told him to fuck off and he battered me for that. He thumped me in the head

> and said 'do you hate me?' and I said 'yeah'. He thumped me in the head and said 'do you hate me now?' and I said yeah' and thumped me again kept on saying 'do you hate me now?' and thumping me until I said I didn't."

> "He used to beat me and he tried to stab me. … It was over a bean sandwich. … Just the tiniest wee things used to set him off; so it did. Even if I went to the toilet, he used to crack up with me because I went to the toilet. … He wrapped the telephone cord around my neck, pulled it so hard he thought I wasn't breathing and put me in a cold bath so I'd start breathing again. … And my daddy broke two of my fingers; my daddy had tried to boot me in the face and I had put my hand to protect my face and he'd kicked my fingers and broke them. … I had a cat and I really loved my cat and he used to make me choose between me getting it or the cat and I always used to say me 'cos I couldn't bear my cat getting hurt. … He always used to tell me 'don't you be telling anyone or I'll kill you' and that's why I didn't open my mouth: I was too scared because I knew he was probably capable of it."

> "First of all he started punishing me if I did something bad at school but then, as I got older, it got worse. He was hitting me with wood or anything he could reach for. … He's never broken any bones but he made my arms swell up and stuff like that. … I got the police involved … 'cos he attacked me when I was in my room one night and my feet and hands were all cut and he made me have a shower and change my sheets and stuff. He tried to lock me in my room so I jumped out of the window and called for an ambulance and the ambulance got there and the police came and they got involved."

As mentioned previously, where physical abuse was part of a child or young person's home life, it was very common for the perpetrator of physical abuse to also have substance misuse issues. References to parental substance misuse are made in a number of children and young people's descriptions of being physically abused.

Some children and young people were able to recognise why their fathers were so violent:

> "He was brought up like that; his dad was violent. I think he (young person's father) thought it was normal."

> "Me dad had grown up in children's homes 'cos his father beat him so badly when he was a nipper and he hasn't seen his parents since he was nine."

> "It was the drink and drugs that made him like that."

90 Cleaver H & Walker S with Meadows P (2004) *Assessing Children's Need and Circumstances: The Impact of the Assessment Framework* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Some children and young people were physically abused by both parents:

> After being in foster care because of physical abuse from their father, Lucy and her sister returned to live with their mother. However, this did not last long:
>
> "*We stayed with me mum for a wee while and then we got put back into foster care because she was drinking too much. … She was being violent; she nearly broke my arm … she was drinking and was just depressed."*

Some children and young people experienced violence from their brothers:

> "*My brother is turning into my dad. In fact, he's even worse than my dad. It just gives me flashbacks to my dad and how he was."*
>
> "*And my brother, he had a temper problem. He just had a lot of anger problems 'cos of my mum. When she used to get drunk, he used to punch the walls and that, kick doors and throw stuff. And 'cos he didn't like it that I was with my dad, he used to get jealous and he used to take it out on me as well. He used to chase me down the road with knives and everything. It used to be really horrible. … He's like broken my little finger. … He used to slap me so hard I'd have blisters and have to go to the doctors."*

The violence from Josie's brother led directly to her becoming detached:

> "*Me and Toby (Josie's friend), were sat with me mum having a chat and a cup of tea when X (older brother) charged into the house. He was dead angry. He started to shout at me 'are you a fucking lesbian? Are you?' He pushed me off my chair and started pushing me around the kitchen, banging me into things. Toby told him to leave me alone and me brother turned round and punched him in the face. Toby's nose was bleeding. Me brother was pushing me around the kitchen shouting 'are you a fucking lesbian?' at me. Me mum was screaming for him to stop and trying to see to Toby. … X got me by the hair and shouted right in me face 'are you a fucking lesbian?' I shouted 'yes' at him. He let go of me and turned round to me mum and said 'did you know?' Me mum was too frightened to answer. Me brother pushed Toby out of the house. Me mum was crying. Toby was shouting at X, telling him to leave us alone and I was shaking and not knowing what to do. I hated him (her older brother) so much. All the years of his bullying and being frightened of him just hit me all at once. I started to shout back at him 'you're a fucking bully and I hate you. We all hate you'. Me brother hit me across the face and started shouting some more. Me mum got in between us both and said to me brother 'leave her alone'. X told her to fuck off and pushed her out of the way. He tried to get hold of me but me mum had hold of me and was shouting for me to get out of the house. I*

> *didn't want to leave her but she kept shouting and shouting for Toby to take me away. Toby led me out of the house and we ran down the street. Toby took me to his house. Later that day, me mum turned up at Toby's with a bag packed full of me stuff. She said it wasn't safe for me to come home. She was crying and looked terrible (Josie starts crying but continues talking). I was crying and Toby took charge of the situation. Toby said I could stay at his and me mum could come and visit me whenever she wanted to. It felt wrong that it was me that had to leave and not him (older brother) but I knew me mum was scared of him and what he would do if she told him to leave."*

For some children and young people, violence was all around them in their family.

> Neil experienced extreme violence at the hands of his uncle and also witnessed his uncle and other family members being violent towards one another:
>
> "*It was not only extreme towards me but to my mother; my uncle was violent to my nan; my mum and auntie were violent towards each other and to me. … It was 'cos they all got pissed up, started arguing and being violent. They drunk and drunk and drunk, like."*

Some children and young people became used to being hurt and ceased to feel frightened when they knew they were about to be harmed but others continued to feel fear:

> "*And then she'd go 'I'm going to fucking kill you, you wee bastard' and hold a knife to me. I was always frightened of what she was going to do."*

A few children and young people viewed the physical abuse they experienced as positive or stated that they understood why their parents and carers abused them:

> "*I view it as a good thing in my life. If he hadn't of done that, I'd have gone off the rails even more than I did; I'd have been like 'terror child'."*
>
> "*I was hard to handle, like, and had all those temper tantrums and that … and my dad had a problem with anger as well because he was sexually abused as well 'cos it was in his family as well … when I was three and having a temper tantrum on my bunk bed and he (Liam's dad/stepfather) came and smashed my face on the bunk bed. He didn't break my nose but he near enough, like. He was always gutted after, like 'sorry, sorry – I didn't mean to – I just lost it with you' sort of thing. I used to get beaten up quite a lot like. I knew it was me and my temper. … I used to go nuts, I did, and push my parents until they couldn't stand it no longer."*

Some children and young people started to run away to escape being abused and running away became a survival strategy to avoid harm:

> "If it stopped you from getting hurt, then you'd do it."

Mothers' Attempts to Protect Their Children
When children and young people were being physically abused by fathers or stepfathers, their mothers were often too frightened to protect their children because they were also being physically abused or because of threats of further violence. From children and young people's descriptions of their mothers' behaviour, it is apparent that some mothers felt unable to protect their children because they were at a loss as to how to do so and some found it easier to disengage from what was taking place in their family. However, a small number of mothers did take various forms of action to try to protect their children. Some were more effective than others and all had costs for the mother and child or young person: Troy's mother encouraged Troy to stay out of his father's way and sometimes was subjected to further abuse when she tried to stop Troy from being harmed; Josie's mother told Josie to leave so that she would not be hurt any more and Marcus' mother fled the family home with her children, becoming homeless in the process and ending up in emergency accommodation.

Sexual Abuse
Just under a tenth of children and young people were sexually abused whilst still living at home by either family members or family friends:

Liam's early childhood was dominated by interfamilial and intergenerational sexual abuse of himself and other family members. When he was three, Liam was sexually abused for the first time by his nan's husband who pretended to be Liam's uncle:

> "I can remember everything that happened in that room (when he was sexually abused). I said to him 'who are you?' and he said 'I'm your Uncle X'. And I don't know why but I thought it was Uncle X who did it to me but it wasn't. … Uncle X is sound. … He (step-grandfather) told me he was Uncle X so he could get away with it. … I can remember exactly what happened in that room like it was yesterday and what was done to me and I can remember who it was that done it to me but for some reason being told he was my Uncle X confused me. … Uncle X was a young 'un (about thirteen when Liam was abused on this occasion) and I get on really well with my uncle … so I don't know why I told everyone it was Uncle X; I just got confused and I got told 'you're making it all up' and the whole thing just got dropped … my nan's in complete denial about it all and my mum, well I haven't really talked to her about it. … After all that, I had a big bad temper – knives and stuff like that; arson. At the age of four I was setting furniture on fire and things like that."

Liam and his half-siblings with often left in the care of Liam's stepfather's mother. Liam's stepfather

had not told Liam's mother that there was a history of sexual abuse in his family and that Liam's step-uncle sexually abused Liam and his three younger siblings:

> "I was sexually abused by him, and my two sisters and younger brother were. I tried telling my old man (Liam's stepfather), like, but because of his past, he couldn't cope with hearing that and they called me a liar and he pinned it on me: he said 'It was you – you've done it to your sisters'. But it wasn't me at all and he pinned it all on me because he didn't want to bring his past up because he had buried it. It made me feel so little; I was about seven or eight at the time and it made me so mad."

Jay started puberty early and began menstruating when she was eight. Jay's stepfather noticed how Jay was changing and his behaviour towards her altered:

> "He could see that I was growing up now and he used to make comments: 'Oh, you're getting tits' and that and I didn't expect that from my dad and it was like he was looking at me another way now and not like I was his daughter. He started to say 'Oh, you're the eldest; you can stay up now and everyone else can go to bed.' And his girlfriend was pregnant at the time, so even she would be in bed. And then it was I wasn't allowed to sleep with my brothers any more and I had to sleep downstairs. And he would always be downstairs, telling me to sit on his lap so we could watch tv and I was thinking 'what's going on?' … When I was in bed (downstairs) my dad would sit on the end of the bed and put his hand under the blankets and stroke my legs and all that type of thing and I knew what was going on. He came into the bathroom when I was naked and I thought 'forget this'."

When Harif was nine, a male friend of his father's began to sexually abuse him. This abuse built up over a three-year-period:

> "At first, he would lift me up and sit me on his knee, moving so that his erection would rub up against me. This made me uncomfortable but I didn't know what to make of it and knew that anything I said wouldn't be believed. He then started to have me over at his house and would touch me and rub against me. By the time I was eleven he was putting his cock in my mouth."

When Joanna was eleven, a male lodger moved into the family home and babysat Joanna when her mother went out. He sexually abused Joanna over a continuous period of time. Joanna never told her mother.

When Charlie-Ann was seven, her stepfather moved into the family home and, by the time she was eleven, had started to touch her sexually. After Charlie-Ann became detached and lived on the streets, Charlie-Ann was desperate for somewhere for her and her boyfriend to stay. Her stepfather, who no longer lived with Charlie-Ann's mother, said they could stay with him but started to molest Charlie-Ann once again:

> "I just wanted to be with Dave (Charlie-Ann's boyfriend), do you know what I mean, and he (stepfather) was the only person that was going to put us up, so he used to touch me up and that again. … And then Dave found out about it one day and flipped on him and flattened him and that and I told my mum and he kicked us out for it. Then we were back on the streets and, erm, what happened? Yeah, we were back on the streets for quite a while and we were like really badly on drugs then, both of us."

Neglect

Neglect was experienced by about half of the children and young people who participated in the research. Some of this neglect was related to parents and carers being caught up in their own problems and being both physically and emotionally unavailable for their children. Other children and young people experienced neglect alongside other forms of abuse. Many became resourceful and sought meeting their needs through others, other family members and friends, and some met their physical needs through criminal activities that provided them with money. Some children and young people experienced neglect from an early age that had very damaging effects upon them and, in a few cases, resulted in them being taken into care, never to live with parents and carers again.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is present in all other forms of abuse such as neglect, physical and sexual abuse. As Howe notes:

> "Physical abuse is not just a body blow; it is an assault on one's psychological integrity."
> (Howe, 2005; 69.) [91]

Emotional abuse also includes rejection that many children and young people experienced, sometimes with no other form of abuse. Feeling unloved by parents is very damaging for young children:

> "If a parent rejects you, particularly when you are in a state of need or distress, then where might you find comfort and understanding? For the young child, there is nowhere else to go other than inwards with the anxiety and the hurt. The developmental consequences of rejection are often severe. Self-esteem is assaulted. Emotional intelligence is damaged."
> (Ibid; 90.) [92]

Many of the children and young people experienced rejection by their parents and carers at a young age, often because their parents or carers experienced a range of problems that prevented them from responding to the needs of their children. As children and young people grew older, around a fifth of them were told to leave home by parents or carers. Experiencing rejection can negatively affect children and young people's sense of connectedness which, in turn, can affect psychological, emotional, social and intellectual functioning[93].

3.5 Young Carers

Just under a tenth of children and young people who participated in the research took on, or were forced to take on, the role of young carer. Young carers may experience substantial physical, emotional and social problems and their schooling may be negatively affected[94]. However, it is important to acknowledge, as noted by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)[95], that many studies addressing young carers examine only the experiences of young carers in touch with Young Carers' Projects, and who therefore identify as young carers and seek help and support; most studies do not address hidden carers such as the children and young people who participated in this research. None of these children identified as young carers nor sought support because caring for others at a young age was what they were expected to do. Children were also cared for by older siblings and often had to take on caring for themselves at a young age after the older sibling left home:

> "I was brought up by me oldest sister but then she left when I was nine. … I was making me own dinners, getting meself to school; just learning to do things by myself. Like school uniform: getting it yourself and ironing it and that. At the age of nine you don't want to be bothering yourself with things like that."

Children and young people had to both carry out household duties and care for siblings:

> "I used to do the cooking, the cleaning, the ironing and he (father) used to phone me to tell me to run his bath for him for when he came back from work. I'd finish school, try to do me revising, the cooking and cleaning and ironing for the three of us (Lucy and her siblings)."

Some children and young people did not care for siblings but had to care for themselves inappropriately:

> "I was looking after myself from eleven: cooking my tea, you know what I mean? Doing my washing and ironing."

Many of the children and young people who provided caring roles were being abused themselves and had a lot of difficult issues and emotions of their own to manage alongside caring for younger children. One young person admitted to harming the children in his care:

91 Howe D (2005) *Child Abuse and Neglect: Attachment, Development and Intervention* Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillan.
92 Ibid.
93 Owusu-Bempah & Howitt J (1997) 'Self-identity and black children in care' in Davies M (ed) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Work* London: Blackwell.
94 Dearden C and Becker S (2004) *Young Carers in the UK: The 2004 Report* London: Carers UK.
95 www.SCIE.org.uk/publications/briefings/briefing11index.asp

> Liam's stepfather had insomnia and could only sleep during the day. As Liam's mother worked long hours it became Liam's responsibility, at the age of nine, to get himself and his siblings up in the morning, get them all ready and take them to school. Liam also brought all the children home from school and gave them tea. Due to being sexually and physically abused at a young age, Liam had a lot of anger management issues and hurt his younger siblings:

> *"I admit it, I used to hit them and stuff and I locked my little brother in the rabbit hutch because he was pissing me off so much."*

Sometimes acting as a carer for siblings impacted upon children and young people's ability to attend school and their friendships:

> Lana started school at an earlier time than her siblings and her school was some distance away so she was often late. Sometimes it didn't seem worth going to school if she was going to be so late. Instead, Lana went home and did housework. She lost touch with her friends because she was busy at home looking after children and seeing to household chores.

Some children and young people were frustrated by the lack of recognition from others about their caring role:

> *"I used to go to school with burns on my hands because I'd been trying to cook for my brothers and school could see what was happening but they didn't really want to get involved because when my mum came to school, she was always the drunken mother."*

When a child or young person is used to acting as a carer, it can be difficult when another adult moves into the family home:

> When Celine was eleven her mother met a man who, after four months, moved into the family home. Celine found this difficult as she had become used to making decisions and being left in charge. Sometimes Celine and her mother's boyfriend clashed and, eventually, these clashes became violent.

A couple of children who came from other countries were sent by their families to earn money to support their extended family back home who were living in abject poverty, and it became the child or young person's responsibility to provide income for their family.

As previously explained, being forced to act as a young carer sometimes led to a children or young person deciding to run away:

> *"I was always left to care for me younger brother and this made me cross so I ran away to me mate's house."*

As touched upon previously, children and young people also cared for parents with mental health and substance misuse issues, looking after them when they were unable to care for themselves:

> *"I had to look after my mother quite a lot because of her drinking."*

> *"I'd go and get him drinks that weren't alcohol or put him to bed or something."*

> *"I go and find her (mother) every day to make sure she's alright; to make sure she's still alright and that; see if she needs anything … but all she wants from me is money and I haven't got any of that."*

One young person still acts as a carer for her mother even though she no longer lives at home:

> *"Every night I go … and cook the tea … I go get her messages[96], stuff like that."*

3.6 Other Issues Relating to Family Life Impacting upon Children and Young People

Poverty

As some of the quotes in the report reveal, some of the children and young people grew up in households where poverty was present; about a fifth of the children and young people who participated in the research described their family as very poor. As Casey's story reveals, some children and young people stole food from shops whilst living at home so that their families had something to eat. As mentioned previously, some families were poor because all or most of the family income was spent on drugs for parents or carers. The majority of all children and young people grew up in social housing on council estates. There was only one young person who described himself as coming from a middle class background where there were no problems in the family:

> *"I've got everything at home. Money's not a problem at home … my dad's a doctor and my mum's a teacher. … My parents are good people who work hard. We go on a foreign holiday every year."*

Attachment

It seems appropriate at this point to raise the importance of how children and young people's early experiences of caregivers impacted upon their development. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this research and report to address attachment in depth, it is important to recognise that many of the children and young people who participated in the research have been adversely affected by the way they were parented. When children experience danger and psychological abandonment from their attachment figures – those from whom they seek affirmation, care and protection – there can be a number of damaging consequences. Contemporary developmental attachment theory continues to develop to further understanding of behaviours and personalities of children who have experienced abuse and trauma. In recent years developmental neurosciences have played a significant part:

96 'Messages' means food shopping.

"They have also explored the deep significances of attachment, affect and regulation, and the quality of early parent-child relationships to the way the brain processes information and experience, particularly emotional experience in the context of attachment relationships, and how its hard-wiring, biochemistry and neurological organisation is shaped by those very experiences."
(Howe, 2005; xv) [97]

Attachment therefore plays a part in forming the brain:

"As our understanding of the interface of brain development and early psychosocial experience increases, we see the role of the attachment relationship as far more than being there to protect the human infant. It also fulfils an evolutionary role in ensuring that the brain structures that come to subserve social cognition are appropriately organised and prepared to equip the individual for collaborative existence with conspecifics for which his or her brain was designed."
(Fonegy and Target, 2005; 335) [98]

This chapter has shown that many of the children and young people who participated in the research experienced abuse or maltreatment in some form, and that many had parents or carers emotionally unavailable to them because of their own issues or problems. Howe explains how the psychological processes of maltreating parents are triggered when they feel disorganised, anxious, out of control, under threat or stress and that therefore they are without a strategy to deal with their own emotional arousal or those of their child:

'It is one of the features of maltreatment that when the child's attachment system is activated, the parent's attachment system also becomes activated, triggering a range of fragile defensive mental processes, which when breached lead to highly dysregulated caregiving responses."
(Howe, 2005, 92.) [99]

When a child or young person is abused by a parent or carer, when they experience fear without protection, they behave in a disorganised way and develop disorganised attachment. Disorganised attachment can also occur when a child is frightened for their carer, for example when witnessing domestic violence as so many detached children and young people have done. The impact of a parent or carer causing high levels of fear and distress in their child can be one of psychological harm:

"Their children have few insights into the nature of their distress and arousal, and even less ability to contain and regulate their feeling. This means that the demands of social relationships can easily become confusing and upsetting, leading to behaviour that is either inappropriate or aggressive."
(Ibid, 192.) [100]

Disorganised attachment can also occur where a parent does not physically abuse their child but has their own problems and becomes emotionally unavailable. Expressed simply, parental problems such as domestic violence, substance misuse and mental health issues, can cause a problem in the way the parent or carer relates to the child; severe depression can lead to a helplessness that hinders the parent from caring for their child in a loving and consistent manner; the drug-dependent parent or carer may prioritise their own needs over those of their children; violent fathers often emotionally remove themselves from their children[101]. So many parents and carers of the children and young people who participated in the research were unable to provide nurture, care and interest in their children because they were so caught up in their own issues.

The impact of maltreatment and trauma upon attachment and children's development is far-reaching and it is beyond the capacity of this report to describe in full the effects on children who experience abuse and the impact of parental problems. However, it is important to acknowledge that detached children and young people's own development may be impaired by experiences of disorganised attachment through maltreatment. For example, children who are sexually abused may experience impairment of physical and motor development, social and emotional development and cognitive and academic development[102]. When a child is physically abused, they can become aggressive towards other children, unable to trust, withdrawn with an uneven sense of identity and are more likely to become violent and aggressive adults. Abuse experienced by children can also predispose a child or young person to violent behaviour:

"Both lack of critical nurturing experiences and excessive exposure to traumatic violence will alter the developing nervous system, predisposing to a more impulsive, reactive, and violent individual."
(Perry, 1997; 74.)[103]

This can be seen in the experiences of many of the children and young people who participated in the research: the young child who witnessed his father stabbing his mother and was violent to other children and young people at nursery; Phil, who carries out a range of violent crimes and attacks upon others; and Aidan, who has a predisposition towards random violent actions.

The impact of neglect can be more damaging for children's development than abuse[104] and can result in severe psychological damage:

"Our evidence supports the hypothesis that the most severe psychological conflicts arise from neglect. Having been deprived of the necessary ingredients in their normal development, children never seem to accept the loss of a childhood that could have been. They keep searching as adolescents and adults, only to find those that they search amongst are usually

97   Howe D (2005) *Child Abuse and Neglect: Attachment, Development and Intervention* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
98   Fonagy and& Target (2005) Bridging the Transmission Gap: an end to the mystery of attachment research in *Attachment and Human Development* Oxford: Routledge 333-343.
99   Howe D (2005) *Child Abuse and Neglect: Attachment, Development and Intervention* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
100 Ibid.
101 Holden G & Ritchie K (1991) 'Linking extreme marital discord, child rearing and child behaviour problems: evidence from battered women' Child Development Vol 62 pg 311 – 327.
102 Trickett P & Putnam F (1998) 'Developmental consequences of child sexual abuse' in P Trickett & C Schellenbach (ed) *Violence Against Children in the Family and Community* Washington DC; American Psychological Association.
103 Perry B (1997) Incubated in error: neurodevelopmental factors in the 'cycle of violence' in J Osofsky (ed) *Children in a Violent Society* New York: Guilford Press.
104 Hildyard K & Wolfe D (2002) 'Child neglect: developmental issues and outcomes' in *Child Abuse and Neglect* 29 pg 679- 695.

themselves deprived people who not only cannot provide them with what they needed as children, but also tend to abuse them, partly out of their own frustrations in encountering somebody who they thought would give to them when they are so hungry." (Ney and others, 1994; 711)[105]

Perhaps this can be seen in Bethany who was emotionally neglected by her mother and formed a number of relationships with physically and sexually abusive men. Where abuse and neglect co-exists, children may develop problems in many emotional, cognitive, behavioural, social and developmental areas. If abused children become parents at a young age:

> "Their ability to remain available and responsive under the stresses and strain of looking after their own children is limited."
> (Howe, 2005; 167.) [106]

It is also important to recognise that many of the children and young people's parents themselves experienced disorganised attachment, hindering their own ability to respond to the needs of their children. As previously outlined in this section of the report, children and young people described parents and carers who were sexually and physically abused by their parents and carers. In turn, some of the children and young people who became parents have not been able to care for their children because of the damaging experiences in their childhood.

Family Life When Parental Issues or Maltreatment Were Absent
The issues and experiences described in this chapter account for the experiences of the majority of children and young people who participated in the research. However, these issues and factors were not part of family life for under a tenth of children and young people who participated in the research, whose routes into becoming detached were different. For example, two of the children and young people left other countries, Romania and Jamaica, to escape poverty and to improve both their own and their families' circumstances. A couple of children and young people described coming from happy homes with parents who showed them love and cared for them and becoming detached through heavily involvement in substance misuse[107]. A few other children and young people also recognised that they came from loving and caring families but revealed that specific events, both relating to physical health, had impacted upon them and altered their behaviour:

> 'When I look back on it, it was being in that fire when I was young and spending so much time in the hospital and then having to return to hospital again and again for more treatment. I was in hospital for a year and had to keep going back for about three more years. I felt depressed – but didn't know what it was – and started getting into drugs and that when I was eleven; I was doing burglaries, shoplifting, stealing cars; anything to make money, like. … I got kicked out of three schools. … My parents just couldn't cope and we had loads of arguments."
>
> "It was when I lost my thumb. My school had wire

> fencing around it and security guards to stop us leaving school and I was climbing over it one day and the headmaster came and shouted my name and I fell and lost my thumb. Everyone teased me at school and it was from then that I changed. I started fighting and that, taking drugs, grafting and having arguments with my mum and stepdad. … Once when I was off my head, I stole a car and caused a pile up on the motorway."

Leo and Jes, two friends who experienced one relatively short incident of being detached to seek fun and excitement and returned home of their own accord, also recognised that their parents are loving and caring. Leo and Jes have become 'weekend ravers' to satisfy their own needs for pleasure and excitement whilst remaining with their families.

3.7 Detached Children and Young People's Own Children

Just over a quarter of the children and young people who participated in the research have been pregnant or fathered a child.

Young Mothers
Some of the female children and young people had experienced pregnancy and two thought they may be pregnant at the time of participation in the research. One wanted to be pregnant whilst the other hoped she was not because of where she presently lived:

> "Right now, I could be pregnant; I hope I'm not – not in a place like this."

Five of the young women were pregnant at the time of their participation in the research. All of these young women were sixteen and living in hostel accommodation. Their housing situation was causing them some concern. For example, one young woman was happy to be pregnant but recognised that it was not an ideal time because of where she lived:

> "The only good thing going on for me right now is having a baby but housing is just a nightmare and that's getting me down. … I'm happy about having a baby but it's not the most convenient time but, at the end of the day, you've just got to get on with it, haven't you? And make the most of it?"

The ages that the young women had become pregnant ranged from fourteen to seventeen with the majority becoming pregnant before they were sixteen. A couple of young women decided to terminate their pregnancies because they felt that their life circumstances were inappropriate to raise a child. One young woman, who lives in a tent, knew that with a child her only option for housing would be emergency accommodation:

> "I thought 'I can't bring my baby up in this' (she gestures to the emergency accommodation we are using to carry out the interview). I can't bring my baby up in this environment.' So I phoned my mother and I begged her, and I begged her and begged her like I've never begged her before,

105 Ney P Fung T & Wickett A (1994) *'The worst combination of child abuse and neglect'* in Child Abuse and Neglect 18 pg 705-714.
106 Howe D (2005) *Child Abuse and Neglect: Attachment, Development and Intervention* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
107 Children and young people's own substance misuse is discussed in section seven.

> *right, and begged her to give me some money, 'cos I was so far gone and I had to go up to Birmingham to have an abortion."*

One young woman became pregnant when she was fourteen and had a miscarriage:

> When Kerry was fourteen, she became pregnant with her boyfriend of two years:
>
> *"It was scary. I cried my eyes out so I did. But then I got used to it and then, when I was about four months pregnant, that's when I started taking drugs. … Es and all that and smoking blow, so I was; and I lost the baby (had a miscarriage). But in a way I was glad because I didn't want to be a young mummy. I did cry when I was in the hospital (after the miscarriage); I sat and cried for an hour and the nurses were all hugging me and saying 'don't you be worrying: you've got plenty of years to be having another one'. I'm alright about now like, so I am."*

Other young women were also frightened when they found out they were pregnant:

> Samantha was fifteen, detached and sleeping on friends' sofas or walking the streets at night. When Samantha realised that she was pregnant, she was devastated and knew it would be difficult having a baby on her own at fifteen, especially when she was on the streets. She contacted her aunt who advised her to tell her mother. Samantha was worried her mother would be furious. Samantha's aunt phoned Samantha's mother who visited Samantha the next day. Samantha's mother told her that she had missed her. Samantha broke down and told her mother that she was pregnant. Samantha's mother was clearly shocked but did not react as Samantha had expected, asking her what she wanted to do. Samantha said she did not know. Her mother said she could come back to live at home but she was not to be out all night, taking drugs as she had done previously.

Only one of the young women still has a relationship with the father of their child. Some of the young women did not receive any support from the child's father when they became pregnant:

> After becoming detached at fifteen Tianna became involved with a twenty-one-year-old man:
>
> *"We started seeing each other and, after a few weeks, he said I could move in with him – he had a flat."*
>
> After being together for four months, Tianna became pregnant:
>
> *"He told me he didn't want a child and that he wanted me to have an abortion. I told him I wasn't having one. We had a row and we split up."*

> Kerry's boyfriend of two years denied being the father of her child:
>
> *"He didn't want to know, like, and said it wasn't his. … It made me angry but his mammy knew and then when I lost the baby, he came round and said 'thank fuck she's lost that child' and his mammy cracked up and said 'that was your baby'. But he was happy 'cos he was gonna be a young daddy and I was gonna be a young mummy and he didn't want that."*

> Bethany's second pregnancy was the result of a one night stand:
>
> *"I was drunk and walking home from one of my friend's and another friend went by in the car. I got in the car with him and ended up having sex with him."*
>
> Bethany has told this man that she is pregnant with his child:
>
> *"He was like 'oh no, no, no. We didn't have sex; you were just drunk'. He's denying it but I know it was him. He's Turkish (so) we'll see what happens when we see what the baby looks like."*

Of all the young women who have given birth to children, only two of them have their children living with them and are living in emergency accommodation. Two of the children and young people's children have been taken into care, one is in foster care and another adopted:

> When Joanna was seventeen, she became pregnant with her boyfriend. As soon as she found out she was pregnant, Joanna stopped selling sex and taking drugs. She moved into her own flat and gave birth to a boy. Joanna was very happy being a mother and loved her son very much. When her son was one, their flat was both flooded and broken into. Because of her past involvement with social services, Joanna went to them for help. Social services were concerned about her son and took him into local authority care, eventually deciding he should be adopted. Having her son taken from her and being told that she couldn't see him broke Joanna's heart; her mental health declined rapidly and she attempted suicide once again. Joanna has since found solace in the fact that when her son is sixteen, he will be presented with a box that she has prepared for him containing letters and photographs. Joanna very much hopes that her son will want to contact her.

Nina lives in a privately rented flat with her boyfriend. She has a son from a previous relationship who is in foster care. Nina was supposed to stay in a mother and baby unit but left as she wanted to be with her partner. Nina believes that the reason her baby has been taken away from her is because:

"They (social workers) think my partner is not able to look after a baby because he's like from a different country (the researcher points out, delicately, that there are lots of people come from different countries and are able to look after babies). … This one, my partner, is like me and has had a horrible life."

Nina sees her son twice a week and enjoys spending time with him:

"I'm doing an assessment with social services and that to prove that I can look after my baby. It's about three month I've got to do it for. In about March time, hopefully I get him back."

Nina is receiving a lot of support to enable her to care for her son.

One young woman decided that her daughter should live with her father to prevent her from being taken into local authority care. Three of the young womens' children live with their maternal grandmothers. These circumstances have arisen in individual ways:

Samantha enjoyed caring for her baby but found it hard not being able to go out with her friends. She was allocated her own flat but was lonely living on her own. One weekend, she arranged for her daughter to stay with her mother and flew to Portugal to work in a bar.

Whilst in Portugal, Samantha partied a lot, took cocaine regularly and started a relationship. She missed her daughter but pushed thoughts of her away. Unbeknown to Samantha, her mother was seeking custody of her daughter and was given temporary custody. One day Samantha phoned her mother who was furious with her and would not allow her to speak to her daughter. Samantha began to realise that she would have to return to the UK and face the consequences of leaving. When Samantha looks back on this time in her life, she says that she wanted to be a young person and do what young people do without having to think about having to look after someone else. Samantha realises that this was selfish and also realises that she was very depressed at this point in her life.

Samantha returned to the UK, sleeping in hostels as she was homeless. She asked to see her daughter but her mother refused. She contacted social services and it was agreed that Samantha would be allowed to see her daughter at her mum's house. At first these visits were difficult. Samantha gradually began to be allowed more

time with her daughter and, at the time of participating in the research, was allowed to take her out on her own and sees her a few times a week. Samantha is moving into a housing association flat where she will be allowed to have her daughter to stay overnight at the weekend with the aim of working towards her daughter returning to live with her permanently.

Bethany and her daughter were thrown out of home by Bethany's mother so stayed with different friends. At one point, Bethany's daughter stayed with Bethany's mother whilst Bethany tried to find them somewhere to live. Bethany's daughter became ill with pneumonia:

"My sister phoned us to tell us to get down to the hospital but they (hospital staff) said they wouldn't discharge her into my care because of the environment we were living in, staying here, there and everywhere, and that they would discharge her into the care of me mother. So me mother had her and then she put in for a Residency Order. If I didn't agree to that they said they were gonna put her up for adoption so I agreed to the Residency Order and then me mother stopped me seeing her. … My mother would phone the police if I turned up to her house and say that I was under the influence of drink and drugs. And then the police would come and arrest me and take me away. … It made me feel horrible, like I wasn't allowed to see my own child."

At child protection conference meetings, Bethany heard how social services were also worried about incidents that had happened before her daughter had gone into hospital:

"I met this other boy through the internet and he lived close to me and, at the time, I thought he was a decent person but everyone was telling me he'd been kicked out of school for being perverted and stuff. They were telling me that I shouldn't be bothering with him and stuff but I just thought it was just rumours. And then someone else told me that the police had confiscated his computer off him for child pornography. … And then, at this (child protection) conference, I found out it was true about the child pornography on his computer and he'd put X (Bethany's daughter) to bed a couple of times and they were gonna test her but I didn't want to put her through the tests and stuff because she was only just coming up to one. And then I got raped by this other boy I met off the internet so I had the police in and they had to take the bedding and everything for forensics.(When I was raped) I was so drunk and I was in bed sleeping after drinking half a bottle of brandy. X (Bethany's daughter) was fast asleep in the room and that's why social services got involved: because of me drinking all the time."

Bethany is now pregnant again, has stopped drinking and is looking forward to the birth of her second child. She is also seeing a psychiatrist. Bethany is presently not having contact with her daughter or her mother. The only time she sees her mother is when they are in court addressing Bethany's wish for contact with her daughter. Until recently, Bethany's mother was trying to prevent Bethany from having contact with her daughter but at the last court session two weeks prior to the interview:

"My solicitors have shown how I've changed and have got my drinking sorted out and it's been agreed that I can have contact with X (Bethany's daughter) as long as I don't start drinking again. My mother's not exactly gonna welcome me with open arms but she can see that I'm having a drugs test every week now and that I'm not drinking so hopefully she'll be more positive about me seeing my daughter."

Young Fathers

Just under a tenth of the young males who participated in the research have fathered children, some under the age of sixteen. One young man fathered his first child when he was thirteen and a second when he was fourteen. Both these children were born and the young male does not have any contact with his children. Another young male fathered children at ages fourteen and fifteen. Whilst living on the streets with a heavy heroin habit, he is one of the few young men who retains contact with his children and sees them fortnightly.

The conception of a child was part of the trigger that led one young male to be kicked out of home and become detached:

Aidan and his girlfriend were both fifteen when Aidan's girlfriend became pregnant:

"At first we didn't think we were going to have an abortion and we told my mum and stepdad and everything and they didn't like it … I'm not sure why … I think it was because she was pregnant in the first place."

Aidan and his girlfriend then decided to terminate the pregnancy because of their ages:

"That's why we had the abortion because of age and education and stuff I like that."

Shortly after this, Aidan and his girlfriend split up for a while:

"My mum said 'if you're never going to get back with each other, we'll help you and everything' but then we started seeing each other again and my mum was like 'if you're going to get back together, you're not living here' … She just said, basically: 'if you're going to be with her, you ain't living here'."

Some of the young men found it very difficult when they fathered a child and the pregnancy was terminated. However they recognised that they were not in a position to care for a child:

"I got someone pregnant recently and that was a bit mental because she had an abortion and that was quite hard. … I don't think I would have been ready to have a kid now … but it's still an emotional roller coaster. It's all been quite difficult."

The impending birth of one young man's daughter has been the motivation for him to stop using heroin and to start sorting out his life:

"In a week's time my little daughter will be due and I want to get myself sorted out for her. That's why I need to get sorted out so I can see her and be a father to her. … I'm still friends with my baby's mother and we speak regularly and I'm going to be there for her and help her with the baby. My mum and her live near each other and see each other: they go for coffee with one another and stuff."

Most of the young fathers do not have contact with their child. As Tianna, Bethany and Kerry experienced, alongside other young females who became pregnant, young fathers are able to withdraw when a child is conceived in a way that the mother or mother-to-be is not, leaving the young mother to deal a whole range of decisions and consequences on her own. A couple of young men would like to have a relationship with their child but do not feel that this is possible for gang-related issues:

Steven first became detached from his family when he was thirteen and started working as a drug runner during the summer holidays. By the time he was fifteen, he was working for an established gang, building a reputation as a competent and trustworthy drugs runner. By eighteen, he owned a flat and had a son with his girlfriend. One night Steven and his girlfriend were at a club. A rival gang burst into the club and shot Steven's girlfriend in the neck; she died from these wounds. He was devastated and decided that his son should be brought up by his girlfriend's sister as he was worried that the rival gang would turn their attention to his son. Steven left the country, sends money for his son, and periodically finds out how his son is doing.

Brad has been involved with his gang for a number of years. After his girlfriend gave birth to their son, he decided it was time for him to cease gang involvement and that the only way for this to happen was to move far away. So Brad, his girlfriend and son moved to start a new life. A gun crime was linked to Brad and he received a custodial sentence in a YOI. With Brad in prison, Brad's girlfriend became lonely and moved back to live with her parents. She does not reply to his letters enquiring after their son and Brad misses his son desperately. Brad knows he cannot move back to the area he originally came from because of gang issues but is torn because he does not want his son to grow up without a father.

3.8 Death, Bereavement and Loss

Just over a fifth of the children and young people who participated in the research experienced the death of a parent through cancer, substance misuse, murder or suicide. Many of these parents' deaths were violent. More parents died from other illnesses. Understandably, the death of a parent had a profound effect upon children and young people. For some, this loss resulted in a fundamental change in their life:

> "*He was murdered, basically. … The worst thing that happened to me was that me dad was taken away from me and my dad was my life. I loved my dad to bits and when he was taken away from me, it was like 'Jesus, how do I go on? … (It) really did a lot of damage. I didn't know how to get over it so now I just put it to the back of my head. Once you start thinking about that all the time, like I used to, I just got raged and end up the way like I was (violent, using a lot of drugs). To be honest, you wouldn't have wanted to know me about two or three years ago. I was a really nasty fucker; the nastiest cunt you could ever meet, especially to people I didn't ken or didn't like. … Maybe it was just my way of coping. … I think it was just because I felt like I'd been done along the way (through losing his father)."*

> "*At first I had a great family life. My mum was a lovely person. She died when I was five and I guess I didn't know her that well 'cos I was only five when she died. … To be honest, her dying didn't really touch me at first 'cos I was too young to be affected by it and I didn't really understand. Now it touches me. Last year it hit me a lot; a lot … but at the time it didn't mean that much. Obviously I was upset but when you're young, it's different; know what I mean? You don't really understand all your feelings and things but now, I find it hard now."*

Like Leah, other children and young people found that the impact of their parent's death was not immediate yet shaped the direction of their life:

> "*It wasn't that bad (when his father died); not at first anyway. It was when I was getting older and that's when I realised. I'd see people enjoying themselves with their dad and hear them talking about their dad and I couldn't talk about mine. … And that's why I started smoking hash when I was about nine, ten. And then when I was eleven, I started drinking and when I was twelve, that's when I started getting into trouble and all that. And I had the booze heavy when I was twelve. And I have been drinking ever since.*"

Sometimes the death of a parent raised conflicting and complex feelings for a child or young person:

After being horrifically abused by her father for a number of years, Kerry ran away from home for a final time and told the police about some of the abuse she had endured. She was immediately taken into care:

> "*I was put in a children's home and on the next day, my daddy killed himself. He was found dead on our stairs. And then that's when I opened up (about the abuse she had experienced from her father): on the day he died.*"

When she heard of her father's death, Kerry had mixed reactions:

> "*It hurt me. … I really loved my dad and it broke my heart when he died … but, in a way, I was glad because he wouldn't be able to get me no more. … But then I started to try to kill myself, slit my wrists and take overdoses, but it never happened and now I'm glad it never happened. … I only tried to kill myself three times and then I realised and it was like 'what am I doing? I've got my whole life ahead of me and I don't have to kill myself just because my daddy's dead' and then I just stopped it.*"

In some cases the death of a carer other than a parent had a massive impact upon a child or young person, irreversibly affecting the direction of their life:

> Jean's mother physically abused Jean's father and, after some time, Jean's father began to retaliate with violence. Jean's mother also physically abused her children. Because of this domestic violence, and to prevent the seven siblings from being taken into care, Jean's maternal and paternal grandmothers said they would care for the children alongside some cousins who were also unable to live with their parents:

> "*It was a bit of a crazy household. There were these bedrooms and all these bunk beds: the lads were in one room, the younger girls in one room and the older kids in another room. … There was twelve children at one time and we all squeezed into these little bunk beds.*"

This arrangement came to an end when one of Jean's grandmothers died and the other couldn't cope on her own:

> "*So we went into care – apart from the cousins; they went back to their parents.*"

Jean and her sister and brothers were moved into separate care placements and lost contact with one another.

Sometimes the death of a carer other than a parent led to a child or young person becoming detached:

Lisa and her mother had a difficult relationship with a lot of conflict. Lisa spent a lot of time with her nana whilst she was growing up. Lisa loved her nana more than anyone else in the world and, as the conflict intensified with her mother, spent more and more time staying with her grandparents. After her nana's death, Lisa felt unable to remain living with her grandfather as she did not get on with him. As neither of her parents allowed her to move in with them, at fourteen Lisa started to sleep rough in a tent.

Jamil's mother was heavily involved in substance misuse and had one violent relationship after another. Jamil's brother cared for him, ensuring he had food to eat, was clean and dressed for school, did his homework, practiced football and generally looked out for him. When Jamil's brother got a job, he rented a flat and Jamil moved in with him. One weekend, Jamil stayed out at a friend's and returned home to find his brother dead; he had been out drinking and choked on his vomit. Jamil was devastated. His mother said he could live with her but he did not want to. He stayed with different friends, eventually ending up on the streets and using drugs. Jamil still feels very lost without his brother.

Another young person's detachment was linked to two traumatic events which included the suicide of her best friend:

When Ashley was eleven, she was mugged by two adults who cut her neck with a knife. Just after the mugging, Ashley best friend, who was being abused by his father, committed suicide. Ashley started drinking heavily and coming into the city centre to drink on the streets, increasingly spending more and more time away from home. When Ashley looks back at this time, she realises she was very depressed because of these two events:

"Obviously when you're young you don't realise that you're depressed and that shit's going on in your head. And I was depressed for a few years and it wasn't until I was in jail that I was diagnosed with severe depression."

Sometimes children and young people's parents' reaction to losing their own parents negatively affected the relationship between a child or young person and their parent. In turn, this played a part in the child or young person becoming detached:

Jimmy identifies the point his relationship with his mother changed as being shortly after the death of his mother's parents. Before Jimmy's grandparents died, Jimmy and his mother had a very strong relationship:

"We were like best friends; we were like really, really, really close and I could talk to her about anything. It's like because both my mum's parents

died in six months when I was fourteen and this was when I started getting kicked out and that. And it was like after my nan and granddad died, my mum just wasn't the same. … I'm not sure why this was but my mum had lost both her parents and I'd lost both my grandparents and she just couldn't see that and she was too wrapped up in herself. I personally think that's why it was but she (mother) might tell you different. I personally think she was just so caught up in her own grief."

Another young person was not informed of her grandmother's death because her family did not want her to attend the funeral:

"They (her mother and father) didn't want me to go to the funeral … because they're ashamed of me. … I mind that they didn't want me at the funeral … we had a massive argument about it and I hit me dad."

For some young people, death and the threat of death are constant features in their present life, as one detached young person described:

"During the past eleven months I've found me brother dead on the couch (from a drugs overdose), me father died two months later, me mother's been in hospital with a brain haemorrhage, me sister's found blood clots in her heart due to injecting heroin."

3.9 Secrets and Lies

As revealed throughout this section of the report, secrets and lies were often part of family life for the children and young people who participated in the research. These secrets and lies related to, for example, the identity of children and young people's biological fathers, circumstances of children and young people's conception and the reason why their mother was not with them. There were also circumstances where it appeared that other people had gone along with secrets and lies because it was easier to do so than face up to the truth. For example, one young person believed that her stepfather knew all along that she was not his child, as did her stepfather's family:

"He wanted to make himself believe that he was because if he didn't, he just wanted to believe that I was his child. And (after he found out that Jay wasn't his child) he didn't want to have gone through all of that and then find out I wasn't his child. And he loved me just as much as he loved my other brother. … Once it came out (the identity of Jay's biological father) it was like they (Jay's extended family through her stepfather) had all known but hadn't wanted to believe it."

There were consequences of these secrets and lies, sometimes directly resulting in the young person become detached. Discovery of secrets and lies often led to conflict between parents and carers and their children and this conflict played a part in the child or young person being or feeling unable to remain in the family home.

Sometimes the impact of finding out that they had been lied to had immediate consequences:

> *"(After realising that for fifteen years he had been lied to about how his father was) I went out to play with my friends as normal and then I sat on a bench and I felt so angry. I was upset and I felt betrayed by my mum. And then I didn't go back home for nine months."*

Some children and young people have never told parents or carers that they know certain information and have carried knowledge of difficult and disturbing events for years without being able to discuss it:

Liam has kept a number of important secrets from his mother: that he knew that she was raped by his biological father and that this rape resulted in his conception; that his stepfather had left him and his siblings in a situation where they were abused repeatedly by his stepfather's brother who had also been sexually abused; that his stepfather accused him of sexually abusing his siblings. In relation to keeping these secrets from his mother, Liam expressed the difficulty of discussing secrets and a concern that his mother may view him differently:

> *"Once again, how do you say all this stuff? I can't let her know that I know, sort of thing. Would she look at me differently after those sort of questions arrive?"*

Parents told lies to prevent their issues becoming known:

> *"My mum never made me go to school and I was hardly ever there. … Even when the school did notice when I wasn't at school, they'd phone my mum and she'd say 'oh my god, she's doing this again', this that and the other and 'I drove her over and dropped her off at school'. She'd make up a hundred-and-one excuses and blatantly she was lying. And then the school just thought I was bad and I'd have arguments with the teacher and just think that no-one believed me."*

> *"My mum would make up stories so it didn't look bad on her. When I went into foster care she said it was 'cos she couldn't handle me 'cos I was a bad child but it was because she was a alcoholic, worked all the time and was never there for any of us."*

In some cases, fathers lied to their children about their mothers or told their children to lie about their mothers:

> *"He said that she took drugs but she never. He said that she was a drug addict and I always used to believe him when I was wee."*

> *"Dad used to tell us to blame our mother when social services came round. When we went to Children's Panel, they used to send a taxi for us and he used to say to us 'if you tell them about me (about how he abused the children and their mother), you will get battered when you get home. Blame it (physical abuse of children) on your mum'. So we used to do that. … It was hard."*

Sometimes children and young people told lies to social workers, other professionals and extended family to cover up the abuse they experienced at home:

> *"My social worker used to ask how I got my bruises and that but I just used to make up lies and say 'oh, I was fighting in school' or 'I was fighting with one of my mates over something stupid' but I don't think they believed me. Because I would never say it was my dad, they didn't take me out of the house (into care)."*

3.10 Summary

■ With a few exceptions, the majority of the children and young people's experiences of family life were fraught with difficulties that they were often left to manage with no support or explanation.

■ Many of the children and young people lived in single parent families for all or part of their childhood. Many lone mothers raised their children in challenging circumstances. Single mothers were less likely to abuse their children than mothers living with a partner.

■ Some children and young people have never met one of their parents and many lost contact with their fathers after their parents separated. In a few cases, mothers left the family and broke contact with the child or young person.

■ Being lied to about the identity of their biological father often had negative consequences for a child or young person, and for their relationship with their mother, and played a part in becoming detached.

■ Children and young people often idealised absent or distant fathers and were less critical of fathers' behaviours than they were of mothers who were often more involved in raising and caring for them.

■ Relationships with step-parents were often poor but there were also examples where the children and young people spoke very highly of a step-parent.

■ Many children and young people did not have contact with their parents at the time of their participation in the research.

■ Grandparents played an important role in some children and young people's lives, caring for them when parents were unable to, but testing relationships with grandmothers, due to generational and cultural expectations, could also lead to a child or young person becoming detached.

■ Many of the children and young people's parents experienced substance misuse, domestic violence and mental health issues. Often these issues led to parents being chaotic or emotionally unavailable and impacted upon their ability to care for their children. Parental issues were often a factor in abuse of children.

■ More than half of the children and young people experienced physical abuse with fathers most frequently the perpetrator, despite the relatively low numbers of fathers involved with their children.

- Whilst a couple of children and young people were sexually abused by step-relatives, other children and young people were sexually abused by family friends. One young person was subject to sexual abuse with the complicity of her mother.

- Neglect and other forms of emotional abuse were commonly experienced.

- The role of young carer was forced upon or adopted by some children and young people with consequences for their schooling and peer relationships.

- The experiences of the children and young people with care-givers raise concerns regarding the possible development of disorganised attachment. The children and young people's parents are also likely to have experienced negative parenting that prevented them from responding to their own children's needs in a positive manner.

- A fifth of children and young people grew up in abject poverty. The majority lived in social housing in low-income families.

- Over a quarter of the children and young people have become pregnant or fathered a child at a young age and only a couple of young females' children remained living with them. Most of the young fathers had emulated the patterns of many children and young people's own fathers by not having contact with their children. A couple of young fathers were unable to have contact with their children because of gang-related issues.

- It was common for research participants to have experienced the premature death of a parent, often in disturbing circumstances, with profound impacts.

- Secrets and lies were all too often part of family life with children and young people sometimes not telling a parent that they knew the truth about secrets kept from them and lies they had been told.

4. Violence

Bob

Bob's earliest memories start when he was four and being beaten by his father:

"He used to beat us up for the slightest wee thing. If he was watching telly and we spoke, he would spit on us or he hit us. And me mum couldn't do nothing as she'd get the same."

Bob described how, after forcing her husband to leave, his mother brought her children up on her own but problems developed:

"We all just turned wild because me dad wasn't there to bully us and that's why we didn't behave so well – because we had freedom for a change. Without him bullying us, we thought it was alright to go about smashing windows, smoking hash … stealing, drinking, violence, taking drugs: everything."

Bob moved from being a victim of violence to a perpetrator of violence. When he was fourteen, he became part of an established gang. Bob became the leader of his gang and often instigated the actions of gang members:

"We used to go smashing people for no reason and drunk. We used to smash cars, stealing bikes, getting lifted and fighting with the police. About a hundred of us were involved in a riot: it was in the paper and everything"

His mother eventually had enough of his behaviour and told him to leave. Bob went to the streets in the city centre where, aged fifteen, he mostly hung out with older people:

"Older people, gangsters and all sorts … these weren't homeless people but proper gangsters – Hibs boys; people who go to matches and are into organised crime and are like high, high up people … I used to go to this pub and we would meet up at this pub and they would organise a fight … they would arrange a place for us to meet and organise a diversion for the police and that on the other side to where the big fight was happening. I just used to be right in with the bigger boys."

Bob believes that he became involved in gangs and organised violence because:

"Violence was part of every day in my house. I've just got used to it. And then I used to do the boxing and that trained me to be violent. Me dad beat me that much that I didn't really feel pain."

Bob ended his involvement with the organised gangs and fighting:

"I took an opportunity to get out before I was murdered. … It was well heavy: talk about guns, shooting people and that and one day I got handed a machine gun and asked to jump in the front end and just take them all out … this was at a football match, as soon as the doors (of the van) got opened I was to just start shooting. There was bullet-proof vests, guns, grenades, petrol bombs in the van and I just did a runner."

Bob's attitude to violence has changed further recently and he attributes this change to:

"Knowing what it's like to be on the suffering end of it. Like I don't like to hit people in case I hurt them too much, in case I didn't stop hitting them. … Being in jail, that's what's made me see things differently. I've seen what I can do to somebody. I can batter them and batter them … (one day) I was up the town drinking and I was drinking that much and I took Valium and I got into a fight and ended up kicking this guy's head and he went into a coma and had to go to hospital. Eventually he pulled through and I got done with GBH – grievous body harm and endangerment to life. I was two weeks in remand and they said I was a danger to society and that I should not be released on bail. I was released on bail and the charges were dropped because there was not enough evidence."

4.1 Violence and Daily Life

Violence is part of life for all but a few of the children and young people who participated in the research. As described in the previous section, many children and young people directly experienced and witnessed violence within family life. This violence, as the experiences outlined in this chapter reveal, can sometimes be the direct trigger for children and young people to become detached. Before leaving home or care, whilst spending time hanging around on the streets, children and young people continue to experience violence and, once they have left home or care permanently, remain affected by violence as both perpetrators and victims. Older young people who participated in the research also described how violence remains a feature of their life even when, in many ways, their life has become more stable. Whilst a few young people have made a conscious decision to leave violence behind, they are a minority and the majority continue to be affected by violence. The normalisation of violence, alongside the need for self-preservation in often violent environments, explains the process by which many of the children and young people found themselves embroiled in a world of violence.

Most of the children and young people who participated in the research grew up with violence all around them in their home and local community and violence was a regular element of daily life:

Ray described the estate where he grew up as a ghetto where violence was a daily event:

"*Murders happened on the next road to us … I saw a lot as a kid on the estate and at home; stuff that, I know as a parent now, I shouldn't have seen as a kid … burglaries and things like that going down; people drinking all day, fighting, getting into trouble.*"

Ray described how these behaviours and activities were 'normal' where he lived and he, in turn, viewed them as 'normal' which meant that Ray also engaged in certain behaviours and activities that led to him serving a number of prison sentences.

"*Look how I turned out. I just got out of fucking jail where I have spent a lot of the past seven, eight years … and that's where it began (by living on the estate he grew up on).*"

This violence could move from the streets in the local neighbourhood into school. For example, Aidan described how a number of fights were pre-arranged and took place in school:

Aidan has been involved in knife fights and was excluded from school for fighting with a knife. On this occasion, a fight was arranged (date, time location) via MSN between Aidan and another young male who was showing disrespect towards Aidan's gang:

"*Everyone was round in a big circle, all hyped up like; I thought they were all gonna jump in and join in. At this kind of fight, anything can happen. I smashed the Chinese kid (the one that wanted to fight Aidan) in the face and there was blood everywhere.*"

Later on that day, on school premises, some of the other gang's members, linked to the person Aidan had fought, surrounded him in the toilets so Aidan wrapped a metal chain around his hand and hit the biggest boy in the face:

"*I was like 'fuck it' and bang, I smashed him in the face too.*"

This boy then pulled out a knife and Aidan was caught by the knife:

"*My whole top was covered in blood. … One of my mates pulled me out of the toilets to get me out of the way but this guy (who stabbed Aidan) is coming at me, for me, so I jump up and kick him in the chest and then crack him in the face again. This big black guy came up and said 'I'm gonna fuck you up for what you've just done'. And I was like, in my head 'I've just had two fights, do I need to have another one?' so I just picked a brick up of the floor and was like 'come on then'.*"

Children and young people interviewed in the same location often described how the area they are from is entrenched in violence that involves them in many ways and eats into their lives:

After being detached, upon reaching sixteen Shannon was housed in a run down estate where three families in one street were at war with one another. As part of this war, a young man was shot in a pub in what became a high profile murder. After the shooting, one of the two young males implicated in the murder came to Shannon's flat, brought by mutual friends. Shannon agreed to become a witness for the police, after being told that she would be taken to a safe house. Shannon gave evidence in court and the two males were sentenced to twenty-one years and seven years respectively. Shannon was not able to return to her flat and housed in another part of the city away from her support networks.

4.2 Violence Within the Family

As section 4.1 reveals, many of the children and young people have experienced violence from family members. A few children and young people were also affected by family members' violent acts towards others:

Savanna's family have always been haunted by the murders carried out by her grandfather. They have moved many times, sometimes because people in the area find out who they are related to. This is particularly difficult for Savanna's mother who does not like living in certain areas:

"Because they all know what my grand-dad (Savanna's mother's father) did. … My grand-dad shot himself in the head because he was having an affair, I get upset when I tell this story: he killed the woman he was having an affair with, her husband, and he shot himself in the mouth."

Just under a tenth of the children and young people witnessed very violent acts where their parent was the victim:

"The worst thing that I ever seen was my mum brought this bloke home and slept with this bloke. And my dad knew who it was and my dad went round there and covered his car in white paint. Then a couple of days later, there was a knock on the door and it was this bloke and I watched my dad get beaten up with a baseball bat. … I was about six, seven. … We used to have these white tiles and I remember looking round and they were red (with her father's blood) where he was beaten up so bad. … It was only about two years later that I began to get over that."

A couple of children, siblings who both participated in the research, witnessed their father being shot dead in front of them:

One day, when Samantha was four, there was a knock on the front door which her father answered and, as soon the door was open, he was shot in front of Samantha and her younger brother. Samantha's father had been a member of the IRA and Samantha thinks that he had been acting as an informer. Witnessing her father's murder clearly had a massive impact upon Samantha. Her father's murder also dictated how family life progressed and impacted upon Samantha's mother's ability to care for her children. After her husband's murder, Samantha's mother had a nervous breakdown and Samantha's aunt moved in to care for the family. Eventually Samantha's mother recovered and was able to care for Samantha and her brother again but did not show Samantha and her brother affection and became distant from them in a number of ways.

4.3 Violence in the Care System

Violence from Carers[108]
A few of the children and young people who participated in the research experienced violence from carers in residential care and, more commonly, during foster placements. One young person described being harmed in a residential school:

Barry was placed in a residential school after running away, getting into trouble with the police and becoming involved in substance misuse. Barry

describes being physically hurt by some of the staff at the residential school:

"When I was brought back (from running away), some of the staff used to come into me room and bang us about. I'd try and stop them and then I'd get restrained and we'd be back to all that stuff again and being charged with assault and me running away again that night."

For those children abused by foster carers, patterns of being abused were different: some experienced abuse in a number of placements, some incidents were a single event and one young person experienced prolonged abuse over five years:

Terry and most of his siblings were taken into care:

"And we were split up like and put in homes all across the country. I was in and out of (foster) homes for two years and then I was put into (a) foster placement with me two wee brothers but we were kind of abused and that in that foster placement. It was really violent. It wasn't like wee stupid things – it was really bad things. … It was real proper abuse, like. They hurt us badly and we had to up at half six in the morning cleaning. … We never like told anybody (at the time) because we were scared of what would happen. … It was only a psychiatrist who worked with my wee brother in hospital who reported it."

Whilst the abuse impacted upon Terry, his younger brothers were profoundly affected. Terry's youngest brother:

"was diagnosed as anorexic because he wouldn't eat whilst he was in the house (the foster placement). … He wet the bed every night he stayed there for five years but as soon as he was put somewhere else, he didn't wet the bed."

Terry's middle brother:

"had a stutter and you should have seen the way they (foster parents) treated him because of his stutter. He would ask for something and stutter and they were like 'oh fuck off and come back and ask when you can speak properly'. It was just horrible. … My brother's stutter got better after he left there (the foster placement) and now he doesn't stutter at all. See my wee brothers, they (the foster parents) had them drugged up to the eyeballs on Ritalin. … You should have seen them: they were like zombies."

Children and Young People as the Perpetrators of Violence Within the Care System
A few of the children and young people described how they had been violent within a care setting. As the two stories below outline, there were often complex emotions and experiences behind the children and young people's violent outbursts:

The sexual abuse Liam experienced was not addressed and, as time went on, Liam's behaviour became increasingly problematic for Liam's family and others in his local community. When he was twelve, Liam was placed in care:

"Because of my temper. … They were like: 'well, Liam's a massive problem child'. … I had a thing with knives then and I threatened staff (with a knife)."

On one occasion, Liam wanted to get something out of the office in the children's home and the member of staff on duty would not let him enter the office. Liam started to boot the door and there was a scuffle and Liam smashed the door which resulted in the member of staff having a knee injury. The police were involved and, at the age of twelve, Liam was charged with GBH and sent to a secure unit where he spent six months:

"That sort of woke me up 'cos the environment I was put into, I was like: 'hang on – what's going on?' It was, what's the best way of describing it? It made me wake up and smell the fear and see reality."

The secure unit was viewed by the court and social services as a last attempt to curb Liam's behaviour:

"They tried everything with me: I'd seen psychiatrists, I'd seen doctors; I was even sent to the top doctor in X. I'd seen them, like, and they were like: 'he needs to be put somewhere'. They tried branding me as a schizophrenic like my real (biological) dad; he's a paranoid schizophrenic. So they thought it was in me as well because I could be alright and then the next minute (Liam clicks his fingers) I would just go. So they tried branding me as that. But I knew I wasn't mad; I knew exactly what I was doing. I wasn't hearing voices or anything like that. … Then they tried to brand me with Asperger's because of my concentration – I couldn't concentrate for long periods of time, stuff like that, and keep eye contact."

After leaving the secure unit, Liam was moved to a privately run placement where he was the only young person:

"It was like a specialised place to deal with children that children's homes can't deal with, like those that have behavioural problems. … They were charging a thousand pounds a week for me. I had three members of staff looking after me and I was there for eight months."

Things went mostly well whilst Liam was in this placement:

"and then they moved someone in with me. At first we got on alright but he was older and bigger than me and he started on me and I went nuts: I tried stabbing him in the throat with a knife so they moved him out and they moved someone else in."

From an early age, Jack lived with his grandmother because his mum misused alcohol and found it difficult to care for all of her children. By the time he was thirteen, Jack had started missing school, stealing, taking drugs and staying away from home. He was sent to a residential home from

where he ran away for long periods of time. Because of his persistent running away, Jack was moved to a secure unit and then to a small residential unit. Jack liked living in this residential unit because the staff made a lot of effort with the children and young people in their care. Whilst Jack was living in this unit, his mother died from an alcohol-related illness. When Jack was told of her death, he became very angry and smashed up the unit and was arrested. Jack was removed from the unit and returned to live with his grandmother for a short period of time. However, this did not work out and Jack became homeless.

Being restrained was difficult for a couple of children and young people and resulted in further violence, as experienced by Barry:

"I found it difficult 'cos I wasnae used to the staff putting the holds on me and restraining me. And that's when I started picking up all those assault charges. … I'd struggle and go off me nut and get done for assault. They'd do me for assault for the stupidest things like one time I kicked open a door and they did me for that."

Both Jack's and Barry's mothers had died from substance misuse and their behaviour in the residential school and secure units was linked to their grief. From the young people's perspectives, staff were very quick to use physical restraint when an alternative approach could have been adopted which would have calmed the situation. As it was, both young people responded to being physically restrained with more violence which, in turn, led staff to use more physical force and the young people being charged with assaulting them.

4.4 Experiences of Violence from Others Before a Child or Young Person Became Detached

One young person was smuggled into the UK after his family sold him into domestic servitude and was abused by the family that bought him and were charged with his care:

Tata was born in Bangladesh and lived with his family. When he was thirteen, his parents sold him for domestic servitude.

"My family was too poor … My dad don't work; he hadn't got any job and my mum work like as a maid. Then they sent me to here to get education, to get good money."

Tata's parents met with a family who were also Bangladeshi and interested in buying Tata to work in their home and restaurant in the UK. Tata does not know how much he was sold for. The agreement was that Tata's wages would be sent home to his family in Bangladesh and that he would be sent to school in the UK. Tata was not sent to school and he thinks his family stopped receiving his wages after a few months. Tata worked eighteen hours a day:

> "I had to wake up six o'clock, I had to clean their house, I had to do their breakfast, I had to clean their dishes, all this stuff. After five o'clock, I had to clean up in their restaurant, I have to work in kitchen. You know like dishes? I have to clean. So this is what I had to do all day. … The people that made me work, they never did let me go out; they like always made me work; I never got a rest; they never gave me money; they like told me that if I go outside, they gonna catch me and send me back (to Bangladesh)."

As well as working Tata so hard that he was permanently exhausted, the family were cruel to Tata and abused him:

> "Like, if they thought I wasn't working hard enough, they hit me like, you know, with sticks … I used to have so many bruises."

Whilst the issue of false imprisonment has been highlighted in previous research literature relating to children and young people running away and becoming detached from parents and carers[109], there has been no previous identification of internationally smuggled children in this body of literature. Tata's story has links with the experiences of trafficked children and young people[110]. Even though Tata's parents gave permission for their son to be brought to the UK and to work, it was on the understanding that he would be provided with an education and other opportunities and that his wages would be sent to his family. Tata's experiences reveal how vulnerable children and young people are when they are brought illegally into a country through informal arrangements. This vulnerability is reinforced by being hidden, unable to understand the dominant language of the country and having no knowledge of legal and social processes with the country they inhabit.

4.5 Destroying and Damaging Property

Perpetrating violence against property was common, being described by around half of the children and young people who participated in the research. Some responded to the emotional turmoil they felt by destroying and damaging property:

> Aidan's grandmother attempted to gain legal custody of Aidan as she did not think that Aidan's mother and stepfather were adequately caring for him:

> "Basically, my mum had problems with her mum, my nan, which must be because my nan is a bit mental. Basically, she wanted me. She wanted me to live with her … she wanted to bring me up and my mum was like 'no'. … She (Aidan's nan) thought that my mum and stepdad weren't looking after me properly but that's because she wanted to control things. She's a controlling person and took it to court (getting care of Aidan) and that sort of stuff. My mum had to go to court but my nan kept not turning up a few times and then she started representing herself."

> Aidan described how a number of events and issues in his family life have disturbed him, particularly being fought over for custody in court by his nan and mum:

> "It messed with my head; it messes with my head. … It messed me up proper, that did. … I used to do stupid things like smash up lights in my room and stuff like that, just smash up things and just go crazy."

> After getting drunk, aged thirteen, Ciaron spray-painted a house – the windows, doors and driveway. He was arrested and charged with breach of the peace, carrying an offensive weapon and being drunk and disorderly. A restriction order was placed on Ciaron and social services became involved with him.

4.6 Threats and Intimidation

Threats and intimidation was a common experience, being described by two thirds of the children and young people who participated in the research. For some, threats and intimidation formed a constant part of their lives whilst still living with their family.

> Kerry's father used threats and intimidation to control Kerry and prevent other people from stopping him doing what he wanted to do. When Kerry was five months old, her father took her away from her mother:

> "My daddy kidnapped me when I was five months … and brought me over here. He told me mummy that if she ever tried to look for me, he'd just keep moving or he'd end up killing her or something."

> Kerry's father made a number of threats to Kerry's mother which meant that her mother was too frightened to come looking for Kerry. As Kerry's father's alcohol use amplified, he became increasingly violent towards Kerry and she was subjected to extreme violence. One of the means by which Kerry's father exerted control over her was to use threats and intimidation. For example, Kerry was allowed to stay at friends' houses but was threatened by her father not to tell anyone what went on at home.

> At eight, Liam was causing problems in his neighbourhood, committing arson, fighting and was also excluded from school. Eventually, Liam's behaviour meant that he and his family had to move out of the city:

> "Because someone came in (to the house) and threatened me with a gun. They were going proper nuts … then we had police protection. Things got a little better because I calmed down a little bit. Then things started kicking off there (in the place Liam and his family had moved to) so we had to move again."

109 Smeaton E (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Young Runaways* London: The Children's Society.
110 See, for example, Pearce J Hynes P & Bovarnick S (2009) *Breaking the Wall of Silence: Practitioners' Responses to Trafficked Children and Young People* London: NSPCC.

Threats and violence sometimes acted as the trigger behind becoming detached:

> The intimidation Josie and Toby experienced from Josie's brother concerning their sexuality directly influenced their decision to leave and come to the city centre. As Toby explains:

> *"How did I end up in the city centre? It was through what happened with Josie. She told you about it didn't she? Her brother's a fucking nutter. He nearly broke my nose. The way he is with Josie, her mam and (younger) brother is out of order. Josie came to stay at mine 'cos it wasn't safe for her to stay at home. Her brother went fucking mental when he found out Josie was a lezzer[111]. I thought he was going to kill her. Then him and some of his mates turned up at mine. It was dead scary. The police were involved and everything. We decided we had to get out of there and came to stay with a mate of mine here in the city centre and haven't left."*

> Harif was sexually abused by a family friend and physically abused by his father. After threats and physical intimidation to force Harif into an arranged marriage, Harif, aged fifteen, ran away and became detached. Harif stayed with a number of the men he was involved with socially, often swapping sex for somewhere to stay. One day, his friend came round to see Harif. He was edgy and nervous, having had a visit from Harif's father and older brother who had been threatening in their behaviour and had demanded to know if Harif was at his house. They had pushed past him to get into the house and look for Harif. They threatened Harif's friend, telling him that they would be back again if Harif did not come home soon and that they would look for Harif until they found him. Harif decided that it would be best if he left X (name of a city) for a while. One of the older men he had been hanging around with said he had a friend in X (name of a city) who would put him up for a while. So, five weeks after running away, Harif got on a train and has never returned home.

Many children and young people experience threats of violence whilst living on the streets. Some of these threats relate to young peoples' relationships with their boyfriends or girlfriends:

> After becoming detached from her family when she was thirteen, Leanne moved to the streets in the city centre when she was fourteen. After a couple of weeks living rough, Leanne met a group of homeless people who she hooked up with and lived with in a squat. She had sex with some of the men and found herself unpopular with the women in the group. However, one man in particular defended her and he became her boyfriend. He was eighteen when Leanne was fourteen. Leanne and her boyfriend lived together on the streets for about a year. Leanne and her boyfriend split up after recently and, at the time of participating in the research, Leanne was wandering around the

> streets on her own with a bottle of cider, appearing dirty and unkempt. She says she is very depressed and can't be with her homeless friends as her boyfriend has a new girlfriend and she has told Leanne to stay away otherwise she will cut Leanne's face. Leanne, now fifteen, has lost her support network and the safety of being part of a group and is very vulnerable.

> Aidan leads a gang of young males. Whilst he is used to fighting and people being out to harm him, at the time of participating in the research Aidan was very upset about a situation involving his girlfriend, who keeps going off with a male from another gang who is repeatedly phoning Aidan and threatening him.

Threats and intimidation may also be related to substance misuse and owing money to drug dealers:

> Paul's substance misuse caused a lot of problems with his mother as he was smoking a lot of hash and drinking alcohol, stealing to fund his substance use and failing to attend school, eventually becoming excluded and permanently leaving school at fourteen. The conflict over Paul's substance use escalated to the degree that Paul's mother threw Paul out of home a number of times. After one incidence of being thrown out of home at fourteen, Paul became detached and lived away from home for two years. During this time, even though Paul's mother was not having direct contact with Paul, she started to buy Paul hash because:

> *"I was buying it on tic and getting into debt and people were coming to me ma's door looking for the money. … They (the people to whom Paul owed money) were saying to me ma that they were gonna kill us and stab us and that."*

4.7 Domestic Violence

As previously mentioned, domestic violence has featured heavily in the lives of half of the children and young people who participated in the research, having a very profound impact upon them. Some children and young people moved on to experience or perpetuate domestic violence in their own personal relationships whilst being detached. There are a number of long-term physical and psychological impacts of domestic violence including: arthritis, hypertension, abdominal and gastrointestinal complaints, frequent vaginal and urinary tract infection, pregnancy-related problems, depression, greater risk of suicide attempt and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)[112]. Over a tenth of the children and young people, all female, experienced violence from their boyfriends:

> When Lana was fifteen, she started a relationship with an older man:

> *"A couple of months before my sixteenth birthday, I was going out with a guy and he used to beat me up and stuff like that. … He wouldn't let me go out and I had to be with him 24/7. If I wasn't with him*

111 'Lezzer' means lesbian.
112 AARDVARC.org Inc (2008) http://www.aardvarc.org/dv/effects.shtml

> *24/7, he thought I was cheating on him. I wasn't allowed a mobile phone. I wasn't allowed nothing."*

For three months, Lana was cooped up in this man's flat without contact with anyone else:

> *"It was horrible. I had to stay in and tidy up… and he would drag me about and say 'do this, do that.'"*

For some young women, this violence did not start until they began to live with their boyfriend:

> Nina was fourteen when she was thrown out of home and moved in with her older boyfriend. He started to be violent towards her:
>
> *"He started smacking me and that … he used to hit me all the time when I went to live with him. … When he went to work, he used to lock me in."*

> Tracy moved in with her older boyfriend when she was fifteen. On her sixteenth birthday, they married. Later that evening, Tracy was talking on the phone and Tracy's husband started to shout at Tracy:
>
> *"He was effing and blinding: 'who the fuck do you think you're talking to?'"*

> Tracy's new husband had never spoken to Tracy like this before. He accused her of speaking to ex-boyfriends and said that he would hit her if he found out she was doing so. The day after they were married, Tracy's husband hit her for the first time, with a metal pole from the vacuum cleaner. On further occasions, he hit Tracy with a wooden stick and threatened Tracy with more violence:
>
> *"He said that if I didn't shut up, he was going to get a knife and slice my throat open."*

Another young person's boyfriend's violence was related to his substance misuse:

> Tilly's older boyfriend asked her to move in with him. She knew that her boyfriend used heroin and didn't have a problem with this as it seemed under control. However, once Tilly began to live with him, she realised he used more heroin than he'd previously admitted and that it became a problem if he didn't have any. His heroin use escalated and he became violent when he was rattling[113]:
>
> *"He started hitting me, sometimes in the face, screaming at me that he needed me to go get some heroin. We never had any money so I don't know how he expected me to get it but he seemed to think it was my job to sort out his gear. So I went to see his dealer who said I could have some heroin for x (boyfriend) if I slept with him again. I was too scared to go home without any gear so I did."*

Some young people remain in violent relationships for lengthy periods of time:

> Lisa started her relationship with her partner when she was fifteen and he was twenty-nine. Their relationship is violent:
>
> *"Last night we were fighting, hence the black eye. Me and my boyfriend never used to fight but now we fight all the time and they've banned me now from the building permanently which does my head in 'cos all I try to do for my boyfriend is look after him and that."*

Sometimes there were significant consequences of remaining in a violent relationship. For example, Leah's baby was taken away from her because she refused to leave her violent boyfriend:

> Leah started a relationship with a second man who was violent towards her and, because of this violence, social services expressed concerns about Leah's daughter. To prevent her daughter being taking into care, Leah agreed that her baby could live with Leah's father:
>
> *"I had her 'til she was one and then I met someone else who used to beat me up and things and the best thing was for her to go and live with my dad. It was either that or they (social services) would take her away from me so at least now she's still with family."*

Some of the young males who participated in the research hinted at being violent to their girlfriends. Aidan made it clear that from his perspective of violence within relationships, a certain level of violence is acceptable and that violence should be responded to with violence:

> From a young age Aidan witnessed his parents hitting one another. His biological parents separated and shortly afterwards his mother started another relationship with a man who became Aidan's stepfather. This relationship was also violent. Aidan thinks that a certain amount of violence within a relationship is acceptable:
>
> *"If someone's going to give something to someone, then they have to accept getting something back."*

> As well as witnessing domestic violence, Aidan has also perpetuated domestic violence:
>
> *"I've hit my girlfriend as well. I've told her that if she's going to hit me, then she's got to accept getting hit back. … It's an eye for an eye."*

Many of the females involved in violent relationships were desperate to be loved, had low self-esteem and previous experience of abuse. Only a handful of the young females made it clear that they would not stand for domestic violence:

113 The term 'rattling' refers to a drug user being desperate for their next fix of drugs and experiencing withdrawal symptoms.

51

Savanna has witnessed a lot of violence and fails to understand women who remain in violent relationships:

"I can't understand how these stupid girls go back to these people that beat them up. Last night there was an argument out there and he, oh my god, he beat her bad. … And she'll be back here today – black eyes and all, she'll be back here today. He lives above me. She's banned from here but she'll be back here today. What a stupid bitch. She's a pretty girl and she let herself go to be with that little rat upstairs and he batters her. I can't see the attraction in it. If anyone ever hit me, I'd chop his willy off. If I didn't kill him, my mother would. I just can't understand: why do they go back for more? I said to her (the female who was beaten by her boyfriend) 'look at you: you're covered in blood. You're a pretty girl. When's enough gonna be enough? When he's killed you?' Pretty girl. She's only eighteen and he's thirty-odd. She can do better."

4.8 Sexual Violence

Just under a tenth of the children and young people have experienced sexual violence before and after becoming detached. Whilst most of these are females, a few males have also experienced sexual violence. None of these children and young people had received any formal support for this sexual abuse[114]. For some, sexual violence was the direct trigger for being away from home whilst for others it was one of a catalogue of events that led them to become detached:

When Kirsten was fourteen, her older cousin forced her to perform oral sex. This event changed the good relationship Kirsten and her mother previously shared and led to Kirsten running away:

"I was fourteen and my big cousin gave me a CD; well, he didn't give me a CD, he said 'you'll do this and you'll do that and then you can have the CD.' Basically he tried to sleep with me. I pushed him off and then he forced me to give him a blow job for the CD and I had to do it, right? If I didnae do it, he was going to batter me."

Kirsten told her mum:

"And me ma was going mental. The whole family hates him (her cousin) … me ma hates him but me ma's not doing anything 'cos she's too embarrassed. Of course she wants everything to be perfect for me granny and me granny doesnae want the family falling out before she passes away and that."

Kirsten ran away because of these two connected events. Kirsten has also been raped by three men. She experiences symptoms of stress and depression and has suicidal thoughts all related to these attacks. Until participating in the research, Kirsten had not told any professionals about being sexually abused and has not received positive

responses from the family and friends she had told: Kirsten's mother, who experienced domestic violence from a number of partners and sexual abuse, told Kirsten that sometimes men do these things and that she has to live with it and responded by locking Kirsten in the house for a few weeks; Kirsten's boyfriend doesn't want Kirsten to think and talk about these attacks; a number of male friends have made plans to beat up the perpetrators; and some of Kirsten's female friends have accused her of making up being raped.

One young female became involved with a group of men who passed her amongst themselves for sexual activity[115]. Lana became involved with this group of men prior to becoming detached and became detached after leaving foster care to be with them. The sex was often non-consensual and caused pain:

Lana was given, and drank, large amounts of alcohol that often led to her becoming unconscious. Sometimes, after waking, parts of Lana's body hurt:

"Sometimes when I wake up, I can feel that my legs and up there (points to her vagina) are hurting, like my legs have been wrapped around all over the place."

Some of the men accepted Lana's refusal when she didn't want to have sex with them but others didn't and Lana has been sexually assaulted a number of times.

Other young people experienced sexual violence whilst they were away from home or care:

Jean started running away from children's homes and sleeping rough when she was twelve:

"I was raped when I was younger and on the streets. It was horrible and I didn't want to tell anyone at the time. … I don't know how (I got through it) but I just did. I was walking on the streets late at night and someone just jumped on me and that was it. The next day, I just felt so dirty I went in the river and washed myself even thought the river was filthy."

Sophie was neglected and physically abused and, from eleven, regularly thrown out of home by her mother. When she was fourteen, Sophie ended up on the streets:

"I was with my friend; she was going out with one of them (one of the four males that raped Sophie) and she says: 'come with me' and I says 'where to?' and she says 'up to my boyfriend's house for an hour' and I said 'but I don't know him'. She said it didn't matter so I got in the car and they took us to X (area of the city) and then my friend just sat in the bedroom and watched them all. I said to her: 'how can you do that to me? I'm fourteen.'"

114 Where appropriate, efforts were made to identify and facilitate appropriate support for a number of young women participating in the research who had been sexually abused.
115 This is discussed further in section seven.

> Sophie's friend knew that her boyfriend and his three friends were planning to rape Sophie and had purposely lured Sophie to her boyfriend's house so this gang-rape could take place. Up until the research interview, Sophie had not told anyone about being gang-raped and had terrible nightmares about it. She also experiences severe depression.

Children and young people's accounts of sexual violence illustrate that sexual attack is:

> "an act of violence in which sex is used as a weapon." (Warsaw, 1998; 11.)[116]

Kirsten, Jay and Sophie, and other young females, were raped by young males. Groth and others[117] argue that power, anger and sexuality are present in rapists' behaviour with power or anger being the dominant issue; sexuality is never the dominant issue. Patterns of young males using sexuality to express power or anger are very disturbing phenomena, revealing that these young males perceive such behaviours towards young females to be acceptable. Young males were also at risk of sexual attack imbued with perpetrators' power and anger issues:

> "Sometimes people would try daft things 'cos I was a kid and vulnerable. … One time I wasn't sure exactly what they were trying to do but they were all perverts … they wanted sex, basically. … One time I went over to this group of blokes on the street for change and that and they said 'oh, we'll give you a lift home' and then they said 'come with us and we'll chill out' … there was four of them. … Then they had me pinned against a wall saying things like 'you're a rough lad, aren't you? I bet you'd like it up the arse' and they started touching me and that. I managed to pick up a brick and started to hit them with it and screaming 'get off me' at the top of my voice and hitting at them. Nothing actually happened because they just gave me a good doing. … This was pretty scary the first few times but then this became another thing that I became more streetwise about and I knew how to handle it and then it stopped happening. And then I was ready for anything then. It actually became more annoying than anything else. It became like 'oh, here we go again'. It was like these blokes thought something like 'let's terrorise this lad here and give him his worst nightmare' but I'd be like 'it's happened before, mate, and you ain't going to do it either.'"

Some children and young people both witnessed and experienced sexual violence at different points in their life:

> Jay saw and heard her stepfather trying force her mother to have sex with him:

> "Me and my brother would be in the room with them and he would be trying to get my mum to have sex with him, grabbing her and that, and she would be saying 'I don't want to, I don't want to'. And he would say 'well, we're going to; I don't care if you're not in the mood'. … Even if we weren't in

> the room with them, we could hear them in the bedroom 'cos he wasn't subtle about it. You could tell he was pissed off if he didn't get his own way about it."

Jay lived on the streets from the age of thirteen and experienced attempted rape three times:

> "I've nearly been raped three times and I've been sliced in my belly. … (On the occasions) I managed to get away. Obviously there's a lot of Yardies and things and other Jamaicans and they used to walk about on the streets and they'd seen me frequently 'cos I was on the streets and knew that I had nowhere to go and one night one tried to grab me. They tried to get me to go to a house, but I wouldn't and they sliced me in my belly. … I went to hospital and they said it was a flesh wound and put a couple of stitches in it."

4.9 Violence on the Streets

Around three quarters of the children and young people described the violence of the streets. For some this was an overwhelming sense of violence that was present all around them and included both homeless and non-homeless populations:

> "There's car robberies, armed robberies with guns. … On shops and jewellers … I've not been involved in anything like that. I know people who say they've done stuff like that but whether they have, I've got no idea. … There's been a couple of murders up here that I've known the people who've gone down (for the murder). … There was one time when this man got stabbed in the street and I knew the lad that did it so I told the police and he went down for it. I don't know whether that was the right thing to do 'cos the lad didn't know I was there when he did it and someone died so he (the person who committed the stabbing) should serve his time for it. So I went to the police. … It (going to the police) was a very hard thing to do 'cos I'm dead wary of myself on the streets. I know how everybody is but I know what some of them are capable of as well and I know what can happen. … I got friends with (a) chef and he got stabbed round the back of where we worked and he got stabbed in the hand and in the leg a couple of times. That all happened where all the homosexuals go and there was three of them who were drunk and lived in the hostels and they just went in (to the restaurant) and said 'get us some money' and they ended up kicking his head in and leaving him for dead. That ended up being a pretty big case and going on for about seven months. He got three years, the guy who finished my best friend (the chef) off and left him for dead. … He's (the chef) in prison now … for the murder of someone. My friend's got a twenty-one-year sentence for killing someone. … All that did have an effect on me. I figured that I don't want to be in a place, you know, where there's loads of hardened criminals."

116   Warsaw R (1988) *I Never Called it Rape Olympia: The Ms. Report on Recognising, Fighting and Surviving Date and Acquaintance Rape* W A: University Press.
117   Groth A Burgess W & Holmstrom L (1977) 'Power, Anger and Sexuality' in *American Journal of Psychiatry* 134 1239–1243.

> *"I still feel that now (that something bad could happen). I've never been uncautious; I've always been cautious and never go out without my knife; not because I feel like stabbing somebody but because I don't want it happening to me. Maybe it's me being a bit paranoid or something but I've kind of been running with some people who've had bad things happen to them."*

Being involved in fights was common amongst the majority of young males and a few females. Sometimes this was in self-defence when attacked by others. Fights also took place when children and young people were 'off their heads' on alcohol or other substances. Children and young people could react violently to the slightest provocation. Some criminal activity became violent, for example when someone resisted having their mobile phone stolen. Most of the young males felt that it was important that they were able to take care of themselves physically and some had gone to extreme lengths to prove this so that their reputation and past acts of violence would ensure that others would leave them alone. The ability to fight and be violent becomes a survival strategy when a child or young person inhabits a violent world:

> *"I used to fight a lot; just with people who get on your tits. I used to get bullied when I was younger by people bigger and older than me but then I just decided it's not happening any more. Some guy tried to bully me so I broke his jaw. … I don't know if I'm hard or not but if I have to, I can kick the shit out of someone. … Some guy came at me with a knife quite recently and he kicked the shit out of me. I got back up, broke his nose and fractured his ribs."*

A number of young people responded to violence with violence when they were on the streets after finding themselves the target of assault:

> *"I got arrested for assault … for one of these white men. They were being racist. … Basically, I was at a party, yeah, and two of my friends were going to the chippy shop and we saw my friends arguing with these white men so we went over, yeah, and said 'what's going on?' and this white man head butted me so we beat him up, right, and then loads of their friends came up and chased us up to the party. These are like grown men; they weren't boys. … So, anyway, we went back up to the party and more of our friends came out and then we just fucked them (the white men) up, basically. Someone got stabbed."*

Victims of Violence on the Streets[118]

Over two-thirds of the children and young people have been victims of violence whilst spending time on the streets. Children and young people described being attacked, whilst sleeping on the streets:

> *"Sometimes there would be groups of kids and adults having a go at you. I've had my eye socket broken loads of times."*

They shared anecdotes of others who were sleeping on the streets at the same time as them being severely harmed by, for example, having petrol poured over them and set alight or being beaten so badly they were in a coma for a long time.

Perpetrators of Violence

Some of the children and young people who were victims of violence whilst on the streets became perpetrators of violence on the streets. Most of these perpetrators were male but a few were female. Substance use is often at the core of violent actions towards others, which often results from conflict arising when a child or young person is under the influence of substances. Violent acts were also perpetrated when a child or young person is in the pursuit of money to buy substances:

Phil has been on the streets since he was fifteen and, by his own admission, is addicted to heroin. To fund his heroin habit, he has carried out a number of violent crimes. Whilst reflecting upon his actions, Phil is able to see that that his need for drugs is what spurs him to commit violent crimes:

> *"I've done everything to get money. I've done cash point robberies. Hitting people and taking their money. Or, I've held a knife to them just before they press the cash point button, put the knife to them and say 'get the money out'. One man said 'there's only twenty pound in it' and I say 'well I've been on the streets for years so press the balance or I'll plug you anyway'. So he pressed the balance and there's like so much in it. And you're only allowed to take two hundred and fifty out or three hundred so I tell him to take the lot out. They were trying to get away with a score and because of the lie, and because of the drugs, afterwards I said 'because of the lie, you're going to get bounced about a bit' and really it's not their fault; it's the drugs."*

Jason has been involved in two street robberies and was in court shortly after participating in the research. He was expecting to be sent to prison. He does not know who he assaulted on one of these occasions:

> *"I was meant to be bevvied and at the scene of the crime."*

The second street robbery relates to stealing a mobile phone from another young person. Jason was very keen to stress that he has only taken stolen a phone from someone once:

> *"I don't usually do things like that and I only done it once. I was hungry, I was starving and me dog was starving. And me dog wasn't going hungry. I love me dog more than anything. It (taking the phone of the kid) was just horrible. It was just horrible. … It wasn't like I robbed the phone; like I went up to the kid and just robbed it. I don't even know – I didn't go up to the kid and rob the phone – I wouldn't have the nerve. The police are lying. That phone was on the bench so I took it. The lad says: 'he*

> *took it off me'. … The next day the witnesses were walking by and they got battered by me mates … I get nicked for witness intimidation or something and I was like 'what for? I don't even know anything about it'. … They dropped the bit about witness intimidation and charged me with robbery."*

As touched upon above, children and young people sometimes committed violent acts for survival when they had no money and needed to eat. A few children and young people were committing violent acts when they still spent time living at home but wanted money to fund alcohol and other drugs. They witnessed others committing violent crime and this became part of what they did when they were out on the streets:

From eleven, Jake has been committing street robberies and has stolen mobile phones from children and young people on numerous occasions. Jake has carried a knife since he was ten, has threatened others with his knife when mugging them, and has used his knife when he or his friends were being attacked, or were at risk of attack:

> *"Sometimes it's you or them, innit, and sometimes you got to protect yourself or your boys, yeah? That's how it is sometimes."*

Jake has also been cut several times with a knife but has never sought professional medical help.

Some children and young people who have experienced violence do not act violently to others. However, some found themselves responding to a situation with violence for the first time and are confused by this, whilst recognising that they felt stressed and under pressure:

Lana described how life was difficult for her at the time of participating in the research:

> *"I'm on a bit of a slippery road at the moment because I beat a girl up really bad … because I was going through a bad stage and I found her in bed with my boyfriend. This wasn't the boyfriend I'm with now; this was last year but I got done for it recently."*

Before finding the girl in bed with her boyfriend, Lana had befriended her:

> "*I took her down my end of town where I'd been brought up, yeah? Within minutes she was causing trouble with my mates; she stayed at my mate's house causing trouble and I got hit one night 'cos of her and everyone turned against her but I stood by her. And when I found her in bed with my boyfriend, I did severely beat her."*

This was the first time that Lana has been violent to anyone:

> *"I've never done that before. I'm not a fighter. I don't know why (I did it); I was just stressed."*

This violence is a consequence of a series of difficult and damaging events and experiences in the lives of the children and young people, for which they have received no support. For example, Lana has experienced physical and emotional abuse from her mother, been forced to act as a young carer and been sexually exploited and attacked by a number of men.

It was commonly accepted by children and young people that sometimes they were at the receiving end of violence and at other times they were the ones who dished violence out:

> *"Violence is like nature, if you know what I mean, because you win some, you lose some; you get put down and then back up, live and fight another day."*

4.10 Weapons

In recent years there has been a significant increase in the use of weapons by young people and an increase in the number of young people who have been the victims of attacks with weapons. In London, in an eight month period during 2007, there were reports of 952 children and young people being stabbed and 321 shot[119].

Only males in the research sample carried weapons. One female described being attacked with a knife, compared with nearly a tenth of all the males.

Children and young people who participated in the research recounted how they have been attacked by other young people wielding weapons. Such an experience is often the trigger for a child or young person to start carrying a weapon:

Barry received a head wound from a meat cleaver and was stabbed in his leg with a knife. He started to carry a knife for self-protection after hearing that a gang were after him. Barry was caught by the police, charged with possession of a dangerous weapon, and was in court the day after participating in the research. As Barry already has a police record for violent acts, he is expecting to be sent to a YOI and was feeling very low about this.

Many young males preferred not to carry or use weapons but did so because others did. If someone they were fighting pulled out a weapon, it was necessary to retaliate and protect themselves by also pulling out a weapon and being prepared to use it. Some tried to limit the damage they did with a weapon but witnessed others who did not have any sense of boundaries when fighting. Such individuals are viewed by many of the young males who participated in the research as changing the nature of the violence:

> *"I always did like a good old-fashioned scrap, ken, but a lot of the time you didn't get much of a chance because they pulled something out on you, know what I mean? There's been times when it's been me or them and I've had to use a weapon. … The whole time I seen somebody do it (use a weapon), I've never seen anybody get killed but*

119   MPS (Metropolitan Police) (2007) *Pan-London Gang Survey* London: Metropolitan Police.

I've seen people get injured. I've stabbed people when I've had to. When I've had to do it, I've done it in the leg or the arm … I don't really like knives, eh, but sometimes I've had to. There was some boys who would take it over the top, eh, and start stabbing them in the chest and that. I was really against that, eh, and got pissed at some of them boys. … When you're doing that, it's coming out of the category of being a laugh and making it too serious. … The ones who take it too far are basically violent and aren't in it for the laugh … sometimes it's the ones you least expect; the ones who are lawyers and that."

This quote reveals the attitude of the few young males involved in football violence. A degree of violence was viewed as 'a laugh' and those that went beyond this degree were viewed as violent. This perspective reveals how what constitutes violent behaviour shifts for individuals over time with the process of moving from being a victim of violence to becoming a perpetrator of violence and the normalisation of violence that is part of many children and young people's childhoods.

A number of young people described how younger children often carry pens to use as a weapon as they can cause damage to others with a pen but avoid being charged with possession of a dangerous weapon. There is a sense that many young people, especially males, carry weapons and that this is for their own protection and survival. Some young males accept that this is how it is in their world but others expressed concern about the use of weapons:

"All these stabbings and shootings concern me. That stuff never happened to me but happened to people I know. People have been bottled and everything. It's dangerous shit out there. … But now that's like normal, people being shot and stabbed. It's nothing now to have a shooter and to use it. … The streets are full of guns."

Knives
Many of the young males who participated in the research carry knives, or have done so at various points in their life. As mentioned, some young people have been carrying a knife since they were ten. Some young men carry their knife wherever they go, even when popping out to the corner shop as there is the possibility of people waiting for them. This is particularly relevant for those who live in hostels and supported housing projects after becoming detached, as it becomes known that this is where they live and anyone looking for them knows where to find them. Carrying a knife has therefore become commonplace and another survival strategy:

"Knives are the normal ting. … I carry a knife. I don't go out that much so anyone, who wanted trouble with me knows where to find me. I tend to stay away so I don't get put into anything that comes round. … If I went to certain areas, I'd definitely carry my knife. If I go anywhere, I carry my knife. … (The researcher asks if he would carry his knife if he went out to the shops). … It depends

how close the shops was and who I might see on the way. If I'm on the bike going down to the shops, then I wouldn't carry it (his knife); if I was in a car, I wouldn't carry it. But, if it's like here in the city and I've got to walk to the Co-Op and past the college, then I'd carry it. Now, the thing is, there's always so many people out to get you. … It's all because of gangs, innit?"

"The people carry blades in their sole. They cut holes and carry knives inside their (shoe) sole. There's a bit (of the knife) hanging out so they can quickly pull it out and shiv[120] someone up, know what I mean?"

Guns
Gun crime has risen significantly in some cities in Wales and England[121] largely because of increased availability and decreased prices[122]. In some areas of the UK, guns, were not mentioned by children and young people participating in the research. In a couple of areas, children and young people identified a limited gun culture: air rifles were common and some people were known to carry small pistols. However, in other areas, carrying a gun had become more common, and the norm for some young people so that detached children and young people had to consider that others may be carrying firearms:

Jimmy described how it has become increasingly easy to get hold of a gun and more and more people are carrying and using guns:

"If you roll with the right sort of people, it's very easy to get a gun. If I wanted a gun, I could go get one now. With a bit of effort and the right people trusting you (the researcher), you could get a gun."

Jimmy knows some people who have guns:

"Some people I know have straps[123] … for protection, to do what they gotta do, whatever, innit? To do robberies. … Some people might just have them to like have them as a status thing but that doesn't mean anything. Some people have them to use them and some people have them to do their routine: say they're going out doing robberies every day, they'll have that gun not willing to shoot someone but if it really comes down to something, they will use it."

A couple of young males had a firearm at some point whilst they were detached:

Brad started to carry a gun when he was fourteen and was surrounded by other young people who used guns. He prefers guns to knives:

"Shanks[124] are a bit more serious than a gun, you know. … I'd rather get shot than get shanked up … I'd rather take a gunshot than get stabbed. … I never used to carry a blade really; it just didn't, it just didn't inspire me. The guns inspire me more, you know. When you look in a mirror with a gun loading up, thinking you are a little bad boy with a

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120 'Shiv' refers to cutting or stabbing someone with a knife.
121 Bullock K & Tilley N (2003) *Shooting, Gangs and Violent Incidents in Manchester: Developing a Crime Reduction Strategy* London: The Home Office.
122 Pitt J (2008) *Reluctant Gangsters: The Changing Face of Youth Crime* Uffculme: Willan Publishing.
123 The term 'straps' refers to guns.
124 'Shanks' are knives.

> *hoodie on … and you're thinking 'yeah, this is the way. … I was passionate about guns."*

Brad now recognises that with guns come all kinds of consequences, many unknown:

> *"Once you pull the trigger of a gun … (you) are causing all kinds of problems there … I'm not just talking about firing a gun; I'm talking about pointing at someone and trying to kill them. 'Cos that's what you're intending to do; you're not just gonna harm him or tickle him … what a bullet can do: it can destroy you in many ways; it can half cripple you; it can kill you. You don't know what you're gonna do; you are just sitting there pulling the trigger."*

Brad's description of how he feels when he has sees himself in a mirror with a gun in his hand conveys part of the attraction some young males have to possessing a gun; they like how it makes them feel and look.

One young person admitted shooting someone in the past and now having to deal with the consequences:

> *"Honestly, hand on my heart, (I) never killed anyone. I've been probably close, do you know what I mean? I've put people in hospital from it but, and then, you know, word gets around and then they're after me 'cos I put someone in hospital."*

Amongst young people who carry guns, there is acknowledgement that if someone thinks they are big enough to carry a gun, they need to be big enough to use it as the likelihood is that they will:

> *"If I want to carry a gun at fourteen, I've got to be the bigger man; that's how it is: if you ain't gonna pull the trigger, then don't have the gun. … The majority of people (who are carrying guns), I'd say ninety percent will use a gun."*

Sometimes a gun is used, in the heat of the moment, to settle a relatively minor incident all because the young person happens to be carrying a gun. One young person described an incident where one of his gang members used a gun on his best friend because of something that took place between his best friend's sister and the shooter's girlfriend:

> *"I know this incident where … one of them got shot in the leg … but he couldn't go to hospital. … It was his best mate that shot him. Something had happened with his girlfriend and sister and it escalated until my man's getting a gun out and shooting his best friend; that's his boy who he's grew up with since he was little. …. No-one's gonna mess with him again … word will get round on the street: my man's just popped his best mate."*

Some young people will avoid going to hospital or seeking other professional medical help when they have been shot because they do not want to police to become involved or for it to become known to any official sources that they

were carrying a gun or are involved in any activity that involved guns. In addition, young people won't report a gun wound or seek formal medical attention if the gun is dirty[125]:

> *"And once you get a dirty gun, you can trace it; it goes back years and years and you can end up doing life sentences over that. People won't report it because they're related to the gang and the gang will close in on it all. … So a lot of people don't report it. It's gunshot; you can get rid of it with a bit of vodka and a stitch and you're done."*

4.11 Gangs

Many children and young people spent time, both prior to becoming detached and whilst detached, hanging out with groups of children and young people on, for example, the streets, in parks and in city centres. For some of these children and young people, they were simply spending time with their friendship group and this time may involve illegal activities, such as criminal activities and using drugs, and fighting with other children and young people. There were also children and young people, mostly male, who self-identified as being part of a gang[126]; nearly half of all males who participated in the research identified as being part of a gang. The few females who described themselves as being part of a gang specifically described a group of homeless people who stuck together on the streets. A few males stated that, in their experience, girls did not become members of gangs. One young male articulated the view that the same pressures to be part of a gang also apply to females:

> *"I don't just think it's a male thing, you know? It's where you're from so girls could have to think about the same things; never rule that out."*

As young females who have participated in the research have experienced the same dysfunctional environments as males and also require protection on the streets, it is interesting that whilst many seek the protection of a mixed sex group on the streets, they do not form or belong to gangs.

With one exception, all the children and young people who identified as belonging to a gang were white. Whilst the number of children and young people from ethnic backgrounds other than white who participated in the research was small, this contradicts often held assumptions about gangs being the domain of black and minority ethnic youth. Hallsworth and Young note that concerns relating to gangs often focus upon the perception that gangs comprise minority youths:

> "there is an ethnic dimension to this fear (of gangs) as the gang is seen to wear a brown face. Thus the gang problem is always a problem of Jamaican 'Yardies', the African Ghetto Boys, the Muslim boys, the Chinese Triads, the Turkish/Kurdish Baybasin Clan, the Asian Fiat Bravo Boys and so on. These are outsiders threatening the good society, outsiders unlike us, essentialised in their difference."
> (Hallsworth and Young, 2008; 185.)[127]

125 'Dirty' refers to a gun that has been used in shootings and linked to a crime.
126 There were some differences between self reporting of gangs amongst the four countries of the UK. None of the children and young people who participated in the research in Northern Ireland identified as being part of a gang or mentioned gangs in their experiences of being detached. There was some discussion of how paramilitary organisations affected their lives which is discussed later in this section of the report. There was also no mention of gangs by children and young people in Wales.
127 Hallsworth S & Young T (2008) 'Gang Talk and Gang Talkers: A Critique' *Crime, Media and Culture* 2008 4 175.

The experiences of children and young people who participated in this research reveal that white children and young people are also part of gangs, also commit violent street crime and are viewed as problematic in local areas.

In a couple of areas, professionals who worked with children and young people said gangs were not a part of youth culture in their area but children and young people who participated in the research claimed otherwise. For example, in one area, a number of young people laughingly described a gang of 'rude boys' who, at one time, caused problems for these children and young people whilst they were detached. This gang were involved in a lot of violence and crime but now that the two main leaders are in prison, their credibility has lessened and they are not taken seriously.

A description of 'gang', fitting with some of the gangs that children and young people who participated in the research belong to, is that offered by Pitt:

> Children and young people who see themselves, and are seen by others, as affiliates of a discrete, named group with a discernible structure and a recognised territory.
> (Pitt, 2008; 6)[128]

From young people's descriptions of the degree of organisation and how their gang formed and operated, it became apparent that there was some diversity in the nature of the gangs that detached children and young people belonged to. Some children and young people[129] belonged to a 'football firm'[130]:

> Lee describes the football firm he was involved with as the 'top mob' in X. Lee distinguishes between a 'gang' and a 'firm'. In a firm it's about:
>
> *"Making a name for yourself and getting to the top … I don't call it a gang; it's not really a gang but I wouldn't know how to define it (a firm), I really wouldn't. But it's like one or two days a week, depending upon what's happening, you go out with your pals, go to a pub, get pissed, start with a couple of lines of coke, go to a game and just do the bastards, know what I mean? It's silly in a way but it's a great buzz after; it really is, I can't explain that."*

The difference between a football firm and gangs, as defined by children and young people who participated in the research, is that where gang allegiance is expected to be complete, members of football firms live their own separate lives for most of the week, only coming together for football matches and organised fights around football events.

A few young people were clearly involved in criminal business organisations but the majority belonged to gangs of children and young people who hung out together, perhaps shared a similar identity and were involved in fights with other gangs of a similar ilk to themselves. Some children and young people who lived on the streets formed gangs that came together as a means of survival.

Some young people were dismissive of the gangs that other children and young people belonged to. From the perspective of those young people involved in organised gangs concerned with planned criminal activity, other children and young people are viewed as being what Pitt refers to as 'the wannabes':

> The wannabes have not developed the structural characteristics of traditional gangs. They have a narrow age range and high turnover. Although wannabes may assume the trappings of street gangs, insignia, street names, etc, and lay claim to territory, they are loosely structured groups, engaging in spontaneous social activity and impulsive criminal activity, including collective violence against other groups of youths.
> (Pitt, 2008; 27.)[131]

One of the young males who belonged to an established, organised and hierarchical gang involved in selling drugs was dismissive of many of the gangs that others talk about:

> *"When I hear people say about gangs, it makes me laugh because they're not a gang, you know. They're not dedicated to that gang; their heart's not set on their gang. … (Where hearts are set on a gang) if there's a war going on between two gangs, they'll shoot until the last bullets are gone. It don't matter if there's eight men down there and six men down there, it will keep going 'cos that's what (some) gangs are about. They'll fight and they'll fight for their territory or their reputation cos' you've got to have reputation in a gang. So you've got this new gang now and they've got to prove to other people and other gangs and word's got to get about on the street. … If you take my gang, for instance, we need to obviously prove to other gangs that we ain't no pussy hole and we ain't gonna take no shit."*

As touched upon in the above quote, there was a sense from some children and young people that, if a gang is to be taken seriously and be effective, there is need for dedication to the gang. As one young person expressed, it is not enough for a gang member to be committed to their gang:

> *"You've got to love it as well."*

As mentioned earlier, the majority of children and young people who participated in the research and self-defined as being part of a gang were not involved in criminal based organisations who were involved in, for example, trading in guns and drugs. Whilst violence was a feature of all gang activity, it was often not in any organised fashion with the exception of the organised violence of football firms. Accounts of these incidents reveal some of the tensions that existed for a child or young person when they participated in this form of violence. For example, concern that they were going to be harmed, being injured and having to maintain their own reputation alongside the feeling of adrenalin that flowed with the violence:

128 Pitt J (2008) *Reluctant Gangsters: The Changing Face of Youth Crime* Uffculme: Willan Publishing.
129 Being part of a football firm was only identified by children and young people in Scotland.
130 A 'football firm' is described as a gang formed to fight with supporters form other football clubs.
131 Pitt J (2008) *Reluctant Gangsters: The Changing Face of Youth Crime* Uffculme: Willan Publishing.

"My first time was X (name of the opposing football firm). I was about fourteen when I got my first proper scrap. I shat myself, I really did 'cos they put me on with about six big boys. There was about twenty of us and more of them and I thought 'this is suicide, it really is'. I was about the youngest there. Anyway, I ended up having a bottle put over the top of me head and I had to go to hospital and have stitches on the top of my head. … I couldn't resist the buzz; it was a great buzz for a laddie of that age; you've never seen anything like this and then – bam! You're right slap bang in the middle of it all and it's just like you wanna just go for it and you don't want to show anybody you're a pussy, know what I mean? You're with all these older guys and you don't want to fanny about. There were a couple of my cousins there and I didn't want to let them down. They're like: 'we're proud of you son; you done well.'"

Sometimes children and young people were injured but accepted this as part of the process:

"You might be lucky one day, you might not. … I was quite unlucky one time. I was in first, it was my turn to be in first, I was sixteen, and I ran to jump up at the top boy who was standing right in front of me and do a flying kick, right, and I completely missed it, right, and he pulled me into the whole crowd and put to the ground. I was kicked up and down and I was unconscious … I woke up in the boozer two hours later and I was like 'how did I get here?' Me pal was like 'you got booted to fuck, you got booted to fuck.'"

Postcodes, Zones and Territory
Being part of a gang was often based on location and territoriality and young people talked about 'postcodes'[132] and how the postcode area automatically defined which gang a child or young person belonged to. The protection of their area, or postcode, was something that brought children and young people together in a gang. Children and young people described forming a gang with other children and young people living on their housing estate who fought regularly with gangs from other housing estates:

"It was just the way people were where I lived; that's what you did: fight with other kids from other estates. We were young, man, and I was backing me pals up all the time."

"If you and your boys see another group of boys that you don't get on with … boys from another zone … you'd have a scrap with them."

Much of the violence that takes place between gangs is related to protection of locality. Young people described how gangs from other areas, and sometimes different towns, came to their area and how the ensuing fighting involved rival gangs coming together to protect their locality:

"Like the Scousers came down here a couple of month back and tried taking over the town. Everyone here: my gang, my mates' gangs, all of us, yeah, were stood fighting with them because we don't like anyone taking over our town. If we came down to theirs and started trying to take over their town, they'd have everybody there."

These findings echo others addressing young people and territorialism[133]: that territorialism was often passed from older generations and was part of every day life, informing identity and friendships. Territorial identities were often expressed through conflict and young people gained respect from representing their area.

Shared Identity and Conflict Arising from Different Identities
For some of the young people, protection of locality was enough rationale for belonging to a particular gang, but for other young people postcode was important but not the only criteria, as a shared identity was also part of their gang culture:

"You've heard of the postcode thing, yeah? But for my gang it was more than that. It's about how we look, how we dress, what colours we wear, how we carry ourselves, how we act, what weapons we carry, what music we're into, how we treat one another and other people."

Young people who spent time in YOIs described how differences between members of different gangs in the same institution could result in violence within that institution. Sometimes a violent incident was triggered by nothing more than two people from two rival gangs being in the same institution:

After being sentenced and sent to a particular institution in the north, as a southern male from a particular gang, one young person knew he was going to get trouble in the YOI:

"I knew trouble was coming at me. I knew the first time I went into the showers, I was going to get it so on my first day in the nick, I walked up to the geezer I knew was the top dog and head butted him and messed his nose up. I did get a doing in the showers but I let people know I wasn't no pussy and most people respected that and left me alone."

Sometimes young people came together in a gang because of a shared style of dressing and physical presentation which could lead to fights with other gangs with a different presentation style:

Aidan described how a lot of the trouble stemmed from different looks, styles of clothing and how clothes were worn, and how other gangs would start fights with him and others in his gang because of the way they look.

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132 Following up on the use of 'postcode lottery' in the introduction to the report, this second description of how postcodes impact upon children and young people's lives leads to the observation that where a person lives, their postcode, influences the direction of their life in a number of ways; for example: which school they attend, eligibility for local authority services, which gang they belong to, who their friends are and with whom, opposing gangs, they cannot form friendship groups.
133 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2008) *Young People and Territoriality in British Cities* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Lee started gang life with the Baby Crew of a football firm:

"The Baby Crew, right … is the younger ones (of the football firm); you always start in the Baby Crew."

From being in the Baby Crew from thirteen to fifteen:

"There was this thing called 'hunt the Emo' which was basically about Goths … 'cos I was a wee hooligan, I was a wee Baby Crew boy. … I'd be walking with four or five boys, right, and I'd see a couple of Emos. I'd spark a joint, right, and start smoking it, right, and wait for somebody (a Goth) to walk past and intentionally bang into them right and say 'what the fuck do you think you're banging into?' and crack (Lee gestures to indicate that he would head butt the Goth). That's what I used to be like. I used to love it."

When asked why Goths were his choice of target, Lee answered:

"I think it's 'cos they were a bit different. … I class myself as a Chav. I wear all the Burberry gear and all that. I still am (a Chav) to an extent but I'm not a nasty cunt any more. I've calmed down a lot since then. I think it was just 'cos they look different, they acted different; they acted like they were scared of you all the time so you thought 'right, you're scared of me so I'll give you reason to be scared of me.' Not only that, I knew they always had hash on them so I was like 'give us your hash, give us your mobile phone'. That's how we had a good time."

Reputation

What is common to the children and young people who participated in the research and their gangs is the importance of reputation. This is confirmed by other research[134] and expressed by young people involved in gangs at a number of different levels:

"Reputation; reputation and not looking like an idiot."

There were differences in what children and young people were prepared to do to gain and protect their reputation, but maintaining reputation was the common factor, be it with the other group of children from the neighbouring estate or the rival organised gang involved in drug dealing and guns. To protect a gang's reputation, it is important for the gang to retaliate if another gang injures a member of their gang:

"If you got this new gang over there and one of their boys gets stabbed, this other gang (the one who stabbed the other gang member), they're thinking 'they're nothing man; what they gonna do? They're not gonna retaliate'. So the other gang needs to retaliate for other gangs to hear what they're all about so they will retaliate. Then it keeps going so then they're getting their reputation and word's getting about on the streets: don't mess with them 'cos they will hack you up or whatever."

Reasons for Joining a Gang

Children and young people became involved in gangs for different reasons and through different routes. For some young males, becoming part of a gang was inevitable, and sometimes seamless, as those around them belonged to gangs, both friends and family members:

Troy's father was sometimes away for days at a time. When Troy was older, he found out that his father was part of a gang that carried out violent crimes such as holding up off-licences with sawn off shot guns. He can remember being woken in the middle of the night on one occasion and seeing that his father had been stabbed in the arm and was bleeding heavily.

There was an assumption that Lee would become part of a particular football firm because there was a strong family affiliation to it:

"I've got family that was involved in it and a cousin who is one of the top boys … I've got family who are serious fucks … who are really into it and into the whole football violence culture – the fighting and the drugs – and are well known, know what I mean? People know who they are. … And they don't want to fuck with them."

Brad described how he learnt to be part of a gang from his father:

"I took it all from the older generation … I learnt it all from my dad. … My dad's taught me everything I know about drugs and crime and guns … I know how to rip a gun apart, know how to put it back together and clean it."

Brad's father holds a high place in a prominent gang. At times, the link with his father has benefited Brad. For example, whilst working as a drug runner for his father, Brad was treated badly by the people selling the drugs. Brad's father intervened and Brad was not treated badly again:

"My dad set something up for me to go pick up a bit of green but I don't know these people (from whom he was getting the grass) but they know my dad but not that I'm my dad's son. Well, I go there and they treat me like a dickhead and it get back to my dad. Now my dad don't like that because no-one takes his son for a dickhead and he go back (to the people that treated Brad like a dickhead) and he's like 'why you being like that for?' 'Well, now you fucking do, so have you got a problem?' 'Nah, there's no problem, no problem.'"

Other times, after doing something stupid or making a careless mistake, Brad's dad has pulled him up in front of his mates and girlfriend and humiliated him. Brad may not have been dealt with in such a severe way as if someone else had made the same mistake but has been degraded to ensure he does not make the mistake again:

134 Wright R Brookman F & Bennett T (2006) 'The Foreground Dynamics of Street Robbery in Britain' *British Journal of Criminology* 46 (1) pg 1–15.

> *"My old man's always gave people warnings. I've slipped a couple of times and … I haven't been dealt with, do you know what I mean, but I've had a few slaps in front of other people … And I've been pulled up on the streets, you know: 'what's up dad?' 'Get in the car.' So I get in the car and he starts slapping me round the face … 'what you been doing this for?' Do you know what I mean? In front of my bird and me mates. And I'm going bright red in the face but he has to do it … for (father's) reputation. Because, otherwise, if he don't do it and something slips up, it makes him look bad."*

When someone is new to the streets, joining a gang can be a survival strategy to manage being on the streets as a gang provides:

> *"People to talk to you, yeah, and people to help you in situations you don't understand. So gangs is related to like family. A gang and family is like, basically, the same thing except, the gang, you go out fighting and with family, you don't. … It's just like a relationship with a family. My experience of gangs, yeah, is like a relationship, if you understand, because in a relationship you need someone there to help you in situations."*

Whilst the pull of the gang can be strong for those without family because the gang provides a sense of family, for children and young people who do have family a gang provides "a buzz" and a sense of freedom: whilst family provides safety and security, a gang provides kicks and excitement:

> *"Because at home with the proper family, you can't do anything; you can't go out cruising all night or stealing cars or motorbikes; but in a gang you can go out and do what the hell you want, basically; so it's freedom."*

Some young males become involved in gangs because they have a weak or non-existent bond to their family. Being part of a gang is a survival strategy that meets both physical and emotional needs. As one young person explains:

> *"It made me feel older and it made me feel as if I was part of something. … Other people would think 'keep away from him; he's a fucking lunatic'. … People would keep away from me because they knew I was part of the firm."*

Being part of a gang provides protection for children and young people both prior to becoming detached and once they are detached. The children and young people who participated in the research believe that life has become more dangerous for them, particularly in some parts of towns and cities in the UK, and being part of a gang affords some protection from other gangs and individuals in these areas. When a child or young person is on the streets, the potential for risk and harm increases and being part of a gang, whether it be formed by groups of homeless people or those from the non-homeless population, is an important survival strategy.

For those children and young people who had difficulties forming friendships with peers, joining and starting a gang offered a route to friendship and closeness with other children and young people:

> Before becoming involved with his gang, Aidan was a loner who needed something to do. Bringing together a gang provided Aidan with something to do and also helped him to come out of himself and become more sociable:
>
> *"I always used to be on my own and didn't chat much. Now I talk a lot and see people."*
>
> Aidan is a hard man. By his own admission, he is capable of extreme violence and has a reputation for being capable of violent acts. Even though he has a small frame he commands respect and fear because of his capacity for violence. Aidan is the leader of his gang and there is a lot of loyalty between the members of the gang:
>
> *"If anyone's got problems with any of us, then they've got problems with all of us … that's what we do. One night there was about ten of us and we all said, we all just put out hands in the middle of the circle and said if anything happens to any of us, it happens to all of us."*

As the above quote from Adian and the previous quote about being part of a relationship reveals, being part of a gang also provides a sense of belonging for children and young people and the security that there are others who care about them and will be there when difficulties arise. In many instances, children and young people described a psychological need for being part of their gang. As Pitt notes:

> "gang-affiliated young people, particularly if their bond to families and conventional institutions is tenuous, may develop a dependency upon the gang that will be reinforced by the threat posed by other gangs." (Pitt, 2008;105.)[135]

Other young males described how they also became part of a gang because:

> *"There was nothing else to do."*

Recruitment into Football Firms
Young males described how they were actively recruited into football firms by adults who drew them into a specific section of the football firm referred to, as previously explained, as 'the Baby Crew':

> *"They try and get as many as they can."*

Young people who have been part of the Baby Crew described how a lot of bullying took place within the Baby Crew but that some young people were protected from this bullying because an older male 'takes them under their wing':

135 Pitt J (2008) *Reluctant Gangsters: The Changing Face of Youth Crime* Uffculme: Willan Publishing.

> *"I was well looked after. One of the big big boys looked after me so others left me alone. He took a liking to me 'cos he says he sees a lot of himself in me when he was younger: the aggression, the violence and the way I was brought up and the way I was treated and I didn't care about anybody but myself."*

Children and young people who showed promise, i.e. the 'right' kind of propensity for violence and an attitude that fits with the culture of the football firm, were picked out of the Baby Crew and encouraged and enticed into the adult football firm, often, as noted by Franks[136], becoming child soldiers with drugs playing a part in their recruitment:

> Lee progressed to harder drugs through his involvement with the football firm. Whilst Lee was with the Baby Crew, he was only smoking hash but once he moved out of the Baby Crew into the Firm, just before his fourteenth birthday:
>
> *"The elder boys kept putting powder up my nose and saying 'that's charlie'."*
>
> Though he had not taken cocaine before, Lee knew that it was cocaine that he was being given. The older men did not tell him what it was but just fed him the cocaine.

Some children and young people recognised how being part of a gang was a continuation of the violence that had started in the family home with them as victims of violence, whilst others did not appear to be conscious of the links between the different violent contexts in their lives. The propensity for violence becomes part of the collective identity of the gang and the identity of those individuals within the gang. Violence becomes a means to address the threats posed by other gangs, to maintain individual and gang reputations, and ensures gang membership. This is exemplified in some of the initiation tasks that some of the children and young people described having to perform before being accepted into a gang:

> *"Each gang member, yeah, has a task to do before they get in the gang – a skill – so they (other gang members) know they can be trusted. What they (other gang members) wanted me to do in our gang is one of the gang members shoot me with a 2:2 air rifle. I stood up, held me arms out and he shot me … in the arm with a 2:2 air rifle. ... It doesn't hurt; pain is the game, if you know what I mean. … I've done many a task … I've been shot, I've done battering people, know what I mean? … rob(bing) houses, go smash someone in the jaw … batter someone, take anything off them, street robbery."*

For some young people, there is an element of not having an active choice of being part of a gang, of what Pitt refers to as 'involuntary affiliation'[137]. As one young person commented:

> *"I don't think people necessarily want to be part of a gang; I don't want to be; it just happens. The whole reason I was part of it (the gang) was because of my postcode. You're born into it, basically. … It happens because you're raised up in the wrong area and that's it."*

Some young people who were part of gangs intentionally kept themselves on the outskirts of the gang and consciously did not ingratiate themselves completely in the gang and its culture:

> From a young age, Lewis felt alone. His stepfather was physically abusing him and he realised he was gay. Lewis largely steered away from friendships until he met another boy at school with whom Lewis developed a close friendship. This boy also thought he was gay and the two boys began masturbating together and then to engage in sexual acts with one another. Lewis enjoyed having someone to hang out with and also how welcome his friend's parents made him feel whenever he was at their house. When Lewis was fourteen, his friend moved away. Lewis was devastated and he began to feel very angry about his life; with the insults and violence from his mother's boyfriend; with his mother for never speaking out against her boyfriend and for letting him live in a cold and unwelcoming home with no food. Lewis started fighting both at school and in his neighbourhood. He started to carry a knife and to get a name for being fearless when faced with violence. Lewis was invited to join a gang. He accepted but kept himself on the outskirts of the gang, keeping himself to himself. He did spend time with the gang but did not tell any of them anything about himself. He started smoking hash and taking ecstasy. He did not like getting drunk so steered away from alcohol. Lewis and others engaged in petty crime: shoplifting, breaking into cars and stealing. Lewis started staying out overnight without letting anyone at home know.

Gang Differences Impacting Experiences of Homeless Life and Access to Services
Gang issues crossed into the homeless world. In some areas there are a number of gangs consisting solely of children and young people who live on the streets. Sometimes services for the homeless become aligned with particular gangs and members of other gangs who are on the streets steer clear of these services. Young people described how, once they reached the age of sixteen, they sometimes had to leave a hostel or were unable to access particular hostels because they are frequented by particular gangs:

> *"I was in hostels for young people with other young people and all sorts would kick off. There was loads of gang stuff. 'Cos I was from one place and in one gang, I'd be fighting with kids who were in the hostels. I'd have to go somewhere else and the same thing would just happen again."*

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136 Whilst carrying out second level analysis of the UK Research, Franks M (2007) identified the similarities between child soldiers in other countries and children and young people involved in football firms in the UK.

137 Pitt J (2008) *Reluctant Gangsters: The Changing Face of Youth Crime* Uffculme: Willan Publishing.

One young person described his confusion at all the fighting that takes place between different gangs from the homeless community:

> "Some of the gang members have had fights with other gangs' members. Basically, I don't understand it as they're all in the same situation."

Other young people have been attacked by gangs when they are on the streets:

> Lewis left his home, gang and area and moved to the city centre where he sells sex to men. Lewis does not feel that he is at risk on the streets. He feels that he can take care of himself and carries a knife for protection. His selling of sex is street-based and, to keep himself safe, he doesn't go back to men's houses and he doesn't get in cars. He has been involved in some fights and was once badly beaten by a gang of youths.

Paramilitary Organisations
None of the children and young people who participated in the research in Northern Ireland belonged to paramilitary organisations but some of their lives were marked by the actions and threats of paramilitary organisations. As described earlier in this chapter, the father of two siblings was shot dead in front of the two children. Other children and young people were affected in other ways[138]:

> Elvis and his family were forced to leave their local area because Elvis' brother was causing so many problems within the local community. A local paramilitary organisation gave orders that the family were to relocate and the family were too frightened to ignore these orders. Elvis and his family were 'allowed' to move to an estate where substance misuse and crime were rife. Elvis very quickly became introduced to drugs by other children on the estate and started grafting[139]. His parents were at their wits' end by both their sons' behaviour and Elvis was thrown out of home when he was fourteen. For a couple of years, he stayed with friends and sometimes slept rough. His drug use and involvement in crime continued and Elvis served a prison service. After being released from prison, Elvis moved away from his local area as he realised his life would be a cycle of drug use, crime and prison if he returned. At the time of participating in the research, Elvis is living in a hostel for the homeless, working as a volunteer with disabled children and training to be an outdoors instructor who works with disabled children. Elvis believes his life would have been different if he and his family had not been forced to leave the area where he was born.

Another young person was forced to leave the country because he witnessed the actions of someone in a paramilitary organisation and one young person experienced pressure to join a paramilitary organisation.

Exiting Gangs and Leaving Violence Behind
For some young males, the lifespan of the gang was for a specific period in their life and did not continue, appearing to be a stage in adolescence which came to a natural end:

Paul was in a gang with other young people in his area. Gang members have now gone their own ways:

> "Some of them have got jobs and houses and things like that and some of them are like me: getting bevvied and that."

Some young males who have been heavily involved in gang culture stated how gangs are intrinsically damaging and can impact negatively upon people's lives:

> "But that's what gangs are about; gangs are fucked up."

> "All the trouble you get into; get arrested, mostly every day. It's not right."

As a result of the trouble that is part of gang life, some young males have made a recent decision to withdraw from their gang:

> Jimmy has withdrawn from involvement with his gang and the lifestyle that membership entails:

> "I've had to; especially at the moment; it's not safe. … There's just too many people out to get everyone. … It's a general thing. You just don't know what's going to happen. It's unpredictable, you know, and stuff could happen any time. … Every time I go out, I have to think that something could happen, take that into consideration and carry my knife in case something does happen."

> Jimmy has moved away from the area he lived in but he still has to be careful:

> "It is safer living here (supported housing project) but everybody knows where I live 'cos they talk and that and I still have to watch my back. There's a negative of living here as my boys (others in his gang) aren't around me here but there's a positive 'cos anybody who comes looking for me ain't gonna get through reception."

> Although Jimmy has made the decision to leave his gang, he recognises that in some ways he is still part of his gang:

> "But I would not say I am not a part of it no more; in some ways I am."

Some felt that they had matured and were entering into a new phase of their life that was not compatible with gang involvement:

> Troy has been involved with his gang since he was thirteen:

> "They are my family; my brothers. We look out for each other, man, and treat each other with respect."

> Troy used to be involved in a lot of fights with his gang:

138 Raws, in Raws P (2001) *Lost Youth: Young Runaways in Northern Ireland* London: The Children's Society, also identifies the impact of paramilitary control.
139 'Grafting' means stealing.

> *"With those that didn't show us any respect on our territory or dissed any of us."*

Troy, now aged fifteen, is trying to distance himself from the activities of his gang he used to be involved in and to stay away from fighting. This is for a couple of reasons:

> *"I'm older now, man, and need to think about what I'm doing. I've got a woman who's got a kid and I need to show that kid what's right and what's wrong. … I work for these bigger boys now and they won't take me seriously if they hear I've been getting into fights over silly stuff."*

Some of the young people came to a point where they no longer wished to continue engaging in violent behaviour and made a conscious decision to leave violence behind. All of the young males who explicitly stated that they are trying to withdraw from violence are those who have been in involved in more organised gangs. This desire to leave violence behind may come from the realisation that they have options and an alternative life is possible:

> Rory is trying to ensure that he does not get into any more fights by getting fighting out of his head by:
>
> *"ignoring people, staying in at my home."*
>
> Up to a year ago, Rory describes how:
>
> *"I was being a little shit … going out every day, fighting, disruptive, running away from the police, getting arrested near enough every day."*
>
> Rory was 'being a little shit' because:
>
> *"I didn't think I had a future until I found this job so it's all working out for me now. At the moment I'm working at X as a voluntary caretaker and getting involved with different people, meeting new people every day and working with disabled people. It's just given me a chance to start my life all over again."*
>
> Rory is now motivated to keep some distance from his old friends and acquaintances to ensure that he does not return to certain behaviours. Having work experience and somewhere to live has enabled Rory to do so.

> Brad has left his gang and local area in order to enable him to escape the life he has been living for the past twenty years. This has entailed leaving his family and friends and starting afresh without the money he is used to having from criminal activities, where he is not known and where he does not have his father, gang and reputation to protect him. He wants to build a new reputation:
>
> *"There's a new reputation for me to build on … and to have that I don't have to walk down the street and (people) say 'there's the geezer that was*

> *shooting people' or 'there's the geezer that sells a lot of drugs' and things like that. That ain't for me."*
>
> Brad knows that this will be very difficult but knows that the only chance he has to escape a lifetime of violent crime and avoid a prison sentence is to move far away and start afresh.

Brad's story highlights how difficult it is for some to leave their gang; to do so means leaving everything behind and starting again somewhere new with no reputation, outside the protection offered by family and friends and with no recourse to making money through previous means. However, as Brad and Bob's stories reveal, some children and young people began to see actual and possible consequences of their actions and develop empathy towards others who have been affected by their actions, and have come to the realisation that this is not how they want their life to be.

Lee's affiliation to his football firm stemmed from familial links and wanting to belong but also from being so angry about his father's death. Whilst this anger has not completely gone, it has subsided and Lee no longer feels the need to express his anger through violence, though sometimes it still seems attractive:

> Lee found leaving the firm simultaneously easy and difficult and sometimes he misses being part of it:
>
> *"It both was and wasn't easy to leave. … It was half and half. Some boys were like 'aye, well on you go; you've done your time so off you go' and others would try to get me to come back saying 'what you fucking doing? You're up there pal.'"*
>
> When Lee reflects upon his time with the firm, he does not have any remorse and recognises that he became involved in organised violence because he had so much anger within him about his father's death and enjoyed the sense of unity and belonging:
>
> *"I don't feel sorry for the people I hurt 'cos what's the point in that but I do wonder what it was all about. … I was an angry lad. I was a really fucking angry person and that was my way of getting a release. Do you know what I mean? That would make me feel better at the end of the day. I'd be walking home absolutely pissed out of my head (after a day at the football fighting) having been with forty other boys who were all part of one of the top firms in Scotland. … Well organised, together and strong as well."*

At the time of participating in the research, some young people were not at a point in their lives where they felt able to withdraw from fighting but were aware that they had a problem with violent behaviour and were making attempts to curb their behaviour:

Aidan is trying to reduce his involvement in fighting but does not see himself completely withdrawing from fighting until he has a child:

"Then I'll have to stop; I'll have to stop everything."

For some males it is difficult to escape violence:

If Jimmy gets a sense that there is going to be some trouble, his strategy now is to avoid that situation. However, this is not always possible:

"But sometimes I don't see it coming and I walk into a situation and have to deal with it."

All this trouble and potential trouble causes worry:

"There is an element of worry but you can't show that, you can't show that you're scared. … If you show any weakness, they're (people who are looking to cause a problem) more likely to think 'let's take him on.'"

Being Detached and Gangs
The state of being detached and the nature of gangs share a number of similarities. A number of gang theorists have identified how gangs are socially removed from family and social structures[140]. However, it can also be argued that some of the reasons children and young people seek gang affiliation is to provide them with a sense of family, community and an alternative to the marginalisation and exclusion they feel from formal structures. Undoubtedly gangs are attractive to the detached because gangs confirm that sense of being detached whilst also providing some solutions to being detached and the avoidance of some of the perils of being detached.

For those young males involved in gangs, being part of a gang played a significant role in becoming and being detached. Some young males who participated in the research were part of a gang before becoming detached. In many cases, gang activities triggered existing conflict with parents and carers who were unhappy with the child or young person's behaviour and attitude.

As already highlighted, for those without family or those with a weak bond with or negative experiences of family, the gang provided alternative family and sometimes young males left their birth families with all their complexities and conflict to move to being with their other family: their brothers. Having this alternative family, their gang, their brothers, eased leaving home for some people as they knew what they were going to and knew the gang would keep them protected; sometimes being part of a gang gave the child or young person confidence to leave. For those who were thrown out of home, there was also the security offered the by the gang: they were not going to be on their own with all the vulnerabilities of the isolated.

Young males often received support from others in their gang in the form of a place to stay, emotional support and physical protection. Sometimes the young males who participated in the research were the only one in their gang to find themselves detached and benefited from the support offered by other gang members. Some found themselves detached at the same time as other members of their gang and stayed together overnight when the rest of the gang members returned to their homes.

Gangs also attract the detached both as a survival strategy to help children and young people manage being on the streets and also to protect themselves from gangs and other groups, both homeless and non-homeless[141].

4.12 The Continuation of Violence

Many of the young people continue to experience in their lives once they are post sixteen and have somewhere to live and are more settled and have, for example, a family:

Savanna met her partner when she was seventeen and he was thirty. They very quickly moved in with one another and Savanna became pregnant. Savanna's partner had a heroin habit, was involved in various criminal activities and became drawn into a feud between prominent families in the local area. One night, whilst coming off heroin, Savanna's partner, alongside his best friend and members of one of the feuding families, decided to blow up the car of a man who belonged to the rival feuding family. This act had consequences for Savanna and her daughter:

"The next day I was sat in the house … with all of them that done blow up the car, my daughter and my two friends. … Three guys walked to my door."

One of Savanna's friends answered the door to find three men from the rival family. They asked for Savanna's partner's best friend and were told that he wasn't there. Savanna's friend became nervous and called for her to come to the door:

"He pushed past me into the house and they had guns. So one of them put a gun to X's (her daughter's) head so I went nuts; I went bonkers. … They beat Y (one of the men who had blown up the car) up in the kitchen so I ran with X (Savanna's daughter) upstairs. My friend left and I thought she would have phoned the police for me but she never; she'd seen what they were doing but she never phoned them (the police). … It looked like they were gonna chop Y's (Savanna's friend's) head off – they had an axe. I said 'you'll fucking kill him' so they stopped and dragged him out of the house. They never touched Z (Savanna's partner) once but W (one of the men who had pushed their way into Savanna's house) told Z (Savanna's partner) that they wanted him to go with them to look at the CCTV to see who had blown up his car. Z (Savanna's partner) said 'fine. Let me give my missus a couple of fags'. When he gave me the fags, he whispered 'phone the fucking police'. So I phoned the police and armed police came over my house and got me and X (Savanna's daughter) out of there."

Savanna and her daughter were taken to the police station. Savanna's partner jumped from the car and made his way to the police station. After

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140 For example Klein M & Maxson C (2006) *Street Gang Patterns and Policies* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
141 For example, groups of football supporters as described in section five.

leaving the police station, there were some concerns about the safety of Savanna, her partner and her daughter:

"But I didn't want to leave the house. I had some nice furniture and that and I didn't want anyone coming in and taking it."

Savanna and her partner made statements against the members of the feuding family who had forced their way into the house, put a gun against Savanna's daughter's head and violently beat up one of their friends. However, this family offered them thirty thousand pounds to drop the charges, which Savanna and her partner accepted. The money was shared with three other friends who were also witnesses to the incident and they all got six thousand pounds each. Savanna thinks that it would have been too dangerous to testify and that her partner and his friend's actions have set in motion:

"A feud that's now going to go on for generations and generations."

Children and young people still view violence as an outlet for their anger and, for example, yearn to return to football violence:

"Sometimes I can get pissed off and the rage comes back to me and sometimes I think to myself: 'fuck, I wouldn't mind going along this weekend and having a bit of a scrap. … There was times when I was tempted to go back 'cos there are times when that rage gets to me and I still get angry and I want to go head to head."

Some children and young people clearly have managed to move on with their lives in some way after experiencing extreme violence yet continue to respond with violence, and threats of violence when challenged:

Liam has made a lot of progress with his life, has gone through a lot of self-reflection, reduced his substance use, has kept a job for some time and is prepared to support his girlfriend with a baby that is not his. However, despite understanding his anger and previous violent behaviour, he still has anger management issues. When the researcher first met Liam, he was living in a supported housing project and informed her that he liked living in the project and found the staff supportive. When she tried to contact him to arrange a second interview, the researcher was informed that he was no longer living there as he had been told to leave after verbally abusing a member of staff and making threats. When Liam discussed this event with the researcher, it became apparent that Liam still responds with violence to a range of situations.

Young females continue to experience violent relationships and many young people continue to become involved in violent exchanges when they use substances:

Carl did not turn up for his first interview. A couple of days later, the researcher bumped into him on the streets and he apologised for not meeting her as planned, explaining that he had got 'out of his head' the night before his interview and been arrested by the police after fighting in the street.

Many of the young males who participated in the research whilst serving a custodial sentence in a YOI described how pent up frustrations and general emotions often result in petty quarrels between young males, very easily becoming violent and sometimes resulting in the young males finding themselves in trouble with the authorities once again.

4.13 The Normalisation of Violence

The extent and normalisation of violence has been a significant part of this research. All of the children and young people have experienced violence in some way, some in horrifying ways, as both victims and perpetrators.

Not all of the children and young people who have been victims of violence have become perpetrators of violence; some have learnt from their own experiences that directly experiencing and witnessing violence can be very damaging and have made a conscious decision to ensure that they protect themselves, and others, from potential violence. However, many of the children and young people have become perpetrators of violence. Others have continued to experience violence as a victim. Some children and young people are both victim and perpetrator. Some of the young people who participated in the research are failing to recognise the danger that their own children have been in from abusive partners.

Where violence has become normalised and remained a part of a child or young person's life, there is often a shared pattern of behaviour:

At a young age, children and young people experience physical abuse at the hands of parents and careers or witness the physical abuse of others in the home. This frightens them and often has a devastating impact upon their development that potentially can last a lifetime. As they become older and start to spend time outside of the home, they witness violence amongst peers and elders. Some children and young people shift from being the bullied to becoming the bully[142] as violence becomes normalised, a means of gaining respect and a survival strategy to avoid being a victim of violence. Violence becomes more extreme and may include weapons. There is an increasing loss of perspective of how harmful and hurtful it is to be a victim of violence. Simultaneously there is acceptance that sometimes you get hurt: you win some, you lose some. Violence has become the outlet for a whole range of issues and emotions and loss of empathy for those targeted by violence. Sometimes a young person witnesses or is the perpetrator of an act of violence that reveals violence has gone too far and the young person reassesses their violent behaviour and withdraws, where possible, from violent behaviour. Sometimes a young person does not have this realisation and starts to use and impart violence to address a number of situations where violence is not usually a feature of the

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142 This is discussed further in Section Seven.

negotiation process; at this stage other young people may begin to withdraw from this young person as they recognise that a boundary has been crossed.

4.14 Summary

■ For many children and young people who participated in the research, violence was part of daily life: in the home, in their local neighbourhood, at school and on the streets.

■ A few children and young people experienced violence in the care system at the hands of those charged with their care.

■ Violence also took the form of children and young people damaging property and experiencing threats and intimidation prior to becoming detached and once detached.

■ Young females experienced domestic violence in their relationships with older boyfriends. One young male also described perpetrating domestic violence.

■ Sexual violence was experienced by both young males and females, including being gang-raped and being passed round by men for sex. Some sexual violence took place when children and young people were living on the streets.

■ Violence, in general, was a common experience on the streets with children and young people being victims of violence, responding with violence in self-defence and perpetrating violence.

■ Carrying a knife was common amongst young males and a couple of young males carried and used guns.

■ Whilst the majority of the children and young people described hanging out with groups of others on the streets, approximately half of all young males self-defined as belonging to a gang. However, there was some diversity of children and young people's descriptions of a gang with many emulating elements of gang behaviour. Only a few young males belonged to organised gangs with an identifiable order that were highly structured and involved in, for example, organised violence and the sale of guns and drugs. Territorial issues, to differing degrees, were apparent in gang activity. With one exception, those young males who self-identified as belonging to a gang were white. The few young females who self-defined as belonging to a gang were limited to groups of children, young people and adults who came together on the streets for general survival. All of the young males who experienced being part of more organised gangs had exited, or were seeking to exit, violence and gang association. Descriptions of gang life and reasons for joining gangs: reveal the similarities between the process of becoming detached and of being part of a gang; the nature of gangs; and the important role gangs play in providing protection and an alternative to family.

■ From the description of the lives of the few young people who have left the streets and have a more settled life, it is apparent that violence continues to be a part of their lives.

■ For many of the children and young people who participated in the research, violence has often become normalised. Descriptions of their lives reveal how children and young people who are victims of violence become perpetrators after learning to respond with violence. Violence can become a currency whereby a child or young person protects themselves by being able to defend themselves and by ensuring their reputation for violence will act as a deterrent to others seeking to harm them. Violence may also serve as an outlet for bottled up emotions relating to, for example, being abused, anger and frustration.

5. The Streets

"The streets don't care for no long term plan
These roads don't give a damn about any man"[143]

Rachel

Rachel has some notoriety amongst the homeless community and is known as the girl who has lived on the streets from the age of twelve. Previous to living on the streets, she lived with her parents and five siblings, and was diagnosed with ADHD. When she was nine, Rachel started to miss school and hang out on the streets with other young people. By ten she was smoking cannabis and progressed to taking ecstasy and cocaine. She carried out street robberies with other young people and became involved with the police. Her behaviour caused conflict with her parents and, when she was twelve, her mother threw her out of home:

"She just got fed up of me and threw me out. … She got sick of me. … It was up to me to find me own place to go to so I stayed with one of me brothers but he got sick of me being there so I just left and went on the streets. … It was horrible … because it rained just about every night; it was cold and I had no blankets; I only had my coat to sleep in. I didn't have no pills or nothing; sleeping rough behind shops and in shop doorways, and all that. Getting kicked in the head by people when I was asleep. Getting bothered by the police all the time and security guards kicking off at me. … Yeah, I was frightened most of the time but when you are on the streets for that long, you just get used to it. … It just happens. One minute you are scared and then, a few months into it, you are used to it."

Rachel was returned home by the police and social services became involved. She spent time at home and with four sets of foster carers. Rachel was thrown out of home again and returned to the streets but in a different town. At first Rachel did not know anyone but over time began to know more and more people involved in the homeless scene. She started to hang out with other homeless people, sleeping with them behind shops and restaurants and these people became her friends and source of support:

"I know more people on the streets in X (name of the town) than I know people who live in houses. … We all look to each other … if one person's got money, we buy everyone food. We share drugs … we all get money at different times so share drugs."

Rachel acknowledges that her health has been impacted by her substance use:

"I'm taking speed and ecstasy every night … I do it most nights when I'm out on the streets to keep me awake so I don't go to sleep. … It's that cold; the cold just wakes you up so there's no point going to sleep. … Also, people can do things to you when you're asleep."

Rachel prefers being on the streets than living at home:

"To be honest with you, I'm happier living on the streets than when I was living back with me mam and dad … because I'm getting on with people, much more so than what I was. … I'm not getting in that much trouble and when I was living with me mam and dad, I was getting into trouble all the time. … I meet more people when I'm out on the streets and I'm not getting told what to do. I get to do my own thing and it works out better. … Also, to be honest with you, it's been good because when people start saying stuff to you, you learn to stick up for yourself."

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143 Rascal D (2007) 'Bubbles' from *Maths and English*.

5.1 The Nature of the Streets

The streets have been vilified, romanticised and dramatised throughout history and popular culture and have played a part in political activity and social change. In some cultures daily life is lived on the streets and some streets are the domain of some and not frequented by others. Here in the UK, the streets play a dominant part in detached children and young people's lives and have played a role in all but two[144] children and young people's experiences whilst detached. Not all children and young people have slept on the streets but all except the two referred to above have spent time on the streets and either found or sought something from the streets. Many of the children and young people spent time hanging about on the streets before they stopped living at home, some only returning home to sleep. Once on the streets, life becomes uncertain and inconsistent. Some days there will be plenty of opportunities to make money and offers of places to stay; other days there will be nothing. Sometimes the streets provide warmth and shelter, other times hostility and danger.

At the time of their participation in the research, children and young people were living in a variety of circumstances. Around a quarter were living on the streets and a fifth were living in supported housing, having recently become sixteen and been able to access housing support. Equal numbers of children and young people lived in private sector accommodation, lived on the streets or stayed with friends when it was possible to do so or were serving a sentence in a YOI. A few were accommodated in probation hostels after serving prison sentences or were placed in temporary accommodation after being recognised as homeless once they had reached the age of sixteen. Three young females lived with older men, two with men they describe as their boyfriends and a third with a man who bathes her in return for providing somewhere for her to stay. Two couples who participated in the research cohabit in social housing and two other young people live at home. There are three individuals who, respectively, live with their foster family, live in supported lodgings and squat in a house that is being repossessed.

The two children who were abandoned have never been street-involved; every other child and young person has been street-involved, some before becoming detached and whilst detached and others after leaving home or care. Many of those presently with more secure housing have remained street involved. Excluding the young people serving a prison sentence at the time of participating in the research[145], less than a sixth identified as ceasing to be street-involved at the point of their participation in the research. Many of the children and young people who live in social housing, private rented accommodation and in supported housing remain street involved and the streets still play a significant part in their lives. MacDonald and Marsh found, in their study of youth transitions in an urban area characterised by poverty, high unemployment and high levels of crime, that:

"for most interviewees street corner society gave way to more mainstream, commercialised leisure life-styles afforded by young adults' increased age and income. The hub of leisure life gravitated from the immediate neighbourhood of their outlying estates to the pubs and clubs of the town centre."
(MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; 74.)[146]

For children and young people who become detached, the pattern is different than described above and migration largely takes place from their immediate locality to the streets in urban centres.

This section of the report examines the place of the streets in children and young people's experiences of being detached, identifying how children move from spending time on the streets whilst still living in home or care to moving more permanently to the streets. This section also captures the lure of the streets, the solace of the streets and the dangers[147] of living on the streets alongside the survival strategies available to children and young people when they are on the streets.

5.2 Turning to the Streets Prior to Becoming Detached

Two-thirds of children and young people started to spend time on the streets whilst they were still living with parents and carers. A combination of push and pull factors are apparent in how this took place. Hall and others describe some of the allure of the streets for children and young people:

"This is free space, where attendance is neither necessary (as at home) nor compulsory (as at school) but chosen. It is also social space, where relations are not marked by familial obligation or by official authority, but by friendship."
(Hall and others; 1999; 506.)[148]

Whilst the relevance of free space marked by friendship is apparent in detached children and young people's experiences of the streets, for many their attendance at home was not necessary (parents themselves were often not at home or did not pay attention to the whereabouts of their child) and the compulsory element of school was waived or ignored[149]. For children and young people who become detached, the streets provide more than a space for leisure but a source of company and comfort. More than a third of all the children and young people turned to the streets whilst still living with parents and carers to escape abuse in the home, because they were unhappy with their home life and did not receive attention and care from parents and carers:

Tianna's parents drank heavily and argued constantly. Her father was violent to her mother, who in turn was violent to all five children. The children were moved from pillar to post because their parents owed money. Sometimes the whole family slept in the van because they had nowhere to live. When Tianna was thirteen, she started to spend time on the streets:

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144 These two children and young people are those who were abandoned by their parent by, in one case, being left in the home and, in the second case, in an emergency accommodation project.
145 It is not possible to assess whether or not they will remain street involved after leaving prison.
146 Macdonald R & Marsh J (2005) *Disconnected Youth: Growing Up in Britain's Poor Neighbourhoods* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
147 Some of these dangers, such as physical and sexual assault have been discussed in the previous chapter.
148 Hall T Coffey Q & Williamson H (1999) 'Self , Space and Identity: Youth Identities and Citizenship' *British Journal of Sociology and Education* 20 4 501 -513.
149 See section six of the report.

> "There was nothing for me at home: no love, no food. I stayed out with me mates having a laugh and that."

When Tilly was eleven, she went to live with her mother and stepfather:

> "At first it was alright. We used to have girly nights, do our nails together and watch films. My mum liked all that stuff but she didn't really like the responsibility of having a kid live with her."

Tilly, whilst still eleven, was regularly left on her own in the house during the day and in the evening started spending time on the streets:

> "There was no-one at home. I would have just been sat watching telly on me own so I used to go out."

Tilly met some young people who were older than her and started to spend a lot of time with them:

> "It was fun. I was the baby of the gang. They all looked out for me and would never let anything bad happen to me. Sometimes they would tell me to go home when it got really late."

By the time she was twelve, Tilly had been excluded from school for non-attendance and was spending more and more time away from home:

> "I started to stay out all night and then for nights at a time. I stayed with friends at friends' flats. We partied and stayed up all night drinking, dancing and taking drugs. It was fun."

When he was eight, Ciaron realised his mum and stepfather were using drugs. He became fed up of being abused and of living in a home where often there was no food. He did not want to be at home with his mother and stepfather:

> "I started looking around and started doing what I wanted to do myself … go out, do what I wanted to do."

Ciaron began spending time on the streets with other children and young people:

> "Hanging about, lighting matches, smashing windows."

By eleven, he was drinking on the streets; at twelve, smoking hash and stealing to fund his substance use. Ciaron's mother did not like what he was doing and they argued a lot about him spending so much time on the streets. Ciaron told his mother that he would change his behaviour when she changed hers so that he would want to spend time at home again.

Occasionally events outside the family led a child or young person to seek solace in the streets. For example, the death of a close friend, losing part of a hand in an accident at school and being bullied at school. Around a tenth of children and young people started to spend time on the streets whilst living with parents or carers because they had fun on the streets:

> "It was a laugh; with all these other kids and no adults about to tell us what to do."

> "We had a right laugh, staying out all night, messing around and that."

Whilst these reasons for, and routes into, spending time on streets were common, there were additional ways that children and young people started to spend time on the streets. For example, Alesha started spending time on the streets after her mother arranged for her to stay with her cousin:

When she was thirteen, Alesha was bullied by a group of older girls. As a response, her mother suggested that Alesha left the area she lived in for a while and stay with her cousin, who was seventeen and lived in another city. Alesha spent a couple of months at her cousin's, did not attend school and spent her time hanging about in the city centre where she met homeless young people and adults.

When starting to spend time on the street, it was very common for children and young people to spend time with older young people and adults:

> "When I was ten, I hardly every went to school and started to hanging about on the streets where I lived and that's where I met my friends who were older, eighteen and that, and they hung around outside the shops during the day, drinking and that."

> "I'd set off for school, wouldn't go and would stay away for a couple of days. … I'd stay with me older friends … just go out stealing."

5.3 Leaving Home or Care and Moving to the Streets

Children and young people find themselves detached and on the streets via a number of routes:

- Over a third were thrown out of home by parents or carers.
- A quarter decided to run away.
- A fifth gradually drifted away after spending more and more periods away from home and simply did not return home.
- Another tenth decided that it was time to leave home.
- A few children and young people ended up on the streets after their father was sentenced to a term in prison.

- Other children and young people found themselves on the streets in individual ways; for example, following the death of a grandparent with whom the young person lived, neither parent would allow the young person to live with them and she ended up living on the streets.

As previously explained, nearly two-thirds of children and young people who participated in the research spent time hanging about on the streets whilst they still lived at home or in care prior to becoming detached. For these children and young people, it was perhaps a natural progression for them to turn to the streets when they were away from home or care. The streets had become their second home which provided an alternative to family and sources of fun, substances and friends with whom there were existing relationships:

From thirteen Billy stayed away from home at weekends. By the time he was fourteen, he was missing school because he was staying away from home for longer than the weekend. This caused further arguments with his mother and became a pattern that led to Billy staying away from home for longer periods of time from the age of fifteen:

"I'd go home after being away for the weekend and there'd be more arguments and in the end I didn't want to go home because of the arguments so I'd stay away for longer and longer. I'd end up popping in to get stuff when I knew my mum was out and bugger off out again."

Billy stayed both with friends who lived with their parents and friends who lived on their own:

"Some of my friends had different relationships with their parents so I'd stay there occasionally and other times I'd stay with mates who had their own places. … They (mates who had their own places) were older … early twenties, late teens. … I met them through another mate of mine who hung out with older people and it sort of progressed from there."

As in Billy's case, some children and young people's parents and carers were angry that their child had stayed away from home without permission. Some of the conflict that led to a child or young person leaving, or being forced to leave, stemmed from what they were doing whilst out on the streets with friends:

"Me mum couldn't handle us … smashing windows, stealing motor bikes, stealing cars. I was getting brought home by the police every day."

Much of the conflict between children and young people and their parents and carers related to children and young people's substance use:

"I was going mad … smoking, taking drugs … drinking at thirteen … taking drugs at fourteen: ecstasy, cocaine, weed. … I was coming in wasted all the time. … Sometimes I needed drugs when I didn't have any, would get stressed out from it. …

I'd just flip out at everybody at home, shout at anybody, loads of arguments and get kicked out of the house."

"When I was eleven I started on the dope and then I tried Es and then a bit of coke. … I needed money to buy drugs so started burglaries and stuff like that … shoplifting, stealing cars; anything to make money like. … My parents found it difficult; they just couldn't cope with it no more. … When I was twelve, my parents couldn't take no more and they kicked me out of the house."

5.4 Children and Young People in Care

Around a fifth of research participants spent time in care: in foster placements, children's homes, secure units and residential homes[150]. Of these children and young people, fewer than half had experienced being detached whilst living in the family environment and entering the care system; more children and young people started to run away, or stay away, and experienced being detached whilst living in care. For some, their care situation was part of the reason they left and became detached:

Jono was taken into care when he was four because he was physically abused and neglected. He spent time in a number of foster placements and children's homes. When Jono was eight he started to run away and sleep rough:

"I would just bugger off. I was being bullied and I got to the point where I just couldn't cope. I felt like the staff were either grassing me up on something I had or hadn't done or just closing the door and saying they were busy when I tried to talk to them. Me family weren't interested in what was going on with me and I just thought 'there's only me in this world that is interested in what happens so I'll just have to sort it meself'. To be honest, it always felt like that. So I used to bugger off a lot, sleeping in stables, cars, garages, lorry parks."

Sometimes Jono felt frightened but:

"I preferred being on my own because I used to feel when I was on my own, doing my own thing and going off on me wanders, that I was alright and I used to feel like I was in control."

By eleven, Jono was running away with older boys and becoming detached for up to three months at a time.

Other children and young people also cited reasons linked to their care placement to explain why they became detached:

"Because it's shite at the residential school."

"We all decided to stay away for as long as we could 'cos we were all fed up of the staff; that was the worst children's home I've ever been in."

"I would get restrained and then they would try to

lock us in our room so I'd just kid on that I'd calmed down and afterwards I'd get out through the fire exit and run away."

"I ran away from them all the time because I didn't really like being in care – I hated it, being stuck in a place with barm pots and nutters. I hated it. … Lots of the staff in the homes didn't like me because I was, well, a bit of a wild lad to say the least."

Children and young people also ran because they wanted to be with particular people:

"I ran away to find me mum."

"I ran away to be with my friends that I met out on the streets before I was put in the children's home."

5.5 Integration of Homeless Communities and Non-homeless Communities

Integration of the homeless population and non-homeless population sometimes played a part in how children and young people found themselves on the streets and detached. From interviews with children and young people, observations and conversations with homeless people and others who frequent street-based services for the homeless, it became apparent that there is some overlap between homeless and non-homeless communities and that this integration takes place in different ways. Some integration takes place when groups of children and young people come to the streets, whilst still living at home or in care, drawn by the freedom and excitement the streets offer, to hang out and have fun and become involved with individuals and groups within the homeless community. Because of the contact between the two groups, the transition from non-homeless to homeless can take place very quickly i.e. a young person who is experiencing difficulties with home life may view the pull of street life as an attractive option and take recourse to the streets in a quicker time frame than a child or young person who has no contacts on the streets and no knowledge or experience of street life:

Janine lived at home with her parents who loved and cared for her. She found her father's controlling manner difficult and started to push against his control by staying out late, eventually staying out all night and returning home the next day. Whilst staying out, Janine and her friends started to go into the city centre to be with other young people, hanging out on the streets, having a laugh getting stoned and drunk. Some of the people she met on the streets were homeless and one young male became her boyfriend, Janine knew that her father would be furious if he found out because her boyfriend was twenty, homeless and sometimes took heroin. One winter's evening:

"It was really cold out, I took X (young person's boyfriend) home and managed to get him into my bedroom without me mum or dad realising; I couldn't bear to see him out on the streets 'cos it

was so cold. Me dad found him in bed and chucked us both out."

Janine started to live on the streets with her boyfriend and his group of homeless friends.

As they have previously established relationships of different kinds, children and young people are able to draw upon these relationships as a survival strategy and become part of an established network. This brings about both positive and negative consequences. Children and young people who participated in the research frequently described how homeless adults often look out for and provide support for others on the streets, especially those who are young. However, the homeless community can also be subject to petty jealousies and conflict that may have negative impacts for children and young people who can experience both support and hostility from others on the streets. Children and young people can also be easy prey to those who wish to exploit them or encourage, for example, substance use and crime.

A couple of children and young people identified how their lives changed with their involvement with the homeless community:

"When I was a kid, I would never come anywhere near here because I would see the homeless people and be scared of them. And then I did come round here and I ended up being like the people here. I don't know why and I don't how but I did. I just came here one day and that's when loads of stuff started like taking heroin and wasting my life away."

"When you're out on the streets and that, and hanging round with all the people on the streets, it's easy to get caught up in all sorts of things but it's not where I wanted to be and I wanted to get myself sorted."

Others choose to maintain some distance between themselves and the homeless community and purposefully avoid integration, viewing homeless adults as dangerous or not to be associated with:

'I didn't know of anyone (who was on the streets) and I was wary of those who were. I was only young and thought the best thing I could do was to keep meself to meself and see me mates when I could."

Some children and young people differentiated between themselves and other people who are on the streets:

"I'm not one of those people who stays at the (name of a hostel); do you know what I mean? I'm not an alcoholic; I'm not a drug addict; I'm not a smack head; I'm not like that. Do you know what I mean? And if I go to (Housing Advice) today, which is the place the council and that will house you, and they say 'we can't house you; you'll have to stay at the (name of the hostel) or (name of a night shelter)', I'm not that sort of person. I can't sleep in those places. Do you know where you've got to

> *sleep? On mattresses on the floor; you've got to sleep there (Lisa points to the floor) with some drug addict right next to you. I'm not like that, I'm not like that at all; I'm not."*

5.6 Survival Strategies on the Streets[151]

Children and young people employed a range of strategies to manage their survival on the streets. Some of these related to making money through criminal activities[152] to enable them to meet their physical needs. Other survival strategies involved children and young people adopting certain behaviours or making decisions to limit the risk posed to them on the streets. Survival on the streets can be a full-time occupation, sometimes failing to leave either time or energy for children and young people to address their issues, work towards long-term goals and move on in their lives.

Stealing
Around three-quarters of children and young people committed crime as under the age of sixteen this was their only means of survival whilst detached and on the street. All of the children and young people who committed crime as a survival strategy stole food from shops to feed themselves:

> *"I did feel hungry when I was fifteen and on the streets but I just went and nicked some food from the shops, didn't I?"*
>
> *"I stole from supermarkets when I was away. Sometimes I was stopped by security guards but I just chinned them and walked on. That's how I survived 'cos I had to eat."*

Others stole clothes, both to wear and sell on, and other goods to sell to others. One group of young males on the streets sold model mobile phones that they snatched from shops, passing them off as working mobile phones. Some children and young people only stole from shops whilst others also stole cars and carried out burglaries:

> *"I had four thousand pounds 'cos we'd just done a big robbery."*

Many of the children and young people have also broken into houses and shops and some have committed violent street crime, as seen in section four of the report:

> *"I went out and robbed people's houses, stole cars, robbed people; anything basically. It was a very confusing time."*
>
> *"I went out robbing off people. I'd just run up to 'em, punch 'em whilst me mates got their phones and money."*

Other Illegal Activities
Children and young people also became involved in other illegal activities to earn money:

> *"I blew up a seventy grand land rover … I smashed it with a crowbar and poured petrol over it and lit it and it blew up. … It was two hundred in me pocket; it was an insurance job."*

As described in the previous section, some children and young people became involved in organised crime, often because they are skilled at particular criminal activity. Those children and young people who gained a reputation as being good at TWOC[153]-ing or burglary were sometimes sought by more organised and professional criminals. For example, an order could be placed for a specific make of car which the child or young person would find, steal and deliver. Young people reported earning between five hundred pounds and one thousand pounds per car. One young person gained a reputation as a trusted and able drugs-runner.

Involvement in both criminal and legitimate, albeit underpaid, work can be negotiated on the streets:

> Whilst waiting at the location of the soup van one evening, the researcher witnessed two men pull up in a expensive car and individually call over a number of young males. The researcher's initial reaction was that these men were up to something illicit because of their behaviour. This was confirmed by a young person who participated in the research. Luke was asked by the two men if he wanted to work on a job with them. Legitimate work can be offered in this way but Luke's gut reaction was that these men were involved in something illegal. Once the job was completed, it was very possible they could push whoever took up the offer of work out of the car and not give them their share of money.

Selling Sex
A few young people, both male and female, were involved in selling sex. For some this began early on in their period of detachment whilst others moved to selling sex as they spent more time on the streets:

> Lewis began to feel very angry about his life: with his mother's boyfriend because of the violence and insults he has inflicted over the years; with his mother for failing to speak out about what her boyfriend did; and about living in a home with no food that was cold and unwelcoming. After a particularly unpleasant argument with his mother's boyfriend, Lewis decided to leave home and never return. He caught a bus to the bus station in the city centre as he had heard that men went there for sex. He got talking to another male who told him how it was easy to get money from older men who very often wanted a blow job. Lewis was invited to stay around and watch how it was done. Lewis was introduced to a couple of punters and, for the first time, aged fourteen, sold sex.
>
> Lewis' sale of sex is street-based. To keep himself safe, he doesn't get into cars and he doesn't go back to men's houses. Lewis carries a knife and is confident he can protect himself if any man ever turns nasty. At present, Lewis does not see any reason why he should not sell sex as it enables him to survive.

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151 Some behaviours adopted as survival strategies are also discussed in section seven.
152 Children and young people's involvement in crime is also discussed in section seven.
153 TWOC is an abbreviation for 'Taking Without Consent'.

After experiencing physical, sexual and emotional abuse in the home, Joanna started to run away when she was eleven and stayed with her friend who was the same age. This friend's mother sold sex and sometimes Joanna and her friend were out on the streets with her when she was working. When Joanna's friend was twelve, her mother put her out on the streets to sell sex. Joanna accompanied her friend and looked out for her whilst she was working. It was only a matter of time before Joanna started selling sex.

When Harif, aged fifteen, first ran away, he often swapped sex for somewhere to stay with older men he knew socially. When it became apparent that it was too dangerous for him to stay in his home city because of his father's threats, he moved to another city. After spending a few cold and miserable days on the streets, Harif spruced himself up, waited outside a gay night club, picked up a man, went home with him, took some poppers and, for the first time, had sex for money. This became a pattern and has largely enabled Harif to avoid sleeping on the streets as he can pay for a bed and breakfast, spend the night with men who have paid for sex or crash with friends he has met through the gay scene. Harif said he is comfortable using sex for survival:

"I've had sex taken from me (when he was sexually abused as a child); I've had sex for all sorts of reasons so why not do it for money? It's something I'm good at and it's something men want from me. I wouldn't sleep with just anyone for money – they have to be alright. … Some blokes like rough sex and have hurt me that way. I've been beaten up three times … twice by men who don't want to pay for sex and once by a nutter who gets off on hurting people. But it's nothing no-one's not done before and I can handle it."

Other children and young people found it more difficult to sell sex on the streets:

"I had to get pissed I was so nervous. Other people had told me the areas that people went to – it's mostly around here in the city centre (the young person gesticulates with her arm). People told to me to be careful as some of the women wouldn't like a younger girl coming on to their patch. I didn't know how much to charge or anything. X (young person's previous boyfriend) had taken care of all the money stuff before. After a few minutes this bloke pulled up in his car. I got in and we drove to a quiet street. He just wanted a blow job and just seemed to want it all over and done with as quick as possible. Before when X (the young person's ex-boyfriend) had brought men back with him, I just used to detach my mind from what I was doing and that is what I carried on doing. I'd think about other things – about what I was going to do with the money I earned: what food I'd buy, what clothes, what B & B I'd could stay in; anything other than what I was doing right there and then.

… I do drink quite a lot when I'm working. It takes the edge away and gives me confidence. Sometimes I've been tired and feel like shit and I've got to go out there and be interested in these men that disgust me."

One of the young people has changed her approach to selling sex and started clipping[154] with other young people on the streets:

"I've changed what I do now. … I only have sex with a few regular clients who I know are okay. Me and some of the others (including a young male who also participated in the research) have a scam going: I wait for a man to approach me, I suggest we go down a quiet alley I know and once we are there, we take all his money, mobile phone, stuff like that. We sell what we can and share the money. It serves the bastards right. They're not going to the police are they?"

A couple of the young females' selling of sex was linked to their substance misuse and provided money to buy drugs:

"Heroin; I started taking that and I had a habit then. … I was begging or shoplifting (to buy heroin); whatever way I could really … I have, like, slept with people to get money and that as well. … It was scary, really scary and I won't do it again … I would have done anything to get money."

Begging and Blagging[155]
Very few of the children and young people who participated in the research begged in the conventional way of asking people for money on the streets; only a handful did so in this way on a few occasions. In one location, a number of children and young people identified a homeless male adult who has organised other children and young people to be part of a begging ring as children and young people attract more public sympathy, and therefore more money. He takes most of the money and puts the children and young people out to beg regularly. None of the children and young people who participated in the research were part of this ring but believed that this man was able to have control over more vulnerable children and young people who beg for him through a combination of protection and threat along the lines of 'the streets are a dangerous place; you need someone to look out for you. Just think what you'd have to do and what could happen to you if I wasn't about to look out for you.'

Some children and young people begged parents to allow them back in the family home:

"Once when I ran away from care, I went to my mum's and knocked on the door 'cos I just wanted to be home. My mother kept me outside the front door and asked me 'why do you keep running away from your care home?' so I told her 'look mum, I've been running away to (a number of different cities), and everywhere with these men and I told her … I told her that it was because I didn't feel loved … I pleaded with her to let me come back home but she (mother) started crying and shut the door in my face so I went."

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154 'Clipping' describes the practice of agreeing to have sex for money and running with the money before sex has taken place.
155 In this context 'blagging' means to gain something through confidence or cheekiness.

> *"I was so cold and hungry and I went to me mum's and I begged her and begged her to let me stay in the house for just a bit but she shut the door in my face."*

Some children and young people described becoming adept at blagging and this enabled them to find somewhere to stay or ensured they had food:

> *"I used to be a right cheeky little thing. I'd go into the chippie and ask if I could have some chips; I mostly got some."*

> *"I used to get me friends to go buy me things that I needed. When I look back on it, I feel embarrassed but I used to just take the piss and say 'go get me that' or 'I need this, can you get if for me?' They didn't seem to mind but I was taking the piss."*

> *"I used to blag, sort of thing. I used to be quite good at blagging. … When I look back at it now, it makes me feel a bit bad as it's a bit cheeky. You don't think about it at the time; you just think it's alright."*

Meeting Others on the Streets
Meeting others also on the streets and spending time with them was a crucial support strategy for a number of children and young people who otherwise would have been very isolated and at particular risk:

Rose was born in Romania, is Romanian Rroma and the second youngest child in a family of eight. Her family were very poor. When Rose was thirteen, her parents sent her to England as they thought that she would have somewhere to live, as her brother was in England, and could get a job. Rose travelled from Romania to England in a lorry, being smuggled over the borders. She was in England for one week and then her brother was sent back to Romania. Rose was given a room in supervised accommodation with other young females who were aged fourteen, fifteen and sixteen. Rose was lonely and frightened and felt intimidated by the other young women who engaged in behaviours that Rose considered 'bad'. Sometimes Rose stayed overnight with others from the Rroma community. Eventually Rose was told that she had to leave the supervised accommodation as she was away too often. Rose, aged fourteen, started spending time on the streets as well as staying irregularly with others in the Rroma community:

> *"I slept one day here, one day there, sometimes I had to sleep in the railway station, in the park, at the bus station. I had to go out of London; I tried staying in Manchester. … People will give me a bed for the night but they always want me to pay my share and I haven't got any money."*

For eighteen months Rose lived in this way, depending upon the goodwill of others in the Rroma community. Other times she did not have anywhere to go and slept rough. Whilst on the streets, she sometimes stole food so she could eat and other goods to sell in exchange for money. Rose was frightened when she was on the streets:

> *"Of course I felt frightened; it's a horrible feeling living like that, not having any food to eat; I was all by myself. I couldn't speak English; I couldn't communicate with people."*

At one stage, Rose spent time with four other young people from the Rroma community who were also on the streets. This group were supportive to one another and helped one another. These other young people have returned to Romania where they are no longer on the streets.

A couple of children and young people were on the streets with no understanding of the English language. This exacerbated their sense of isolation and confusion and added another obstacle to being detached and on the streets.

Some children and young people identified how being with others also on the streets helps to ensure they felt safe:

> *"I usually felt safe 'cos I was with older people and felt safe with them but … it's 'cos of who's out there: if I'm sleeping outside, you don't know who's gonna come up and kick you in the head or rob you. … Even though I was usually with other people, sometimes I'd walk through the town centre until silly o'clock on my own. … To be honest with you, nothing used to go on in my head (about possible harm); I just used to walk round in circles. … Nothing would go through my head except: 'at least I'm not at home.'"*

> *"I always felt safe and confident (when I was on the streets). I know how to look after myself and sometimes stayed in squats with older friends who became like my family."*

Some relationships between children and young people and others in their lives, both friends and boyfriends or girlfriends, are partly held together by being on the streets. Some children and young people questioned whether they would spend time with those close to them on the streets if their circumstances were different:

Charlie-Ann met her boyfriend on the streets when she was fifteen and he was twenty-one. They have been together for six years and have spent periods of that time apart when either one of them has been on a residential drug rehabilitation programme. Charlie-Ann is not sure that they are happy together:

> *"Erm, dunno. I think it's more like we just need each other."*

She is also not sure whether they would be together if they were not on the streets:

> *"'Cos it's never been like that and the whole six years we've been together, we've never done*

> *anything together. … It's just been the same thing every day for six years: just hanging around on the streets. Not having anywhere to go. … And I think we've just stuck together because of the drugs and that, and it's just being on the streets and having someone there."*

Identifying Safe Places
Children and young people held different views about the safety of city centres compared with their local area. Whilst some children and young people stayed away from city centres, others found their local area too intimidating, preferring to move to the city or town centre:

> *"I'd like to go into the city centre because there's lots of people around and I'd feel a bit safer. … The area I was in felt really dodgy, especially at night, and it was quite intimidating, especially when you're younger. If you're in town or something, you just feel like you can find a little hiding space. … There's more space to hide in towns."*

> *"The city centre is very busy and people are harder. … Some people here (in the city centre) are just looking for a fight. … But it can be alright in the town (the city centre); you can always get something to drink, get something to eat, even if you've got no money."*

> *"The streets are wider and more open (in the city centre) and there's more opportunities to find somewhere to stay, more free meals and everything. More money to be made, more opportunities for stealing and things like that."*

A few children and young people tried to keep themselves safe by staying away from the centre and finding a quiet place:

> *"I've always tried to make sure I am in a secluded place. See, in my place I know I am safe, so other people won't necessarily walk past."*

Attitude and Behaviour to Minimise Danger
Some children and young people clearly adapted their attitudes and behaviours to match what is required to survive on the streets; the streets can shape attitudes, behaviours and actions. Sometimes children and young people stopped acting in certain ways because they don't match the nature of the streets:

> *"I just think it's the streets themselves makes someone, or makes a gang. … I've got manners … but I don't use them on the streets because the street hasn't got manners: it's got grime, hatred, do you know what I mean? There's no love there."*

Some of the children and young people did not feel at risk or frightened living on the streets because they prepared themselves not to and this enabled them to cope with being on the streets:

> *"I'd built up such a mentality to block everything out that I didn't really think anything bad could happen."*

Some children and young people expressed a very clear moral code that guided their own conduct and that of others. Having a sense of what is right and wrong has provided a survival strategy for some children and young people and means that they are prepared to adopt some survival strategies but not others available to them in their circumstances. There appears to be a clear code of conduct amongst the homeless, both the under sixteen and adult homeless population, that you don't do anything against your own kind (i.e. other homeless people). Whilst carrying out interviews in one location a situation arose relating to a young person who had participated in the research:

> There was some outrage amongst the homeless population as a young person was believed to have stolen a post office card, mobile phone and charger from an older homeless adult. This was viewed as wrong because the young person's boyfriend sold drugs and there was a perception that there was no need for the young person to steal from another homeless person, the assumption being that her boyfriend provided for her. There was consensus that the young person could not be allowed to get away with this act of theft and that violence was the appropriate way for her to be dealt with. The next time the researcher saw the young person, she had a black eye and other bruising on her face.

Those children and young people that appear to manage being on the streets more robustly than others are usually those who have spent time hanging out on the streets prior to being away from home or care and take very quickly to street life by learning how to survive on the streets:

> *"I learnt who was okay and who was not. I found out which were the easiest shops to steal from and which ones to stay away from. I realised I needed more than what I could steal and decided that, as it's nothing I've not done before, I would have sex for money. I guess some people would call it prostitution – and I've been called a lot worse names than a prostitute – though this time I would keep the money. People can say what they want about people having sex for money; there aren't that many options for young females out on their own."*

Alternatives to Sleeping on the Streets
As previously highlighted, some children and young people consciously avoided the city centre and others did not sleep on the streets whilst being street-involved. A few children and young people stayed in squats whilst spending time on the streets and remained street-involved with a particular uncertainty to their existence from moving around so much:

> *"You wouldn't get very long in a squat 'cos you'd be moved so you'd find another squat and then be moved on from there … so I was generally moving around all the time … with different groups of people. … Sometimes we'd buy food; sometimes people would go looking through bins and skips; other people would steal from shops and bring the*

food back to the squat. It was communal so we shared all our food. … Eating and stuff got a lot easier when I was in squats 'cos it was all communal and everyone would get a meal and stuff."

A few children and young people slept in tents when they have been detached outside of the city or town centre:

"I set up a tent all on my own in a wood."

"I'd done my Duke of Edinburgh's award and that so knew how to camp and survive so pitched my tent in these woods and stayed there."

One young person has been living in tent long-term from the age of fifteen and experiences a number of health problems related to this:

"I get gammy feet and that. … My trainers are fucking stuck to my feet and that's when it's cold. … My skin gets stuck to my shoes when it's cold. I get a bath or shower and peel them off and it fucking kills me; it fucking kills me. … And I'm freezing in it. I am freezing. I get one or two hours' sleep. … I'm just grateful it hasn't been raining for the past couple of days otherwise I'd be fucked."

Many of the children and young people stay with friends as well as having time sleeping on the streets or being out all night:

"Sometimes we stay with Harif (young person who also participated in the research) and then with other friends. Sometimes we've stayed out all night when we've had nowhere to go but we usually get somewhere … I'm never on my own. Toby (young person who is also detached) makes sure of that. Harif too but he does his own thing. There's a girl who works at the bar who's really nice and I sometimes go out back to hers and have a bath and a chilled out night and that."

Some children and young people prefer not to accept offers of a place to stay because of a fear of becoming reliant upon others:

"They (friends) offer me somewhere to sleep some nights but I just don't do it … because I can't be getting too reliant upon people."

Amongst those young people who had just turned sixteen and were able to access support services for the homeless, a few preferred being on the streets than in some hostels:

"I've been on the streets and it's better than this … because it's just horrible here (in the hostel). On the streets you don't see needles. I know it's not safe for me on the streets but my partner, he been on the streets for two years and I been on the streets and we managed to feed ourselves."

"I didn't stay in the B & B 'cos it was shit. It was like a dirty and smelly place. It was a horrible and

uncomfortable place to live in. There was nothing there, really. I'd rather sleep on the streets than in that place."

5.7 Dangers of Street Life

Life on the streets can be very dangerous. The previous chapter has outlined some of the sexual and physical violence children and young people have experienced whilst on the streets. Children and young people described being attacked by people when they are sleeping out, being punched and kicked. They shared anecdotes of what happens to people when they sleep on the streets: of having petrol poured over them and being set alight, or being beaten so badly that the victim was in a coma for a long time. Despite the dangers of living on the streets, some children and young people preferred to risk the dangers of the streets because, for some, home life was just as dangerous and being on the streets offered freedom and opportunities that were not available elsewhere:

"Every day life is dangerous, love. At least I'm free here on the streets; no-one controls me; I've got some good mates; we have a laugh. Most days are okay; some days are shit but I get by."

Some children and young people did feel at risk on the streets. One potential risk was adults from the non-homeless population when they are drunk:

"Obviously there were lots of drunk people and you were in the town and stuff, on the streets, always out … and drunk people aren't always that nice sometimes … anything could happen … you could get beaten up and stuff."

"People were always coming into them closes[156] who were drunk when I was sleeping and started fighting with us."

Some children and young people tried to ensure that, whenever possible, they were out of the city centre or areas near to football stadiums when a football match took place as on these occasions anyone on the streets was in danger of being attacked by groups of drunken football supporters.

Some children and young people were very frightened when they were on the streets:

"It was the most scariest thing. … It was horrible. … Nothing bad happened because I kept on moving but I was terrified all the time."

"I was living on the street and sleeping up closes and shit like that. … It was scary and it made me wish I hadn't done what I'd done and could live with me parents. I just wanted to go home but I couldnae. It was scary."

"It was scary at night time, like at four o'clock in the morning and sometimes I got chased by the police and other homeless people. I was proper paranoid some of the time 'cos you're just like rattling

156 'Closes' refers to communal areas such as stairways and walkways between flats.

> *around not knowing what could happen. It was mental sometimes; I can't really think of the words to explain it."*

> *"I think anyone would find it frightening; it is frightening."*

Others just did not like being on the streets:

> *"The fact of being homeless, even if you've got money and that, it's not nice. I was depressed the whole time I was on the streets."*

> *"It was horrible, cold, wet, scary, loud, dirty … I didn't care if anything bad happened to me; I got depressed bad."*

> *"People tell you that it's not nice on the streets but you don't listen. But once you are homeless and on the streets and that, it's not a nice feeling at all."*

> *"Everything goes through my mind when I'm sleeping on the streets like my family should be with me and this shouldn't be happening; I shouldn't be in this situation. If I'd have had a better upbringing, if this had of happened or if that would have happened."*

> *"The streets are no place for a gay Asian pretty boy like me. I like my home comforts: a bed to sleep in, a hot bath. And I didn't sleep in case someone did something to me whilst I was sleeping. I didn't have any money. I was cold and began to feel miserable."*

> *"It was awful; it was totally awful the whole time."*

Children and young people described a number of negatives of being on the streets, such as being cold and hungry, lonely and worried:

> *"You feel numbness from the cold, aching. Depends where you sleep and if you've got blankets. You just need to stay warm. That's the only thing I was bothered about when I was on the streets: being warm."*

> *"When it was so cold; when your stomach was hurting because you were so hungry and there was nothing you could do about it and when you see people walking past with nice clothes and, I don't know, they walk out of the hairdressers and they've got nice hair. It gets to the point on the streets that you think 'is it worth it?'"*

> *"I'd be up on the street or standing in phone boxes with Bob (young person's cousin who was also detached and on the streets) to keep warm the whole night. … If it was really cold and we canna stay with me pals and we got nowhere to go, if the police drive past in a van, I'd throw a brick at the window just to they take me in and I'd have somewhere to stay."*

> *"When you fall asleep on the streets, you've got to like sleep with one eye open."*

> *"You just feel like you could get attacked or mugged. A lot of the time it's just paranoia, feeling scared that someone might come across you and just decide to hit you or do you over. … You just don't feel safe."*

> *"The bad things are the danger thing, being here, there and everywhere but also the relationship with my mum and my sisters. I missed my sisters."*

> *"Loneliness but there's nothing you can really do about that. At the same time, being on your tod is good as well 'cos it gives you time to think."*

> *"Getting the worries; the cold – that's the worst thing, the worst thing ever."*

> *"Yeah, my physical health has been affected by it (being on the streets). … I have lost absolutely loads of weight. I used to be a size ten and now I'm not even a size six. That's from living on the streets and not eating and all the drugs ….. I've like caught loads of things as well; I've STDs, I'm hepatitis C and I've had Chlamydia."*

Children and young people also commented upon how changes in civil society made their lives more dangerous. Previous research[157] described how, in the 1990s, children and young people away from home or care did not venture as often into city centres because of the increase in surveillance. In two locations children and young people remarked upon how the increase in police personnel on the streets has meant homeless people are forced to move away from areas where they feel safe because they are known by and know people from the non-homeless community who are friendly towards them and offer support in a range of ways. Some described how significant amounts of time are spent avoiding police personnel. Some children and young people actively avoid being visible on the streets and become underground, moving away from people and places where they are known and feel safe, becoming hidden and therefore more at risk because their presence is not monitored by others.

Some children and young people acknowledge that whilst they have fun on the streets, there is a darker side to being on the streets in city centres:

> *"There's more of an edge here; you feel like something could kick off. I know how to look after myself but you see some young kids here who really shouldn't be here. … You also see some young girls selling themselves – sometimes for hardly anything at all. Man, that's depressing."*

Homeless adults also revealed concern about those children and young people they view as less streetwise and particularly at risk. As one adult homeless person told the researcher about a thirteen-year-old female who is on the streets with her fifteen-year-old sister:

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157 Safe on the Streets Research Team (1999) *Still Running: Children and Young People on the Streets in the UK* London: The Children's Society.

> *"It's not right someone her age; she's not streetwise like X (her sister). … She should be at school and stuff. … We all look out for her but she shouldn't be here."*

Some of the older young people who participated in the research expressed concern about the younger children who spent time on the streets in city centres, noting the change that takes place in relation to children and young people on the streets:

> *"'They're getting younger and younger and more and more dangerous. They see their brothers doing it and think they can do it too and they just seem to be getting younger and younger, coming into the city centre and doing all sorts. It's like they think that they can do what they want and don't really care what happens if they get caught doing stuff. … I've seen eight/nine year olds in town drinking and other stuff. Some of the young ones carry knifes and stab people; stabbing's mental in this town. They know they'll be in trouble if they carry knives so some of them use pens 'cos the police can't take it off you."*

> *"I seen a lot of young kids wandering about late at night, sleeping on the streets, getting into trouble and getting arrested. I've seen young girls selling sex; it's terrible. … They've got these pimps who they call their boyfriends but they're not. … Some of them look about fourteen."*

Whilst for some children and young people becoming detached and living on the streets was a seamless process, other children and young people were not prepared for being on the streets; even though they spent time hanging out on the streets and thought they would be alright with it, the reality was very different:

> *"I was just sort of thrown in the deep end … I used to try and stay awake all nights when I was on the streets … I was scared. I just walked and walked. … When I was younger and living with me parents, I used to hang out on the streets a bit so I did have some knowledge of what it was like to be on the streets and how to be on the streets but I wasn't prepared for it when it happened properly. It was winter and it was a bit of a shock to the system. I didn't know what to do."*

> *"I felt confident but I wasn't really; I was naïve. I had no idea what it was really like on the streets, what could happen. There's so many bloody weird people out there. … I've had so many people approach me and say 'do you wanna earn yourself some money', you know? Like doing dodgy stuff, you know. … Like rent boy sort of stuff, um, like prostitution."*

5.8 Positives of Being on the Streets

Children and young people identified a number of positive things about being on the streets. Some children and young people liked being out on the streets because of the possibility of adventure and found it hard to be away from the streets, craving the fun and excitement of the streets:

> *"It got to the stage where I found it hard to be indoors. I'd be indoors somewhere and I'd be bored and I'd want to be out on the streets, seeing what was going on, who was about. When I was young and in care, I'd sometimes just sneak out of my bedroom window and go out to touch base and then sneak back into my room. …. And it always felt like a journey. You never knew what was going to happen. … Being inside was boring and that was it: being outside was exciting."*

> *"We'd make the most of it (being on the streets). We'd get blankets of like whatever and we'd just sleep somewhere; get a tent up somewhere or something and just make the most of it."*

> *"Sometimes you can have a good time; have a laugh with all the drunk people; see what's happening in town. Town goes on until about six in the morning. Go get some breakfast from the night shelter."*

Some particularly cherished the freedom offered by the streets:

> *"Freedom – nobody telling you what to do; nobody trying to stop me doing anything. I could do what I wanted when I wanted. Have whatever I wanted to eat. Wear whatever I wanted to wear. Take what I wanted to take."*

> *"It's freedom out on the streets."*

Some children and young people benefited from being able to escape their home environment:

> *"Calmed me down a bit; got me off drugs as I just had to deal with whatever was going on."*

> *"I preferred being on my own because I used to feel when I was on my own, doing me own thing and going off on me wanders, that I was alright and I used to feel like I was in control."*

> *"I think I've turned out better now than if I'd have stayed living at me mum's or me dad's. … I've not turned out like me mum because I've learnt from their mistakes. So I've learnt to have my priorities straight. … I've learnt never to get on heroin or anything like that because me dad's been on it and me mum used to be on it. I've learnt to be a proper parent."*

Others view being on the streets as having being beneficial for them in terms of their own maturity and ability to handle situations:

> *"I've grown up a lot quicker. I know I'm never gonna live on the streets again; I'm never gonna let that happen again. … It was a learning curve. … In a way I'm glad I've been in that situation, being homeless, 'cos, like I say, I grew up a lot quicker and became more wise. It also gave me more confidence about myself because you've got to be confident walking around on the streets 'cos of the drunks: head and shoulders back."*
>
> *"If all that happened hadn't happened, I wouldn't have experienced some things that I have experienced so it's like now, if it comes across again, I'll know how to handle it."*

5.9 Normalisation of Being on the Streets

An inherent acceptance exists amongst many of the children and young people who participated in the research that being on the streets was a natural progression of their life. Their experiences and lifestyles have become normalised for some who know other children and young people, including their siblings[158], who live in similar chaotic and difficult circumstances.

> *"I've slept up closes and that but that's part of life; everyone does that round here."*

Whilst this normalisation was shared, there were some different perceptions of the opportunities available to children and young people. For the few who had recently moved into private accommodation, having a place to stay was the starting point for moving on with the rest of their life. Those who had recently moved into supported housing appeared to fall into two camps: those who would take advantage of the opportunities available to them at this point in their life, such as education or training, and those who largely carried on living in the same way but with somewhere to stay. For a couple of young people, there had been a recent realisation that their lives should not be like this and they were slowly beginning to make inroads to change their lives. For many children and young people at the time of participation in the research, there was an acceptance that this is how their life is and they revealed no desire to change their life or awareness that there was an alternative to the pattern of their life.

5.10 Withdrawing from Street Life

It appears to be hard for some children and young people to withdraw from street life as even amongst those with private accommodation and jobs, there is still the draw of street life. Some children and young people's involvement in street life takes significant resources:

> Chelsea has a nine-month-old baby, is seven months pregnant and has a private sector rented house forty-five minutes away by bus from the town centre. She spends large amounts of her time at a drop-in service, and other services, for homeless people. Chelsea spends £24.50 of her weekly money of £64 on travel to be with her homeless friends seven days a week. Chelsea arrives at the drop-in for 10 am and stays there until it shuts. When the researcher first met

> Chelsea, she left the drop-in at 6 pm and moved on, with her baby, to 'tea and toast' that opens until 8 pm. Her friends and peers were not at 'tea and toast'. Chelsea caught the last bus home and was at the drop-in centre at opening time the next morning.

A similar pattern was followed by other young people who are no longer homeless. Those who have spent significant amounts of time with streets communities appeared to find being alone difficult. Children and young people described how some of the people who participate in the homeless scene are not homeless but have a house or flat and how they would not withdraw from the homeless scene if they were offered a property themselves:

> *"I'd still hang around in town and that with me friends and that – they've always been there for me when I've been in the shit and that and I've been there for them when they're in the shit. Just 'cos you get a flat doesn't mean that you bugger off and leave them. I'd still hang around but I wouldn't be out as much. They could come and sit in mine and stuff like that."*
>
> *"Most of me pals are still in hostels and that. Even though some of us have houses, we still meet up and that. It's who we are (part of the homeless community) even though we've got somewhere to stay."*

Other children and young people presently have no choice but to be involved in street life, despite a desire to move on. They have made a conscious decision to be friendly to other people they know who are involved in street life, but largely keep to themselves to avoid being drawn into previous behaviours, such as crime and substance misuse. This means that whilst they know and are cordial to many people involved in the homeless scene, they do not benefit from the support of a group and spend a lot of time on their own. A couple of young people interviewed had goals, and are strongly motivated to make changes and create a life that they want. They view it as too risky to have too much involvement with others more involved with street life.

Whilst still on the streets, some children and young people have tried to improve the quality of their lives. For some this occurs when their substance use ceases or reduces:

> *"After being off heroin for a few weeks, it's only just now that I'm getting my energy back, getting my sleep back and I just feel better about myself. I was letting myself go: I had long hair; it was greasy; I was skinny; I wasn't dressed properly; wore the same clothes for days. Now I wash my clothes, change my clothes."*

A few children and young people have started to develop a life away from the streets whilst they do not have somewhere of their own to go to:

> *"Not many people know about me and X (Tilly's girlfriend); it's private and part of my life that's not connected to the streets."*

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158 In some children and young people's families, there was a pattern of children leaving home before sixteen and either moving to the streets, staying informally with friends or seeking supported housing once they become sixteen.

At the beginning of the research, at their time of participation in the research, only two children and young people had never been street-involved. A tenth of the children and young people had ceased to be street-involved through different pathways away from the streets:

> *"Then there was like this Bengali family. Where I was there was not much Bengali family so I couldn't tell people like (what was happening) and this Bengali family they like found me and they took me (to their) home and then they send me to the Home Office. The Home Office, they interviewed me and they ask me questions and they think I am not safe to go back to my country (because they thought the young person would be sold again into domestic servitude) and they give me my family (the foster family where Tata lives and is very happy)."*
>
> *"I went to one of me mates and me mate's mum phoned social services. He'd (young person's friend) been sneaking me into his bedroom and she (friend's mother) didn't mind but she thought it wasn't right that I was on the streets and that."*
>
> *"I just got sick of it. … I don't hang about on the streets any more and I don't fight with people. I got sick of that an' all."*

Some children and young people have begun to see an alternative way of living but there is no support available to them to enable them to leave the streets:

> *"I started to realise what life was really about instead of just smoking hash and taking other drugs. There was another world: a world of jobs and homes. There are things you can do with your life rather than running about stealing and taking drugs. … I realised I could do other things; that I could get help with my drugs and anger management; that I could have a house and other stuff that other people have. I could have help with my past."*
>
> *"It's just so hard to get away from it all. … I've been away for so long from my other friends who don't live like this that I feel they've all moved on and got their own lives with cars, jobs and house. These (Germaine gesticulates to the people around us) have been my friends for so long. This has become my family. I know it sounds wrong but that is how it is. To me, this is home; that's true that is: this is home. I don't want it to be home because it's not a nice place but it is home."*

5.11 Summary

- The majority of children and young people spent time on the streets prior to becoming detached. They were drawn to the streets because there was nothing for them at home and also because the streets offer freedom and fun.
- Sometimes conflict arose between parents or carers and children and young people relating to what children and young people were doing on the streets. This conflict could act as the trigger for children and young people becoming detached and permanently on the streets.
- As well as running way and being thrown out of home, children and young people also drifted to the streets.
- Children and young people in care sometimes took to the streets because they were unhappy in their care placement or wanted to be with particular people.
- Prior to becoming detached, integration with homeless communities could hasten the speed at which a child or young person took to the streets and became detached.
- The homeless community could be a source of support and protection as well as a risk to children and young people. Some children and young people sought out others on the streets but others actively avoided the homeless community, viewing homeless adults as different and as a potential danger.
- With a couple of exceptions, those children and young people who did not sleep on the streets were street-involved.
- Children and young people employed a number of survival strategies on the streets including shoplifting, burglary, stealing cars, involvement in selling drugs, selling sex and begging and blagging. Sometimes spending time with others on the streets was an invaluable source of support. Survival strategies also entailed identifying safe places to be and practising attitudes and behaviour to minimise danger.
- Some children and young people viewed their time on the streets as wholly negative whilst others described it as being largely positive.
- For some, being on the streets was normal because it was experienced by many of their peers. It appears to be difficult to withdraw from street life, even when a young person has permanent accommodation.

6. Detached Children and Young People's Experiences of Agencies

Adam

From being an infant, Adam was neglected by his parents, spending long periods of time in his room, and subjected to extreme physical abuse by his father. Both parents misused and sold drugs and his mother had a mental health disorder. When Adam was four, he was placed in foster care with his younger sister. Over time, he began to enjoy living with his foster carers. Adam's parents split up and when he was nine, he and his sister returned to live with their father who started to sexually abuse Adam's sister and to abuse Adam once again:

"It became even worse. … He was always looking to beat me. He would punch me, hit me with bottles, slippers; cut me with glass; hit me with a cane; he would do anything."

As a result of everything that was taking place at home, Adam's behaviour started to change and he became involved with the police at the age of nine:

"I'd seen a better life (in foster care). I'd enjoyed being in foster care and started doing well in school and everything. And I went back to me father and I was there for a year or so and I got into loads of trouble. … That was when I went back to me dad's and I didn't want to be there. … I caused a lot of trouble when I was a little kid: vandalism, smashing cars up; that kind of thing. I stripped a car when I was nine."

After living with their father for a year, Adam and his sister were taken back into care and initially placed in the same foster placement. This placement did not work out for Adam and he was moved to his third foster placement whilst his sister remained in the previous placement. At first he was happy in this placement but problems began to arise when he started drinking with older friends and causing trouble at school:

"It was good to start with but then it all went tits up; I don't really know why. They (the foster carers) were quite old and I was ten … I ran them ragged. … Some of it was me being rebellious at school, going out drinking with me mates and that. … It was the buzz; it was fun; being with your mates and no parents nagging you."

The foster placement broke down and Adam moved into his fourth foster placement where he spent six weeks before running way because he didn't like being in a placement with two other males he did not know. Aged thirteen, Adam ran to the woods to have his own space. Adam was reported as missing and, after being away for a few days, was caught by the police. He refused to return to the foster placement he had run away from and his previous foster parents agreed that he could return to live with them. As Adam and these foster parents cared about one another, the placement worked well for a while. As happened previously, the foster parents found it difficult to cope with Adam's behaviour:

"It all started to go downhill after I was excluded from school for fighting. I was being a bastard. … I'd gone back to drinking again; to doing vandalism again; I was getting into trouble with the police; I was caught driving me mate's car."

Alternative education was not put in place so Adam left school at fifteen and spent most of his time drinking and committing crime. Adam's foster carers, unable to cope, threw him out. Sometimes he was able to stay with friends but other times he was on the streets which he found difficult and frightening. Adam lost contact with his social worker for a few months but made contact with him after turning sixteen and his social worker found him a place in a hostel. Adam feels very negatively about social services, though he recognises that they did try to help him in some ways by, for example, providing counselling. Adam was able to develop a good relationship with his last social worker:

"He was more laid back (than other social workers). He spoke to you more as a person than as a client. He was more easygoing, sort of thing; you could chat to him about anything. He was good. He helped me a lot as well. … He got me off the streets and into a hostel. … He helped me into college as well."

Adam now receives support from a voluntary sector drop-in project. As well as providing general support which Adam finds invaluable, they have referred him for anger management therapy and are working with him to find more permanent housing.

6.1 Agency Involvement

Over three-quarters of children and young people who participated in the research did not receive support from agencies to address problematic issues in their lives and ensure their needs were met. School attendance was erratic for most and only a quarter completed their secondary education. Some children and young people were involved with social services but many, at risk and in need, were not. Involvement with the criminal justice system was common. A few children and young people were referred for therapeutic support and a few worked with voluntary sector agencies, often being very positive about the support they received. A very small number of children and young people had a range of services involved with them. For example, one young person had a social worker, a drugs worker, a worker from the Youth Offending Team (YOT) a psychiatrist and a key worker from a voluntary sector project.

Most children and young people did not attempt to seek formal support because they did not realise that there were problems as their experiences had become normalised. This normalisation was reinforced by the lives of others around them that were similar; most knew other children and young people who were living in similar situations to them; some also had siblings who had left home before the age of sixteen. For those that simply drifted away from home, it was sometimes hard to pinpoint when they had actually left home and when a way of living became problematic. Some children and young people lived a particular lifestyle for some time before it felt difficult, uncomfortable or problematic. Some children and young people were happy with their lives or just accepted that this was how life was and did not want to seek change until their own coping mechanisms broke down, or suppressed reactions and emotions related to past events and experiences came to the fore and became impossible to ignore. Many children and young people did not know why they suddenly started experiencing problems or who they should go to as those people around them often had similar issues and they seemed to be a part of life. It appears that some children and young people have very few expectations: that life could have dealt them anything but the harsh hand they experienced; that their life could be different; and that they deserve a safe and protected childhood where they can develop to meet their potential and have access to support and opportunities. A few children and young people had some understanding that certain things should not be happening to them, that others should not be acting in various ways and that they should not be on the streets, but did not know where to go for help:

> "I never knew where to go. I knew I shouldn't be on the streets but I never knew where to go, though. I know now that I could have gone to Connexions and they would have helped me but I didn't know that then."

At the time of participation in the research, some children and young people did not want support except that offered by friends:

> "I don't like talking to anybody except me pals and if I need someone to talk to, I'll talk to them."

Some felt that they were managing adequately without any additional support and some just found it easier and safer to be self-reliant.

6.2 School

School is a key social institution providing a pathway to future opportunities and transitions for children and young people. For many of the children and young people who participated in the research, the culture of school is different to their own and the norms and boundaries expected at school were not present in their home and wider social life. Coupled with a number of factors making it difficult for a child or young person to attend school alongside the pull not to attend school, it is not surprising that many children and young people were unable to prioritise their education or were not interested in doing so. Four patterns of attendance at school existed amongst children and young people who participated in the research:

- Out of the 103 children and young people who participated in the research, only three regularly attended school and completed their education.
- A quarter of the children and young people left school at the age of sixteen, having missed large chunks of schooling. Nearly half of these children and young people completed their education outside of mainstream schools in, for example, residential schools, YOIs and schools for children with special needs.
- A couple of children returned to school after returning home from being detached[159].
- Other children and young people were either still away from school at the time of participation in the research or did not complete their education.

Reasons Children and Young People Drifted Away From School
Around a fifth of children and young people stopped attending school when they became detached. Apart from this fifth and the three children who attended school regularly, others had already stopped going to school before they became detached. Irregular attendance at school began with primary school for a few children and young people because their parents did not facilitate attendance. As children and young people grew older, they often became friends, and spent time with groups of children, young people and adults who were either not interested in schooling or too old to be at school. Attractive and sometimes exciting alternatives became available, such as having fun, taking drugs and committing crime, and children and young people become more interested in being part of this 'buzz' than attending school. Some children and young people left school and education permanently as young as twelve:

> "Because I was running away all the time and it became awkward to get me into schools so I just stopped going when I was twelve."

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159 A third child/young person returned home as a consequence of being involved in the research and has been reintegrated back into mainstream education.

> *I wasn't very good at it and that. I was naughty and stuff like that. … I didn't really used to go in much … and when I was there I didn't really do much anyway. There wasn't much point in me going … I just sort of stopped going when I was thirteen."*

Others stopped attending because of events and experiences that were taking place in and outside of school. Some were being bullied at school and self-exclusion became self preservation[160]. Others, as seen, were living on the streets and found this incompatible with attending school. Others stopped attending because they were pregnant or miscarried:

> *"I had too much pressure because, before I had my son, I had a miscarriage. I was having twins but I lost them both."*

Some children and young people were moved around a lot from school to school and this disruption contributed to the child or young person ceasing to attend school. Most of the children and young people who experienced this were in care:

> *"I was in over eighty foster homes and children's homes and so I was moved around from school to school as well."*

> *"I didn't really do very well with school. I think I left school at thirteen, fourteen. … I kept having to go to new schools and that's why I packed it in completely. I was just wagging, wagging it and wagging it until I just didn't go at all."*

Other children, outside of the care system, were moved around a lot by parents and carers and this led them to stop attending school:

> *"Me mam and dad didn't care if we went (to school) or not so sometimes we went and sometimes we didn't. We moved around a lot when we were little so education was disrupted and we got into the habit of missing school. I'd have liked to have gone to school properly, get some qualifications and that."*

Some children and young people did not attend school because of their caring duties or because their parent or carer kept them awake at night and they were too tired to attend school the following day:

> *"That (education) got messed up, that did; 'cos of me uncle getting pissed and keeping me up all night arguing."*

> *"He (father) wouldn't let me go to bed sometimes when he was drunk or he'd wake me to shout at me and keep me up for hours. I'd be too tired the next day and go back to bed. I started missing that much school, I just thought it wasn't worth bothering."*

One young person's father was taken to court because the young person missed so much school:

> *"I stopped going (to school) when I was thirteen. When I was thirteen, I'd like pretend to go to school, do you know what I mean, and not go. And then, when I was like fourteen, I just stopped (pretending to go to school) and just didn't go to school and my dad had to pay a really big fine."*

Attempts to Maintain School Attendance Whilst Detached
A small number of children and young people continued to attend school whilst they were detached. However, only a couple of these children and young people were able to carry on with their education as they had somewhere to live. A couple of children and young people who were living on the streets attempted to maintain their inclusion in school but found this difficult and the demands of living on the streets eventually resulted in them leaving school:

> *"I tried to make it to school every day but I had to work to get money to live so didn't always make it to school. I needed things; I needed food; when I had a period it was a nightmare and I needed to be able to buy all the things for that."*

> *"I used to go and get ready (for school) at friends' houses in the morning but I just couldn't be bothered with it no more. I was getting too tired in the classes. … I was always dead tired in the mornings (from not having anywhere to sleep) … so I ended up not going at all."*

Children and Young People's Perceptions of Mainstream School
Many children and young people did not like school. Sometimes this dislike was expressed through a child or young person's behaviour which was reacted to accordingly by the school and led to the child or young person spending less and less time at school:

> *"It was shit. … It got to the point where I only came in on once a week on a Monday and then had the rest of the week off 'cos of my behaviour. … I would tell the teachers to fuck off … fight in school and all that."*

Some children and young people did not like the culture of school and struggled with the work they had to do:

> *"I didn't like it and I didn't want to go. … I didn't like having all the work to do and all that writing and that. I don't like that; it's not me."*

Having a learning disability sometimes hindered the child or young person's ability to manage what was expected of them at school:

> *"I stopped going to school when I was twelve; never got on with school. I'm dyslexic, I am, and that may have something to do with it."*

A few children and young people reported how they had started to enjoy school and do well at school when placed with foster carers they liked:

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160 MacDonald R & Marsh J (2005) *Disconnected Youth? Growing Up in Britain's Poor Neighbourhoods* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

> *"Everyone (in the foster placement) was so laid back and they were really nice. They put me in a new school 'n all and I made loads of friends. It was the proper friends. I started to do really well at school and I was put in a higher class 'cos I was doing so well."*

Exclusion from School
Nearly half of children and young people who participated in the research were excluded from school:

> *"I got kicked out of school as well … for messing about. What it was, I sat on a teacher's car and got kicked out for that; which I thought was a bit stupid. And they let me go back and I walked out of a lesson and I was kicked out for that."*

> *"I wasn't going to school much and when I was in school, I was causing a riot. … I was on me last chance and then I had a fight and I got expelled."*

> *"I was getting suspended a lot and then they expelled us … for stupid stuff and because I was hardly ever there. The last school I went to, I just got expelled again and I never went back to another school. … I'd just turned fifteen."*

Experiences of Alternative Education
After being excluded, some children and young people were placed in alternative provision where they were happier:

> *"When I got put to The Panel for the second time, it was a choice between a school for bad boys, X (name of the school) or X (name of a school) Support School. It's like a school but not a school. … You go for three hours a day and you get a pool table, a juke box; you get lunch as soon as you go in; a second break; a fag break. On a Friday they take you on activities: go-carting and things like that. I loved it there, I really did."*

> *"I felt like I achieved something. I made quite a few friends of my own age, which I'd never been able to do before. … I'd always had younger friends."*

> *"I got excluded when I was thirteen and then I had home tuition for about a year. Then I went to this school where they specialised in teaching kids with Aspergers. I had a brilliant time there."*

Others were not so happy with being placed in alternative education:

> *"I said 'listen, I wanna do education' but they put me in with all these like idiots who didn't want to do education and were messing around all the time. I wanted to get some qualifications behind me 'cos I didn't want to end up like me mum."*

Some children and young people went from being pupils at school who were well behaved and worked at their studies to exhibiting problematic behaviour due to problems in their lives. In the majority of cases, children and young people reported that no-one asked why their behaviour had changed or if there was anything wrong.

Three instances were cited where school personnel did take action: one child was referred to social services when the child disclosed to a teacher that he was being physically abused at home; a second child received a lot of support from the head teacher who became aware that home life was difficult for the child; and a third child was referred to social services but had become so detached that it was not possible for social services to locate her.

For the many children and young people unknown to other services, school was the only agency that they had contact with. In these circumstances, when a child or young person disengages with school, the child or young person becomes lost to all agencies.

6.3 Social Services

A fifth of children and young people who participated in the research were involved with social services; most of these spent some time in care settings such as foster placements, children's homes, secure units, residential schools and mother and baby units. Social workers did attempt to work with other children and young people but were prevented from doing so effectively by either the child or young person or their parents:

> *"I saw them (social worker) about three or four times and then I didn't want to deal with them any more. Every time they arranged to come and see me, I wouldn't be in the house and I guess they just kind of gave up."*

> *"My dad would never let them through the front door and used to tell them to fuck off. I did see my social worker at school sometimes but she wasn't allowed in the house and my dad told me he would kill me if I told her what he did to me."*

These descriptions from children and young people highlight how social workers often face a number of hindering barriers to effectively engage with detached children and young people. When working with children and young people who become detached, social workers are working with families where there are a lot of difficult issues, and sometimes with families and children and young people who are not interested in their support. This may be for a number of reasons such as previous negative experiences of social services, incorrect perceptions of what being involved with social services entails or fear of what may happen once they and their children become involved with social services. It is also very difficult for a social worker to intervene when they do not know where the child or young person is and are unable to locate them. In addition, as the above quote implies, social workers may have to face violent or abusive responses when they try to gain contact with the child or young person.

A few children and young people were happy when they lived in care:

> *"We said 'we want to go back to living with our foster carers 'cos we were happy there.'"*

> "One of my foster parents is one of my best friends and she was there when my baby was born. I loved her to bits when I lived with her and we're still good friends."

Others, who lived in multiple placements, had a range of experiences within the care system, sometimes identifying how being moved so often had such a negative impact upon them:

> Jean had mixed experiences of foster carers. Jean was abused by some foster carers:
>
> "There were some who liked beating kids because they've not got none of their own to batter. Me and my little sister both got battered by foster parents. There was one lot of foster parents who battered us both severely when we lived with them together and they (social services) interviewed us separately and because our stories didn't match, they didn't do anything about it."
>
> Jean had a very positive experience of one foster carer:
>
> "There was one lovely woman. She was quite old and she went on holiday. Because I didn't have a passport, I wasn't able to go with her and whilst she was away, social services said 'look, when she comes back from holiday, you're not going to go back to her because she wants to adopt you and she's too old to adopt you'. … She was in her mid forties and they (social services) said that because I was at that unstable age, it was just one of those things that couldn't happen."
>
> From being seven to eleven, Jean lived in eighty-six foster placements. She thinks that this was because she found it difficult to be treated as a child when she acted older than the age she was and did not fit in:
>
> "I never fitted anywhere because I was always older-headed … older-minded. I had to act like I was the older one when I was with my brothers and sisters. When I went into foster homes I was often told 'we don't want you here' so I ended up running away and kept on doing that and, in the end, they couldn't place me in the foster home so I ended up in children's homes."
>
> Jean also attributes being in so many foster placements to not wanting to be where she was not wanted or where she wasn't treated properly:
>
> "I wasn't a really naughty kid; I just didn't want to be in certain places: If I didn't feel treated right, if I didn't feel wanted, then I didn't want to be there. … It was really horrible. I wanted to cry all the time but I didn't. I just kept on moving on and moving on and, in the end, it's just how it got to be."

> From being eleven, Jean lived in four children's homes and preferred living in children's homes to living in foster placements:
>
> "It wasn't too bad. All the kids (in the children's homes) had been through different things and had different behaviours but you always felt wanted; I always did. The younger children always seemed to attach themselves to me."

> Horatio has lived in a number of foster homes and children's homes with mixed experiences. Some of these foster carers treated Horatio inappropriately:
>
> "One lot were a bunch of goons. The dad beat me with a golf club. … My social worker found out about it and I was taken off them."
>
> Another set of foster parents were unkind and, when this was raised, claimed that this was because their Protestant views differed from Horatio's Catholicism. When Horatio was ten, he was moved to a foster placement where he was really happy and he started to progress in many ways. He was suddenly moved and was devastated and, at this point, stopped investing in his carers. Horatio thinks that he was in over twenty care placements until the age of eleven and that it was very damaging to be moved around such a lot:
>
> "Sometimes I was there for two weeks, three months or six months. A few I was in for more than a year. … It does mess with your head and then people wonder why you start to run away. … See if you get emotionally attached to a family and then you get pulled away, it racks your head; it hurts your head, like. People don't understand that, I think. I don't understand the whole concept of moving a kid from here to there to another place, and so on. And then try to say it's your own fault: 'oh, you're misbehaving' and then just move you somewhere else. And then they move you from children's home to children's home so what's the difference and how's it going to make you change?"

As well as being moved from placement to placement, it was also difficult for children and young people to be moved back and forth between home and care:

> "It was unsettling for me 'cos I was moved back and forth, back and forth. I was always told it would be different when I went back home but it never was."

Whilst all who lived in children's homes described care home staff whom they liked and perceived as doing a good job, some felt that not all care staff were able to work with children and young people in their care in a positive manner:

> "When they did organise anything, it was like they were doing it for themselves. Sometimes it was like you were just an inconvenience and they'd have rather done the activity without you being there and they had just brought you along because it was their job. So it didn't feel like you were having fun but like you had to be sorry for being there."

Some children and young people were not happy with the aftercare services they received:

> "They're supposed to look after you from when you're sixteen but they didn't really do much."

A number of children and young people who spent time in the care system felt very strongly about how they were perceived and represented by professionals and described how these representations can haunt a child or young person throughout their time in the care system. Their comments highlight that, to ensure more positive experiences of social care professionals, it is important to work in an informal and welcoming manner, giving each child and young person time as an individual whose views are sought and valued. Children and young people clearly value being treated this way and respond well. Being misrepresented, or presented in such a way that does not allow for change even when the child or young person no longer engages in certain behaviours, can have a number of negative impacts:

> "Whatever's written about you in records, that's who people think you are. Nobody cares if the records are wrong or if the full story isn't told. Whatever's written down, they believe that and that's that. They always revert to whatever's been written down and you can never escape it even if you've changed or don't do certain things any more. … When people write things down, it's permanent."

> "Being in (a) care situation … the staff are always right, never mind what you say or do: the staff are always right. … As soon as you go into care, you get labelled straight away, never mind what you've done. Say you are in care 'cos of your parents, like, because you are in care, you get labelled 'bad'. Other people say 'he's a care kid; don't get involved with him; he's trouble'. So you end up thinking 'fuck you then, if you think I'm trouble, I'm gonna give you trouble'. You think 'why am I getting judged like this if I'm not like that? I might as well be like that. If you're gonna judge me like that, I'm gonna be like that'. I know now that's the wrong way to look at it but that's how I looked at it when I was younger."

> "Staff, social workers and that, would look at you and assume they know you. They judge you immediately: 'oh, you're just like the rest of them' and that makes me think 'now hang on a minute, no I'm not'. … That used to be the thing that bugged me so much … them all thinking 'oh, you're just another one of them lads; just another troublemaker'."

A couple of children and young people abused or inappropriately treated by carers have made formal complaints. One of these complaints relates to being abused by foster carers:

> "At first social services were like 'oh no, don't be going to court; let's settle privately'. But I was like 'no I don't want to settle the claim privately'. I want to sue because, back in the days when it was all happening, I didn't really know that it shouldn't be happening but now that I know it shouldn't have happened, I want to do something about it. And that's what I've said to social services. … I had to sign these papers last week so my solicitor could serve the papers to court. I was so nervous; I didn't eat all day. … When I think about what they did to me and my brother, and what they probably did to other children, I feel so angry. Even though I told my social worker what they did to us, my brothers had to stay with them (foster carers) after I was taken away and I found out that they had other children after we were taken away from them. It's not the money that I'm bothered about. I want them to acknowledge what actually happened and change things so it doesn't happen to other kids."

Another young person experienced problems with staff after becoming inappropriately involved with them:

> "Two members of staff were having an affair and I stitched on them and they went against me. And then I had the whole staff team against me and they stitched me up for selling drugs. So I told them that I was getting cocaine for one of the members of staff, which was true but she said I was lying and they did an internal investigation. They didn't get someone external in like they were supposed to … so I made a formal complaint to social services and they got Care Standards involved. … It took 'em three years but they got it sorted in the end."

A couple of children and young people were placed in bed and breakfasts under the age of sixteen when they sought help from social services:

> "I was staying with friends all over the place, I went to social services and told them that I had nowhere to live and said I couldn't go home. They rang my mum and she said 'no, I don't want her here'. They phoned my dad and he said 'no, I don't want her here' and then they put me in a B & B … and then I was there for quite a long time. Then I went back to my dad's and left again and ended up on the streets."

6.4 Involvement with the Criminal Justice System

Over a third of children and young people who participated in the research have been involved in the criminal justice system. Children and young people were charged with, for example, arson, shoplifting, stealing cars, aggravated burglary, actual bodily harm (ABH) and grievous body harm (GBH), criminal damage, being drunk and disorderly and vandalism:

> *"I'm a graffiti artist and all the trouble I've had with the police was linked to my graffiti. … My dad's house got raided by them. I wasn't living there but that was my known address and all my things were there. … I got done for vandalism and saw a youth offending team for nine months."*

Children and young people were fined, placed on Anti-social Behavioural Orders (ASBOs) and a couple were tagged. A fifth of the children and young people spent time in a YOI, half of these on more than one occasion:

When Ray was fifteen and on the streets with a heavy drug habit, he broke into a house, filled the car in the drive with the stolen goods and drove away. Ray, under the influence of drugs, realised that the police were following him:

> *"I've been up for fucking days on end, speeding out of my napper in a stolen car with a load of booty in the back seat with this (police) car flashing behind me. So I'm panicking now … so I slammed on the fucking brakes, jump out of the damn car and, by this time, the police car has gone straight past me. So I run back to the car, grabbed what I thought was a camcorder and a jewellery box and run off. Anyway, these two blokes, these two 'have a go heroes', got me and held me down whilst the police came. So that was it. I got arrested, taken down to the police cell … and that was me: that was my prison life started."*

Ray was sent to a YOI and found prison life easy to adapt to:

> *"Well, from what I was experiencing around the place and the lads I was mixing with, it was no big thing. We was coming off the streets and doing the same things in there. … It was fucking ridiculous some of the stuff we used to do there. The things we used get up to: the drugs, bullying. I had a couple of slaps whilst I was there, everybody gets it, but I always did kind of alright. I think it's a survival mechanism: fit in and get by."*

Ray left the YOI and stayed in a homeless hostel but fought with others in the hostel:

> *"I stopped there for a couple of weeks and there was a bit of animosity. I burgled the hostel office, took the cash tin, done one and didn't go back."*

Ray was back on the streets, still taking large amounts of ecstasy and speed and stealing to fund his substance use. Ray served a second sentence in a YOI and two sentences in a prison. After the fourth time, Ray made an effort to change his life but found it hard to come off drugs and change the lifestyle he was born into and carried on:

> *"I thought I'd have a fresh start: clean of drugs, blah, blah, blah. Then I met my children's mum and had a couple of kids but ended up in prison for one more sentence."*

When asked to reflect upon his life since he was fifteen and became detached, Ray described how:

> *"It all went kind of quick. I never experienced university kind of life, going out with mates, going on holidays, one night stands; all them kinds of things I never did because I was taking drugs or in prison. After leaving prison for the fourth time, I met me missus and had a couple of kids and now I've got responsibilities. I do think that I missed out on a lot of things. 'Til I met me missus, I'd never been to a circus or to a zoo; that's what I'd class as normality. My kids go to safari parks and to zoos. They have nice clothes and shoes on their feet. My mum was too busy playing bingo and drinking, and whatever else she was doing."*

Spending time in a YOI appears to have different impacts upon children and young people:

> *"Whilst I am in here, I can be thinking about my next job on the outside and learning from others in here about how to do stuff."*

> *"I wasn't bothered (about spending time in a YOI); it got me off the streets. Got me three meals a day. It was boring but so's being on the streets sometimes."*

> *"At the start it was pretty mad but then you just get the hang of it. … At the start, you're just sat thinking 'what am I doing here? Everyone's out there and I'm stuck in here'. But then you get the hang of it and it's not so bad and you're alright, like."*

> *"It was three years of my life wasted, though. I won't be doing all that stuff again. I learnt the hard way but I've stopped all that stuff … a lot of my mates got out and then were back in a week later for doing all the same stuff that had put them in there before."*

Some children and young people had a set of rules that influenced criminal behaviour and certain activities were deemed unacceptable. Others, who were permanently on the streets and perceiving there to be no other options, became so desperate for money to fund their substance use or general survival that they moved on to committing more violent crime. However, some refused to become involved in certain criminal acts even when those around them do so:

Luke has developed a reputation for himself as a good car thief. He is aware that he is lucky not to be in prison as members of his family and friends have served prison sentences. Some people with whom he has committed crimes have progressed to more violent crimes such as armed robbery. Luke is very clear that he is not interested in violent crimes:

> *"Some people I know started hanging around with the wrong people and got involved in violent crime. I've stayed more to cars and buildings. I've robbed*

> *shops when they're closed, not when they're open. Robbing shops during the day is taking the piss a bit, hurting people and that. At least when they're shut, there's usually no-one in the building."*

6.5 Other Agencies and Interventions

Therapeutic Interventions
A few children and young people received therapeutic services from a counsellor or psychiatrist with mixed results:

> *"I have spoken to counsellors but they just bring everything up. When I first talk about it and it's on my mind, I get panic attacks. But after a bit, it does make me feel better. But it's just the first couple of steps of talking about everything; and then, coming home, it's still on my mind."*

> *"On the first session, I told her (the counsellor) that I didn't want her help, that she should shut her trap and leave me alone to deal with it meself. … I didn't want to open up to anybody about it and, as I got older, I started to talk to my pals and that 'cos they wouldn't judge it and make out that they knew loads about it. I just wanted someone to listen and not tell me what's what and that because I already knew what was what and I didn't need anybody to explain it to me."*

> *"It was brilliant seeing the psychiatrist. She really helped me with everything and to realise that I was not to blame (for the young person's father's suicide)."*

> *"I never went after the first time (of seeing a child psychiatrist) 'cos I didn't like it."*

> *"He (the psychiatrist) used to say things like 'I know exactly what you're going through' and I'd be like 'no you don't'. And then he'd say 'well, I've met other people like you' and I'd say 'but you don't know me'; know what I mean?"*

> *"I had to go see a psychiatrist. … It helped me big time."*

> *"It sorted my head out, man … 'cos I was doing a programme and it was about fighting and all that and it sorted my head out 'cos it was a programme where you got to talk about all your feelings and all that. I used to talk about what I used to do, fighting and all that, and talk about a better way of doing things and all that. So when I came out (of the secure unit), my head was more sorted."*

Interventions from the Voluntary Sector
A very small number of children and young people were referred or self-referred to voluntary sector services when they were under the age of sixteen. One young person received support from a specialised service for refugee and asylum seeking children; another from a project for young runaways; and a few children and young people were supported by staff from a sexual exploitation project. One young person accessed one of three refuges for young runaways in the UK:

After years of neglect and physical and emotional abuse because of parental substance misuse, Ciaron started to stay away from home when he was fourteen, often sleeping rough, drinking and stealing. He stayed away a number of times and was never reported as missing. One time, Ciaron stayed away for longer than usual and maintained contact with his social worker but did not find her helpful as she repeatedly told him to go back home. He insisted that he was not going to do so and his social worker said that there was nothing she could do for him. Ciaron became fed up with sleeping rough. His social worker had given him the phone number for the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) so Ciaron phoned the number and was given the number for a refuge for young runaways. Ciaron phoned and a worker from the refuge came to meet him. He was offered and accepted refuge where he stayed for two weeks. Ciaron benefited from the time in refuge:

> *"It was just good; doing stuff, watching telly, playing on the computer; stuff like that. Sometimes I talked to staff about what I wanted and they helped me to sort it out. "*

Ciaron told his key worker what had happened to him at home, the extent of his abuse, that he did not have a bed, was often not fed at home, and other reasons for running away. Through discussions between Ciaron, refuge staff and social services, it was decided that he would not return home and would move to a children's home:

> *"Aye, being in the refuge gave me space to think about what I wanted to do and what my options were. I didn't want to go back home and told them I wanted to go into care."*

For two years Ciaron lived in a children's home with mixed experiences. Sometimes he wanted to be away from the children's home and had two further admissions to refuge. Once again, refuge staff worked with him to outline what the issues were and to seek a solution so that Ciaron was able to return to the children's home.

Whilst detached children and young people often do not access formal systems of support and may find it difficult to adhere to the structured approach of refuge and conventional approach of intervention[161], being in refuge worked well for Ciaron. This is likely to be because he was detached for a relatively short amount of time, was used to receiving interventions and was proactive in seeking support to address the problems in his life and changing his circumstances.

All of the children and young people who had experience of voluntary sector support were positive about the support they received:

> *"I tried shouting out to social workers and they put me through to X (a local runaways project) who try and stop you running away. X (Sarah's key worker at the project) ended up saying to me, when they*

161 Smeaton (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Young Runaways* London: The Children's Society.

*realised I was gonna keep on running, 'you're
gonna do it anyway so just make sure you keep
yourself safe and you've always got a place to go
to, that you're warm and you've got food and
you've got people around you that you know you
can trust'. They (project staff) knew I wouldn't stop
running away because I was in such a habit of it.
… I liked going there because it was someone to
talk to."*

*"They (project staff) understand you and it's a nice
place to come."*

6.6 Agency Support Aged Sixteen and Over

Once children and young people reach the age of sixteen,
they are, of course, eligible to access services for the
homeless. Many sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds had
some reservations about using services for the adult
homeless population but did so when desperate:

*"When you're fucked and it's pouring down with
rain and you'll get an alright night's sleep, it's like a
godsend when there's nowhere else to go. So I go
and sleep down there in some sleeping bag that
smells like shit and you've got some fucking stinky
man snoring next to you."*

In some areas, when children and young people became
sixteen and sought help from housing services, they were
placed in a bed and breakfast whilst waiting for a place in
supported housing project:

*"They put me in a skanky B & B with like some
druggy people next door and this drunken woman
used to stand and swear outside my door. There
used to be like heroin needles under my bed and
stuff. … I was in the B & B for Christmas for over a
month."*

*"I slept in parks and stuff; slept in stolen cars and
that. I slept in a car for a couple of months and
then, after waiting until I was sixteen, I went to see
about getting a place to live. … I went to the
housing services and they put me in this B & B but
I didn't stay in the B & B 'cos it was shit. … It was
like a dirty and smelly place. It was a horrible and
uncomfortable place to live. … I'd rather sleep on
the streets than in that place."*

Others have been referred to mixed sex accommodation
for homeless people aged sixteen to sixty. Some found
living in such projects frightening:

*"There's people in reception having fits on the floor
… there's people using needles. … As I'm walking
up the stairs, there's no cameras on the stairs. …
My boyfriend's got to sit out here and I got to shout
to him from the window when I get back to my
room that I'm alright because he don't want to
leave me here and he's not allowed to sleep here.
… There's needle boxes in the corridors; I've got to
walk past needle boxes. I see prostitutes coming in
and out; I've got a guy next door who sleeps with
prostitutes … next door to me and I hears them*

*(having sex); it's not nice. … They all seem to pile
up in one room using their needles. It's horrible. …
They bang on the door constantly; it's horrible: 'got
any heroin? Got any gear?' … People bang on
your door at seven o'clock in the morning for fags;
it's horrible. I was walking out the other day to go
to the shop for something and somebody says to
me: 'have you got any heroin?'. I said: 'I don't do
that. I only knows fags; I don't drink or anything like
that'. She asked me: 'Do you have any heroin? Are
you a prostitute?' I was like: 'No, I'm only sixteen;
I'm not a prostitute.' … I need to get out of here …
I can't be here for much longer. … I'm awake for
hours. I sit by my door until about three o'clock in
the morning and wait until everyone else has gone
to bed and then I feel safe to go to bed. … It's
changed me being here … I'm pure scared. I'm
always thinking about who's on the other side of
the door and what they could be doing."*

These comments from young people about support
available to them when they are over the age of sixteen
reveal, once again, how some young people view
themselves as being different from others who are
homeless. This also reveals how services for the
homeless, at present, are not able to represent the
diversity that exists with the homeless population. For
example, because so much of the homeless population
does have a substance misuse issue, it is appropriate to
have needle disposable bins in homeless hostels; yet, if
you are a young person who does not use drugs, the
presence of needle disposable bins and people who are
using drugs can be intimidating.

Some young people were referred to supported housing
projects. Many continued to live the same lifestyle as they
did on the streets but with the benefit of having
somewhere to sleep and spend time when they did not
want to be on the streets. Others have benefited from the
support available to them in such an environment and
begun to move on:

*"This place has provided me with both a home and
help to go to college and stuff and to help me build
my life and progress me into an adult."*

One young person described how he feels able to talk
with a worker in the project because of her capacity for
empathy and capacity to communicate with him:

*"She's alright, she is. She's on the level and she
knows what's going on and how it is. … She talks
sense. … She talks in my language so I can
actually understand what she's saying."*

After being self-reliant and independent for so long and
negotiating a more informal world with its own sets of
norms and values, some children and young people are
uncomfortable with more structured forms of support and
prefer the informality of drop-in centres where they can
return each day with no longer-term demands being made
of them, unless they request them. All of those who
accessed drop-in centres for homeless people were very
positive about the support they received at the drop-in
centre:

> *"It's good here 'cos they help you and everything. You come here, they give you something to eat and everything and help you with stuff. You've got somewhere to go (during the day and early evening) so you're not on the streets, getting into trouble. You can speak to someone if you want. It's got activities and everything."*

> *"In the last two weeks I've felt so different because of the staff here. … They don't think they know you, they get to know you … and work from there."*

> *"I've ended up here (at the drop-in centre) and things have started to look up; it's to do with the friendly support … it makes you feel less like a low life; it makes you feel like there are people out there who do care. At one point, I had no self-confidence, no self-esteem, no-one to turn to, nowhere to go; nothing good going on; nothing. My life was in limbo. And now I've started thinking 'hang on, life's not that bad'."*

> *"The food is proper cheap here and you get to have somewhere to go to sleep during the day … from ten in the morning to nine at night. And it's somewhere to keep warm. … And if you need any support in other ways, such as filling our forms and all that, they (project staff) help you with that."*

6.7 Research Participants' Recommendations to Help Children and Young People on the Streets

Children and young people were asked for their views on how best to help other children and young people on the streets. Some did not know how they should be helped and were not able to offer an opinion. Others were very specific and offered opinions that related to a range of circumstances and proposed responses. Suggestions were made that related to attitudes and perceptions

> *"Comfort them; talk to them; give them something to eat. Talk to them; see how they're feeling. If they're feeling bad, try your best to help them. And if you can't do anything to help them, make them comfy and wish them luck. … A lot of people think 'oh, they're on the streets, they're just junkies, they're tramps'. A lot of people haven't got drug problems; it's just mental issues like aggression, violence, depression. It's not just drugs, hen. It's everything; everything. They're all sat here for one reason or another."*

> *"All young people should be given a chance and a opportunity to get on with their life."*

> *"People should try and understand them as well. Not just try and make them fit."*

One young person had messages specifically for the middle classes and lawmakers:

> *"Don't be so judgemental on young people that get into trouble. And people that make the laws: you should be doing what this lassie (the researcher) is doing: coming to talk to people who have been on the streets. Go into prisons and see for yourselves the hold that drugs get on people."*

Another young person thought that responsibility lay with parents who needed to change their behaviour and attitudes:

> *"Parents need to get a grip."*

Some recommendations were specific to children and young people in the care system, highlighted the attitudes of others towards children and young people and touched upon issues relating to professionals who work with children and young people in care:

> *"I hope things do change (for children and young people living in care) but I don't think it will change unless the government does something about it. They need to get the right members of staff in homes to run them. There are some good members of staff working in children's homes but there's some real shit ones who abuse it and are only there for the money (for their wage); they don't care about kids. And that's what really does my head in: they've got to be there to help."*

> *"Children's homes can have up to ten kids in them and only two members of staff on at any time but they need more than that. There needs to be one-to-one time with each kid. They need more support."*

> *"Don't restrain them unless you really need to because that just makes them more angry. Staff could just tell you to go to your room, rather than drag you to your room. There's lots of ways to calm someone down other than putting your hands on them and restraining them. Restraining just makes the problem even worse."*

> *"There should be more support put in place for kids. Like, social workers and stuff need to realise that they've got to listen to the kids and not make judgements for them 'cos every time I saw a social worker, they didn't listen to what I wanted. They do what they think is best and not what the child wants. I know some kids may be like 'well, I want a mansion and I need this, that and the other' and that ain't gonna happen but social workers need to listen to kids' opinions."*

When asked how he would work as a professional with a young boy who had similar experiences to him, one young male replied:

> *"I'd try and talk to him and find out what sorts of interests he likes to do and I'd take him out and I'd try and build a bond with him and build up a friendship with him so that he would talk to you and open up. That's the way I'd treat him … I'd build up the trust."*

Many children and young people felt that it was important for those working with them to understand the reasons why they were behaving in a certain way and work with them to change their behaviour:

> "Kids need to be taught how to look after themselves and how not to put themselves at risk. They (social workers) always tell you 'you're putting yourself at risk' but they never tell you how not to. They never ask you why you're doing it and what's causing it. Everyone needs someone there for them."

Once on the streets, it is important for children and young people to know where they can go for support and have some consistency in relationships with professionals:

> "They know they can go somewhere where they won't be judged. That they won't be chucked into foster homes and left, and stuff like that. Once kids start a relationship with someone who is able to help them, they should be able to maintain that contact and know they can always go for help."

Having somewhere to stay was viewed as very important:

> "I think there should be a big building where they all can go and stay … (with) everything they need: food every day, hot water, warmth."

> "There should be places kids can stay so they don't have to be out on the streets."

> "They should have hostels for kids like us."

Some children and young people were more specific, emphasising the need for somewhere to stay specifically for children and young people that homeless adults were not able to access:

> "More kind of night shelters for young people, safer and not full of junkies. … Like a youth centre where they can get themselves something to eat and a bed for the night."

> "There should be places for kids under sixteen to go to. There's no way I'd go to one of them homeless hostels. Old men off their faces; it's not safe."

> "Somewhere to go at night … a night shelter or something like that; a night shelter, yeah, but a night shelter specifically for fifteen-year-olds; something like that. … There should be something like a youth club where you can get something to eat and then get your head down again and then you can get something to eat again in the morning. I'd love to see something like that for young people."

As well as providing accommodation, there should be drop-in projects that only children and young people can access:

> "I know I've had a lot of help from X (drop-in centre for over-sixteens and adults), but I also know how many drugs there are in here and how easy it is to caught up here in all sorts. It's so easy for a young person to come here and start using drugs, get involved in crime; all sorts. There should be places where people over the age of sixteen can't go with staff that are there to help anyone that wants help."

> "There should be places where they can stay. If they've ran away from somewhere, there should be places where they can stay without being returned to where they ran away from. There ain't nothing like that for kids on the streets round here. … It should be somewhere just for kids; not with adults staying. And it shouldn't be run by social workers 'cos they might not want to be around social workers. They might want to talk to someone who is nothing to do with social services."

Once a child or young person became sixteen, supported housing projects were identified as important to enable a young person to make the transition to living on their own in accommodation:

> "There should be more like flats where they've got like staff and they help them to live on their own and with any problems they have."

As touched upon in by children and young people, having someone to talk to and listen to children and young people was viewed as very important:

> "There should be people they can talk to if they have any problems in their life or if they're worried about something. But then they might be scared to tell someone what's going on at home."

> "Just people, basically, to listen to them. I've basically learnt, right, over the years, that the best form of help is, when I'm angry or hurt, for someone to say 'listen, I'm here to listen to you and I'm not going to try to tell you what to do or what you cannae do. I'm not going to try to tell you if you're in the wrong. I'm just here to listen to you. Do you know what I mean? Just tell me what you want. You don't need to feel pressured into telling me anything you didnae want to say'. I don't think I'd have been so violent or angry if there had been somebody like that for me."

Some children and young people were able to identify that different children and young people require different forms of support:

> "It depends upon their situation, dun it? If they're taken away from where they wanna be, they'll keep running away, innit? … Kids (in care) should be given proper access to family and stuff; to people they want to see. … It's hard to say what should be done because everyone's different."

Some children and young people wanted to use their own experiences to prevent others form ending up away from home or care and on the streets, describing what is effectively a mentoring role:

> *"What I would like to do, yeah, is get other children and young people, sit them down in a room and let me talk about my situation."*
>
> *"They need people working with them who've had the experiences they've had."*

Some children and young people believe that there is nothing you can do to prevent some from being away from home and on the streets under the age of sixteen, that it is inevitable and that they have to find out for themselves what it is like.

6.8 Summary

- Only a quarter of the children and young people who participated in the research received interventions to address problematic issues in their lives.

- Most children and young people did not seek formal support because so many of their experiences, for example, violence and being on the streets, became normalised, being reinforced by others around them as well as through their life processes and experiences.

- Some children and young people identified barriers to seeking support such as not knowing where to go for help or having to be self-reliant to survive.

- The majority of children and young people did not enjoy school and left before the age of sixteen with no qualifications, sometimes because it was difficult for them to attend school and often because they preferred the culture and the company on the streets. Nearly half the children and young people were excluded from school and some attended alternative educational provision with mixed results.

- Whilst most of the children and young people were at risk and experiencing harm, many were not known to social services. Children and young people expressed mixed perceptions of their social workers and there were also mixed experiences of being in care.

- There was significant experience of being known to the criminal justice system and some young people had served more than one sentence in a YOI.

- A few children and young people received therapeutic services and interventions from the voluntary sector.

- Once children and young people reached sixteen, the range of options for support widened but they expressed reservations about accessing generic services for the adult homeless population, viewing these places as undesirable and some homeless adults as dangerous. There was experience of being referred to supported housing projects where some participants took advantage of available support to make changes in their lives. More young people take advantage of the less formally structured support offered by drop-in centres as this model of support is familiar, because it is frequented by 'people like them' and fits with what they feel comfortable.

- The children and young people's recommendations to support detached children and young people on the streets mostly related to respecting children and young people, giving them space to talk and listening to them, incorporating their views in decision-making that affects their lives, having professionals who are non-judgemental, proving less structured support for under-sixteens including drop-in centres and hostel accommodation and providing mentors.

7. Identities, Behaviours and States of Being

Gerald

Gerald was frightened of his father who physically and emotionally abused him. This abuse stopped when he wrote a story at school about a child who was abused and his teacher contacted social services.

When Gerald was seven, he realised he was gay:

"Oh yeah, I knew by the age of seven; … I told mammy when I was ten … and then me daddy, I only told him about a year ago and he said he knew and told me to shut up."

Gerald started cutting his wrists when he was nine:

"I can't really remember what was going on but I think it was being bullied and stuff. … Now I think, looking back, it was for attention, most of it. I don't really know. I just wanted someone to really care. … I felt like my mother didn't really care about me; we weren't getting along. … I thought I was (depressed) but now I don't know. I never got anything (medication) for it (depression) but I used to crack up; I did. I used to think 'what the fuck? What's the point? Is this what it's meant to be like, life?'"

Gerald described how self-harming helped:

"I don't know exactly how it helped but it did. It like relieves it or something; it relieves something inside."

After ceasing to self-harm, Gerald became bulimic:

"I used to get bullied for being fat. And then I just started being sick 'cos my friends did it….. So I thought I could lose weight by being sick but then that fucked me head up 'cos I was being sick and I wasn't losing weight. It became obsessive."

When Gerald was thirteen, he made friends with an older woman whom he visited and smoked cannabis with. She introduced him to a man who was twenty-one:

"At first she (the older woman) said 'you're not going with him; you're too young' but in the end she gave him my number and I told him I was seventeen. He came down to her house a few times and I ended up losing my virginity to him when I was thirteen."

When Gerald was fourteen, he became involved with a second older man:

"When I was fourteen, I was going with this fella. He was twenty-four and thought I was seventeen. … (One day) X (Gerald's boyfriend) came up to me and went 'are you only fourteen?' I said 'no I'm not' and he said 'yes you are' and from then on I used to just go meet him and have sex with him and that was it. We didn't even ever go out anywhere I wouldn't stay the night with him; we just had sex and that was that. … I didn't fancy him or nothing. I just wanted sex. Sex is sex. I know it's wrong to think of it like that but … that's how I thought about it at that time and I didn't care."

Gerald was also taking drugs regularly by the time he was fourteen:

"I was smoking dope every day and then I was taking Es two or three times a week. And then it was getting out of hand. I was just sitting in me bedroom by meself just taking them (drugs). It all started when I was going out with me friends and we'd sit about drinking alcohol and taking drugs and stuff and then I started doing things like stealing DVD players and just took drugs all the time to get my head away from what was going on."

7.1 Contextualising Identities, Behaviours and States of Being

This report has so far outlined how children and young people who participated in the research often had very difficult family backgrounds, experienced abuse, were both victim and perpetrator of violent acts and employed a range of survival strategies to manage their time away from home or care and on the streets. Many of these children and young people are also extremely resilient; have been able to forgive and understand those who abused them; have managed a range of extremely difficult living circumstances and remain loyal, warm and kind to others[162]. Some have retained the ability to show love whilst others have been too damaged to show love. Others are so desperate to be loved that they fall prey to those who wish to exploit the vulnerable for their own purposes. Because of their experiences, being abused, witnessing violence, substance misuse and criminal activity, various behaviours and attitudes became normalised and certain needs were not met. When these children and young people found themselves on the streets having to protect and provide for themselves, they naturally fell into what they had experienced and witnessed; into what was normal in their lives.

This section of the report focuses upon a number of identities, behaviours and states of being that have, in some cases, been formed and influenced by the children and young people's life experiences and in other cases, formed despite histories of abuse and neglect. If we are to understand those children and young people who become detached, respond to them in effective ways and prevent other children and young people from becoming detached and on the streets, it is important to contextualise their identities, behaviours and states of mind to attain understanding that is as full as possible.

7.2 Substance Use

According to Home Office figures[163] 17 percent of eleven to fifteen-year-olds used an illegal drug during the previous year. All of the children and young people who participated in the research used substances before the age of sixteen. A small number used only alcohol or cannabis but did not use other drugs; these children and young people were often heavily affected by parental or carer substance misuse so limited the substances as they were mindful not to replicate the dangers of their parents' substance misuse.

Substance use has featured heavily in this account of the lives of children and young people on the streets in the UK. It is therefore important to understand its role: how it becomes normalised and acts as a coping strategy in a number of different ways. It is necessary to acknowledge its role in becoming and being detached and how it can lead to a range of problematic behaviours and experiences.

According to the Home Office[164], substance use amongst children and young people can lead to low educational attainment, truancy, school exclusion and engagement in criminal activity and anti-social behaviour, ill-health, risk taking leading to accidents and pregnancy. There is also some evidence that teen substance use can be damaging for development of the brain[165].

A couple of young people started using drugs when they were nine. One young person started smoking cannabis when he was nine and was taking cocaine by the time he was twelve. Another young person took started taking ecstasy, cannabis and coke at nine. Others started smoking cannabis at ten, drinking heavily at eleven and one child started a three year heroin habit at the age of twelve. Polydrug use featured in most children and young people's experiences. There were also instances where children and young people did not know what they were taking. For example, one young person described taking heroin by accident after he mistook heroin for cannabis oil. Cannabis and grass were the substances most frequently used, followed by alcohol, ecstasy and cocaine. Heroin was used by just under a tenth of children and young people. Other substances children and young people described using were ketamine, speed, acid, MDMA, Valium, poppers, glue and petrol.

Substances played different roles in children and young people's lives. For most, substances began as a fun, as something they did with their friends away from parent or carers, for 'the buzz', often starting with alcohol or cannabis. Over time, their substance use changed and harder substances were used with more frequency. As we have seen, children and young people's substance use often caused conflict with parents and carers, resulting in a child or young person being thrown out of home. Substance use also acted as a pull, as part of the fun, leading children and young people to stay away from home. For some, even though using substances was fun, the effects of substances also played a part in aiding a child or young person to escape negative emotions. Some children and young people began to recognise that certain substances had negative effects and ceased to take them. Others remained unaware of any negative effects and found using substances a coping strategy to manage being on the streets or to block out painful memories and emotions.

MacDonald and Marsh note that:

> "The received wisdom in the UK drugs literature is that recreational and dependent users are distinct, separate groups. The former are 'sociable, sensible, and morally aware as non-users' (Perri 6 and others, 1997; 45)[166]; like most young people, they view 'taking hard drugs and actually injecting as anathema: a Rubicon they will never cross' (Parker and others, 1998b; 132.)[167]."
> (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; 179)[168]

MacDonald and March argue that their own study and other studies support the thesis that:

> "The Rubicon dividing recreational and dependent heroin use is being bridged by an apparently growing number of young people."
> (Ibid, 180.)[169]

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162 The researcher both witnessed and received kindness and warmth from children and young people who participated in the research.
163 Home Office (2008) *Drugs: Protecting Families and Communities – the 2008 Drug Strategy* London: the Stationery Office.
164 Ibid.
165 Winters K (2008) *Adolescent Brain Development and Drug Abuse* Loughborough: The Mentor Foundation.
166 Perri 6 (1997) *Escaping Poverty: From Safety Nets to Networks of Opportunity* London: Demos.
167 Parker H Aldridge J & Measham F (1998) *Illegal Leisure* London: Routledge.
168 MacDonald R & Marsh J (2005) *Disconnected Youth? Growing Up in Britain's Poor Neighbourhoods* London: Palgrave Macmillan.
169 Ibid.

Whilst this pattern is evident in the substance use of children and young people who participated in the research, it is also suggested that this Rubicon is ceasing to exist in the minds of some children and young people because drug dependency can occur using a range of substances other than heroin and also because drug use is changing: more children are taking drugs at an earlier age; many drugs have become cheaper and easier to obtain; children and young people injected drugs other than heroin to increase the hit; violent crime is being carried out by children and young people whose drug use is linked to, for example, cannabis and ecstasy. The factors previously commonly associated with heroin use by young people – low levels of parental supervision, poor attendance and attainment at school, originating from more deprived areas – are now apparent in children who use cannabis, ecstasy, speed and cocaine.

Pathways into Substance Use
Some young males became involved in substance use through spending time with older brothers and their friends. Other young males described how family members' substance use led to the normalisation of drugs:

"A lot of them smoke weed or take coke, do you know what I mean, and a lot of them deal cocaine and things like that so once that's a part of your life then really your kids seems to (take drugs); it seems to be a part of their life as well."

"I wanted to try it (grass) and 'cos of my old man smoking it; it was like a normal thing."

Sometimes it was adults, parents' friends and friends' parents, who introduced children and young people to substances. One young person was introduced to cannabis by his mother's friend and gained kudos amongst his peers for his hash use:

Lee started smoking cannabis when he was twelve. His mother smoked and it was common for her and her friend to smoke when Lee was around. At first he did not realise what they were smoking. One day Lee asked his mother's friend:

"'What's that you're smoking 'cos it's not fags; it smells different'. She told me it was a joint with hash in it. … I asked 'can I try it?' and she passed it over and I tried it. She started to give me wee bits here and there, for nothing, but I paid her for it as well."

Lee found that being twelve and in possession of hash gave him some credibility amongst other children and young people in the housing scheme:

"If you've got hash: you're the man."

Others described how hanging around with the 'wrong crowd' led them to using drugs:

"I started using heroin after being around the wrong people, I suppose; hanging around with people who use heroin."

"I started running away and getting into trouble because I was hanging around with the wrong people. I started using drugs and that: cannabis, I was sniffing petrol and E's and that. I started on the cocaine when I was fourteen."

Children and young people were also introduced to drugs by older boyfriends:

"I started using heroin when I was twelve through my older boyfriend; he was nineteen. I didn't have a clue what it (heroin) was. At first he said it was insulin and did I want to try and I said yes. I just kept on wanting it and wanting it. By the time I was fifteen, I was really messed up on it."

A couple of children and young people tried some substances for experimental reasons:

"I tried LSD, pills, magic mushrooms, coke, speed; and that's it. I just tried them; no harm in trying."

Some children and young people's substance use escalated once they had become detached:

"I'd met these older boys; some of them were in their early twenties. I met them through other boys in the home or out and about on the streets. … They used to look after me 'cos I was like them but a lot younger. … I stayed at their houses when I was away from care and that's how I got into harder drugs 'cos they were passing coke and that around. … Sometimes I didn't know what was going on but I just took it and liked it."

"When I was fifteen, I used to work … seven days a week and get about three hundred pounds a week and spent most of it on coke. Sometimes my mates would come round and put some money towards it. I used to think there was nothing better to do than spend all my money on cocaine and get wrecked."

Some children and young people began using heroin whilst detached. As with Charlene, whose story opens the report, heroin use could begin through spending time on the streets with homeless people who use heroin. Others began to attend drop-in centres for the homeless and were introduced to heroin by other homeless people who accessed these services.

Reasons for Using Substances
As already mentioned, substances were often used by children and young people to manage emotional pain and distress:

"I'm fucked up (researcher asks why he is fucked up) … because I love her (his ex-girlfriend) to bits and I've been away from her for a year and a bit and sometimes I wake up in the morning and think 'what's the point?' … And there's my wee boys. I think I hear them crying and I wake up and it's not them and my boys aren't there. That's why I have a heroin habit now (Phil is now crying). I was doing ecstasy, speed, cocaine and uppers and that but

once all that happened with my girlfriend, I turned to heroin."

"It (alcohol) cuts out feeling bad."

"I've also got an alcohol problem and I'm drinking nearly every day because of what's been happening (with being physically and sexually abused) and stuff."

Extent of Substance Use
Some children and young people acknowledged the overwhelming impact of their substance use as it became unmanageable and took over their life:

"It (alcohol) has a big impact upon my life. It stops me from doing anything as well. I wake up in the morning and the first thing I think about is drink. … I drink cider every day, wake up shaking and that. … Sometimes it's alright but sometimes I end up fighting with people but then that's normal in this place. It all depends upon how you grew up; I grew up in the wrong way, obviously."

"It messed with me mind a lot; a hell of a lot. I can't remember it all but I was paranoid, I know that. 'Cos now that I've cleaned myself up, I look back and think 'wow that was bad'. Know what I mean? I was just a menace. I never really cared about anyone. I just cared about myself. I was living life day to day. I'd just take each day as it comes and didn't think about any future. I always assumed living life to the fullest was getting wrecked every day and thinking that was having a laugh. I called it fun at the point when I was doing it all but I think, when I look back on it, I was hanging out with the wrong crowd and it was a combination of that and I felt like I was living in hell on earth, basically. When I was wrecked I was having fun and when I was straight, I felt all frustrated and unhappy. I preferred being wrecked than straight; I found that more entertaining. It's mad how things change, innit?"

"If I hadn't started drinking and taking all that … if it hadn't been for drinking and drugs, I wouldnae have started stealing and all that. I was always fucked and that and me ma didn't like seeing me that way all the time."

"I sold my tv, I sold my clothes, I sold everything and eventually I had nothing left in my room."

"It got to the point where I woke up and unlike most people who had a brew and a cig, I had an ecstasy tablet 'cos it would stress me out if I didn't have one of them first thing. I was having one every four hours and when one was wearing off, I was taking another."

Perceptions of Substance Use
Some children and young people were able to recognise that certain substances had particular effects upon them and have reduced or stopped their substance use accordingly:

"Hash calmed me down a lot … but could also make me go mental. I started doing bongs and things like that and it made me think about too much."

"Every time I touched it (grass), it used to make me cry … looking back, thinking back."

"Ketamine is extremely psychologically addictive. … In some ways, it's worse than heroin."

"I started to lose a lot of weight and to experience a lot of bad come downs and just took more (speed). I started not to sleep at all. My friends kept saying how I shouldn't be taking it (speed) and how I was too skinny and looking rough so I stopped taking it."

A few children and young people believe that their present substance use is manageable:

"I can control it; I'm not an addict; I don't crave it but it is a temptation. If someone puts money in front of me, I'd go and buy coke but if there's not any money, I won't get any. … I know when the cravings come on 'cos I've been there before and I have been an addict before but I now know the difference between wanting more and needing more. It's in the way you think. … That's the thing I understand with drugs now. They're a powerful thing if you misuse it but if you don't, I think it's an alright thing to do."

'I've not always smoked (grass) but then I always go back on it. … If I can't get it, 'cos of money, then I don't smoke it. I don't need it, I just like it. It's 'cos I've got nothing to do. If I had a job, I wouldn't smoke it. I don't crave for it like some people do. I just like to get nice and honed[170] on it."

Drugs and Offending
Drugs, committing crime and spending time on the streets became intertwined for many of the children and young people who used substances:

"I know it sounds bad but I was robbing to buy me drink and drugs: burglary, cars, shops; anything that had any value. I never robbed a person in the streets or anything like that. I had limits."

"I was smoking cannabis at ten, hanging round with these older kids who smoked; drinking when I was eleven. … And by the time I was thirteen I was hitting the cocaine and ecstasy. … I was in bad habits like thieving to get money together to buy drugs. … I was stealing mobile phones and bikes and selling them just so I could feed a habit."

"I broke into houses, random shoplifting. It's (cocaine) not cheap stuff."

"Me and me pals broke into a pub just to get a drink and somewhere to stay."

170 'Honed' means stoned.

Some children and young people have committed a number of violent crimes to fund their addiction to drugs:

"I've a one hundred and sixty pound a day heroin habit. … I've done everything to get money. I've done cash point robberies, hitting people and taking their money. Or I've held a knife to them just before they press the cash point button, put the knife to them and say 'get the money out.'"

"I was like robbing people on the street, like, robbing dealers, robbing shops; anything. Anyway I could get money, I would do it."

"When I was taking drugs when I was nine, I was stealing mobile phones (off other children) and bags."

For some, crime to fund substance use led to involvement in the criminal justice system[171]:

When he was thirteen, Ray began drinking alcohol and smoking dope with other young people and adults, moving on to taking speed and acid and sniffing petrol and glue. As he started to use substances daily, his school attendance became increasingly erratic; by the time he was fifteen, he no longer attended school, became detached and largely spent his time at an adult friend's flat, drinking alcohol and taking drugs. It was at this time that Ray starting burgling to pay for alcohol and drugs, breaking into sheds and flats and also stealing cars. Ray started to spend time on the streets, committing crime daily to support his drug use and for general survival:

"So I'm knocking about on the streets now, stopping at whoever's house I can and I'm burgling full-time. I'm taking Es, speed every day."

He met people who also lived on the streets or spent a lot of time on the streets. Drugs drew these people together. Whilst Ray took advantage of this drug culture, he also spent a lot of time on his own:

"I met up with people and took drugs with people but I used to spend a lot of time walking up and down and around a place – grafting. After taking speed and E, I start walking around the streets, grafting, from about five or six in the morning. By this time, I'd really stopped bothering with houses and stuff like that and was burgling businesses and stuff like that, where there was staff accommodation."

By this point, Ray was injecting large amounts of speed and ecstasy for an instant hit. After a police chase, Ray was caught, on drugs, in a car he had stolen full of stolen goods and sent to a YOI for two and a half years. This was to be the first of four sentences he was to serve. Ray was able to get hold of drugs in prison and whilst he was not able to take as many drugs as he had been doing, his drug use continued.

After leaving prison for a third time, Ray moved to another city, in attempt to live his life differently. One day, whilst on a bus, he saw someone he had known in prison:

"I should never have got off the bus that day. I hung round with him, he introduced me to other people and I was introduced to heroin and crack. I started to sell a little bit; started to smoke a little bit and then it was all over. I started smoking heroin and crack and burgling, burgling, burgling. … Every day I was starting in the morning taking drugs, walking around going into offices and stealing, grafting. I was always earning money so I always had drugs. It was a ridiculous amount of money I spent on it (heroin and crack). I'd make some money, get some more drugs, start grafting again for more drugs. I'd be full of drugs but still grafting."

During his fourth prison sentence, Ray took advantage of the drug rehabilitation offered and left prison clean from drugs.

Other children and young people continued to take drugs in prison:

"I won't lie to you. I did use heroin in prison but not like I was using it outside. It was not a problem getting heroin in prison and I have used it like I did on the outside but I wanted it to change. It's as easy in prison to get heroin as it is out here."

"If you know the right people who can get money to you or the person selling drugs, you can get any drug you want in prison."

Moving Away from Using Drugs
Some children and young people stopped using drugs in very difficult circumstances, such as stopping their use whilst still on the streets and surrounded by people who are still using:

"The cravings for heroin are so strong. Even being round here is hard when you know other people are still using."

"I had a heroin habit and was injecting. … I was in the jail for the two weeks and I was rattling for a week and then the last week, I was off it and I didn't touch it. I haven't touched it since and I've been out (of a YOI and on the streets) for five days. I've been off it for a week and five days."

Some changed their substance use as soon as they found a place to stay:

"Before I moved in here, I was drinking nearly every day and doing all sorts and smoking weed but now it's mostly all stopped. I only go out drinking once a week and I don't smoke weed any more. … I've cleaned myself up."

171 Children and young people's involvement with the criminal justice system is discussed in more depth in section six.

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Others, as explained in section five of the report, as a strategy to maintain their wits and keep themselves safe, stopped using drugs once they were on the streets. To remain clean from drugs, children and young people often stay away from those they previously took drugs with:

> Samantha no longer takes drugs and only drinks occasionally. She has not made contact with her former friends as she does not want to risk becoming involved in using drugs again. She wants to be there for her daughter and work at improving her relationship with her mother and providing a nice home for her daughter.

As well as ceasing to use substances, children and young people also made an effort to stay away from criminal activity:

> *"I've been trying to stay out of trouble but I've been in trouble because I had a habit and I had to keep my habit by stealing and robbing, and things like that. But now that I'm off heroin, I'm trying not to steal and to do other things to get money. … I'm trying to think of things to occupy myself."*

For some, the battle to leave their substance use behind cannot be achieved on the first attempt:

> Leah used heroin from the age of fourteen:
>
> *"Well, I've been dependent upon drugs since I was fourteen. I was clean for about nine months and have been back on heroin for six weeks."*
>
> During the time that Leah stopped using heroin, she was successful in her application to work as a croupier:
>
> *"I was doing really well: enjoyed my job, had money, had my own flat and then got back into using heroin again and it all went downhill. … I was hanging around with my sister again. I was on holiday (from work) and was bored so started seeing my sister, and she's a heroin user, and started taking heroin again."*
>
> At the time of participation in the research, Leah has not used heroin for five days and is using alcohol to help her abstain from heroin, whilst still living on the streets:
>
> *"And now I'm drinking as well. I'm not an alcoholic. I'm not 'cos I've only been drinking for about a week. I'm not dependent upon alcohol but if I carry on like this, I probably will be."*

For some, the motivation to stop using substances was linked to becoming pregnant, becoming a parent and wanting to gain access to their child:

> *"I was drinking a bottle of vodka a day but as soon as I found out I was pregnant, I stopped. … I was going to the Community Addictions Centre and they were testing me to see if I was drinking or not; I was having blood tests and they were testing my liver 'cos there were some problems with it from all*

> *the drink. … My solicitors have shown how I have changed and have got my drinking sorted out and it's been agreed that I can have access to X (Bethany's first child) as long as I don't start drinking again."*

A few other young people attempted to stop their substance use with formal support with mixed results:

> *"I was getting a methadone prescription and that and I was going to come off heroin but then, one day, I was rattling off me head and I missed my appointment and I never had a prescription for that day and my next appointment wasn't until half-past- four the next day so it meant I had to wait all day and I went stealing to get some money, got caught and they took me off the register because I was away (in custody) for so long."*
>
> *"I was using heroin until about two weeks ago, I had a horrible heroin habit and lost everything. I've got a methadone script but I'm going to try and come off methadone 'cos I don't want to stay on it."*

Others are at different stages in their attempts to stop using substances. Whilst some would like to be free of being dependent upon substances, they are worried about what it will be like and what the consequences will be for other parts of their lives:

> Ashley and Paul have both been street drinkers from a very young age. Paul does not see himself giving up drinking or changing his life. Unlike Paul, Ashley wants to stop drinking and thinks that the effects of alcohol have worsened:
>
> *"I get even more aggressive than I used to. … I'm going to a Christian rehab centre in Wales for eighteen months."*
>
> Ashley knows that there will be consequences for her relationship with Paul when she goes to the rehabilitation centre:
>
> *"I need to stop drinking; I've got to do this for myself and I know it will mean the end of me and Paul but I need to do it. I feel bad about me and him but I got to do it."*
>
> Ashley is nervous about stopping drinking and wonders what will take its place. She also realises that she will have to face some of what makes her depressed:
>
> *"It does make me nervous, aye, but I got to do it. I can't go on living like this forever. I want me own home; I want a job; I want a normal life."*

Some children and young people whose lives have become more settled have reduced their substance use and the types of substances they use, preferring to use substances for relaxation purposes:

"I stopped using other stuff and just had a drink and a smoke at the weekend. That's what it's like now: I don't smoke or drink in the week but just at the weekend … it makes me relax and go to sleep."

7.3 Mental Health Issues

Over two-thirds of children and young people who participated in the research experienced mental health issues. All of these children and young people experienced depression to differing degrees, and some also experienced panic attacks, anxiety, self-harm, insomnia and eating disorders. Given the extent of abuse, violence and the number of parents who were unable to care for their children because of their own issues, this is unsurprising. Many children and young people have experienced a range of traumatic events in their lives and have not received support to address their issues and experiences. Mental health issues are significant because they often result in the child or young person's needs not being met, being vulnerable to further abuse, placing them at further risk and preventing them from addressing day-to-day living as well as moving on with their future.

Many are able to recognise why they are depressed[172]: through, for example, experiencing: rape and other sexual attacks; being refused access to their children; from being away from those they love; because there is no one to love or to love them; from living on the streets. Others did not know at the time why they behaved or felt the way they did but, with hindsight, recognise that it was because they were depressed as a result of what was happening, or had happened, in their lives:

"I was always greetin'[173] and I didn't know what I was greetin' for; I was angry and harming people. I was going round with a knife. I wanted to stab my dad. I couldn't sleep and I would go and creep up on my dad, wanting to kill him but I never did."

"From the age of eleven I used to sit there with my friends and inside I'd be feeling down and depressed … I used to cry a lot when I was by myself. Sometimes I used to flip my lid. … I used to end up just going nuts and that's when I'd go out and really get wrecked and do all sorts … I didn't feel angry, just down."

With no other outlet available for children and young people to express their pain and grief, some children and young people started to self-harm:

"I've been depressed plenty of times and I've self-harmed as well. I used to slice me wrists … when I was about thirteen. I used to burn myself with lighters as well."

"Sometimes when I'm sat on me own, thinking about what me stepdad did to me mam and me and about me mam dying, I cut myself … It helps let the pain out."

"It just helps, like, when I cut myself. I don't know how to explain it. Like, when I cut myself, it takes away the emotional pain."

For some children and young people, self-harm remains a coping strategy even though their circumstances have changed and they have supportive and helpful people in their lives:

Chloe has experienced a number of episodes of depression and has self-harmed. When she was thrown out of home, Chloe went to live with her mother who drank on a daily basis and who physically and emotionally abused her. She became friends with a man in his forties who lived in the same block as flats as her mother and moved in with him to escape being abused. He started to use heroin and Chloe was threatened because he owed money and began to feel upset by being surrounded by dirty needles. She started to have panic attacks and self-harm. Chloe does not think that any particular event brought on the panic attacks and self-harming:

"I'd probably just had enough of everything that was going on. It just all built up and it all just happened. … It felt so bad when I used to get them (panic attacks) I used to self-harm and cut my arms, yeah? It felt like, at the time, that I was letting all this pain out; that I was letting this massive release out. It didn't feel like I was hurting me but just like something bad was happening. I used to get up in the morning and think 'Oh my god, what have I done?' But then I started doing it (self-harming) even if I didn't have a panic attack."

At the time of participating in the research, Chloe was finding life difficult. Despite having friends, a supportive boyfriend and warm and kind staff in the supported housing project she lives, Chloe still self-harms and finds relief:

"And I've done some stupid things … I couldn't sleep the other night … and I just took loads of paracetamols. … And last night I was getting a panic attack and I had to do a bit of self-harm but it was such a relief and when I woke up this morning, I felt loads better."

A few young females have attempted suicide. As seen previously, one young female attempted suicide after her abusive father committed suicide. Another young person attempted suicide when she was thirteen after four years of daily emotional and physical abuse from her mother:

"She used to hit me all the time. Once I tried committing suicide (because of being hit) and I cut all my wrists … I sliced my wrists."

Another young person has tried to kill herself twice, once because of the physical and emotional abuse inflicted by her stepfather and a second time, after leaving home because of this abuse, because she was detached:

"It just got on top of me once again: not having my mum about; not having anywhere to live."

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172 A number of these reasons have been discussed previously.
173 'Greetin' means crying.

One young person has been self-harming for thirteen years, feels suicidal regularly and no longer receives medication for depression because she has taken so many overdoses:

> "I was on loads of medication for that (depression) like Valium and I've been on Amitriptyline; loads of medication I've been on but because I'm really suicidal and every time they give me my tablets, I take them all, they took me off them."

7.4 Sex and Sexual Exploitation

The report has previously described how children and young people have become pregnant or fathered a child at a young age, been involved in a number of exploitative relationships and sold sex. It is important to understand children and young people's sexual behaviours and their vulnerability to sexual exploitation. The research has identified how the children and young people can be subject to sexual violence and can sometimes place themselves in situations that are dangerous or that they do not have the maturity to manage.

Sexual Behaviours
Many children and young people became sexually active at a young age[174]. As previously seen, one young male fathered his first child when he was thirteen. One young female started to have sex when she was eleven with her boyfriend who was nineteen. Most children and young people were having sex from the ages of thirteen and fourteen. Some of the young males presented themselves as very sexually confident and experienced.

In instances where more than one child or young person participated in the research from the same small group of friends, it became apparent that sexual partners were changed frequently. Sometimes it was hurtful for children and young people when their ex-boyfriend or girlfriend started going out with one of their friends. When a relationship ended, there were often consequences for females, in these instances, relating to their experiences and safety on the streets:

> At the time of participation in the research, Alesha described herself as being very depressed. This was for a number of reasons but included the end of her relationship with her boyfriend as he had started to see his previous girlfriend again. All three young people are part of the same group of homeless people. This group of people have been an important source of support to Alesha since living on the streets and she is currently spending a lot of time away from them as she finds it painful to see her ex-boyfriend and his girlfriend together. Other homeless people are concerned about Alesha and commented upon how she seems to be struggling and is at more risk because she is no longer protected by being with the group.

As identified in the previous chapter, sometimes children and young people's circumstances keep them together. Where both people involved in a relationship were interviewed, there was clearly some difference in how the two people viewed the relationship. For example, whilst one of the couple described a future where they settle down together and have children, the other shared doubts about the relationship and how their present circumstances made it difficult to leave or contemplate surviving without the other person.

Sexual Exploitation
The risks posed to detached children and young people by sexual exploitation have been documented in previous research[175]. Just under a fifth of the children and young people who participated in the research experienced sexual exploitation that took a number of forms: children and young people having sexual relations with older men and, in one case, a woman; being forced to have sex with other people for money by a boyfriend; being shared for sex by groups of men; and selling sex on the streets. One young female also became involved with men who were sex offenders and one of these men had access to her infant daughter. Another young female's sexual exploitation, as described at the beginning of section three of the report, was instigated by her mother who allowed men to sexually abuse her for money to fund the mother's substance misuse.

There are some differences between males and females in relation to sexual exploitation. Males tended to self-present as 'having a good time', enjoying themselves and sometimes taking 'older' men for a ride, thereby blurring the boundaries between exploiting and being exploited. As previously described females involved with older men perceived this involvement as a relationship and these men as their boyfriends.

About a fifth of children and young people have been involved in exploitative relationships with older men. As indicated in the previous paragraph, one young male became sexually involved with an older woman:

> Troy started having sex when he was fourteen and has had sex with a lot of different girls, some of whom are older than him. When he was fifteen, Troy was having sex regularly with a woman who was thirty.

About half of the relationships with older men began whilst the child or young person was still living at home but spending time on the streets and sometimes acted as the reason that the child or young person ran away. A few such relationships started when the child or young person became detached and the rest began on incidents of running away for short periods of time. One of the older men who became the boyfriend of a young female was a friend of the young person's father. With two exceptions, these children and young people's first sexual experiences were with older men. These two exceptions were young males who identify as gay and whose first sexual encounters were with other males around the same age as them. There is often a power imbalance when a male or female has an older 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend', making it very difficult for the child or young person to resist their demands and express their own wishes. Most of the relationships between young females and older men have been abusive in ways other than being sexually abusive as domestic violence, physical abuse, emotional abuse, isolation and control, have been features of their relationships[176]. Previous research by Barnardo's[177], addressing sexual exploitation of young

174 This was also recognised in Smeaton E & Rees G (2005) *Running Away in South Yorkshire* Sheffield: The Children's Society/Safe at Last.
175 Smeaton E (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Young Runaways* London: The Children's Society.
176 This has been addressed in more depth in section four.
177 Barnardo's (1998) *Whose Daughter Next?* Barkingside: Barnardo's.

females, pinpoints how this perception of the older exploiting male as 'boyfriend' entraps the child or young person in a relationship they view as one they want to be in:

> "The term 'boyfriend' is crucial, as it is the young woman's perception of their relationship that sustains the control and abuse"
> (Barnardo's, 1998; 13.)[178]

As highlighted by Gerald's story, a couple of children and young people lied to their boyfriend about their age. One man ended a relationship after finding out the real age of the young female:

Tracy began a sexual relationship with a twenty-year-old man when she was thirteen. She lied about her age and told him she was sixteen. Tracy began to worry about what would happen when he found out her real age. When he did, he ended the relationship. Eventually, when Tracy was sixteen, they rekindled their relationship, and were still together at the time of the young person's participation in the research. Tracy knows that her partner finds it hard to trust her because she lied to him about her age three years ago.

A couple of the young females experienced being shared between groups of men. Involvement with these men started before they became detached and led to them becoming detached:

Lana, physically abused and forced to care for her younger siblings, felt unloved and, at thirteen, become involved with a group of adult men. This involvement became sexual. Lana began to run away from foster care when she was fourteen after these men contacted her on the mobile they had given her, telling her to come and meet them. On these occasions, Lana travelled long distances with some of these men to other cities where she would be taken to flats, sometimes with other young girls. There were other men that Lana did not know at these flats and, after drinking large amounts of alcohol, she would have sex with these men, sometimes unable to give consent because she was unconscious:

"I knew I was going to see their friends and they'd tell me I was going to see their friends but there was too many of them. We were drinking vodka and whisky and when you were drunk, they liked to pass you around … (for) proper sex. … One time, I'd gone drinking at me mates house, drinking me bottle of vodka and necking it. I fell asleep and they all just done their business … one after the other but I was fast asleep and I didn't know what were going on."

When comparing the backgrounds of the children and young people who became involved in different forms of sexual exploitation, it is hard to see a common pattern: only a couple of children and young people lived in care; most of their parents did not have substance or mental health issues. The only factor common to all of the children and young people who were involved in sexual

exploitation was that all of them experienced some form of abuse. Yet, even when considering children and young people's experiences of abuse and neglect from parents or carers, there were no common patterns. Prior to experiencing sexual exploitation, only a few children and young people experienced sexual abuse in the home, a couple by a family friend and one young person, as mentioned previously, with the knowledge of her mother who allowed men to sexually abuse the young person in exchange for money. Different forms and degrees of abuse and neglect were experienced by these children and young people:

Casey has experienced sexual, physical and emotional abuse; witnessed parental substance misuse and domestic violence; was forced into sexual exploitation when she was thirteen by her mother who sold sex; has experienced violence as both victim and perpetrator; and missed school. Despite a range of risk factors, she has not been involved in sexual exploitation since leaving home despite often having no money or food.

Tilly was loved and well cared for her by her grandmother until she was eleven but left to her own devices when she went to live with her mother. She was forced into having sex for money by her boyfriend so he could buy heroin. After leaving him, she went to the streets and sold sex as a survival strategy.

Although both these young females were forced into having sex so others could get money to fund their substance misuse, each has responded very differently to experiencing sexual exploitation. Where one of the young females sold sex as a means of earning money, thereby ensuring her survival, the other young female, after experiencing sexual abuse and witnessing her mother's sexual exploitation, has avoided any further involvement in sexual exploitation.

There was no common route into sexual exploitation. The grooming process could be almost non-existent or minimal:

"I was out drinking (on the streets) and I walked out in front of this car and the next minute, we'd (the young person and the driver) got together. … He were like twenty summat. … He were that close from hitting me (with his car). … He got out of his car to check I was alright and I was like 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry' and then I looked at him and I was like 'you're gorgeous'. He was like 'do you want to come to my house? I'll get you a drink and summat to eat to like calm you down a bit' … the next minute (when they were back at his house) we started cuddling and that and then the next minute we went in the bedroom."

Alternatively, the grooming process could be very evident:

178 Ibid.

> *"They gave me presents, like teddies and stuff, or they'd buy me clothes and shoes, stuff like that – just to make you sleep with them or summat: (Lana does an impersonation of the men who passed her around for sex) 'I've bought you a present and now I'd like you to sleep with me.'"*

In these instances, where emotional needs have not been met, it appears that young people's need for emotional warmth was key to the ability of older men to manipulate them. Some young females recognised that the reason they became involved with so many men, and became sexually exploited by them, was because they didn't feel loved and wanted to feel loved:

> *"It's the same, all the same, but when you're in my situation, yeah, they're making it to you like they wanna love you and stuff like that and I think 'Oh well, if they feel like that and they wanna love me, I'll go with them because all I want is love.'"*

> *"I got mixed up with them all (the men that exploited her) because I never felt loved and I wanted to feel loved."*

> *"I was enjoying myself and I was enjoying feeling being loved."*

One of the young males who sells sex on the streets, is, by contrast, very clear that he does not want love. He has sex outside of selling sex but does not want a relationship and is comfortable with this at present as this prevents him from becoming emotionally hurt.

Only one young person having a relationship with an older man at the time of participation in the research expressed any unease about their relationship:

> After Lula moved in with her boyfriend, their relationship changed. Lula's boyfriend wants her at home and does not like her seeing her friends after school or at the weekend. He likes her to cook his tea every night and no longer gives her gifts. He has become increasingly sexually demanding. She has given up voicing that she does not want sex and has sex with him whenever he wants. Sometimes her boyfriend is very critical of her appearance, saying she wears too much make up or that her clothes are too tight or short. Lula's boyfriend works in a bar and likes her to be at home at night whilst he is out working.
>
> Lula is not sure if she is happy with her boyfriend but says that that he is all she has. She is no longer close to any of her friends and hardly has any contact with her father. If she left her boyfriend, she would have no-one and nowhere to go. She is also financially dependent upon her boyfriend.
>
> Whilst Lula's boyfriend does not physically harm her, she is sometimes frightened of him because of the control he has over her. Her boyfriend has very dark moods where he won't speak to her and she is frightened of provoking him.

> Lula is shortly to be sixteen, sitting her GCSEs later this year and predicted to do well. She would like to study for A-levels and go to university but her boyfriend does not want her to.

Lula's experience of being detached is very different from other that of other children and young people who participated in the research. School is the only agency involved with Lula and is not aware that her father abandoned her some time ago, that, even when she lived with her father, she cared for herself and now lives with an adult male who is abusive towards her. This older male is isolating Lula from her friends who do not know that her father left and that she lives with her older boyfriend. Lula currently has no support system available to her. Whilst Lula has never been on the streets, she is more isolated and lacking in support than many of those children and young people who spend time on the streets and is clearly in need of safeguarding.

Lula's experience does not fit with the traditional model of sexual exploitation. For example, Barnardo's[179] identify underlying and immediate vulnerability factors implicit in the experiences of children and young people vulnerable to sexual exploitation including going missing, relationships with parents or carers, accommodation, experience of violence, substance misuse, sexual health and awareness of risks or own rights. Whilst Lula was abandoned by her father, with whom she did not have a close relationship, when she was fourteen, she had somewhere to live, continued to attend and do well at school, has not experienced violence or used substances except alcohol occasionally and has never gone missing. The exploitation of Lula became possible because she was treated as an adult at a young age, left to care for herself when she was still a child and received attention from an adult when she was used to being on her own and devoid of individual attention. Lula was groomed in her home by an adult who was a trusted family friend, who knew her circumstances and that she lived on her own.

One young female who had been neglected and physically and emotionally abused by her parents was at risk of sexual exploitation due to the environment she was in but where she felt protected and cared for in a way that she had never experienced before:

> *"Things were really bad at home. My mam was hitting me, me eldest brother was hitting us all; me and me mam argued all the time we were together; the rest of me brothers and sisters were arguing all the time. When we saw our dad, he was always pissed. It was doing my head in. I wanted to be somewhere else, away from it all. I just found out that me boyfriend had been shagging one of me friends behind me back. Everything was fucked up. … Me auntie came to stay and brought her friend who lived with her. … Me and me auntie's friend got on well and she said I could go and stay with her if I wanted. Me mam said that was fine so I went back with her. … She worked as a receptionist in a brothel. Sometimes, if one of the other prostitutes didn't turn up for work, she would go with men and that. She used to take me with her during the day. I just hung about the reception*

179 Scott S & Skidmore P (2006) *Reducing the Risk: Barnardo's Support for Sexually Exploited Young People* Barkingside: Barnardo's and Creegan C Scott S & Smith (2005) *The Use of Secure Accommodation and Alternative Provisions for Sexually Exploited Young People in Scotland* Barkingside: Barnardo's.

> *talking to her and the other women who worked there, reading magazines and that. Sometimes I would go out for a walk but she (woman who Tianna was living with) liked me where she could see me. … She would have Yardies and that round in the evening. It was always after I went to bed and she would tell me never to come into the sitting room when they were there. She smoked crack with them and had sex with them, all for money. I stayed in the bedroom watching TV and sleeping, but sometimes I used to hear what they were up to. … She made sure I was safe; no-one ever harmed me whilst I lived with her. We were like really good friends. She always made sure I had plenty of food, bought me clothes, DVDs and stuff. We talked loads and used to have a laugh. She was really kind to me. At the weekends, when she wasn't working, we used to go to X market and that, go to museums; it was fun. … She didn't even let me have a drink. That was cool; I didn't really want to have a drink or take drugs whilst I was there. It was enough being there, having a break from what went on at home."*

This experience highlights how informal support can hold risks for a child or young person but at the same time be appreciated by the child or young person as the alternative holds greater risk for them. In the scenario described above, it is feasible to be concerned, from a professional perspective, that the child or young person was being groomed into, or at risk of, sexual exploitation and was at risk from the men who came to have sex and use drugs in the flat where the young person stayed. However, from the young person's perspective, it was safer to be in this environment than in her home environment and boundaries were set that the young person was happy to accept.

Sexual exploitation of children and young people has been presented as both child abuse/ sexual abuse[180] and as:

> "Part of the survival strategies of young people in their attempts to negotiate actively the socio-economic conditions they inhabit."
> (Phoenix, 2002; 372.)[181]

Both are represented in the experiences of children and young people who participated in the research. All the children and young people who were sexually exploited have been sexually abused by perpetrators, whether they are older boyfriends or men who have paid for sex. Some have also sold sex as a survival strategy, viewing it as the only option available to them in their present circumstances to meet their need for drugs or daily survival.

7.5 Identity

Children and young people's identities were influenced by their experiences as well as their circumstances but at the same time, identities also influenced the nature of their experiences.

The Streets and Identity
Hall and others describe the role of the streets in forming children and young people's identities:

> "It is in the course of such informal interaction, away from parents and teachers, that significant aspects of young people's personal and social identities are affirmed, contested, rehearsed and reworked."
> (Hall and others, 1999; 504.)[182]

For children and young people who become detached, the streets influence identity in other ways through the need to survive and navigate the streets. For example, children and young people have outlined the importance of reputation, of self-presenting as confident and managing conflict and aggression. For some, being away and on the streets offers the opportunity to be who they are:

> *"I'm loving being in charge of myself, being who I am and doing what I want to do."*

Experiences Linked to the Young Person's Sexuality
A few of the children and young people experienced violence in the home centred upon their sexual orientation. Most of those who identified as gay or lesbian thought that part of the reason their father, stepfather or brother was violent towards them was because they had some inkling that their son/stepson/sister was gay. This indirectly led to their becoming detached. Previous research[183] has outlined how intolerance to a child or young person's sexuality can start in the home and lead to a young person becoming forced to be away from home and becoming homeless. In Josie's case, the violent reaction from her brother when he found out his sister was a lesbian led to Josie's mother telling Josie to stay away from home to keep her safe and led to Josie and Toby becoming detached after threats from Josie's brother:

> *"How did I end up in the city centre? It was through what happened with Josie? She told you about it, didn't she? Her brother's a fucking nutter. He nearly broke my nose (when Toby tried to intervene to protect Josie from being harmed by her brother). … Josie came to stay at mine 'cos it wasn't safe for her to stay at home (after Josie's brother found out she was a lesbian). Her brother went fucking mental when he found out Josie's a lezzer. I though he was going to kill her. Then him and some of his mates turned up at mine. It was dead scary. The police were involved and everything. We decided we had to get out of there and came to stay with a mate of mine in the city centre and haven't left."*

All the gay and lesbian children and young people who participated in the research migrated to urban centres after leaving, or being forced to leave, home. Previous research has noted how this move can be prompted by an incentive to be amongst more diverse and tolerant communities[184]. However, this can expose the child or young person to further possibility of risk and harm[185] as revealed by young males' descriptions of unprotected sex, staying in the homes of men they know very little about,

180 Bean P (2002) *Drugs and Crime* Devon: Willlan and Pearce J Williams M and Galvin C (2002) *It's Someone Taking a Part of You: A Study of Young Women and Sexual Exploitation* London: National Children's Bureau.
181 Phoenix J (2002) 'In the name of protection: youth prostitution policy reforms in England and Wales' in *Critical Social Policy* 22 2 pg 353 – 375.
182 Hall T Coffey A & Williamson H (1999) 'Self, Space and Identity: Youth Identities and Citizenship' in *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 20 4 501-513.
183 Crisis (2005) *Sexuality and Homelessness* London: Crisis.
184 Dunne G Prendegast S & Telford D (2002) 'Young, Gay, Homeless and Invisible: A Growing Population?' *Culture, Health and Sexuality* 4 pg 103 – 115.
185 Lankenam S Clatts M Welle D Goldssant L & Gwadz M (2005) 'Street Careers: Homelessness, Drug Use and Sex Work Among Men Who have Sex with Men (YMSM)' *International Journal of Drug Policy* 16 10 – 18.

using drugs as part of sexual encounters and selling sex on the streets. The young males who migrated to city centres and embraced the lifestyle it offers, developed sexual habits that form part of a social scene linked with drugs and clubbing and are presently happy with how they live:

> "My boyfriend's twenty-two. We go out a lot and that. I've been taking pills since I was twelve. I love 'em. … I've been going to clubs and that from fourteen. Sometimes I'd meet blokes and that and go back with them. … Was I ever harmed? No. I like shagging, I do. I'm up for it!"

> "My life is like one big party."

Being 'Different'
Some children and young people discussed, implicitly and explicitly, thoughts on their own or others' identities. Some of these have been discussed previously; for example, in relation to Jay who was brought up to believe she was white when she is dual heritage and to those children and young people who have been lied to about the identity of their biological father. Sometimes it was difficult being different from others around them: being the only black child in school; wanting to play with the girls and being forced to play with the boys; being beaten because you're gay; being on the streets and not able to understand or speak with anyone. Being different from siblings was often given as a reason why the individual child or young person had problems with parents and others in their lives:

> "From being little, I knew I was different from my brother and sisters and my friends. Then, when I knew I was gay, I realised why I felt different. I'm camp and always have been and I think my dad knew I was gay and this is why he was so violent to me in a way that he wasn't to my mum and brothers and sisters."

> "Because I was gay … I was different. I used to play with the girls and the teachers said I wasn't allowed to play with the girls and I had to play football and stuff. I was getting bullied because I used to play with girls in school, play hopscotch and stuff. And then, my daddy as well, he told me I wasn't allowed to hang about with girls as well. He used to hit me for that too."

> "My brothers and sisters just accepted what our parents did to us. I was different. I used to argue with them and say it was wrong and that's why I was the one who got the worst of it."

Other children and young people believed they were different because they had got away from the area they lived in:

> "Our estate was out of the way and uncultured. There's no Asian man at the corner shop and stuff like that or black neighbours. … It's a completely different way of life down there; they're like hillbillies. … People stay there; move next door to their mum and stuff. Me brother's the same; he'll never leave there."

Children and young people differentiated between groups of people according to identity and self-identified as belonging to a particular group:

> "You've got the Poles who all stick together; you got the older homeless who drink all day and stick together; and you got us lot who do our thing and earn money during the day and get together in the evening at the vans and stuff. There's also the homeless who spend all day in the day services for the homeless."

Sometimes children and young people did not agree with how others identified them:

> "People say I'm a wigger[186]. … People say I'm a white black boy … but I don't see how people can say that. I wear the clothes that I want to wear. They're not a black person's clothes or a white person's clothes: they're my clothes."

Being different sometimes led to children and young people being targeted and targeting others. Those children and young people who experienced conflict on the streets, or inflicted violence upon others, often categorised the victims of attackers by identity: Goths, Chavs, Yardies and Emos. Sometimes these groups were targeted because they did not share the same identity as children and young people who participated in the research. Jes, the only person to identify as coming from an affluent background, recognised that he was different from the other children and young people he hung around with on the council estate and on the streets but adapted to fit with them:

> "I became one of them."

Shifting Identities
Others from different cultures and countries do not want to return home for different reasons relating to identity. A couple of young people think that they would no longer fit with their family back in the country of origin because they have changed so much, becoming used to higher standards of living and their way of life in the UK. Another young person does not want to return because of how her ethnic group is treated:

> Rose came from Romania thinking that life would be better in the UK. Even though she has experienced being on the streets, having nowhere to live, being lonely, hungry and isolated, Rose feels that life is much better in England:

> "Oh my god, it is much better here. … Here (in England) at least you have a chance of getting a job, of getting some money, of making your way. In Romania, all they do is ignore you, spit at you. There's nothing for us (Rroma) there."

186 'Wigger' means a white person who has adopted elements of black culture such as, in this context, style of dress, choice of music and mannerisms.

7.6 Being Bullied and Bullying

It is important to understand detached children and young people's experiences of being bullied and bullying to further understanding of the consequences of various experiences in their lives and how they made sense of these experiences and responded to them.

Nearly a fifth of children and young people who participated in the research experienced bullying and some, as a reaction to being bullied, started to bully other children. Children and young people were bullied, for example, because their father was in prison, because of their colour, because they lost part of their hand in an accident at school or because they were 'quiet'. Being bullied could act as a trigger to a child or young person becoming detached. As previously seen, Jono started to run away because he was bullied by other children and young people in the children's home and Alesha's first contact with people on the streets was when she was sent away by her mother to avoid being bullied.

Much of the bullying took place at school:

"I was always picked on at school; I don't really know why. Maybe it was because I was different, eh … because I never wanted for anything (before his father was murdered) and I got what I wanted, eh? And the other bairns seen that and didn't like it."

Some children and young people became excluded from school after responding to the bully with violence. All of these children and young people were also being physically abused at home:

"I haven't been to school for ages. I was excluded for fighting. I was bullied by a group of lads and one day I had enough of it and hit one of them with a chair. My stepdad had had a real go at me and then this lad did and I just lost it."

"I just kept skiving; never went. I was always fighting 'cos it was always 'who's the hardest in the school'. I was bullied in primary and then someone tried to bully me in high school and that's when I got wild and wouldn't let anybody batter me. I wouldn't let nobody hit me or anybody bully me. I started to stand up for meself and never looked back from then."

Another young person started to miss school because she was being bullied and eventually stopped going to school when she was thirteen:

"I used to miss it (school) 'cos I was getting called a 'paki shagger'. I used to take my friends to see my bloke and I didn't know they were racist and they told people at school and they all called me 'paki shagger'. Or they used to shout at me 'she don't like English white boys' so I couldn't cope and I just didn't go any more."

After being bullied, one child started to bully other children at school:

"The woman who lived five doors down the road who got me mum onto smack paid her daughter to batter me at school. She battered me mam and she paid her daughter a pound a day to batter me. Then went I went to secondary school, I started bullying and I was getting kicked out of school."

A couple of children and young people, who experienced a range of abuse at home, started to bully others at school, eventually becoming excluded for bullying. Both of these explained how no-one taught them what was right and wrong behaviour and how most people around them treated others with violence:

"I don't know why I bullied people. I didn't know right from wrong. I didn't know if I was allowed to bully or not allowed to bully because nobody had ever showed me right from wrong."

"My mum never taught me what I should do and what I shouldn't. She bullied us kids and her boyfriend bullied her. I got bullied at school and I think it was what I thought people did to get by so I started bullying others. When I think about it, it makes me feel really bad 'cos I know what it's like to be bullied and I did that to other kids."

Other children and young people were bullied in care and in the family home. Eventually all of these children and young people decided, after experiencing bullying for a while, that they were not going to be bullied any more and started bullying or responding with violence:

"I used to get bullied when I was younger by people bigger than me but then I just decided it's not happening. Some guy tried to bully me so I broke his jaw."

"I thought 'it's my turn to bully someone' and I started going out bullying people."

One young person took an overdose after being bullied by one of her friends:

"She was a bully and used to bully me and when I was thirteen I took an overdose. … 'Cos she knew my father was a lot older than my mother, she used to send emails over the internet saying 'your father's old enough to be your grandfather' and other nasty spiteful stuff. … After I'd taken the overdose, I was in hospital and then I went back to school and the teachers tried to keep us (Bethany and her friend who had bullied her) separate. She was always drunk and she was jealous that me and some of our other friends had gone out so she took her jacket off and I knew she was gonna do something and I let her beat me 'cos I wasn't the type to fight back then; I am now."

7.7 Anger and Anger Management Issues

Given the range of experiences described in this report, it is unsurprising that a significant proportion of the children and young people who participated in the research felt angry. Whilst a few were able to keep their anger in check, around a quarter of children and young people who participated in the research identified as having a lot of anger that affected their behaviour in negative ways, or an anger management problem:

"I was an angry lad. I was a really fucking angry person and that (football violence) was my way of getting a release. Do you know what I mean? That would make me feel better at the end of the day."

The majority of children or young people with anger issues were male but a few females also described anger issues. For some of the time, certain children and young people could not explain the anger but were able to look back on it retrospectively and account for their emotions. Others always knew what it was they were angry about. Experiences that led to children and young people developing problems with anger included:

- fathers dying
- mothers dying
- fathers sexually abusing their sisters
- fathers physically abusing them
- mothers abusing them
- fathers abusing mothers
- stepfathers abusing mothers
- stepfathers abusing them
- others trying to take them away from their parents
- parental substance misuse leading to physical and emotional abuse and neglect
- mothers leaving with no contact
- being abused by foster carers
- being raped

Most of the children and young people have never received any support to address the experiences that led them to having so much anger. A handful received support with anger management and the issues that led them to be angry once they were sixteen and were able to access support for homeless young people:

"I still feel angry some of the time but now I can go to the staff and ask them if I can talk to them. I like living here and having them to talk to so I don't do anything that means I wouldn't be able to live here."

A few children and young people's anger issues were picked up whilst they were in care under the age of sixteen with mixed outcomes. Whilst Barry found the anger management support he received in a secure unit helpful and Rory was given a punch bag to take his anger out on, Liam found that, although his anger was recognised, nobody asked him *why* he was angry which made him angrier.

Sometimes children and young people were unable to express anger at those whose actions caused the anger because they were too frightened of them but acted out their anger upon those they were close to and others:

"When I went back to live with my mum, I started going mad at her, blaming her 'cos I thought it was because of her that I had to go and live with him (Gerald's father) and him hitting me, blah, blah blah. She just sat there and cried."

"School wasn't good … basically I was taking my anger out on the other kids."

"Back then I couldn't control my temper. I didn't know how to and that (anger) was the only emotion I felt. I didn't feel no love. I didn't feel hate; just anger. I would hit out at anyone and everyone; I didn't care. … Nothing scared me. It was a bit wrong because I had no limits. I did what I wanted to do and no-one could stop me. … I ran riot. I was a little bastard. Sorry to use language like that, but I was."

A few are in the process of seeking support for their anger, recognising it is important to do so to enable them to move on:

'I'm going to start anger management soon so I can move on with the rest of my life. I'm gonna get on the straight and narrow. I want to do something with my life experiences and use them to help other people."

Others, at the time of participating in the research, were clearly not at a stage where they were able to seek support with their anger or did not want to address their anger in ways recommended to them:

"I feel like knocking someone or something. … Some people get on my nerves around here and I feel like doing something."

"I like have a switch inside of me. When it goes, it goes big time and I see red and I'm capable of anything. Sometimes I can control it and that's when I get beat up. When the switch goes, I don't know what I'm doing. I used to smack people's heads up on the floor, loads of stuff, man."

"Now the doctors are saying I should be in (name of hospital that deals with mental health illness), you know that mental place? 'Cos when I argue and that I get really angry … I won't be calmed down. They said I should like be on some medication like, just to calm me down."

7.8 Taking Responsibility, Remorse and Forgiveness

A number of children and young people discussed their role in the progression of their life. Some of those who witnessed violence, crime and substance misuse, whose parents and carers abused them, who found themselves detached and on the streets through the actions of others, were willing to take some responsibility for their circumstances even when it was out of their power to control the direction of their lives. A few of the children and young people recognised that they were loved and well cared for and took responsibility for their actions:

> "I always got attention, I was well cared for. It was just me that messed it up."

> "I've made some fucking bad decisions."

> "It was just me. It was since I had the accident with my hand. My parents did everything they could for me. They took me away to this caravan in the country to get me away from drugs and me mates who I was getting in trouble with and I got hold of some drugs, stole their car and caused a pile up on the motorway. I woke up on the side of the road with no idea what had happened 'cos I was off my head when I done it."

When asked what could have prevented them from becoming detached and on the streets, children and young people sometimes replied in ways that addressed their behaviour:

> "To have stopped being the way I was when I was younger."

> "To have looked at how I was behaving."

Others expressed remorse about past actions:

> "I regret everything that I've done, it's just not right."

> "I was living on the street and sleeping up closes and shit like that. … It was scary and it made me wish I hadn't done what I'd done and could live with me parents. I just wanted to go home but I couldnae."

> "There are things I regret … I wish I went back to school."

Other children and young people do not have regrets about past actions as there is a pragmatic sense of what can be done about the past but do reflect upon past behaviour and question it:

> "I don't feel sorry for the people I hurt 'cos what's the point in that but I do wonder what it was all about?"

Other children and young people have accepted what has happened to them, what others have done to them and mistakes they made themselves, and, in a bid to move on, tried to come to terms with their own and others' actions:

> "I've come to terms with what's happened to me and to let go of it, like, and not think too much about why it all happened. Do you know what I mean? I've got to learn to live with what went on and just get on with it and live my life. That's what I've got to do. If you dwell on things, it just messes your life up."

Sometimes this has meant forgiving those who inflicted immense pain, cruelty and damage:

> "The problem with stuff like that (sexual abuse) is that you've got to learn to – not learn to forgive – well, yeah, in a way learn to forgive, not actually to forgive but to, well, let it go. And you've got to understand it to understand yourself."

> "I forgive him, like, and I still love him. I still go to his grave and all, once a month … I always loved him. I always used to forgive him, no matter what he did because it wasn't really his fault; he probably had a mental health illness or something."

One young person has been able to forgive the perpetrator of sexual abuse for what he did to the young person but this forgiveness only goes so far:

> "'Cos he (perpetrator of sexual abuse) went through it (being sexually abused as a child), yeah, and he didn't really know it wasn't alright to do it so I can understand it from that point of view. But, at the end of the day, it (sexual abuse) is still wrong. … I have forgiven him for what he did to me but I haven't forgiven him for what he did to my sisters and my younger brother and that I can never let go of."

7.9 Resilience: Children and Young People's Ability to Manage Risk

Throughout the course of this research questions arose that related to children and young people's ability to manage risk and cope with a range of damaging and dangerous experiences, environments and possibilities. In addition, individual children and young people reacted differently to similar experiences, some managing to cope in ways that others did not and to protect themselves to different degrees. Some of the answer to these questions relates to children and young people's levels of resilience.

There is a wealth of literature addressing resilience and, whilst it is outside the scope of this research to provide answers to why some of the children and young people appear to be more resilient than others, it is appropriate to consider resilience as it is a key concept in understanding the experiences of the children and young people who become detached and spend time on the streets.

Resilience is defined as:

> "positive adaptation in circumstances where difficulties – personal, familial or environmental – are so extreme that we would expect a person's cognitive or functional abilities to be impaired."
> (Newman, 2002; 2.)[187]

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187 Newman, T. (2002) *Promoting Resilience: A Review of Effective Strategies for Child-Care Services.* Prepared for the Centre of Evidence-Based Social Services, University of Exeter.

Resilience is not static but shifts and different risks may be met with different responses. As explained by Howe:

"Certain characteristics, experiences and attributes may help you cope well with a particular risk, but that same trait may not always confer a benefit when a different kind of risk is met."
(Howe in Gilligan, 2009; v.)[188]

Resilience is acquired in two ways: through genes and through social experience[189]. Drawing upon a number of research studies, resilience theorists[190] suggest that there are three categories of protective factors that influence the development of resilience relating to individual's attributes and their contexts:

1. The first category includes the attributes of an individual's cognitive ability, levels of self-efficacy[191] and self esteem. Temperament and personality are also important as these influence adaptability and sociability, which are important if resilience is to be developed. Self-regulation skills influencing impulse control, affect and arousal regulation are also required. A positive outlook on life also supports resilience.

2. Relationships with others are also key to promoting resilience. Parenting quality can affect resilience with, for example, the presence of warmth, structure, monitoring and expectations. It is important to have close relationships with competent adults such as parents, relatives, and mentors. To encourage the development of resilience, it is important for children and young people to have connections to prosocial and rule abiding peers and older children and young people.

3. Availability of community resources and opportunities also promote resilience: good schools, prosocial organisations, neighbourhood quality, public safety, collective supervisions, libraries and recreations opportunities, and quality of social services and health care.

Other protective factors relate to particular events or sets of circumstances experienced by detached children and young people. For example, Clarke and others[192] chart how a range of work relating to the phenomenology of adolescent grief has been carried out relating to independent, but conceptually related, variables influencing adolescents' bereavement reactions when a parent dies. These include[193]:

- age at death of parent
- gender of the child
- gender of the deceased parent
- cause of the parent's death (natural versus non-natural, violent versus non-violent)
- foreseeability of the death and degree of preparation for the death
- witnessing the death
- reactions of the surviving parent

- how the surviving parent responds to the child
- the surviving parent's ability to assume a lone parent household role
- subsequent life circumstances
- availability of social support
- the child's prior history of psychopathology
- family history of psychopathology

The majority of children and young people who participated in the research did not have many of the key factors that promote development of resilience in their lives. For example:

> Lee's father was murdered in an unforeseen violent act. The death of her husband precipitated his mother into depression, substance misuse, threat of suicide and physical abuse. She struggled to care for Lee both physically and emotionally. Lee, in turn, refused the social support offered to him (counselling).

Ciaron's experiences reveal how when a child or young person has some level of genetic resilience, it is possible to build upon this resilience through their social experience of interventions:

> Ciaron experienced abuse and neglect in the home, with no boundaries both relating to his mother and stepfather's behaviour and to his own. He started to spend time on the streets with young people who took drugs and carried out petty crime. He lived in a number of poor neighbourhoods where there were no attempts by police to protect public safety, experienced generally negative experiences of schooling and a lack of collective supervision of children who he said were left to roam the streets and other neighbourhoods. Yet with positive experiences of social care, from the workers at the refuge and care staff in the children's home, Ciaron was able to build on his personal resilience. He has moved to a point in his life where has ceased street-involvement and many of the activities he associated with street-involvement such as taking drugs, crime and fighting. Now living in supported lodgings he is seeking employment and training.

Some of the children and young people are clearly resilient:

> Kerry has moved on with her life. This is extraordinary given that she was horrifically abused by her father until she was eleven. Following her father's suicide, her own suicide attempts, a miscarriage and substance misuse at a young age, she presents as someone who is able to express love.

188 Gilligan R (2009) *Promoting Resilience: Supporting Children and Young People Who are In Care Adopted or In Need* London: British Association for Adoption and Fostering.
189 Ibid.
190 Such as Masten A & Powell J (2003) A Resilience Framework for Research, Policy, and Practice in Suniya S e.d. R *Resilience and Vulnerability: Adaptation in the Context of Childhood Adversities* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
191 'Self-efficacy' is a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation.
192 Clark D Pynoos R & Goebel A (1996) Mechanism and Processes of Adolescent Bereavement in Haggerty R Sherrod L Garmezy N & Rutter M e.d. *Stress, Risk and Resilience in Children and Adolescents: Processes, Mechanisms and Interventions* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
193 Ibid.

Liam, after being sexually abused by members of his family, reported that he and his siblings were being sexually abused and was blamed for the abuse of his siblings. He was subjected to physical abuse by his stepfather and attacked by others in the community because of his behaviour. He was placed in care where he was sometimes very violent and started to use cocaine which became a habit. He has reduced his drug use, maintained a job and improved relationships with his parents. Despite still having some anger management issues, when he feels control is taken away from him, Liam has worked hard to understand his experiences so he can move on with his life.

Kirsten was raped a number of times and suffers from depression. Nevertheless she is determined the perpetrators are not going to ruin her life and agreed to access support to address sexual abuse:

"If I move on with my life that's me saying to those men that done it (raped and sexually abused her) that I've won. It me saying 'look what you boys have done to me but you haven't won and you're not gonna bring me down for the rest of my life."

Jono was impacted by parental substance misuse and parental mental health disorders, physically abused by his father, bullied in care and ran away at a young age. During the time he was on the streets he fought off sexual and physical attack, become reliant upon substances and managed to stop using drugs. He witnessed substance related illness and deaths of family members. To ensure he does not use drugs again, Jono is keeping his distance from others who are homeless whilst he is living in a hostel and trying to improve his life:

"Mentally, I've always been told that I'm very strong so that might have been a good thing and I've always had faith that certain things are possible. … I've been told that I'm very optimistic and that a lot of people would have ended their lives if everything that had happened to me had happened to them. But there's no point in me killing meself 'cos I've still got a full life ahead of me and anything could happen."

7.10 The Future

As discussed in section six, some children and young people do not see a future that does not include the streets. Even if they cease to live on the streets, some continue to spend time on the streets engaging in street culture; others envisage that they will always spend time on the streets. A few foresee problems for the future because of past actions and their consequences. Those that have been involved in the criminal justice system perceive that a criminal record will prevent them from gaining legitimate employment:

"See once you've been in trouble with the police, and employers see all them things on your record once you've had the CRB check, they just push you aside. … If you're straight up with them, you don't get a job anyway and if you lie, you get sacked. You can't win either way. … I'll just try to get cash in hand work; that comes your way on the streets sometimes."

Children and young people were in different circumstances at the time of participation in the research and different options were available to them. Some were in training and education and beginning to feel that the future they wanted was more in their grasp. Many wanted to change how they lived, ceasing their substance use or criminal activity, for example. In general, children and young people want what many people expect: to be happy, to have a home, a job and a family; a life with stability and some choice:

"Have a bloody family; a life where I could do what I wanted."

"Get me own place, get a job, a stable place, a driving licence and me own car and to know that me home and job is for life. I want a stable life."

"I'd like my own place, to stop robbing things, get a job and that."

"A flat, a family and to hope that my kid's life doesn't turn out like mine."

"Me family still aren't talking to me and that's why I decided I needed to pull it back together again. I'm going to sort my own life out and then try and get back in touch with my family."

Many wanted to gain some qualifications and have a career of some kind:

"I want a job. I want the best, not this shit that I've got to have now (gestures to the emergency accommodation). That's what I want: the best. Why shouldn't I have the best?"

"I would like me own flat. I wouldn't mind going to college to train in something, not sure what and I haven't got any GCSEs so it would be good to get some of them."

"Me and Toby are saving up to get a room in a shared house. And then I'm going to go to college to take my GCSEs and work in a bar part-time."

Some wanted to use their own experiences to work, in some capacity, with children and young people with difficult lives. A couple of young people wanted to go to university to train to be social workers or youth workers to enable them to work with other children and young people who had difficult lives:

> "I wanna go to college doing youth work. And I want to be able to use what's happened in my past to learn from it and help others learn from it."

> "I would like to go into residential social work".

Some are already on the way to achieving their goals:

> Whilst living in a hostel for the homeless, Adam is training to be a sports coach working with children and young people and does voluntary work in an old people's home and with disabled children. Adam would like to train as a social worker with children and young people and put his experiences to good use.

> Since moving into the Foyer, Jacob has been carrying out a fork lift training course and is also attending a training course on acting as a mentor. Using his own experiences, Jacob would like to help other children and young people address their issues and he hopes to become:
>
> "A fork lift driver and have a family and a home; a girl, kids; settle my life down."

A couple of children would like to go to school and reintegrate into activities they were involved in prior to becoming detached:

> "When I get settled, I'd like to join a football team again."

Others had hopes for the future that were based around their children:

> "I want a nice house for my child, at least."

> "I want more than anything for my son to come looking for me when he is sixteen; that's what I live for."

> "I want to come off the smack so I can be there for my wee bairns and hopefully get back with my girlfriend."

> "I wanna get away from here (the homeless hostel Tianna lives in with her child). It's horrible here; it's no place to bring up a child. There's druggies and all sorts here. Sometimes it all kicks off and you don't get any sleep. How am I supposed to raise my son in here? I'm supposed to be getting a flat soon and then I'll wanna get settled, get X (her child) into nursery and get some qualifications."

> "I just need a nice place to live and support with the baby but, I suppose, what you want and what you get are different things."

Some are trying to learn from other people's mistakes that affected them. For example, some are trying to parent their children differently from the way they were parented:

> "I'm more sensible (now) and I think about what the kids are needing before anything else. To be honest, what I experienced as a child, I feel like I missed out on a lot and my kids aren't going to miss out. I couldn't talk to my mum or my dad and have an honest conversation. I want my kids to be able to do that even if it's something wrong they've done."

As seen from the quotes, having somewhere to live was a crucial first step to enable a child or young person to move on with their life:

> "I can't get an address until I get a job and I can't get a job until I get an address so it's just a matter of which cracks first."

> "We need to get our own place and once that happens, we'll be sorted."

> 'I'd like to have somewhere to live and, dunno; just that really. If I had that, I could get meself sorted. That's just the main thing. You can't do nothing when you're on the streets."

> "Get a flat and that and sort my life out. Stop getting into trouble with the police."

> "I would like to get off the streets and what it's like to live somewhere; get me own flat or something.

For many, the future is uncertain and not always easy to think about. For example, for those in prison who have been caught in a cycle of crime and violence, the reality of coming out of prison is that they are forced to go back to people and environments where they will become entangled in crime once again:

> Bill's father was very violent towards his mother and served a prison sentence for stabbing her. Bill enacted the violence he witnessed at home, was abandoned by his mother at five, and was brought up by his aunt. When Bill was thirteen, his mother came back into his life and he ran away to live with her. She was using heroin and was unable to provide for Bill. He witnessed her being abused by a number of men and took to the streets, becoming involved in criminal activity at a young age. Bill has served four periods of time in a YOI. At the time of participation in the research, he was concerned about what would happen when he was released as he wanted to change his life:
>
> "Well, every time I'm out there (after being released from YOIs) I just keep getting in more trouble, like."

> After being released from a YOI for a third time, Bill went to see his probation officer and was told that they had not been able to arrange any accommodation. His probation officer suggested that he stay with his mother, who they know uses heroin, or with his friends, who are the people with whom Bill gets into trouble:

> *"Like this time I was only out for two weeks. I got out, went to probation, they had nowhere for me to stay, they said have you got friends to stay at, I said you've had, like, nearly 22 months to sort this out, they said have you got friends to stay at. Well obviously if you wanted me to mix with all the old people I was mixing with, yeah. … They said do you want to go to your mum's … no I don't want to be round her with heroin and stuff like that, I don't want to end up like that. I don't want to be around it. So basically, just, I was in exactly the same position when I got out as before I went in … nothing had changed … I just started drinking and that and then started robbing beer from shops and started doing stupid stuff and then one night I was walking past a house and seen the window open and I climbed through it, drunk, I was stupid."*

Bill has stress-related psoriasis which was very bad at the time of interview. Bill is very worried about what will happens when he is released as he does not want to serve another custodial sentence and wants to change his life: move to somewhere where he does not know anyone, get some accommodation and build on the qualifications he has been working towards whilst serving his sentence. He is concerned that with nowhere to go, he will have to go to his friends' and an area that is connected to his criminal behaviour and the cycle of crime and serving time will continue.

For those in YOIs and others, the need to break links with people and areas connected with certain lifestyles and behaviours was viewed as critical, yet acknowledged as very difficult for both practical and emotional reasons[194]. These networks have acted as some children and young people's family, provided protection and support but also given rise to more problematic behaviours and experiences. To branch out on your own with no concept of how to survive without recourse to criminal acts, violence and substance use in a world where people behave differently and with different norms and values, is incredibly daunting. Once again, children and young people are expected to manage very difficult and new circumstances with no support or guidance.

Others had plans for the future but were loath to share them in case this acted as some form of a jinx:

> *"I want to start a dance course in the autumn but I don't like saying it just in case something happens to make it not happen. So I just take a day at a time."*

A few children and young people do not plan for the future, living day to day, and others do not want for much as their experiences have taught them not to expect much:

> *"I don't plan things; I take it day by day."*

> *"I want me dinner; no plans further than that. I'm one of these people who lives each day as it comes along."*

> *"I don't look back. I don't look forward. I just think about what's going to happen tomorrow; that's it."*

> *"What would I like to happen in the future? Dunno really. I wouldn't mind running my own bar and that. For now I just wanna continue having a good time. That's what it's about, innit?"*

7.11 Summary

- Identities, behaviour and states of being were all too often a consequence of damaging experiences from early childhood that were reinforced as a child grew older. However, it is also important to recognise that children and young people showed remarkable resilience and agency to manage the range of circumstances in which they found themselves.

- Substance use was rife amongst detached children and young people, often starting at a young age, and was linked to fun, escapism and coping with emotional feelings that children and young people found difficult to manage. Children and young people were introduced to drugs by siblings, parents, both older and same-age friends and boyfriends. Substance use often escalated when a child or young person became detached. Polydrug use was common and some children and young people became heavy users of drugs such as heroin and cocaine. There was a close relationship between substance use and crime, and violent street crime was linked to a child or young person's substance use. Whilst ceasing to use drugs was recognised as difficult, some children and young people managed to stop using drugs, and resist drug use, whilst still living on the streets. Becoming a parent often acted as an incentive to stop using drugs. Some of those children and young people whose lives have become more settled have changed their substance use, now using alcohol and or cannabis at weekends for relaxation purposes.

- Many of the children and young people have experienced depression, and other mental health issues, and have never received any support to address the trauma behind their depression. Some children and young people found self-harming a helpful release for their inner pain and turmoil; a few have attempted suicide.

- Sexual activity started at a young age for many of the children and young people and there is often swapping of sexual partners between groups of children and young people. Sometimes relationships are held together by being on the streets.

- Children and young people are sexually exploited in diverse ways, ranging from casual sex with adults, older boyfriends, being shared for sex by groups of men and selling sex. Exploitative relationships could play a part in a child or young person becoming detached; and becoming detached could also make a child or young person vulnerable to sexual exploitation. There were also examples of young people viewing selling sex as a means of survival. There were different patterns of grooming and some children and young people identified that feeling unloved and desperately wanting to be loved led them

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194 This is also discussed in section four in relation to children and young people trying to exit gang activity.

to be vulnerable to sexual exploitation. It is also recognised that detached children may not always be on the streets but are also very vulnerable and in need of safeguarding behind closed doors.

- Children and young people discussed their own identities, and those of others: how they are formed and freed by the streets; how issues relating to sexuality led them to be on the streets and shaped how they spend their time whilst detached; how being different influenced the course of their life; and how groups of people become established based upon physical style of presentation and sharing an identity. For a few, their identity has shifted making it difficult for them to return to a place of origin.

- Children and young people's experiences of bullying and its consequences are explored alongside the process of becoming a bully.

- Anger issues are highlighted as consequences of some children and young people's experiences, the lack of support with a range of difficult and traumatic events and issues and the impact anger issues had on their lives.

- Some children and young people took responsibility for their actions, expressed remorse and were able to forgive those who had inflicted cruelty and damage.

- Resilience was key to some children and young people's management of risk and partly explains why some children and young people were able to survive highly damaging experiences.

- Children and young people's wishes for the future reflect those desired by most people: a home, a family, to be loved and to love, to have children and give their children a good home and life, a career and enough money. A few are at the outset of progress toward some of these aims. Others do not see a future where the streets do not play a significant part in their life even if they cease to live on the streets. Others want to reduce or abstain from certain behaviours, such as using substances or engaging in criminal behaviour but without somewhere to live, view this as impossible. Children and young people also recognise the importance of breaking with areas and people that are associated with what they now view as problematic behaviours. Without the chance and support to move into accommodation in a new area and rebuild a life, the opportunity for change is bleak.

8. Concluding Comments and Recommendations

This final section brings together some separate strands of the findings described in this report, poses some questions for consideration and offers a number of recommendations to meet the needs of detached children and young people in keeping with the aims of the research.

8.1 Concluding Comments

Beyond the Initial Concept of Detached
Throughout the research process, the concept of being detached has been stretched in interesting ways. Some theorists would undoubtedly conceptualise detached children and young people as belonging to a feral underclass, be it a socially produced underclass or one created by feckless individuals[195], or as products of social exclusion produced by a number of social pathologies. None of the children and young people, of course, referred to themselves in this way or used any other word that refers to the state of being detached from parent or carers and social structures of support. For so many of them, it was normal to be away from home or care either permanently or for long periods of time under the age of sixteen so that no word was used to describe this as a particular phenomena.

As the research process with children and young people took place, it became very apparent that this research is not only about detached children and young people on the streets in the UK but about how life is experienced by many children and young people. Whilst not all children and young people become detached and live on the streets or become street-involved, many children and young people share research participants' experiences of home life. Some remain in the home continuing to be abused, others die from injuries sustained from abuse and others are taken into care.

As the research progressed, the opposite of detached, namely being attached, began to become relevant, especially in relation to the importance of attachment and children and young people's experiences of being parented and the likelihood of disorganised attachment. In addition, the extent of children and young people's attachment to other people and behaviours played an important part in their experiences. For example, children and young people become attached to other people, to their gang or group, to substances, certain behaviours, the streets and sometimes attached to being detached, often finding it hard to leave the streets. After consideration of the impact of parents' and carers' issues, their lack of connection to their children, and implications for attachment and disorganised attachment, it appears that many detached children and young people have parents who are emotionally or physically detached from them. Thus parental detachment plays a part in children and young people becoming detached from parents and carers and key societal institutions. The extent of parental issues, and implications for the all important process of attachment amongst other impacts of parental substance misuse, domestic violence and mental health disorders, highlight how important it is to support parents with their issues and with parenting. These patterns also raise questions about who helps detached children and young people to parent, both those who are already parents and those who become parents in the future, and what will happen to their children if no support is set in place.

Diversity and Detached Children and Young People
Detached children and young people are not homogenous and there is a lot of diversity within their experiences. For example, there is diversity in how children and young people become detached. It is important to recognise that whilst some children and young people become detached through running away or being thrown out of home, for some there is no specific moment that they can identify as the time they stopped living at home; they drifted away. Becoming detached is often a gradual process. There is not always a common response to shared experiences or factors in children and young people's lives. For example, children and young people's experiences of sexual exploitation did not conform to one or two models and reaffirms Scott and Skidmore's recommendation of defining sexual exploitation as:

> "incorporating a spectrum of abusive relationships rather than confirming to a single model."
> (Scott and Skidmore, 2006; 32.)[196]

There is also diversity in how males and females dealt with their experiences and their outlook and attitudes. For example, males are more likely to be violent and become part of a gang even though females have also been victims of violence and witnessed violence and have the same needs as males, who have some of their needs met by belonging to a gang.

It is also important to recognise the diversity of gangs to ensure more accurate and responsible used of the term 'gang' and to recognise that this term does not define the 'catch all' term used by children and young people, professionals, the media and policymakers. There was a lot of diversity within children and young people's experiences of being part of a gang and whilst a few were involved in more hard-core gang activities including the sale and use of drugs and guns, the majority were not. Whilst there are undoubtedly negative elements of gang association for individual children and young people and local communities, it also important to acknowledge the diverse reasons children and young people become part of a gang. There are also positive elements to children and young people's involvement in gangs that provide a sense of family and protection where blood ties and formal social structures have not done so.

Risk
Children and young people who participated in the research are often at risk through others' actions but also because of their actions. Children and young people are also at risk because they do not receive appropriate support to address their issues. For example, the extent of depression experienced by children and young people has potential for the longer-term impacts and also affects children and young people's enjoyment of childhood and youth and their ability to make decisions.

Perhaps one of the most shocking findings of the research is the prevalence and extent of violence in the children and young people's lives as both victim and perpetrator, although it is not inevitable that victims of violence become perpetrators of violence as some of the children and young people's experiences reveal. Many of the children and young people were subjected to and witnessed appalling violence and some are violent to others. To understand why children and young people commit violent acts and exhibit damaging behaviour is to understand what has happened in their past and to recognise that they developed in the only way they knew to adapt and manage their circumstances.

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195   Thereby recreating the agency/structure dichotomy.
196   Scott S & Skidmore P (2006) *Reducing the Risk: Barnardo's Support for Sexually Exploited Young People* Barkingside: Barnardo's.

Previous research[197] has outlined how children and young people are not always aware of potential risks when engaging in certain activities or making decisions about what form of action to take. Children and young people's perceptions of risk influence their decisions. For example, as described in the report, some children and young people feel that becoming reliant on others is a risk that they cannot take because if they cease to be able to cope on their own and support is subsequently pulled away, there is concern that they will not be able to manage. The choices available to children and young people are also linked to risk. Whilst some of their actions may be viewed as risky from the perspectives of others, the child or young person may view available alternatives as riskier. In addition, lack of alternatives may also compel a child or young person to contemplate a course of action that is inherently risky.

There are some mixed messages relating to risk for the children and young people who participated in the research. Many have not been protected from risk by adults that are supposed to protect them, by their parents and by support agencies; and others have been subjected to harm by the very people who should have their welfare at heart. Many children and young people have witnessed prevention of risk, as far possible, by the very people often presented as a potential source of risk. For example the adult homeless population and those involved in selling sex. It is also possible that the same person may be both protector/provider and exploiter and the child or young person may decide that the protective element takes priority.

The extent of substance use amongst the children and young people is alarming and only time will reveal the long-term damage that the children and young people experience after prolonged use of substances that started at a young age. Once again the normalisation of substance use partly accounts for why children and young people use drugs. In addition, children and young people also use substances for the same reasons that adults do: for pleasure, to manage stressful circumstances; for escapism to take them away to a different place where there is a release from pain and hardship.

There are often risks related to sexual behaviours and attitudes towards sex. Sometimes females are at risk from how males use sex to express emotions that have little to do with sexuality. There are a number of factors that are likely to decrease the likelihood of practising safe sex: drug-related sex, being desperate for money, being sexually exploited by those who have no concern for the child or young person's welfare and unequal power relationships when a child or young person has a sexual relationship with an older adult. Children and young people are therefore at risk of becoming infected, and infecting others, with HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Recognising That Detached Children and Young People Have Strengths
The experiences of the children and young people who have participated in this research have revealed how many of them have shown remarkable levels of resilience and initiative, and have developed coping strategies to manage a range of difficult and disturbing events and

circumstances. Whilst many have not completed secondary education, alternative education has often taken place, teaching the child or young person what they need to know to survive in the world they inhabit that sits at odds with formalised education. Despite the odds, a few of the children and young people have arrived at a place in their lives where, at the point of their participation, they have changed a number of their behaviours and attitudes, choosing to forego crime, substance use and social networks where drugs and crime are common, and are ready to become a part of the more formal world of education, training and work and all that entails. Whether or not children and young people are ready to leave the streets, they still share the same general hopes for the future as most people relating to a home, a family and a safe and secure existence. Sometimes children and young people want their lives to change but are at a loss to know where to begin; some support services established to facilitate the rehabilitation of children and young people unwittingly recreate the circumstances that hinder their rehabilitation.

Sometimes an act or experience generally portrayed as problematic for children and young people can also act as a positive force. For example, teenage parenthood is often portrayed, for understandable reasons, as problematic and undesirable, and this research has described how many of the young parents have limited or no access to children. However, for some, becoming a parent motivated them to change their lifestyle: to stop using substances or selling sex; to withdraw from violent behaviour and to generally address their issues so they are able to have a relationship with their child and provide for them in some way.

Normalisation, Disassociation and Denial
The term 'normalisation' has been used a lot throughout this report to, for example, offer some explanation of how children and young people accept being harmed and inflict harm upon others; their involvement in crime and substance use; and their acceptance that part of their life is lived on the streets. Normalisation also offers some explanation of why many of the children and young people who participated in the research did not seek support. To further understand processes of normalisation, it may be useful to consider other options available to detached children and young people. One such option could be to disassociate from what happened to them and took place around them. Whilst some of the children and young people may have taken this option, events often spiralled to the point where it was no longer possible for a child or young person to disassociate because something happened externally or internally to the child or young person and they were forced to react. A second option could be to deny that which is taking place. This can be seen in children and young people's presentations of, for example, their sexual relationships with older adults. However, it is argued that normalisation can contribute to both disassociation and denial and that all three are interlinked to differing degrees at different stages in a child or young person's life and form part of a process. Normalisation, disassociation and denial are also seen in the research participants' parents' and carers' behaviours and responses[198].

197   Smeaton E (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Young Runaways* London: The Children's Society.
198   As presented by the child or young person.

Perhaps normalisation, disassociation and denial are also strategies employed by individual and group responses to some groups of children and young people. Normalisation processes are exemplified in statements such as 'that's what children and young people are like today; it's all these violent games they play'. Disassociation is expressed through utterances that place the emphasis upon the other: 'that wouldn't happen to my child; that's a problem found with Black and other ethnic minority youth'. Denial is represented, for example, in accounts negating the existence of children and young people on the streets: 'there aren't children and young people on the streets in the UK. We don't have problems like that here; that's an issue for poor countries'.

Conflict between Perceptions of Childhood and Realities of Detached Children and Young People Lives
Detached children and young people's experiences do not always fit with public perceptions and other portrayals of childhood. There are many experiences of childhood. For example, the lives and concerns of detached children and young people are very different to those of children and young people who participated in *A Good Childhood* (Layard and Dunn, 2009)[199]. There is also tension between perceptions of what childhood is and failing to meet the needs of children and young people who are forced to adopt adult behaviours to manage their circumstances, and simultaneously expected to fit into preconceived moulds of childhood. Demonising children and young people fails to account for, and shifts focus away from, the reasons children and young people sometimes engage in violent and disturbing behaviour, thereby preventing debate and formation of consensus that is based upon reality.

Do These Children Matter Too?
Despite a range of legislative measures, guidance and policy commitments, there are too many children and young people in the UK who do not receive the support and care they are entitled to, that rhetoric claims to provide for all children and young people under the age of sixteen. The government's aim[200] is for every child, whatever their background or circumstances, to have the support they need to:

- be healthy
- stay safe
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution
- achieve economic well-being.

Many detached children and young people do not receive support to achieve these five outcomes and are far from reaching these outcomes. This becomes very apparent when of each of the five outcomes are discussed in relation to research participants:

- **Being healthy**: detached children and young people are not physically, mentally, emotionally and sexually healthy, do not have a healthy lifestyle, both before or after becoming detached, and take illegal drugs.

- **Staying safe**: detached children and young people have experienced maltreatment, neglect, violence, sexual exploitation, bullying, crime and anti-social behaviour in and out of school, do not have security and stability and are not well cared for.

- **Enjoying and achieving**: detached children and young people are often not ready for school, do not attend and enjoy school, do not achieve educational standards at secondary school, are not able to achieve personal and social development and have very little recreation opportunities available to them.

- **Making a positive contribution**: this outcome is more complicated as detached children and young people do not achieve making a positive contribution as perceived through the lens of government policymakers and others. However, when detached children and young people's life experiences are contextualised, a different perspective emerges. For example, many of the detached children and young people engaged in decision-making and faced difficult decisions. For example:
  - Do they tell someone what their father is doing to them and risk losing him when they love him and nobody else appears to have a problem with what he is doing?
  - Do they stay in a home where they are subjected to extreme physical or sexual abuse; where no-one cares whether they are there or not because parents and carers are too caught up in their own problems and unable to care for their child; where they have to witness drunken ramblings and substance-related chaos; where there is no food or company? Or do they remove themselves from often dangerous environments and move to often the only option available to them: the streets where there are others who care about them, offer shelter and warmth but also pose a potential risk?

When thrown out by parents or carers, detached children and young people have to make decisions that children and young people should not have to make. For example:
- Should they sleep in the city centre where there are others or should they go to the woods where they will be on their own?
- Should they take drugs to stay awake all night or will they risk sleeping and hope that no-one rapes or beats them up?
- Do they experience the negatives of not having their basic needs met or do they sell sex?

Some experience positive relationships that others may not consider positive because of the circumstances and the behaviours of those with whom the relationship is formed:
- With other young males who are part of a gang and provide protection and a sense of belonging and family.
- With homeless adults on the streets who share what they have and look out for the child or young person.
- With older females who sell sex and care for the young person.

199 Layard R & Dunn J (2009) *A Good Childhood: Searching for Values in a Competitive Age* London: Penguin Books.
200 http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

The children and young people who participated in the research revealed resilience and ability to cope with and manage transitions, often developing enterprising behaviours to meet their circumstances. Many detached children and young people cared for themselves and others in challenging and dangerous environments, forced to think and act as a young adult and negotiate others' dangerous and damaging behaviours with no support to make sense of what was happening. Whilst living at home and on the streets, children and young people had to learn to provide for themselves outside of the law and convention.

■ **Achieve economic well-being**: the majority of detached children and young people do not engage in further education, employment or training on leaving school, largely because they left school under the legal minimum age, and are not ready for employment, do not live in decent, or any, homes or in a sustainable community. They do not have access to transport and material goods, nor have they lived in households free from low-incomes.

Providing Alternatives
Elements of the above comments point to the need to provide alternatives. If detached children and young people are expected to change their behaviours, there needs to be some alternative opportunities, alternative support mechanisms and alternative ways of engaging and including the hard-to-reach. These alternatives have to be realistic and fit with what is available to them. If a society does not want children and young people to be on the streets, it has to provide alternatives to the streets. Adults have recreational spaces to congregate; children and young people often don't. If we don't want them hanging around on street corners and other public spaces, they have to be offered some viable alternative. Many of the research participants clearly enjoyed elements of risk-taking behaviour and mentioned the adrenalin rush, commonly referred to as 'the buzz', they enjoyed whilst fighting, taking drugs and being on the streets. Perhaps when requesting that children and young people refrain from these activities, a legitimate alternative needs to be set in place that also provides an adrenaline rush.

Attempts to access 'hard-to-reach' families have not been successful; the testimonies of the children and young people who participated in this research bear witness to this as does, for example, the government commissioned evaluation of Sure Start. The government's Runaway Action Plan, an example of government activity to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people, whilst welcome, will not meet the needs of detached children and young people as it is based upon research, learning and practice that relates to a largely separate group of children and young people.

It is time to accept that something more needs to be done to reach and safeguard detached children and young people and provide them with alternatives.

8.2 Recommendations: Meeting the Needs of Detached Children and Young People

A number of recommendations can be drawn from the research, some that are supported by other learning. Firstly, there are recommendations relating to general approaches to meeting the needs of children and young people:

1. When developing services to meet the needs of detached children and young people, it is important to start with the premise that children and young people who become detached have chaotic and messy lives and that this will impact upon any attempts to intervene and with the process of supporting them and meeting needs.

2. It is also crucial to accept that detached children and young people may not share the cultural values of services and professionals:

   "many of these young people have been forced to take responsibility for their own survival, both at home and whilst away from home, and the norms and values that govern their lives differ to those of mainstream society."
   (Smeaton, 2005; 23.)[201]

3. It is necessary to accept that years of trauma require years of recovery: a history of trauma requires long-term interventions. It is also likely to take time to acquire detached children and young people's confidence and build a full picture of their experiences and needs.

4. Provision of appropriate and effective support for parents and carers is essential. The life experiences of parents and carers affect the lives of their children; their own experiences of being parented, their personal issues and the complex situations in which they find themselves have, in turn, a significant impact on their children. Such support should perhaps build on the principles recommended for working with children and young people, such as recognising that long-term interventions are required to build trust and address intergenerational patterns and issues.

5. Without doubt, placing interventions with detached children and young people and their families will often be challenging. The families of children and young people who become detached are often very hard to reach and some may not initially welcome offers of support, perhaps due to negative perceptions or experiences of agencies. However, detached children and young people also have a lot to offer and the consequences of enabling them to develop a positive life would have far-reaching consequences for individuals, local communities and wider society.

6. As well as supporting children and young people and their carers, it is important to support the professionals who work with them and all the challenges they present. As previously noted, detached children and young people and their families may sometimes be difficult to access and work with. Where professionals fear a violent response or visit alone, there is potential

201 Smeaton E (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Children and Young People* London: The Children's Society.

for professional concerns to be left unaddressed[202]. Frontline workers need support and back up from managers and other colleagues so that they are able to share fears and stress. The Children, Schools and Family Committee recommends that social workers should have more time to work with families before need becomes acute and also recognises the importance of enabling social workers to focus upon their relationships with the children and families that form their caseload:

> "Stable, reliable bonds with key individuals are fundamental to children's security and development. In all circumstances, the care system should be supportive of rather than obstructive of good relationships. Children too rarely have the sort of relationship with their social worker that they want. High staff turnover, heavy workloads and an administrative burden all militate against relationships flourishing. Vacancy rates remain high and new recruits lack support. Social workers feel disempowered and then more experienced may seek moves away from frontline work. The same factors impinge on social workers' capacity to forge constructive relationships with families before problems escalate to the point where a care order might be sought."
> (Children, Schools and Family Committee, 2009; 8.)[203]

Lord Laming[204] makes a number of recommendations relating to supporting frontline social workers, including improving their training and increasing the numbers of frontline social workers with an appropriate skills base. There is also a need to move away from the culture of distrust that leads many care professionals to operate within a climate of fear. A lack of public and professional support plays a part in professionals being hindered from being as effective as possible and ill-equipped to manage their work.

7. Learning from research confirms that when working with detached children and young people:

> "there is a need for a careful balance between ensuring a person's immediate safety and retaining a relationship to the long-term benefit of the young person. By the very nature of the experiences of young people who are detached, interventions should focus upon long-term engagement and trust-building. This can offer the opportunity for crisis intervention when a young person experiences a breakdown in their survival strategies."
> (Smeaton, 2005; 23.)[205]

It is therefore necessary to work with high thresholds of confidentiality.

8. Services for the adult homeless population are not appropriate for detached young people. Many children and young people are too vulnerable to cope with frightening and chaotic environments. Others become introduced to new drugs and behaviours and further submerged in street-life.

9. Responding to the needs of detached children and young people will require resources and cost will be cited as a barrier to implementing interventions. However, it is important to consider the costs, financial and otherwise, if there is no investment in detached children and young people[206]. If both preventative and responsive interventions are not set in place, society will continue to pay for many of these children and young people, often into adulthood, as they become more entrenched in the criminal justice system, require medical interventions in relation to, for example, mental health issues and substance misuse issues. It is also not acceptable to compromise children and young people's safety by 'value for money' decisions.

10. The first contact with a detached child or young person is crucial, often requiring a light touch that is presented in an informal manner. Get this right and there is potential to work with the child or young person for longer-term benefit. If the first contact with a detached child or young person is unsuccessful, there is potential that the child or young person will not return and opportunity to provide support will be lost.

Moving on to address specific preventative and responsive recommendations to meet the needs of detached children and young people:

11. Abuse and other risks experienced by children in the home at very young ages confirms the importance of professionals implementing home-based interventions. The majority of detached children and young people's parents do not, for a number of reasons, access children centres and health clinics and professionals must be encouraged to carry out significant parts of their practice in the family home where they will gain insight into family dynamics. As noted by Lord Laming, health visitors should be given resources to effectively assess and support children and play a key role in their protection:

> "The role of health visitors as a universal service seeing all children in their home environment with the potential to develop strong relationships with families is crucially important."
> (Lord Laming, 2009; 57.)[207]

12. In general, early intervention should be promoted to prevent children and young people from being harmed and to work with parents and carers so that it becomes possible, both from a child protection perspective and parents' and children and young people's perspectives, for the child to remain in the home. This importance of early intervention is confirmed by Lord Laming:

> "Leaders of local services must recognise the importance of early interventions and ensure that their departments support children as soon as they are recognised as being 'in need', averting escalation to the point at which families are in crisis."
> (Ibid, 4.)[208]

202 Littlechild B & Bourke C (2006) 'Men's use of violence and intimidation against family members and child protection workers' in Humphreys X & Stanley N ed. *Domestic Violence and Child Protection: Directions for Good Practice* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
203 Children, Schools and Family Committee (2009) *Looked After Children* London: The Stationery Office.
204 Lord Laming (2009) *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report* London: The Stationery Office.
205 Smeaton E (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Young Runaways* London: The Children's Society.
206 Railway Children has produced a paper to compliment this report highlighting some of the costs of children and young people becoming detached which confirms that failing to respond to detached children and young people incurs significantly high costs. This paper is available at http://www.railwaychildren.org.uk
207 Lord Laming (2009) *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report* London: The Stationery Office.
208 Ibid.

13. Not all children and young people will come to the attention of support services whilst still living at home. However, an opportunity arises to access a child or young person when they start to spend time on the streets, before they have ceased to live at home and become detached. Street-based youth work should be carried out on the streets and other areas that children and young people frequent at times when children and young people are on the streets, particularly evenings, weekends and school holidays. This work should be carried out in an informal manner by professionals with appropriate expertise using a range of creative means to engage with children and young people. If a child or young person's needs are identified, it will be possible, in some cases, to work with the child or young person and their family to address the issues, and if this is not possible, a safe alternative can be found for the child or young person.

14. At this point, it is appropriate to highlight the important role that schools play. When a child or young person attends school, teachers and other personnel are able to identify when a child or young person's behaviour changes and provide support after a child or young person discloses problems. Despite the clash between many detached children and young people and school culture, and subsequent feelings of alienation, school is often the only agency that children and young people are known to and once they stop attending school, they become lost to social support agencies. As identified previously in other research[209], when a child or young person disengages with school, this should trigger the need to alert appropriate agencies so that interventions can be made before the child or young person becomes untraceable or too entrenched in street life. If schools are to implement this role effectively, it is important that they are provided with the resources to do so.

15. If it is not possible to prevent children and young people from becoming detached and on the streets, there is need to respond to their needs when they are on the streets. This will be particularly challenging as, by this point, many will have particular identities, attitudes and behaviours that influence their perceptions and way of life; some will be hard to reach and engage. This may be different for children and young people who are identified as soon as they come to the streets and who may be more amenable to receiving support. Detached children and young people's experiences and self-reliance highlight the importance of building trust and of developing services for children and young people that are based on models for the adult homeless population, whose lives they share, but which are specifically for children and young people. Responsive measures should take three forms:
   - Outreach work should take place to identify detached children and young people on the streets.
   - There should be drop-in centres for children and young people that operate in an informal manner, open during evenings and weekends, and provide the basics of shelter, warmth and food but also able to provide further support, either directly or through appropriate referral mechanisms, when

indicated by children and young people that this is desirable.
   - There should be accommodation provision for children and young people that also operates in this informal way, closely monitored and inspected but not as a children's home, based upon the principles of hostels for homeless adults providing a bed for the night, some food and washing facilities, but with the capacity to respond to children and young people's requests for more support.

16. For previously identified reasons, many children and young people find withdrawing from street life difficult. Having safe and permanent accommodation is clearly crucial for young people as a first step to changing their lives but it should not be assumed that providing accommodation will provide the solution to all of their issues. For some who are used to being with a group of people on the streets, living on their own is isolating and lonely. Others will still require a lot of support to address a range of issues including, substance use and mental health issues, so that they are able to remain in their accommodation and move on with their lives.

There are additional recommendations that feed into those that are more specific:

17. A number of the recommendations offered so far have explicitly or implicitly touched upon the skills required by professionals who work with detached children and young people. As well as receiving training specific to issues relating to children and young people, it is also important that professionals with direct contact have understanding of detached children and young people and are able to present in an informal manner whilst setting boundaries and maintaining a professional focus and making professional judgements. There is some argument that the voluntary sector is best placed to provide certain forms of services for vulnerable children and young people, and indeed some detached and young people may be dissuaded from seeking support if it was perceived as being offered by social services. However, the key is to ensure that services are tailored to meet the needs of detached children and young people and that professionals delivering services have the appropriate skills and expertise to do so, be they from a statutory or voluntary agency.

18. The research findings and recommendations raise issues relating to safeguarding children and young people and child protection procedures. The experiences of detached children and young people means that some will not be sympathetic to child protection measures being set in place to address their needs and will refuse to engage with or will reject outright such an approach, perhaps finding it difficult to be told they are a child and treated as such when they have been providing for themselves and living in an adult world. There is a difficult balance to be achieved between recognising the child or young person as a 'child', as defined by law, protecting the child and probably losing the opportunity to protect the child *and*

209 Smeaton E (2005) *Living on the Edge: The Experiences of Detached Young Runways* London: The Children's Society.

providing a protective response that is acceptable to the child and results in improved circumstances for the child or young person. To safeguard children and young people effectively, there should be some flexibility in how child protection responses are implemented to ensure the best outcome possible is achieved. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to look at implementing other responses. For example, where a child or young person is involved in a sexually exploitative relationship, dependent upon the child or young person's age, ability and other factors, it may be more appropriate to implement a domestic violence response. In addition, the difficulty of safeguarding children and young people when they are not known to support agencies is recognised. This adds weight to arguments to implement a range of preventative and responsive measures to detached children and young people.

19. As part of any intervention with detached children and young people, there should be a focus upon building resilience both by supporting the child or young person's resilience and also by providing a social context that promotes resilience. However, whilst building resilience is vital, it is important to recognise, firstly, that the social context can only foster or inhibit qualities of resilience that a child or young person may or may not display[210] and, secondly, to ensure avoidance of exclusive reliance upon a resilience-led perspective, particularly in extreme adversity[211].

20. It also important to treat detached children and young people on the streets with respect and view each as an individual, without making assumptions and ill-informed judgements. They all have something to offer and are important for the future.

There are a number of recommendations relating to future research:

21. As mentioned in the introduction, it has not been possible to share all of the research findings in this report and it is important that opportunities are made available to disseminate other research findings to further understanding of the lives of detached children and young people and identify learning for policy and practice. For example, there are some significant differences between males and females that are worth further exploration.

22. As parental and carer issues and experiences played such an important role in children and young people's lives, it is important to gain understanding of their perspectives of how circumstances developed so that it was no longer possible for children to remain in the home and parents or carers and children become detached from one another. This learning would enable interventions to be developed that respond to parents' needs and are able to effectively focus addressing the issues and dynamics that trigger a child or young person becoming detached and also upon building more positive relationships between parents and carers and their children.

23. As many of the children and young people who participated in the research in a number of locations came from local estates, to achieve full insight into their worlds, it is recommended that action research be carried out in localised areas that includes the participation of local stakeholders including key professionals, community representatives, parents and carers and of course, children and young people.

24. This report ends with the recommendation that a community approach be adopted to care for all children and young people. It is our collective responsibility to address the needs of detached children and young people, to understand them and their worlds and to represent them accurately. Their experiences may be difficult to comprehend and may contradict previous notions of what it means to be a child in the UK but it will only be possible to design and deliver effective responses to their needs when there is understanding of the realities of being detached and on the streets in the UK. Every child matters and these children and young people matter too.

Emilie Smeaton
August 2009

210 Gilligan R (2009) *Promoting Resilience: Supporting children and young people who are in care, adopted or in need* London: British Association for Adoption and Fostering.
211 Fraser M Richman J & Galinsky M (1999) 'Risk, protection and resilience: towards a conceptual framework for social work practice' *Social Work Research* 23 2 131 – 143.