

**POWER  
THE  
FIGHT**



**Cumberland  
Lodge**

# Protecting Young Black Lives, Celebrating Black Professionals

**Report**



# Protecting Young Black Lives, Celebrating Black Professionals

## Author

**Jessica Agboola**

Research Consultant

## Editor

**Professor Carlene Firmin MBE**

**POWER  
THE  
FIGHT**



Contextual  
Safeguarding



Cumberland  
Lodge

# Foreword

What do safe Black professional spaces look like? We spent two years considering this question.

This event, and the report it has produced, was two years in the making. It was born out of trauma. A trauma of being two out of three Black experts in a room of over 45 white professionals who spent three days talking about, and often problematising, the lives of Black children. A trauma that set us on a journey towards a three-day event where we'd be two Black professionals in a room of over 45 of our Black peers; recognising our collective contribution.

As this report demonstrates, there is a major difference when you fill a room with Black professionals. Firstly, our conversations moved quickly beyond the interpersonal violence that had preoccupied the event we attended two years prior. Instead, the concern of participants was principally the systems that Black children encountered, and the harm those systems were causing. Secondly, the emotional toll of the work we all do had space to show itself. Tears were shed, frustrations were aired, and in the process we started to see and articulate what we needed to keep going. And finally, we had the permission and the safety to disagree; to work towards shared goals while acknowledging our roles in realising those goals won't be the same. We know there is more work to do in understanding differences within Black collectives, in order to protect and celebrate the young Black lives that brought us all together.

We are grateful to the funders who worked with us to resource an event that was accessible and authentic. We thank Cumberland Lodge for doing things differently, and for ensuring we could host an event that not only served an all-Black guestlist, but reflected us. We want to recognise the contribution of the planning committee who worked with us to turn a vision of two people into the reality of a collective. And we acknowledge each other – our distinct networks, experiences, and skillsets – which, when brought together, illustrated how two minds are often better than one.

We know this report doesn't mark a full stop. It's a semi-colon on a journey to celebrating Black professionals and protecting the young Black lives we serve. We will work with event participants and our wider networks to pursue every recommendation we make in this report. Combined, they will create the conditions in which Black professionals are seen, valued, and feel safe; with each other, within services, and in the redesign of systems that should protect, rather than harm, young Black lives.

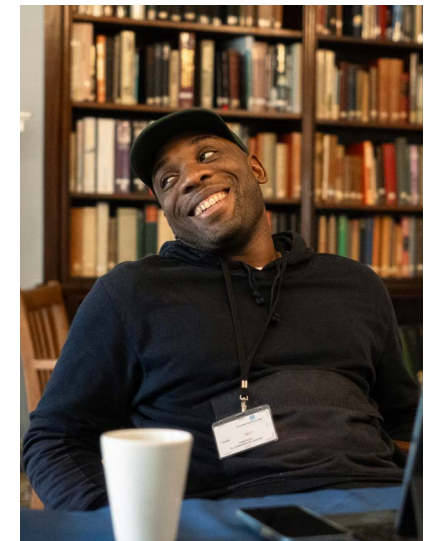
Under the coat of arms of Jamaica are the words: "Out of many, one people". On this retreat we witnessed these words in action.

What do safe Black professional spaces look like?

This.

Thank you for trusting the process.

**Professor Carlene Firmin MBE and Ben Lindsay OBE**



# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Recommendations and insights</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Section 1: Protecting young Black lives</b>	<b>15</b>
Sources and types of harm	16
Contributors of harm	18
<b>Section 2: Celebrating Black professionals</b>	<b>27</b>
Roles and identities	27
Access and belonging	28
Ability to rest and recover	30
Working in safety	32
Building networks	33
Divergence of views	36
<b>Interface</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Section 3: Insights and recommendations</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>49</b>

# Protecting Young Black Lives, Celebrating Black Professionals

## Executive summary

From October 1-3, 2023, the “Protecting Young Black Lives, Celebrating Black Professionals” conference took place at Cumberland Lodge in Windsor, hosted in collaboration with Power the Fight and the Contextual Safeguarding Research Programme at Durham University. The event convened 50 Black professionals who, across a range of sectors and disciplines, play a role in violence reduction. This was the first time Cumberland Lodge had hosted an event for Black professionals, and the first time many participants had been in a Black majority work environment.

The event, and the report it produced, focused on two key matters: issues that currently compromise the safety of Black young people, and the contributions made by Black professionals who are committed to keeping them safe.

## Protecting young Black lives

The range of issues that compromise the safety of Black young people that were discussed at the event included experiences of racism and racial trauma as a safeguarding issue; the impact of COVID on wellbeing and wider mental health needs; schooling and exclusions; the issue of interpersonal violence and its normalisation; and the impact of short-lived funding on young people’s access to sustained support. As such, participants identified factors that created conditions in which harm could occur (or made protection challenging), as well as different sources of harm. For the most part, participants appeared more drawn to discussions of structural or system harm than interpersonal harm, and were keen to get to the root



causes of such harm (such as racism within school policies and procedures) rather than the consequences of such harm (disproportionate exclusion of Black young people from mainstream education).

## **Celebrating Black professionals**

This event built on the extremely limited information about the experiences of Black professionals who play a role in violence reduction in the UK; particularly the seminal report by KIJJI (2021) on a range of challenges that 100 Black professionals faced when seeking to safeguard Black children and families.

The event brought together a vast array of professionals, from different backgrounds and sectors, and with different histories and ways of being involved in violence prevention. Some were mostly concerned with interpersonal violence, others with system violence; some funded responses, others delivered them. As such, participants reflected on how they identified themselves, how others viewed them, and how they viewed each other, and how this mattered for their ability to come together and provide peer support. More broadly, participants reflected on the extent to which they often struggled to access, or felt a sense of belonging in, professional spaces where young Black lives were discussed. Many noted that they had never been to a space like Cumberland Lodge before, or had access to decision-makers or funders in a strategic setting. Moreover, most participants struggled with the conflict of working in or with systems that they sought to reform, but also recognised as currently presenting a risk to Black young people.

Participants used the event to rest and recover, as well as to plan and network. Some found rest a challenge, and many commented on the trauma they experienced in supporting Black young people impacted by racism, in systems and services that were themselves racist. Not only did this compromise their wellbeing, but such experiences sometimes left Black professionals feeling psychologically, emotionally, or relationally unsafe. It became apparent that Black professionals need access to multiple networks of peer support, both within and across disciplines and sectors, to know that they

are not alone, and to work from a position of support and companionship rather than isolation and competition. It was felt that this was possible, including for a group with potentially divergent views, if event participants were given the space to surface points of agreement upon which they could identify shared goals.

## **Working at an interface – creating inclusive and culturally responsive sources of support**

Black young people need access to inclusive and culturally responsive sources of support, and Black professionals need to work in inclusive and culturally responsive spaces through which such support is made possible. An absence of these sources of support poses a risk to both Black young people and the Black professionals who protect them; Black professionals whose contribution needs to be appropriately recognised, valued, and celebrated.



## Recommendations and insights

The event surfaced six insights and associated recommendations, for building on what was shared and what was called for over the three days.

### Insight 1:

It is critical to name racism as a safeguarding issue, and classify its impact on the welfare of Black young people and the Black professionals who support them.

#### To achieve this, we recommend that:

##### The Department for Education recognises racism as a safeguarding issue by:

- coordinating a cross-Government strategy to address the impact of racism on the welfare of children and young people
- reviewing existing cross-Government commitments on extra-familial interpersonal harms to ensure the impact of system/service harm on these issues has been sufficiently considered and addressed.

**Funders** who dedicate resources to promoting the welfare and rights of young people:

- name a commitment to anti-racism in your funding strategies, and illustrate how you intend to fulfil that commitment
- map the extent to which work you have funded to date addresses the safeguarding impacts of racism, and commit to resourcing work in this area in the future
- ensure your commitments to resource anti-racist initiatives are long-term, in recognition of the extended period of time it will likely take to see meaningful and sustained impact.

#### White leaders and employers:

- recognise, in safeguarding policies, procedures, and audits, the impact that racism has on the welfare of Black young people your organisations may serve, and/or the Black employees/volunteers who support them
- resource spaces that Black employees/volunteers identify as safe, including working with external, Black-led organisations, to create opportunities for processing the impact of the work on their individual and collective welfare.

#### Event participants and their Black colleagues:

- take time to reflect on the impact of racism on your welfare, and the welfare of the Black young people you serve, identifying opportunities (or lack thereof) to process this.

### Insight 2:

It is critical to value (and work to nurture) the specific contribution that Black professionals make in safeguarding Black young people.

#### To achieve this, we recommend that:

##### Funders:

- in addition to asking about ethnic breakdown of the staff who work in organisations that you fund, also ask what impact this breakdown has on the ability of a service/organisation to safeguard Black young people.

#### White leaders and employers:

- demonstrate how you value Black employees/volunteers by first asking what that looks like for them, and appropriately following up.

#### Event participants and their Black colleagues:

- regularly share and promote Black professionals' networks
- share case studies of the work undertaken by those who contributed to the event, profiling them on organisational websites, blogs, and via social media.

### Insight 3:

It is essential that we create safe and inclusive services, both for Black young people to access, and for Black professionals to work within.

#### To achieve this we recommend that:

##### Funders and commissioners:

- ask how the organisations you support create safety for Black employees
- ask the organisations that you support to identify risks faced by Black young people, and steps they have taken to mitigate or address these in the delivery of their services.

##### White leaders and employers:

- work to identify processes, practices, or tools that you use, which reinforce bias or discrimination, either towards the young people you support or the professionals you employ. For example, are there ways that Black young people are both hyper-visible in terms of the risks they are thought to pose, but under-recognised in terms of the needs they have, or contributions that they make?
- recognise that racially-marginalised employees may feel or be unsafe in contexts that white employees find to be safe and inclusive
- create a range of avenues through which Black professionals and Black young people can raise issues of racism.

##### Event participants and their Black colleagues:

- recognise the ways in which the systems/services you work in can pose a risk to Black young people, and identify allies in your organisation and networks with whom to discuss any concerns
- consider keeping a diary, or other reflective tool, to process experiences of racism in the organisations that you work.

### Insight 4:

Trauma-informed principles must provide the foundation for service and system design/delivery.

#### To achieve this, we recommend that:

##### The Department for Education:

- reviews policy and guidance in respect to safeguarding young people, to ensure the multiplicity of harms that undermine their welfare have been duly considered.

##### Funders, including Violence Reduction Units:

- ask how services adopt a trauma-informed approach in the ways they support staff as well as young people
- resource responses to harm at multiple levels, not just those caused by interpersonal forms of violence
- ask how services intend to mitigate the potential for system/service harm to Black young people in the process of intervention
- resource clinical supervision for professionals, including specialist supervision for Black professionals where required.

##### White leaders and employers:

- offer to resource reflective spaces with culturally sensitive (potentially external) supervisors where Black professionals can share experiences, challenges, and insights, which is crucial to their ability to decompress from racism
- recognise and value the fact that such contributions to Black professionals enhance their sense of belonging and positively impact their overall wellbeing. This is critical given the challenging nature of not only experiencing racism and/or its effects, but trying to support and advocate for younger people who experience it too.

### **Event participants and their Black colleagues:**

- access, and where possible contribute to, peer support networks, as an important route to providing collective support and/or taking collective action.

### **Insight 5:**

Services to meet the needs of Black young people are under-resourced.

### **To address this we recommend that:**

#### **Funders and commissioners:**

- review whether the interventions/support being resourced matches the needs expressed by Black young people and the professionals who support them; or whether it is more readily informed by national datasets/research that does not necessarily reflect localised need
- consistently ask how service providers know that there is a need for what they offer, and whether this need reflects the populations they will most likely serve.

#### **White leaders and employers:**

- ring-fence resource to address the impacts of racism on Black employees, both in terms of their wellbeing and their progression. Such efforts will contribute to creating sustainable environments in which Black professionals thrive, opposed to the work contexts characterised by precarity and being devalued
- consider whether the interventions you provide to Black young people reflect what they need or what wider systems suggest, and be transparent if you identify a mismatch.

#### **Event participants and their Black colleagues:**

- identify opportunities to pool efforts and expertise to secure larger amounts of investment in Black professionals
- ensure the needs of Black young people are reflected in the work that you do; challenging system narratives or

stereotypes which undermine access to effective service provision.

### **Insight 6:**

■ A need for collective action.

### **To achieve this, we recommend that:**

#### **Funders and commissioners:**

- resource follow-up activities to the first Cumberland Lodge event for Black professionals; including space for sub-groups to pursue specific recommendations, and opportunities to regroup as a wider collective to surface points of disagreement and commonality.

#### **Event participants and their Black colleagues:**

- carve out space to disagree and agree in pursuit of collective goals, providing safe and respectful environments in which to do this.

#### **Policymakers regionally and nationally:**

- recognise that Black professionals, and the young people they serve, are not a monolith, and will share divergent views and experiences. As such it is critical that multiple stakeholders are engaged in policy development activities.



# Introduction

## Background to the event

From October 1-3, 2023, the “Protecting Young Black Lives, Celebrating Black Professionals” conference took place at Cumberland Lodge in Windsor, hosted in collaboration with Power the Fight and the Contextual Safeguarding Research Programme at Durham University.

Power the Fight CEO, Ben Lindsay OBE, and Contextual Safeguarding founder, Professor Carlene Firmin MBE, convened 50 professionals who play a range of roles in violence reduction: from those who fund services and write policies, to those who deliver interventions, advocate for young people harmed through interpersonal violence and/or system harm, or research both violence and system responses. Taking place just days after the tragic killing of 16-year-old Elianne Adams from Croydon, the event’s timing was particularly poignant. Participants unanimously expressed that such a gathering had been long overdue. Power the Fight’s mission to reduce violence impacting young people, and Contextual Safeguarding’s vision of a future where young people feel safe beyond their homes because their communities and child protection systems can, and will, protect them from harm, converged at a highly significant moment (Contextual Safeguarding, 2024).

## Event structure and attendees

The conference took place over two-and-a-half days and included a series of presentations, fireside chats, independent and therapeutic-led reflective sessions, yoga, and poetry. The event featured contributions from Black professionals who seek to prevent violence in community, social work, advocacy, criminal justice, health, education, faith, and wider youth work sectors.

## Report structure

This report provides an account of those contributions, framed with reference to wider literature relevant to those contributions, to help a wide range of organisations and individuals think about their role in protecting young Black lives and celebrating Black professionals.

This is achieved in three parts. Section 1 focuses on Protecting Young Black Lives, and the key issues affecting the welfare and flourishing of Black young people. Section 2 is entitled Celebrating Black Professionals, and highlights the overarching themes impacting Black professionals that were shared at the event. Section 3 concludes the report by offering key insights and recommendations as per the following audiences: policymakers; funders and commissioners; White employers and service leaders, event participants and their Black colleagues.

## Seeking safety for young Black people in the UK: key issues in the research

The Cumberland Lodge event took place following decades of growing concern regarding the welfare of Black children and young people in the UK, the services that exist to protect them, and the under-researched Black professionals who support them. To ensure this report provides a concise account, these key areas are condensed below; for a more in-depth understanding, please refer to the full briefing produced in advance of the event. We framed our discussion of young people’s welfare in respect of “safeguarding”.

We define safeguarding as:

*The measures, policies, and practices that protect and promote individuals’ wellbeing, safety, and rights, particularly those made vulnerable by virtue of their age or ability. It is also prevention of, and protection from, harm caused by systems and services that young people encounter. The topic of safeguarding is vast in that its primary goal is to prevent harm, abuse (including exploitation), and/or neglect, and to ensure that individuals can live free from injury or the threat of harm (Conference Briefing, 2023, 2).*

Children and young people in the UK are exposed to a range of safeguarding risks and harms, both within and external to their families. These include familial child abuse (physical, sexual and/or emotional harm) and neglect; sexual or criminal exploitation by peers and/or adults external to the family home; street-based violence; online grooming and abuse; relationship/dating violence; and institutional harm. When Black children and young people experience these issues, there are multiple additional factors to consider. Their victimisation may be under-recognised; they may be at increased risk of these harms (for example, exposed to street-based violence or exploitation more readily due to being disproportionately excluded from education); or may lack protection when services that have been commissioned fail to reflect their needs and experiences, which is harmful itself.

As such, according to Claudia Bernard and Perlita Harris, Black children and young people are more likely to experience “individual, familial, community and structural factors that increase risks..., reduce their chances of flourishing and which can create stressors for their parents and carers in their dealings with child protection services” (Bernard and Harris, 2016:11). Adverse experiences, including racial discrimination, educational disparities, economic inequity, criminal justice system inequities, health disparities, and exposure to community violence, may all act as stressors; with systemic and structural factors influencing exposure to harm and exacerbating its impact (Bernard, 2020).

## Section 1: Protecting young Black lives



# Section 1: Protecting young Black lives

Scholars and practitioners alike have questioned the value of our state responses to these issues given their negative impact on Black children and their families, including the:

- disproportionate removal of Black children from their families who are placed in the care of the state (DfE 2020; Bernard, 2020; Hunter 2021)
- late or non-diagnosis of neurodiversity or learning needs amongst Black children, impacting their ability to access education (Firmin et al 2021)
- disproportionate exclusion of Black children from UK mainstream education and the so-called “school-to-prison pipeline” that results in their overcriminalisation (Mohdin, 2021; Lammy, 2017)
- treatment of Black young people by the police, including disproportionate and violent experiences of stop and search, and over-monitoring via surveillance, mapping and matrices (Williams, 2018; Connelly, Legane, and Joseph-Salisbury, 2020)
- limited commissioning and funding of services either led by Black professionals and/or designed with the needs of Black children, young people, and families in mind; with a reliance on stereotypes and misinformation sometimes guiding work that is prioritised over work that is needed (Firmin et al, 2021; Bardowell, 2022; Mwale and Williams, 2023).

Such processes have left Black children and young people hyper-visible to punitive practices and under-served in terms of their welfare needs (Davis, 2019; Firmin et al 2021). The devastating impacts of this can be seen in a range of serious case reviews published in recent years; for example the cases of Child C, Child Q, and Child Delta, where all children were subject to adultification (the act of perceiving Black children as older, more mature, or a greater threat than their white peers),

and subsequently did not receive the appropriate care and accommodations they should have had the right to (see event pre-conference briefing for further detail).

Following the welcome from the conference hosts, the opening presentations were delivered by SOLVE CEO, Craig Pinkney, and Professor Claudia Bernard. Their contributions covered a lot of ground in setting the scene for the days that would follow. Topics covered included: **experiences of racism and racial trauma as a safeguarding issue**, the **impact of COVID on wellbeing and wider mental health needs; schooling and exclusions**; the **issue of inter-personal violence and its normalisation**; and the **impact of short-termist funding on young people's access to sustained support** following the killing of George Floyd; matters that were revisited to varying degrees throughout the remainder of the conference.

There were a host of thoughts on systems harms and police brutality; the nature of exclusionary institutions, lack of access to these institutions, and underdeveloped sensitivity to neurodivergence within these spaces. This section captures further discussion had on the various sources of harm, direct experiences of harm, and compounding contributors of harm faced by Black young people that were raised by conference participants.

## Sources and types of harm

### Racism as a safeguarding issue

The need to be specific and **classify experiences of racism and racial trauma as a safeguarding issue** was central to group discussion. The participants unanimously agreed it needed to be classified as such in legislation, policy, and across all social and protective services. One participant stated how this lack of recognition meant young Black people were experiencing “systemic harms and structural harms in social services and spaces where they should be safeguarded” (Conference, 2023).

The group also discussed the **diversity of young Black people** being disproportionately impacted by systemic racism, which in turn impacts their material and social conditions. It was specifically highlighted that Black people are ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse. They have a common set of experiences navigating racism, but within that they also have their own different lived experiences: for example, Somalians and their refugee population; Caribbean experiences of the UK education system; and those who are LGBTQ+ or have neurodiverse needs.

### Welfare post-COVID

In regards to welfare, great concern was expressed over the **unequal impact of COVID-19 on young Black people** and how it will significantly affect their individual wellbeing and resilience in the coming years. Discussion focused on how the pandemic exacerbated the ways that systemic barriers and histories of oppression impact their day-to-day, and thus their experiences of harm. It was highlighted how Black youths are at a higher risk of depression, anxiety, and other **mental health struggles** because of racism as a key factor.

### Disproportionate suspension and exclusion rates

In regards to education, it was mentioned how Black children are losing learning through **suspension and exclusion**. More specifically, how Black Caribbean children were 1.5 times more likely to be suspended than their white British peers, and Black girls were being excluded at alarming rates but invisible amongst these issues too (Agenda Alliance, 2024). Even still, the loss of learning to any child compounds inequalities in the long term and has its own detrimental effects.

### Violence and its normalisation

The group described current affairs as a state of emergency where young Black people's welfare and the welfare of Black professionals safeguarding them was concerned. The **issue of violence and its normalisation** was brought into focus

as a type of harm experienced. Some highlighted how social media and some music encouraged unnecessary violence to become a response to rejection. Participants expanded on this and reflected on how this sense of rejection is intensified by the reduction of real-life interpersonal connections attributed to the prevalence of social media. It was emphasised how the issue of violence could be partially remedied by community-based programmes that focus on developing youth's sense of self; specifically teaching healthier forms of masculinity to young boys, and how it (in)directly affects and reduces harm experienced by young girls.

## Contributors of harm

### Short-termist funding

The challenge of short-termist funding surfaced, emphasising the conflicting objectives inherent in commissioning a programme aimed at enhancing a young person's quality of life, when in actuality, such funding can have counterproductive effects due to its restrictive nature. These funding injections have felt like **short-lived benevolence** and **performative** in the wake of George Floyd's murder, the Black Lives Matter resurgence, and the pandemic. Many participants felt that commitments made in 2020 have not resulted in any progress on them being able to positively influence the outcomes of young Black people, despite their proximity to, and deeper understanding of, them. This has unfortunately created feelings of disempowerment and disillusionment, further contributing to harms at multiple levels of the system.

The influx of short-termist funds post-2020 allocated to specific groups was discussed. Specifically, how, according to one participant, it has inadvertently led to increased competition among organisations, highlighting the absence of a unifying political analysis. The confluence of trauma and scarcity of resources within individuals and organisations has further complicated these dynamics, leading to divergent

perspectives even within the same cause. The participants discussed how the absence of a political analysis has meant that discussions often revolve around individual analyses rather than a shared collective understanding. In summary, the discussions simply acknowledged that longer programmes and sustained engagements are more beneficial than short-term, minoritised funding when seeking the welfare of young Black people.

### Non-inclusive education environments for Black young people

When discussing the area of education, conference attendees stressed the critical need to **name the racism experienced by Black people as a type of racism based upon anti-blackness**. This entails acknowledging and rectifying systemic, institutional, interpersonal, and internal racism that permeates the educational landscape. A failure to do otherwise would contribute to harms experienced by young Black people and those taking care of them.

A participant attributed this to the lack of care and humility in educational institutions. They reflected and said: "school knows what it is. It's upholding certain systems. The education system doesn't humble itself. It doesn't love us. It doesn't love us because it doesn't seek to know us." The participants painfully reflected on the **competing ideologies** between the **education system**, **"deeply rooted in a white supremacist paradigm"**, and the **genuine needs of Black students**. An example of these competing ideologies is that between the education and criminal justice system uncovered in MP David Lammy's review. Following the release of the report, Lammy is noted to have said: "the relationship between pupil referral units and the criminal justice system has become symbiotic, and the rise of exclusions is creating a pipeline of young people into our prison system." The review also revealed that Black pupils from Caribbean backgrounds are still significantly overrepresented in pupil referral units compared to how many of them are in mainstream school. Although the Lammy Review was published in 2017, the report content still resonated with



many participants who shared experiences of being blocked in their efforts to create an inclusive education environment for young Black people.

Interestingly, the disproportionate exclusions of Black young people from mainstream education were not directly discussed in main group discussions. This may have been due to the commonplace understanding participants have of this issue by virtue of this being their area of expertise. Another area that could have been explored more was young Black people placed in the care of the state, but it is possible this was not deeply explored due to factors such as participant familiarity, or even timing restraints on conference formatting. What that meant was we could focus our energies on the structural and systemic drivers of harm within education, of which exclusions was one consequence. As such, conference participants focused on the root causes of the harms faced by Black young people, rather than the symptoms of such harm.

The imperative for transformative change in education was the focus of conference discussions. Attendees stressed the urgency of removing existing systems that reinforce inequality, and replacing them with frameworks that actively combat racism. Initiatives such as **designing anti-racist syllabi, co-creating curricula, diversifying teaching staff, and fostering a culture of inclusivity within educational institutions** were proposed as essential steps towards creating an environment that truly understands and values Black young people.



Additionally, the conference discussions underscored the **latent and underutilised power that teachers hold** in shaping the educational experiences of young Black students for good. One participant said:

“*Teachers don’t know what they could be, and I think we’re at the endpoint where the teachers don’t know what they are... We are where the tyres meet the tarmac in terms of social justice. We are the eyes and ears with new generations that we don’t get. So, teachers have a vital role to play in creating safety. And the first thing that teachers need to be is humble and to learn.*”

This statement highlights the transformative potential embedded in the teacher-student relationship, and the crucial role teachers play in fostering a safe and inclusive educational space if empowered to. The emphasis on humility and continuous learning serves as a call to action for educators to actively engage with anti-racist pedagogy and training, understanding the unique challenges faced by Black students, and incorporating diverse perspectives into their teaching methodologies.

The discourse at the conference also delved into the critical importance of **representation and buy-in from those holding positional power within the education system**. Recognising the influential role that parent/guardian representation on the board of school governors plays; diverse representation and cultural sensitivity on senior leadership teams; and a headteacher who understands that systemic racism exists and actively partners with their staff to safeguard children against it. In particular, participants reflected on the exhausting and losing battle it was to be in a school with a headteacher where “racism was still up for debate.” Such an environment, according to the participants, perpetuates the already huge risks of Black children being impacted by racism in school. The sentiments from this topic were that representation amongst/buy-in from those with positional power is essential. Without diverse voices at the decision-making table, systemic change remains elusive

and Black students remain at risk of the odds of compounding inequalities stacked against them. These insights highlight the necessity of fostering a more inclusive leadership structure within education, where Black teachers and safeguarding professionals contribute to the formulation and implementation of policies that directly impact Black students.

Ultimately, this part of the conference underscored the importance of aligning the ethos, aims, and ideologies among the education system, educational and safeguarding professionals, and Black students, to foster their flourishing in supportive environments.

### **Limited and compromised access to services and movements**

Discussion was had on governance and scaling organisations and movements supporting Black young people, and the impact this had on their ability to access services that met their needs. Discussions included attempts to distinguish between scaling movements and scaling organisations, and the role that each could play in supporting young Black people: **scaling a movement** necessitating vertical partnerships, shared guiding principles, and mutually established operations and accountability points, and **scaling an organisation** involving the challenge of growing a budget, a task often dependent on engagement with white-led institutions. There were divergent thoughts on this topic, but the participants emphasised the desire to expand their efforts to increase overall impact for the youth. The intricacies of how to achieve this varied and were left under-explored due to time constraints.

The conversation did bring to light the nuanced process of scaling a movement. Unlike organisations, movements may not entirely rely on external funders, nor do they adhere to the same structural frameworks. The transformative power of a movement lies in its ability to generate a groundswell of action from diverse sources, with individuals coalescing around a shared cause. The dialogue attempted to highlight that movements have the potential to transcend organisational structures, allowing for a dynamic and inclusive approach to addressing issues affecting Black young people, but it was

evident that a greater investment of time would be needed to think through this topic more thoroughly.

The upside of merely having the discussion was that it revealed the importance of differentiating between scaling movements and scaling organisations. While organisations may grapple with the challenges of financial growth and engagement with external entities, movements thrive on collaboration, shared principles, and the collective power of diverse individuals. The dialogue appeared to be the start of a conversation and effort that acknowledges the diverse approaches needed to support young Black people comprehensively.

Participants highlighted the difficulty in achieving financial growth necessary to increase impact on young Black people because of the dependency that is created between them and white-led organisations and funds. For many, this dependency posed unique challenges for organisations seeking expansion, because it depended on the volatile perception of how much efforts supporting young Black people need. On multiple occasions participants revisited a crucial question of whether organisations might reinforce stereotypes or fail to meet the actual needs of Black young people when they adopt outcome metrics favoured by white-led institutions, organisations, and evaluation methods. As such, we were left wondering if there was room or appetite for those delivering such services to measure their value outside of these pre-defined structures, and in direct collaboration with Black young people, their families and wider communities. The conversation prompted an exploration of whether the focus should be on changing the behaviour of Black youth to align with the expectations of larger commissioning bodies, or whether efforts should concentrate on transforming the conditions in which these behaviours manifest. These critical questions brought to light the challenges faced by organisations in determining the metrics for success, and the impact of their work on the lives of Black young people. It is notable that a lot of what was discussed at the event in terms of service support and education provision was at the level of system harm rather than interpersonal

violence. This illustrates the earlier point about racism being a safeguarding issue.

The dialogue further delved into the dynamics of delivery and funding sources, illustrating the pressures faced by organisations to align with the language, outcome measures, and expectations of UK commissioners. The conversation introduced an alternative perspective – **measuring differently**. While outcome measurements are significantly under-researched, concern about the impact of neoliberal and individualised frameworks for monitoring issues driven by contextual and structural factors is increasing (Firmin et al, 2023). A Contextual Safeguarding approach aims to consider this and “come as close as possible” to a measurement that “works across individual and system levels” (Firmin et al, 2023: 152). This approach to outcome measurement suggests that “outcomes should aim to change the social conditions of abuse” (Firmin et al, 2023: 154). Crime, for instance, can be reduced through environmental interventions *and* “increase feelings of safety or consider broader social, cultural, and systemic factors behind crime and safety” in these metrics (Pain, 2000 in Firmin et al, 2023). Whilst it is tempting to allow service priorities of the funding bid to dictate success as the number of programmes delivered, a Contextual Safeguarding approach to “outcome measurement prioritises safety of the young people affected” (Firmin et al, 2023: 156). This means that metrics may well be informed by the beneficiaries of the service, guardians, those delivering the service, and those resourcing it. This was a perspective discussed by those at the conference and challenges the conventional model of commissioning, fostering a more precise, multi-stakeholder and whole-systems evaluation of the issue being measured.

It is worth noting that a lot of what was discussed at the event in terms of service support and provision was at the level of system harm rather than interpersonal harms, violence or tension. This illustrates the earlier point about racism itself being a safeguarding issue. An area that, if addressed, would reduce the symptomatic issues one could argue are being experienced and captured in this very report.

## Section 2: Celebrating Black professionals



## Section 2: Celebrating Black professionals

Research on the experiences of Black professionals involved in violence prevention in the UK is extremely limited. The seminal report produced by KIJJI, a membership organisation for “Black safeguarding professionals” (BSP), used online survey results from 100 Black safeguarding professionals from a range of sectors, including children’s social care, education, and organisations specialising in “Violence Against Women & Girls”, “Serious Youth Violence” (SYV), and parent support, to identify a range of challenges that Black professionals face when seeking to safeguard Black children and families. Respondents principally described the absence of fair and equal progression opportunities, and barriers imposed by ethnicity-based discrimination. For example, a lack of Black senior leaders across a range of sectors involved in safeguarding, from social care to policing, was noted. They also noted the lack of spaces in which to safely discuss and address experiences of racism – an issue confirmed and discussed in a small number of other publications (i.e. Gov.uk, 2017; Firmin et al. 2021; Reid and Maclean, 2021).

### Roles and identities

“ I’m an activist, that’s what I am.

During the course of the conference, the term “professionals” was queried. Some identified more with terms such as “activist”, “community leader”, or “practitioner”, given the connotations of professionalism emitting feelings of exclusivity and class differences. While there was no conclusion to this topic, it was noted by many, including the conference organisers.



One thread explored by all participants was the role of Black leadership. A nuanced perspective emerged that shed light on both the advantages and challenges they face in their roles. The reality and cost of navigating “multiple truths” was acknowledged, for instance, being “in the system but not necessarily of the system”. The discussion also emphasised the double bind that Black leaders often find themselves in; working twice as hard against a doubly-thick ceiling. This entails the continuous effort to code-switch; navigating complex dynamics and the constantly changing political will and financial appetites towards the safeguarding of Black youth.

This section highlights the emotional toll of such efforts, illuminating the need for support networks at both junior and senior levels. These networks become essential not only as a means of navigating the challenges posed by the double bind, but also as a source of resilience and solidarity.

## Access and belonging



We’re navigating multiple truths here.

On the theme of access and belonging experienced by the participants, the topic of navigating “multiple truths” re-emerged. Participants discussed the complexity and isolating effect they experience occupying what social theorist Patricia-Hill Collins (2000) describes as an “insider-outsider status” within the systems they navigate. While not explicitly articulated in those words, participants acknowledged the intricacies of their position, grappling with the dichotomy of being both part of the system and, at times, feeling like outsiders. One participant astutely recognised the limitations of adopting a reformist or conformist stance, emphasising the critical need for sensitivity to their complicity if resourced by the system. This recognition is particularly challenging, as it demands an immediate and nuanced analysis of one’s own position within the system. Acknowledging this dual role,

where they both receive resources from, and seek to reform or conform to the system, adds layers of complexity to their professional identity.

Moreover, this insider-outsider status significantly impacts the sense of belonging that Black professionals feel at work, especially when they feel disempowered to instigate meaningful change. The realisation that their affiliation with the system may implicate them in its shortcomings creates a complex dynamic that can lead to feelings of frustration and disconnection. The struggle to reconcile their commitment to safeguarding with the constraints of the system underscores the emotional toll on these professionals. These reflections highlight the need for proactive development of support mechanisms to navigate the nuanced challenges of their roles, fostering a sense of belonging that empowers them to advocate for meaningful change within the systems they operate. In terms of violence prevention, this network of services and systems is vast, for example: Black professionals involved in the assessment of Black parents/carers via social care, the criminalisation of Black children in policing and youth justice organisation, educating (and, as noted above, sometimes excluding) Black students in schools, funding services for Black children in grant-making organisations, and assessing the wellbeing of Black children in mental health services. To differing extents, all of these services have the potential to, and do, cause harm to Black children, by employing labels and individualised mechanisms to intervene with their behaviours and/or assess their progress. When we work in these systems, and/or adopt these features of how they are delivered, we legitimise them and, in the process, risk causing harm to young people we seek to protect.

The theme of **resistance** emerged in discussions, with a call to shift the narrative from solely focusing on trauma to also celebrating Black joy, strength, and resilience within themselves. Participants recognised the destructive impact of individualism on their community, and discussed the importance of fostering a sense of collective responsibility. The feeling of loneliness among professionals was also addressed,



with individuals sharing personal experiences of grappling with authenticity, and the challenges of doing extra emotional and psychological work to navigate their roles and create spaces of belonging for themselves, such as affinity groups and requesting supervisions. The conference itself served as a space for celebration and affirmation, providing a rare occasion for the participants to feel truly seen and supported. This was deeply appreciated by the participants, with some saying an empowering experience like this was a first for them. The recognition of suppressed emotions and the affirmation of belonging within the conference community became essential elements in fostering a sense of liberation and camaraderie among attendees.

The conference space over the days allowed for the formation of meaningful relationships among the participants. These relationships focused not only on the things that need to change, but also started a conversation on the various ways all those present may continue to support one another.

## Ability to rest and recover

“ This work requires you to be superhuman.

As the conference unfolded, the pervasive reality for Black safeguarding professionals became apparent – **an inability to fully disconnect and rest**. Despite the immersive experience, numerous participants found themselves working late into the evening, supporting their teams, and addressing pressing issues on live cases. The weariness expressed by many was palpable, a sentiment exacerbated by the constant demand to hold things together within their teams and workplaces. This exhaustion was not just physical, but extended to their internal states, reflecting the emotional toll of navigating their day-to-day lives within their workplaces even when they were not there. The weekend encapsulated the struggle of being fully present, both physically and emotionally, as these participants grappled

with the need to constantly navigate spaces that often caused grief and pain, as well as a great sense of responsibility to alleviate it. It seemed as though the participants wielded a double-edged sword that seemed to liberate others and, at times, simultaneously still entrap them. Dialogue and activity around self-care and healing was enabled, and participants benefited from the importance of practices like yoga and creative release in poetry seminars as a means to address their mental and emotional wellbeing. However, it was very apparent that many participants felt stretched by structural, interpersonal, and personal levers, reducing their ability to disconnect.

Participants highlighted the occasional intensity of the conference, with some expressing overwhelm and being triggered. The demands of the schedule, coupled with the emotional weight of discussions, left many desiring more rest and recovery that they hoped they could experience in the time they carved out at the conference. However, some side-conversations reflected on the limitations of a 2.5-day conference in providing the commensurate degree of rest needed from a systemic racism.

The participants' desire for deep and regular rest necessitates spaces that promote not only professional development, but also genuine rest and recovery for Black safeguarding professionals.



## Working in safety

The participants discussed that they and other professionals often find themselves grappling with a profound lack of psychological safety within their professional spheres, where the risks associated with raising critical issues concerning Black youth wellbeing are palpable. According to the participants, the systemic racism embedded in these environments has created an atmosphere that undervalues and marginalises their perspectives. These professionals face the daunting prospect of jeopardising their employment security should they speak out on issues that are crucial to the wellbeing of Black youth, many said. The very systems designed to ensure the welfare of vulnerable populations often fall short in recognising and addressing the nuanced challenges faced by Black communities. KIJIJI's report documented that almost half of Black safeguarding professionals present in their study said they lack fair and equal opportunities to progress in the workplace, specifically those in children's social care.

The fear of professional repercussions acts as a significant barrier, impeding open dialogue and inhibiting the candid discussion of systemic issues affecting Black youth. The lack of psychological safety hinders the ability of BSPs to advocate effectively for the changes necessary to uplift their communities. Furthermore, they discussed the space to test ideas or try something new as a rarely afforded opportunity. The demand for a pre-existing track record and often unpaid efforts further compounds the difficulty of introducing innovative approaches to address systemic issues.

This challenge is further exacerbated by a broader societal failure to acknowledge the unique struggles and concerns of Black individuals within youth-facing organisations. Breaking down these barriers requires a fundamental shift in organisational cultures, fostering an environment where professionals feel secure in expressing their perspectives and raising critical issues without fear of retribution. Many participants raised critical questions about the sustainability of their work in what can feel like a hostile working environment.

The need for deliberate spaces where individuals can openly discuss insecurities, expectations, and failures was raised. But so was recognition and action from the institution to create these systems for them as employees.

Participants also highlighted that organisations supporting Black youth often face heightened scrutiny compared to their white-led counterparts, despite receiving smaller amounts of funding. What was particularly discussed was the scrutiny and condition attached to funding bids and tenders that also limit scaling of organisations and their impact, given the much smaller resources Black-led organisations work with. The emotional and psychological toll professionals face, meeting these expectations and dealing with constraints like staffing, highlights the necessity for a funding landscape that is more equitable. This landscape should recognise the unique challenges of organisations supporting Black young people and acknowledge the value they bring to their communities.

## Building networks

“ One of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone (hooks, 2014:227).

The topic of building networks for Black professionals was approached in multiple ways. The overarching mandate, however, was, unsurprisingly, partnership across difference. Partnership between Black men and women, across generations and socio-economic class and more, was discussed. A multifaceted approach is crucial, drawing upon diverse resources and avenues for collaboration. Many participants commented on the vast array of sectors and positions represented at the event, and how critical it was that this variety was maintained in any future network building.

How to use this difference was described in a range of ways. For example, one participant noted the Black middle class leveraging their capacity and resources to support their working-class counterpart. Another participant noted how they would like to see the same applying to Black men sharing their privilege with Black women. The discussion shone a light on how an intentional collaboration can play a pivotal role in addressing systemic challenges faced by the community. Additionally, collaborating with religious communities was named as a strategic avenue for the participants building networks, recognising the influential role these spaces play in fostering community cohesion and support in society.

Many participants also called for the recognition that a young person's local community contributes to the safeguarding effort. A participant said that "our [safeguarding] network is made up of parents, families, taxi drivers, barbers, butchers, and newsagents." The discussion highlighted that the pivotal role each one plays in the safeguarding ecosystem is essential for holistic and community-driven approaches (Contextual Safeguarding, 2023). It was also discussed that the police's primary role is enforcement, not prevention, emphasising the need for community-led initiatives that focus on proactive measures where there is trust.

One proposal suggests bringing all statutory services and community organisations under one consortium. While this approach holds potential for enhanced coordination, the tension lies in the differing ideologies that various groups may bring to the table. Managing these ideological differences becomes critical for effective collaboration.

The need for a robust infrastructure to navigate future crises or opportunities is underscored as a critical imperative within the Black safeguarding professional community. It was discussed that the momentum of moments such as the Black Lives Matter resurgence in 2020 could have been engaged with differently. The participants reflected on politics and the value of coalition-oriented, long-term thinking, and the need to establish a framework that ensures readiness for the next crisis between themselves. This discussion resurfaced earlier points made

about political analysis being key to whatever structures are built. Participants also emphasised that shared values must supersede individualism, recognising that the strategy of division can be weaponised to stall progress. The ultimate call was for a strategic and collective effort to overcome divisions and build a network that is resilient, inclusive, and aligned in its commitment to safeguarding Black communities.

The importance of pace, care, and peer support as values within this network and ecosystem was also raised. Participants reinforced statements made earlier around the isolating and mentally taxing experience of being a Black professional involved in safeguarding youth. One participant shared a personal testament to the power of peer support during a crisis, highlighting the speed and depth of support received from fellow Black CEOs within a matter of days. The ability to reach out and share vulnerabilities without fear of judgment or exposure emphasises the critical role that peer-to-peer support plays in ensuring the wellbeing and resilience of those leading safeguarding initiatives. Creating spaces for these conversations, whether formal or informal, becomes a fundamental component of a network and ultimately racial justice ecosystem, acknowledging the diverse needs and preferences within the community. As these conversations evolve, there is a growing recognition that such spaces provide essential support and understanding for those who may be hesitant or reluctant to share their experiences, fostering a sense of collective strength and resilience within the Black safeguarding professional community.

The conference discussions also emphasised the role of **collective action** and building a united front to influence positional power within various sectors. Participants acknowledged that achieving systemic change requires collaboration. Recognising that individuals may face challenges in isolation, the idea of building alliances and coalitions was emphasised to amplify different voices in Black communities and effect meaningful change for, and with, young Black people.

Participants also expressed a shared sentiment that the nature of their work tends to be more reactive than they desire, given

the prevailing state of emergency in their communities. They highlighted the multifaceted constraints that impede their ability to proactively address the challenges at hand. This can also be seen in the overview of themes outlined prior to this section. They reflected on the delicate balance between responding to immediate crises and laying the groundwork for long-term systemic change through intentional partnership. Despite this, it was agreed that there was a mutual need for relationships, both informally and formally.

## Divergence of views

The conference was opened with ground rules to “elegantly challenge” one another when a differing point of view may arise. Some areas of diverging views revisited the topic of governance and scaling organisations and movements.

The discussion on funding and delivery methods was marked by a lack of consensus, reflecting the intricate challenges faced by Black professionals addressing diverse issues. Beyond financial considerations and service delivery constraints, the conversation implicitly explored abolitionist, reformist, and conformist engagements in social change amongst Black practitioners and professionals. While not explicitly named, these perspectives emerged organically as contributors discussed their methods, aiming to safeguard young Black people. The report’s reflective space illuminates the diversity of standpoints, with some advocating for transformative change (abolitionist), others pursuing incremental improvements (reformist), and some adhering to existing structures (conformist). Key questions were asked, such as “are you providing the service that they [young Black people] need if you align yourself to institutions that some of us think are harmful?”. The debate underscored ethical dilemmas around aligning with institutions perceived as harmful, prompting crucial questions about the services provided and their impact on the wellbeing of the individuals being served.

It seemed that participants generally leaned towards a reformist perspective, with some aligning more with abolitionist or conformist views. However, a deeper conversation is necessary to identify optimal strategies for supporting and meeting the needs of Black people, clarifying specific roles and responsibilities within this context, and this was expressed in the discussion.

The group also attempted to discuss the misalignment internal and external to Black communities. However, many discussion points that were raised in line with this theme could have benefited from more time, and the critical action point for a deeper political analysis underpinning the work and perspectives of the participants. Spaces like the ones the conference held were noted by participants to have been historically destabilised by external forces. But it was acknowledged that they provide an essential platform for working through differences, putting perspectives on the table, and collectively discussing the politics that underpin their work. The intentional act of creating these spaces is recognised as both a political and impactful endeavour, allowing participants to navigate the challenges of misalignment both within their organisations and in response to external pressures.





## Interface

### **Who will protect young Black people and celebrate Black professionals? A culturally responsive workforce**

The issues facing Black young people and the Black professionals who support them meet at an interface, and that interface is the extent to which service environments are inclusive and culturally responsive.

Black professionals are well placed to support young Black people, including recognising and understanding the different ways young Black people articulate their own experiences of racism. To do so, however, requires a workforce with a healthy degree of racial literacy and cultural sensitivity. Small studies in this field have found that many professionals are able to describe racism as a feature of safeguarding practices but are unable to name it as such (Firmin et al, 2021); they can “describe the shame and broader damaging impacts of racism ... as something that happens between people, a relational issue that affects Black young men, rather than something that may also be driven/caused/enabled by organisations or broader structures” (Firmin et al. 2021: 11).

Conversations at the Cumberland Lodge event surfaced similar tensions, and the limited working contexts in which Black professionals feel safe to raise and address these core issues. The absence of a racial analysis, or the lack of space to develop one, poses a huge risk to both the wellbeing of young Black people and Black professionals.

## **Section 3: Insights and recommendations**





## Section 3: Insights and recommendations

The conference, much like the green pastures it was held on, can be seen as a fertile space for the continuation of these conversations and further action. The potential for a coordinated strategy as a collective is acknowledged, providing many opportunities.

The section below identifies what this might look like for those partaking in the effort to protect young Black lives and celebrate Black professionals.

### Insight 1

It is critical to name racism as a safeguarding issue, and classify its impact on the welfare of Black young people and the Black professionals who support them.

It is notable that whether it was talking about the safety of Black young people at schools or in their local neighbourhoods, conference participants tended to focus far more on the impact of systems harms than interpersonal ones. Indeed, the professionals repeatedly reflected on the extent to which racism within systems/services created the conditions in which interpersonal harms were possible and/or disproportionately experienced by Black young people. As such, we conclude that in order to mitigate or resolve the harms Black young people face, racism must be classified as a safeguarding issue.

#### **To facilitate this, we recommend that:**

##### **The Department for Education recognises racism as a safeguarding issue by:**

- coordinating a cross-Government strategy to address the impact of racism on the welfare of children and young people

- reviewing existing cross-Government commitments on extra-familial interpersonal harms to ensure the impact of system/service harm on these issues has been sufficiently considered and addressed.

**Funders** who dedicate resources to promoting the welfare and rights of young people:

- name a commitment to anti-racism in your funding strategies, and illustrate how they intend to fulfil that commitment
- map the extent to which work you have funded to date addresses the safeguarding impacts of racism, and commit to resourcing work in this area in the future
- ensure your commitments to resource anti-racist initiatives are long-term, in recognition of the extended period of time it will likely take to see meaningful and sustained impact.

**White leaders and employers:**

- recognise, in safeguarding policies, procedures, and audits, the impact that racism has on the welfare of Black young people your organisations may serve, and/or the Black employees/volunteers who support them
- resource spaces that Black employees/volunteers identify as safe, including working with external, Black-led organisations, to create opportunities for processing the impact of the work on their individual and collective welfare.

**Event participants and their Black colleagues:**

- take time to reflect on the impact of racism on your welfare, and the welfare of the Black young people you serve, identifying opportunities (or lack thereof) to process this.

## Insight 2

It is critical to value (and work to nurture) the specific contribution that Black professionals make in safeguarding Black young people.

The conversations that took place during the Cumberland Lodge event were different to those which often occur at

events focused on safeguarding, violence, or harm. As noted elsewhere, a dominant focus on the risks posed by systems/ services emerged amongst a group of participants who themselves were navigating harms that Black young people also experienced. The varied ways in which Black professionals encounter racism, and the ways that this shaped their approach to supporting young people, appears to be under-valued and often unrecognised.

**To address this, we recommend that:**

**Funders:**

- in addition to asking about ethnic breakdown of the staff who work in organisations that you fund, also ask what impact this breakdown has on the ability of a service/ organisation to safeguard Black young people.

**White leaders and employers:**

- demonstrate how you value Black employees/volunteers by first asking what that looks like for them, and appropriately following up.

**Event participants and their Black colleagues:**

- regularly share and promote Black professionals' networks
- share case studies of the work undertaken by those who contributed to the event, profiling them on organisational websites, blogs, and via social media.

## Insight 3

It is essential that we create safe and inclusive services, both for Black young people to access and for Black professionals to work within.

Event participants discussed various ways in which Black young people are unsafe in the services they access, or in their interactions with systems. This type of risk can accelerate, or facilitate, young people's exposure to various forms of interpersonal harm and/or reduce their access to protection.

Black professionals also feel, and are, psychologically or relationally unsafe in various professional settings; particularly settings that pose a risk to Black young people. This lack of safety undermines the ability of Black professionals to safeguard the young people they support. Safe and inclusive services for Black professionals can therefore in turn create the conditions in which Black young people can safely access support.

### **For this to be possible, we recommend that:**

#### **Funders and commissioners:**

- ask how the organisations you support create safety for Black employees
- ask the organisations that you support to identify risks faced by Black young people, and steps they have taken to mitigate or address these in the delivery of their services.

#### **White leaders and employers:**

- work to identify processes, practices, or tools that you use, which reinforce bias or discrimination, either towards the young people you support or the professionals you employ. For example, are there ways that Black young people are both hyper-visible in terms of the risks they are thought to pose, but under-recognised in terms of the needs they have, or contributions that they make?
- recognise that racially-marginalised employees may feel or be unsafe in contexts that white employees find to be safe and inclusive
- create a range of avenues through which Black professionals and Black young people can raise issues of racism.

#### **Event participants and their Black colleagues:**

- recognise the ways in which the systems/services you work in can pose a risk to Black young people, and identify allies in your organisation and networks with whom to discuss any concerns

- consider keeping a diary, or other reflective tool, to process experiences of racism in the organisations that you work.

## **Insight 4**

■ Trauma-informed principles must provide the foundation for service and system design/delivery.

Young people's experiences of harm are complex and multi-layered. During the Cumberland Lodge event, participants discussed the risks of interpersonal violence between young people, young people being groomed by peers or adults, mental ill-health, the legacy of COVID, and system harms such as school exclusions and policing. Services need to recognise the multiplicity of harms that Black young people endure rather than silo them, how they experienced them, their sources, and the cumulative trauma that this all presents. In addition, Black professionals have been traumatised in the process of providing support; both in terms of the systems/services they work within, and the impact of those systems on young Black lives. As a result, it is critical that all organisations involved in serving and supporting young people take a trauma-informed approach, not only to their practice but to the design and delivery of the systems in which practice takes place.

### **To achieve this, we recommend that:**

#### **The Department for Education:**

- reviews policy and guidance in respect to safeguarding young people, to ensure the multiplicity of harms that undermine their welfare have been duly considered.

#### **Funders, including Violence Reduction Units:**

- ask how services adopt a trauma-informed approach in the ways they support staff as well as young people
- resource responses to harm at multiple levels, not just those caused by interpersonal forms of violence

- ask how services intend to mitigate the potential for system/service harm to Black young people in the process of intervention
- resource clinical supervision for professionals, including specialist supervision for Black professionals where required.

#### **White leaders and employers:**

- offer to resource reflective spaces with culturally sensitive (potentially external) supervisors where Black professionals can share experiences, challenges, and insights, which is crucial to their ability to decompress from racism
- recognise and value the fact that such contributions to Black professionals enhance their sense of belonging and positively impact their overall wellbeing. This is critical given the challenging nature of not only experiencing racism and/or its effects, but trying to support and advocate for younger people who experience it too.

#### **Event participants and their Black colleagues:**

- access, and where possible contribute to, peer support networks, as an important route to providing collective support and/or taking collective action.

## **Insight 5**

Services to meet the needs of Black young people are under-resourced.

Financing and resourcing efforts to sustainably eliminate the consequences of racism was a key thread throughout the conference. Both financial and non-financial resources were needed but felt scarce, even though some argued that resources were available, just not accessible to the Black professionals who needed them.

## **To address this, we recommend that:**

#### **Funders and commissioners:**

- review whether the interventions/support being resourced matches the needs expressed by Black young people and the professionals who support them; or whether it is more readily informed by national datasets/research that does not necessarily reflect localised need
- consistently ask how service providers know that there is a need for what they offer, and whether this need reflects the populations they will most likely serve.

#### **White leaders and employers:**

- ring-fence resource to address the impacts of racism on Black employees, both in terms of their wellbeing and their progression. Such efforts will contribute to creating sustainable environments in which Black professionals thrive, opposed to the work contexts characterised by precarity and being devalued
- consider whether the interventions you provide to Black young people reflect what they need or what wider systems suggest, and be transparent if you identify a mismatch.

#### **Event participants and their Black colleagues:**

- identify opportunities to pool efforts and expertise to secure larger amounts of investment in Black professionals
- ensure the needs of Black young people are reflected in the work that you do; challenging system narratives or stereotypes which undermine access to effective service provision.

## **Insight 6**

A need for collective action.

The Cumberland Lodge event demonstrated the benefits of providing a safe space for Black professionals to come together. There is much that we share, but also points where



our experiences or views diverge. It is critical that further time is invested to identify common goals or objectives, amidst points of disagreement, to clear a path to pursue collective ambitions for Black young people and the Black professionals who support them.

### **As such, we recommend that:**

#### **Funders and commissioners:**

- resource follow-up activities to the first Cumberland Lodge event for Black professionals; including space for sub-groups to pursue specific recommendations, and opportunities to regroup as a wider collective to surface points of disagreement and commonality.

#### **Event participants and their Black colleagues:**

- carve out space to disagree and agree in pursuit of collective goals, providing safe and respectful environments in which to do this.

#### **Policymakers regionally and nationally:**

- recognise that Black professionals, and the young people they serve, are not a monolith, and will share divergent views and experiences. As such it is critical that multiple stakeholders are engaged in policy development activities.

## References

Agboola, J (2023). *Conference Briefing: Protecting Young Black Lives, Celebrating Black Professionals*. London: Cumberland Lodge & Power The Fight. Available at: <https://www.cumberlandlodge.ac.uk/resource/protecting-young-black-lives-briefing/>

Agenda Alliance (2024). New figures show school exclusions for Black Caribbean Girls are rising again. Available at: <https://www.agendaalliance.org/news/school-exclusions-black-caribbean-girls/> (Accessed: 27 March 2024).

Bardowell, D. (2022) *Giving Back: How to Do Good, Better* London: Dialogue Books

hooks, b. (2014) *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*

Bernard, C. (2020) *Understanding the lived experiences of black and ethnic minority children and families*. Darlington: Research in Practice

Bernard, C and Harris, P. (2016), *Safeguarding Black children: Good Practice in Child Protection*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Brown L., Solarin A., and Charles, K. (2021) Opportunities and Support for Black Safeguarding Professionals. KIJJI. Available at: [https://wixlabs-pdf-dev.appspot.com/assets/pdfjs/web/viewer.html?file=%2Fpdfproxy%3Finstance%3DRG6YuUf0Tqd pKjXiLynd7LKoWjDnarPQ6o3E-M9ywTY.eyJpbnN0YW5jZUlkj oiNDzkMDc3YmMtYzUyNS00Yjk5LThiYTmtNWVmNDhjZjZMT I5liwiYXBwRGVmSWQiOilxM2VIMTBhMy1Y2I5LTdlZmYtNDI5O C1kMmY5ZjM0YWNmMGQiLCJtZXRhU2I0ZUIkjoizGY0ZmJm NTEtMmYzNi00N2lwLTk2YzEtY2JiNjRlZjg1MjllkIiwic2lnbkRhdG UjOiilyMDI0LTA0LTA5VDE2OjlyOjA0Ljg1NVoiLCJkZW1vTW9kZ Sl6ZmFsc2UsImFpZCI6IjZIMDY4NGYzLThiNWMtNGRIMC1hMz NkLWUyZjg4MDDlMTgzZCI6ImJpVG9rZW4iOiI5OTImYzhlZC1Y TEzLTBjMjktMWQ2Mi05NTQyYzlwYTYzYjQiLCJzaXRIT3duZXJ JZCI6ImQzOWlxMDQ1LThiMzEtNDgwYy05ZTE0LTg0NDQwOG ZIMjY5YyJ9%26compId%3Dcomp-kk8zhcge%26url%3Dhttps %3A%2F%2Fdocs.wixstatic.com%2Fugd%2Fd39b10\\_9ea8779](https://wixlabs-pdf-dev.appspot.com/assets/pdfjs/web/viewer.html?file=%2Fpdfproxy%3Finstance%3DRG6YuUf0Tqd pKjXiLynd7LKoWjDnarPQ6o3E-M9ywTY.eyJpbnN0YW5jZUlkj oiNDzkMDc3YmMtYzUyNS00Yjk5LThiYTmtNWVmNDhjZjZMT I5liwiYXBwRGVmSWQiOilxM2VIMTBhMy1Y2I5LTdlZmYtNDI5O C1kMmY5ZjM0YWNmMGQiLCJtZXRhU2I0ZUIkjoizGY0ZmJm NTEtMmYzNi00N2lwLTk2YzEtY2JiNjRlZjg1MjllkIiwic2lnbkRhdG UjOiilyMDI0LTA0LTA5VDE2OjlyOjA0Ljg1NVoiLCJkZW1vTW9kZ Sl6ZmFsc2UsImFpZCI6IjZIMDY4NGYzLThiNWMtNGRIMC1hMz NkLWUyZjg4MDDlMTgzZCI6ImJpVG9rZW4iOiI5OTImYzhlZC1Y TEzLTBjMjktMWQ2Mi05NTQyYzlwYTYzYjQiLCJzaXRIT3duZXJ JZCI6ImQzOWlxMDQ1LThiMzEtNDgwYy05ZTE0LTg0NDQwOG ZIMjY5YyJ9%26compId%3Dcomp-kk8zhcge%26url%3Dhttps %3A%2F%2Fdocs.wixstatic.com%2Fugd%2Fd39b10_9ea8779)

[31b274373a538293d949c0fcd.pdf#page=1&links=true&originalFileName=KIJJI%20SUMMARY%20REPORT%202021&locale=en&allowDownload=true&allowPrinting=true](#) (Accessed 9th April 2024).

Connelly, L., Legane, R., and Joseph-Salisbury, R. (2020) *Decriminalise the Classroom: A Community Response to Police in Greater Manchester Schools*. Manchester: Kids of Colour and Northern Police Monitoring Project

*Contextual Safeguarding* (2024). *About Us*. Available at: <https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/about-us/> (Accessed: 27 March 2024).

Davis, J. (2019) 'Where are the black girls in our CSA services, Studies and Statistics?' Available at: <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2019/11/20/where-are-the-black-girls-in-our-services-studies-and-statistics-on-csa/> (Accessed: 27 March 2024).

DfE (2020) *Children Looked After Including Adoptions 2019/20*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2020> (accessed 1 May 2023).

Firmin, C., Featherstone B., Gupta, A., Morris, D., Morris, M. Saar-Heiman, Y. and Wroe, L. (2021) *Building safety - contextual safeguarding*. Available at: <https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/media/zcthpocu/building-safety-final.pdf> (Accessed: 22 August 2023).

Gov.uk (2017) *Race in the workplace: The McGregor-Smith Review*. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7f81c6ed915d74e33f6dc4/race-in-workplace-mcgregor-smith-review.pdf> (Accessed: 26 March 2024).

Hunter, K. (2021) 'Out of Place': The Criminalisation of Black and Minority Ethnic Looked After Children in England and Wales. *Prison Service Journal*, Issue 258

Lammy, D. (2017). *The Lammy Review: An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System*. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/643001/lammy-review-final-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/643001/lammy-review-final-report.pdf). (Accessed: 06 August 2023).

Mohdin, A. (2021) 'School-to-prison pipeline': Youth Justice Services Failing Black Boys, *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/oct/21/youth-justice-services-still-failing-black-and-mixed-heritage-boys-finds-report> (Accessed: 06 August 2023).

Mwale and Williams (2023). *Harm to Healing: Resisting Racial Injustice in the Criminal Legal System of England and Wales*. Available at: <https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/22f0bfe3-9a97-45c1-b4b1-ca5ffc212747/downloads/Harm%20to%20Healing%20Report%20-%20Temi%20Mwale%20%2B%20Patrick%20.pdf?ver=1701453260149> (27 March 2024)

Pain, R. (2000). Place, social relations and the fear of crime: a review. *Progress in Human Geography*, 24(3), 365-387. <https://doi.org/10.1191/030913200701540474>

Reid, W. and Maclean, S. (2021) *Outlanders: Hidden narratives from Social Workers of colour (from Black & other global majority... communities)*. Lichfield: Kirwin Maclean Associates.

Williams, P. (2018). *Being Matrixed – The (Over)policing of gang suspects in London*. Stopwatch.



## Power the Fight

Launched in 2019, Power the Fight is a multi-award-winning charity which tackles violence affecting young people. We create long-term solutions for sustainable change and act as a link between the community and policymakers.

Most of our work is with young people, families, schools, local authorities, faith groups, and community organisations who want to be equipped to engage with issues related to violence affecting young people in their context.

We do this by supporting young people and families, training and resourcing communities, and advocating for system change.

## Contextual Safeguarding Programme

Our vision is a future where young people feel safe beyond their homes because their communities and child protection systems can, and will, protect them from harm.

We achieve this by learning about young people's experiences of harm and safety outside of the home. Working with professionals and communities, we use this learning to increase protection in young people's peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods.

## Cumberland Lodge

Cumberland Lodge is an educational charity and social enterprise that exists to empower young people to lead the conversation around social division. Providing them with the skills, perspective, and confidence to question, challenge, and understand, some of the most complex social issues of our time.

*This report is printed using recycled paper. It was produced by:*

Cumberland Lodge

The Great Park

Windsor

Berkshire SL4 2HP

[cumberlandlodge.ac.uk](http://cumberlandlodge.ac.uk)

[enquiries@cumberlandlodge.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@cumberlandlodge.ac.uk)

01784 432316

    @CumberlandLodge